

quarterly resource for local church elders † july/september 2007

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D I G E S T



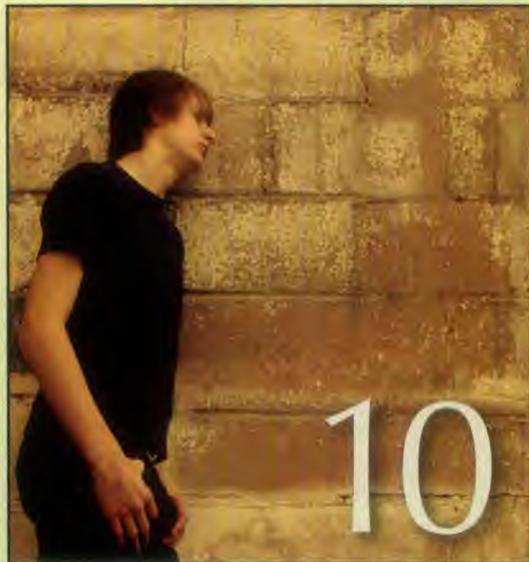
The World Church:

**Without Lay Leaders,
the Church's Work
Would Cease**

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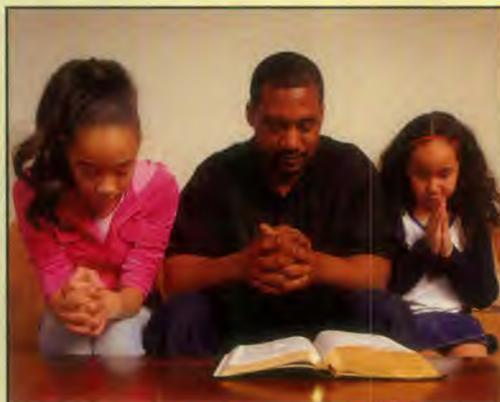


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ELDER'S DIGEST

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Dangers that Leaders Face

Did you know that being a church leader can be dangerous? The enemy seems eager to ruin spiritual leaders, using different strategies to accomplish this purpose (1 Peter 5:8). He knows that when a leader is damaged, the entire church is affected. That is why members should pray continuously for their leaders.

The Bible presents some examples of people who didn't know how to manage the post of leadership, and this problem still exists today. You probably know of at least one person in a leadership position who was involved in something that caused a scandal for the church. Often these dangers are related to money or sex.

For many years after I became a pastor, I thought that if I experienced victories in these obvious temptation areas, I would be secure in my ministry. But life has shown me that the truth is not that simple. Another group of dangers also threatens spiritual leaders, and these dangers are much harder to detect because they reside in thoughts and habits; yet they are no less disastrous than the so-called "traditional" or "common" sins.

Pride

There is an inherent and strong desire in every human being to be appreciated, applauded, and popular with those under his or her leadership. But there is a real danger here, which Jesus talked about in Luke 6:26: "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you . . ."

Like a drug, pride has clouded the minds of some leaders. As a result, they are sometimes led to think that they are infallible and may end up becoming insensitive and tyrannical.

Pride resides in each of us. It is usually kept under control, not because of humility but for lack of an opportunity to reveal itself. We live in a world that does

not value or desire humility. Be it in politics, business, or sports, people are always striving for recognition and fame. Unfortunately, this attitude has contaminated many good people. Humility is the trademark of any servant committed to God's work.

Power

Some leaders are also contaminated by the fatal attraction to power. Power in itself is not bad, but it can be dangerous. It is even more dangerous when it is disguised behind religion. When pride mixes with power, the result is disastrous. Unfortunately, the potential for abuse or misuse of power is also found inside each of us.

In the Church, it would be well to avoid the concept of "position," but rather to refer to "functions." The term "position" denotes power, while "function" denotes service. In church organization, we need presidents, department heads, district pastors, local elders, and deacons, but no one should feel greater or better than the other. We are important to this Church, but no one is irreplaceable.

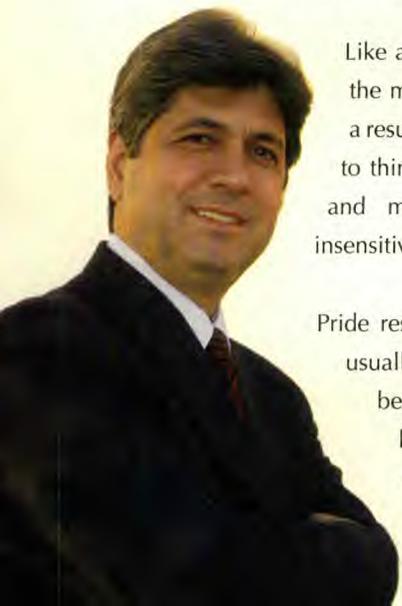
Pride makes people think they are always right, and power makes them force others to agree. An ecclesiastical function is only truly blessed when given by God and when the person is transformed into an instrument of blessing. Therefore, no one should become puffed up because of his or her title or function.

Let us all perform the Church's work, seeking to do the best for the people and for God, without expecting human recognition. The sense of meaningfulness and acceptance of our service must come from God above all.

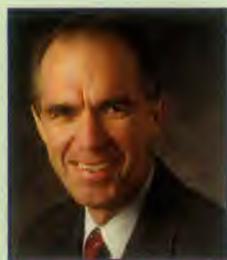
To serve as leaders in our Church can be a challenge, but it will certainly also be a great opportunity to do something that only we can do. Missing this opportunity would be throwing away a chance God has given us to make a difference in His Church. **ED**

Jonas Arrais

General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



While attending the South Pacific Division's Ministerial Advisory in Australia, *Elder's Digest* editor Jonas Arrais had the opportunity to talk with several ministerial secretaries and to ask questions regarding the work of local church leaders in that field.



Gary Webster, Division Ministerial Secretary, was raised in a Christian home, strayed from Christ, but was

saved by God's marvellous grace in 1974. He is married to Merilyn, and they have two daughters, Robyn and Lyndelle. He has held several positions in this division. He is passionate about preaching Christ and bringing people to Him and into His church family; he also helps ministers to train and equip members.

Some Division statistics

This division includes 14 countries and is covered by four unions: Australian Union Conference, New Zealand Pacific Union Conference, Papua New Guinea Union Mission, and Trans-Pacific Union Mission. This field has about 400,000 members attending 1,830 churches and 3,187 companies.

What challenges do pastors and local church leaders face in your field?

Gary: A number of challenges face us in ensuring we have strong spiritual elder leaders.

1. Helping our pastors to see the

importance of "hands-on" training of their local church elders. Much of an elder's work needs to be modeled. Ministers not only tell elders what to do, they can also show them how to do it by taking them (especially new elders) with them on visitation, Bible studies, etc.; elders are more willing then to share the minister's work for God's children.

2. Educating our local churches and elders to be less pastorally dependent. If elders assume more responsibility, the minister is free to train and equip members, reach out to lost people, and increase the spiritual growth of members.
3. Helping conferences, missions and local churches to see the critical importance of supplying each elder with a copy of basic tools such as *The Elder's Handbook* and *Elder's Digest*. How can church elders lead if they are not given the resources that will teach them how to lead? They should not have to pay for such basic tools from their own pockets. This is the responsibility of the church for which they are working.

What evangelism growth strategies are the South Pacific Division using?

One of the most effective tools in personal evangelism that we have used in recent years is the SEARCH video series. Television advertising for a video on the return of Jesus has resulted in thousands of people requesting to watch our videos, and scores of lay members are involved in active ministry to lost people.

We also are working with small groups. This strategy has been increased around our division and is seen as critical to both qualitative and quantitative church growth.

Church planting has become a significant aspect in the Church's strategic plan to reach lost people. There are some significant evangelistic challenges in the South Pacific Division; for example, where rapid and strong growth have occurred in the Pacific Islands, integrating these new believers in the body of Christ has been a huge challenge. The "back door" is swinging wildly in some places. Adequately trained elders and the multiplication of holistic small groups are seen as vital to this challenge.

In affluent countries such as Australia and New Zealand, secularism and materialism are having a significant impact on the spirituality of church members. A passion for Christ and lost people is absent in too many of our members. This is the fundamental reason that the Church in those countries is experiencing little or no growth. Prayer—serious, earnest and heartfelt—is the only thing that will turn many of our churches around. Revival and reformation are our greatest needs.

Some churches see evangelism as the work of a specially-trained speaker. Such approaches are having less and less of an impact. As a result, many ministers and members consider public evangelism to be ineffective, outdated, and irrelevant. This is unscriptural, but it does under-

score the fact that public evangelism must change its basic approach. It must become more of an event to help members to reap the fruits of their friendship evangelism. Evangelists and pastors need to invest far more time and energy into reviving, mobilizing, training, and involving members in the work of Christ.

Health-and-Healing ministry needs to be taken more seriously by ministers and members. Positive results have been seen where this program has been used successfully to touch lives for Christ. We must revisit this method of reaching people that was used so powerfully by Christ, in the New Testament church, and in our Adventist history.

