

MINISTRY[®]



INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS
AUGUST 2008

Finding purpose
in a multichurch district

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Cover Illustration 316 Creative

Layout 316 Creative

Subscriptions 12 issues: United States US\$32.50; Canada and overseas US\$45.50; single copy US\$3.00. To order: send name, address, and payment to *Ministry*[®] Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A.

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Ministry[®] (ISSN 0026-5314) is a journal of the Ministerial Association, © 2008, published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®] and printed by Pacific Press[®] Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. Member Associated Church Press. Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho.

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Vol. 80 Number 8

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OUR READERS RESPOND...

New Testament house churches

Thank you for publishing Kwabena Donkor's article, "New Testament House Churches: A Model for Today's Complex World?" (April 2008). He refers to the excellent book by Roger W. Gehring, *House Churches and Mission*. I wish to commend this work to pastors and administrators.

It seems to me that there is a strong societal movement that is embracing the importance of meaning and relationships. Adherents value that which is intimate and smaller. They are not so interested in placing great effort into programs and planning. Activities that swallow up large sums of money (e.g., church buildings) do not seem to be relevant to them. They want to spend time and money where they can really make a difference in people's lives. The huge demands of their employment make them want to get straight to what really matters. It is for this increasingly large group that the house church will have meaning. They will be willing to risk, experiment, and be creative.

The result of such activity could often appear messy as youthful enthusiasm ventures for Christ, but I consider that we will see an increasing percentage of our people attracted to this form of fellowship. However, my concern is that some may see the house church movement as a threat, as something that it [the church] cannot control.

I hope that we will approach this intelligently, seeing the possibilities. I say this because if the Holy Spirit uses house churches as "feeders" for community churches then I believe we will have a great evangelistic asset for the gospel of Christ. House churches and community churches will no doubt meet the differing needs of people. For some, house churches may be transitional places during different "seasons" of their lives, and we should be big enough to cater to those needs.

We need *both* house churches and community churches.

—John M. Denne, Nunawading, Victoria, Australia

I read with interest the article by Dr. Kwabena Donkor, as I live in a region with significant distance between established church buildings and have participated in house church leadership.

It seems clear to me that this article is written from the viewpoint of an administrator. [Editor's note: Dr. Donkor has been a pastor until several years ago and now serves in a theological role and has never been an administrator.] To answer his question, "Is the house church an option for Adventist work in today's big cities?" the author makes the point that "its effectiveness . . . would appear to depend on careful evaluation of several factors." After raising several important questions regarding the viability and functionality of house churches the author concludes with the statement, "These and many more such questions may need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis before a decision can be made on the viability of the house church for today."

This perspective fails to address three key factors involved in house church creation and administration.

First, house churches are started by the Holy Spirit impressing the heart of a house owner to open his or her home, not by the work of an oversight committee studying and approving a new administrative style.

Second, they come into existence automatically to fill an immediate need.

Third, if the Creator chooses to raise up house churches because of these factors, the true role of the church's high level administration will be to provide effective pastoral support to keep them connected spiritually, denominationally, theologically, economically, and missiologically.

The pertinent questions are, Do we see the Holy Spirit moving in this

direction? and Are we prepared to effectively support them?

—Tim Tillman, Waupun, Wisconsin, United States

Stem cells

Thank you for the thoughtful and thought-provoking article, "Stem Cell Research: What Is a Christian to Do?" (June 2008). You carefully and eloquently demonstrated that there are no simple and easy ethical answers to the increasingly complex dilemmas issuing from today's increasingly sophisticated laboratories.

My mind was drawn back to the late 1940s. I spent a week speaking on alcohol problems at a youth camp in Nebraska. I shared a cabin with a fellow pastor, beginning each day with joint worship.

One morning he read from a book—one sentence of which has forever remained in my memory. It simply said, "God has revealed all that man has discovered, and man has discovered only that which God has revealed." Believing that God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom, surely we are confronted many times with the question, What's a Christian to do?

Your article went a long way in helping us to think deeply about today's ethical and moral issues pertaining to stem cell research, and led us to some guidelines without laying them out as such. In the ultimate sense, we are individually responsible for not only the choices we make, but the moral and ethical basis upon which we make them. Motive is key. God looks upon the heart!

—H. H. Hill, Pendleton, Oregon, United States

While the conclusion of Dr. Handysides's article is troubling—"Perhaps this is one of those areas where each, individually, have to come to a conclusion. . . ."—its implication is more troubling. Not only are the "Pastor Don's" in the church not able to give a clear answer to such a fundamental question

Continued on page 29

Where is the rule book?

WILLIE E. HUCKS II



When Kathy and I married, I had already been pastoring my first multichurch district for two years. Marriage brings with it many adjustments—indeed, those of you who are married understand what I am saying. But for my wife, it was particularly challenging: a young bride living apart from her family for the first time, not having any pastoral spouses in her immediate family to serve as role models, becoming a part of church families that knew me but didn't know her.

A life of adjustments

The adjustments are greater, I believe, for pastoral spouses—one reason being that there are no formal, written rules for them. I observed my wife deal with the transition during those early years of marriage and ministry; and later I spent many years in a university setting watching wives of men who, later in their lives, heard the voice of God calling them to prepare for the gospel ministry. The *men* heard the voice of God, but not necessarily their wives. The *men* engaged in years of academic preparation for entering the gospel ministry. But how did those spouses prepare for the proverbial fishbowl into which they were about to enter? What about their children, some of them teenagers, who already often found life difficult enough to face without the added pressure of being called a preacher's kid?

During my time as a professor of pastoral ministry, I made sure that we continued our departmental practice of bringing in an experienced pastoral spouse to address the theology majors (mostly males), encouraging them to not place unrealistic expectations upon their spouses. This chosen pastoral spouse also conducted regular sessions for the spouses of these theology majors (the spouses who attended were female), preparing them for what they would soon face and equipping them to deal with life as a pastor's spouse. I wish my wife had been exposed to such classes before we married—it would have saved her much heartache while she was adjusting to the

real and imagined expectations and rules of church members.

The adjustments are even greater for the spouse (especially if the spouse is female) who is married to someone who pastors several churches at once. If one church demands more of her time and talents than the others or if one church isn't as warm and accommodating as the others, there is always the potential for resentment to build. Conversely, if one church is more accepting, it can be tempting for the spouse to gravitate toward that church.

These issues are magnified when children are involved. Some church buildings are more children friendly than others (I think of mothers with small children). The length of the church services in one church may be more conducive to managing restless children than in another church. As children grow older, they may find that they like one church over another, and prefer to attend that church.

And what should the spouse to do? Sometimes the female spouse finds herself balancing the wishes of her husband-pastor, the needs of her children, and the expectations of several church families. Where is the rule book that guides the spouse, telling her what and what not to do?

Maintaining a balanced perspective in ministry

This year marks the third consecutive one that the editors of *Ministry* have devoted the August issue to life in a multichurch district. Every issue of this journal that we produce excites me; but August excites me even more because we pause to focus on what has been my deepest passion in my 23 years of gospel ministry: pastoral ministry in multichurch district settings.

The authors we are publishing this month are all pastors of multichurch districts—with the exception of Ellie Gil, whose husband pastors two churches. We, as editors, are excited to publish a lead article that addresses pastoral life from the spouse's perspective, just as we were pleased to publish the August 2007 lead article that addressed pastoral life from the children's perspective (see Richard Daly, "Multichurch District Life and Children").

The counsel that Ellie Gil shares, reminds me of some of the wisest counsel I ever heard shared with pastoral ministry students. The counsel was given by a pastor's wife whom I invited to speak to my pastoral ministry students. She told the pastors in training that pastors' wives face expectations that are not placed upon wives of other professionals, but ultimately the only expectations that those wives must meet are those that God places upon them. And when the spouses of pastors (and pastors also, for that matter) keep that counsel in mind, then it becomes easier for spouses and pastors to maintain a balanced perspective in ministry—ministry in the home and in the church. And let me add that it wouldn't hurt if we as pastors reminded our congregations of the truth of the words of my guest lecturer.

We honor you

We, the editors of *Ministry*, take this moment to again thank our own wives, Ruth Satelmajer and Kathleen Hucks, for their years of support and wise counsel during our ministries. We also honor all the spouses of pastors throughout the world for their selfless, often unseen, support of the people that others call "Pastor"—the pastor they know best as their marriage partner for life. Nobody gave them a rule book to know what they were supposed to do as the spouse of a pastor; but they've done a wonderful job in fulfilling the only expectations that matter: God's. ■

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Finding purpose in a multichurch district

Ellie Gil



Ellie Gil is the wife of a pastor who serves in Gonzalez and Denham Springs, Louisiana, United States.

I often wish there was a crash course on how to be a pastor's wife. After all, it seems that the moment I said "I do" to the man of my dreams (who happened to be a pastor), I signed up to be a partner in team ministry, whether or not I was ready.

Once, when a good friend saw me frazzled and drained as I tried to juggle work, family, marriage, and church ministry, she said to me, "I think being the pastor's wife is the only job where you are expected to work alongside your husband. After all, a surgeon's wife is not expected to operate, a teacher's wife is not expected to teach, and the list could go on."

Those of us who are pastors' wives fell in love and married a man for his love and qualities and for who he was—and not what he did. But, in marrying a pastor, we signed up for a ministry that we must learn along the way.

It gets more complicated

Just as you are trying to figure out what your role will be as a pastor's wife, you suddenly realize that you will often have twice the challenge when serving in a multichurch district, as is often the case for today's pastors. You, then, have to learn the art of getting to know each of your church's distinct personalities and how you fit into the puzzle. Add a family and a career to this equation, and you will need to also learn how to balance more than you ever thought humanly possible. The good news is that no human effort will make your ministry with your husband a blessing but

rather a complete surrender of your will to God's purpose for you.

Learn the basic skills

During the past 20 years, I have learned not to plan for a definite schedule, but, instead, to live in the moment. Plans can change in a moment's notice; you'll need to learn to be flexible so you won't be disappointed. When serving a church, let alone two or more, you will always face one emergency or another.

Learn, too, that your children will be expected to behave a little better than everyone else's children. Therefore, you should put their spiritual well-being above living up to what others expect from you as a pastor's wife. Decide early in ministry, before your children grow resentful of sharing you with others so often, to give them the time they need, and deserve, to grow to their fullest spiritual potential. If you cannot make time to have family worship with your children because you are too busy with ministry, then you have misplaced your most important responsibility before God.

Learn to smile when your heart is crying. You might think that this is hypocrisy, but in ministry we often need to worry about the perception of others as we serve as ambassadors of Christ. God knows the pain in your heart, but try not to let it interfere with bringing joy and encouragement to others. And who wouldn't rather be in a happy and joyful situation all the time? However, sometimes the best ministry we can offer includes listening and crying with someone who feels disheartened and needs the comfort of someone who cares.

Learn to accept criticism as a way to grow in the role where God has placed you. Your first reaction to criticism will be defensive; after all, that is our human nature. Try to listen and decide if there is any validity to the criticism, even when it comes in a nonconstructive way. Ask yourself, *What would God have me learn from this?*

Learn how to find that "invisible fine line" that you cannot cross as a pastor's wife. Do not get ahead or behind your husband in ministry; keep your communication open so that you both serve as a team.

