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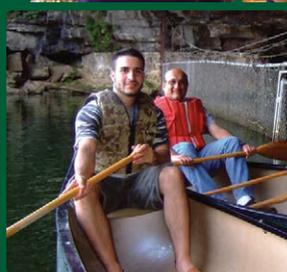
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- 06 The life of the pastoral family: An interview with Willie and Elaine Oliver**
Willie E. Hucks II
How do you develop and maintain a healthy family life? Get tips about one of the toughest jobs anyone can tackle.
- 10 Maximizing marital and parental satisfaction in pastoral couples**
Curtis A. Fox
Read how to prioritize your life to ensure that your spouse and family get your best time and energy.
- 14 Securing Christian marriage and family: Helpful resources for pastors**
Claudio Consuegra
The purpose of this article centers on providing resources that will assist pastors in their ministry to their family and their members' families.
- 17 Pastoral stress management to maximize family function**
H. Peter Swanson
How can we learn to deal with the harsh reality of stress?
- 21 Family bonding and family dinners**
Duane McBride, David Sedlacek, Alina Baltazar, Lionel Matthews, Romulus Chelbegean, and Gary L. Hopkins
Pastors must find ways to effectively minister as our current society faces a crisis in the family with a destructive impact on community and the church.
- 25 Mentoring: Training the second line of leadership**
N. Ashok Kumar
Discover what mentoring involves, how it can be a blessing, and how to be a good mentor in the ministry of the church.

CORRECTION: In the January 2013 issue of *Ministry*, F. Donald Yost's article, ("Nurturing Where Dementia Has Struck"), has an omission. The "Spiritual Care Dos" segment did not include its source provided by the author, which is the Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network at www.docstoc.com/docs/895702/Providing-Spiritual-Care-in-times-of-Disaster. We apologize for the omission.

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- 04 Letters**
05 Editorial
09 Revival & Reformation
28 Resources
29 Dateline
30 The Pastor and Health

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12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring,
MD 20904-6600 U.S.A.
www.ministrymagazine.org
ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org

EDITOR

Derek J. Morris

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Willie E. Hucks II

CONSULTANTS TO EDITOR

John Fowler, Clifford Goldstein, Myrna Tetz

EDITORIAL SPECIALIST

Sheryl Beck

FINANCE AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGER

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ADVERTISING

Cheri Gattton
advertising@ministrymagazine.org
+1 208-965-0157

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+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

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SECRETARY Jerry N. Page

ASSOCIATE SECRETARIES

Jonas Arrais, Robert Costa,
Willie E. Hucks II, Anthony Kent,
Derek Morris, Janet Page

MINISTERIAL RESOURCE CENTER COORDINATOR

Cathy Payne
888-771-0738, +1 301-680-6508
www.ministerialassociation.com

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“None among us is perfect and it is out of the acknowledgement of our imperfections and the humility that accompanies them that we are humbled and encouraged by grace.”

Pastoral thorns in the flesh

I just finished reading “The Preacher’s Problem” by Charles Wesley Knight (November 2012), and all I can say is Amen! Thank you so much for this timely article with its focus on the joys and challenges of public proclamation of the Word. Most certainly each one of us who is called to preach has our own version of a thorn in the flesh—be it physical, spiritual, or emotional. None among us is perfect and it is out of the acknowledgement of our imperfections and the humility that accompanies them that we are humbled and encouraged by grace. This article will remain on my mind and in my heart with the blessings of the honesty and truth it names and with which I am empowered to preach, minister, and lead with (my) thorn.

Blessings on your ministry of encouragement through *Ministry* and thank you for the continued quality of excellence in the articles you publish.

—Rev. Susan McAllister, Wexford Heights United Church, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

Thank you so much, Charles Wesley Knight, for encouraging me through your insightful article. It pinpointed that “thorn” that can derail any preacher. I have seen it happen. For that reason, it has been my prayer for God to keep me humble.

—Willie J. Wright Jr., pastor, Rochester, New York, United States

Having just finished reading for the third time the lead article in the November 2012 issue of *Ministry*, I can only hasten to convey personal and heartfelt thanks for a truly helpful and much needed presentation by Charles Wesley Knight. Paul’s thorns in the flesh have now become clear as crystal to me and answered so many questions that have plagued me over the years in the pulpit.

Now retired, I am unable to put into practice the aching desire to amend the lost years of my preaching, as I had regarded the thorns in my approach to sermon or pulpit preparation as a negative invasion by Satan to upset or hinder, rather than a rejoicing that

humility was the challenge in bringing all glory to God.

My sincere prayer is that many others will be able to benefit from this great article as well.

—Max Van Dyck, email

Caring for those with dementia

I read the article by F. Donald Yost (“Nurturing Where Dementia Has Struck”—January 2013), and I have some concerns. He left a lot of the complexity of issues regarding the struggles facing the family and the individual dealing with dementia out of the article. It appeared to me that he only dealt with his feeling of loss and was not able to see that she also might be experiencing her own feelings of loss.

My sister had Alzheimer’s disease and, during that period of her life, my other sisters and I attended a monthly support group led by a nurse who was trained in working with dementia residents and the progression of the Alzheimer’s disease. There are seven levels of dementia; however, it does not progress from level one to seven. Instead, the individual can be in level one status this minute and level seven the next minute. Therefore, you cannot ever dismiss the person as completely unable to understand what is going on or that they have lost all comprehension of how much they have been compromised as a functioning individual. As my sister encountered more difficulty in speaking, it was very obvious that she continued to comprehend what we said to her and did with her. Her voluntary comments, though small, would tell us very clearly that she continued to understand. We continued to give her the respect and love every human being deserves, and we truly enjoyed being

Continued on page 27





Misguided devotion

I began my pastoral ministry with good intentions. After completing seminary, I set out with a deep desire to serve God with all my heart, along with all of His children. Unfortunately, I was misguided and ignorant in one vital area of life.

For the first few years of my pastoral ministry, I abandoned my family in the name of Jesus. I started work early, came home late, and allowed almost any phone call to interrupt family activities. To make matters worse, I was oblivious to the damage occurring in my family. Whoever said “ignorance is bliss” either was ill informed or was talking about some other situation. *Bliss* was not a word that came to mind when describing the loneliness and sense of abandonment in my home.

Fortunately, my wife had the courage to confront my unhealthy behavior—she wrote me a letter. I can still remember the moment I opened it. The content was quite different from the love notes we wrote each other during our courtship. One sentence will never be forgotten: “You tell me that I’m at the top of your list, but I don’t feel like it.”

The time had come to practice what I preached. I was familiar with the inspired counsel of the apostle Paul: to love our spouse as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25). The apostle used words such as *nourish* and *cherish* to describe the intentional nurturing of our family relationships. But how often we fail to put those principles into practice.

The articles in this month’s issue of *Ministry* will help us on our journey. I agree with my colleague Willie Hucks that developing and maintaining a healthy family life is one of the toughest

jobs anyone can tackle. In his excellent interview with Willie and Elaine Oliver, Family Life directors for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, we are reminded “while healthy family relationships are difficult to develop and sustain, it is still possible to enjoy a fairly healthy family life.” The good news is there is hope for us all.

One powerful insight impacted me from Curtis Fox’s article on maximizing marital and parental satisfaction in pastoral couples: “Prioritize your life and work to ensure that your spouse and family get your best time and energy. Build beautiful memories in special places, doing wonderful things together.” While I deeply regret the wasted years, I’m thankful for new beginnings and fresh opportunities.

The article on family dinners and bonding provides timely counsel for our eat-on-the-run culture. Take time to eat with your family and with special friends. While we don’t live to eat, we can experience blessings as we take time together enjoying healthy food. I have learned to give thanks to God at mealtimes—not only for the blessing of food when many in the world go hungry, but also the blessing of sharing the meal with loving family or friends.

We pray you will be blessed, and we also want to hear from you. What are some ways you have found to safeguard your family and enjoy

healthy relationships? What lessons have you learned during your years of pastoral ministry? You might even want to share this issue of *Ministry* with your spouse and/or children. The articles could provide the basis for constructive conversations during quality family time. Sometimes the truth we discover is painful, but this is a vital step towards healing. If you are married, your spouse will rejoice. If you are a parent, your children will bless you, or at least give thanks to God. If you are single, you can apply valuable lessons to your important

While I deeply regret the wasted years, I’m thankful for new beginnings and fresh opportunities.

relationships. Share this special issue with a married colleague in ministry who may need this practical counsel more than you realize.

I am so thankful to God and my wife for rescuing me from an unhealthy behavior early in our marriage. We have been married for more than 35 years and we have had at least 25 happy years! I plan to take some practical counsel from this month’s issue and live what I learn. I encourage you to do the same. 🙏

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Willie E. Hucks II, DMin, is associate editor of *Ministry*.



The life of the pastoral family:

An interview with Willie and Elaine Oliver

Editor's note: Willie and Elaine Oliver serve as directors of the Department of Family Ministries for the world church of Seventh-day Adventists, headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Willie Hucks (WH): So many, including myself, believe developing and maintaining a healthy family life is one of the toughest jobs anyone can tackle. What challenges have you found to be unique to ministerial families in particular?

Willie Oliver (WO): We have to admit up front that there are no perfect families because there are no perfect people. Even when people are intentional about having healthy family relationships, it still remains a challenge because we are all flawed, and our failings make it extremely difficult to sustain healthy relationships. But while healthy family relationships are difficult to develop and sustain, it is still possible to enjoy a fairly healthy family life.

The families of pastors are similar to other families, plus have the added pressure of being on display and under constant scrutiny. Because communities of faith are about accepting, developing, and maintaining trust in God demonstrated through the way believers live their lives, church members instinctively tend to look at the pastor's family as a model of how to behave as a Christian. Since no one is perfect, the deficiencies

within the parsonage are often magnified for no other reason than their position in church life as the "first family." This added burden frequently multiplies unwarranted pressure on young children and adolescents, and even on spouses who may try to keep up with the expectations of church members or who grow resentful by the unnecessary stress this reality causes. In teenagers, this unwanted attention often manifests itself in rebellious behavior and disregarding church norms and highly valued Christian principles.

WH: What lessons have you learned as parents of two children—pastor's kids—that can help your fellow pastoral couples raise their children?

Elaine Oliver (EO): An occupational hazard in parenting pastors' kids is feeling the pressure to have perfect children. Sometimes that pressure comes from our own expectations, but often it comes from the expectations of our congregation or other outside influences. The truth is, children are human and will make mistakes, and pastors' kids are no different. We found it much more helpful to concentrate on loving our children unconditionally, passing

on to them our spiritual values through daily family worship, and spending meaningful time with them each day, even if for just a few minutes. If, as parents, we create an environment of trust and safety, our children will be more willing to talk to us about their spiritual struggles that are a normal part of their developmental process.

