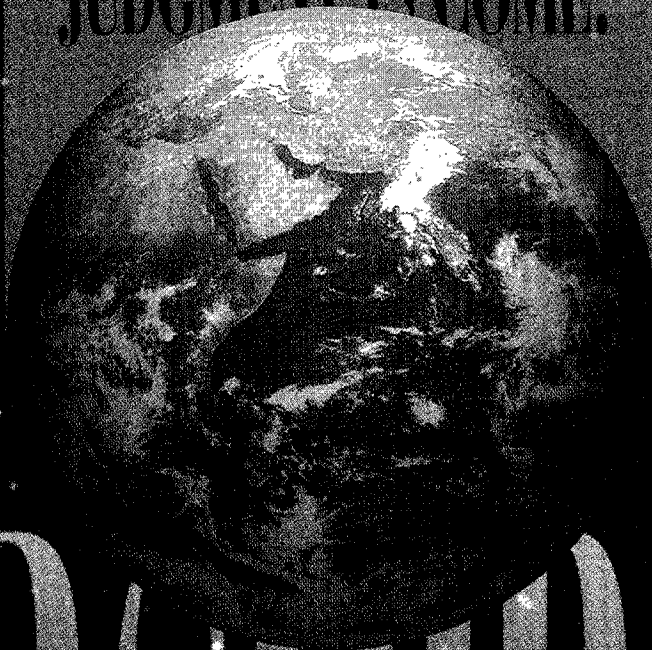


Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

October 1996

FEAR GOD AND GIVE
GLORY TO HIM, FOR
THE HOUR OF HIS
JUDGMENT IS COME.



WORLDWIDE

Thank you for thinking of us

I was happy to read about the plan to send *Ministry* to the retired clergy, and today my January and February copies were delivered. Thanks very much. Receiving *Ministry* again after a 10-year lapse will indeed make me feel more like a member of the club!

I was a reader for 40 years, compliments of my employing organizations and saved up nearly a 40-year collection of issues that I gave to the Pacific Union College library to fill out their collections and to share with other schools that train new ministers.—E. Irvin Lehman, San Carlos, California.

Appreciation

I am a Presbyterian pastor. For many years (ever since Pastor Spangler was the editor) I have been receiving a complimentary copy of *Ministry*, for which I remain extremely grateful. The thoughtful and incisive articles have benefited my ministry and, I am sure, have also benefited thousands of pastors in various denominations. The January issue on authentic spirituality was particularly helpful.

Someday I hope that I will have the privilege of attending one of your pastors' seminars. I tutor at our local theological college, and I am sure a seminar would enrich my whole ministry.—Rev. Everson T. Sieunarine, Trinidad.

■ I am an Anglican pastor who has become an avid reader of *Ministry*. I always find the articles interesting and informative, and of concern to me and my denomination as well as yours. Thanks for an excellent magazine.—Susan De Gruchy, Lively, Ontario.

Pastoring in multicultural settings

I appreciate the fact that the May issue of the *Ministry* has tackled the very sensitive issue of intercultural relations in worship. The church has always avoided facing this challenge. I am happy that *Ministry* has been bold enough to address the problem.

We had a long discussion on this item at our union committee. We realized that we could not hope to get help from any source, because the church will not touch this topic. The discussions were conducted in a Christian spirit. There was frankness as we agonized to find

solutions. Some of our laypersons who are members of the union committee are busy organizing forums in which this challenge will be addressed. We do not know what will become of those endeavors, but we are trying to face up to this challenge.

What you have done makes *Ministry* relevant to our times. If we do not address the problems we face now, then we are missing the mark. People have never moved around as they do today. We have truly become a global village. If we view this movement of people negatively, then we are defeated from the onset. If we view it as an exciting challenge, the Lord will guide us in finding solutions to what we perceive as problems.—V. S. Vakaga, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

A perspective of Utrecht

As I perceive it, the single most important issue at Utrecht was not the denial of the ordination of women, but the debate that preceded the vote on that issue, pitching two respected theologians to speak on the opposite sides of the issue. These theologians presented the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy evidence before the entire session and came out with diametrically opposed conclusions.

Only time will tell the full impact of this approach to solving theological differences, but here are a few facts that have already surfaced:

1. This method of solving theological problems diminished some people's faith in the 27 fundamental beliefs more than we realize. Confusing cries from ordinary church members are heard everywhere: "If theologians do not seem to know where they are going, how do we find clarification on doctrinal issues?" "Adventist theology depends on who the teacher is." "Could it be that our doctrines may really not be Bible-based but rather individually argued?"