Learn to share your husband with others; your husband, *the pastor*, is the one you share and not your husband, *the man*. Make every effort to help him share the love of Jesus, and be his support when he needs a comforting word.

Is it really my job?

If you think of the ministry of a pastor's wife as a job, you will be greatly disappointed. In a job, you expect to receive some type of reward or

recognition for work well done; this is often not the case in ministry.

What is the difference between a job and a ministry?

If you do it because you are expected to, or because no one else will, then it's a job.

If you do it because you want to be used by God, it's a ministry.

If you quit because no one appreciated you or thanked you, it's a job. If you're committed to doing it, expecting only to feel God smile down on you, it's a ministry. If your main goal is to be successful, how you can move upward, it's a job. If your main goal is to serve God, it's a ministry.

God wants us to be happy in ministry. You might not feel qualified to do the ministry before you, but remember, God does not call the qualified—He qualifies the called. God shows off His mighty power when He works with impossibilities and uses those who have fully surrendered themselves to serve Him.

What is my ministry?

Many times you will be asked to take on the responsibility of a church position for which you might not feel a burden. Think about it before you answer. If God has not placed this position upon your heart, you will do a disservice to Him and to the church to accept it just because you are expected to do so.

The best ministries in which to get involved are the ones that the Holy Spirit places on your heart. How will you know? If you notice that the children's departments seem to have fallen by the wayside, and no one has been selected to do something for them, maybe the Holy Spirit has impressed you to get involved. If the church facilities look dreary and abandoned, take an afternoon with your children, clean out a flowerbed, plant some flowers, and teach them that we should care for God's house as much as we care for our own.

Early in our ministry when our children were young, I served in the Sabbath School department. Often the room used

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needs are in each church. Sometimes your help may not be in taking on a challenge by yourself, but rather to support and help another church member to do a ministry for which they have felt a burden. When the church members feel that they are called to a ministry, we serve them best by offering the help they need and request.

We enable them to serve better when the ministry is their own, a ministry that they can continue long after we have been called to serve in another place.

Even though you may consider yourself a superwoman, you cannot be in two places at once, so choose where you will give of your time. Don't spread yourself so thin that you feel discouraged and overwhelmed. The devil delights in making us feel as failures; we cannot possibly accomplish all the responsibilities that we might be called to do. Sometimes, we take on things with the best of intentions, even though we have not thought through the consequences of how it will affect our personal spiritual life, our marriage, and our children.

Don't give up

You might wonder what challenges you accepted the day you said "I do" to your husband, the pastor. You took on a role you might not have wanted or for which you did not feel qualified. You will always fall short of filling the expectations that others put upon you, but remember that it is God whom you are serving.

I have learned that I will never be the perfect pastor's wife, but I do know that I received this call almost 20 years ago. When I said "I do" to my husband, the pastor, I said "I do" to my Jesus, my Lord and my Savior, who has given me a special call, a call that I accept gladly and seriously, and one that I believe will make a difference in the lives of others now and for eternity. **M**

for our children was filled with outdated, dreary, and faded materials. I wanted to see a happy place for our children to meet Jesus, so I asked several individuals in the church if we had anyone with art skills who could paint a simple mural. I found several qualified people, but they did not have a burden to help; thus, I, the most unqualified artist, took it upon myself to paint a mural for the Cradle Roll classroom. So with paint and pictures in hand, I painted my first mural. The expressions of joy and awe as the children came into Sabbath School made all the hours spent worthwhile.

It's hard to get excited about a job, but it's easy to be excited about a ministry. Let your children see the joy in you as you serve in a ministry for which you feel called. Teach them how to find their place in ministry.

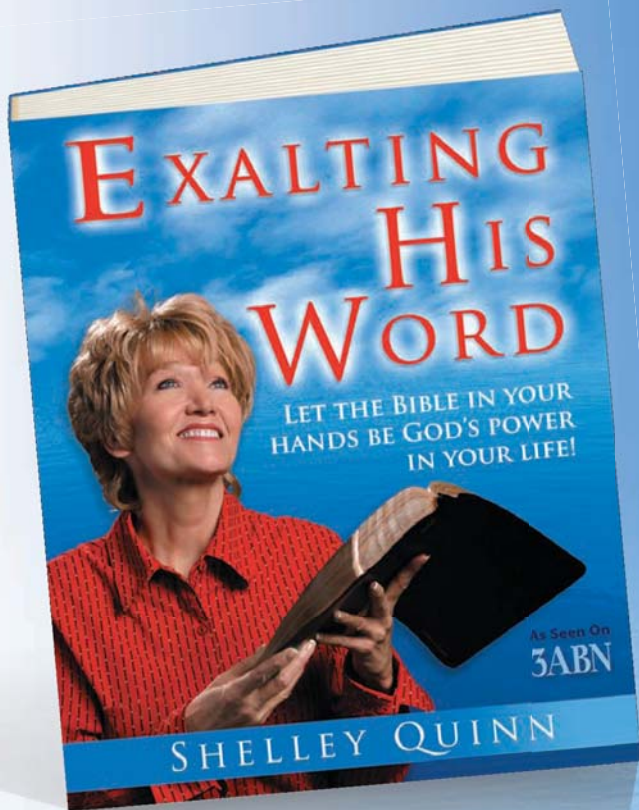
Encourage your younger children to color pictures for shut-ins. Have older children find verses of encouragement to send to others. Once when I sent food to a family with a critically injured son in the hospital, my children, then 13 and 11, decided they would wrap the plastic utensils in a napkin and attach a verse from the Bible that talked about healing. This was a tiny gesture that meant the world to the family, and it gave my children an opportunity to share in ministry.

How do I choose where to minister?

One of the biggest challenges in serving in a multichurch district is deciding how to divide your time. I have learned through the years to step back when we first begin to serve in a new district and see where and what the

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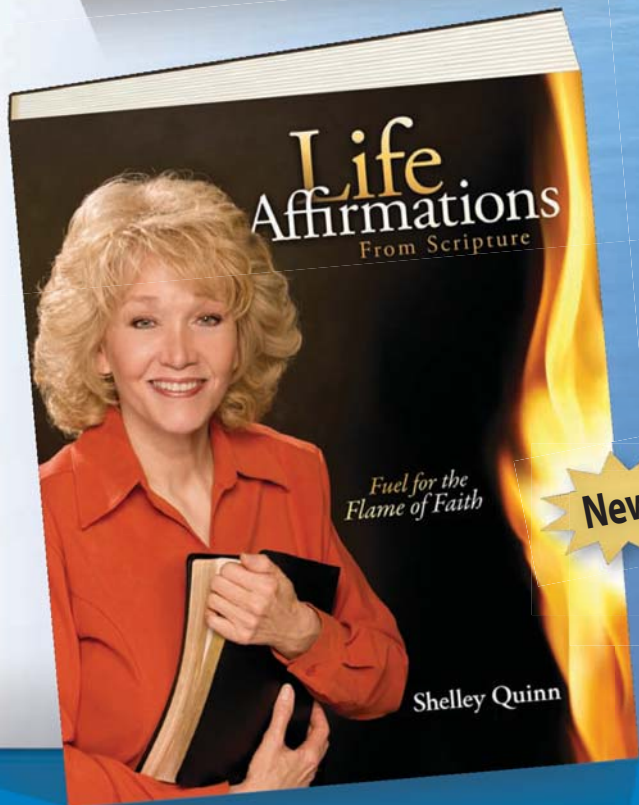


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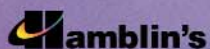
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A balancing act

Vernon T. Waters



Vernon T. Waters, MDiv, is pastor of the Walnut Street Community Seventh-day Adventist Church, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, United States, and the Grace Tabernacle Seventh-day Adventist Church, Norristown, Pennsylvania, United States.

I remember my feelings when I received my first multichurch district assignment: feelings of inadequacy, nervousness, and excitement. Though pastoring a single church had its own distinctive challenges, it certainly had spoiled me. Even without the experience of district pastoring, I had a feeling that ministry would be a crucible in which I would learn quite a bit—about pastoral ministry in general and about myself in particular. Four years later, my suspicions would prove correct.

Sending out signals

People who are stranded or in some other form of trouble send out distress signals meant to attract the attention of searchers to a particular location in order to aid in a time of need. I am not in the emergency personnel field (except the work of rescuing people from sin through the preaching of the gospel), but I do know that if a search and rescue team sees a distress signal, they can then focus their energies on those who require attention. As a district pastor, I have come to understand that every local church sends out its own signals. Better said, they send out a call for individualized, specific attention. And the pastor must respond. The response for one church may not be the same as for the other church or churches within the same pastoral district.

Gary L. McIntosh in his book *One Size Doesn't Fit All!* lays out, among many others, these critical evaluation points as necessary for successful ministry. Knowing, understanding, and adapting

one's ministry approach and style based upon, at least, this clear signal greatly assists with a district church's health and growth.

A district pastor, though having two or more churches, is still only one person. The pastor brings their own personality, temperament, skill, and mind-set to each church. They sometimes make a grave mistake when the signals of each church in the district are ignored or confused for the signals of the other church.

In my limited experience, I have found it much more productive, humane, and respectful to first grasp how best to minister to and empower the congregations to be what God created them to be. By evaluating the congregation's size and appropriate needs, discovering its orientation, and learning how the church is structured, this can be accomplished. According to McIntosh, this means formulating a plan respectful of the church's size.² It means the plan must be suitable for the church's orientation, whether it be relational, programmatic, or organizational.³ It means being mindful that a church's structure at its cellular (root) level can be single cell, stretched cell, or multiple cell.⁴ I believe that when district pastors are aware of these informational components, they better know how to plan their evangelistic and administrative approaches.

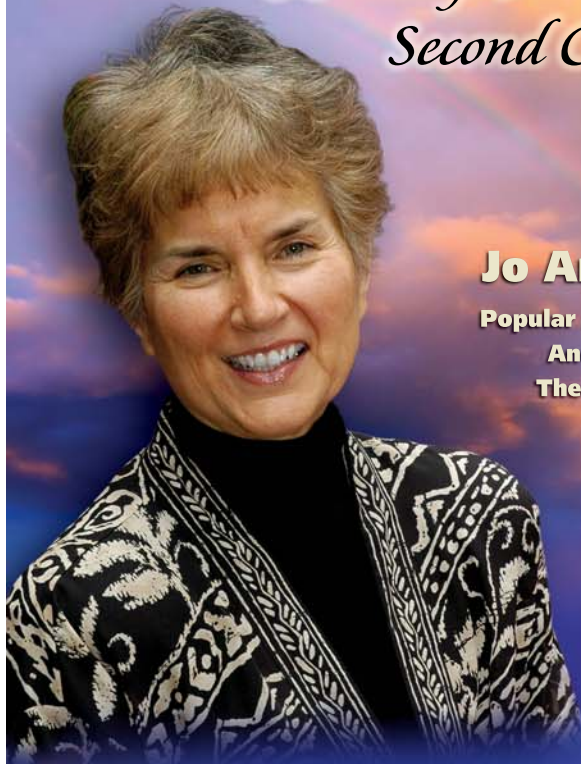
All things to all people

I have discovered that district pastors need to be relational in their church and community ministry. Becoming one with those we serve is crucial to winning hearts and minds to the gospel as well as empowering the already enlisted for active duty in God's service. Out of respect and love for those whom we serve, I truly believe we should honor the unique personhood of each congregation. Used rightly, blending in can be a valuable ministry skill. Consider the relational testimony of the apostle Paul: "I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22, NASB).