WH: It seems natural to think of the perfect family: husband, wife, and children that live happily ever after. Do you provide resources for non-nuclear families? For example, families that have been blended after divorce or the death of a spouse?

EO: Working effectively with families means addressing the realities that exist in our communities today. While it is true God left us an ideal to reach for, an important part of our work is to develop resources that speak to the many permutations of family forms we find in society and the church today. To be sure, good communication in families led by two parents is not much different than good communication in a single-parent home. Notwithstanding, any meaningful and relevant ministry to families must address the problems persistent within

families in the church, which, in many ways, are a reflection of the families we find in the general population. The truth is, while good communication

blended (parent/stepparent, child/children, and/or stepchildren), made up of a single adult living alone, or single adults sharing a home. People

do so later than they did before. Then there is the reality of divorce, ever present in and out of the church, in addition to widows and widowers, whom we tend to forget. Regardless of what is causing the increase in single adults, we have no choice but to be mindful and intentional about ministering effectively to this segment of the population. Ministry leaders should be intentional about informing themselves about the specific needs of single adults in their congregations as well as the surrounding communities. Every house of worship should have a single-adult ministries coordinator and committee that work closely with the pastor(s) to address the interests of the various members of this group. Providing fellowship, support, and ministry involvement for the various single adult groupings in the church



is good communication, we are very mindful that relational dynamics vary based on the people who make up that particular family. There is no single way of handling families. As such, we try to develop resources that will address the specific needs of families in order to be relevant and instructive regardless of the present family need.

WH: It also seems natural to *not* think of singles as composing a family, a family of one. Are singles a family? What counsel do you provide to pastors for how they should relate to singles in their churches?

WO: We tend to think holistically when addressing the notion of family. From our perspective, a family can be nuclear (father, mother, child/children; single parent, child/children), extended (more than one generation under the same roof),

involved in pastoral ministry must be concerned and engaged with both the family of *one* and the family of *one* adult parenting children, which is growing in prominence in and out of the church. Marriage trends in recent decades, tracked by the National Marriage Project* based at the University of Virginia, show that Americans are less likely to marry (from 1970 to 2010 the rate of people getting married declined by almost

is so vital to the health of church life. Despite the fact that marriage and family are high values among people of faith, churches must fight the tendency to be couple oriented. Congregations must be mindful of the specific needs of this burgeoning demographic or risk becoming irrelevant.

WH: Child abuse remains a prevalent issue worldwide. Is there something

If, as parents, we create an environment of trust and safety, our children will be more willing to talk to us about their spiritual struggles.

pastors and churches can do to educate church members regarding a proper response to this problem? What can churches do to positively impact their communities that experience such horrors?

EO: If there are children in your congregation(s), there is a high probability at least one child is being abused. Every church needs to be sure it has policies in place to help protect children, at the very least, when they are in church or at a church-related event. As Christians, we see children as precious gifts from God, and are tasked with the responsibility to care, protect, and make sure they develop and grow as God would have them do. Each church should have a family ministries committee, which includes parenting education among its benefits to members and visitors alike. The objective of parenting is to nurture children to grow to their full potential

in Christ. Discipline, which comes from the same root word as *discipleship*, should be the motivation of parents with their children, rather than punishment. Discipline aims to teach and give nurturing direction while punishment aims to be punitive, hurt, and control children. Pastors must be mindful to train their staff members and parents in their congregations to value children and make it a point to preach parenting sermons that convey God's regard for children.

WH: How can pastors and elders access the available resources you provide?

WO: Each year the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists develops a resource called the *Family Ministries Planbook* that contains sermons, workshops, and other leadership pieces to facilitate working with families in congregations. Over the years, our department has developed

Readers who have an iPhone, iPad, or an Android smartphone can download our free worship app from the respective devices' app store by typing *family worship* into the Search window. The Family Worship app is filled with worship ideas to help parents with children from infancy to late adolescence. You will find many other resources through our Web site, including our family minute television segments that are played on Hope Channel as well as our new television program, *Real Family Talk With Willie and Elaine Oliver*, also on Hope Channel.

WH: What counsel do you give to pastoral families in terms of maintaining their daily worship?

EO: Make family worship a matter of priority. Agree, as a family, on the most appropriate time to have family worship, then remain committed to that time and make it interesting by including the entire family in taking turns deciding what components to include in your time together and

leading out in worship. If you have school-age children, your sessions need last no longer than ten to fifteen minutes. If your children are adolescents, fifteen to twenty minutes may be enough. The real point of family worship is to connect you to each other and to God. Invariably, you will find it easy to share that concept with members of your congregations. However, it is really important that we spend that time involved in spiritual disciplines as a family. Children grow



Willie and Elaine Oliver

a number of other family strengthening materials that can be accessed from AdventSource, our North American-based ministry resource center. Simply logon to www.adventsource.org, click on the Store icon, and type *family* into the search engine on that page. You will immediately see a list of items that can be useful for a deliberate and effective ministry to families. You may also logon to our Web site at <http://family.adventist.org> for information on additional ministry choices.

up so fast; and before you know it, they are gone. Leaving a spiritual legacy to our children is among the best gifts we could ever give them as ministry leaders—the kind of gift that will stay with our children for many years to come.

WH: Somewhat related to the previous question, what lessons have you learned from your own marriage that you can share with your fellow pastoral couples as it relates to keeping Christ at the center of your relationship?

WO: Being a Christian is a full-time reality that applies to every facet of my life; marriage included. However, I am similar to other Christians throughout the ages. The apostle Paul expressed it best in Romans 7:15 when he declared: “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do” [NIV]. This acknowledges that, as Christians, we tend to not always practice what we profess because of our human frailties. While a

relationship with Christ is central to my life and a priority that carries into my married life, I am ever mindful of the inconsistencies that often appear in my marriage to Elaine. My Christianity informs the way I negotiate marriage by intentionally being kind, loving, patient, forgiving, and committed to my wife. Because I am human, what I want to do I do not always do. A long time ago, though, Elaine and I agreed we would never hurt each other on purpose. So, when our humanity gets in the way of how we intend to behave in our marriage, we pause, acknowledge our mistake, apologize, and make the necessary time to repair the hurt in our relationship. We have learned to give each other the benefit of the doubt when either makes a mistake that hurts the other. We understand that there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people, and that includes us. As pastoral couples, we must understand that we are

human and subject to inconsistencies. We should also remember how the apostle Paul comes to grips with this phenomenon as expressed in Romans 7:24, 25. The grace of God is always available and must be employed in the parsonage to maintain the equilibrium that is necessary in every marriage that will remain viable.

WH: Do you have any closing thoughts to share with our readers?

WO: Having a relatively healthy family is a gift from God. To be sure, it takes effort, intentionality, and reliance on the Almighty. Nevertheless, we should never forget God has promised to be with us until the end of the age, leave His peace with us, and supply all of our needs. Let’s trust Him despite the challenges faced each day of our lives. 

* The State of Our Unions, accessed Jan. 16, 2013, www.stateofourunions.org.

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One essential activity

Jesus taught that many who are lost cannot be classed as necessarily wicked; rather, they are foolish and careless (see Matt. 7:24–27). One area with potential for neglect and carelessness is the regular, systematic study of the Word of God.

The reading of books about the Bible or theology does not substitute for a deep, personal knowledge of Scripture. To neglect the experience of the rejuvenating, reforming power that the study of God’s Word gives to our spiritual lives is a loss we dare not risk.

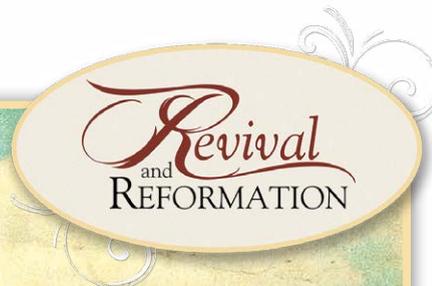
Ellen G. White observes, “Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them.”*

Lord, “[d]irect me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. . . . Turn my eyes away from

worthless things; preserve my life according to your word” (Ps. 119:35, 37, NIV).

— AUDREY ANDERSSON SERVES AS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION, ST. ALBANS, HERTS, ENGLAND.

* Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 593.



Curtis A. Fox, PhD, is professor and chair of the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, United States.



Maximizing marital and parental **satisfaction** in **pastoral couples**

The call to pastoral ministry can be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences that any person can have. But, this same calling can be very challenging and dangerous as well. Specifically, the life of a minister could have significant negative effects on his or her personal life, marriage, and family life. This may not be new light, but the helplessness that stalks many ministers as they attempt to evade the landmines around their marriages and families leave many bruised or maimed.

So as to avoid a pessimistic view, I must pause to rejoice with generations of pastors that have shared in this blessed work for the salvation of souls, leadership in the body of Christ, and in the empowerment of the people of God for life and service. Many such men and women have baptized in the name of Christ, dedicated children to God, buried saints that have fallen asleep in Jesus, encouraged many who were discouraged, performed weddings of gleeful couples, challenged young people to live for Christ, preached passionate sermons, and more, yea, far more. Pastoral ministry is an awesome vocation. Can there be any downside to such a noble calling? Can there

be any pitfalls in doing it? I answer Yes—many!

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to study clergy families, and I found this to be fascinating. Many clergy families share five major stressors in common: mobility, low financial compensation, high time demands, low social support, and intrusiveness to the boundaries of the family.

In many denominations, clergy and their families are moved from one congregation to another (and often from one homestead to another to be nearer to their congregations). These moves involve uprooting from familiar surroundings, social networks, friendships, and social institutions that aid in their survival and well-being. Children and spouses may have to separate from work and school to allow a peaceful transition.