Our local elders, the under-shepherds of Christ, are doing a wonderful work for Him and His people. Out of love for Christ, many extend themselves far beyond the call of duty. The words of Paul to the church elders and deacons in Philippi can be said of so many of our local church leaders: "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1, 6).



Graeme Christian is the Australian Union Ministerial Association Secretary. Born in Tasmania into a ministry family, he began his formal ministry in Sydney, Australia. He has worked in different places and performed different functions

in the church. Currently he is serving as the Ministerial Secretary for the Australian Union Conference, located in Melbourne. His wife Marcia is a school teacher and is also passionate about the Lord's work. Their children are now young adults.

Some union statistics

This union has 410 churches and 81 companies, with 52,771 members cared for by approximately 300 pastors and more than 1,300 local church leaders.

Could you give a brief statement on the importance of the work of lay leaders?

Graeme: Excellence in leadership is vital for the church. The contributions of the leadership team can never be overrated! Their priorities set the direction for the church. Their passion for the gospel commission focuses the church on the job Jesus has given us. The work of our leaders creates the climate and the culture, of the church—whether it's caring or just plain busy. I want to applaud those who tirelessly invest of themselves and their abilities in the most significant ways to facilitate the growth of God's work in their areas.

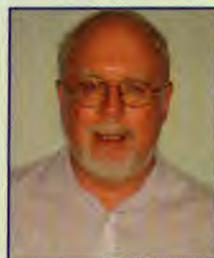
What kind of challenges do they face?

Graeme: Local leaders are busy people, yet busy-ness never led to godliness. One of the first challenges for Adventist leaders is to keep growing as spiritual leaders who are on track with God. A second challenge is to keep focused on our core business. It was Jesus who gave

the church its job description: to take the gospel to the world—and this begins in our own communities and our network of friends and family. The way we spend our resources—our time and money in particular—is a good indicator of our priorities. Jesus cared for people and worked to bring them a clearer picture of God.

How can pastors and elders work as a more effective team?

Graeme: Teamwork is based on our willingness to respect each other for the strengths each one has been given by God. God is a team, and His picture of the church involves each one doing his or her part. The doctrine of spiritual gifts helps us to understand this principle. The apostle Paul used the body as an image of the church, with each one doing his or her part to build up the body. God has made us individuals; however, individuality and teamwork are often in conflict. Submitting to each another is tough sometimes; however, this is the basis of teamwork.



Paul Cavanagh is the Trans-Pacific Union Ministerial Secretary. He was born in South New Zealand and raised in a secular

environment. He became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian at the age of 19. He attended university and gained a BSC in the biological sciences, then earned a B.A. in theology from Avondale. After graduation, he was called to work in

the Island Mission Field and has served in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Papua, New Guinea. A study break in the United States gave him an opportunity to earn a M.A. in Missions and a Master's of Public Health.

Some union statistics

This union has 435 churches and 570 companies cared for by 290 pastors and more than 2,000 local church leaders. Territories and languages in this union:

Island Nations of Solomons, Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Niue, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau Islands (unentered). In the Melanesian areas of Solomons and Vanuatu, there are hundreds of local languages; the *lingua franca* is Pigin or English. Some French is spoken in Vanuatu. The Polynesian Islands have their own languages.

Discuss the importance of church leaders and what the church is doing for them.

Paul: The role of lay leaders is recognized in the TPU as being extremely significant, for it is impossible for those in gospel ministry to adequately shepherd the church members by themselves.

Local church leaders face many problems. Those in rural areas lack a formal education and come from a non-literate (i.e. oral) background, so reading is not a part of their lives. Many lack training for the role they have been asked to fulfill in the local church. Many areas do not have supporting resources. As the church expands, these leaders face a steadily increasing number of new members. These issues are being addressed at the union level with the development of resources and training materials.

A series of training sessions to develop skills needed for leadership at the local church level is in progress; it is intended that there will be two units each year produced in this area. Other departmental leaders in the union are working on training materials for local church leadership in other areas as well. It is an intentional policy of the TPU to raise as many church companies up to organized church level as possible. Training materials are being developed with this in mind.

All churches and companies are receiving the *Elder's Digest* magazine on a regular basis, and each will receive a copy of the *Elder's Handbook*.

There is a real need to intentionally define the role of the pastor and the role of the elder; the pastor/elder team must understand how they complement each other in this work.



Kendall Cobbom is the Ministerial Secretary in the New Zealand Pacific Union. He is married to Lanelle, and

they have two beautiful daughters. He is the youngest son of a minister and spent much of his growing-up years in the Pacific Islands (Pitcairn, Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea) where he grew to love this part of the world. He considers it a privilege to minister in his father's footsteps and to have an immediate connection with people because of his having ministered there beforehand.

Some union statistics

This union is the "baby" of the South

Pacific Division, but it contains a diversity of cultures and island groups over a broad sweep of the Pacific: all of New Zealand (two Conferences), French Polynesia, Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Pitcairn Island. In this union territory, the languages spoken are English, French, Cook Island, Maori, Bismarck, Tahitian, Samoan, and Tongan. (With New Zealand being a cosmopolitan location, there are many other language groups there besides those mentioned.) We have 137 churches, 37 companies, and 17,235 church members in our union cared for by 92 pastors and about 725 local church elders.

What kinds of challenges do local church leaders in your union face?

Kendell: One of the key challenges is a dependence on self and the skills that come "naturally," rather than a reliance on God's guidance for all that takes place in ministry. We are tempted to think that we are working "for God" rather than "with God."

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites us to be yoked to Him—what a partnership!

What are pastors and the Ministerial Association doing for lay leaders?

Kendell: Pastors and our Ministerial Association are there to support and empower lay leaders in ministry. We are not there as lords but as servant-leaders. Unfortunately, one challenge of ministry is theological conflict, and this is an area where those who are more educated may be able to assist in resolving conflict and encouraging lay leaders to grow in God's grace through a daily ongoing relationship with Him.

What kinds of training and materials are they receiving?

Kendell: Certainly *Elder's Digest* and the *Elder's Guide* are very helpful for keeping in touch with current issues and support. We are making the "Seminar in a Box" video series available to our lay leaders as an excellent equipping tool.



Tony Kemo is the Papua New Guinea Union Ministerial Secretary. He was born and raised in the village as a first-generation Adventist. His parents were converted from paganism to Adventism. Tony graduated with a B.A. in Theology from Pacific Adventist College and a M.A. in Administration and Management from Avondale College. He has been a pastor for 34 years and has been married to his wife Beatrice for 33 years. They have been blessed with four children and now have four grandchildren.

Some union statistics

Pidgin, Motu, and English are the common languages spoken in this Union. However, in Papua, New Guinea, more than 800 dialects are spoken throughout the entire country. They have 3,305 churches and companies with 234,520 members cared for by 343 pastors, 394 volunteer missionaries, and approximately 10,500 local church elders.

What kinds of challenges do you face in your union?

Tony: We are bringing more people into the Church while at the same time losing more. Nurturing is our greatest challenge

in Papua New Guinea Union Mission. PNG is poor in many ways, especially in the areas of physical and social life. To alleviate this poverty, we have to find some solutions to the physical needs of our people. More people are living without jobs in urban centers, and survival becomes difficult. In these situations, many of our young people fall back to their old ways of life.

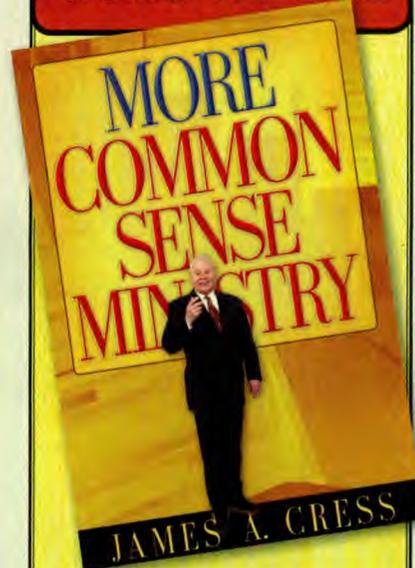
Tell me something about teamwork between the pastor and elders.

Tony: Elders should meet regularly with the pastor. The pastor must create an environment to train elders, equip them with resources, and then delegate responsibility to them to conduct the functions of the church. The pastor has to work with his elders to visit church members, those who are sick, those who are mourning for the loss of their loved ones, and those who are struggling in their Christian lives. Having fellowship together can also help to build team spirit.

In your opinion, what kinds of qualities should lay leaders have?

Tony: Christian values that are based and rooted upon the life of Christ can make a difference in someone's life. The lay leader builds a vertical relationship with God on a daily basis. As the Holy Spirit lives in the lives of lay leaders, the qualities of God's life are seen in him or her. Pastors must become model leaders so that their lay leaders will follow the directions given by their example. ^{ED}

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Addictions of many kinds exist in today's society. Some 14 million people in the United States are addicted to alcohol alone. The Adventist Church, however, has not been quick to recognize or talk openly about addictions within its membership. Church leaders have found it particularly challenging to seek help for themselves or family members.