Adaptability and flexibility, as it relates to meeting the needs of each congregation in a district setting, while necessary, are not always easy. It requires a self-sacrificial spirit that only Christ can perform within the pastor. Yet such a daunting challenge has positively and beneficially forced me to know myself and, as Paul counseled Timothy, "Pay close attention to [myself]" (1 Tim. 4:16, NASB). Understanding my own personality type, leadership style, emotional disposition, thinking patterns, and temperament has not only helped me to be a more confident person and effective minister but has enabled me to be

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cognizant of when and how my own persona interferes with a congregation's need to express itself in its own God-given, unique way.

Does this mean that I have no place or authoritative voice within the particular congregation I am serving? On the contrary! My role is valuable as I fulfill it according to Christ's instructions.⁵ I just have to be careful that I do not allow my position and influence, which so often makes me a target for flattery and idolatry, to override or drown out the unique voice of the local churches that I serve.

If we equip and empower them, they will be blessed

Why do I think the aforementioned so important? First of all, we who pastor more than one church cannot act like we have only one church. Consider the fact that, for us, our attention becomes divided. It seems that before we can get a program running smoothly, we have to go off to the next church, and by the time we return, we have to start all over again. This seems to be an endless cycle with the pastor at the center of evangelism and member care.⁶ Neither can we act as though we have only one church in two (or more) different locations. When we help each of our congregations discover and embrace their identity in Christ and empower them to do the work He commissions, it gives us a freedom to focus on and be true to our role as the equippers we have been called to be.

Equipping the church members: that's the bottom line. While in a single church setting the pastor can be more visible, more internally active and more directive to the same people they see each week; district pastors have to rely on their leadership even more to accomplish the same effect. It becomes all the more urgent for those churches to discover, reclaim, and embrace what it means to be a church filled with involved people laboring to finish the work. When properly equipped and empowered, churches in the district situation do not need to wait for a pastor to do God's work. If we are faithful to give them the charge, they will be faithful to do the work with or without

the constant oversight of the pastor.

The pastor's respect for the unique identity and DNA of the churches in their district hopefully encourages them to formulate their own vision (not the pastor's)—with proper facilitation and encouragement. The pastor becomes part of the team, rather than the team itself, using their giftedness to assist the church in bringing the Spirit-enlightened vision of the church members to fruition.

Empowerment principles

The district pastor cannot adopt this philosophy without also being committed to a macromanagement rather than micromanagement approach. Micromanaging (sitting in or chairing every meeting, telling everyone what to do and how to do it, never releasing responsibilities to others) only weakens a church's ability to think and make full use of the grace that Christ dispenses for the finishing of His work (cf. Col. 1:28–2:1).

Macromanagement, on the other hand, can be described as more of a role of facilitation and equipping. It is empowerment. It is keeping the big picture in view and equipping key persons to accomplish the objectives of the plan. Through those key people the congregation is instructed, motivated, and equipped to carry to completion the agreed upon vision.

Heavy investment in key leadership is vital. I have focused primarily on building, educating, and mobilizing the elders, pouring into them whatever good I can to help them lead the congregation in the fulfillment of the vision. My ambition in every case includes following the example of Paul who declared to the Ephesian elders, " 'For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood' " (Acts 20:27, 28, NASB).

BECOMING ONE WITH THOSE WE SERVE IS CRUCIAL TO WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS TO THE GOSPEL AS WELL AS EMPOWERING THE ALREADY ENLISTED FOR ACTIVE DUTY IN GOD'S SERVICE.

A pastor in a district situation should be aware of how easy it can be for a small congregation to lose its unique Adventist identity and mission on its way to becoming a medium-sized church. In desperation, they easily graft in all kinds of ideologies, practices, and theology from the Protestant mainstream in order to fit in and produce growth. Pastoral guidance is needed here not only to help the church accept and embrace its identity as an Adventist church in its own particular community but to reacquire and renew its commitment to Matthew 28:18–20 and Revelation 14:6–12.

Frustrated, torn, and tempted

Switching from church to church on a biweekly basis can be frustrating. The pastor is called a pastor because of God's call to be a shepherd. By nature, pastors have a genuine love and concern for the members of their churches (or certainly should). But due to the inability to concentrate on more than one church for a consistent length of time, it can seem and feel unproductive.

I have found encouragement in knowing that my people appreciate my efforts and some even understand that I must do what I am assigned to do. I have heard members say, "I wish you did not have to divide your attention between two churches," or "we need our own pastor." Such words are flattering indeed. For a relational pastor to become unsettled and infatuated by such flattering love is easy. To know that you are so valued by your congregations is gratifying. Such words can make you as the pastor desire to do more to accommodate the wishes of your members. If you give in to such honest flattery,

you may try to stretch yourself beyond your call of duty for the sole purpose of their comfort and not in order to fulfill your ministry. But I have learned that the best way to love my people is to stay focused on what is best for them and not get swept away by their coaxing for more attention from me.

Conclusion

It has been, and continues to be, a rewarding yet challenging experience serving as a district pastor. I have grown personally, professionally, and spiritually.

My ministry has had many challenges. I have perspired quite a bit at times when facing very difficult ordeals and controversies. Nevertheless, while in this crucible, I have gained a new admiration and deeper respect for servants of God like the apostle Paul—servants, who suffered so much for the cause of Christ, yet maintained a deep level of concern for all the churches that they served.

And for this multichurch pastoral ministry, I am most grateful. ■

- 1 Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best In Any Size Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 7. Because these three elements have so profoundly impacted my ministry, I simply took the first three chapters in the table of contents—size, orientation, and structure, and made them the focus of this section. While, in my estimation, much of the book is geared toward the pastor or lay leader with a one church focus, there are valuable principles that can be useful in any church ministry situation.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 5 I am an avid proponent of the message of Eph. 4:7–16.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7: 21, 22; "Followers of Christ Will Be Missionaries," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 8, 1895; "A Call to All Our People," *The Indiana Reporter*, February 25, 1903. In these quotes, Ellen White advocates for full member involvement in the work of evangelism and member care through small groups.

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Meaning of “forever”: Categorical or qualified?

David Hamstra



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When God promises that a blessing or judgment will last “forever,” what does *forever* mean?

Consider the position of annihilationists—those who believe that hell is the final event when sin and sinners will be permanently eradicated from the earth—as opposed to those who believe that hell is a place of everlasting, never ending, fiery torment of the wicked.¹ Seventh-day Adventists and other annihilationists find some of their most challenging passages of scripture in the book of Revelation: “And the smoke of their torment goes up *forever and ever* [eis aiōnas aiōnōn]; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” “And a second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! HER [the great harlot’s] SMOKE RISES UP *FOREVER AND EVER* [eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn].’” “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night *forever and ever* [eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn]” (14:11; 19:3; 20:10, NASB; emphasis added).

The phrase *forever and ever* in these passages could be literally translated as, “into ages of ages,” which means from one age to the next. Taken at face value, these passages do not speak of a limited duration for the torment of the wicked.

Yet Adventists, among others, point out that these passages in Revelation must be interpreted

in the context of other Scriptures that use the phrase *forever*.² For example, the “brimstone” in Revelation 20:10 alludes to God’s fire of judgment that came “out of heaven” and is similar to the judgment that came on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24). Jude described this inferno as “eternal fire” (Jude 7, NASB); however, evidence shows that the “eternal fire” that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah does not burn today. Comparing the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah to the judgment on the wicked spoken of in Revelation—“fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Rev. 20:9, NASB; emphasis added; cf. Gen. 19:24–28)—the eternal aspect of God’s fire of judgment could refer to its *consequences*, not its *duration*.

Similarly the phrase *forever and ever* in Revelation 14:11, 19:3, and 20:10 should be interpreted within other Scriptural context. Isaiah, for example, wrote of the judgment on Edom: “Her land shall become burning pitch. *Night and day* it shall not be quenched; its *smoke shall go up forever*. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it *forever and ever*” (Isa. 34:9, 10, NRSV; emphasis added).

This passage, in which God *predicts* that Edom will be burned by fire forever, has four verbal parallels to Revelation 14:11, 19:3, and 20:10 as well as the thematic parallel of judgment. The fact that Isaiah 34:9, 10 is the only passage in the Bible with this many parallels to the Revelation passages indicates that the author of Revelation would have us interpret “forever and ever,” when referring to the torment of the wicked, in the context of God’s judgment on Edom.

Of course, we know that when Revelation was written, smoke was not going up from the former territory of Edom. “Forever” in the case of Edom cannot, therefore, mean “without end” but points to irrevocable destruction.

“Forever”: Qualified or categorical?

This leads to the conclusion that both the Old Testament and Revelation use the word *forever* in a *qualified* sense, meaning that the destructive fire will last as long as it takes to accomplish its purpose of total destruction. The fires of judgment on Sodom and Edom were not put out; they burned until they accomplished their purpose of total destruction. Similarly the fire in Revelation can be understood as burning until all sinners are destroyed (Mal. 4:1–3).

We find this qualified sense of “forever” in the Old Testament not only in God’s *pronouncement of judgment* on the wicked but also in God’s *promises of blessing* to the righteous. For example,

God promised David, "I will establish his [Solomon's] throne *forever*. . . I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom *forever*, and his throne shall be established *forever*" (1 Chron. 17:12, 14, NRSV; emphasis added).

God promised David that his dynasty would rule over Israel forever, yet it came to an end after about 500 years. Five centuries is a *very* long time, but David's dynasty expired when his descendants ceased to accomplish their purpose (2 Chron. 36:11–21). Therefore, God's promises of a "forever" blessing to David carried with it a qualifying condition.

Such an interpretation becomes problematic for Christians who interpret "forever" in a *categorical* sense. The reason

of "forever" shows that, although they initially appear categorical, they are usually qualified, *How can one know if a promise of "forever" refers to a blessing or judgment that never ends or to one that will last only until the accomplishment of its purpose?*



fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent *decay* [*diaphthora*]; but He whom God raised did not undergo *decay* [*diaphthora*]' " (Acts 13:32–37, NASB; emphasis added).

Paul was addressing a Jewish audience that was well aware of God's "forever" promise to David (1 Chron. 17:12, 14). Was that promise categorical or qualified? Would the Messiah, the one who was to restore David's throne, come or had God completely rejected His people due to their disobedience? In answering that question Paul gave the principle of how to understand "forever" in God's promises.

Paul began with the qualified nature of God's promise to David in Psalm 16:10.

THE ETERNAL ASPECT OF GOD'S FIRE OF JUDGMENT COULD REFER TO ITS *CONSEQUENCES*, NOT ITS *DURATION*.

can be understood easily. The phrase *forever and ever* occurs 12 times in the book of Revelation, nine of which refer to the duration of the reign of God or His people. Naturally, both eternal life and God's reign are "forever" in a categorical sense. Thus if "forever" describes the blessing of the righteous in a categorical sense, shouldn't the same be the case in describing the punishment of the wicked?