With regard to compensation, ministers, in some parts of the world, have been known to have lower levels of remuneration compared to other professions. While in the top ten with regard to educational attainment, clergy are very low on the scale with regard to salary; in fact, they rank 325th among 432 occupations. The minister's calling often assumes a vow of poverty. This call that demands a

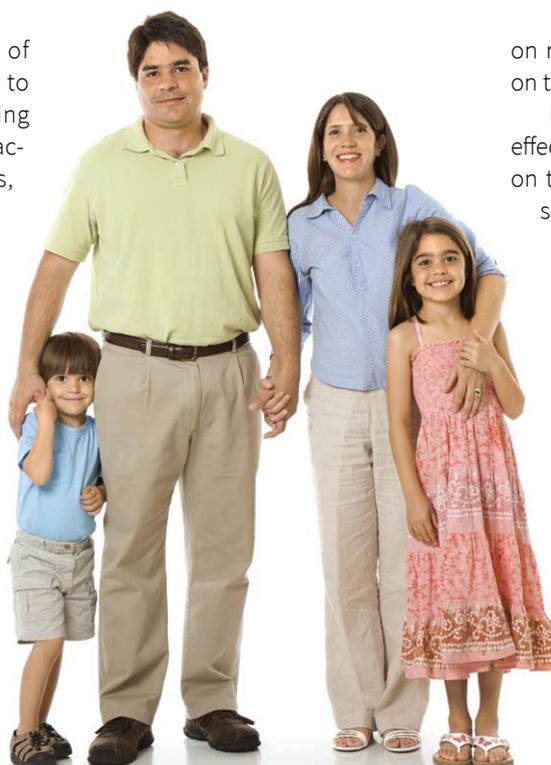
certain lifestyle appears to be inconsistent with the minister's ability to sustain it financially. For that reason, the family is prone to financial strains that have serious implications for marital satisfaction and stability as well as family distress.¹

Time demands have been noted as a big challenge for ministers. As he or she attempts to share the resource of time with his or her family, the congregation, and the larger church organization, there is often a pull in too many directions and some things get left out or unattended. Too often, the family gets neglected. The effect of working on call 24 hours a day is grossly underestimated. This can be the perfect setup for sapping the physical, emotional, and spiritual constitution of ministers, and robbing their marriages of the vitality that can only be sustained with the investment of quality time and energy. The public and private failures of pastors testify in part to the harrowing time demands of ministry.

Social support is a crucial issue for pastors as well. One of the more subtle deceptions of ministry is the belief that because pastors are doing people work and are always around people that their social needs

are met. To be sure, the reality of ministry is often counterintuitive to social need-satisfaction. If meeting social needs involves having interactions characterized by openness, challenge, accountability, and abiding reciprocal friendships, then I proffer that ministry, as practiced, does not allow for such interactions between the minister and the congregants or with others.

One characteristic of ministry is referred to as “antifraternalization norms.”² This norm adopted by ministers in their congregations disallows them from having nurturing friendships. Often, in interactions with congregants, the minister “befriends” but



on red alert status, which is wearing on the soul.

My empirical attempt to test the effects of these five common stressors on the marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction, and life satisfaction of male clergy and their female spouses illuminated the issues at hand. When the factors of mobility, compensation, time demands, lack of social support, and intrusiveness to the boundaries of the family were placed in a statistical model, it showed that these clergy stress factors influenced the marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction, and life satisfaction of clergy and their spouses. On closer observation, intrusiveness to the

*Ministers need to **reflect deeply** on their own issues and philosophy regarding the **intrusion to the boundaries of the family** as well, and spend enough time and energy doing so until they **win the victory.***

does not enjoy being *befriended*. The relationships go one way and so the emotional needs of the minister and family are not met in those contexts usually. Another related characteristic of ministry is referred to as “pedestal effects.” Often, the minister is elevated by his or her congregants and then set apart from common human experience. Admittedly, the minister values and seeks that elevation and, thus, does not experience many nurturing relationships in the congregation. Even entering into a therapeutic relationship for an emotional or family

problem has been shown to be threatening to many ministers. Finally, the line that separates the minister from his or her work is, at best, often blurred. The minister and family are “owned by the people” and enjoy little physical and emotional space to live a personal life unfettered by the constraints, expectations, demands, and judgments on self, spouse, and children. That intrusion into their private space can have serious effects on the minister and family. Living in a glass house can create a debilitating hypervigilance that keeps the minister

boundaries of the family appeared to be the only unique predictor of the marital satisfaction of clergy and their spouses. Also, social support was the only unique predictor of life satisfaction for them.

For the rest of this article, I will raise some issues that may be addressed by clergy, their families, and the church administrators to aid in maximizing their marital and parental satisfaction. By this, I am implying that clergy have to take personal responsibility for managing some of these issues to achieve positive ends. In addition, the family

must engage in protectionist measures to ensure that their boundaries are not compromised as well as manage the other stressors they face. Also, church administrators in the higher organizations must play their role in enacting policies and procedures that minimize the negative and disparate impacts on clergy and their families.

Understanding the pastoral ecology

In the training of men and women for ministry, I suspect too little is discussed about the larger systemic pull in ministerial life that can be potential for personal and family destabilization. A system exists that tricks and seduces us into thinking that helping others is most crucial, and is more important than self-care and family nurture. I know what you may be thinking: *That has not happened to me and, indeed, never will.* If so, I thank you for illustrating the point that I am trying to make. We are so very unaware of it. We can go on to talk about the conundrum of invulnerability; suspicion about relationships; guilt about not working more; identity based on doing rather than being; and perpetuation of the myth of perfection in life, work, and family. These are system issues and they all have a bearing on marriages and families in that context.

If anything would change for the clergy and family, there has to be a conscientious theology of self-care and family care. Otherwise, we will struggle eternally with the same issues of neglect of self and family that brings disastrous consequences to our lives, health, and our emotional and family's well-being. That is not the calling from God. Rather, the calling includes modeling self-care and family nurture among other things, and demonstrating how to hold the truth of God "in earthen vessels" as we live in the real world. Perfectly? Never. But the struggle is itself the greater testimony of God's strength made perfect in human weakness.

The pastor's responsibility in shaping the pastoral ecology

There are some models of ministerial life that make clergy work a hostile environment for the thriving of marriages and families. The minister who holds himself or herself aloof from the people and portrays a superhuman and invulnerable self among them will not enjoy mutually nurturing relationships and will suffer isolation and loneliness among other things, even while working among scores of people on a regular basis. I propose that the chief executive officer (CEO) model of pastoral leadership is not apropos. The minister is not the CEO of a corporation but one person, placed among other people to teach and model the will of God. The pastoral relationship is more one of friendship with the people of the congregation, which allows for building an authentic community. In that authentic community, pastors and spouses can live and grow with other couples, encouraging, supporting, and challenging one another on this journey called life.

I imagine that a swift retort to the foregoing idea would be that those friendships should be found elsewhere and/or with their peers. Conversations between pastors are not usually about the emotional nurture of each other. I believe that if ministry is done as Jesus did it, some of the present challenges would abate or become more manageable. Jesus mingled among men and women during His ministry and derided the walls of partition and hypocrisy that separated the intellectual scribes and philosophical Sadducees from "common people." The lack of nurturing social support has significant implications for marital and parental nurture. A marriage needs community as this kind of partnership needs time alone to flourish. This can happen for clergy in their congregation. Children may enjoy the pedestal for a moment,

but they soon begin to revolt against the pressure of the glass bowl. With appropriate boundaries, this model suggested can serve great ends.

A challenge to spouses

To challenge ministers' spouses and families to take some personal responsibility for marital and parental satisfaction can be difficult. Many spouses of clergy feel like it is sacrilege to challenge the involvement of the minister in his or her calling and demand from them greater participation in family life. "How dare I do such a thing?" is a sure and certain question that flies in the face of any such challenge. Then, that is part of the problem, more than the solution. Because the minister's calling is deemed untouchable (the "pedestal effect"), often spouses suffer in silence and slowly develop negative attitudes toward ministry and the God of the ministry, sometimes slipping into cynicism and hate for the calling and those associated with it.

As an unknown author said: "if you do what you've always done, you will get what you've always gotten." I cannot blame any here, but many spouses need to be coached to stand up to the ecological forces against their homes and family lives and help the minister to draw the boundary line so as to preserve the integrity of their marital and parental relationships. He or she would need to view the minister as a very real person with proclivities common to humans, and who does need that challenge all too often. Doing so may set the tone for the rest of their joyful years together.

Ministers need to reflect deeply on their own issues and philosophy regarding the intrusion to the boundaries of the family as well, and spend enough time and energy doing so until they win the victory. In one sense, clergy may have the best schedule among other professions, but this issue is not always paramount. The clergy, as well as the spouse, has to

make family boundaries a priority or family nurture will slip into the background. Our own children can be neglected while we visit others faithfully. The younger generation of clergy and spouses need to know that they must start positive habits earlier rather than later.

Church administrators have a role to play

In some fellowships, clergy mobility seems inevitable. I am not opposed to shuffling the ministerial crew to build up the work in various places. In my own experience, I accepted each move as a calling, and I was ready for my marching orders. In reflection, I think that too often the moves are made with too little regard for the challenges and possible disruptions to the personal, family, and congregational equilibrium. The minister's spouse hardly receives consideration, let alone is consulted when moves are being made. These moves may affect emotional connections, job tenure, educational plans for the spouse and children, and the spouse's own ministry, to name just a few issues. Often, a disconnect between the minister and his or her spouse occurs as well. A move may have a totally different meaning for the pastor. For example, the pastor may be relieved by the opportunity to recycle skills and sermons in another location, to move away from a problem church, to be "promoted" to a larger or more established congregation; none of which may have anything to do with the spouse.

Church officials may serve a greater good by considering the needs of the whole family in such moves, work to create shared meaning with the nonclergy spouse, and be intentional in aiding in the spouse's adjustment to the new environment. While moving the clergy may be inevitable, at the very least, the

move may be more bearable for the spouse knowing that he or she has received consideration. In addition, church administrators can be more intentional in organizing financial compensation, policies, and direct challenges to their clergy to be more present at home in order to help shape a better ecology in which family life can thrive.

Recently, while sitting with a group of ministers talking about the challenges of ministry to family well-being, I heard one minister, married for a few years, saying almost gleefully, "I have never sat with my wife in church since being married." Whatever else is true, his experience expressed a culture of ministry that suggests that the people in the congregation come first and that one should not cloud up one's mind with thoughts of the needs and comforts of a spouse when doing ministry. On the other hand, if you poll spouses regarding their views of ministry and the emotional impact it has on them any day, including the Sabbath, the revelation is mostly consistent. Slowly, but surely, many of them come to despise the thing that removes their clergy spouse so far from them, thus reducing them to microscopic insignificance in ministry. You need a lot of grit to row against this tide and create a richer experience born out of valuing, respecting, and honoring the family, and seeing as an enemy anything that stands against giving them the best place in heart and affection, even while doing ministry, loving the people of God, and working with and for them.

Conclusion

I close with some advice to pastoral couples.

1. Prioritize your life and work to ensure that your spouse and family get your best time and energy. Build beautiful memories in special places,

doing wonderful things together. Also, let the moments at church be special for your spouse and children. Your congregation might be thrilled to see you sit with your spouse or family while at church. They may forget your sermon but not that.

2. Learn financial management skills from all the right places and people, and practice those skills to avoid financial distress.

3. Create a culture of vulnerability around you rather than invulnerability. Be real. Talk about your desire and struggle to be the best spouse or parent you can be. Ask for the prayers of your congregants and promise them yours.