2. How shall we solve lifestyle issues? What about keeping the Sabbath? Are we going to bring two theologians to debate whether playing soccer on Sabbath is a cultural issue?

3. It is one thing to have a church family in love discuss and disagree on a given subject. It is another thing to have two theologians "argue" in front of whoever was in that auditorium. This is exactly what some of the breakaway movements have been saying for a long

time: "The mainstream church does not know what it is doing."

4. When the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy are used for political ends it waters down the authority of these books.

5. In many churches members are raising some difficult questions: Is Seventh-day Adventist scholarship a matter of proposing an idea and going to the Bible to find support for that proposal? "Is it Bible-based or is it subjective?"—Saustin Sampson Mfuné, Mzimba, Malawi.

The historical-critical method: the Adventist debate

Robert McIver's call (March 1996) that we must be "Bible-centered, Bible-based" must never change!

We need to be teachable. Being teachable means we approach the Word of God reverently, prayerfully, humbly, quietly, seeking God's Holy Spirit for guidance and insight. We are to compare scripture with scripture.

We are to come to the Scriptures in childlike faith. God will prove Himself to us if we ask Him to. God's Spirit will quicken certain passages to us and give us directions. Wait on the Lord—He will give us our "heart's desire" (Ps. 21:2). "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). We may not understand perfectly all that God is doing for us and through us—but we can be confident He will not withhold any good thing from us.—Bill More, associate chaplain for Transport for Christ, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

■ The March issue of *Ministry* [on the theme of hermeneutics] was very helpful to me in many ways. In addition to the concluding insights of articles by George Knight and Robert McIver, I found the editor's counsel very useful in our approach to Bible study: "I feel that the commonsense perspective is one that easily gets lost in the casuistic intricacies of trained scholarship." Thus Robert Folkenberg, the General Conference president, is quite right in what he said elsewhere: "Wherever we live, we must not be content with a cerebral, theoretical faith, with its corollary premise, that intellectual commitment to a series of statements is not enough."—Sampson Opare, Mamprobi, Accra, Ghana.

"And worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (Rev. 14:7, RSV).

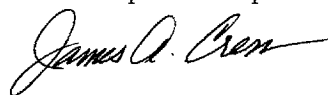
Worship, the theme for this month, provides a defining role for Seventh-day Adventist message and mission. Our Advent movement has been placed in history to call a careless world back to honoring Jesus as our Great Creator and to point a judgment-bound world to its only hope which is Jesus, our Wonderful Saviour and soon-coming King.

With Sabbath worship such an integral part of our self-identity, we cannot escape the importance of worshipping on the biblical day of rest. For this we find solid biblical evidence running in a clear theme from the Genesis account of creation to the celebration of the Lord's Day in both the last generation and the earth made new.

But what is the right way to worship? Perhaps no more heated debate is generated than when we attempt to prescribe our own viewpoint of how to worship onto the experience of another believer. I've discovered worship style to be as varied as the multiplied circumstances and cultures in which congregations exist.

So rather than attempting to impose our viewpoint on others regarding worship style, perhaps we serve our Lord and our ministerial task better when we rekindle a deep commitment to worshipping and rediscovering the personal interaction with heaven that comes with really worshipping God Himself.

I believe the theme articles in this issue will enhance your worship experience and your leadership of worship.



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Keep your vision

Mike Speegle

Years ago a group of us pastors were reminiscing about the call to ministry. Each one shared the particular way in which their call had been experienced. Even today I am amazed at the wide variety of ways this "calling" was felt and understood by different individuals.

One of us could trace his call to a time he was simply told by a visiting evangelist that he "would make a good pastor." Another had lived a wild life that was arrested by a bullet. He responded by going into ministry. One wanted "to be a minister" from childhood. As the group shared their sense of God's calling, one thing became clear: *God doesn't call everyone in the same way.* God is a lover of diversity and uniqueness. While the manner in which the call comes may differ, the general concept is consistent: a call to serve Jesus Christ and His gospel.

Having kept in contact with this group through the years, I know that each one has wrestled with staying with that "calling." As the challenges and cost of ministry have taken their toll, they have each seriously pondered the question *Is it worth it?*

That's a good question. A serious question. And it can be answered *only* in the context of God's call in one's life. To ask it outside of that context leaves out the vision that was there at some earlier point in life. Although a vision sometimes dims, vision is nevertheless a key component in answering the question *Is it worth it?*

Why are you pastoring? What are you hoping to accomplish? What are you committed to in this ministry?