It would appear, therefore, that annihilationists have *arbitrarily* interpreted "forever" in the context of judgment in the qualified sense while understanding the same word when used with reference to the blessing of eternal life in the categorical sense. A more consistent interpreter would suggest that if the duration of hellfire has a limitation then the "HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID" (Acts 13:34, NASB) that are promised to the righteous could be equally temporary. So if the sacred history of God's promises

Decay: The result of a qualified "forever"

In his Antioch sermon (Acts 13:13–43), Paul recounted Israel's salvation history, beginning with the Exodus and ending with Jesus, whom he proclaimed as the promised descendant of David. Then, like any good preacher, Paul drove the point home with a powerful conclusion. "And we preach to you the good news of the *promise* made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He *raised* up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, "THOU ART MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE." As for the fact that He *raised* Him up from the dead, no more to return to *decay* [*diaphthora*], He has spoken in this way: "I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY AND SURE BLESSINGS OF DAVID." Therefore He also says in another Psalm, "YOU WILT NOT ALLOW THY HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO *DECAY* [*diaphthora*]." For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation,

God promised David that he would not "undergo decay," which is not a promise that he would never die, for David only lived long enough to accomplish his purpose and then passed away. Paul's description of David's death as a sleep rules out the notion that David could consciously survive the decay of his body. Similarly, after his death, David's dynasty decayed to the point where it no longer accomplished its purpose and also ceased to exist.

Even so, this qualified promise of God's "forever" blessing through David was still open to future fulfillment in the categorical sense.³ But decay, the irrevocable tendency towards death that characterizes all life on this planet, stood in the way of any categorical fulfillment, because that which is mortal "forever" *only* exists in a qualified sense. Therefore, Paul concluded, the only way God's blessing can never end is through Someone who is not subject

to decay—Someone who can mediate between the qualified promise of the past and the hope of categorical fulfillment in the future.

That Someone is Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection enabled categorical fulfillment of “forever” promises for all who trust Him. The same reasoning about Christ’s resurrection fulfilling the promise that David would not undergo decay, and placed in the mouths of the two apostles of the early church (Acts 2:25–31; 13:32–37), clearly indicates this is a core teaching of the book of Acts. The resurrection of Christ is *central* to New Testament proclamations because with Christ forever *never ends*. He is the *only* way to categorically affirm “forever” life.

Incorruption: The result of a categorical “forever”

The resurrection of Jesus leads to the principle of incorruption that shows us whether a “forever” promise of God is qualified or categorical. Jesus took our corruptible body, died for our sins, and was raised with an incorruptible body without undergoing decay. Consequently He has the ability to give everyone who comes to Him forgiveness of sin and never ending, categorically “forever” life, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus will complete this restoration at the resurrection by giving all who believe in Him an incorruptible body as well. Paul explained, “This perishable [*phthartos*] must put on the imperishable [*aphtharsia*], and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53, NASB). Those who will experience the lake of fire *never* receive this promise.

In Scripture, those who follow Jesus receive the promise of eternal life. Paul articulated the principle of incorruption again when he wrote, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap *corruption* [*phthora*], but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap *eternal life*” (Gal. 6:7, 8, NASB). Likewise, in John’s vision of heaven only the saved were permitted access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14; cf. Gen 3:22–24).

Jesus also juxtaposed the “eternal life” of the righteous with the “eternal punishment” of the wicked (Matt. 25:46, NASB; cf. Dan. 12:2). In Matthew, as in the rest of Scripture, Jesus gives the promise of eternal life to the righteous, not the wicked. This rules out the notion that the punishment of the wicked (Matt. 25:41; cf. Jude 7) consists of eternal conscious torment, as that would require the wicked to have never ending life. To understand this more coherently, Paul defines the punishment of the wicked as consisting of “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:9, NASB; cf. Rev. 20:9).

Therefore the punishment of the wicked can be understood as a never ending state brought about by a fire that destroys completely (Mal. 4:1–3). This promise through Paul of “eternal destruction” reiterates the qualified Old Testament promise that “though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction *forever*” (Ps. 92:7, NRSV; emphasis added). Because the promise that the wicked will cease to exist forever is given as a blessing to the righteous (Ps. 92:10, 11; 2 Thess. 1:7, 8) and in the context of the reign of God (Ps. 92:8, 9; Matt. 25:31, 32) this promise is also open to categorical fulfillment.

Conclusion

Without Jesus, “forever” only lasts until the accomplishment of its purpose, but *with* Jesus forever never ends. On this earth everything has a beginning and an ending, and those who decide to live without Jesus in their decaying bodies will come to a final end. For them God’s promises of “forever” judgment exist *only* in the qualified sense.

But for those who choose to be united with Jesus in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4, 5), He has an *incorruptible* reward. The decaying nature of life on this planet causes God’s “forever” promises of blessing to be cut short. But because of Christ’s death and resurrection, God’s people may look beyond the qualified fulfillment of the present to the categorical forever of the future. So even

though those whom God saves also die on this earth when their purpose is accomplished, because they have died in Christ, their death becomes only a time of sleep—a rest period during a life that *never ends* (John 11:25, 26).

This understanding of “forever” in God’s promises grounds Christians in the hope of resurrection and immortality while at the same time relieving them of questions concerning the compatibility of God’s love and justice with the unending torment of those who do not accept the gift of Christ. By teaching their people the difference between God’s categorical and qualified promises, preachers and teachers can give scripturally based comfort to both those who have lost loved ones in Christ and to those whose loved ones passed away without accepting Him. A categorical and qualified understanding of forever also inspires Christ’s disciples to share this good news with those who do not yet know Jesus, as well as with those who have rejected Him due to what they understood to be the Christian doctrine of hell, so that all may have the opportunity to choose Jesus and receive eternal life. ■

- 1 For the current debate between these two positions in the evangelical community, see Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Fudge, who wrote *The Fire That Consumes* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994), defends the annihilationist view. Peterson responds (*Hell on Trial* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995]) with a spirited rebuttal, defending the notion that hell is a never ending fire.
- 2 In *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), Jon Paulien estimates that the book of Revelation “contains about 2,000 references of one kind or another to the Old Testament” (136).
- 3 “The particular character of the Old Testament promises can be seen in the fact that the promises were not liquidated by the history of Israel—neither by disappointment nor by fulfillment—but that on the contrary Israel’s experience of history gave them a constantly new and wider interpretation.” Jürgen Moltman, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

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The journey continues for a young pastor

Juleun A. Johnson



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As a new pastor, I discovered that there were more things to learn than what I had learned in college. The most challenging aspect of my learning curve was understanding local accents. I found myself agreeing to things I did not comprehend.

As it was initially difficult for me to understand the language of the people—through no fault of their own—so it is initially difficult to understand the language of a church. Learning the language of the church members helps to ease the tension between the pastor and the members. Understanding what they are saying and balancing it with what they need becomes critical to the success of the pastor.

The fervor that we as young pastors have for ministry may be apparent. However, the effectiveness of our ministry may be stymied by issues of communication—or miscommunication. Possibly we and our church members may speak the same language and things are running fine. But it can also be very easy for the speaker to send one message and the listeners to hear a different one. This issue often arises in the context of church leadership.

The journey to balancing church leadership and personal spirituality

The book *Resonant Leadership* describes three essential characteristics of cutting-edge leaders. The authors say, “Mindfulness, hope and compassion spark positive emotions and healthy relationships that enable us to be

resilient and function effectively even in the face of challenges.”¹ Remaining optimistic and encouraged when faced with constant obstacles and opposition is a difficulty many pastors face in a multichurch district.

Another issue plagues many multichurch districts: a lack of consistent leadership. However, an old saying states, “The solution to the problem is no farther than you are from the mirror.” I discovered that this was true of myself. And if you are like I am, you have found that from time to time your ministry has hit a rough spot. But don’t worry, for you are not the only one. Rough spots can serve to help us evaluate our effectiveness in ministry. At times, these questions even lead to wondering about your call to ministry. God calls people whom He can use. In the book *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders describes what every pastor must strive to do. “All Christian [pastors] are called to develop God-given talents, to make the most of their lives, to develop to the fullest their God given powers and capacities.”² For many multichurch pastors, a description of this would be a “baptism of fire.” Often you must cultivate and develop many capacities at once.

One area that needed development—especially early on in my ministry—was scheduling my time. During my first year of ministry in a three-church district, I led a quarterly Communion in every church. That totaled 12 Communion services a year. Indeed, Jesus said, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup” (1 Cor. 11:26),³ but I had about as much as I could take. The same was true for board meetings, funerals, and hospital visitations. For many multichurch pastors, a risk exists of becoming overly familiar with the things of God.

The spiritual connection, even for people in ministry, can fade very easily. However, we still must deliver God’s messages to His people. We may feel hopeless about our spiritual journey; yet, we must deliver a cheerful “Happy Sabbath.” Underneath that outer joy lies inner pain and frustration as the spiritual reservoir may have dried up. Going through the motions can be a regular course of action.

The journey to balancing ministry and family life

In ministry, there are times when family life takes second place to church. While trying to learn about the church district, we sometimes find it easy to slack off on duties at home. When we neglect our families by spending too much time at the church—planning, scheduling, and counseling—our spouses and kids often *feel*

neglected. At other times, we may be at home speaking of how little we like the church.

These statements describe in a sense what happened to me. But after some reality checks from friends and family, I came back to life. In a conversation with my wife, she let me know she was not enjoying the Sabbath because I had stopped enjoying it. From that moment, I realized I was no longer just affecting myself but my wife and surely the people to whom I ministered.

I realized very early that I was not omnipresent and could only be in one place at a time. Therefore, I could only handle one set of problems at a time. This meant it was possible to emotionally involve myself in one church at a time. Yet, I still had to practice the ministry of presence. The pastor's presence in visiting people is incalculable at critical times: births, hospital visits, deaths—not only of the members but of their non-church family members and friends. Every situation may not allow the pastor to be physically present, but we can send cards to say "I'm thinking about you." People greatly appreciate a call on a birthday or anniversary.

The journey to learning the languages of my churches

One of the greatest barriers to effective ministry is poor communication. You can preach powerfully, you can pray mightily, but you still could be considered ineffective. Effectiveness is not measured by preparation, but how effectively the pastor reaches the hearts of the church members. But we must learn our church's language.

One of the difficult aspects about pastoring more than one church is learning the internal language of each church—since every church speaks a different language. Ministry becomes effective only as we are able to speak the language of our parishioners. Some churches may only want to reflect on the past, others care about evangelism, and some just want to hear about health. I know whereof I speak, for in my previous district I had three churches with three different sets of needs—all legitimate; but different nevertheless.

One way to effectively learn the language of the church would be to find its hurts and core values. A good time to learn these is at prayer meeting. During the testimony time, I realized people kept conveying the same idea. As I continued to listen, I found the itch that needed scratching. It also let me know I could not preach the same sermon three times. The one-size-fits-all sermon did not fit and that wasn't because of its lack of preparation. The sermon just did not speak the language of each church.