4. The spouses of ministers should develop identities of their own. They should become involved in their own calling rather than depend on the church to provide one for them. This will help to insulate them from some of the negative effects of church life.

5. Use nurturing friendships well. The social needs we have are to be met. Such friendships affect the soul and keep us buoyed up. This may even reduce some dependency on one's spouse and change the dynamics of the marriage. In addition, establish a great friendship with your spouse.

6. Establish healthy boundaries around your marriage. Use time that is not work time, and resist intrusions into your private space.

7. Avoid taking each other for granted. That is so very easy to do. Be attuned to communication from each other, and provide space to listen and observe. Marriage and family are wonderful gifts. Appreciate the gifts, and practice stewardship of your family. The dividends are out of this world. 🌱

1 D. Mace and V. Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Families?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982).

2 T. Blackbird and P. Wright, "Pastor's Friendships, Part 1: Project Overview and an Exploration of the Pedestal Effect," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13 (1985): 274–283.

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Claudio Consuegra, DMin, serves as the family life director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Securing **Christian marriage and family**: Helpful resources for pastors

Ministry to couples and families composes a significant part of pastoral work. Most pastors spend a great deal of time dealing with interpersonal issues and family concerns among their congregants, indeed, more time than in dealing with theological or administrative issues. And yet many pastors lack adequate training or skills to help their members face challenges in marriage and family relationships. The purpose of this article is to provide resources that will assist pastors in their ministry to families.

Preparation

To begin with, pastors need to know how to help couples planning to get married so that they understand what it takes to make a happy marriage. For many years, the North American Division's Department of Family Ministries has encouraged pastors to be trained in the PREPARE/ENRICH program. Once trained, the pastor can lead premarital couples in a marriage-preparation program (PREPARE), and help married couples to enrich and improve their relationships (ENRICH). For information on training and resources, visit www.prepare-enrich.com.

In my premarital counseling experience, I found several informative and useful books. *The Adventist Home* by Ellen G. White is a good starter. While the book is a compilation, and therefore challenging for some to read, it is packed with practical advice for couples contemplating marriage as well as for those already married. *Preparing for Marriage*, edited by Dennis Rainey, is a hands-on workbook for premarital couples. To help you sharpen your premarital counseling skills, here are other helpful books: *The Premarital Counseling Handbook* by Christian psychologist H. Norman Wright; *Counseling Couples in Conflict* by Mark Yarhouse and James Sells; and *Marriage Counseling* by Everett Worthington.

In premarital counseling, I usually require the couple to read several books, such as *So You're Getting Married* by H. Norman Wright, and *Fit to Be Tied* by Bill and Lynne Hybels. In addition, I recommend books on sexuality, such as *Captivated by Love* by Alberta Mazat, *A Celebration of Sex* by Douglas Rosenau, *Intended for Pleasure* by Ed and Gayle Wheat, *The Gift of Sex* by Clifford and Joyce Penner, and *Sex Begins in the Kitchen* by Kevin Leman. These books give a Christian perspective on sex within marriage and

provide helpful information on sexual intimacy for those preparing for marriage as well as those who are already married who may be facing challenges in this area of their relationship.

Marriage: Beginning and early years

David Olson, author of the PREPARE/ENRICH program, cowrote the book *Empowering Couples*, which includes a number of quizzes and exercises to assess the condition of a couple's marital relationship and to help them in those areas that need strengthening. Another resource from PREPARE/ENRICH is *The Couple Checkup*, which includes an online scoring questionnaire that a couple can take as an inventory of their relationship.¹ Other books I have found helpful are *The First Year of Marriage* by Miriam Arond, and *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman. Mark Gungor's *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage* is also a good source for understanding those early problems in marital life, and it comes with a video series that provides practical information for couples in a very humorous way. However, some of your more conservative members may not be comfortable with a few of Gungor's

illustrations and so you may want to view the series first. The series, priced fairly inexpensive, can also be purchased in a group version.

Growing family

A successful marriage, like a good garden, requires adequate cultivation and pruning. To deal with habits, behaviors, or negative feelings that rob true intimacy from marriage, and to provide one-on-one counseling and help, the North American Division has established a Family Ministries Web site with a list of Adventist counselors. To visit, go to www.adventistfamilyministries.com/article/70/resources/directory-of-counselors. The Kettering Health Network provides confidential counseling to clergy and others at www.ketteringhealth.org/counseling/. The American Association of Christian Counselors also provides a list of counselors on their Web site at www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/.

As the family grows, there comes a time when pastors and church members reach or experience an empty-nest syndrome known as the time when children leave home for college, marriage, or simply for independence. This could be a critical time for marital relations. David Arp's *Empty Nesting* guides through these challenging changes for middle-aged couples.

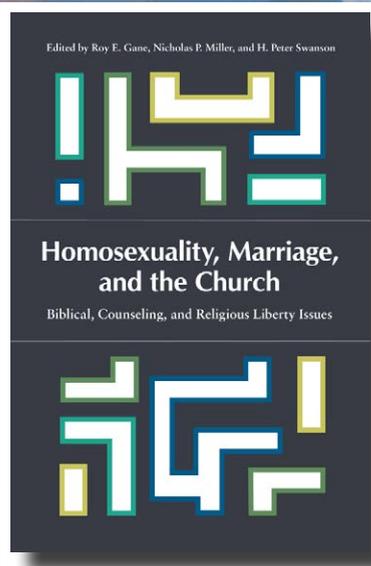
At some point, the unthinkable happens: a couple considers divorce. Before people plunge into this marriage-ending option, pastors can use, in their counseling process, the excellent DVD program *Choosing Wisely: Before You Divorce*. A very practical resource for those who have lost a spouse to death or divorce is *Living Life After Divorce & Widowhood: Financial Planning, Skills, and Strategies for When the Unthinkable Happens* by Maurcia DeLean Houck. These resource guides outline steps to be taken in case of a terminal illness and after the death of a spouse, so the death

will not have devastating financial consequences. "Dealing With Divorce" from Seminars Unlimited is a seminar that can be used as a group program for the church and community or to help individuals going through this painful transition in their lives.

Some people will choose, or have the opportunity, to marry again. Two resources can prove very helpful to them. *The Remarriage Checkup* by David Olson and Ron Deal includes an online scoring questionnaire and helps the couple deal with issues that may have affected previous relationships, thus preventing recurrences. For individuals who have children and are contemplating entering marriage and forming a blended family, Ron Deal's *The Smart Step-Family* is a valuable resource.

One of the growing problems facing families today is pornography. There are several resources that can assist in dealing with this threat to a successful and happy married life.

Homosexuality?



Politicians trying to change marriage. Theologians trying to change the Bible. Influenced by popular culture and politics, some religious thinkers are claiming Biblical support for the practice of homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

Their efforts create serious confusion among the young, and challenge the church's ability to sensitively address one of the most explosive spiritual and religious liberty issues of our time.

In this first publication from an Adventist publishing house on this topic, leading Adventist scholars, joined by other Christian experts, provide a clear explication of the Bible's equally clear teaching. Writing for pastors, counselors, local church leaders and thoughtful lay people, they explore the sobering implications of the current confusion for counseling and for personal and institutional religious liberty.

Through it all, they make an impassioned call for love and care for those who are being misled into a walk down a dangerous path.

Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church

Edited by Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson
ISBN: 978-1-883925-70-3 **\$24.99**



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Douglas Weiss, a Christian counselor and national leader in the field of sexual addiction, has written several books on the issue of intimacy and pornography. I recommend *The Final Freedom: Pioneering Sexual Addiction Recovery*; *Intimacy Anorexia: The Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage*; and for children of sexual addicts, *Beyond the Bedroom: Healing for Adult Children of Sex Addicts*. Pat Springle's *Freedom Begins Here* combines a devotional with a DVD program that can help those struggling with pornography.²

Parenting

The experience of parenting can be the most fulfilling and exciting but also the most challenging to a couple and their marriage. Just as adequate premarital preparation can be very beneficial for a successful marriage, pre-

Several other resources can be very helpful for parents:

Web sites

- North American Division Children's Ministries: www.childmin.com/eng/index.php
- North American Division Family Ministries (Parenting): www.helpimarent.com
- Young Child Ministries: www.youngchildministries.com

E-Newsletters

- Adventist Parenting E-newsletter: www.adventistparenting.org

Parenting blog

- <http://rarekidswelldone.com/blog/>

When death comes

Ministry puts pastors at the center of the lives of their church members. One

crucial moment calling for pastoral concern is during a terminal illness or death, and pastors need to be well prepared to be of spiritual and supportive sustenance to the families involved. During my ten years as a hospice chaplain, I recommended to

the families of patients the book *Final Gifts* by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. Although their theology may be at variance with yours, the insights these hospice nurses offer on ministry to those going through such difficulties are quite helpful. Two other books also provide valuable insights: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's classic book on the stages of the dying process, *On Death and Dying*, is very enlightening and can help us understand why those who have been diagnosed with a serious and, in particular, terminal disease act or react the way they do as the disease progresses. Another classic reading

on the subject of death and tragedy is Rabbi Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Writing from his own experience after the death of his son from the rare genetic condition known as progeria—rapid aging in children—Kushner does not offer an answer to why bad things happen but rather a positive option when bad things happen.

In dealing with death, two books have proved particularly helpful as I help people through their journey of grief, bereavement, and recovery: *Grief Recovery* by Larry Yeagley, and *Beyond Grief* by Carol Staudacher.

Toward happy families

Good marriages and healthy families are not accidents or happenstance. American entrepreneur, author, and motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said, "Your family and your love must be cultivated like a garden. Time, effort, and imagination must be summoned constantly to keep any relationship flourishing and growing."

As pastors, we have the distinct honor and privilege to help the families in our churches live out heaven on earth. Sometimes teaching families a simple skill, helping them look at their relationships from a different point of view, suggesting materials to read, or walking with them through some of the difficult times in their lives can make a world of difference to them. The most important thing we can do is to make sure our own marriages are healthy and strong and our family relations are positive, even if not perfect. Then we can move on to helping the families in our church and community, and we can move on—in the strength of God and our own healthy family relationships! 🌱

1 Visit the Web site www.couplecheckup.com for more information. Couples will receive a report based on their answers, along with a discussion guide on proven relationship skills. There is a fee involved.