"As Seventh-day Adventists we tend to think these are somebody else's problems—not ours—so we are interested in 'fixing' other people rather than recognizing that we ourselves have an addiction," said Ray Nelson, coordinator of Adventist Regeneration Ministries—a Christ-centered recovery program for addictions headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland. "We need to become better equipped as a church to help."

Nelson, who is also a pastor and the Church Ministries director for the Chesapeake Conference, noted that addictions can be physical, emotional, psychological, or physiological.

"These character defects, or mental obsessions, often result in guilt, shame, and blame," says Nelson. "Related thoughts, emotions, and actions can lead to activity and substance addiction, and addictions mask one's reality and result in separation from God."

In July, an addiction conference is being sponsored by the North American Division (NAD) Health Ministries and Ministerial departments and the Adventist Theological Seminary. The goal of the conference is to raise awareness of addictions, both inside and outside the church, and to provide tools and resources for combating them. Focusing on both prevention and recovery, workshops will address food, gambling, sex, alcohol, and drug addictions, among others. It will also feature speakers who are professionals in their fields.

"Our intention is to assist our pastors, teachers, and others in creating safe places for them and their members or students to be able to share in a confidential way, and to know that they can find help," Nelson explained. "There are answers, and there are resources available to help them."

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"We live in an addictive society," NAD Health Ministries director DeWitt S. Williams explains. "No matter what profession you are in, addictions are becoming much more prevalent, and we believe this conference will provide the tools needed for our members not only to overcome any addiction they may personally have but also to help others overcome theirs. It's for everyone—pastors, teachers, lay members, health professionals, students. All can benefit."

For more information or to register, go to www.plusline.org/events.php call 1-800-732-7587.

Why has it been recommended that a leader not serve in more than one office in the local church? My church is small, and I don't have many options.

The *Church Manual* says, "In the distribution of duties pertaining to church activities, care should be taken not to lay too much responsibility upon willing workers, while others with perhaps lesser talents are passed by. The election of one individual to several offices is to be discouraged unless circumstances make it necessary. The elder especially should be left free from other burdens to perform effectually the many duties of this sacred office" (p. 52). The best option for each congregation is to have the maximum number of people doing something for the church, not what we see today where one person is overloaded with activities. The *Church Manual* presents a case, as an exception, when a member may in certain circumstances assume more than one position, but this should not be practiced as a rule. Each pastor and elder should train new leaders and not work always with the same group of people. Delegating responsibility and training others for the work should be a common practice in our churches. When we select one person to fill several offices, we show that we are not training new leaders. Besides under-stimulating the church's leadership, this sends the wrong message to other members, suggesting that we don't trust their spiritual gifts. Challenge yourself in the next nominating committee to correct this problem, or your church may become lethargic.

An elder who has been removed from the church loses his ordination. When he returns and is rebaptized, could he be an elder again?

In past years, the *Church Manual* forbade an elder removed from church membership from becoming an elder again. Currently, the manual does not forbid it. And by not forbidding, it is understood that in some cases, such a person could be elected once again as an elder. Every elder is ordained for this position. With the discipline of removal, he immediately loses his ordination. In the future, if he regularizes his situation with the church and the church elects him to be an elder once again, he will have to be ordained again. Much care should be taken before we nominate someone in such a situation. An elder should have certain spiritual and moral qualities to serve in such post. No hasty decision should be made without considering whether sufficient time has elapsed. The church leader should be above any personal problem that might expose him to criticism from the congregation. ^{ED}

General Conference Ministerial Association

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Those which are published will be answered by the staff of the General Conference Ministerial Association.

Elder's Digest For Free?

Elder's Digest magazine provides valuable tools and resources for the local church leader. Now, through conference sponsorship, you can receive this magazine at no cost. Have your pastor contact your conference Ministerial Association leader.

Charles Dudley on

Youth

Children and adults who have grown up in sheltered second-, third-, or fourth-generation Adventist homes often don't know what the "real world" offers. A few break away, thinking that they are being cheated out of new and exciting "real" experiences. But many soon discover that it's a mirage.

Consider for a moment the "real" world of some young people and their families:

The pastor's wife frantically summoned her husband to come home immediately. When he arrived, police officers were pointing pistols at his son's head. Little did the pastor realize that his son was a fugitive from justice.

His son had been with a few other boys from the neighborhood when one proposed they rob a store on the other side of town. Not realizing that this was something his buddies had been doing for thrills and kicks on many occasions, he went along for the ride.

After the crime, his buddies left town, and he went to visit relatives. The police put out an all-points bulletin on the youth as fugitives. When the pastor's son came home a few weeks later, the police were there to do their duty. The youth was arrested and is now in prison awaiting a possible 30-year sentence.

He was an Adventist youth.

A second-generation Adventist lay dying of AIDS. He called his parents to his bedside and looked into their faces and said, "I had to come to this before I would come to myself. I am glad that my sins are forgiven and that God loves me!"

He was an Adventist youth.

A divorced Adventist mother was left to raise her children as best she could without any child support. When her son turned 18, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. His years in the service, however, took their toll: her son came home with little interest in spiritual things.

He too was with neighborhood friends when they suggested robbing a convenience store. He too just went along for the ride and didn't participate in the robbery. But things turned sour when one of his nervous colleagues panicked and shot and killed the store attendant. The police soon caught all of the robbers, including the former Marine who was sentenced to 30 years in jail. And just after he began serving his time, a fight broke out in the prison's exercise yard. He attempted to quell the confrontation and was stabbed in the back and hospitalized.

He is an Adventist youth.

Another young man was sitting in Sabbath School when one of his gang quietly entered the church to kill him. When the gang member finally cornered the Adventist youth, he drew his gun to "blow him away." But another gang member in the balcony saw what was happening and threw an "Uzi" down to the Adventist youth, who proceeded to cut down his assailant.

The Adventist youth immediately left town under the conviction that he

must mend his ways and stop "playing" with church and God. He entered a rehabilitation center in another city and found peace and joy as he helped other Adventist young people through similar troubles.

When he returned home for the holiday season, his heart was filled with joy for the Lord, and he sought to share these blessings with his former gang members. They weren't very receptive, and he was killed.

He was an Adventist youth.

I'm sure these and similar experience break the heart of Jesus. He loves His people. And He never intended that His followers would allow the "real" world to invade their lives and tear up their families and relationships.

In 1977 juveniles committed 14 million crimes in the United States. They impacted the lives of tens of millions of people and cost the economy more than \$425 billion. Such crime has risen 40 percent in the past 10 years; killings 93 percent.¹

At a community forum in Knoxville, Tennessee, the city's chief of police remarked that chronic youth offenders exhibit six characteristics, either singly or in combinations. They (1) belong to a delinquent peer group; (2) have weak family attachments; (3) experience early childhood abuse, usually physical; (4) perform poorly in school; (5) lack consistent discipline; and (6) live in high-crime neighborhoods.²

How does society begin to curb youth crime? At the same forum, a juvenile court judge stressed the need for youth "to do something constructive [with their

lives] . . . before they reach adolescence." He denounced "the growing social acceptance of children growing up without men in their lives." The judge said that youth need both a father and mother for healthy development. To this end, he said that parents of younger children need strong parenting support from others.³

According to a newspaper report, other speakers at the community forum "expressed nothing but pure common sense when it comes to curbing youth crime. It doesn't take a genius to know that wholesome recreating, supervision, helping parents be better parents, and the presence of strong mom and dad role models all contributed to the building of the character and accountability of children. It's always going to be those basics that make the difference."⁴

What about our youth?

What about our own youth who attend our Sabbath School classes and sit in our pews each week? Are some perplexed, frightened, or troubled? Absolutely! And we as a collective group of Christians—a church—must address their needs seriously, individually, and corporately.

Parents must work with their children. Church leaders must help youth and parents. Youth must nurture youth. If we want to see our youth in God's kingdom when Christ comes again, we must get serious about helping our Adventist youth cope with the difficulties facing them in today's society.

So as caring Christians, what can we do? Consider these ideas:

Strengthen the church school program. For years, a certain pride existed in receiving a Christian education. Joy was

found when one was able to attend a church school. Christian teachers helped develop the hearts, minds, and characters of children in spiritual things.

Regrettably, many people today don't want the blessings of a church school where a child's mind is trained to love God supremely and to care for the interests and needs of fellow human beings. The expense of operating church schools does not seem to be a priority. But as someone said, "Christian education doesn't cost, it pays"—spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially. Attending public school takes its toll on Adventist youth.

Rebuild the Sabbath School programs. The Sabbath School program sets the tone for worship and for living a Chris-

tian life during the week. Parents should ensure that their children come to Sabbath School every week. A better bridge should be built between church-school learning and that which occurs in Sabbath School classes. Christian teachers should be involved in molding the characters of children all week long.

Encourage Adventist Youth Societies. We need more of these. Leaders must reflect upon the past blessings of these programs and encourage the formation of more. Consider the benefits that our youth gain from progressive class work, living with nature through camping, learning the meaning of "wilderness survival" for the times that are just ahead, sharing the gospel with communities through youth outreach programs, Friday night or

Sabbath afternoon AY meetings; and the positive role modeling by adult leaders.