The way I dealt with the issue of sermon writing was based on the language and needs of the church. While I preached the same *concepts* in each church, the *approach* to each sermon for each church differed. Some may think this could lead to burnout. However, it was effective for me because I was meeting the needs by speaking the language of that particular church. Preaching the same text does not mean using the same angle. For example, I would preach on the Beatitudes but use the perspective that fit the language of each congregation. Instead of being burned out, I was invigorated because I was hitting the target for which I aimed.

I learned that the language of the church was affected by several factors. The first indicator of the language was the geographic location. I had an urban church, a suburban church, and a rural or country church.

The next indicator for me was that every church had different desires. I thought that I had to meet a list of things learned in school to be considered effective. But as I learned the desires, priorities, and passions, I felt encouraged. In one church, people basically testified that they had regrets about many decisions in life; they wanted to make better choices. Another church's members had a need for solutions to current issues, such as health and finance. In the other church, people wanted to know how to deal effectively with issues relating to family and communication.

A final indicator of the language for me was addressing the spiritual needs. Some never had experienced the joy of salvation. But they could tell me every prophecy in detail. Others could recite

scripture but had disdain for their own children. Eventually, as I learned the language, the areas of spiritual interest emerged. In hearing the language, I learned to speak the language that met their needs. In doing this, it gave me a sense that I was being effective.

When I learned these factors at play in each situation, I became more at peace and at ease with myself. I became confident in the use of my God-given gifts, and my spiritual life went to another level. I started to feel relieved and the burdens of life seemed a little less significant. I still was able to minister and be of service.

Possibly the greatest stress reliever for me was that I knew what to preach about. In the three prayer meetings per week, I already had topics. Learning the language of the church saved me time. It helped me to develop a series of sermons as well as a framework for envisioning the future. Even the once drab board meetings had renewed purpose and joy because I had learned the language of the church.

As I understood the language of the churches within my district, I restructured my priorities. I realized my greatest treasure was my family. Although I did not neglect any duty that I had, I placed them where they should be found. At an ordination service I once attended, I heard the speaker—who had been in ministry for more than 50 years—say the greatest testament to our ministry is not the baptisms, nor the number of churches built. Rather, that our families are with us. Understanding the language of a church helps to renew vigor and vitality to pastor and parishioner. It also helps pastors in multichurch settings realize that they can be effective without losing their spiritual lives or the spiritual life of their families. ■

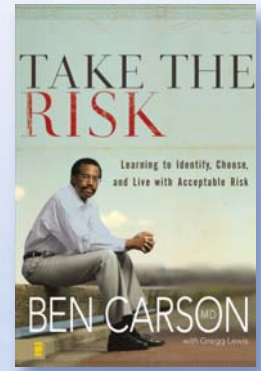
- 1 Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Resonant Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2005), 71, 72.
- 2 J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 15.
- 3 All Bible texts are taken from the King James Version.

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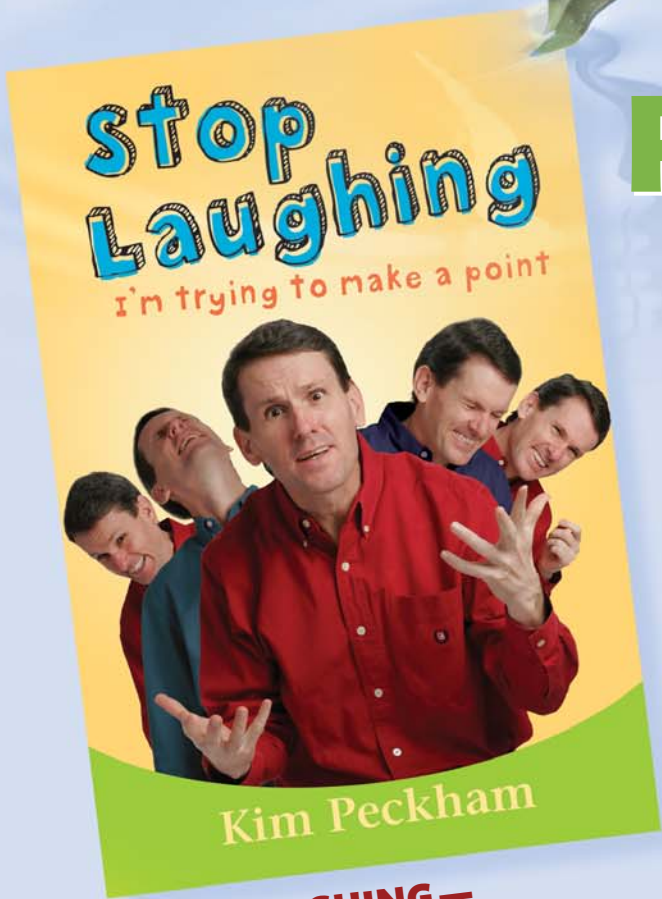


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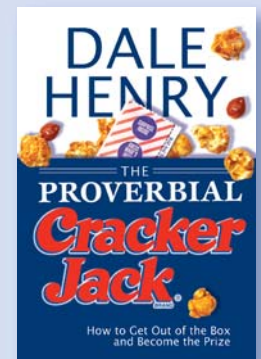


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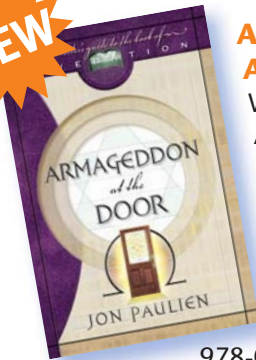
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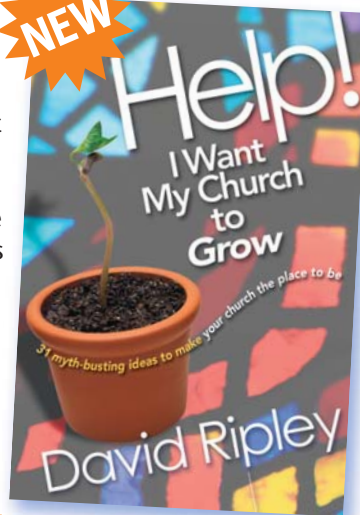


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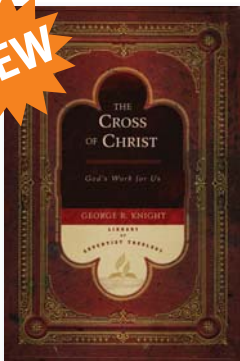


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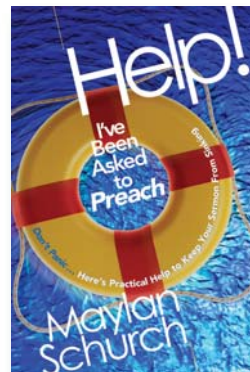


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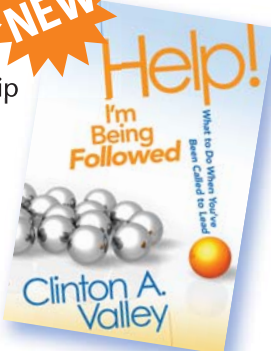
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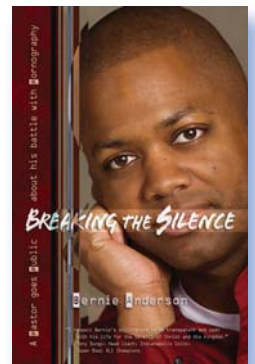
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The local ministerial alliance: Strengthened by differences

Jeff Scoggins



Jeff Scoggins, BA,
pastors three
churches in east
central Minnesota,
United States.

Several years ago I left a job in overseas church administration, moved to a community outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and started pastoring a three-church district. I was not a seasoned pastor returning to the pulpit after doing some overseas mission work. I had, in fact, never pastored a local church, except as a volunteer. After working with church planters in the former Soviet nations, I had become intent on working in the grassroots ministry back in the United States.

Hoping to level out the steep learning curve, I immediately joined my local ministerial association. I expected to meet a diverse group of local clergy, learn more about the community, and enhance my professional skills. And that is exactly what happened. But I found something else as well, something even more significant, and that was *friends*. And, for a new preacher in a small town, *this* is no small discovery.

Soon I was meeting monthly with Ryan,¹ the pastor of an evangelical church just down the road from my house. We talked about church projects, and about the challenges of pastoring; we also exchanged advice on working with difficult people, compared favorite books, and introduced each other to new authors. And, of course, we prayed together.

A few years after we arrived, my wife gave birth to our second son. The day after delivery, she developed a blood clot in her leg. Complications multiplied and, as months dragged by, she

grew frustrated about sitting on a couch with her leg in the air when she needed to be taking care of her kids. Family members prayed from afar, as did church members, friends, and colleagues. Then, one day, Ryan asked if he and his wife and a friend could come to our house to pray *with* my wife. When they arrived, I took the children downstairs to give the group some quiet. They stayed only 20 minutes, but it was obvious my wife had been moved and encouraged by their concern. Interestingly, her health has improved steadily since that day.

Ryan later told me that he considers himself our pastor, and that if ever we need him in that role, he will be available to us because pastors' families like ours do not always have a nearby pastor to minister to their needs.

The point? If I hadn't bothered to join my local ministerial group, I never would have met Ryan and his colleagues.

If they're not against us, then . . .

I've learned God uses all of us, in spite of and even because of our differences. "Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations," wrote Ellen White. "Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock."²

I am relieved to know that I'm not a lone voice in my community. The more I interact with my colleagues in ministry, the observation Jesus made in Mark 9 that "whoever is not against us is for us" (verse 40, NIV) speaks more deeply to me. I have come to know godly men and women of different faiths, and they have come to know me. I have learned from them and, I hope, they from me.

Ryan constantly pushes me in my spiritual disciplines and gives me solid spiritual advice that often finds its way into my sermons. Sometimes, I can do the same for him. Simply showing up to meet and eat with other pastors once a month provides me with scores of opportunities to share myself and my church with the greater community. When I meet people from other churches, I love to say, "I know your pastor. He's a great guy!"

Misfit to teammate

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I admit that I first felt somewhat apart from the rest of the group due to my distinctive beliefs. And, although I avoided becoming a spectacle among my fellow ministers, I have wondered that if on some

level they felt I didn't quite fit. But, after four years of involvement in my current ministerial group, I have noticed a significant sense of ease among us that didn't before exist. For instance, I never bring up the Sabbath during meetings, but they do. And we laugh together about our differences.

For my part, I stick to what we have in common.

"Here is common ground, upon which we can meet people of other denominations; and in becoming acquainted with them we should dwell mostly upon topics in which all feel an interest, and which will not lead directly and pointedly to the subjects of disagreement."³

"If our ministers show themselves friendly and sociable, and do not act as if they were ashamed of the message they bear, it will have an excellent effect, and may give these pastors and their

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congregations favorable impressions of the truth."⁴

Not all ministerial groups are equal

I also joined a different ministerial group there as well. In this case, the ministerial group leader made it a point to introduce himself as soon as I moved to town. He was a wonderful man, and I appreciated his hospitality. However, he made it clear that the pastors in that area were not interested in sharing "truth" with each other. He related to me how another pastor had wanted an "iron

sharpening iron" sort of relationship with him in regards to Bible truth. In other words, he wanted to debate and prove. This pastor pointedly explained to me that once everyone understood that this ministerial group was not that sort of forum, then all was well.

