

quarterly resource for local church elders † april/june 2008

ELDER'S DIGEST

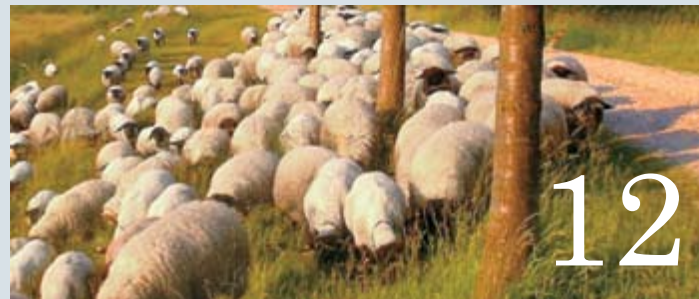


GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

From Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue and People:
Diversity and the Changing Face of Adventism

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REVIVE THE CHURCH

As leaders, we are responsible for the well-being of our church. It is our job to feed the members with good messages, reviving their faith and enabling them to fulfill the mission of the church. We are also responsible for providing spiritual support through visitation and Christian friendship. But some churches may need a spiritual revival.

A genuine spiritual revival will surely lead the church to true reform. This is accomplished through spiritual and biblical sermons and with a strategy that encourages the entire church leadership to reach that goal. Of course, poor, aggressive sermons and legalistic, radical attitudes are unlikely to accomplish much. The Bible says, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 4:6, NIV).

I would like to share with you an adaptation of Charles G. Finney's list of characteristics or symptoms that determine whether or not a church needs a revival. For him, a spiritual revival is needed when the following elements are present:

- Lack of love: When there is lack of fraternal love and Christian trust among those who profess to be religious.



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

- Discord and division: When there is contention, jealousy, and slander among those who profess to be Christians.

- Worldliness: When worldly influences and their philosophies permeate church programs and members' habits.

- Sin in the church: When the congregation notices that its members are falling into sin and bringing dishonor to the church.

- Controversy and disharmony: When the spirit of quarreling and argument corrodes church unity.

- Evil controls society: When evil triumphs over the church, producing moral and spiritual damage.

- Spiritual lethargy: When church members are not involved in missionary programs or activities.

Being aware of these factors and looking at some of our churches, I believe that spiritual revival is an urgent matter. It is the only way these churches will return to the basis of the Adventist faith and re-establish a commitment without reservation to the cause of God.

I believe, however, that such revival should begin as a personal experience of its leaders. Then the reviving influence will surely reach the church members. A spiritual revival never begins with the "church" but always with its "spiritual leader."

We need to better administer our time and establish the church's priorities. The faith of our members will be revitalized, and we will see that living a genuine Christian life will be a priority, both to us personally and to our congregations.



INTERVIEW

WOMEN-IN-MINISTRY QUESTIONS

There is much discussion in the Seventh-day Adventist Church about women in ministry. In response to this interest, Nathan Brown, editor of the South Pacific Division's *Record*, posed a series of questions to theologian Dr. Paul Petersen. This article is the second part of that conversation. Considering the importance of this issue for our worldwide church, we are also presenting this interview in *Elder's Digest*.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul seems to set out a new egalitarianism found in the gospel. This is echoed by a statement in the Adventist Church's Statement of Fundamental Beliefs: "We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation." How can we make this a reality in our churches and church leadership?

The unique characteristic of Christian leadership is submission to the needs of others. This characteristic reflects the nature of God Himself. God's challenge to us is to create a loving community based on unselfish mutual service, helping us by our fellowship to exemplify His kingdom on earth and prepare people to live for eternity. God's vision for us is to take the world back to Eden, countering the results of sin and reflecting Jesus Christ by never abusing power in our social relationships. His kingdom is to be among us. It is to this corporate sense that Jesus refers in Luke 17:21.

The only way to reach that goal is for each of us to submit to the crucified Savior, known to us from the way the Holy Spirit portrays Him in the Bible. Only then are we able to put aside our personal and culturally conditioned prejudices, gender biases included.

Is recognizing and affording equality of opportunity, giftedness, and ministry a biblical imperative for the church? Is it a cultural discussion?

Justice is a biblical principle. Equal pay for equal work and responsibility is in accordance with biblical ethics. At the same time, we must acknowledge that opportunities within the church will be impacted by the opportunities within the specific culture where a church operates.

A number of the functions of the church are directly related to its public relations. In some cultures, for example, young people might have relatively better opportunities than in other cultures to serve the church in some functions. The same is true for different genders, not because of different values in the eyes of God as such, but because of the need of the church to function most efficiently in its particular culture, enhancing the chances of proclaiming and sharing the gospel.

Because the issue of gender roles is so culturally influenced, to what extent should the church be responsive to the culture in which it ministers?

There needs to be a balance. We are to be sensitive, but the message of the gospel should not necessarily submit to culture. There are clashes. We do not accept "cultural rape." My home country earns a great deal of income from exporting bacon and beer; our Adventist

message contradicts these aspects of my culture. In other situations, we need to leave minor—though important—issues for the sake of the all-important one: to bring the Advent message to the people.

Though slavery is morally wrong and though the Christian church over time became a major force in eradicating it from the Roman Empire, God did not put that issue first on the agenda for the apostles. So, at times, we will have to let the core of the gospel do its work. We should not expect a group of people to learn in one generation what has taken God's people generations to understand.

How do we balance the conflicting biblical principles involved in the call of some women to specific ministry roles with the offense this may cause to others who see this as biblically wrong?

Let me answer by quoting the Swiss Reformer Zwingli who, albeit in a different context, expressed that "whoever through . . . ignorance wants to take offense without cause should not be permitted to remain in his . . . ignorance but should be strengthened in order that he may not regard as sinful what is not sinful."

It seems that discussion of women-in-ministry will inevitably arrive at the question of the ordination of women. If we can answer the general objections to women in ministry roles, are there further specific objections to the ordination of women?

We will have issues if we maintain or return to a Catholic view of ordination and the sacraments. It is paramount for us to come to a genuine understanding of God's intention with these rituals. But besides that theological question, within the Adventist context we have chosen to give the ordained minister worldwide functions. This fact has been a major issue in our discussions so far. An ordained minister is allowed to baptize and conduct the Lord's Supper everywhere in the world. Because of this, the General Conference delegates in Utrecht denied separate church divisions the right to ordain female ministers to function within their territories.

My personal opinion is that this objection could be overcome in a practical way by understanding that no minister should perform duties anywhere in the world without cooperating with appointed local leadership. I have in my ministry been asked to perform clerical duties in areas other than where I work at present, and I have been happy to do so, but never without informing and consulting with local leadership.

Some would include marriage in the rituals belonging to the ordained minister. It often is, but in a sense, marriage is a civil institution. The right to legally perform marriage is extended to the church by the government,

as is the case in Australia, for example. In some countries, the local elder also shares such legal authority. In other places in the world, ministers are not allowed to carry out the legal aspect, but marriages exist nonetheless. They do not depend on ordained ministers.

Is ordination important or necessary to ministry? Would we be better off to stop ordaining anyone?

Dedication for service, being officially shown the trust of the corporate church, the community of believers, is personally inspiring. Ordination also implies that the church has appointed some people for certain functions. Without ordination or a similar action, organization would disappear, and the era of the judges would return.

Ordination does not function in a magic sense, infusing the minister with some special "power." It would, however, be wrong to say that it is just an appointment by the church. Such expression downgrades the value of the church. Ordination is so immensely significant exactly because it is the church of God that has appointed the minister. Whoever treasures the church will treasure its expression of confidence through ordination.

A recent statement from General Conference president Jan Paulsen on the question of ordaining women included this comment: "Although we may not see a clear biblical [reason] that ordination may not happen, there are many cultural issues that impact this decision on a local level." At the same time, church leadership has insisted that this is a question on which the church must maintain unity. How important is worldwide uniformity on questions such as this?

Unity in the Spirit is always important, but it has two sides. We have avoided being split on the question of ordaining woman; hopefully, we will manage not to be split on the question of not ordaining. The proclamation of the gospel is always our first priority. To achieve our divine task, it may in parts of the world be important to give full acknowledgement to female ministers preaching that message.

Do you see a way forward on this issue?

Education and cultural sensitivity must go hand in hand. Theologically, we need a clearer understanding of the nature of the Protestant message regarding the authority structure of the Papacy, which in reality is the foundation for all theological objections against female participation in pastoral ministry. Further, we need to develop cultural self-consciousness, realizing more fully the biases of our own culture so as not to impose them on biblical texts or other people.

What advice would you give to a young woman who feels called to full-time ministry?

Become a minister of Christ. Preach the gospel; present the Advent message. Serve as a human being, not because you are a woman. Serve because you have been called by Jesus Christ to represent Him, not yourself.

The corporate church today provides such opportunities. Policies are in place so that female ministers may, for almost all practical purposes, share equal rights and responsibilities; although you will definitely encounter your share of human opposition, there are rich and wonderful rewards and blessings in following that call.

The corporate church needs such role models to persuade skeptics and inspire other women to serve. And in my experience, our church members in general are kind and gentle Christians who will be grateful for your contributions.

What advice would you give to a member of a congregation to whom having a woman pastor just seems wrong?

The Adventist community worldwide exceeds 20 million people. For most of us, there will, of course, be elements of the life or teachings of the church with which we agree more or less.

First, I take for granted that disagreements are to be expressed with Christian kindness and courtesy. Second, I trust that we will always make an attempt to question our own presuppositions and cultural biases.

We do well in adhering to the views of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In contrast with the prevailing Christian American culture of the time, they argued strongly for female preachers of the gospel in a series of articles in *Review and Herald* during the 1850s. And, remember, Ellen White was a woman. Would you not have liked to have, for instance, Ellen White as your pastor and preacher? I would.

Learn from the position of our pioneers regarding female preachers, and respect the decisions of the corporate church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has voted to accept female preachers and elders. Commissioned female ministers are fully qualified to perform baptisms and other such functions. The position of the church on these issues is clear.