The church that cannot save its own youth will never be able to save the world! Youth have something to offer in the development of the church that will benefit not just our youth, but the world.

ED

¹ Horace Johns, "Using Common Sense to Curb Crime and Violence" in *Nashville Pride*, Jan. 27, 1997.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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Gordon E. Christo, Ph.D.

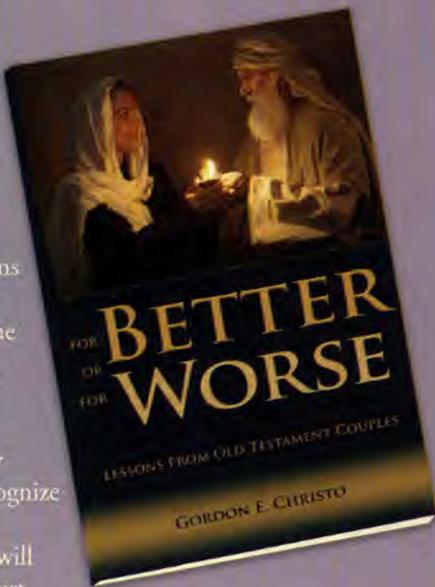
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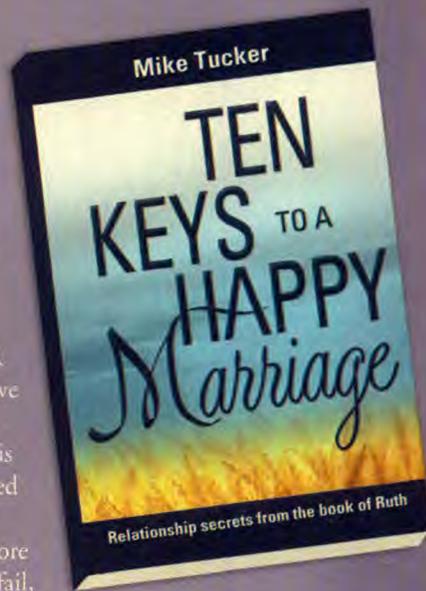
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Introduction

“God hath not left Himself without witness” (Acts 14:15-17). Though God has not revealed Himself to our senses—we cannot see Him, hear Him, or touch Him—He has not left us to grope blindly in confusion and doubt, without any evidence of His existence.

The writer of the well-known book *Steps to Christ* puts it this way: “God never asks us to believe without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason, and this testimony is abundant” (p. 105).

What are some evidences of God’s existence, and where do we find them? In this lesson, we will study three of the clearest evidences for God, which we will call “Footprints of God in Creation.” These evidences are readily available to all those who are willing to use their eyes, ears, and rational powers.

Footprints of God on the earth

“Ask now the beasts, the fowls, the earth, and the fishes and they shall teach thee” (Job 12:7-10). Read also Matt. 6:28, 29 and Rom. 1:19, 20.

All around us, in earth and sea and sky, are countless evidences of order, beauty, accuracy, adaptation, and intelligent planning. Consider these marvels of creative design: The beauty and perfume of the flowers. Snowflake crystals. A butterfly’s wing. A spider’s web. A bird’s feather. A cob of corn. The marvelous instincts and mechanisms of the honeybee. The annual miracle of bird migration. The bat’s ingenious “radar” system. Now let us ask: *Could these wonders of creation have made themselves?*

Footprints of God in the heavens

“The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). Read also Gen. 15:5, Neh. 9:6, Isa. 40:26.

In the heavens above us, we see the same evidences of pattern, order, beauty, accu-

racy, and apparent purpose that we see in our own world, only magnified to a breathtaking degree. Consider these wonders of the starry heavens: The enormous sizes, weights, speeds, numbers, distances, and temperatures of the billions of planets and stars. The precise calculation and coordination of their weights, motions, speeds, temperatures, and orbits. The fine balancing of attractions and repulsions. Split-second timing. Perfect synchronization. Clock-like regularity. All maintained in a state of harmony by constantly-operating laws and controls. Now let us ask again: *Could these marvels of creation have made themselves?*

Footprints of God in our bodies

“Who hath made man’s mouth? Have not I the Lord?” (Exod. 4:11). Read Ps. 94:9 and 139:14.

The human body contains the same amazing evidences of ingenious design, coordination, adaptation, and creative forethought that we see in the earth and in the heavens. Consider these wonders of the body-temple: the living cell, the heart, the brain, the eye, the ear, and the hand; the senses of touch, taste, and smell; the nervous system, the glands and the digestive system; the prolonged and intricate miracle of reproduction and growth; the body’s marvelous defense and healing mechanisms. What shall we do with these countless evidences of intelligent planning and forethought in the earth, in the heavens, and in our bodies? We cannot ignore them. They demand a rational explanation. They have come into existence either by design or by accident. They are the product of God or of chance. There is no neutral ground. So, let us ask, for the third time: *Could these marvels of creation have made themselves?*

Did you ever hear the story of the watch that made itself? Late one night Joe Brown woke up with an uneasy feeling that something unusual was going on in his bedroom. He lay very still, listening and wondering. Pres-

ently he heard faint scratching and clicking noises from the direction of his dressing table. Reaching for his flashlight, he shone the beam towards the mysterious noises. His eyes bulged. It seemed that a miracle was taking place on top of the dressing table! Scattered about its surface were the parts of a watch. But the curious thing was that they were not lying still. Like actors in a play, they were all dancing about as if they were alive! The case of the watch was lying face downwards, and the other parts were scrambling into the case and snuggling down into their correct positions, as if directed by some invisible intelligence!

While Joe watched, open-mouthed, the mainspring, hairspring, and balance wheel jumped in and adjusted themselves with perfect precision. Then sundry minor cogs, wheels, and plates appeared, all in correct order, took their places, and lay still. Next a swarm of screws danced up, hopped in, and screwed themselves deftly and snugly into place. The back cover clicked itself on with a sharp snap. Then, with incredible ease, the whole watch flipped itself over on its back. Face, hands, and glass fitted themselves expertly into position. Finally, the winding staff appeared, slid smoothly into place, gave itself a few brisk winds, and the watch began a rhythmic Tick-tick! Tick-tick! Tick-tick!

Do you believe this story? It doesn’t make sense, does it? Yet such a fantastic impossibility as a watch that made itself would be a small miracle, indeed, compared with an eye or ear or heart or brain or universe that made itself!

Conclusion

In of Hebrews 3:4, Paul sums up the evidence for God. Can you find any fault with this conclusion? It is the only rational explanation for the marvels of creation that we have studied in this lesson. ^{ED}

Frank Braden writes from Australia.



Introduction

It is God's will for the church to be renewed and transformed. Is there a secret to renewal? Two truths answer this question.

Yield yourselves to God

The key word to spiritual renewal in the Christian life is "yield." It is the same word translated "present" in Romans 12:1. It is the word that is used to describe the presenting of an offering in the sacrificial system in the temple. It is an act of worship whereby we personally acknowledge that we belong to God. This act is the secret of renewal of life. Notice three things about this act.

A. It is a realistic act.

1. It is a definite act. There must be a time in my life when I present myself to God; from then on, I must consider that my whole life belongs to Him.
2. It is a transfer of my life to Him.
3. It is an act of the will.
4. It is an act of surrender.
5. It is an act of obedience.

"The spirit of truth and light will quicken and renew us by its mysterious workings; for all our spiritual improvement comes from God, not from ourselves" (Ellen G. White, *A New Life*, p. 35).

"Every act of obedience to Christ, every victory obtained over self, is a step in the march to glory and final victory. Take Christ for your Guide and He will lead you safely along" (Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 25).

B. It is a reasonable act. This is what Romans 12:1 tells us. A lost person has only one nature, called "the old man." But something happens when a person is born again. A new life comes in—Christ's life, in the person of the Holy Spirit. The new believer now has two natures: the self-life and the Christ-life.

They are enemies, and they struggle for full control of one's life. Our choice is the secret to victory.

"The power of Christ alone can work the transformation in heart and mind that all must experience who would partake with Him of the new life in the kingdom of heaven" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 129).

C. It is a resisted act. The flesh resists the Holy Spirit in us (Gal. 5:16-26). Surrender becomes the key to victory. What stands between you and renewal? Jesus must be Lord of our lives!

"When man dies to sin and is quickened to new life in Christ, divine love fills his heart; his understanding is sanctified; he drinks from an inexhaustible fountain of joy and knowledge, and the light of an eternal day shines upon his path, for with him continually is the Light of life" (Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 250).

Yield your members unto God

The word *members* refers to the parts of our bodies, thus the areas of our lives. We are to yield ourselves and our members to God. This makes Romans 12:1 clearer, where it says "present your bodies." Present everything to God: your eyes, ears, speech (see Colossians 4:6), mind, hands, feet, knees (this represents how you worship), lungs (this involves what you breathe and take into your body), stomach, and face (this speaks of your countenance, whether sad or cheerful).

"All who consecrate body, soul, and spirit to God's service will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical, mental, and spiritual power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of

His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 306).

Conclusion

This is the secret then: Yield yourself and your members to God. Build an altar and place yourself and all aspects of your life before God.