Interestingly, in the next ministerial alliance

I joined, the president used the very words "iron sharpening iron" in a positive way. He looked forward to such a relationship. This has taught me that not all ministerial groups are created equal. Not all have the respectful team dynamics of the group in which I am now involved.

Nevertheless, I'm convinced that if a ministerial group exists nearby, Adventist pastors should join—if for no other reason than to help generate a constructive dynamic that would otherwise not exist. One thing is sure: no one can effectively influence the inside of a circle from the

Benefits of belonging to a ministerial alliance

The benefits of belonging to a ministerial alliance are many. Here are just a few:

Most pastors field a significant number of phone calls asking for assistance with food, transportation, rent, utilities, lodging, etc. Our ministerial members pool their funds for this kind of assistance and funnel it through the police office. When we receive a phone call for assistance, we assess the situation, and then if appropriate, we inform the caller that we have a system set up just for them and refer them to the sheriff's office. We alert the dispatcher that we are sending someone. When that person arrives, the police run a background check, and then gives them a voucher for

gas, food, or one night's lodging, while also making sure that no one abuses the fund. A side benefit, which the police office appreciates, is that they have apprehended several people wanted for crimes as they tried to take advantage of this benevolent fund.

Our area churches have had an issue with couples "shopping" for wedding deals. In other words, whichever church requires the least premarital counseling is asked to conduct the wedding. My fellow pastors, who are as interested in preserving marriages as I am, have defined some uniform standards and cooperative measures that will ensure that wherever a couple goes, they will find someone serious about helping

them to prepare for marriage. Now, when couples are searching for a church to conduct their wedding, they find consistent premarital counseling requirements.

Our ministerial group passes around a sign-up sheet for hosting the monthly meetings. I visit other churches that I would otherwise never enter, and they come to my church. Most pastors even express good-humored appreciation for the vegetarian meal that we serve during the meeting.

We get to laugh together, even at our differences, which changes the entire dynamic between churches.

When one church faces a difficult situation, the rest of the Christian body supports them. The city condemned one church building in town due to structural concerns. Because the pastor was our friend, nearly every other pastor in town offered the temporary use of their facilities, if needed.

outside. For a pastor, a ministerial group is the most natural community circle in which to interact, and it lays a foundation for how the religious gatekeepers of your community perceive your church. That alone makes the investment worth every minute.

You might ask, though, "Where do I get the time? I don't have enough time for my own members as it is!" I have found that church members are delighted when their friends of other faiths know and like their pastor. The more my church members feel the effects of their pastor's involvement in the community, the more they encourage me to become more involved, and as a by-product they become more involved themselves.

Conflict: From within and without

I asked a few Adventist pastors about their experience in ministerial groups. Some had similar experiences to mine, others not. One pastor said that some in his own congregation attacked his involvement, fearful that he might

be "contaminated." To make matters worse, a congregation of another faith told their pastor to force the Adventist pastor out of the group because Adventism is a cult. Fortunately, that pastor sat down with the Adventist pastor and, after their discussion, was satisfied that his congregation was wrong, just as the Adventist pastor was satisfied that his congregation was wrong in fearing his "contamination." He currently serves as treasurer for his local ministerial alliance.

I also learned from other pastors that, in larger population areas, multiple ministerial groups may exist at odds with each other over theological beliefs, which makes it more difficult to decide which group to join. One pastor made it a point to join both groups in his area. Another pastor chose to join the group that defines itself by what it is rather than by what it is not. In other words, he joined the group that was more inclusive than exclusive.

As in any good endeavor, Satan is going to make it as tough as possible for the gospel. The more he can separate

Christian from Christian, the more he has divided and conquered.

In the grand scheme of things, as pastors we can't afford *not* to become involved in a local ministerial group.

"The wisest, firmest labor should be given to those ministers who are not of our faith," wrote Ellen White. "There are many who know no better than to be misled by ministers of other churches. Let faithful, God-fearing, earnest workers, their life hid with Christ in God, pray and work for honest ministers who have been educated to misinterpret the Word of Life."⁵ ❏

- 1 "Ryan" is a pseudonym.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 78.
- 3 White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1946), 144.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 143.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 562.

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We take time to ask each other about the challenges we're facing as pastors. I find that I can speak of things in this setting that would be impossible in any other. Then someone prays especially for me, and I pray especially for another pastor.

Ministerial groups sometimes put on major community events, such as a Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, after-game activities to keep kids from getting too rowdy following major sports events, Easter and Christmas community events, and much more.

Some ministerial groups create a rotating schedule in order to provide worship services for community organizations such as retirement and nursing homes, as well as for on-call chaplaincy services.

Sometimes the group organizes continuing education opportunities, bringing in outstanding speakers on topics ranging from prayer, to youth ministry, to leadership. My ministerial

group recently offered such a seminar.

The ministerial group in our area helps us connect with other community organizations, such as law enforcement, welfare services, and charitable and civic clubs. Because of the needs mentioned in our ministerial group, I involved some of my members in volunteering at the local food bank.

My fellow pastors frequently comment on my newsletter, which goes not only to my members but also to other area churches. If they didn't know me, they likely wouldn't even read it.

I gain a better sense of the history and spiritual needs of my community. I moved here just four years ago, but some of my colleagues have lived here most of their lives. Because of them, I understand things about the people around me that I wouldn't otherwise know.

The ministerial alliance also functions as a forum to sort out misunderstandings. At the first ministerial meeting I attended

here, the leader asked for announcements. Our church was beginning a Revelation seminar, but since the mailers did not indicate the sponsoring church, I felt reluctant to announce it. Fortunately, I did. Later the senior pastor of the largest church in town (who had not attended the last ministerial meeting) apologized to me because he thought another church was sponsoring the meetings, and had warned his congregation to stay away. "Next time, please let the ministerial group know of these events so we can avoid misunderstandings in the future," he told me. How glad I was to tell him that I *had* announced it. Another time, I listened as two pastors at a ministerial meeting sorted through a misunderstanding over funeral arrangements. The issue could easily have led to hard feelings between the churches, but the fact that these pastors were eating together gave them the opportunity to smooth the waters. ❏

Growing churches in a multichurch district

David Guerrero



David Guerrero, MA, pastors the Almond, Stevens Point, and Wisconsin Rapids Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Wisconsin, United States.

Pastoring a multichurch district has its challenges. How one approaches those challenges makes the difference between just surviving or thriving as a pastor of such churches. During the last eight years, I have learned, as a district pastor, some lessons and these granted me some skills in growing churches that I believe can benefit other multichurch pastors as well. In this article, I wish to share eight principles that helped me in my multichurch ministry.

1. *Dispel the pastor-laity dichotomy.* As a district pastor, you start with an advantage: since you can't be in all the churches each Sabbath, your church members should already be aware that each one of them needs to be a minister engaged in a specific pastoral task.

That's one reason why I conduct a Bible-based training series for my members shortly after I take up a new assignment. As a pastor, I have the responsibility to be a pastor-teacher. Where I feel that I am not adept in a certain area, I arrange for someone else to provide that specific training. I let my congregation know that one of my major responsibilities includes training them to be my partners in ministry, to discover and then utilize their spiritual gifts for the Lord.

When members realize that they are part of the pastoral team, they come to embrace their ministry with responsibility and excitement. Each member needs to grasp this basic vision that ministry is an every-member responsibility.

No such thing as *I am the pastor, you are the member* exists. *You and I are both parts of God's ministry to a dying world.*

2. *Set people apart for the work of the ministry.* Doing this accomplishes two major things. First, setting people apart helps us to build confidence and respect for one another. Second, I have an opportunity as a friend to help church members discover God's calling in their lives.

Once members of a congregation discover their calling, I encourage them to fulfill that calling through two main venues. First, I have them attend a spiritual gifts' seminar. Second, I have them commit to a specific ministry in which they prayerfully choose to engage. Once they have begun their ministry, the church gives them a certain autonomy to work as God has called them to work.

Of course, like all things there are checks and balances to monitor progress as well as maintain unity. This becomes necessary to ensure a cohesive working pattern within the church structure. In the churches I have pastored, I have seen individuals develop and utilize various gifts—preaching, teaching, music, administration, and hospitality, for example. Members so trained may utilize one or more of these gifts to enhance and enrich the life of the church. As this aspect of the work flourishes, I become more of an adviser and cheerleader as I watch people grow and experience God's power in their lives. Even more exciting is to see how the church grows in unity and love as well as in membership.

3. *Encourage small groups to learn and grow.* In the district where I presently pastor, we have nine small groups. These groups are diverse in nature, study, age, and approach. These groups meet the needs of the community and the church in unprecedented ways. They meet on different days of the week and at various times. When people feel that they have a place to learn and grow, other than just during the worship service, it builds a bond of unity as well as impacting kingdom growth for Jesus (Acts 2:44–47).

The churches I pastor have developed small groups with the intention of having a place where everyone can go for spiritual growth and development. Besides the already mentioned benefits of small groups, they also free me to do the ministry that God has called me to do in the community. Thus I am available to reach and impact the lives of others in ways that I would not have been able to (such as the on-call chaplaincy duty I perform at the local hospital) if I was

doing all the ministry in the church. As a result, I have had many opportunities to lead others to Jesus as well as help others get a better understanding of Seventh-day Adventists because of my availability to the community.

4. *Involve members to create an awe-inspiring worship.* With each member assuming a responsibility in the life of the church, we have an atmosphere where congregational worship becomes not a one-person-directed activity but an every-member-involved event of inspiring worship. Our churches are meant to be places where people come to meet with God and experience the

trusting relationships with others before seeking to indoctrinate them. While we must teach others the messages of the Word of God, we limit our success when we seek to *hit them right between the eyes* and *let them have it* without taking the time to let them know how much we really do care for them. We need to exemplify that care through genuinely meeting their needs.

A fellow minister shared with me that he was having a problem getting a couple with whom he was studying to make a commitment for Christ. As he shared his dilemma, I helped him understand that this couple was


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presence of the Spirit. Over the years the churches I have pastored have realized that our worship service should be evangelistically oriented. As a result, from the moment people walk in the door every effort is made to make them feel like a welcomed guest with a worship service designed to uplift Christ in our singing, praying, preaching, and teaching.

Our worship service focuses on an encounter with Christ. The service includes a time of praise in singing and testifying, leading to an experiential service in which we all have given of ourselves as well as receiving the blessing that God intends for each one of us.

5. *Be relationship builders.* In training members to bring individuals to Christ, our emphasis should be to build

having marital problems, and this was the primary need at the moment that needed to be addressed. My colleague came to realize that he was not meeting their need, and therefore this couple couldn't make the decision he wanted them to make. Of course, he was giving them Bible studies regularly. This in and of itself is a good thing; however, what this couple needed first was some time and attention to resolve their relational issues. As this need was met through pastoral counseling, support, and prayer, they gave their hearts to Jesus and were baptized. There lies an important principle in getting people involved with the church: relate to them, understand their needs, and let them know how the Lord meets their need. Once this is done, they are ready to be your partners in ministry.