But more than that, the authority is the Word of God, never the preacher—whether male or female. For instance, we do not, as in some charismatic circles, submit to the authority of any leader because of his charismatic gifts and supposed direct link to God, independent of the Word. The Bible is the source of our doctrinal authority, not the role of any leader. Creating or accepting such an authoritative teaching role in the church will set aside the Bible.

Our leaders are appointed or elected by the church and, in relation to the organization, receive their authority from the church. They may be replaced, and they are replaced from time to time. The role of our leaders is not to decide the message, but rather themselves to submit to the message and to the church at large. And as we elect them, we should respect their right to exercise the authority we give them in the appropriate areas.

Let me illustrate this point by referring to one of the most exciting events during the awakenings in the 1840s. In Sweden at that time, laypeople were not allowed to preach or even gather people in homes for Bible studies. To create revival, God called children between the ages of six and ten, to preach the Word. They would read from the Bible in clear voices, in public places and in gatherings in homes, calling for conversion and commitment to Jesus, appealing for a sober life and preparation for the second coming of Jesus. Though many of these children were incarcerated and tortured, they continued their biblical preaching, led by the Holy Spirit.

If a girl at the age of six preaches truthfully from the Bible, the authority of that message stands above the authority of any elder or ordained minister if he preaches contrary to the Word of God. This is the measure by which we judge anyone who ministers or leads—regardless of gender (see Matt. 7:20).

Nathan Brown is the editor of *Record*. Paul Petersen is the field secretary for the South Pacific Division, based in Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.

BIOGRAPHY

MARIA SIERRA

Maria Sierra has been a local church elder for 4 years at the Bayridge Spanish SDA Church in New York, U.S.A. She is a busy mother with 3 kids, but finds the time in her schedule to contribute mightily.

"I enjoy working in God's church. It is an amazing experience! I understand that through my ministry I can help advance members to grow spiritually and to become more involved in church activities. I pray to God each day to help me be a blessing channel through His hands while I work for Him."




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BECOMING A Bridge Builder FOR BUDDHISTS



As a church leader, you may face tough challenges sharing God's love with members of non-Christian religions. Scott Griswold, director of the Buddhist Study Center in Thailand, draws from his mission experience to give you practical tools for building bridges of understanding and friendship with Buddhists in your community.

Whether your community has many Buddhists or none at all, it's likely this information will be invaluable to you soon. For Buddhism is "the integrating and identifying religion of approximately one billion people," says Dr. Alex Smith (*Evangelical Missiological Society, Spring 2000*). Between 40-90 percent of Cambodia, Bhutan, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam are Buddhist. Smith puts the number of Buddhists in the U.S.A. at ten million. This growth has been within the last several decades, especially among young people. Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, France, Indonesia, and Mongolia each have several hundred thousand Buddhists.

"Christians have often found it difficult to share the gospel with Buddhists," says Griswold. Buddhists have often found it difficult to become Christians. Why is this?

Many Buddhists come from countries where the families and societies are closely knit. A change to Christianity is often seen as a betrayal to family and country. They may view Christianity as foreign, something linked to the politics, materialism, and immorality they see in western countries. Their own spectacular temples, intricate systems of morality, and elaborate ceremonies lead Buddhists to assume that becoming a Christian would be a step down.

Buddhist beliefs about life, death, and salvation are vastly different from ours. Many times they simply don't understand what we're saying or find it unbelievable and irrelevant.

So what can we do? We must become BRIDGE BUILDERS. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit as fully adequate for taking the gospel to the entire world, including to Buddhists (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit gives us three bridge pieces that will span the gaps and make it easier for them to experience God. These are:

- **CHARACTER BRIDGES**
- **ACTION BRIDGES**
- **WORD BRIDGES**

A transformed CHARACTER is extremely important because the focus of Buddhism is right-living, right-thinking, and the denial of desires. Buddhists must see someone living the good news they are seeking.

Compassionate ACTIONS are an important drawing factor because Buddhism is full of merit-making. When Buddhists see us caring for the poor, it will be easier for them to think our scriptures and our God have something to offer them.

Empowered by such love, our WORDS will sink into their hearts. We will learn to speak in ways that lead them simply step-by-step to greater truths.

These three bridges are not a method; they are the power of the Holy Spirit, directly tied to the fruit of the Spirit (character), the gifts of the Spirit (actions), and the tongues of the Spirit (words). As we call out to God in prayer, He will use us to make bridges directly to the hearts of Buddhists.

How can we begin building these bridges? There are four simple steps.

1. Listen to know their beliefs and needs.

Listening to our Buddhist friends helps us know what is important to them and how we can meet their needs. It communicates that we value and respect them.

Do we know what our friends believe? What do they think about God, life, death, and what comes next? Some Buddhists think more about spirits, magic, and protection than about Buddha's teachings. Some are highly philosophical with no room for what is unseen. Others are secular, thinking only about their families, businesses, or pleasure.

Jesus used parables tied to what people lived and liked. Once we know their beliefs and interests we will know where to start the BRIDGE and what piece of the good news they first need to hear.

2. Affirm Similarities in Values

Buddhists believe in the law of karma—everyone reaps the good or bad that they sow. Most are confident of an afterlife in hell or heaven for awhile and then a return to this world of suffering. Often Christians want to jump quickly into the good news of forgiveness and to truths about death and eternal life. The Buddhist is frequently confused or offended by the person's confrontational approach.

BUILD another piece of the BRIDGE by affirming what you hold in common. We also believe we reap what we sow. Share some of Solomon's proverbs and Jesus' teachings that highlight the morality we hold in common.

We too believe in something beyond the grave, in angels, and evil spirits. Sure our understanding is different, but why not start with a friendship based on what we share. If we believe that all truth has its source in God, we don't need to be afraid to affirm the good which Buddha taught, even while we recognize the enemy has mixed truth with error.

If they're not ready to see Jesus as the eternal Son of God who can forgive sins, then let them come to value Him for His wise teachings, later for His kind actions or His power over evil spirits. In time the step to full belief won't seem so hard.


3. Joyfully Share about Differences through a Testimony

People may not want to discuss religion, but if you're their friend, they'll listen to your story. If you want them to understand about a living God, tell them something that happened when you asked for His help. If you want them to believe Jesus can forgive sins, talk about your struggles and the peace you found in the story of the cross. Your stories, friends' stories, and stories from the Bible interestingly shared at the right time will never be forgotten. How much better this is than a debate in which no one is changed and someone probably become more closed than ever.

4. Invite them to Experience Something New

The BRIDGE is not finished until our Buddhist friends step into a relationship with the living God. Our job is to BUILD small steps by inviting them to try a variety of new experiences. At the right time we might be able to say:

- "May I pray for your troubled teenager?"
- "Would you like to try memorizing this scripture that helped my relationship with my wife?"
- "Would you like to experience a Sabbath with my family this weekend? It's really helped us grow close together and has helped my stress-level too."
- "Try praying to God every night before you go to sleep and see if it helps your fears go away."

"Small steps, where God's power can be felt, will make it easier for a Buddhist to make the full step of surrender and loyalty to God. Today God is longing to communicate His love to the many Buddhists that do not know Him as their Father. Will you join Him as a BRIDGE BUILDER?" 

To learn more about ministry among Buddhists visit the web site at www.BridgesForMinistry.org. There you can find such resources as the *30-Day Cycle of Prayers for Buddhists*, *Bible Studies for Buddhists*, and more. To receive an e-mail newsletter called "Prayers Among Buddhists" write to houseofpeace@csloxinfo.com

Scott Griswold is the director of the Buddhist Study Center in Ayutthaya, Thailand. The Office of Adventist Mission, located at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, operates five Global Mission Study Centers under the leadership of Dr. Ganoune Diop. The Centers aim to establish bridges of understanding with various major world religions. For more information on the study centers and to discover what's new on the frontlines of Adventist Mission, visit www.AdventistMission.org.

I HAVE BEEN BURNED AND HURT BY THE CHURCH IN THE PAST. HOW CAN I OVERCOME THIS, RENEW MY PASSION FOR CHURCH, AND REGAIN A DESIRE TO ATTEND CHURCH?

The pain caused by a church is a “silent killer.” This doesn’t mean that the hurtful words and events are invisible. It is a “silent killer” because of what it does deep in the mind, heart, and soul of the wounded. If not dealt with, the wound will destroy your future happiness, joy, and well-being. And the collateral damage always negatively affects the ministry and outreach of the church; some churches never recover. Recognize that the behavior which brought such devastation to your heart is not much different than the hurt you might encounter in the workplace, marketplace, or home. The difference is that we just don’t expect God’s people to behave like those who do not have Christ in their lives. Almost everyone agrees that church is the one place that should be safe, accepting, forgiving, and free from conflict and pain; in most churches, however, elements of strife, conflict, and hatred creep in and shatter that dream.

This happens more in some churches than in others. The spiritual health of a church’s members and the strength of its leadership determine how prevalent and to what extent divisive behavior can gain control. Out of control, it has the effect of a termite infestation that slowly but surely destroys the foundation of the congregation’s spiritual life.

If you have been hurt by the church, it is important for you to turn your focus away from the people involved and away from the church itself, trying instead to identify the root cause of your pain, turmoil, and disillusionment. Honestly identify what you are feeling. If you are like most people, you will have experienced anger, sorrow, disappointment, rejection, hurt feelings, jealousy, fear, rebellion, pride, blame, loss, shame, embarrassment, and a feeling of being threatened or looking foolish. Find out what is at the core of your hurt—not what someone said or did to you, but what is causing your pain. Then search the Scriptures to discover what God says about what is hurting you. Using a Bible concordance, look up each word and read, think, pray, and apply the applicable texts to your life. For example, you may think that you are angry, but in reality you feel rejected. What does God say about rejection? He says, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5); “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3); and “Surely I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20).