"Let us give up our work, our plans, our selves, our lives, our loved ones, our influence, our all, right into God's hand; and then, when we have given all to Him, there will be nothing left for us to be troubled about" (Hudson Taylor).

"Through the Holy Spirit the character is transformed and the mind and will of the human agent are brought into perfect conformity to the divine will." (Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 162).

"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.' This is a self-denying way. And when you think that the way is too strait, that there is too much self-denial in this narrow path; when you say, 'How hard to give up all,' ask yourselves the question, 'What did Christ give up for me?' This question puts anything that we may call self-denial in the shade" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 240). ^{ED}

SERMON NOTES:



Introduction

God's guidance is available in His book, the Bible. We can check our understanding of it through the Holy Spirit, the "Faithful Guide" who is present to instruct us. We can develop a submissive spirit to His guidance through prayer. But having done these things, we may still lack confidence and clarity in doing God's will. Some of our confusion may stem from differing interpretations of the truth or from untested principles. How shall we overcome confusion and respond to God's guidance with clear obedience to His will?

We will walk in the light we have

Read Ephesians 5:8. We must develop a curious and quick mind in Christ. We know that we do not have all of the answers, but we are committed to the One who does.

Walk in the light that you have. If you want to become a long-distance runner, begin by running short distances. If you want to speak a language fluently, learn a few words first.

Walking in the light does not mean that we always walk with perfect stability. But like a little child learning to walk, we shouldn't stop trying even when we fall down. Though we may stumble at first, with practice we will learn to walk.

We will test to prove what is acceptable unto the Lord

In school, tests are used as part of an evaluation process. Topics that are not understood can be clarified. Our conduct is tested to see if it is acceptable to the Lord. Through this testing, we experience clarity in guidance.

Where does this happen? Right out in the world where there is darkness. Out in the world, we are to rely on all of the testing devices at our disposal, beginning with the Bible and with the Holy Spirit's guidance. Read Philippians

2:13. In addition to the Word and the Spirit, there are at least four other testing devices.

A. *The conscience of the person being tested.* This inward computer stores the information we have received about what is right and what is wrong. As we make decisions, our conscience either affirms or warns against the attitudes or actions we are about to take. Though the conscience that has been exposed to the darkness is not fully trustworthy (see Titus 1:15), yet when we have been taught the truth, the conscience will bear witness to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1).

B. *The counsel of other Christians.* Believers are instructed to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16). No believer is to become our highest authority on truth, yet more experienced believers who show by their lives obedience to the Word should be sought for advice on confusing issues.

C. *Common sense.* Titus 2:12 tells us we are to "live soberly," which means sensibly. But common sense is never to be accepted as complete sense. God frequently leads us in ways that do not seem sensible. We are to use our minds as we evaluate each situation.

D. *Circumstances.* At times, one's situation or circumstances may influence a decision. For example, let's imagine that based on your relationships with your children and the children in the church, you believe you should be a school-teacher. Yet your education has not prepared you to teach, and you do not have a teaching certificate. You either have to go to school again or forget this vocational choice. Your circumstances influence your decision. Yet circumstances alone are never sufficient as a testing device.

These four aids, along with the inspiration of God's Word, may verify and clarify God's guidance.

We will reprove the unfruitful works of darkness

To reprove means to rebuke or to silence so as to bring out conviction or confession of guilt. We may do this by our words, but more significantly, by our conduct. God's guidance is offered to show us how to live and influence people in an evil world.

John Bunyan describes a minister as one who has "his back to the world, his face toward heaven, and a Book in his hand." However, it would seem a bit more precise to say, "He has the Book in his mind, his eyes on Jesus, and his body in the world." If we live in this manner, we demonstrate the truth and call others to it.

Conclusion

God is our refuge, and the church serves as our shelter from storms. But God's guidance must be tested in the world; here is where light and darkness meet. We may be frightened by the conflict, but all that God provides is more than enough as we walk in the light we have, as we test to prove what is acceptable to God, and as we reprove the unfruitful works of darkness by our words and deeds. ^{ED}

SERMON NOTES:

Ezer Giroto is a retired pastor in Brazil.



The World Church: Without Lay Leaders,

Ask any Seventh-day Adventist Church member, and he or she will tell you that pastoral work is not a solo enterprise. Ask any pastor the same question and he'll admit that despite the pastor's leadership role, nurturing and sharing the Gospel takes a real team, a village, or in this case, an entire church.

This group effort becomes readily apparent when multiple churches share one pastor. Don't be tempted to think of just traditional member involvement—cooking a hospitality dinner, teaching Sabbath School, or collecting offerings. In some cases, necessity has inspired church members to fulfill one of the most traditional and distinct duties of pastors: standing in the pulpit.

In many parts of the worldwide Adventist church, one pastor per church is unheard of. No longer optional, member involvement is encouraged. When looking at the pastor-to-member ratio in some countries, the need for more member involvement becomes clear.

In India, there are more than 1 million members and fewer than 1,000 trained pastors. In China, 80 pastors lead some 340,000 members. In Zambia, the Adventist church has 500,000 members and only 120 trained pastors. Keeping these numbers in mind, it's not unusual for some pastors to have anywhere from eight to 20 churches, says Pastor G.T. Ng, former executive secretary for the Adventist church in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, an area where lay members are actively involved. One pastor leading multiple churches is routine in many of the world's faiths, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church is no exception.

One example is Emmanuel Mwale, who pastors seven churches in Chipata, Zambia. At one point, he pastored 11 churches at the same time! Mwale's churches range from seven to 30 kilometers away. Needless to say, it is impossible for one person to adequately nurture and guide several congregations simultaneously, especially when they are some distance apart.

"It is not an easy work," says Pastor Mwale. He says pastoring a church is about more than just fulfilling administrative duties. "It is a very different work to nurture. Currently my itinerary is to visit churches every once in a while. This means I have to train church elders and give them skills on how to run a church."

Nathan DeLima says that in his country of Mexico, it is common for one pastor to have 10 churches. He himself has 16 churches, which means visiting only one or two of them each month. He relies on his elders or co-pastors to do a lot of leading.

Like Mwale, DeLima is concerned about the spiritual life of his congregations. "Members need to be nourished," he says. "I have 1,000 members in my churches. I can't see them all, and so I'll visit the ones who are sick and in crisis—those who need more care." According to DeLima, the corporate church doesn't view pastoring as it should. He says that the Church focuses more on administrative work, while he looks at it as a crisis in leadership. While admitting that the support of church elders is necessary, he says, "We rely too much on elders who are sometimes not as committed. And church members don't always see their authority." However, this attitude toward lay pastoring differs



the Church's Work Would Cease

depending on where you go in Mexico. DeLima says in the South, lay pastoring is an accepted part of the culture.

In many parts of the world, the church can't just hire more pastors. For many, it is a financial issue. In parts of Mexico or India, church members' wages do not allow their financial gifts alone to pay a pastor's salary.

Another challenge is training pastors. Seventh-day Adventist seminaries are not always close by for those who wish to do God's work on a full-time basis. For Pastor Mwale, who left teaching to become a pastor, most of his training has occurred on the job. His pastoral training comes in spurts. After just six months of basic training, he was assigned churches. For up to four months every year, he continues his theological training. This means that some pastoral responsibilities must either wait until his return or require him to travel up to 80 kilometers to perform a baptism. When asked how he functions in such a high-pressure job, Pastor Mwale points to one of his favorite Bible texts, 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15. "The love of God compels us," he quotes.

Many of the church leaders interviewed for this article, though, see lay pastoring as central to church growth.

In India only 10 to 15 percent of the church's population has some kind of formal education, which makes it difficult to draw qualified pastors from the membership, says Pastor John Rathinaraj, secretary of the Adventist church in Southern Asia.

"We have 1 million members and fewer than 1,000 trained pastors and 2,000 volunteers," he explains. "We don't let [just] anybody stand in the pulpit. They must be good Sabbath-keepers, tithe-payers, and well-versed in the Bible. The volunteers get so much experience doing ministry [that] at times they know more than those coming straight from seminary institutes."

"We believe that if we had one pastor for each church, then the lay pastor would sit back and do nothing," says Cornelius Matandiko, president of the Adventist church in Zambia. "It is advantageous that our elders are challenged to study the Word, do visitation, and be involved in evangelistic campaigns. This causes them to grow spiritually, which results in more and more church growth. Lay people are the whole reason the church is growing so fast. They are not as trained as pastors, but because their faith is so strong, they take things and run."

Not everyone is convinced that there is a link between the pastor-congregation ratio and church growth. Monte Sahlin, a vice president for the Adventist church in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and author of *Adventist Congregations Today: New Evidence for Equipping Healthy Churches*, says that although "it would appear that maybe fewer pastors would increase involvement and growth, there is no real evidence to support this. It is true that those countries where there is high growth are also places where there are fewer pastors, but that does not prove a cause-effect relationship. In fact, it may be the reverse: because the church is growing, there are fewer pastors per member."