While the greatest challenge in

ministry may be the many hats you have to wear and the many "customers" (community, congregation, conference, family) you have to try to please, if you have no vision of why and what you are "called" to do, you're going to struggle in ministry. You will struggle with the "D's": *dissatisfaction, disgruntlement, disgust, disillusionment, and disappointment.*

The one thing that separates good pastors from mediocre ones, happy pastors from unhappy ones, is vision and what that vision does in a minister's life. Vision gives meaning, sets boundaries, clarifies essentials and nonessentials. It gives direction and definition to a person's ministry. Vision takes the general call to be a minister and gives it specifics. It gives reasons for doing the things you do.

How does one maintain this vision? Here are four simple steps:

Grow spiritually in the call of God. The call of God is a continual process. God wasn't finished with you when He called you. There is never a time to be satisfied with the level of spiritual maturity you are presently at. "I press on toward the goal" was Paul's motto, "the prize of the *upward call* of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14, RSV). These should be our objectives.

Take advantage of opportunities for growth. Find ways to put yourself in a learning position instead of a leading position, a listening position instead of a speaking one. "The key to maintaining your edge as a pastor is to maintain an ever-deepening love affair with God. Techniques and methods are useful, but they pale in comparison to the importance of an authentic and sincere devotion to the Lord."¹

Build up the call of God in your life.

Take time to develop your ministerial skills. Attend seminars and workshops by leaders who have shown by their lives that they "know of what they speak." Be willing to learn from others. Read, listen, talk with others with the intent to learn and not just to share or to teach.

Nurture the call by the choices you make, the opportunities you choose to accept. As you are faced with ministry choices and opportunities, evaluate them based on what you are after. If you're after a career, you'll make certain choices. If you're after fulfilling God's call, you just might make some different choices.

Recently a friend of mine turned down the opportunity to pastor his conference's largest church (1,000-plus members) because, while it was a "wise" career move, it wasn't a wise "call" move.

"The reason you were called to lead a remnant of God's people is not because of your potential to change the world (only God Himself can do that), but because of your availability to be used as a living instrument of His grace, power and wisdom."²

Stay available. Let your unique call to ministry motivate, encourage, and challenge you to stay on course in fulfilling God's work in your life. Press on toward the goal that God has called you to. ■

¹ George Barna, *Today's Pastors* (Ventura, Calif: Regal Books, 1993), p. 164.

² *Ibid.*



My church: a quadrant of concerns, a trilogy of trust

Rex D. Edwards

I have some concerns for my church. It is unlike me to express my quarrels because of my love for the church, its people, and its leaders. Nevertheless, I have encountered these concerns and felt the need to encourage them.

First, I feel my church appears too preoccupied with money. In an age of rampant materialism I see the same spirit reflected in our peculiar preoccupation with things, albeit in the name of the Spirit! Do we express our objectives more in terms of quantitative attainment than we do in terms of people? Do not goals, programs, promotional stimulants, the compulsion to physical or numerical growth quite often become superficial ends in themselves?

Sometimes, in the pursuit of all these attainments, we have forgotten the actual worth of God and of the person. Is it not easy for the church to obscure the widow's mite in deification of the impact made by the largest contributors? Have we by default projected a greater desire for the giving of money and organizational talent than for the giving of our souls.

Second, the church is too much a victim of what I would call "long-distance" service. Much of the money that has become the church's preoccupation has been sought for the sake of distant causes. How easy it is to suffer from the illusion that while we champion legitimate church projects miles away, God's work locally will remain vibrant with only mediocre support. Often enough we find it easier to finance the evangelization of strangers than to witness of Christ's love to our neighbor. While we

have committed ourselves to financially supporting worthy global projects, have we come to consider ourselves largely exempt from the projects at our own occupational or neighborhood frontier?

Third, within the church's denominational life we are distracted by organizational conformity. Within our church family there is little consistent expression of honest, friendly criticism. Our church papers rarely raise questions or discuss necessary negative concerns. Many pulpits are also silent in this respect, because of the fear of being viewed as disloyal if they are too forthright.