After you have identified the cause of your pain, accept that God has a balm of wisdom, compassion, and love to generously apply to your wound(s). By calling on

Him, your focus quickly becomes riveted on Him rather than on the event or person that hurt you. Admittedly, you may have been harmed, injured, or offended. You certainly feel it. Those are by-products of deeper, more important realities that have derailed your passion for God, His church, and His purpose for your life. This hurt has soured your heart, and, if left unattended, will lead to bitterness that negatively affects every fiber of your soul and robs you of the chance to find fulfillment in Christ. You do not want this to happen.

How do we keep hurtful experiences from destroying us? The Bible says to “guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Prov. 4:23, NLT). We guard our hearts by choosing our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions. Guard your heart in this situation by refusing to rehearse what happened. Do not dwell on the people who hurt you or on the weaknesses of the church. This change of focus will take humility. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; Prov. 3:34). It will take forgiving attitudes and actions (Matt. 18:22; Mark 11:27; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13) with no hint of vengeance (Rom. 12:19). Above all, it will take the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through you (Eph. 3:16).

Don’t blame God for how His children behave. Don’t abandon His church either. Most church members are dedicated, grace-filled, loving, and forgiving. Seek out these people. Spend time with them. If you cannot find them (and this is rare, even in the most difficult churches), find another church. The church is God’s idea, and He protects it faithfully even though He is often pained by its behavior.

Remember that an unattended wound will penetrate deep into your soul and destroy any chance of living an abundant life in Christ (John 10:10). You can have hope because you are seeking healing. It is now up to you to do the right thing and turn your focus to the place—no, the Person—who will truly transform your life above and beyond this hurt.

Jesus calls lovingly to you, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30).



General Conference Ministerial Association



Review and Herald

ELDERS AS SHEPHERDS AND

This article will explore the functions of church elders from the shepherd metaphor mentioned by the apostles Peter and Paul, as well as the teaching of the New Testament regarding the nature of church elders as overseers.

Although the early church took the name “elders” from Judaism, elders in the Christian church appear to function differently than the elders of Judaism. For example, during the meeting of the elders at Ephesus and the apostle Paul, there were some specific declarations that reveal the elders’ functions: “Take heed of yourself and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son” (Acts 20:28).

The first instruction of the apostle was that the elders pay attention to themselves. The expression “take heed of yourself” probably suggests that an elder’s entire life was to be in harmony with the teachings contained in Scripture. Elders were local leaders of the people, so they needed to be faithful to the Lord, His Word, and His church. Indeed, Paul was warning them that apostasy would arise even among them; therefore, they must be prepared and alert (Acts 20:29-31).

Second, they must pay attention to the flock. The text explicitly uses the word “all” before “flock” to denote the care of the whole church—the body of Christ. Elders must include all believers—families and children—in their ministry. Therefore, it implies the ministry of visitation and nurture. How did elders care for the whole congregation? Two important aspects could be considered: first, there was a plurality of elders in each local congregation (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 6, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Peter 5:1, 2; 1 Tim. 5:17-19). It seems probable that the elders would have followed Paul’s example and distributed among themselves the responsibility for visiting the members. The early church developed ministries in homes. There were no church buildings; people worshipped in “house” churches. Paul declared that he taught them “in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance of God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20).

The apostle Paul pointed out that elders under the direction of the Holy Spirit were to be overseers, “to care for the church of God” (Acts 20:28). The word “overseers” suggests that elders were supervisors—or guardians—of the flock. In other words, the term is used to explain the first part of verse 28, in which Paul says, “Take heed . . . to all the flock” (Acts 20:28a). The last part of verse 28 gives insight into the responsibility of the overseers. They were to “care for the church of God which he [God] obtained with the blood of His own Son.” The overseers were responsible for caring for the souls that were redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Mark 10:45).

Elders also needed to be watchful. The apostle Paul admonished them to be alert, declaring, “After my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). In his epistle to the Hebrews, he reminded the members to “obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account” (Heb. 13:17). The essence of the apostle Paul’s message is this: guard the flock—wolves are coming. Protecting the flock includes seeking the lost sheep. Elders must continually guard the congregation from false teachers and teachings. A good shepherd is always alert to danger.

The apostle Peter also told the elders how to fulfill their ministry. “Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3). Three important points are mentioned here. First, the elders’ ministry had to be without compulsion; that is, their pastoral ministry would be achieved through love and tenderness, not force. Second, being an elder was not a paid position; elders needed to feel drawn to the work and be willing to spend whatever time was necessary to do it. Finally, they were to serve and lead the flock with humility, “being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). In other words, the elders should teach by example.

Elders and apostles were responsible under God and the church for the care of souls. When they fulfilled

LEADERS OF A LOCAL CHURCH

their ministry, they were functioning under Christ, the “Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). Apostles and elders are the overseers and shepherds of the souls in their care, just as Jesus Christ Himself is the Shepherd and Overseer of all souls.

Although in the Old Testament the work of the Lord is illustrated by the shepherd metaphor, Psalm 23 illustrates how elders may also function as shepherds. According to the metaphor of the “shepherd and the sheep,” elders are spiritual leaders who feed, nurture, protect, lead, and comfort the believers.

In the New Testament, Jesus cited the same principles in His discourse on the good shepherd (John 10:1-21). In this illustration, the shepherd is shown to have an intimate knowledge of each sheep (John 10:3), providing food for the sheep and leading them to good pasture (verse 9). Shepherds have a supreme responsibility to care for their sheep even at the cost of their own lives (John 10:11). Using the shepherd metaphor and the inherent functions of church elders as described by the apostle Paul (Acts 20:28), it is reasonable to describe an elder’s functions from the shepherd metaphor perspective.

Moreover, Jesus’ illustration goes beyond gentle pastoral care. Shepherds should not be afraid of confrontation (John 10:12; Acts 20:29-31), despite considerable personal cost, because ministry is a selfless sacrifice. And because there are other sheep not of the fold implies that elders will have to reach out to people who do not know the “eternal gospel” (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Paul mentioned another elders’ responsibility in his letter to Timothy: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). The word “rule” gives the twofold meaning of those who simultaneously lead and care for souls. In addition, they were preachers and teachers of the flock.

How can churches ensure that elders fulfill their roles as presented in the Scripture? The New Testament model emphasizes church elders in their qualifications, character, and spiritual gifts. It appears that the apostles chose local leaders whose Christian character and spiritual gifts matched the function to which they were

called. Moreover, it seems that the apostles followed a “training model” given by Jesus Christ because they were constantly preparing others for the work of ministry. For example, the apostle Paul recruited coworkers (Timothy and Titus), who functioned at the same leadership level.

Noting the functions of local church elders as described in the New Testament, we see that counseling skills are important. Because elders are confronted with a variety of problems—adolescent crises, divorce, single-parents issues, family conflict, and child relations—they need a knowledge of counseling principles. This preparation will help elders fulfill one important role of elders as shepherds.

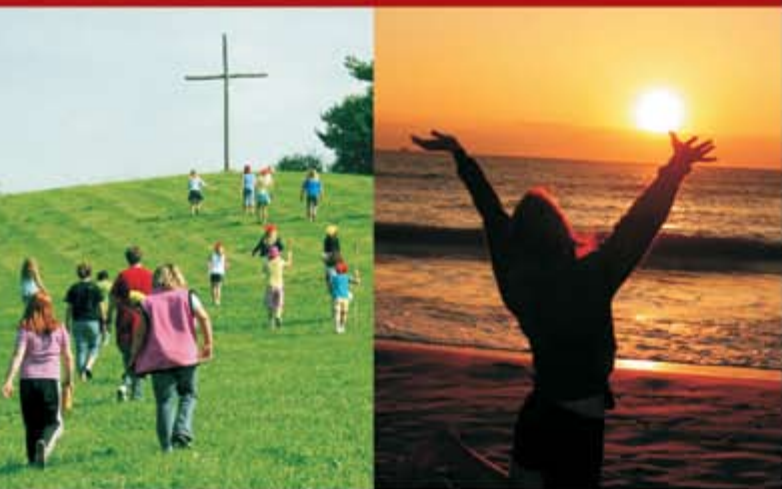
To fulfill their teaching ministry, elders also need to be well-versed in both the content of the message (Scripture) and the method for communicating it. Therefore, they should be taught the principles of hermeneutics and exegesis in order to grasp the meaning of the Scripture. This would include a knowledge of fundamental Adventist beliefs, beliefs centered in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Another important aspect of teaching is understanding how people learn; therefore, a study of lifespan psychology and psychology of learning would be most helpful.

After planning a curriculum for training church elders and deciding who will teach, the pastor should develop an annual training calendar. The *Elder’s Handbook* suggests that the training curriculum include the following: church organization and administration, including spiritual gifts; church growth; care of new converts; worship leadership; preaching; visitation; the function and chairing of committees; and the pastor-elder partnership.

The study of Paul’s messages gives excellent guidance as to the responsibilities and duties of elders. These insights will guide pastors as they train elders to grow and mature in their service as shepherds to the congregation.

Miguel Luna
Northern Asia-Pacific Division Ministerial Association Secretary

IN 2008 RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM WILL BE PROMOTED
AND CELEBRATED AROUND THE
WORLD THROUGH ACADEMIC
CONGRESSES AND FESTIVALS.



FESTIVALS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2008

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Dominican Republic
- Jun. 24-28 Stadium, Luanda, Angola
- Jul. 4-5 St Petersburg, Russia
- Jul. 12-13 Honolulu Central SDA Church
Honolulu, Hawaii
- Aug. 18, 20, 23 Mexico

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION EVENTS 2008

- Jun. 12 6th Liberty Dinner
Washington, DC, USA
- Sep. 8-12 9th IRLA Meeting of Experts
Bucharest, Romania
- Nov. 19-20 3rd IRLA South American
Congress, Santiago de Chile



A Festival of Religious Freedom is a large meeting, open to the community, in which we celebrate religious freedom and say "Thank You" in a public way. We thank God, who gave us religious freedom; the country which protects religious freedom; and those who struggled and sometimes gave their lives to obtain religious freedom. In more than 130 countries around the world, religious minorities have freedom to organize communities, to print books, to own churches or places of worships, to share their faith, and to educate their children according to their religion. A Religious Freedom Festival is a great way to publicly say a big "Thank You." The festival program includes music, skits, testimonies, and short speeches regarding religious freedom.