Michael Kaminsky, secretary for the Adventist church in the Euro-Asia region, does not agree. He talks of what the church was like under the Soviet regime where religion was forbidden and there were no official churches or pastors. He said those who learned of Christ's love shared the story with others. But once Communism crumbled and Christianity, long-stifled, was free to emerge, church members left the soul-winning up to pastors and public evangelism campaigns.

Without church responsibilities, Kaminsky said, those members who joined the church mainly through public campaigns soon left. In 2001, the church in that region decided to revisit the methods that the church's pioneers had used during the Soviet era. Personal evangelism has now become a major focus. Church leaders are now teaching church members that they too are responsible for sharing the gospel.

"We have enough pastors for our existing congregations," Kaminsky said. "We want to continue to get our members involved so that no one from our territory becomes too dependent on pastors."

Vasily D. Stolyar, president of the Adventist church in Western Russia, says "Many lay members want to help. It is like a first love for those who are new in the church. They need training, and we are preparing them with special books, with sermons and with DVDs."

There is no denying that most pastors would like more help from their members. In places like Japan, it is difficult to find ministers, so difficult that churches routinely recruit pastors and lay people from Korea.

Masaki Shoji, president of the Adventist church in Japan, says that Japanese church

members are not filling the leadership gap either, leaving pastors overworked. He says pastors not only lead three or four churches, but at times they also work in the church's administrative office.

Harald Wollan, secretary for the Adventist church's Trans-European region, says that with a varied territory, there is no consistent number of members who are involved in their churches. "In the Scandinavian countries, there are not enough pastors, and more lay people are preaching in our churches on Sabbath," he says. "But in Britain there is a great deal of lay involvement even though there is a large number of pastors. When I first visited Serbia, I was amazed how many young people were involved. Yes, there will always be pastors supervising, but elders are running churches."

"The church belongs to the people, and they should be more involved in any position," says Francois Louw, from the Adventist church in Southern Africa. "We cannot depend on one pastor to spread the Word. The church is growing rapidly. Where there are more congregations than pastors, people are compelled to lead."

Wollan concludes: "No matter what you call them—elders, co-pastors, lay leaders—we all know that without them working tirelessly without pay, the work of the church would come to a complete stop." ^{ED}

Taashi Rowe is the General Conference Adventist News Network editorial assistant.

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Denise M. Lopes

Similarities

Both of you are married to men who have been called by God to fulfill a mission—to work in the administration of the church and preach the gospel. No wonder you are known in the church as “Elder ___’s wife” and she as “Pastor ___’s wife.” You are the wife of the man who is to be the right hand of the spiritual leader, and she is that leader’s wife.

Many people like to use the expression “first lady” when referring to the pastor’s wife. History helps us in this respect by mentioning that the “first lady” had her “ladies-in-waiting.” You can surely be a “lady-in-waiting” for the “first lady” of your church. And this title is not quite appropriate because you, without doubt, can serve as the right hand of this woman.

You might start by doing something simple yet vital for her: try to understand her. There is no one better suited to doing that in the church. Let me explain. As an elder’s daughter since I was 10 years old and a pastor’s wife for the past 20 years, I can understand both positions, and I can assure you that you have the ability to understand her.

We all know that the pastor’s wife is a woman like any other, but we expect more from her than from anyone else. We expect dedication, interest, a thousand talents, vivacity, responsibility, constant presence, an abundance of smiles, right words at all times, and a good appearance. Hers is a special position but also a very difficult one. Although we realize she is not perfect, deep inside we still expect perfection. And when this doesn’t happen, she may become the object of criticism from other sisters in the church.

I want to remind you, dear friend, that on a smaller scale, the church members view you in the same way. As a leader’s wife, you are also looked at differently by the brethren. They all know you are not perfect, but deep inside, they expect more from you than from the other sisters.

You might be thinking, “Yes, but I didn’t ask to be an elder’s wife.” Well, my dear, many women never dreamed of becoming pastor’s wives, just as you perhaps never imagined that one day you would be an elder’s wife.

How do we explain that? We don’t. We simply accept it. First, because love doesn’t have a pre-determined address. True love is drawn to a person, not a person’s position. Second, you never know when God will make a special call for His service. We are all called for salvation; some, however, are called to fulfill a mission of responsibility in leadership. You and the pastor’s wife were both called for a service of love, as you are united by the love of men who, above everything else, love God.

Isn’t this beautiful? Yes, it is. But above all, it requires meekness.

Differences

Changes: To better understand the pastor’s wife, you must remember a few important aspects. Frequent changes, such as moving to a new location, may cause stress for the pastoral family. Although they are aware of this reality and constantly preparing for it, we have to recognize that, along with their expectations about the new environment and new friendships, they will also experience losses and the uncomfortable feeling of the new and unfamiliar.



When moving to a new location, the pastor's family has many questions. What will the new city be like? How will they like their new house and the new church? Will they be accepted and loved? Will the children be able to adapt to the new place? What will the school be like? Will they make new friends? How long will it take for them to overcome the separation from old friends from the previous congregation? All of these and other questions float in the air, and the only comfort is to know that, if God has called, there is a plan. And everything is in His hands.

Your experience may be very different from that of the pastor's wife. Elders usually remain a long time in the same church. Therefore, you do not have to deal with these changes in your life and can enjoy having family nearby and longtime friends nearby. A pastoral family usually lives far from their loved ones and does not settle down in one place for long. This sometimes becomes a great problem, especially for the children.

That is why, my friend, when your church is receiving a new pastoral family, you can be the link that will help ease their transition, welcoming the new family

until they are used to the local church. You know the church, but the pastor's wife doesn't. Your life will generally have more stability than hers.

Individuality: God was very wise at Creation, for He had important lessons to teach each one of us. Several aspects of God's character are reflected in nature, such as His creative capability, His love of diversity, and His extremely good taste. Have you ever stopped to think about the diversity of the world's flowers, fish, and plants? Do you realize that no two zebras have the same stripe pattern? This teaches us something about what God imagined and desired for the masterpiece of His creation: man. He desires unique beings, differing not only in appearance, but also in temperament and abilities. This becomes evident not only by what our senses can observe, but also by His Word, where we learn that, when it comes to gifts, the Holy Spirit gives them according to His will.

Then, my friend, it is not strange that in many churches we see the brethren wishing the new pastor's wife to be like the former one, or wishing that she had almost all spiritual gifts—singing, playing, and preaching; a rapport with adults,

youth, children, and the less fortunate; the physical and emotional disposition to visit the sick and attend all funeral services; sufficient knowledge to answer any question; and the ability to assume many functions in the church. This is not possible because it is not God's plan. To some He gave the gift of music; to others, the gift of evangelizing; to others, the gift of prayer or simply of being gentle and smiling.

Obviously, that doesn't mean that she cannot at times give more of herself and consequently allow herself to be a more efficient instrument in God's hand. But, dear friend, think and answer: What can you do to motivate and encourage her to develop her gifts even further? How can you prevent her from suffering because of unrealistic expectations and comparisons? What can you do to make her feel valued by the church simply for who she is? How can you help the church to value the qualities she possesses?

There is still another aspect of individuality. Each person's temperament must be respected. Her need for privacy in personal and family matters must be respected. She sometimes needs to have her husband all to herself. As a woman, you know how we need moments alone with our husbands; we need them to listen to us, and we need their attention and loving care if we are to remain emotionally happy in our marriages.

Perhaps you thought that being the right hand of the pastor's wife meant assisting her in her work, but to understand her and show her sisterly love means more to her than anything else. **ED**

Denise M. Lopes is the Women's Ministries Director, Brazilian North Union Conference



Invest *in* Kids!

Linda Mei Lin Koh

“When Jesus told the disciples not to forbid the children to come to Him, He was speaking to His followers in all ages—to officers of the church, to ministers, helpers, and all Christians. Jesus is drawing the children, and He bids us, Suffer them to come; as if He would say, they will come if you do not hinder them” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 517). These are strong words from the pen of inspiration for us today.

George Barna’s recent book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, provides even more urgency to do more children’s ministry and do it better. Back in the early days, children’s ministry was similar to babysitting; adults could worship in the sanctuary while we were down the hall telling Bible stories, singing songs, coloring, and waiting for the adults to get done.

It’s a different world now! Today’s children are bombarded from all sides with the most ungodly influences. Parents, with their very busy lives, are not aware of what they are up against. Church leaders’ views of children’s ministry remain rather antiquated, with little understanding of how critical it is to start developing a child’s biblical worldview from the very earliest years of life. George Barna’s book attempts to sound the alarm for all parents, leaders, and teachers, and if we do not take this seriously, we are very likely to raise a generation of kids who do not know God.

Now that the alarm has been sounded, there is a call to action. It’s calling us to invest more in kids! Parents, educators, and the church can and must do our utmost to develop our children into spiritual champions. Church leadership

needs a strategy now to help transform kids’ lives. We need to invest our resources, be it curriculum, finances, or personnel, to educate and inspire kids to accept Jesus and to nurture them in a loving, serving relationship with Him. We cannot afford to look through a narrow glass and leave children out in the periphery of church life. They need to participate in corporate worship with their parents and other adults. When we involve them in prayer, testimonies, collecting the offering, outreach activities, and other leadership roles, these children will feel a part of the faith community. They are becoming disciples of Jesus Christ!