Fourth, there is too much similarity between the programs and activities of local churches and the nearest social, civic, or community organization. I would be the last to say that these elements of human fellowship and fraternity are unimportant. They are important, but not central. The real nature of the church is not social, but spiritual. The real business of the church is to proclaim Christ and Him crucified. It is not to teach young people to play better shuffleboard, but to expose them—and their parents—to the fact that life is lived under God.

I sometimes wonder if the church in our time is not becoming more and more isolated from the real currents and needs of people, and more and more the promotor of an impotent institutionalism. Does the church sometimes resemble a ship that has been permitted to accumulate barnacles and rust, and to list in an ungainly manner in a safe harbor? Could it not, with care and courageous command, again sail grandly toward an exciting destination?

So how does one view the church?

Let me submit three persuasive ways of looking at it: **First**, the church is historically valid. It has worn out many hammers. Admit whatever peculiar negative factors you can amass, and the facts of history will never support the illusion that the church is dying.

Second, the church exists out of necessity—people need the church! George Bernard Shaw was known to have said that he liked churches best when they were empty. But then at a later period in his life he said: "If people suddenly found themselves without churches and rituals, many of them would find that they had been deprived of a necessity of life; that their want would have to be supplied; and there would presently be more churches than ever, and fuller ones." Acknowledge whatever faults you may observe, and catalog them. But can you ignore this testimony from human experience? We need the church.

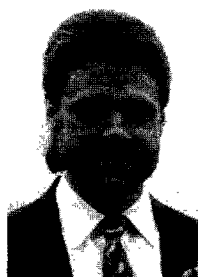
In the **third** place, God willed the church! Which is what we might call the conclusive argument, since further than God's authority you cannot go. "Upon this rock I will build my church," said Jesus. He came into the world to save it. Jesus was God's revelation, and upon His departure from the earth He left the church as the new humanity bearing His image. Weakened in one place, it is strong in another. Persecuted and hounded into obscurity, it emerges cleansed, reduced to a remnant, but with a new authority because of suffering.

What is our greatest impediment? Is it not simply this: that we have lost our sense of the divine nature of the church? ■

Worship: the heart of the church

Greg Taylor

The church that makes worship central in its life will be dynamic and alive, life-changing and contagious. The gates of hell will not prevail against it.



Greg Taylor is the senior pastor at the Foster Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asheville, North Carolina.

Becky had always had an eye for Jason. It had been that way ever since fourth grade. Of course, back then he was totally oblivious to her feelings, and she would never let on. But as the years rolled by and they got into high school, her care for him deepened. She would drop hints here and there that she was interested in him, but he never seemed to catch on. Oh, they would talk after class, study together, and eat lunch with each other in the cafeteria. He would even tell her some of his feelings about other girls. She would watch with pain as he took her friends to the school banquets and to other places. She would cry when she found out he had another steady girlfriend.

Soon Becky and Jason were attending the local community college. During the second semester they ended up in a freshman composition class together, and the old friendship was reignited. After class one day Jason said, "Becky, I have a couple tickets to the fall festival this weekend, and I was wondering if you'd like to go with me." Becky, trying hard to hold back her joy and excitement, said as casually as she could, "Sure. I'd like that."

The next few weeks and months flew by. Becky and Jason did everything together. They grew to love each other deeply. And on days when they could not see each other, they would always be in contact by phone. He would call her at 9:00 each night on the dot. And each week, no matter how much they had talked, they would meet together for an hour of eye-to-eye conversation. These times were especially meaningful. Becky thought she was the happiest woman alive.

Then something started to change. During his nightly calls Jason stopped telling Becky about his life and asking about hers. It didn't happen all at once. There were good days. But Jason started sounding fidgety. Often he would say the same old things day after day. Nothing new, nothing from deep inside him, no real heart-to-heart sharing. Becky would try to pull things out of him, but to no avail. Her heart broke as she encountered his indifference.

One day she said to him, "Jason, I wish you were either hot or cold—either that you'd fall in love with me 100 percent in heart, mind, and soul, or that you'd break up with me. Because I love you so much and always have, this halfhearted stuff is tearing me apart. Please make a choice."

God looks for wholeheartedness

God is in love with us. He always has been (Jer. 31:3). The one thing that gets to God (Rev. 3:16) is when I, the apple of His eye, the object of His everlasting love, the focus of His most tender emotions, am not present in the relationship. When I go through the motions, recite the lines, pray token prayers, while my heart is far away, He cannot let it go.