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| SERMON 1

FATAL INFECTION

Romans 5:12-21

A woman took her husband to the doctor's office. After the exam, the doctor told her, "Your husband is suffering from a very serious infection." The husband, who was hard of hearing, asked, "What did he say?" His wife said, "He says you're sick." The doctor went on. "But there is hope. You just need to reduce his stress. Each morning, give him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant, nice, and kind. For lunch and dinner, make his favorite meals. Don't discuss your problems with him; it will only make his stress level worse. Don't yell at him or argue with him. And most importantly, cater to your husband's every whim. If you can do this for your husband for the next 6-12 months, I think he will have a complete recovery." When the husband asked again, "What did he say?" his wife replied, "He says you're going to die."

I remember learning about Adam and Eve when I was very young. One thing that always bothered me was that they blew it for the rest of us. I remember thinking that if only they hadn't sinned, we wouldn't have to worry about mosquitoes or wasps or other insects that make such nuisances of themselves.

Adam and Eve sinned when they chose to do what *they* wanted instead of what *God* wanted; they disobeyed. As a result, sin has been passed down to all their descendants. From Adam and Eve (our first parents), we have received an inheritance, but it is not money—it is sin. And because of Adam and Eve's sin, we are born with the inclination to sin, rather than wanting to follow God's leading.

When you go to the doctor and he gives you a diagnosis, you are certain to have many questions. Is my condition serious? What is the treatment? If the diagnosis is serious, you might ask, "Doctor, how much longer can I expect to live?"

Now suppose I told you that you have a fatal infection. You would probably have some questions for the doctor. We will look to the Great Physician for answers.

I. WHO IS INFECTED?

We are all infected with the disease called sin. We got this infection simply by being born. I doubt that scientists will ever find a "sin" gene, but just as your hair and eye colors are inherited, you also inherit sin.

The bad news is that you can do absolutely nothing to help yourself. You can't take penicillin or some other medicine to get rid of this infection. You can't go to a surgeon and have him cut out the infection. As Paul says, "Consequently, the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18). You can't live a holy life on your own.

If God is omniscient and knows all things, He knew that Satan would fall. He knew that Adam and Eve would sin and that as a result, all mankind who followed would be born with this infection. If God knew all of this, why did He create Adam and Eve?

Let me answer this question with another question to those of you who have children. When you had children, did you think they would be perfect, or did you realize that there would be times when they would disappoint you? Did you realize that your children would sometimes bring tears into your life? Did you realize they would bring you pain? Did you realize they would hurt you, that they would disobey you? If you realized all these things, why in the world did you have children? You hoped the good times would outweigh the bad. You hoped the joy would be greater than the pain, that the obedience would be greater than the disobedience.

II. IS THERE A CURE?

Is there a cure for this fatal infection, or are you doomed to die? You don't have to die. There is a cure! There is a remedy! Romans 5:17 says, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."

Yes, there is a disease called sin. Yes, it is fatal. Yes, if left unchecked and untreated, this infection is terminal. But there is hope, and that hope is found in Jesus Christ. God can cleanse us from sin. He can change us from within. He can heal us from this infection. He can restore us to a great relationship with Him.

III. THE CURE

If God's plan is for you to live a holy life free from sin, does that make you some kind of "super Christian"? Sometimes when we talk about holiness and sanctification, people get nervous.

Holiness isn't an abstract concept. It isn't a doctrine to be dissected in the laboratory. Holiness is simply a way of living made possible through an intimate and personal relationship with God. So when we talk about holiness, we aren't talking about something that makes us holier than our friends. It isn't something that makes us "super Christians." It doesn't change us into Christian robots incapable of doing wrong. We don't possess holiness under our own power.

CONCLUSION

When Adam and Eve sinned, their sin was like a virus. It spread and caused a fatal infection. Sin infected their children and spread through the entire human race. We are all infected. But there is hope. There is a cure. And that cure is found in Jesus Christ. You can receive this abundant provision by God's grace.

Ellen White says, "Let these words fill us with comfort and hope and peace. While you are worrying over the sins of others, Jesus says, 'Turn your eyes away from these things and behold the Lamb of God that take away the sin of the world. There is a balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there. Jesus is the great physician, and He can cure all the maladies of the soul'" (*Manuscript Releases, Vol. 12, 1990*). ED

General Conference Ministerial Association

HOW TO MAINTAIN SPIRITUAL PURITY

Genesis 33:18-34:31

God's people are called to be a distinct, separate people. Christians are to maintain a clear identity, both in what they believe and in how they behave (1 Peter 2:9). God also gives us several warnings in the Bible about spiritual impurity, which could also be called spiritual corruption or spiritual defilement (Rom. 12:2). By this point you're probably wondering what the subject of spiritual purity has to do with the sordid tale of sex and violence in Genesis 34. The answer is "Everything!" The nation of Israel was always in danger of losing its distinct and holy identity by adopting the practices or accepting the people of Canaan. They could become spiritually defiled through intermarriage, treaties, or various enticements (Examples: Lot in Sodom, Abraham in Egypt, etc.).

This passage in Genesis teaches us about the need to maintain spiritual purity, and how not to respond to spiritual impurity. Let's summarize the first lesson of Genesis 34 like this.

I. SPIRITUAL PURITY CAN BE MAINTAINED ONLY BY BEING FULLY OBEDIENT AND ALERT.

When I use the term "spiritual purity," I'm speaking of people's behavior and beliefs. Spiritual purity means that our beliefs and behavior are consistent with what is acceptable in the Bible. To maintain that standard of morality, separation, and purity of doctrine, we must be fully obedient to God and alert to the dangers of worldly contamination.

Jacob had been instructed by God to return to Bethel. Instead, he lingered near the city of Shechem, one day's journey from Bethel. He did not just stay overnight or stop to replenish his provisions. He actually purchased land there "within sight of the city."

He did part of what he was supposed to do but not all. He acknowledged Yahweh as his God for the first time. He worshipped Him there (Gen. 33:20), but he did not fully obey God. Just because Jacob built an altar and did spiritual things did not mean he was where he was supposed to be. In some ways, Jacob was doing what many Christians do today. They acknowledge God and worship him, but they don't do everything God asks.

Read Genesis 34:1-4. This sad passage demonstrates Jacob's lack of alertness concerning spiritual purity. At the time of this story, Dinah would have been between 13

and 15 years of age. As her father, Jacob would have had full control over her activities. He apparently allowed her to "visit the women of the land." This was a foolish decision because he should have known the character of the people in the city and realized that Dinah would be in danger of being defiled or corrupted.

In verse 2 we learn that Shechem "violated" Dinah. "Violated" refers to sexual activity, but we are not told if she was seduced or raped. The point is that Shechem had sexual relations with Dinah even though she was not his wife. He did speak kindly to her and sought to marry her, but this in no way mitigated his defilement of her. This was a terrible sin!

But remember, Dinah would not have been defiled if Jacob had been fully obedient and alert. In a similar way, today, we must be fully obedient and alert to the various temptations that could lead to spiritual corruption for us and also our families. We have a responsibility; we can't allow our children to make all their own decisions, and we must remember that our choices affect others.

This story addresses a second subject: how not to respond to spiritual impurity. When corruption happens, how should God's people respond? In this story we read about two ways *not* respond to spiritual impurity.

II. DO NOT RESPOND TO SPIRITUAL IMPURITY WITH APATHY OR FANATICISM (GEN. 34:5-7).

There is a stark contrast between the way Jacob responded to spiritual impurity and the way Jacob's sons responded to Dinah's defilement. Jacob "kept quiet." He was apathetic about this great sin. It wasn't that he didn't care; rather, he did not want to deal with the problems that would come by dealing with Dinah's defilement. Jacob's sons were anything but apathetic. They were furious because they recognized that "Shechem has done a disgraceful thing in Israel." At this point their reaction is appropriate, but they crossed the line in responding to Shechem's sin. First though, Hamor (Shechem's father) tried to make a deal with Israel to get them to overlook this moral impurity.

Read Genesis 34:8-12. Hamor offered Dinah's brothers the same proposition that the world offers Christians in the present time. He basically said, "Relax your standards of purity. Don't be too upset, and

I will make it worthwhile. You can have peace, prosperity, and property, but only if you don't insist on doing the right thing." As Christians, we need to remember that we're called to be a distinct and holy people, and that Satan is always looking for ways to entice us to compromise God's holy standards. Satan will promise us the world if we just give in. It should be noted that Hamor's promises to the Israelites were lies, just as Satan's promises to us are lies (Gen. 34:23).


Moses may have included this chapter in all its repulsiveness to warn God's people of the dangers of becoming assimilated with the world. The nation of Israel was about to go into the land of Canaan. The people were under the danger of being blended into the Canaanite way of life and that was a threat for the spiritual purity of not only one individual but for the community as a whole.

We also are urged to maintain our distinctiveness instead of blending in with the world.

Read Genesis 34:13-31. Here we see another wrong way to respond to spiritual impurity. Jacob's sons deceived the men of Shechem so that they could punish all of them. This was an extreme reaction. It was fanaticism, and it was just as unacceptable as apathy. Circumcision in those days clearly was not done with the same surgical precision and antiseptics as are used today; as a result, a man would be incapacitated for several days after his circumcision. It would have been easy for Simeon and Levi to kill all the males of the city. The point is that they went too far in responding to impurity.

Sometimes Christians exhibit the same type of fanaticism. History is filled with stories of those who have crossed the line in seeking moral and doctrinal purity. Fanaticism is an unacceptable response to spiritual impurity. It is good to be zealous, but we must be careful not to go too far.