Notice the pen of inspiration’s strong admonition: “Those who love God should feel deeply interested in the children and youth. To them God can reveal His truth

and salvation. Jesus calls the little ones that believe on Him, the lambs of His flock. He has a special love for and interest in the children. . . . The most precious offering that the children can give to Jesus is the freshness of their childhood" (*Reflecting Christ*, p. 373).

Ellen G. White strongly concurs with the Barna's research when she says that "no higher work was ever committed to mortals than the shaping of character. Children are not only to be educated, but trained as well; and who can tell the future of a growing child, or youth? Let the greatest care be bestowed upon the culture of your children. One child, properly disciplined in the principles of truth, who has the love and fear of God woven through the character, will possess a power for good in the world that cannot be estimated" (*Child Guidance*, p.163).

Barna's research makes it very clear that the spiritual development of children is primarily the responsibility of parents; however, the children's ministry team and the whole church must be actively involved as well. According to Gary Hopkins, author of the book *It Takes a Church*, the entire faith community is a vital agent

in the spiritual growth of children. It takes a church to show children that the church cares about them. If church members take time to know the children personally, pray for them when they are facing difficulties, encourage them when discouraged, and forgive them when they err, they are more likely to stay with the church and with God. Yes, we are called to partner with parents in helping our children grow closer to Jesus.

Yes, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has invested an enormous amount of human and financial resources in providing church schools for our children. The Sabbath School Department has for years provided a good curriculum and other resources for our children to learn from God's Word. That is commendable! But let us not forget these little ones in our churches and in the pews. We need to learn how to love and treat them with dignity and respect. Too often we send them out of the church when there are no more seats for the adults or we don't include Sabbath School rooms for kids when building a new church.

Invest in children now! Let the church catch a vision for the importance of

children's ministry and an understanding that it takes effort and dedication to do it right. We should no longer refer to children as the "church of tomorrow" but realize that children's ministry affects the church today. We need to move from "Can't we just show a video to eat up time?" to helping to strategize on how to make every second count in children's church. We need to provide space for children's Sabbath Schools, translate and print *GraceLink* Bible study guides, set a budget for children's activities and child evangelism, and provide the best teachers to teach and impact them. We cannot afford to lose our children to the world for the kingdom of God is for them, too. Remember that tomorrow's members and leaders begin with today's children! **ED**

Linda Mei Lin Koh is director of Children's Ministries for the General Conference.

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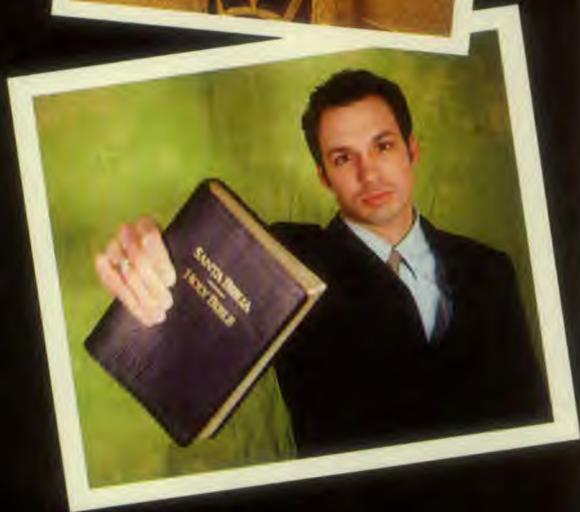
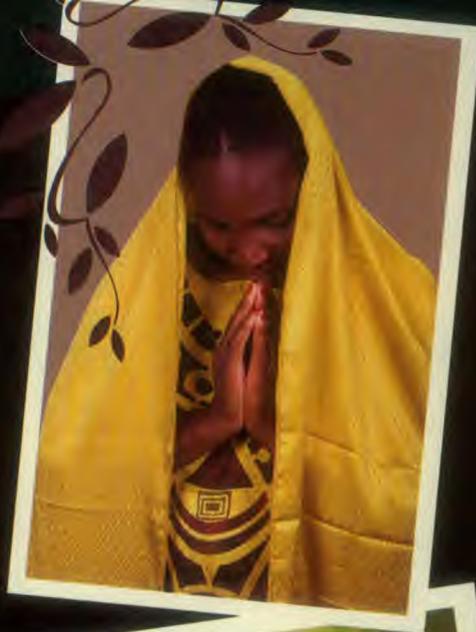
LEADERSHIP FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND GROWTH

Here are a few principles that can help leaders to create an atmosphere of spiritual renewal in a church organization. Leaders will:

1. Maintain their own constant personal connections with God based on quality time alone with Him (John 15:4-8, Ellen G. White in *Education*, pp. 260, 261).
2. Regularly remind everyone in their sphere of influence that "a revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work" (White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 121).
3. Prioritize constantly the call to personal and united intercessory prayer to unleash God's power in all planning and implementing of action plans, and telling the story of the Lord's works. "A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer" (Ibid.)
4. Make time available for regular praise, thanksgiving, and prayer in all committees, meetings, and activities. "Rejoice always . . . in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16, 18; cf Ps. 34:1-3).
5. Call our people to always check every plan and activity with the inspired writings. "Believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).
6. Make sure that God is at the center of all reporting of ministry results. Whenever possible, organizational reports should be full of stories and testimonies of the Lord's power and His wonderful providences at work in the lives of His people.
7. Encourage the organizational staff to use the "Experiencing God" principle (see *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Claude King). Ask the Lord to reveal to you where He is already performing a special work in our territory. Then, instead of simply duplicating programs and activities being used in other places, ask to join Him in His work and seek wisdom as to His unique plans for the church.
8. Seek to clarify God's vision and priorities, believing that He will always provide for His own vision. Then look beyond human reasoning and resources to carry out His plan. Leaders speak and move in faith while avoiding presumption, "for with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).
9. Share all personnel, financial, and other organizational needs, problems, and challenges as calls to united prayer and opportunities for the Lord to receive glory as He leads your church.
10. Make available opportunities and resources such as the following to keep the above principles functioning:
 - A. A network of leaders to facilitate and equip all employees and members in spiritual renewal disciplines (Luke 10:2).
 - B. Spiritual retreats, ministerial meetings, educators' meetings, and other events to foster these principles with employees and members.
 - C. Articles, letters, and personal appeals from all levels of leadership to encourage spiritual renewal.
 - D. Channels of communication to tell the story of how the Lord is working to revive His people and grow His kingdom.

Our prayers are with you for the revival of true godliness through the Holy Spirit to be in you and your people until Jesus comes again. ^{ED}

Jerry Page is president of the Central California Conference, and his wife Janet is the prayer ministry coordinator in that conference.



By now, it can be assumed that the seven goals of “Tell the World” are part of the warp and woof of everyday thinking of Seventh-day Adventist leadership worldwide.

The very first of the seven initiatives outlined in this major quinquennial imperative focuses on spiritual growth: “Increase the percentage of church members spending time in daily Bible study and prayer from 50 percent to at least 65 percent.”

On the face of it, any effort to urge Christians to read their Bibles would seem a bit absurd, like reminding football fans to tune in and watch the Super Bowl on television. Of course that’s what a football fan would do; in fact, one of the evidences that someone is a football fan is that he or she would be glued to the tube come Super Bowl time. Similarly, it would seem that an evidence of one’s Christianity is that he or she would be glued to the Scriptures.

Well, maybe.

Here’s where we encounter the concept of so-called “fair-weather fans” in the world of sports and what we call “nominal Christians” in the world of religion. There, it’s been said: As a people who consider ourselves Christian, if we don’t regularly read God’s Word—savor the poetry, wrestle with the paradoxes, interpret the histories, study the prophecies—then we’re nothing more than nominal Christians.

Is it possible that, even to some who call themselves Christians, the Bible is little more than a quaint book with little everyday importance? What is the Bible’s relevance, if any, to everyday life in the year 2007? After all, the most recently written books of the canon were authored more than 1,900 years ago, and the earliest millennia before that. What possible benefit could we derive from the works of a bunch of misfit writers who couldn’t even get along with people in their own time? Are we truly supposed to learn something about relationships from people who were often hated so much that they were put to death? Are we to learn how

Christians

Gary B. Swanson



to win friends and influence people? In most cases, the stories of the heroes of the Bible were tales of how to *lose* friends and *alienate* people.

And just think about it: few of us have ever personally known anyone swallowed by a whale, fed by ravens, addressed by a snake—some of the most far-fetched stories you could ever imagine. What do these things have to do with us as we're about to enter the so-called Age of Aquarius? As we face a bewildering barrage of issues created especially for—aimed directly at—us courtesy of Madison Avenue, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley, our attention quite naturally drifts away from quaint tales of talking bushes, donkeys, and whirlwinds. We're far too sophisticated to take such things literally or seriously.