What is more serious still is when the worship of all His people arranges itself along the same lines. We might meet with Him on the right day, at the specified time, and keep our date regularly, but when we do, we sing the songs, do the praying, drop some money in the plate, and doze off for the "message" (Isa. 29:13).

This has to be faced. Just about all of us are guilty of this. We have had

times in our lives when we have wounded our God. And it is time that we individually and corporately repent of this sin that pains God so profoundly. It has been only in the past few years that I have been convicted of this great need in my own life: the need to worship God truly, to bring absolutely all that I am into intimate contact with all that He is, to bring myself completely into a relationship with Him, to stay in prayer or to stay in communion with Him each day until I know in my heart that we are vitally connected and that sin is forgiven and the joy of the Lord is in my soul.

It is for us to prepare ourselves for the big event. Corporate time with God must be more than rituals, set phrases, and formal exchanges born of our years of uninvested passion. I cannot be satisfied with the forms of godliness without contact with the Spirit of God. I believe that the greatest need in the church today is worship, real worship. We need wholehearted intimate contact with God individually and corporately, or we are just empty vessels playing church, having a form of godliness that denies God's power. In this condition, instead of attracting lost people to God and His message, we will repel them.

Listen to these words of Jesus to the woman at the well: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23, NIV). It is that last line that catches a Christian in the heart. God is actively seeking a certain quality in those who worship Him. He wants a relationship with us that will be full, open, honest, and intimate. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (verse 24, NIV). God is looking for deep spiritual contact with us daily and weekly.

Worship in the eschatological scheme

It is fascinating to note how this plays itself out in the eschatological scheme of things. In Revelation, John records his vision of heaven, and we find that worship is central to all that happens there. Obviously, those who inhabit heaven are those who find their greatest joy in

praising God (see Rev. 4; 5; 7; 11; 14; 15; 19).

The message of Revelation 14 is specific. The three angels' messages have become the rallying cry, the focal point, the mission statement, as it were, for Adventists. We see in these messages our call to proclaim the gospel to all the world, to hold up the authority of God's Word, to urge lost people to take God and His Word seriously, and to come out of any lifestyle that is less than God-honoring. We find, in these messages, the urgency to warn the world of God's judgment hour. We find here the reaffirmation of God's creative power and the need to recognize Him as Creator.

This message is for all people. Hence, we are a missionary-minded church. The three commands in verses 6 and 7 particularly stand out: *Fear God; give glory to Him; worship Him*. God is still seeking a particular kind of worshiper: Those who will bring all that they truly are into intimate contact with all that He truly is. At its very heart the three angels' message is *a call to worship*. And it is fair to say that as a church we are missing the mark situated at the very center of the message that has always been foundational to Seventh-day Adventism. The point is that the *evangelistic thrust in Revelation 14 is worship-driven. The call to come out of Babylon is a call to abandon meaningless worship and to come into a vibrant community who really worships God*.

So what do we do?

1. *Face reality*. Admit our true condition. Admit that worship has not always been high on our priority list. Face our true condition openly and honestly. Then we must go beyond admission to confession. Tell God where we are, first as individuals and then corporately (1 John 1:9).

2. *Seek renewal as our top priority*. Personal prayer is first. Pray as never before that God will bring renewal to our own hearts. Pray that worship will find its rightful place in our daily lives. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then

will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14, NIV). Then as small groups we must commit to prayer for one another and for our church, that God will pour out His Spirit upon us and give us guidance as to how to make His priorities our own.

3. *Reexamine corporate worship in light of the importance God places upon it*. Remember, the new wine of the gospel of Jesus Christ must be kept fresh. If the old wineskins (forms and traditions) are allowed to get too much older, more brittle and cracked, the wine of God's love will drip out and may be lost. We must be searching for fresh ways to express the unchanging but ever new message of God's love (Matt. 9:17).

Several areas in the weekly routine of worship that need to be reexamined. The apostles did not design our current corporate worship format. A break from the routine might be a big step toward helping our people think about what they are doing in the worship service. The use of visuals, energizing platform decor, the use of children's stories, well-planned music, even drama, can help engage the heart and mind in worship. Just some careful, intentional planning will do wonders. As we try to lead our people to worship God fully, they will catch on to the meaning and purpose of well-planned worship.

A case study

I pastor a church that has taken worship very seriously. Starting before I arrived, there had been some deep renewal among many of the members. Repentance and prayer have become a real part of church life—both individually and corporately.