CONCLUSION

As Christians we're called to maintain spiritual purity and respond appropriately to spiritual impurity. To do this, we must learn the two lessons that are illustrated in this text today: (1) Spiritual purity can be maintained only by being fully obedient and alert; and (2) neither apathy nor fanaticism is the appropriate response to spiritual impurity. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING

1 Samuel 8:1-9

Primary Purpose: To call on the congregation to make Christ Lord and King and to avoid the mistakes made by Israel.

In the Bible passage we are studying today, we see the nation of Israel making some fatal mistakes that we can learn much from. Sometimes it is important not to make mistakes.

Read the following examples and consider what would happen if we settled for 99-percent accuracy:

- We would have no phone service for 15 minutes each day.
- At least 1.7 million pieces of first-class mail would be lost each day.
- 35,000 newborn babies would be dropped by doctors and nurses each year.
- 200,000 people would get the wrong drug prescriptions each year.
- We would have unsafe drinking water three days every year.

Some mistakes are almost unbelievable.

Take the case of the bank robber in Los Angeles who told the clerk not to give him cash but to put the money in his checking account. Or the two teenagers who burst into an establishment, ran to the counter, and demanded that the clerk put all the money in a bag.

The puzzled library attendant, who had collected less than \$1.00 in fines that day, ducked out and called the police. It seems the youth got confused because the bank and library were a block apart and looked alike. The thieves were apprehended by police and "booked."

Those are mistakes that people actually made. However, the mistakes in our Bible passage for today come from the book of Samuel.

BACKGROUND

Just as Eli's sons had done, Samuel's sons also took bribes. God did not condemn Samuel for his sons' actions. Evidently, Samuel did not know about his sons' actions, or perhaps he knew and tried to correct them. Nearly 30 years had passed since God had given Israel the victory spoken of in 1 Samuel 7. But Israel quickly forgot about the Ebenezer they had dedicated. Once again, they experienced spiritual decay.

When there is spiritual decay, the church tends to become more like the world, using the world's methods and resources to do God's work. God gave the Israelites what their hearts desired even though it wasn't His will. Samuel may have interpreted this as a rejection of his leadership, but, God saw things differently.

Samuel did what we should do; he made it a matter of prayer. He laid out his case before God and shared his heartache with Him. Let's look at several aspects of this story:

I. ISRAEL'S FATAL MISTAKES

Ellen G. White says that the government of Israel was administered in the name and by the authority of God. The work of Moses, of the 70 elders, of the rulers and judges, was simply to enforce the laws God had given; they had no authority to legislate for the nation. This was, (and continued to be) the condition of Israel's existence as a nation. From age to age, men inspired by God were sent to instruct the people and to direct the enforcement of the laws.

The Lord foresaw that Israel would want a king, but He did not consent to a change in the principles upon which Israel was founded. The king was to be God's assistant. God was to be recognized as the Head of the nation, and His law was to be enforced as the supreme law of the land (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 603).

a. Israel wanted to be like the surrounding nations (verse 5). They wanted a man, not God, to lead them into battle. God had called them to be a chosen people who would be His witnesses; instead, they wanted to be like and look like the world. The Israelites also wanted to worship the gods of those around them (verse 8).

But God's people are to be "sanctified" or "set apart." We are to look different from the world and not be conformed by it.

b. Although God never let the Israelites down, they rejected His leadership (verses 7, 8). God wants us to make Him king. The Christian life is not a democracy. God is looking for a people who will follow His leadership. We are reminded that "if we are faithless, he will remain

faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

c. The Israelites weren't willing to wait on God's timing. God was grooming David to be king, but Israel wanted a king before David was ready. So God gave them Saul while He was preparing David.


Sometimes the worst that can happen to us is that we get what we ask for.

II. TRAGIC RESULTS

Ellen White says, "As the people contrasted the course of Saul with that of Samuel, they saw what a mistake they had made in desiring a king that they might not be different from the nations around them. Many looked with alarm at the condition of society, fast becoming leavened with irreligion and godlessness. The example of their ruler was exerting a widespread influence, and well might Israel mourn that Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, was dead. The nation had lost the founder and president of its sacred schools, but that was not all. It had lost him to whom the people had been accustomed to go with their great troubles—lost one who had constantly interceded with God in behalf of the best interests of its people. The intercession of Samuel had given a feeling of security; for 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' (James 5:16). The people felt now that God was forsaking them. The king seemed little less than a madman. Justice was perverted, and order was turned to confusion" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 663).

a. Israel failed to experience all that God had planned for them. He wanted to lead them Himself, but they rejected Him. In Exodus 19:5, 6, God said that He wanted the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In Deuteronomy 14:2, He affirms they are a holy people, a treasured possession. (See also Deuteronomy 26:19.)

b. The Israelites experienced a harsh monarchy that led them farther from God. God gave them what they wanted instead of what He wanted them to have. We should be careful what we ask for—we might actually get it (verses 9)!

Is the Lord your king? 

General Conference Ministerial Association

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND

Philippians 2:5

Advertisers know that the way to your pocketbook is through your mind. They spend millions on advertising to get you interested in their products. Likewise, Satan wants to interest you in sin without telling you the end result. But the Holy Spirit is given to us to deliver us from the power of sin. To help us, He often reminds us of Scripture and the lessons taught in the Scripture, but we must listen.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5, this is a war for our minds. A key word in this verse is “argument.” Our minds are capable of all kinds of arguments, sophistries, and imaginations. Let’s look at some of them.

I. DOUBTFUL MIND (Luke 12:29)

When Satan questioned Eve in the Garden of Eden, he caused her to doubt. We read that God said to Eve, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die” (Gen. 3:3). But the serpent tempted Eve, saying, “You will not surely die” (verse 4).

Satan is the master liar, and he will wreck your mind if you let him. He will distort your thought patterns and destroy your confidence in God. He will try to make you think that God is against you and that all your troubles are coming from God. He wants you to think that God has let you down, that God is blessing others but not blessing you. He wants you to be unhappy with your lot in life and blame God for your problems. Basically, he wants you to doubt God’s love for you. We must guard against a doubtful mind!

In Matthew 14, we read about Peter walking on the water. When he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. Jesus said to him “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Keeping your eyes on Jesus and being thankful for His blessings will help you to “keep the faith.”

II. BLINDED MIND (2 Cor. 4:3, 4)

Satan blinds us with all kinds of lies—evolution, situational ethics, cults,

world religions, and so on. College-age young people are often susceptible to these lies because they have relatively little life experience and are often not very knowledgeable about the Bible. This makes them easy prey for the intellectualism offered by many secular teachers.

Sometimes people experience horrible things. Satan will suggest to them that God is to blame for not stopping these tragedies. Sin can also blind our minds to the truth of God’s Word. Each sin is like a brick in the wall between you and God. Your mind becomes blocked off from God’s truth. The key to victory is to be willing to come to the light. Let yourself be exposed to the light of the Word of God. Then the image of God will shine on you, and faith will be given to you.

III. CLOSED MIND (2 Tim. 3:7)

Some people spend years in school learning many unimportant things, none of which will bring lasting happiness. Because of sin, their minds are closed to the truth (John 3:20). Sadly, the picture we see is of Christ standing outside trying to offer life and grace to closed minds (Rev. 3:20).

To fully understand the truth of spiritual things, we must first come to the Savior, confessing our sins and inviting Jesus into our hearts. Then the Spirit of God will become our Teacher.

IV. RENEWED MIND (Eph. 4:23)

Because of our sinful nature and the choices we made before we became Christians, our minds need to be renewed after we are saved. We need to surrender our minds to Christ.

On occasion I have heard it said that someone “brought a lot of baggage” into a relationship. Similarly, all of us bring baggage to our Christian walk with the Lord. The Bible says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). We need a transformation, something

only God can do. How does He do it? Paul gives us the answer: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

V. REPROBATE MIND (Rom. 1:28)

What is a reprobate mind? A reprobate mind has a vanishing conscience. A reprobate mind feels no regret over committed sins. A reprobate mind resents Christ and His Church. A reprobate mind lacks sensitivity to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a reprobate mind willfully rejects the claims of Christ and the good news of the Gospel. It is apathetic and indifferent to the witness of the Church. A reprobate mind is in great danger. Such people may imagine new religions or theories that explain away the God they do not want to acknowledge. These people are not only headed for hell, but they will bring others with them if they do not repent.


VI. SPIRITUAL MIND (1 Cor. 2:14-16)

What is Christ’s mind like? It loves lost souls (Luke 19:10). It directs one to do things that please the Father (John 8:29). It wants to do the Father’s will (John 5:30). It is humble (John. 13:3-5; 12-17). It is loving (1 John 3:16).

VII. HEALTHY MIND (2 Tim. 1:7; Isa. 26:3)

If we look carefully at these verses, we see that a sound, healthy mind has inward peace. Inner peace comes from having a right relationship with God. To have a right relationship with God, we must guard against impure thoughts.

CONCLUSION

We need minds that are guarded against doubt, discouragement, pride, and impure thoughts. 

General Conference Ministerial Association



IN THE ADVENTIST WORSHIP AND THE ISSUE OF “UNWORTHINESS”

It is always an intensely emotional experience to participate in the Communion service. Whether it is the Foot Washing or the Lord’s Supper, it is for all of us an opportunity for synthesis between the theological and emotional aspects of faith. With our participation on these occasions, we can communicate many things: our acceptance of the love of Jesus; the remembrance of the death of Jesus on the cross, the moment of victory over evil; the tension of the awaiting of “that day” when we will live this rite again, together with the Lord; love for our brothers and sisters, also expressed by embracing and the tears of emotion.

Recently, I have been asking myself what we communicate by our *non-participation* in the Communion. Usually there are various reasons given for this auto exclusion. From the emotional point of view, the causes may include the discomfort of interpersonal conflict situations still existent, or moments of discomfort where doubt often wins. From the theological point of view, there may be guilty feelings that cause us to feel unready—unworthy—before God. We may choose not to participate because we recall I Corinthians 11:27, which says, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (RSV).