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The Process of Forgiveness

Forgiveness, as more than a one-time act, can be described as a journey, or process as described by Lewes B. Smedes in his books.*

Stage One: We hurt. The pain seems personal, unfair, and deep. We will always feel this pain when we are betrayed or harmed by someone.

Stage Two: We hate. Hate becomes our natural response to any deep and unfair pain. Sadly, this instinctive backlash emotionally separates us from people who still belong in our lives.

Stage Three: We start the healing of ourselves. Here we choose to stop viewing hurtful people in the context of the pain they inflicted. Instead, we rediscover their humanity—that they are “human just like us.” We also surrender our right to get even. This enables us to see the offenders differently—through miracle eyes. Eventually we even wish that good things might come for them.

Stage Four: We come together. Finally we are ready for a reborn relationship with the person who hurt us. However, this does not mean we tolerate a continuing pattern of abuse or violence. In serious, irresolvable cases, the relationship may even need to be terminated. But in many cases, we become not only open to, but eager for, freedom from hatred and restoration of a relationship.

—Claudio and Pamela Consuegra, Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

**Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984) and *The Art of Forgiving* (New York: Random House, 1996).

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6. *Let everyone know that church growth is everyone's responsibility—indeed the entire district.* Get the church members to see that growth happens as we are concerned for each other. Educating the churches in your district to see that they are all part of one single church instead of two, three, or four different churches helps each church to participate in activities that will contribute to the growth of God's church.

One way to accomplish this is to have district-wide programs that promote unity, cooperation, and contributions from each church. Recently we had an evangelistic series where the churches that I pastor contributed leadership, finances, and talents to bring people to Christ. Three persons were baptized. What was impressive about the involvement of the members from each church? That no one worried as to which church the three new members would join. The focus was kingdom growth for the Lord.

7. *Remember that you are the pastor of the community where you serve.* In order for pastors to succeed in their district, they must be visible in the community. In order to be visible pastors, they must believe that they have been called by God to pastor the community. In the community that I pastor, I am active in providing Christian counseling and chaplaincy services to the community hospitals, police station, and businesses. I have done this by building relationships with people, churches, leaders, and organizations in the community. As a result, I am an invited presence in my community as a pastor to all people, and it is not uncommon for me to receive a phone call from some official, organization, individual, or family to come and provide spiritual care. This happens because of being available and present for everyone in the community that I serve as pastor. As I minister to others, people learn of the love of Christ and desire to know me, the God I serve, and the church to which I belong.


8. *Provide ongoing training.* Ongoing training of the people we serve turns out to be crucial to the growth of the church. In my district the training

centers on the areas where we see God leads us. We approach this prayerfully as we seek to observe where God is working and desires for us to join Him in ministry.

While we do have scheduled training in areas on winsome witnessing, small groups, church growth, spiritual gifts, etc., we also will seek to improve our skills by scheduling some of our training in areas where we realize that we need to grow and become more effective as ministers and in soul winning churches for God. We will either utilize a person in one of our congregations who has proficiency and skill in a certain area(s) to give the training, or we may invite someone else to provide the training for us. I have found that offering ongoing ministry training for the people that I serve does much for their enthusiasm and growth as effective Christian ministers.

Conclusion: What God has done

The decision of our churches to work together in ministry has resulted in seeing great things happen in our midst. Our 20-member church has grown to 55 members as they followed God's call to reach the community. A new Spanish church has been planted that has grown from four members to 40 in an 18-month period. We have seen another church grow from 20 to 65 members in the same time period. The third church in the district has built a new church with 40 people in attendance. A year later, weekly attendance in the same church averages around 100.

Numbers aren't everything, but as we have sought God's model on how to "do church," He has blessed us in ways that we could have never imagined. As we move forward working hard for Jesus as well as following God's will and plan for our churches in our multichurch district, we know that the best is yet to come! 

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eanderson@swau.edu



Pastors: The key to 2009 year of evangelism

Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States—2009 has been titled “The Year of Evangelism” with an unprecedented goal of 100,000 baptisms for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD). Impossible? “Not if we trust and serve God with all our hearts,” states **Ron Clouzet**, ministerial secretary for NAD. This initiative, suggested by pastors, worked its way to the 2007 NAD year-end meetings, where church leaders from across the division voted on it, including 21 suggestions for the entire cycle of evangelism such as preparation, proclamation, and preservation (see www.yearofevangelism.org). This constitutes the boldest initiative this division has ever had.

2009, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, United States (www.comeseegotell.org). For the first time, pastors will be invited to this professional convention where the focus will be *pastoral evangelism*. The pastors who attend will greatly benefit.

“Imagine all of North America coming together in prayer, in search of a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to sow seeds of kindness in the community, and reap people ready to meet our soon coming Lord,” concludes Clouzet. [Ron Clouzet]

Build new churches in just one day

Sacramento, California, United States—How many months or years would it take your congregation to fund, plan, and construct a new church build-

Nearly one million new members join the Seventh-day Adventist Church each year. Seventy thousand requests have been made to Maranatha Volunteers International alone for church buildings. How does a small organization begin to meet such a huge need?

The One-Day Church is a simple, cost-effective, and efficient steel structure that volunteers can build in just one day. Pastors can solicit information from Maranatha about volunteering to help construct churches for other congregations, or talk with their union leaders to request a One-Day Church for their own congregations.

Maranatha will provide the basic structure and roof. Local congregations will finish the walls with their choice of material. The One-Day Church seats about 125 people and will fit the needs



Why begin with pastors? Quite simply, because when pastors are excited about sharing and leading people to Jesus, this ministry becomes infectious. If pastors say to their members, “I’m going to conduct evangelistic meetings,” or to the church board, “I’d like us to plan for evangelism,” those members will have a much better chance to lead people to Christ than when the minister remains on the sidelines. When the pastor leads in evangelism, the members will follow in service.

One of the most exciting resources for pastors will be the biannual ministries convention scheduled for January 18–21,



The first One-Day Church was completed in June, outside of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The building was assembled in a single day and ready for a service that night.

ing? It is now possible to build a quality church building in just one day. Maranatha Volunteers International has partnered with Adventist-Laymen’s Services and Industries and Adventist businessman **Garwin McNeilus** to develop a prototype steel structure and roof for an easily assembled sanctuary.

of congregations in more remote areas. Maranatha will continue to build its current structures in other regions.

Maranatha erected the first of several One-Day Churches this year in Ecuador. For more information or to volunteer on the building site, visit www.maranatha.org or call

Dateline



(916) 920-1900. Pastors wishing to request a church building should contact their union or division leaders to make a formal request. [Carrie Purkeypile]

Interfaith conference

Doha, Qatar—On May 13–14, 2008, the sixth Doha Conference of Interfaith Dialogue (among Jews, Christians, and Muslims) was held under the auspices of the emir of Qatar, **Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa**, who in a spirit of promoting a culture of dialogue in the region, has supported this initiative. This conference was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Qatar University, and the newly inaugurated Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue.

The overall theme was religious values: perspectives on peace and respect for life. Ethical issues such as euthanasia, desecration of sacred symbols, human trafficking, and violence in media were addressed together with some other issues more philosophical in nature such as attitudes in each faith towards the other, spiritual values, ideals, and some tragic issues that are a source of pain in the region.

In each panel, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim views were presented, after which

a period of discussion followed. Anglicans, Catholics, Copts, Orthodox, and Seventh-day Adventists, among others, represented the Christian community. [M. Phillips/TED News Staff/TED News]

Iraqi president affirms Christian presence and roots

Baghdad, Iraq—Iraqi President **Jalal Talabani** invited leaders from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other Christian churches, to a formal dinner at his residence in April to affirm their unique role in Iraq's historical and cultural heritage.

In his address to leaders of various churches, President Talabani acknowledged that Christians were among the founders of Iraq. He asked them to embrace the country and its history, and encouraged them not to leave Iraq in spite of the difficult situation gripping the country.

He concluded his speech by declaring, "Iraq is a large garden and the Christians are the flowers in this garden. If we lose them, we lose that beautiful color and the sweet fragrance."

Baghdad Adventist Church pastor **Fawzi Benjamin** represented the Adventist Church during this event. [B. Fargo/TED News]

Evangelism in India

Tura, Meghalaya, India—Peter J. Prime, associate ministerial secretary for the world church of Seventh-day Adventists, conducted a two-week evangelistic meeting April 26–May 10 in Tura, Meghalaya, India, during which 536 persons were baptized. The baptisms were the largest number ever recorded for the area and represented about a 7 percent increase in its total membership.

The meetings were held in the town hall and were aired nightly on cable TV for one hour. Each evening the attendance at the hall—with a seating capacity of more than 1,500—was dense at the beginning but became even more so with an over-flowing crowd by the end of each evening's program.

A field school of evangelism for pastors and lay members of the Northeast India Union Section was conducted in conjunction with the evangelistic meeting. The distinctive feature of the program was that it represented an exposition of the gospel within the biblical message "God Is Love." Those who attended were given the opportunity to experience true liberty—liberty that comes only from the gospel. [Peter J. Prime]

R E S O U R C E S

BOOK REVIEW

15 Characteristics of Effective Pastors: How to Strengthen Your Inner Core and Ministry Impact, by Kevin W. Mannoia and Larry Walkemeyer, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, Gospel Light, 2007.

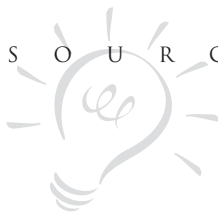
Pastoral ministry comes with prepackaged expectations—preaching, prayer meetings, visitations, baby dedications—

all interspersed with an occasional evangelistic meeting or Bible study group. However, anything done on a regular basis without creativity and evaluation can become boring and ineffective.

How, then, can we as pastors be confident that we are being *effective* in leading our churches spiritually? How can we safeguard ourselves from just "going through the motions" of ministry? Will our impact on the community be active and vibrant or unnoticed?

The authors direct our attention to 15 characteristics that an *effective* pastor should possess. Some of these

traits seem to come with the ministry package: love for God, love for the church, prayer life, and Holy Spirit empowerment. However, there were a few other areas where pastors may be easily challenged, and thus our ministries can be negatively affected. One such area that deserves careful consideration, if the goal of *effective* ministry is to be attained, is personal accountability. The authors, Kevin W. Mannoia and Larry Walkemeyer, indicate that "effective pastors have close friends with whom they share life. Alone, built on the small foundation of their own ability, a pastor



stands virtually no chance of remaining undefeated. Mutuality requires that you acknowledge your own inadequacy and it will not exist where vulnerability is not present." Effective growth and change are often times the direct result of objective scrutiny from a trustworthy, accountability friend, who is willing to risk reflecting a different perspective.

Grace, spiritual formation, integrity, servant leadership, holiness, inspired preaching, sure calling, a godly character, a strong marriage, and visionary leadership are the other characteristics emphasized by the authors. These traits are not as simple as we may assume. The authors prompt us to think more deeply than we normally would.

These characteristics can easily be used as a tool for pastoral self-evaluation, for pastoral screening and searches, and for pastoral training in theological seminaries. Students can actually learn from pastors who are living and incorporating these character traits into successful, *effective* ministry—thus making a difference in their private and corporate lives.