During the eighties the church had gradually declined in membership from 500, with a strong attendance, down to just under 400 membership, with 120 or so coming each week. A core group of individuals took this as a personal and spiritual challenge. They began to pray for God's direction, for renewal, and for evangelistic vision. As they prayed together, they grew in their love for Christ. They began to realize that for them worship had gradually become just

a ritual. Their new understanding of the gospel gave them a passion for worship and a deep concern for their children. They prayed for direction and did some research. Soon they discovered that most of their children, inactive members, and unchurched friends were thoroughly bored with church. They felt that it was irrelevant and impractical.

The leaders discovered that other churches like theirs had found a road to recovery through an unreserved return to Jesus and His gospel. They instituted a "seeker service" in which they tried more contemporary forms of worship aimed at attracting the youth. They utilized appropriate arts, practical teaching, and music to proclaim the timeless truths of God's Word. This service was designed to be as evangelistic as it was to be a time for weekly worship. It was designed for people who had left the church and for those who were unchurched.

They also planned and provided a way for believers to worship God in a deeper way. The "believer service" would

study the Word more deeply and provide advanced worship opportunities for mature believers. When I arrived as pastor of the church, there had already been a decision to experiment with some of these ideas.

The transition has not been easy. Some long-term members found the change unacceptable for various reasons. Some found other places to worship. The congregation as a whole, however, felt God's leading as we began to see authentic renewal within our membership. A passion for worship developed and a commitment to reaching lost people. Since starting the renewal process, the number of people coming to worship has more than doubled. Decisions for Christ and baptisms are a regular occurrence.

Worship is now a priority. Our worship committee meets with the pastoral staff to plan creative ways to support the biblical messages that will be presented. Drama, music, audiovisual, and technical teams meet regularly to prepare and make

sure we are honoring God with our very best. We believe that one day we will have in our church the worshiping community described in Acts 2:42-47.

In the Acts church, worship was central. There was a sense of awe that God was doing something supernatural in that community. The Holy Spirit was present. The rich cared for the poor, the teaching was transformational, the sacraments were held high, people met regularly for praise and worship, and lost people were regularly coming to faith.