But I ask myself, “Will I continue announcing to the others—my brothers and sisters—that I still believe in the value of the death of Jesus for my salvation when the deacon passes by and I do not partake of those symbols?” It seems that we are faced with a tension between theological beliefs and the ecclesiastical practice: on the one hand, the death of Jesus is preached as the salvation from my sins—the Communion being one of the signs—and on the other hand, I do not partake of the emblems if I am not yet prepared.

Reformer Calvin, addressing those who at times excluded themselves from participating in the Communion, had already noted this contrast: “In fact, whoever refrains from the Supper, for reasons of their imperfection in faith and behaviour, is like a sick person who refuses to take medicine.”¹ But beyond the reflections of this reformer, what reflections should we consider regarding the passage in I Corinthians 11:27?

TO BE WORTHY OF THE COMMUNION: A MISTAKEN UNDERSTANDING

First of all, it is best to explain what the apostle Paul is affirming when he uses the word *unworthily*. The word *unworthy* comes from *worthy* (*àxios*) meaning “balance the two scale pans of the scales”: which means that a thing is worthy when, put on a scale pan,

it can be balanced, or is the “equal” of the weight put on the other scale pan. Then, when do we personally appear to be *worthy*, in comparison with Christ? Is there a time when we can “balance” the scales when comparing ourselves to Christ? The answer seems to be obvious! It is true that we are called to “bear fruit that befits repentance” (Matt. 3:8, RSV), but it is also true that those who follow the Bible see themselves—and continue to see themselves as—*unworthy*. It is this level of awareness that allows one to receive the gift of grace. We are like the Prodigal Son, who, by recognizing he is unworthy, can be forgiven by his father (Luke 15:22-24). Similarly, the centurion of Capernaum, after expressing his unworthiness to receive Jesus in his home (Luke 7:6), was praised by Jesus for this kind of faith (Luke 7:9).

Only Jesus is worthy: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12, RSV). It is in the virtue of Jesus Christ’s—the only worthy one—that we receive His dignity, and definitely not on our own merits. As Paul the apostle reminds us: “I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength for my work. I thank him for considering me *worthy* and appointing me to serve him” (1 Tim. 1:12, GNB).

From a “moral” point of view, it is impossible to arrive at church on a Saturday morning and be worthy of the Communion. What did Paul the apostle mean by this? The answer can be found in the context of the passage and in the grammatical construction of it.

THE CONTEXT AND THE GRAMMAR

Like all early Christians, the Corinthians were used to celebrating the Communion every time they had supper. Many of them forgot the meaning of what they were doing, consuming the emblems as if they were ordinary food: “When you meet together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not” (1 Cor. 11:20-22, RSV). The apostle Paul is forced to re-explain some practices because the real significance has been lost. After Paul had re-explained the meaning, he warned them not to make the same mistake again, asking them to consume “these emblems” while remembering Jesus’ sacrifice.

The term *unworthily* used in the text is not an adjective but an adverb, that is to say, it refers to their way of celebrating the Communion and not to the moral quality of the participants. This point is stated by

J. Pöhler in a work by the EUD’s Bible Research Committee: “Unworthiness does not consist in the moral quality, that is the character of the participants of the Holy Supper, but is the result of the wrong way of considering the Holy meal, with which we contradict the solemnity of the service.”²

Paul tries to correct the problem of the wrong understanding and not of the mistaken moral behaviour. We can also understand this from some verses thereafter, when the same point made in 1 Corinthians 11:27 is expressed more directly: “For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:29, RSV). Comparing verses 27 and 29, we understand that Paul expresses the idea of “unworthiness” to describe those who consume these emblems without “distinguishing the Lord’s body,” and without understanding what they are doing. The use of the word *unworthily* is therefore not describing the pureness of the moral—that we receive *by* the cross and not *toward* it—but the attitude of those who understand what is being commemorated with those emblems.

THE LORD’S SUPPER

Another consideration can be made by thoroughly examining the first Communion service that was celebrated, the one established by Jesus. The Bible says that after Satan took possession of Judas, Jesus celebrated the Lord’s supper with his disciples (Luke 22:3, 14-20). Why did Jesus not stop Judas from taking part in the ceremony? Why did He not consider him as not being worthy? Ellen White comments: “Though Jesus knew Judas from the beginning, He washed his feet A long-suffering Saviour held out every inducement for the sinner to receive Him, to repent, and to be cleansed from the defilement of sin It was because the disciples were erring and faulty that He washed their feet, and all but one of the twelve were thus brought to repentance.”³ Jesus did not only receive Judas at *His* Communion, but also invited Peter who was conceited and not yet fully converted. Remember the appeal made to him, “and when you have *turned again*” (Luke 22:32, RSV). This also refers to *those* disciples who had sinned: “A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was to be the greatest” (Luke 22:24, RSV). It certainly was not a Communion service for only those who were without sin.

CONCLUSION

Going back to my query, “What do we convey with our *non* participating,” I would like to invite everyone of us to see this ceremony in the right light. The Communion Supper is not a *celebration* for only *special* people.

The Communion Supper reminds us that it is by going to Calvary—the cross of Christ—that we discover and understand Jesus’ love for us. He says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32, RSV). Ellen White wrote, “Christ has instituted this service that it may speak to our senses of the love of God that has been expressed in our behalf. There can be no union between our souls and God except through Christ And nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us.”⁴

As we gather in front of His emblems—emblems of *His* dignity—our hearts have an extra reason to be won over by His love, as the centurion was won at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:39). We do not have to think about ourselves—about our unworthiness—but of Jesus: “The Communion service was not to be a season of sorrowing As the Lord’s disciples gather about His table, they are not to remember and lament their shortcomings. They are not to dwell upon their past religious experience, whether that experience has been elevating or depressing Now they come to meet with Christ.”⁵

The next time a Communion is celebrated in your community, do not take it as an arriving point but as a beginning one. The best week should not be the one that precedes the Communion Supper but the one that will follow. The reconciliation with God, with our-

selves, and with our brothers and sisters, should not be a prerequisite to participate, but as a reason to behave in a loving, Christian way. The Communion Supper is always a starting point instead of an arrival: “Communion should always end on a high note. Wrongs have been righted. Sins have been forgiven. Hope has been restored. It’s a time for rejoicing.”⁶ Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32, RSV).

ED

¹ J. Calvin, *Il Piccolo trattato sulla S. Cena nel dibattito sacramentale della Riforma (A short tract on the Holy Supper in the light of the sacramental debate of the Reformation)*, Claudiana, Torino, 1987, p. 81.

² Ralf J. Pöhler, “Qui est digne de participer à la cène” (“Who is worthy of partaking of the Lord’s Supper?”), in *Cène et ablution des pieds*, p. 251. *Etudes en ecclésiologie adventiste*, vol. 1, France, Editions Vie et Santé 1991. See also, *Ministers’ Manual: “He is not speaking of unworthy people who participate, but of an unworthy manner in which they participate”*, Ministerial Association 1992, p. 212; and F. Holbrook, “For Members Only?” *Ministry*, February 1987, pp.10-13.

³ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 655.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 659.

⁶ *Ministers’ Manual*, Ministerial Association, 1992, p. 216.

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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

From Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue and People:
Diversity and the Changing Face of Adventism
Part 1

Demographic shifts, cultural and ethnic diversity, globalization and the rapid expansion of the church in the Southern hemisphere strongly suggest that the future of Adventism will emerge from the developing nations. There is compelling evidence to support this position. In his carefully researched study, Philip Jenkins speculates that in 2025 there will be about 2.6 billion Christians in the world; 633 million will live in Africa; 640 million in Latin America; 460 million in Asia. Europe comes in fourth with 260 million. He states further, "Africa and Latin America would be in competition for the most Christian continent. About this date, too, another significant milestone should occur, namely, that those two continents will together account for half of the Christians on the planet."¹ These are figures we cannot ignore. Their implications are vast for Adventist mission, theology and practice.

As the center of gravity shifts from the North to the South, one could expect the same shifts to occur in Adventism. To reinforce his position, Jenkins cites the well-known African theologian, John Mbiti, "the centers of the church's (the Christian church), universalities are no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila."²

I am making the case based on the evidence of the rapid expansion of Christianity in the Southern hemisphere, a similar pattern will emerge in Adventism. The growth of the church in Africa, Latin America and Asia suggests that the centers of Adventism will no longer be Washington, D.C., Berrien Springs, Michigan, Loma Linda, California or Sydney, Australia but San Paolo, Lusaka, Nairobi, Harare, Manila, and Kingston, Jamaica. And this pattern is irreversible. The implications of these global shifts are vast and challenging for Adventist mission, theology and practice.³ These demographic, cultural and ethnic changes will merge to create a new church that is almost unrecognizable from decades ago.

If we are predicting millennial, massive demographic and cultural shifts in the movement of Adventism on a global scale, it means that leadership and laity must be concerned with creating those structures that will allow the Church to continue to thrive in its new environments. A central and critical concern is authenticity and orthodoxy in theology and doctrine. This is not an academic

for answers to these complex questions and issues. It provides a window of opportunity to embrace this emerging new Adventism in all its richness of diversity and multiculturalism and to leverage it as an opportunity and a blessing to celebrate our differences and explore its vast capital for accomplishing God's mission in the world.

In the Church's imagination, nothing is more urgent and compelling than fulfilling the great commission:

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always even to the end of the world" (Matt 28:18-20, *The Message*).

The mandate, the mission, the message and the promise are unmistakably clear. They are at the heart of the Church's reason for existence. It is now up to us to develop strategies to make them reliable, relevant and fulfilled.



issue. It is a matter that demands the attention of both theoreticians and practitioners. The potential danger of "inculturalization," that is to say, a way of transporting and transplanting Adventism in forms that are appropriate to particular cultures in order to make a decisive case for its relevance and transformative power without losing its essential teachings, is vital to our mission strategy. So the question remains:

How will we respond to this new Adventism and maintain the vitality of our unity in diversity in Christ the head and founder of the Church? How will we continue to celebrate the continuing presence and power of the Holy Spirit who is always at work in drawing men and women from every nation, kindred, tongue and people to be part of the redeemed multicultural and diverse community who will sing a new song to the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10)?