2 For more information, contact AdventSource at their Web site: www.adventsource.org.

A successful marriage, like a good garden, requires adequate cultivation and pruning.

parenting preparation can help make this experience less stressful and more joyful. One of the premier books on parenting is *Child Guidance* by Ellen G. White. As with *The Adventist Home*, this is also a compilation and contains very valuable insights on parenting from a biblical point of view. Kay Kuzma's *The First 7 Years*, Sally Hohnberger's *Parenting by the Spirit*, and George Barna's *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* are very insightful books relating to spiritual parenting. To help prepare children ages 8–12 for baptism, my wife and I wrote the book *Making Jesus My Best Friend* (also available in Spanish).

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H. Peter Swanson, PhD, is assistant professor of pastoral care, counseling, and testing at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



Pastoral stress management to maximize family function

In his book *The Hidden Link Between Adrenalin & Stress*, Archibald Hart describes, in startling detail, the harmful physiological and significant negative effects to one's religious experience when living on an adrenaline "high,"¹ including mistaking adrenaline arousal for true spirituality!²

There is critical-incident stress, chronic-overload stress, and individual vulnerability to stress. And there's family susceptibility to stress. Thus, more than just survive, pastors and their families need to find ways to thrive in spite of their inevitable exposure to these various forms of stress.

How, then, can we learn to deal with the harsh reality of stress?

The beam analogy

Like air, stress is everywhere. It is around us and *in* us too. We cannot see it or touch it, but stress can overwhelm us. Like the ocean, stress ebbs and flows: one moment we can barely discern its power, the next it is a tempest that threatens to engulf us. Stress is a force that can undo individuals and undermine families.

Experts may argue over a precise definition of stress, but there is greater agreement about how it works. In the field of engineering, workers know the importance of realizing how much weight steel beams can bear; thus, one of the beams may be tested by exerting

increasing amounts of pressure upon it until it buckles. Then, by calculating the safety margin and ensuring that the beams are never loaded too near the breaking point, those beams can serve their intended purpose without danger of collapse.

We cannot as easily measure the stress tolerance of people; obviously, it is unethical to heap on them bigger and bigger burdens until they stagger and stumble, all just to see how much stress they can bear. But there is an indirect way to estimate the relative heaviness of various stressors. The respected Holmes and Rahe stress scale³ identifies 43 stressful life events that, in combination, can overburden one to the point that physical illness is the probable result.⁴

Not everyone will break down if subjected to the same intense, high-stress events that can do others in. As with physical strength, people differ in terms of how resilient or stress resistant they are. And at different periods in life, even the most robust person may face times of greater vulnerability to stress; however, events such as the death of a loved one or a serious personal illness or accident will likely strain the coping resources of most people.

Also, a steel beam can bear a heavy sustained weight for a long time without weakening. But if the same beam were to be exposed to frequent

on-again, off-again pressures of even a lighter load, metal fatigue would set in over time and the beam would become unstable. Similarly, it is not necessarily one great emergency bravely faced that signals the strength of a person. What matters, in the end, is the ability of individuals to weather the bruising effects of the major sporadic crises that befall them and also withstand the cumulative effects of daily wear and tear.

So when we speak about pastoral stress management, we are talking about the combined weight of excessive episodic burdens, the ongoing exposure to intense everyday pressures, and the degree of vulnerability to stress of the pastor and each individual in the minister's family.

Crisis preparedness

To accurately predict when we will be faced with personal calamities and reversals can be labeled as almost impossible, but there are some things that we can do to prepare.

First off, we need to face the facts. We sometimes play mind games with ourselves. We may think, *I'm a very good driver with an excellent driving record. Accidents happen only to other people. Or, I'm secure in my job and I'm confident that will not change. Or, When you take as good care of yourself as I do, you will not have any serious*

health problems. But the reality is that, even in the best regulated lives, bad things do happen and, thus, we must be prepared for any eventuality.

Some common sense steps include practicing emergency home evacuations, keeping important documents in a fireproof safe or bank's safety deposit box, ensuring that ample

list. Consider this stress reliever as really good for maintaining balance. However, the benefits of all things being accomplished during the week will be missed if the pastor has to react to whatever arises to demand one's attention. The top-priority items that typically require steady, deliberate action over time are frequently

may feel when giving a series of polite but resolute refusals to a pushy person will be offset by the satisfaction of knowing that you did not have to "rob Peter in order to pay Paul."

Another situation when you need to say No comes to the fore. This occurs when your to-do list is too long for the day or the established priorities some-

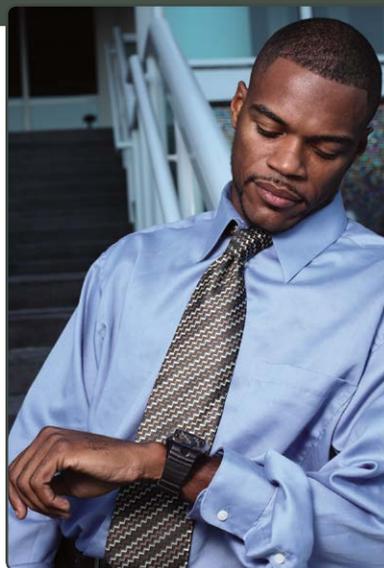
Assign a decisive Yes for the most important things for the day, and, at day's end, a determined No to the uncompleted things at the bottom of the list, no matter how cherished they may be.

rainy day funds are readily available, carrying emergency phone numbers in one's wallet or purse, and distributing among responsible family members your personal crisis-management plan. With these and other person-specific contingency arrangements in place, the impact of high-stress predicaments will be moderated for individuals and families.

Overload pressures

There is always more work for the pastor to do than there are hours in the day. This calls for discipline. Scheduling is obviously essential and, while there are certain constants that you can count on, the events of the week should not be so tightly packed together that everything will come unstuck when the unexpected intrudes into carefully laid plans.

The second stress-taming skill is prioritization. At the week's end, the pastor should recognize the importance of savoring the satisfaction of having made good progress on the most important items on the to-do



displaced by distractions or matters of lesser importance that clamor for instant action.

Now, let us look at the third discipline. It is a matter of integrity to say No when to answer Yes would mean that previous commitments would have to be set aside. Some people want you to drop everything and attend to whatever may seem urgent to them but which does not classify as an actual emergency. The momentary stress you

how get scrambled. Some pastors find it so easy to play favorites when they have to decide which item on the list to work on next. The things that are easier to do, or are more enjoyable, tend to jockey themselves up to the top of the list. Assign a decisive Yes for the most important things for the day, and, at day's end, a determined No to the uncompleted things at the bottom of the list, no matter how cherished they may be. Then affirm yourself for what you accomplished and resist any regret over the unfinished tasks.

Right up there on the importance scale is sermon preparation that, on average, will likely take ten or more hours per week. If you like living on the edge, you can start work on your presentation the day or two before you are supposed to preach. However, scheduling complications may arise unexpectedly, and you may find yourself seriously stretched for time. That anxious foreboding that you will not be adequately prepared before you step into the pulpit can uncomfortably boost your stress. So, early in the

week, finish the heavy lifting you find essential for good sermon preparation.

Dealing with people—the pastor’s main job—is often very taxing, especially if several difficult individuals seem to take delight in making trouble. Add to this the never-ending flood of emails, phone calls (sometimes in the middle of the night), and committee challenges, and no wonder that many pastors survive only by living on adrenaline.

Deep reserves

In addition to the immediate detrimental effects of being overstressed by everyday pressures, there are also long-term injurious consequences from overextending one’s self. Hans Selye describes what his research revealed about “adaptation energy”⁵ that helps us through very rough times.

Some people inherit a large “fortune” of this force to deal with life’s stressors, others a lesser amount. But

the supply is limited for each individual and no way exists to replenish this reserve. “The stage of exhaustion, after a temporary demand upon the body, is reversible [by restful sleep and vacations], but the complete exhaustion of all stores of deep adaptation energy is not; as these reserves are depleted, senility and, finally, death ensue.”⁶

Interestingly, in 1890, 17 years before Selye was born, the following words were published by Ellen G. White: “Those who make great exertions to accomplish just so much work in a given time, and continue to labor when their judgment tells them they should rest, are never gainers. They are living on borrowed capital. They are expending the vital force which they will need at a future time. And when the energy they have so recklessly used is demanded, they fail for want of it. The physical strength is gone, the mental powers fail. . . . Their time of need has come, but their physical resources are

exhausted. . . . God has provided us with constitutional force, which will be needed at different periods of our life. If we recklessly exhaust this force by continual overtaxation, we shall sometime be losers.. Our usefulness will be lessened, if not our life itself destroyed.”⁷

Sensitivity to stress

This leads to a consideration of the pastor’s vulnerability to stress. Obviously, the more susceptible the person, the greater the need to take protective measures.

A good starting point would be to find out how much crisis stress you have been exposed to in the past 12 months; you can do this by taking the Holmes and Rahe stress scale test online.⁸ If you find your level of accumulated stress is elevated because of out-of-the-ordinary events, such as a dramatic change in your financial state or gaining a new family member,



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you will need to be particularly careful to protect yourself from the adverse effects of stress in the upcoming year.

In addition to being alert to ward off unnecessary stress, you can strengthen your hardiness by giving decisive attention to your physical health. Adequate sleep, appropriate exercise, healthy nutrition, and revitalizing recreation are essential.

You must also recognize that it is not only external stress that one must monitor. There are toxic emotions that vex the spirit and drain the energies. “Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death. . . . Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul.”⁹

If you take a rough tally of the number of negative, self-critical thoughts that enter your consciousness in a day and compare that with the frequency of your uplifting, affirming thoughts, you will have a good indicator of the amount of self-imposed stress that can be reduced by right thinking.

Family stress

Like the minister, families can experience stress; thus, it is important that the members of the family learn to shield themselves from damaging stressors.

As with individuals, family systems can also be producers of stress from within the family units. “The stress of living with one another still represents one of the greatest causes of distress.”¹⁰ So writes the father of stress research, Hans Selye.¹¹ Though he was speaking broadly about human interactions, social workers and marriage-and-family clinicians can testify about the staggering turmoil generated when things go awry in families. And pastors know all too well that parishioners’ homes can be ravaged by interpersonal conflicts and chronic tension.

When seeking to manage stress in the pastor’s household or when counseling with people to help them deal well with distress, one needs to raise awareness about what causes stress in the family. Actually writing down *what* happens and *who* triggers the troubles can focus attention on what changes need to be made.

Usually the pastor will find it counterproductive to try to change the people; they are sure to resist. What needs adjustment are words and actions. Keep in mind that abrupt change is hard. Gradual change is easier. So, think in terms of reducing the frequency of certain stress-producing behaviors and increasing the occurrence of stress-relieving words and deeds. And remember to celebrate even the smallest improvements.

Time and again, counselors encounter very ordinary problems in families that flare up into blistering conflicts simply because the members lack basic communication and problem-solving skills. When these deficits are remedied, the overall stress levels can go down dramatically.