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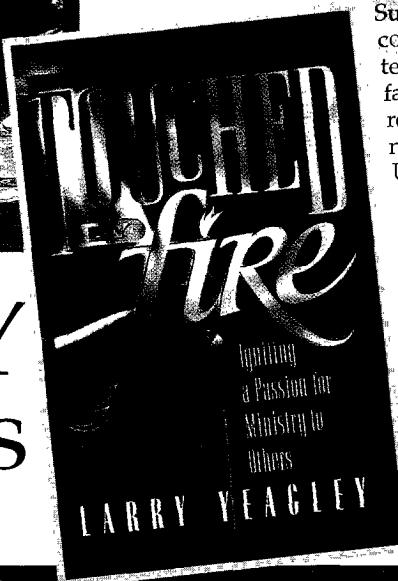
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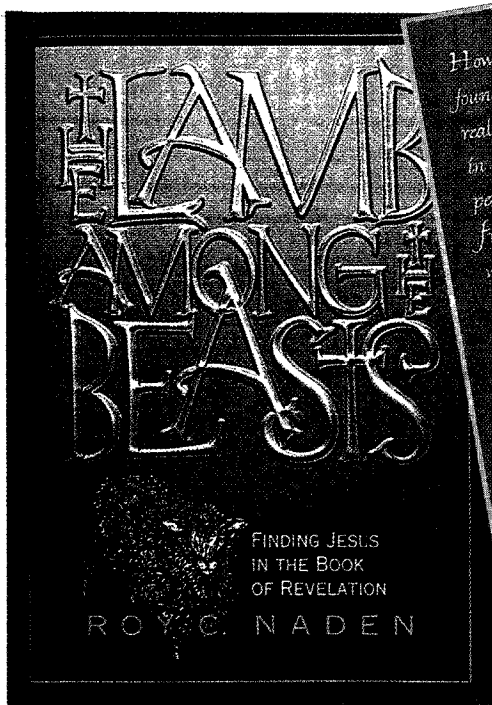
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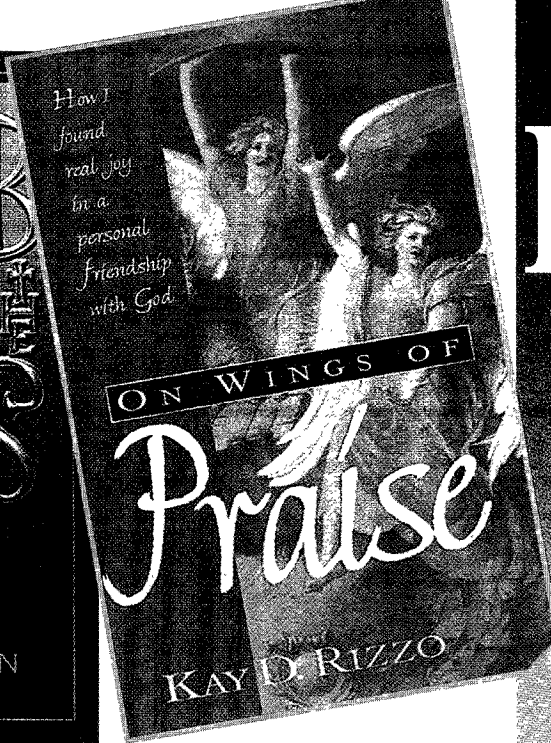
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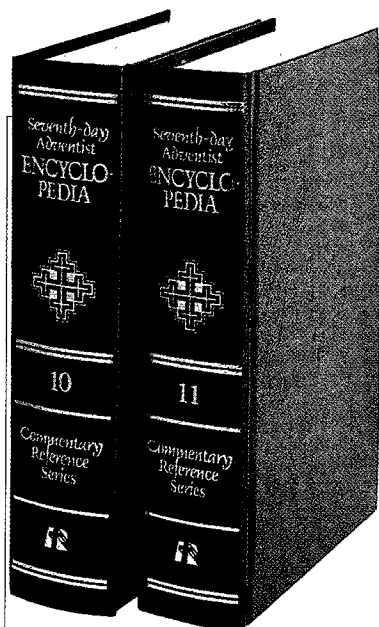
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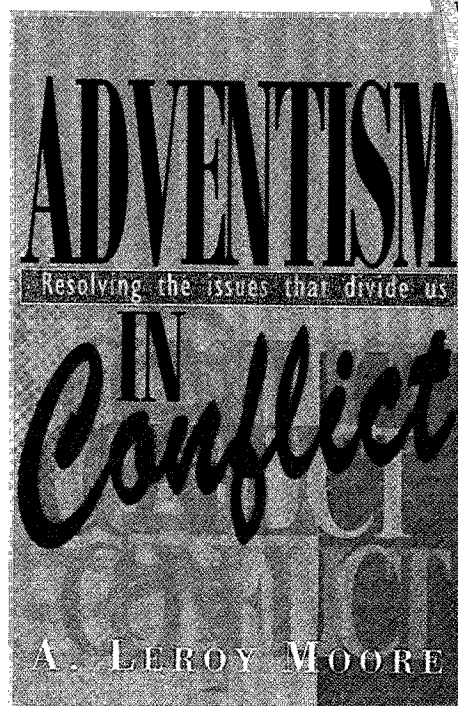
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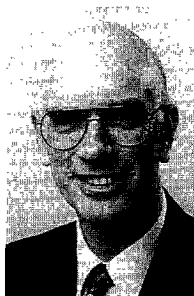
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Battling the worship committee

Bruce Manners

An honest look at pastors and their truest role in corporate worship



Bruce Manners is editor of Signs of the Times (Australia), Record, and the Pacific Record from the Signs Publishing Company in Victoria, Australia.

Don't get the idea that I'm against worship committees. I'm not. Bless their computer-printout programs, the worship committee is the best thing that's happened in church since Isaac Watts revolutionized church music.

But in so many places the worship committee is taking over the worship hour. It's time for preachers to hit back!

More than likely you'll recognize the following worship scene; it's something that happened to me a few weeks ago. And it probably happened in a church not too far from you.

I glance at my watch: 11:28 a.m. The children are being called to the front pews for a story.

I take another look at the program. There's a musical item, a skit, and a hymn before I preach.

The story ends at 11:41 and, fortunately, includes the musical item.

It's 11:53. I'm about to stand to preach. One of the elders leans across and whispers, "You take whatever time you need."

As a visiting preacher, I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I nod knowingly. As I stand behind the pulpit, I notice several people checking their watches. The elder may be happy for me to preach for as long as I like, but the congregation seems to have other ideas.