The answers to these questions are complex and varied. They require imagination, creativity, organizational and structural reforms, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity, cultural and contextual appropriateness. These initiatives must be guided by the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this book is a modest attempt to engage in the search

Ellen White calls our attention to a very successful strategy Jesus employed in His effort to reach those who were the objects of His missionary engagement: "Christ's method alone will bring true success. The Savior mingled with the people as one who desired their good, He had compassion on them, ministered to their needs, then He bade them follow me."⁴ This strategy is particularly relevant and reliable in a multicultural, multiethnic, multinational context. Like its Head and Founder, the Church must continually explore different methods and strategies to fulfill its commission in a rapidly changing world. ED

¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002), 2. See also L. Robert.

² John Mbiti, quoted in Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 154.

³ It is estimated that by 2020 there will be 50 million Adventists in the world. Over 85 percent will be first generation from the developing nations. Several million of the adults will be illiterate.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1905), 143.



The joy OF SERVICE

I once heard a male friend of our family exclaim, "Women! Can't live with them, can't live without them!" I smiled at his frustration but understood what he was saying; my husband sometimes says the same thing. But having women in the church who are committed to the mission of the church is something I'm sure we can all live with. God has seen fit to allow our church to have more women than men in church membership, and this is a good thing. Why? Women who have dedicated their lives to God and to the mission of the church, who go and tell the world about Jesus, are a blessing to every pastor and church leader.

In 1996, when I became the Women's Ministries leader for my home union (Caribbean Union Conference, located on the island of Trinidad and Tobago), I was not sure how this department would function in the church. Our union had never had a Women's Ministries depart-

ment before, so I knew that the only way to see how this department worked would be to use my husband's church district as my testing ground. My husband Joe was very open to this. We tested our ideas in one of the local churches where we worshipped and worked, and I discovered that women could support the work of church pastors, elders, and other leaders in many ways:

1. Women are called to serve in the communities.
2. Women can assist with visitation of members.
3. Women are natural caregivers and caretakers.
4. Women have hearts that respond to others in need.
5. Women believe in the power of prayer.

How do I know this? Let me share with you a few excerpts from page 463 of the book *Evangelism*, a compilation of quotes by Ellen G. White. These words have given me a vision and purpose for my sisters around the world.

"The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Savior will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed" (*Review and Herald*, Aug. 26, 1902).

"In the various lines of home missionary work, the modest, intelligent woman may use her powers to the very highest account. Who can have so deep a love for the souls of men and women for whom Christ has died as those who are partakers of His grace? Who can represent the truth and the example of Christ better than Christian women who themselves are practicing the truth?" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 10, 1914).

What words of encouragement, not only for my sisters, but for all leaders in the church! The work is too great for any one person or group to complete. God understands this, and He has provided the leaders of His

church with an army of talented, spirit-filled, self-sacrificing women to help complete this work. Women are supremely well-qualified to serve in many endeavors of the church. For example, they are capable of nurturing our sisters in the church and the community. They can empower our sisters to become stronger women of God in the areas of Bible study, prayer, and personal growth. They can conduct outreach to those in the community who are desperate for a touch from Jesus.

I am not sure what Women's Ministries looks like in your church, but if it does not include the characteristics described here, we are depending on you to share this vision with the sisters in your local church and help them to re-focus their vision on the things that God has called them to do.

Women's Ministries is here to hold up your arms and support your work, just as Caleb and Aaron did for Moses. As we look with eager eyes for the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ, let us work together and share the joy of winning souls for our Lord.

ED

Heather-Dawn Small
General Conference Women's Ministries Director

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A Special Feast:

IDEAS TO STRENGTHEN THE SPRING BAPTISM

In March of 1963, Pastor Ademar Quint performed the first youth baptism in Rio de Janeiro. It was called the “spring baptism” even though it was not spring in Brazil; the program was so named because it involved youth who had surrendered themselves to Jesus. That year, 48 youth were baptized.

The following spring, more youth were baptized. Other churches began holding similar events. Gradually, in many places, these events became the major baptismal feast of the year.

This spring we celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of this baptismal feast and offer some suggestions on ways to make this celebration special:

GET THE YOUTH INVOLVED. The youth evangelism calendar peaks with the spring baptism. It is a great celebration. Each field should prepare orientation materials and promote this special event. The youth and other church members should be challenged to prepare the candidates for this feast.

PLAN A SPECIAL CEREMONY. The baptismal ceremony needs to be one of the best events in the church; there needs to be a feeling of celebration. The event needs to reflect the joy Heaven feels when a sinner repents. Spring baptism provides the perfect reason to celebrate.

1. Organize the program in advance. Meet with the pastor and others who are involved to plan the event, assign tasks, and choose special guests.

2. Write down the order of the program and give a copy to everyone involved.

3. Prepare nice decorations. The beauty of the church reveals the atmosphere of celebration and makes the environment more pleasing. Take advantage of the season and use lots of flowers and colors, specially around the baptistry.

4. Organize the candidates’ processional. Baptismal candidates may walk down the center aisle as their names are called. You may want to show a photo or a small video of each candidate, mentioning his or her name, age, what he or she likes most about church, the name of the person from whom he or she received Bible studies, etc.

5. Mention the members who prepared the candidates for baptism. These individuals may walk down the aisle beside “their” candidates. This gives recognition to these soul-winners and encourages others to follow their example.

6. Plan a special sermon. The pastor may illustrate the sermon with the stories or experiences of some of those who are being baptized.

7. Make it a meaningful occasion. The pastor may call each candidate by name as he or she enters the baptistry, or a young person might announce the name of the person being baptized.

8. Make a call, perhaps just before the last person is baptized. The conversion story of the one being baptized might be used as a call, or the person being baptized may make the call with the pastor.

9. Plan a ceremony to introduce the new members to the congregation. This could take place right after the baptismal ceremony, or, if you want to avoid having a very lengthy program, plan another meeting on a different day, which will give new members another opportunity to invite their friends.

10. Prepare special music. What hymns will be sung during the baptism? Who is going to coordinate the music? There should be no improvisation. Special music should be prepared in advance. Invite good singers. Remember to choose a special appeal song that is solemn and touching.

11. Make a good promotion. Seek creative ways to inform and motivate the church. Many people who are giving Bible studies will be encouraged to prepare their candidates or to invite friends to the ceremony. The Youth Ministries leader of each field or union may prepare promotional posters for the churches and invitations to be given to the candidate’s friends.

PREPARE THE YOUTH. Find out which boys and girls are old enough to be baptized. They might belong to the Pathfinder Club, attend the junior or teen Sabbath school classes, go to the local church school, be part of the church families, participate in small groups, or be members of the youth Bible study class. This baptism is special for them. Ellen White says, “As the Holy Spirit moves upon the hearts of the children, co-operate with His work. Teach them that the Saviour is calling them, that nothing can afford Him greater joy than for them to give themselves to Him in the bloom and freshness of their years” (*Evangelism*, p. 580).

Some people may question the appropriate age for baptism. The youth should not be forced in this matter, and they shouldn’t be encouraged to be baptized if they are not yet ready. Two aspects need to be considered:

1. Bible knowledge. Youth should not be baptized simply because their parents are Seventh-day Adventists; they should study the Bible for themselves. They do not need to reach the knowledge level of the adults, but they need to know, accept, and live the basic practical teachings of

the Bible. Those who do not come from Christian families should receive special orientation.

2. Maturity. Youth need to understand what is involved in their decision, and they need to make a commitment to Christ. Younger children often have a great knowledge of the Bible, but that is not enough. They need to understand what their decision to be baptized means. In this situation, Ellen White’s counsel is very clear. There is no specific age for baptism. Children should be encouraged to be baptized, but they need to be evaluated within their personal reality. She says, “Children of eight, ten, or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners and of the way of salvation through Christ” (*Child Guidance*, p. 490, 491).

It is important to remember that one baptism can generate other baptisms. If you invest in the spring baptismal feast, you will be preparing new candidates for the next baptism. Join the other church elders and challenge the church to work, pray for decisions, and prepare a beautiful feast. After all, this is the reason why God’s church exists in the world: to win people for the kingdom of Heaven. ED

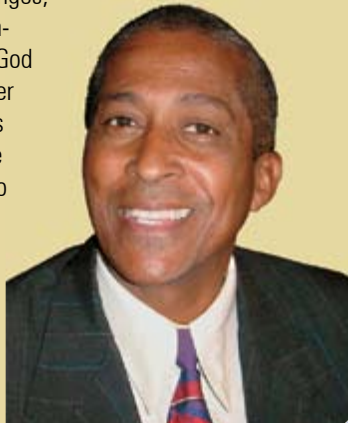
Otimar Gonçalves
South American Division Youth Director

FAUSTO CONTRERAS

BIOGRAPHY

He has been a local elder for 5 years at the Staten Island Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church in New York City, U.S.A. He is married to Carmen and they have 2 children, Eliecer and Emmanuel.

“I am so happy to be a part of God’s church and help prepare people for heaven. I understand as church elders we have many challenges, but I am convinced that God can empower and equip us to overcome all barriers to accomplish His work.”



The art of speech: CULTIVATE YOUR VOICE

“ I will be with your mouth
and teach you what you
shall speak ”

(Exod. 4:12)

When we accept an invitation to speak for God, we assume a great responsibility. When we speak for God, we must use a soft and gentle voice and speak in a clear and distinct manner. God expects us to honor Him in all aspects of our lives. That is why He enables and guides us in the correct use of the voice.