Young families that have never had the opportunity to learn how to get along well together can often benefit a great deal from observing how well-functioning families manage stress. The wisdom accumulated by older couples can be passed along so that the challenges faced by the inexperienced can be made more manageable.

Crucial to family harmony is the ability of its members to regulate their feelings. Selye states, “Among all the emotions, those that—more than any others—account for the absence or presence of harmful stress in human relations are feelings of gratitude and goodwill and their negative counterparts, hatred with the urge for revenge.”¹²

Translated into religious terms, we are well advised to “[c]ultivate thankfulness. Praise God for His wonderful

love in giving Christ to die for us. It never pays to think of our grievances. God calls upon us to think of His mercy and His matchless love, that we may be inspired with praise.”¹³

Powerful antidote

While “the stress of living with one another still represents one of the greatest causes of distress,”¹⁴ we find it is also true that “[m]any studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models, and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person’s resilience.”¹⁵

Pastors are strategically positioned to foster strong and healthy relationships and do the good and holy work of bringing brightness and blessing¹⁶ into their own families and the families of church members who make up the family of God—characterized as having “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7, NKJV). 

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6 *Ibid.*

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DUANE MCBRIDE, DAVID SEDLACEK, ALINA BALTAZAR, LIONEL MATTHEWS, ROMULUS CHELBEGEAN, AND GARY L. HOPKINS

Duane McBride, PhD, is professor and chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

David Sedlacek, PhD, is professor of family ministries and discipleship, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Alina Baltazar, MSW, is a certified family life educator and licensed clinical social worker working at the Institute for the Prevention of Addiction, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Lionel Matthews, PhD, is professor of sociology, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Romulus Chelbegean, PhD, is director of the Family Studies program, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Gary L. Hopkins, MD, DrPH, is research professor, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan; and associate director, Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Family bonding *and* family dinners

Among other reasons, God created families in order to protect, nurture, and train children. The family is also a setting where children learn the language and core values of their culture. While some detractors of the family system have tried other alternatives, God provided no substitute for His original plan for the family. Seventh-day Adventists have always emphasized the importance of the family. Given the high rate of divorce, single-parent families, and family conflict, our current society faces a crisis in the family that has a destructive impact on society and the church.

What family does

One of the critical roles of the family is that of facilitating positive attachment between parents and their children. Parents who have strong emotional bonds with their children are the ones who know their children's friends, spend time with their children, and have open communication about sensitive issues. In these families, the

children are much more likely to have internalized spiritual values and be significantly less likely to engage in substance abuse and sexual promiscuity.¹ While families have consistently been found to be one of the strongest protectors against high-risk behaviors, they can also be a major cause of these behaviors among youth. In families where there exists abuse or neglect, high levels of marital and family conflict, little or no emotional bonding or communication, and virtual disengagement between parents and their children, the children have much higher rates of delinquency, substance abuse, and sexual promiscuity.²

These types of findings have also been seen in studies conducted at Adventist colleges. For example, in a recent study at Andrews University, Alina Baltazar and her colleagues found that, among Andrews University students, an emotional bond between parents and their college-age students, family worship, open communication about drugs and sex as well as parents knowing the hobbies of their children,

were all significantly related to a higher rate of healthy behavioral choices.³ This data suggests that the bonding between parents and their children during childhood and adolescence still impacts the choices of young adults.

Family dinners

One of the most interesting and recent empirical findings about the role of families in promoting healthy child development relates to family dinners.⁴ The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University has, for more than a decade, been examining the relationship between family dinners and adolescent behavior. Those youth who have fewer than three family dinners a week with their parents are two to four times more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs compared to those youth who have five to seven family dinners per week.⁵ Other research has found that the frequency of family dinners also relates to lower rates of all types of delinquency and sexual promiscuity.⁶

In addition, researchers at Andrews University, in analyzing national data, have found that the frequency of family dinners relates to lower rates of youth being victims of crime and violence.⁷ These types of findings also occur in Adventist populations. In a recent study conducted at Andrews University, researchers found that family dinners are related to lower rates of substance use and sexual activity.⁸

So what makes family dinner so important? Researchers have found a number of interactions occur at family dinners that facilitate the positive impact of parents on their children. Family dinners often provide a relaxed atmosphere that allows for open communication—from exchanging views of daily activities to talking about sensitive issues regarding core moral choices, from sharing key aspects of each other's lives to continuing the emotional bonding between family members.

Such a setting may be more successful than a formal sit-down and listen-to-me lecture. Youth who frequently eat family dinners with their parents spend more quality time with them, giving everyone an opportunity to know each other, share values, and interests. Family dinners are a place for parents to learn what concerns their children. Youth learn that their parents love them and are interested in their lives. Family dinners are where children learn who their parents are at their core and how they deal with the vicissitudes of life.⁹ In many cultures, there is a high symbolic meaning to sharing a meal—sharing a meal symbolizes friendship and protection.¹⁰

Sin emerged in a perfect environment, and we should recognize the

importance of that incident. The most functional family imaginable is not immune to the vulnerabilities of a fallen world. However, decades of social science research show that the functioning family strongly relates to helping children, adolescents, and young adults make better behavioral decisions. Those factors that relate to making the best behavioral choices also relate to cessation of high-risk behaviors. Some youth experiment with substances or engage in inappropriate sexual behavior. However, most

pastor being less available for family dinners. A further stress on a pastor's family is the moral expectations that congregants have for the pastor's family. The expectation is often that the pastor's family should be the moral and behavioral role model for the church. Research by Strange and Sheppard¹³ found that the children of pastors felt that they were watched closely by members of the congregation for moral failures. A study by Lee documented that these stressors, and their needs for social support to deal with those stressors, are felt by Adventist pastors' families.¹⁴

Pastors' families are under unique stresses that often prevent them from spending the time necessary, including family dinners, to bond with their children. Research consistently shows that positive time between children

and their parents, which results in open communication between parent and children about spiritual values and sensitive moral choices, creates an effective way to transmit core values. This results in the highest probability of youth making better choices. Yet, while members of the church may look to clergy families as role models, the demands that members place on pastors' families may result in placing the pastors' families at high risk for poor behavioral choices.

Strategies for successful bonding in pastoral families

Many pastors mistakenly believe that they are invincible because they are doing the Lord's work. To counteract the denial factor, it would be good for pastors to have regular, heartfelt dialogue with other family members,

Remember that they, your children, are more important in the long run than your image as a pastor.

youth never move from experimentation to habitual behavior and the real danger lies right there. Parent-child bonding that occurs at family dinners is one of the core reasons for the cessation of high-risk behavior.

The pastoral family

Pastors' families live under unique and significant pressures that may affect their ability to bond with their children over family dinners. Clergy are among the most trusted professions, with individuals and families turning to clergy for help in a wide variety of traumatic experiences.¹¹ These demands frequently result in considerable difficulty in time boundaries. Congregants often expect their pastor to be available at all times.¹² Church committee meetings also often occur during the early evening hours, and these time demands may result in the

pastoral associates, or accountability partners. Often pastors are the last to see the truth about their tendency to overwork. Specific stressors that undermine quality family time at dinners should be counteracted, whatever they are.

We are stewards of our children. God has entrusted us with them for eternity. The picture we give them of Christ, through our actions toward them and our spouses, teaches them more about God than do the sermons we preach. We want them to experience the love of Jesus through us, and that can happen only when we spend time with them by sharing our excitement about Jesus Christ but also by being actively involved in their world.

In order to do this, we must be willing to set appropriate time boundaries with both church authorities and congregants. As clergy remember that they are not God but merely His instruments, they are freed from the need to rescue others. While the time given to others is important for ministry, another important part of ministry is empowering others to do for themselves what they can, which often can be a great deal. Carving out regular time for family dinners and making congregants aware of that sacred time can go a long way toward really making God first and family second and profession third. Being able to say No without feeling guilty establishes the importance of a healthy pastoral ministry.

Because research demonstrates the importance of family dinners, make time for at least five of them with your family each week. While you should not overcontrol the spiritual development of your spouse and children (as some pastors feel they must), you must recognize the importance of integrating spirituality into mealtimes as naturally as possible. If you are passionately in love with Jesus yourself, your excitement about Him will be evident, genuine, and uncontrived. To read the emotional and spiritual

Reminders for pastors who are parents

1. Your children are God's children in your temporary custody
2. Pastoral families have specific stressors
3. Set time boundaries with the following:
 - a. Church authorities (institutional meetings, travel expectations)
 - b. Congregants (office hours, board meetings, visitation)
4. Schedule family time:
 - a. Set aside time for five family dinners per week
 - b. At the dinner table:
 - i. Avoid conflict and/or confrontation
 - ii. Share the activities of the day (know your children's hobbies)
 - iii. Promote open communication about sensitive moral issues (such as alcohol, tobacco, drug use, and sexual activity)
 - iv. Integrate spirituality
 - v. Role model
 - vi. Facilitate the internalization of spiritual values
 - vii. Plan some fun time (games night, outdoor activities)
5. Never give up on your children
 - a. Experimentation does happen
 - b. Both parents and kids make mistakes
 - c. What prevents falling also supports recovery

maturity of your family, so as to avoid conflict and confrontation at meals, is an important concept. Share the activities of your day in an appropriate way, and listen carefully to the stories your family shares about their experiences. Get to know what hobbies and interests are important to your children. This has been shown to be a protective factor in families as it helps to bind your children's hearts to yours.

Children, particularly adolescents, often hesitate to tell their parents, particularly pastoral parents, about their struggles. Afraid of being judged and condemned or of making the pastoral family look bad, they go underground. We find it important to create a non-judgmental environment where they can talk with you about anything. Make yourself a safe person for them.

Listen, but do not immediately react, even when they tell you things that they have done related to moral issues, such as drinking alcohol, using drugs, smoking, and sexual activity. Listening may break your heart or make you angry, but hold your peace until you have prayed and collected yourself. Remember that they, your children, are more important in the long run than your image as a pastor. Reason with them from the Word of God without beating them up with Bible texts. Pray with them about whatever they reveal to you. Do not be afraid to be vulnerable with them, and share appropriately about some of your struggles at that age as well.

Set aside time for fun and relaxation each week with the family. Take yearly family vacations because these times

build important memories. Facilitate regular family worship, perhaps in the context of a family meal. This does not mean that you have to lead each time. Challenge children to create and lead worship. This will help them to develop their spirituality and share their own personal spiritual journey in a loving, supportive environment.