It's time we all embrace *effective* ministry. Let this book teach you how to become a well-equipped, *effective* pastor.

—Reviewed by Brenda Billingsy, senior pastor, Metropolitan Seventh-day Adventist Church, Hyattsville, Maryland, United States.

BOOK REVIEW

I Forgive You, But . . ., by Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2007.

I Forgive You, But . . ., by Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, is not merely another book about why we should forgive each other. With a depth of theological

understanding rarely seen in publications on this subject, Morales-Gudmundsson presents forgiveness not only as an intrinsic part of God's character, but she ably articulates the idea that forgiveness—God's and ours—constitutes the very heart of the gospel.

Gudmundsson describes the process of forgiveness as a journey that includes not only the act of appropriating God's forgiveness, but the experience of becoming a channel of God's grace and love for the restoration of all who enter into what she calls the "covenant" of forgiveness. She also sees this covenant journey as one in which justification and sanctification are united in applying each dimension of God's forgiveness to all of our sins, past, present, and future. Because "sin is the transgression of life and the order that sustains life" (p. 44), it cannot be ignored or passed over. "My offense or that of another toward me carries with it a price that someone has to pay" (p. 44). And from the gospel perspective, "it was, in fact, the Victim who was called upon to pay the price" (p. 44).

She finds a deeper appreciation for God's forgiveness in two distinct New Testament Greek words that are used to describe two unique aspects of God's forgiveness: *charizomai* and *aphiemi*. The former is the term that is used to refer to the aspect of forgiveness that God granted to the whole world through Jesus Christ on the cross—because sin was imputed to Him. The latter term means "to put or send away" or "to separate from" (p. 52). This is what God does every time we repent and confess. "Through the transactions of our confession and repentance, acknowledging with gratitude the gift of forgiveness that has already been given us, we take hold of God's *aphiemi* to begin living the life of forgiveness" (p. 52).

I have found this book to be an invaluable tool in counseling church members, as well as a resource for deepening my own theological understanding of God's

plan of forgiveness and restoration.

—Earl Peters, MDiv, is pastor of the Salt Lake Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States.

BOOK REVIEW

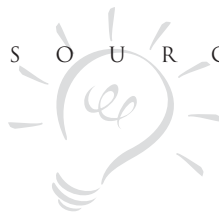
If I Were the Devil, by George Knight, Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2007.

The title of the book caught my attention, not because I worry about George Knight being the devil, but because Phil Follett and I asked George Knight to make this presentation at the 2000 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Session in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. I wondered how that excellent, but brief, presentation could become a book.

Here's how: Knight collected 20 articles and presentations, grouped them into categories, and published them as a book. He even kept the historical references to events and publications, which lends an interesting sense of perspective to the chapters. The "Acknowledgments" section gives a handy guide to when the chapters were written, and the target audience of each chapter, article, or presentation.

The book's value lies in Knight's breadth of knowledge of Adventist history, and his keen insights about that history's lessons for the twenty-first century. Even though most of the book comes from material published in the 1990s, it still reads like today's newspaper.

For example, his review of Adventist prophetic interpretation of the shut door, written almost 20 years ago now, still yields valuable insights, not about theology in the 1840s and 1850s, but about mission in this century. So, also, does his analysis of the challenges facing the church administrative structure.



The book's primary weakness lies in its collecting of articles on relatively similar topics that are too often repetitive. The collection needed a stronger rewriting or editing, so that the reader was not confronting the same material about the history of Adventism's road to organization in the mid-1800s or its highly hierarchical structure of today.

One review of each of these historical events would have sufficed for the book, but each is treated multiple times.

Perhaps the most lucid chapter is "Church Structure for the 21st Century." It brings together Knight's historical reviews, ties them to current management thinking, and creates a framework for re-thinking church structure. Knight

argues that the framework needs to be biblical, balanced, affordable, international, and missiological.

The book is a useful addition to the library of any pastor or other thought leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

—Reviewed by Kermit Netteburg, senior pastor of the Beltsville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Beltsville, Maryland, United States. ❏

LETTERS *continued from page 3*

as this, neither is the church for which he works. This is reminiscent of a time when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, [KJV]). Are we blind guides? Are we not able to be more than spiritually ambivalent when apparent moral complexities arise?

Jesus was never confounded by such issues, and He isn't today. Psalm 139:13 speaks clearly concerning this topic. David speaks of being "knit . . . together" [NIV] in the womb. When does this miraculous knitting together begin? As soon as the sperm penetrates the egg. This is no mystery. Therefore, relegating the embryo to any use other than that which it was designed for—the eventual birth of a child—is *not* a part of God's plan.

—David Moench, email

True discipleship

Jim Cress in his April 2008 "Pastor's Pastor" column ("Not Quite Christians") has defined one of the critical needs of the church today. We must be grateful and we must rejoice in the enormous growth of the world church in many parts of the world, propelling to astonishing achievement of doubling and tripling accessions in the last ten to fifteen years. This growth has been particularly noticeable in the so-called developing world.

Even as we rejoice in such phenomenal growth, we must not neglect to pay attention to a key concern that Cress raises: the issue of discipleship. Statistical growth in membership must be reflected in measurable indicators of discipleship:

faithfulness in worship attendance, Sabbath keeping, stewardship, witnessing, to name just a few. Recently a church leader shared with me, with a great deal of sadness, that many units in his field have not paid workers' wages regularly, have not sent in their share of workers' retirement contributions, have not been able to collect tithes due from subordinate units, and have not been able to forward tithes withheld from payroll. And this from one of the fastest growing areas in the world field. Along with such sad reflection, I was given a simple math lesson: if each of the members that make up the statistical report gives one unit of currency of the country each week (I am not talking about faithful tithe, and I am not comparing it with the US dollar), that area may be able to overcome most of its financial problems.

Meaningful growth must transcend numbers to embrace discipleship and stewardship and must subject itself to periodic auditing of membership records to care for death, transfer, apostasy, and just not being there. Unaudited membership is good only for projecting an image of unprecedented status in growth and retention and skewed number of delegates to constituency sessions.

—John M. Fowler, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

True evangelism

I found Don Jacobsen's article "The Lady in the Aisle" (April 2008) thought-

provoking. It speaks to the very core of our existence as a people and church.

How do we reach people in an ever-changing world and an ever-changing church with the good news of the gospel? While the model that he suggests is far different from that which we have used over the last several decades, I suggest that it is not as much a paradigm shift as it is an appeal to return to the method employed by Jesus and that of the early Adventist pioneers. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' " (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Typically, this method does not produce the quick results that we get from traditional public evangelism, and requires a lifetime commitment rather than that of only five or six weeks at a time. But the results do tend to be longer lasting, and the experience for the individual believer who "lives evangelistically" is unparalleled. And how much more successful would our public evangelism be if we were preaching to an audience who already considered us to be their church? It would seem to me that Jacobsen has challenged us as pastors to model Jesus' method and to cast that vision to those sheep whom God has entrusted us to shepherd.

—Mike Hill, email ❏

How to guarantee a crowd, part II

JAMES A. CRESS



In addition to some methods for catching the interest of potential attendees at evangelistic endeavors that we discussed previously (June 2008), the following ideas will help increase attendance and maintain continuing interest in your programs.

Biblical authority. Base each presentation firmly on God's Word. Shun sermons that wander into speculation. Build confidence by referencing the Bible, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and by affirming the Holy Spirit's power to awaken our hearts to understand what Jesus wants us to experience.

Take-home lessons. During the first week of our series, we provide each person a Bible study guide to complete at home and bring back when they return to the meetings. I challenge participants to complete the lessons as a method for learning to study the Bible for themselves. The lessons emphasize the messages presented and enable the Holy Spirit to speak to each individual as they study.

Preach benefits. More than by merely reciting facts, people are warmed and won by proclaiming the benefits behind factual features. For example, hope beyond death's grief brings joy when I explain how Jesus regards the benefit of reunion for myself and my loved ones as so important that He personally guarantees the resurrection—the Lord, Himself, descends from heaven to raise the righteous and catches the living up together with them.

Experimentation. When presenting messages that compel behavioral change, share the process as well as the expectation. As I invite people to consider keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, I encourage them to experience the Lord's Day for themselves by providing opportunities to enjoy a Sabbath blessing. Rather than asking for a commitment to a reality they have not yet experienced, I encourage tasting and seeing that the Lord is good.

Fellowship. While people learn much through proclamation, they absorb more through interaction and discussion. After-meeting times of conversation, light refreshments, questions,

and fellowship accomplish much in settling the message into the minds and attitudes of attendees. Such opportunities awaken conviction.

Goals. Encourage faith-stretching objectives. We ask members to pray specifically for those they will invite and to reach out actively and winsomely to their family, friends, and associates expecting heaven to honor their endeavors with fruit for the kingdom. Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God.

Culturally relevant incentives. In some locales, we have encouraged the most popular person in the city to invite all their friends. Then, we recognize the person with the most guests as "Mr./Ms. Congeniality" and give them a special gift for having demonstrated their influence.

Unique experiences. A fellowship banquet featuring healthful recipes makes an inviting introduction to Adventist lifestyle. We always include a Communion service as part of the evangelistic series with advance notice that Adventists celebrate open Communion and we invite any believer to participate.

Family orientation. Our colleagues, Ron and Karen Flowers, prepared a helpful book, *Family Evangelism*,* which presents techniques of using family systems rather than individuality as an evangelistic tool. While the Western world seems to glory in the individual acting alone upon their convictions, the New Testament presents another approach of leaders bringing their whole extended family with them into discipleship. Providing infant care and attractive children's programming signals parents that you desire to benefit their entire family.

Attractive advertising. Your promotional strategies dictate the crowds you attract. Sensationalized portrayals

of lurid scenes may detract those who would be open to another emphasis. For example, instead of depicting fierce beasts, our evangelistic brochure features a dad embracing his wife and kids with their puppy. Attendees arrive expecting practical benefits.

Practical topics. Emphasize Bible answers for real-life situations. Discover the powerful impact of topics that provide scriptural methods for successful living—how to face the future with greater confidence; how to have your prayers answered; how your family can be secure. Such titles attract those who are looking for answers.

Enlist support. When an Adventist hospital, school, or publishing institution exists in the community, I always feature these leaders, and they invite their contacts. I also contact spiritual television and radio programs to request a special letter of invitation to their lists. I even ask my fellow pastors of other denominations to notify their congregations that I am beginning a special series in my church designed for the entire community.

Sequence of presentations. Begin with practical and prophetic topics that build confidence in Bible authority and are common to most believers such as the assurance of God's love and providence in Daniel 2 or the hope and signs of Jesus coming in Matthew 24. Next, preach distinctive truths that anticipate convicting choices and conclude your series with deeply-spiritual decision sermons that motivate a determination to follow Jesus.

Christ-centered. Keep Jesus the central focus of every sermon. Make His power and the joy of walking with Him as your Savior and Lord the theme and appeal of every message. You will discover real power and amazing results from lifting up Jesus. ■

* Ron and Karen Flowers, *Family Evangelism* (Silver Spring, MD: Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003).

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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