Yet where do we go for answers to the questions that occur to any half-awake viewer of the six o'clock news? Even a skeptic author Mike Bryan says, "Contemporary culture isn't just un-Christian, it's anti-Christian, pagan, devoted 24 hours a day to each and every vanity condemned by Jesus."¹ No apparent answers there! If people don't think they can find answers in Scripture to life's toughest, grittiest questions, where are they supposed to look? What else is there to recommend? The media? The university? The street?

"One of the most valuable things we can do as we talk with seekers is help them see that there is more than one way to make sense of the world and that the Bible does a better job of putting together some of the hard pieces than any other explanation of existence. We need to offer fresh perspective through the Scriptures, reminding people what is real and what is important."²

Jesus Himself referred to Scripture for the answers to the issues that confronted Him. He often quoted from writings authored centuries before His life on this earth. Jesus explained John the Baptist's ministry by quoting Malachi, a writer four centuries before His time (Matt. 11:10). When the Pharisees criticized Him for consorting with tax collectors and sinners, He quoted Hosea, an author from seven centuries before (9:13). In meeting temptation in the wilderness, He quoted Moses, though the book of Deuteronomy was written 16 centuries before (4:4, 7, 10). Clearly Jesus did not consider the Scriptures to be irrelevant to His time, even though many of them were written long before.

Sometimes it's a bit tempting to think that Jesus walked the same literal streets as Abraham, Moses, and Daniel. Not so. It would not be accurate to assume that all biblical settings represent a kind of monolithic cultural milieu. Though Jesus

was born into a world vastly different from those of Abraham, Moses, and Daniel, He recognized that the timeless principles of their times applied in His day—as they just as certainly do today!

Who we vote for in the next election should be based on our reading of Scripture. Our decision to participate in a hot issue of public debate, a moving trend in behavior, or a popular breakthrough in thinking should stem from our study of biblical principles.

And this is something that the "Tell the World" imperative directs us, as world church leaders, to model for our membership. Otherwise, how can we honestly proclaim, as the psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105)? **ED**

(Endnotes)

1. *Chapter and Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 105.
2. David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), pp. 83, 84.

Gary B. Swanson is associate director of the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department.

Bridging the Gap:

The Challenge of Postmodernism

We live in an increasingly secular society. Postmodernism has affected the vast majority of the population. Postmoderns have a very fluid view of truth. Truth is relative to postmoderns, with no absolutes. True postmoderns can hold two or three conflicting ideas in their minds at the same time and still refer to all three as truth. Proving something to be true from Scripture means nothing to postmoderns. Their response may be something similar to: "That may be your truth, but it's not my truth." Postmoderns are suspicious of anyone who claims to have absolute truth. They don't actually believe that such a thing exists.

This can be very frustrating to Christians who hold a biblical worldview. We adhere to the reality of absolute truth as demonstrated by Scripture.

Bridging the gap

How can we bridge the gap between Christians and secular, postmodern men and women? We do it through genuine relationships.

Today's society is relationship-starved. True intimacy appears impossible to achieve. Postmoderns long to find someone who understands and accepts them unconditionally. While the previous generation sought truth, today's generation seeks intimacy and belonging. Building lasting, loving relationships with postmoderns is the key to effective evangelism.

Jesus' method is the pattern for this type of evangelism. Ellen White wrote: "Christ's method alone will bring true success. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them 'Follow Me'" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Only after postmoderns believe that you genuinely care about them will they care to know what you believe. Presenting sacred truth prior to the establishment of a quality relationship will be counterproductive. It is then that a "reaping event"

designed specifically for today's generation will produce results.

Heart Quest

It is to that end that Faith for Today presents NET 2007, a reaping series for today's world. The title of the series is "Heart Quest: Finding the One Who Has Loved You All Along."

Heart Quest is a series of 13 broadcasts with follow-up lessons designed to prepare candidates for baptism. Each night, Pastor Mike Tucker will present a contemporary, grace-oriented introduction to Christ and basic teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The series will run from October 19–November 3, 2007.

Each night, Pastor Tucker will present Jesus as the fulfillment of the human heart's longing for love, meaning, and acceptance. Doctrines will be presented for their value as an aid to personal spiritual growth. Every sacred truth will be seen through the lens of the Cross.

FAITH FOR TODAY presents Mike Tucker

HEART QUEST

*Finding the One who
has loved you all along...*

As with previous NET meetings, local churches are urged to register as downlink sites. The new twist for this series is that owners of the HOPE satellite dish will be invited to turn their homes into downlink sites where friends, neighbors, and family members may be invited to view the broadcasts. All of the support materials available to churches will be made available to dish owners as well. Advertising materials, preparation and downlink manuals, and a visitation guide will be provided to each dish owner who registers. Nightly sermons and study guides, as well as baptismal guides, will be provided for download to a computer printer. Gift Bibles and books will be available for purchase at specially reduced rates.

Your home can become an evangelistic downlink site! Your television can be used as a tool to reach this generation for Christ. Plan now to register your church or home as a satellite downlink site for this innovative evangelistic series. Join us in reaching secular people with the news of a soon-coming Savior. ^{ED}

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PREPARING TO PREACH



Every pastor must preach, usually every week. In some parts of the world, local church elders also do the same. Some preach well; others preach so poorly that listeners conclude that the speaker must have slept through even the most elementary speech class, and they now hope also to snooze through that which they must endure. The difference between pulpit brilliance and dull, lackluster presentations will be fashioned through the diligent effort of a detailed preparation process.

Preach with a Plan. Failing to plan is planning to fail. Rarely does God answer your prayers for a “Friday-night miracle” with a top-quality sermon. If you wait until just before your message to search for something to say, your procrastination will be clearly evident.

Determine to plan at least a year in advance. If you begin immediately, this process will begin to bear rich fruit within six months and will refresh your preaching the longer you proceed.

Devise a preaching planbook with dated pages for each sermon of the coming year. Establish now a balanced diet of spiritual food which you intend to present. Select major doctrines, practical topics, serial passages from each chapter of an epistle, narratives of great Bible sto-

ries, gospel parables, issues confronting society, calendar holidays and special events, or even a lectionary cycle. The most important concept: write it down right now!

If you design a sermon schedule, the Holy Spirit will begin to drop ideas into your mind which you can place in the appropriate pages of your book. While God’s omniscience may foretell what you will eventually preach, you cannot recognize without a plan that with which the Spirit will happily enrich your sermons. Of course, circumstances might occasionally necessitate realignment, but overall, your plan will pay rich dividends.

Preach with Participation. Take your planbook everywhere. Jot a note when an idea strikes you, even if you have to interrupt a conversation to capture the thought before it escapes. Enlist others to assist by sharing their ideas, then publicly recognize their contribution in your sermons; more people will join in your process. Engage parishioners through interactive dialogue. Poll for topics or texts which they hope you will address in your preaching.

Preach with Power. By relying on your relationship with Jesus, born out of quality time invested in reading, praying, fellowshiping, witnessing, and seeking

God’s will, your proclamation will exude more power than you can imagine. Your messages will come with heaven-sent authority that clever platform histrionics could never equal.

Preach with Purpose. When preparing each sermon, ask yourself, “What do I want my listeners to do next Tuesday as a result of what they hear me say today?” Once you determine your objective, make that intent the goal of your sermon and conclude with specific “how to” recommendations for following God’s will. Always make an appeal. If you expect nothing from your audience, why waste their time?

Preach with Place. Recognize that you enter the pulpit as a representative of the King of kings. Your words have holy purpose as you stand between the living and the dead. You warn people to shun hell while you call them to embrace heaven. You deliver a message from the throne room of the universe which delivers souls from Satan’s grasp. Always remember this lofty responsibility which has placed you to proclaim for Almighty God.

Preach with Priority. If you utilize this planbook system, you need not scratch around for something to say; instead, you will have more ideas than you can develop—so many that you can prioritize

the most important. Select major topics, eliminate minor curiosities, emphasize essentials, and establish the choicest of great themes.

Preach with Passion. Reject humdrum, lifeless, willy-nilly meanderings. Express your convictions in such a way that people will know what you believe. Preach “as if” you have faith and you will gain it! Ask your questions in the study and refuse to parade doubts in the pulpit.

William Willimon describes his future father-in-law’s endurance of one minister’s tentative tapdance. “That particular Sunday, the preacher was a master of ambiguity and equivocation. Mr. Parker

squirmed in his pew as the preacher carefully qualified just about every statement. . . . The poor preacher continued to flail away, poking here and there at his biblical text, rather than delivering it. ‘We need to be more committed to Christ . . . but not to the point of fanaticism, nor to the point of neglect of our other important responsibilities. We must have a greater dedication to the work of the church. Now I don’t mean that the church is the only significant organization of which you are a member. Most of us have obligations to various community groups . . .’ On and on and on!” After the service Pastor Parker shook his finger at Willimon, himself about to enter seminary, and thundered, “Young man, if

God should be calling you into the pastoral ministry, and if ever you should be given a church by the bishop, and if ever God gives you a word to say, for God’s sake would you say it!” (*Christian Century*, May 4, 2004, p. 10).

Preach with a Person. Lift up Jesus in every presentation. Exalt Him as the answer to every need. He promises to accompany your efforts with consequential success. **ED**

James A. Cress, General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

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