Finally, never give up on your children. They will make mistakes, and so will you. Model what it is like to extend grace to them when they err. Likewise, take the initiative to apologize when you hurt them. A part of their growth process includes experimenting with many things and learning from what they try. Be a safety net for them; create an environment at family dinners that children look forward to with joy. Family meals, spending time with your children, being authentic, and sharing your faith in a genuine way have been shown

to be preventive measures that can be used in the pastor's family and can be advocated to congregants. After all, maybe this is part of the real meaning of Jesus' appeal to be allowed to dine inside somebody's heart (Rev. 3:20): holistic joining around the evening table has both a precluding and a healing effect for all participants. 

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Mentoring: *Training the second line of leadership*

May 21, 1991, dawned as usual. New Delhi was gorgeous, with flaming red flowers of gulmohar trees adorning the streets of India's capital. Thousands of people crowded the streets, malls, and old bazaars as usual, enjoying the last days of spring and dreading the oppressive humidity and heat that would soon come their way. But before the day was over, the city and entire country were engulfed in sorrow, tears, and a fear of the unknown. Rajiv Gandhi, then prime minister of India, was assassinated in the distant south.

The dreadful murder cut short the career of a young leader who had so much to give his country and was to lead millions into a bright future. Rajiv was well prepared and groomed to face the challenges of leading the world's largest democracy, which was struggling to emerge and march toward new economic and social triumph. But when he was assassinated, the whole country felt the vacuum that could not be filled. There seemed to be no obvious second line of leadership that could step in and take over the reins of governance.

Some time passed before the country recovered from that shock. The lack of mentoring and preparation of leaders for the unknown exigencies of the future was obvious everywhere.

The context of that tragedy led every political party in India to think about mentoring and grooming future leaders.

Mentoring and preparing leaders for the future should prevail in any organization—from a giant corporation to a small church entity. To overcome crises in leadership, a second line of leadership must be trained and mentored. Neither imagined threats nor feared jealousies should come in the way of preparing future leaders, ready and trained to fill leadership roles. This article will review what mentoring involves, how it can be a blessing, and how to be good mentors in the ministry of the church.

Mentoring: What it involves

When Moses accepted the call to lead the children of Israel, he was not informed about how long he would be holding the office. He was not given the exact date when he would retire from his post. But Moses was an effective and God-fearing leader, and knew that the future of Israel was in the hands of God, who is the ultimate Leader. And yet, Moses knew that God works through human agencies. Moses took up not only the mantle of leadership to direct the children of Israel through the desert to the borders of the Promised Land but also the role of being a

mentor. In that role, he trained Joshua to become a future leader. Exodus 17:8, 9 introduces Joshua for the first time. Joshua “entered the personal service of Moses either before or soon after the battle with the Amalekites.”¹ As a good leader, Moses saw the leadership potential in those around him, encouraged the development of that potential, and gave them on-the-task training. Moses did not see a threat in Joshua but an opportunity to secure the future course of the history of God's people in the wilderness and on to the Promised Land.

In the same manner, Elijah mentored Elisha. When Elijah saw Elisha, plowing his land with 12 yoke of oxen, he spotted a person whom God could use. At the prophet's bidding, Elisha ran after Elijah and accepted the summons to be mentored by him for the future ministry that awaited him (1 Kings 19:19–21).

Later, Elisha learned the lessons of discipleship. He understood the importance of following Elijah until his time for leadership had come. The process of mentoring is a two-sided coin: the leader prepares, trains, and educates; the future leader follows, observes, learns, and awaits the appropriate time to assume the responsibilities of leadership. Spiritually speaking, mentoring has no room for power grabs. Before Elisha could assume leadership, he

waited, walked, watched, and learned the way God expects a leader to be. The time for transition of leadership came when Elijah ascended to heaven, and his mantle fell upon Elisha. The new leader was ready to take charge and tried what his master did earlier. Elisha hit the waters of the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah and was excited to see a repeat of the miracle that they had witnessed earlier.² Often on the road of mentoring, those who are tutored tend to follow the attitudes of their teachers, and so we should learn the importance of mentors reflecting God's will and way as perfectly as they can.

The New Testament provides a good example of mentoring in the ministry of Paul and his association with Timothy. Timothy joined the apostle in his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–3) and remained with him ever after. The spiritual bond that tied the apostle and Timothy lasted a lifetime, and Paul addresses the young man as a son (1 Tim. 1:2). He remained faithful and loyal, not only to the apostle but also to the guardianship of the truth that was shared with him.

Paul found Timothy trustworthy and assigned him pastoral work at Ephesus (1 Tim. 4:12). Though Timothy was timid by nature (2 Tim. 1:6, 7), Paul encouraged him to become one of the finest workers for God.³ As a good mentor, Paul was interested not only in the spiritual and pastoral growth of Timothy but also in his physical welfare so much so that the apostle advised him to take proper medications to ensure his health (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul's mentorship produced a successful evangelist and pastor. A careful reading of the two epistles that the apostle wrote to Timothy reveal the concern of the aging mentor for the development and growth of the young pastor: that he should be strong and stable in the true doctrine of the gospel, guard the sacredness of public worship and private conduct, resist false teachers, be rooted and firm in God's Word, train elders and deacons for the future of

the church, and safeguard the truths entrusted to him. Both epistles that Paul wrote to Timothy are models of mentoring care and concern for the future of God's community of faith.

Blessings of mentoring

When I reflect on the relationships of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Paul and Timothy, I often think of the blessings I have enjoyed from several good mentors in my life and ministry. Two such mentors stand out. The first one was a senior pastor when I had just entered the ministry as his associate. By precept and example, by patience and gentle prodding, he led me to understand and follow the great mysteries of pastoring—preaching the Word, visiting with parishioners, praying with those who needed prayer, caring for those who needed the touch of grace, and just being someone who can be trusted by the community of faith. This senior pastor, by his example and leadership, led me to a closer walk with my Savior. While I was still wrestling with my call, he took the time to guide and counsel me in the practical difficulties of ministry. He gave me opportunities to minister and encouraged me to take responsibilities. He molded me to become a well-organized worker for God.

The second leader was my conference president, who gently guided me in the steps of church administration and leadership. I remember one time when I was asked to translate for a visiting preacher. My understanding of English was no match for the speaker's eloquence, and I was timid and nervous. But the conference president believed in me and expressed his confidence that I could do it. With his encouragement, I did it, and gradually became proficient both in English and my mother tongue. Step by step, encouraged by the mentors I had, I have now reached the stage of being a radio speaker. Both my senior pastor and conference president were conscious of their roles as mentors, and

helped to make me what I am. They taught me responsible ministry and exhibited in their personal lives how pastoral principles work. Their unselfish and generous guidance enhanced my spiritual and professional growth. Their influence touched and molded my professional and spiritual lives.

Being effective mentors

Of the many principles that contribute to the making of good mentors, three stand out as significant.

1. Be an encourager. Mentoring is by no means an easy task. Our mentees may not always meet our expectations. At times, they may disappoint us. Peter disappointed Jesus several times. He was hasty, imprudent, and often spoke first and then thought. He was quick with his sword in defending his Master and was just as quick in denying Christ. But Jesus never gave up on Peter. As a Divine Mentor, Jesus knew the possibilities that lay buried in the heart of Peter. In spite of all his failures, Jesus encouraged Peter and assured him of His prayers in the face of satanic assaults to derail him from discipleship (Luke 22:31). Again and again, Jesus encouraged Peter and, after the Resurrection, assured him of the sacred job of caring for His sheep (John 21:15–17). Ellen G. White writes, "The Saviour's manner of dealing with Peter had a lesson for him and for his brethren. It taught them to meet the transgressor with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love."⁴ As mentors, should we not follow the example of Jesus and be a source of encouragement to those who are under our care and training?

There may be times when being a mentor can be quite discouraging. A pastor was once told by his supervisor that something was wrong with his work: "Only one person has been added to your church membership this year, and he is just a lad too." Later that day, heavy of heart, the pastor prayed for encouragement. He knew God as his ultimate Mentor, and He

would never fail him. As he concluded his prayer, he sensed someone walking up behind him. Turning around, he saw that same boy—his only convert that year. The boy said, “Pastor, do you think I could become a preacher or missionary some day?” The pastor encouraged him to pray and seek God’s guidance about it. The lad was Robert Moffat, who later went to Africa to win that land for Christ. Some years later, when Moffat spoke in one of the churches in London about his experience on that continent, a young doctor, deeply moved by Moffat’s message, came forward to work with him in Africa. His name? David Livingstone.

2. *Be ready to sacrifice.* Mentoring can be a joyful experience when there is a sacrificial attitude. When mentors sacrifice something, this will be cherished in the hearts of their followers. I can recall my senior pastor’s many acts

of sacrifice and kindness. He once gave me his own personal Bible for my use, invited me to use his library for study, took time to pray with me, and was there when I needed him. These little acts of sacrifice cemented within me a resolve to be like him. His mentorship was a precious gift for the rest of my life. Without a spirit of sacrifice, one cannot be an effective leader, much less a successful mentor.

3. *Lead from the front.* From a biblical perspective, a leader or mentor lives as a shepherd. If you want to be a mentor, then you must become a shepherd, leading the sheep from the front, ready to lay down one’s life for the safety of the flock. Paul stresses this important factor of leading from the front: “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16, NIV). He also reminds the mentors to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV). Mentors are not cattle drivers; they

are shepherds—caring, gentle leaders, showing the path of righteousness and service.

Conclusion

The importance and necessity of effective mentorship cannot be overstressed. Without training in a second rung of leadership in ministry, the work of the church will suffer. A Joshua must follow a Moses. An Elisha must succeed an Elijah. No one can remain a leader forever, and no organization can succeed in its mission without adequate provision for the next round of leaders, and that is where mentoring counts. 

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LETTERS

Continued from page 4



with her and doing things with her until the day she died.

I understand it is very difficult for a spouse to watch their loved one deteriorate and know there is nothing they can do to help them regain their health, but they can give them love and respect no matter how compromised they become. As Christians, the Bible tells us that love is the most important thing we can give one another, and God calls us to do exactly that.

—Mary Simmons, Macungie, Pennsylvania, United States

Salvation, hermeneutics, and culture

Thank you for Lael O. Caesar’s excellent article “Salvation, Hermeneutics,

and Culture” (November 2012). From my extensive reading of the Word of God, this article spells out a very deep and wide understanding of the Holy Scriptures solidly based on *Sola Gloria*, by grace and not by human wisdom and understanding.

—Edwin Koch, pastor emeritus, Melbourne, Australia

Dealing with the weaker brother

I am a longtime, non-Adventist reader of *Ministry* who has never written a letter to the editor; but I want to give two thumbs up to Loren Seibold for his article “The Tyranny of the Weaker Brother” (November 2012). In my opinion, this is one of the top five, if

not the best, most logically organized and biblically accurate articles I have ever read in *Ministry*. The exegesis, logic, and theology are superb, and the conclusions are correct.