As Ellen White reminds us, “The science of reading correctly and with the proper emphasis is of highest value. No matter how much knowledge you may have acquired . . . if you have neglected to cultivate your voice . . . all your learning will be of but little profit” (*Evangelism*, p. 666).

TIPS TO PRESERVE YOUR VOICE

Here are several pointers that will help you present God’s messages in a pleasing and effective manner:


- Speak with moderate intensity. Speaking too loudly can irritate your listeners and perhaps also damage your vocal chords.
- Articulate words accurately but do not exaggerate the movements of your mouth. Clear articulation helps people understand the message and reduces the strain on your vocal chords.
- Explore different intonations. Try speaking loudly and softly. If possible, imitate the voice you are representing, but do not go beyond your limits. A change of intonation reduces the probability of vocal weariness.
- Use a microphone whenever possible, but be careful not to put it too close to or too far from your mouth.

- Always ask for feedback regarding the volume of your voice. A sound that is too loud or too soft may puzzle or annoy your listeners.

VOCAL WARM-UP AND VOCAL COOL-DOWN

It is common for the voice to sound lower or hoarse in the morning due to the long period of vocal rest. To warm it up, do some vocal exercises such as the following:

- Produce the sound “trrrrrrr” (vibrating the tip of your tongue) or the sound “brrrrrrr” (vibrating your lips). There is no need to apply strength when making these sounds.
- Avoid speaking right after ending a sermon or lecture. Being silent right after the constant use of your voice is a way to let your vocal chords cool down.
- Produce the sound of the letter “M” as you chew on an apple. This movement, associated with the astringent action of the fruit, will prepare your voice for speech.
- Breathe correctly. Let air go in through your nostrils, expanding your lungs and going out of your mouth, as you empty your lungs completely.
- Relax your shoulders and neck, making very slow rotational movements (three times on each side).

When you are in front of the congregation, don’t worry about anything except being a speaker. Try to avoid being tied to your notes. Let yourself be used by God and believe what He says: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (Exod. 4:12). 

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil



THE ELDER AND THE SABBATH SCHOOL

If the church were to depend entirely upon the efforts of the elders to win souls, the task at times would seem almost hopeless. However, this is not the case in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church is so organized that it gives the elders many helpers. Every department of the church exists for the purpose of winning souls. Each adds its contribution to the total church program and the building up of God’s kingdom upon the earth.

The Sabbath School is especially conducive to winning souls. The leaders of the local congregation should recognize this and capitalize on the various facets of the Sabbath School to enlarge the church membership. It has often been said that the Sabbath School is the church at study. But it is more than this. It can be, and many times is, a baptismal class and an introduction to a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is common knowledge that in the fast growing divisions in the world the

Sabbath School membership exceeds that of the church. It was my privilege to serve overseas for one term of service. In one place the baptized church membership was fifteen, but the Sabbath School membership was two hundred. What a glorious opportunity existed there for the winning of souls to Jesus!

It goes without saying that the elders should attend the Sabbath School. Because most of our churches are not large, the elders can greet the members as they arrive. This gives the members an opportunity to introduce to the elders visitors they may bring with them. Knowing who is present will help to guide the elder in his sermon, and greeting the visitors as they arrive will give the elder an opportunity to invite them to be in his Sabbath School class. The fact that the elder is there to welcome them shows the members that he is interested in the Sabbath School.

The elder's work with the Sabbath School should begin in the Sabbath School planning committee. There he can guide the affairs without dictating. He should urge the officers to see that the school operates smoothly, that no embarrassing incidents take place that would give an unfavorable impression to visitors. He can let the officers know that he will support them in their program. In the Sabbath School planning committee meetings the elder can guide in the selection of teachers who will put their best into their teaching.

When the teachers have been selected, the elder or the pastor can give guidance to them in presenting their lessons. They should be cautioned to use tact, never arguing with the members or visitors. The teachers should be encouraged to present additional facts and thoughts related to the lesson, because most of the members have studied the lesson at least once. The teachers can be reminded that they have the "first chance" with the class members and visitors; that is, they can make a good or bad impression on them before the preacher presents his sermon.

One of the elders will want to have a Sabbath School class. Visitors should be urged to attend this class, and the Sabbath School members should be encouraged to introduce any visitors to the pastor or elder if he has not already met them. When there is a likelihood of many visitors not of our faith, an adaptation of the Sabbath School lessons is helpful. These do not follow the regular lessons, but contain the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. Some of the less-informed members of the church may be invited to join this class also so their faith can be strengthened, and they will thus form a nucleus for the class. If non-Adventist visitors attend this class regularly, they can be led step by step into the message.

One of the most fruitful phases of the Sabbath School is the branch Sabbath School. This can be conducted in a variety of places. If members live some distance from the church and cannot attend regularly, they should be encouraged to have a branch Sabbath School in their homes, or some other suitable place. If this is held in the afternoon, the elders and other members of the church can assist. Sometimes after a series of Bible studies there are still some in the community who are interested but who have not been baptized. This provides an excellent opportunity for a branch Sabbath School. I had this experience a few years ago. I had baptized several people as a result of personal work in the community, and since the new members lived about sixty miles from the church, a branch school was organized in one of the homes. I took laymen from the church to carry on the school when I could not attend. After a few weeks I left that district, and three weeks after my departure, nine souls were baptized from this branch Sabbath School.

Another avenue of soul winning in the Sabbath School is the Vacation Bible School. To most people their children are their dearest possessions. If an interest is taken in the children, it will be easier to reach the parents. Many baptisms have resulted from the follow-up of a Vacation Bible School. Sabbath School members and church school pupils have been secured also as a result of Vacation Bible School. Fortunate is the evangelist who can conduct an evangelistic campaign in the same location immediately following a Vacation Bible School. The children can serve as advertisers for the meetings.

There were times when the General Conference asked all departments to be especially evangelistic, but the Sabbath School should always be geared to use every means for the winning of souls. The elder and pastor can use this department to distinct advantage, not by dictating to the Sabbath School officers, but by guiding them. The elder should let them know that he is vitally interested in their work and will give them every support. ED

Milton T. Reiber was a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference when he wrote this article.



ONE IS A WHOLE NUMBER TOO

When evaluating your congregation, one often overlooked group is your single members. You may not immediately recognize some of these individuals because they have stopped attending, so carefully analyze your singles before concluding that you know who they are, much less what they need.

Who are singles? The church mirrors society with as many as 30% of adults living alone. Nearly one-half of adult church members are single. While less than 8% of them will never marry, many are divorced, widowed, or not-yet-married. Because so many are single for different reasons, the church – and for that matter the individuals themselves – may not see what they have in common.

SINGLED OUT. Many singles have opted out of church attendance for a variety of reasons. Some expect to re-establish their relationship with the church when they marry and have children. Some believe they can maintain spiritual life separate from the church because they feel the church ignores them. They believe the church's doctrinal or spiritual message, but they feel excluded by a strong cultural message emphasizing marriage as the preferred, or only acceptable, status. They are made to feel "less than whole."

SUDDENLY SINGLE. Some were once married but have unexpectedly become single through death, divorce, separation, or abandonment. After a spouse's death, more and more retirees live alone either by choice, imbalance of genders in older age, economic chaos, or by fear from having observed peers who ended up unhappy in second marriages. Loss is always traumatic and can be catastrophic both economically and spiritually, shattering one's personal identity.

SINGLE BY CHOICE. For those who choose singleness, you can honor their completeness rather than making unfortunate comparisons with those who are married as "the correct option." Avoid blatant – or even subtle – insinuation that singles are "marriage wannabees" just waiting to be rescued. When we showcase marriage as the only life-style that brings happiness and fulfillment, we set some people up for disillusionment, pain, and despair.

Kit Watts, former Assistant Editor of *Adventist Review*, has written extensively on the church's treatment of

singles and has influenced my thinking and words on this topic. She asks, "Have we over-emphasized marriage and family as symbols of God's love to the exclusion of other symbols? For example, could we emphasize Jesus' own model more: 'Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13 NASV)."

CIRCUMSTANTIAL SINGLENES. Some, who once expected to marry, discover that obligations to parents or siblings, completing an education, establishing a profession, or even the passing of time reduces the pool of possible partners. They may not have consciously chosen to remain single, but circumstances have formed their conclusion.

Further, because of our strong warnings against becoming "unequally yoked," believers in some areas of the world cannot find a marriage partner of the same faith with similar spiritual, educational, professional, or social expectations. Sometimes singleness is not the choice but the consequence of belief, compatibility, or geography.

SINGLE LEADERS. Intentionally include singles in leadership. Jesus and Paul, themselves single, demonstrated that the church is the place to make family. Yet, while upholding the sanctity of marriage and our duty to honor parents (Matthew 12:46-50), they explained that the gospel transcends family ties and that the church is a fellowship built not upon race, tribe, gender, or social status, but upon each individual's choice to follow Jesus.

SINGLE EXAMPLES. Marriage is honored by Scripture, but not a requirement for spiritual leadership. In some areas, the church would refuse ordination for Paul or John the Baptist because they were unmarried. Kit Watts, also points out that Jesus, as God in the flesh, was a single man who lived an exemplary life.

God created humans for relationships, and marriage may be one of these. However, the church must have room for everyone.

Paul describes the church as a body. A body has two arms and two legs, but only one heart and one brain. Remember, the body needs every single part! ED


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General Conference Ministerial Secretary

HERNAN DARIO A. SEPULVEDA

BIOGRAPHY

Hernan Dario Alzate Sepulveda is a local Church Elder at Centro Evangelistico de Palermo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bogota, Colombia. He is married to Carmen and has 2 children, Karen and David. He has been an Adventist since 1988 and has been an Elder for 2 years now.

"I am very happy to be a Church Elder. It is a great privilege and big responsibility to accept this call from the Lord and it is my prayer that my ministry be fruitful. Through this experience, I have been able to help the members of my church to increase their Christian experience, working together in harmony with my fellow elders and pastor to receive all of God's blessings. My biggest prayer is to equip the members spiritually and prepare the church for Jesus' soon return."



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