I find it a bit surprising to find such an antilegalistic stance taken within the Adventist movement, which seems, to this one on the outside looking in, to be overly concerned with matters of Old Testament law and legalistic observances of the Sabbath. Nevertheless, I find it refreshing, and hope that this kind of theology will work its way through the entire movement.

—William Sillings, general superintendent, International Fellowship of Bible Churches, Bethany, Oklahoma, United States 



How to Lead in Church Conflict: Healing Ungrieved Loss

by K. Brynolf Lyon and Dan P. Moseley, Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2012.

K. Brynolf Lyon and Dan P. Moseley are both seminary professors who pursue careers in the world outside the seminary: Lyon a practicing therapist, and Moseley a congregational consultant. In *How to Lead in Church Conflict: Healing Ungrieved Loss*, they approach conflict as the loss or perceived loss of something significant to us, then proceed from that position to relate conflict with grief. For them, the most important answers to leading through conflict lie in the practice of ministering to the complexities of ungrieved loss within a community. Thus, congregational leadership in the process of conflict is not as simple as many would believe.

The authors define their perspectives on conflict and leadership: conflict, they assert, is often about ungrieved loss. Groups, such as congregations, experience conflict when the ways that have defined them change. Likewise, people or groups experience grief when they realize that goals, real or anticipated, cannot be mutually realized. The emotions involved are a grieving process that can severely inhibit a community's function and the leader's work.

Further complexity is apparent as the authors unpack the liquid nature of our time and the resulting loss of permanence in organizations that have provided a secure and stable place. The very change we seek leaves loss in its wake.

Lyon and Moseley see leadership as a corporate process of cocreation. Leaders rely on dynamic relationships and perform a specific function on behalf of the group. In the context

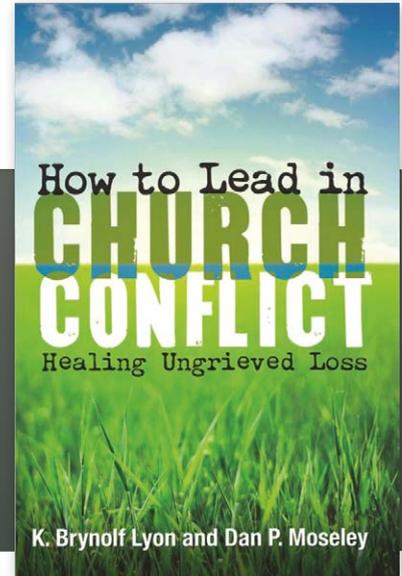
Leading means attending to losses and managing the grief process.

of conflict management that means recognizing within the congregation the root and variables providing the conflict. A leader works to create space in which grief can be experienced without harming relationships or the future.

Pastors and other church leaders must know how to be present in the dynamics of grieving while supporting new innovation. The process of managing conflict is remembering, in a healthy manner, forgiveness and mercy. Leading means attending to losses and managing the grief process.

The authors set out three narratives in chapter 2: a pastor coping with a challenging family change, a growing church with conflicting approaches to a building project, and a community divided by differing views. The stories serve as case studies for the remaining chapters and provide reflection on conflict in the realities of the church.

Chapter 3 explores the dynamics of conflicted relationships, helping us understand their ambiguity and complexity. Chapter 4 helps identify the loss to helpful growth that



neglecting grief portends. Chapter 5 describes how dealing with loss positively transforms a congregation and leadership. Chapter 6 suggests that preaching and liturgy offer a vital opportunity for pastoral leaders to help congregations grieve loss. Worship settings create an important space in which congregations grieve loss and can open to God's new work.

How to Lead in Church Conflict is a book of significant depth with key ideas that are complex and intertwined. The insights about conflict as unresolved loss and grief are truly helpful. With rich illustrations, the book helps the reader understand the dynamics of conflict, grounds the reader's leadership in the meanings and progression of church life, and accompanies groups through potentially harmful moments toward the creative potential that conflict provides.

—Skip Bell, DMin, serves as professor of Christian leadership and director of the Doctor of Ministry program, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. 



► The Holy Spirit works in Albania

Tirana, Albania—On December 1, 2012, Adventist believers and seekers from all churches and groups throughout Albania convened at a festival of faith, celebrating the wondrous works of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor **Leo N. España**, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Albania, in his year-end report exclaimed, “Two thousand twelve, what a blessed year for the church in Albania!” He was referring to the highest number of baptisms to be recorded in the last 15 years—21 in 2012. “We thank God for His many blessings. It has been wonderful to see how the Holy Spirit has worked in the hearts of the people through the work of pastors and church members who have been dynamic in their participation of the proclamation of the gospel.”

España concluded, “Amid songs of praise, preaching, reports, meditation, fasting, and humble prayers, our church has met today seeking for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We know there is still much to be done. As our Lord Jesus said in Luke 10:2, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few’” (NKJV).

A collaborative effort resulted in the distribution of Christmas parcels to the poor and vulnerable children

throughout the country. The annual distribution of thousands of Christmas



parcels, kindly provided through ADRA Germany and ADRA Austria, was highlighted on national and local television. “Here’s an excellent opportunity for ADRA and the church to encourage Albanian society to be more engaged in our own communities by giving rather than receiving,” said

Dr. **Beatrice C. Kastrati**, director of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Albania.

The year was also marked for the significant progress of Internet ministries. “Thanks to the LIFEconnect platform, we can now witness, make real connections, and even give Bible studies to the unreached in ways that we could never imagine before!” said **Sanda Veidemane-Thomollari**, one of the digital missionaries (DM) from Elbasan. Using the LIFEconnect Albania Web site and its Facebook

presence, the online series *Exploring Life Together* has already shown promising results. “More than one million Albanians are on Facebook, and as we post, we bear in mind that we are the light of the world and salt of the earth,” said **Blerina Hasani**, an active DM from Durres.

“Preparation for outreach efforts throughout 2013 has commenced,” said Pastor **Julian Kastrati**, coordinator for publishing ministries in Albania, who was the main speaker at the festival. In his sermon, Kastrati invited everyone for the year 2013 and beyond to “wear the wardrobe of Christ, consisting of His compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and covered by His forgiveness and divine love for God and one another.”

For more information about the work of the church in Albania, visit www.adventist.al, www.adra.al, and www.lifeconnect.al. [Julian Kastrati, tedNEWS] 



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Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is associate director, Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Should we love people more than the health message?

Three years ago, I worshiped in a relatively small church in the United States. After worship concluded, most attendees found their way downstairs for the fellowship meal. As the final preparations were being made, it became apparent there was one lady who was very much in charge. She insisted I come to the front of the line, offer the blessing, and be the first to receive my food.

Reluctantly, I walked forward, planning to drop back as the hungry kids surged forward to fill their plates. However, as I opened my eyes after praying, this lady was holding a plate right in front of me and indicated that guest speakers always got their food first. As I took hold of the plate, she pointed at one of the first dishes on the table and whispered, “This dish is made with real cheese.”

Everyone in the room heard it, and they were now looking to see if I would place some of this cheese dish on my plate. The dish that was now the center of attention was one I would normally have passed over, as it was not one of my favorites. Not knowing who had prepared it, I offered a silent prayer to heaven for wisdom and took one spoonful. The host gasped.

Nothing more was said about this as others joined me at the table. We shared conversations and fellowship together. As I prepared to leave, I thanked the lady who organized the meal and then I walked out. As I passed into the hallway, a lady was standing along the wall silently crying. As no one was talking

with her, I took several steps in her direction and asked if I could help. Her next words jolted me from any lethargy I may have been feeling.

“I am the lady who made the dish with real cheese,” she replied, “and I have been waiting to talk to you. Thank you for taking and eating one spoonful.”

She then told me she was a new member of the church, having joined just a couple of months prior. She was thrilled with the message, enjoyed the fellowship with her new friends, but was deeply hurt by the fact that this was the third time a similar comment had been made about a dish she had brought to potluck.

“No one has studied with me about the health message, and I am completely in the dark about what I should bring to meals, except that it should be vegetarian.” With more tears flowing, she continued, “As I was preparing this meal—and I left the ham out—I told my husband I would never go back to this church again if another hurtful comment was made about my dish. But you ate some, and I am coming back next week.”

While there is no excuse for treating anyone the way she had been treated, I invited her to join me in the foyer of the church for a few minutes to share a quick introduction to our philosophy of health. Then I prayed that the Lord would give her courage and understanding as she grew in her walk with God.

On the drive home I called her pastor, who had been at another church



in his district, and told him this experience. He and his wife visited her the next day, threw their arms around her, invited her to their home for some simple cooking lessons—and today she organizes the church fellowship meals.

If we are going to experience successful health ministry in our churches, we need to love people more than we do the health message. That does not mean that we must lower the standards by which we live, but it certainly expresses the importance of being loving, understanding, and patient with those who are still learning. Extreme attitudes toward health (and other) practices disgust and discourage many to the point that a lifetime of living will never undo the damage.

It pains me deeply to see fellowship meal tables adorned with signs proclaiming certain foods made according to one standard or another. These practices do not promote unity, but rather pride in some hearts and hurt in others. “But thank God! . . . [H]e uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume” (2 Cor. 2:14, NLT). Are you a sweet perfume to all? 🌱

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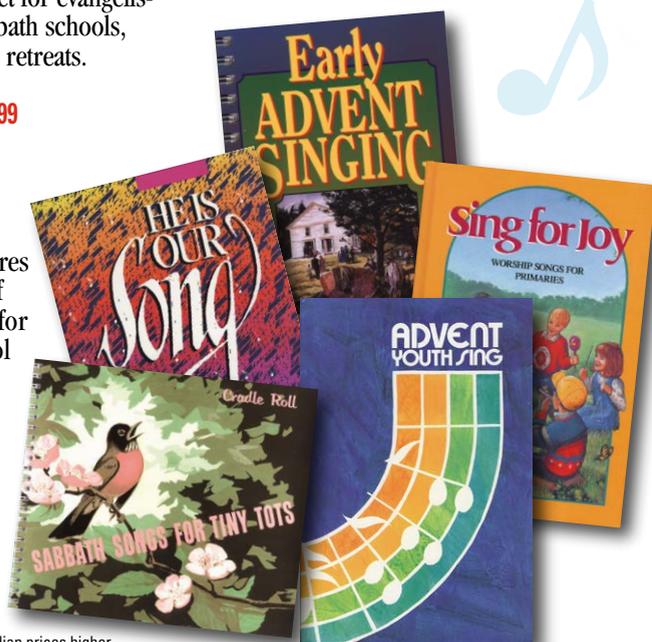
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