After the service I ask whether worship often goes past midday. Often, I'm assured. A deacon tells me of a recent visiting minister who began to preach "on the stroke of midday."

"And he preached for a full 45 minutes," he adds.

There's a hint of pride.

But wait a minute, the worship hour (do we drop the word "hour"?) was never meant to be endured. And if we expect people to spend an hour or more in Sabbath school as well as attend the worship program, we have to look not only at the content of the latter program, but also at the length. That's a message preachers *and* worship committees need to hear.

Is it that the worship committee fears that the preacher may not produce the goods for the members and therefore feels it must make up for it? Is it the committee's intent to fill the hour so full of other things that the preaching ends up as just another part of the program? Is it to keep the people happy?

Preachers can hit back, not with a takeover of the worship committee (although there should be a close liaison between the preacher and the worship committee), but by doing best what preachers should do best—preach.

Here are 10 preaching suggestions to keep your congregation on the pews' edge.

1. Competition always a reality.

You can't assume that just because people have come to church they're going to forget the professionalism of speakers they see on television: the quick wit of the television show host, the rehearsed and carefully written humor, or the closeup emotion of a soap opera.

2. Be sweet and short.

Neil Postman reminds us of days past when the spoken word could be tolerated for longer times. He illustrates with debates between Stephen A.

Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. In one, Douglas spoke first, for an hour; Lincoln responded, for an hour and a half; then Douglas had a half hour to rebut Lincoln's reply.

On another occasion, Douglas spoke for three hours and Lincoln was to respond. Noting that it was 5:00 p.m., Lincoln told the audience he would probably need as much time as Douglas and Douglas was scheduled for a rebuttal. He suggested the audience go home and come back after dinner for four more hours of talk. They did! And neither debate took place during an election.*

Warning: Don't try this at church. These men were trained professionals. More important, these events took place in the 1850s.

We live in the days of the photo opportunity, the sound bite and brevity of *Reader's Digest* style, the *One-Minute Bible* and publishers' extracts; and of problems solved in 30 minutes on sitcoms. It's a brave ("foolish" would fit most times) preacher who talks for more than 25 minutes.

3. Take time to prepare.

The worship hour is *the* most significant time in any church. There are no other occasions when you have most of the members in one place on a regular basis. Preachers need to recognize the importance of this weekly event. It needs to be the most significant time in our lives as well.

That means preparation.

Most preachers are busy people—especially the church pastor, who is expected to be available for whatever crisis a church attender may have. But if preparing the sermon takes a low priority, listening to it will take an even lower priority.

An hour's preparation on Friday night (or worse, Sabbath morning) just isn't good enough. Why should preachers be taken seriously if they aren't serious about their preaching?

In fact, we cheat our congregations if we haven't taken the time to be properly prepared. We cheat ourselves and our reputation. Worse, we're cheating on the One who called us to preach.

4. Throw away your Spurgeon and your Zillion and One Sermon Illustrations—unless you can adapt some of the illustrations you find there. The guest preachers of the past, including Spurgeon, were great preachers because they spoke to the people of their times. If they were preaching today they would preach differently. The message may be the same, but the style would be different.

Read Spurgeon and the other greats from past eras for your own inspiration, but don't expect that they will inspire too many in your congregation. The illustration that will inspire is something from the here and now. This is probably the genius of Bill Hybels—he illustrates the biblical text with the 1990s.

And the biblical text does need illustrating to make it real and relevant for even the most informed congregation. You can preach vividly of dusty sheep trails on Palestinian hillsides, but it may have little relevance for those whose lives are locked into the concrete and tar of city life.

5. Be relevant and varied.

When I was called away from pastoral ministry some five years ago, I discovered a truth about preaching: the local pastor has a huge advantage over any guest preacher. The pastor knows the congregation.

The best preaching is practical and relevant to the needs of the congregation—that's the church pastor's advantage. The shepherd knows the sheep, their strengths, weaknesses, and needs. The people appreciate a word from the Lord that touches their needs.

Variety in preaching content and style is particularly important for those who regularly preach in one church. Just as a one-note piano would soon be tiresome, so it is with a one-theme preacher. Variety in preaching is a recognition of the various needs of the congregation.

6. Find your dairy farmer.

Early in my ministry I was given a church in the Gippsland area of Victoria, Australia. There were a number of dairy farmers in the congregation. I learned more about preaching from those dairy

farmers than they'll ever know.

Every Sabbath morning they were up at 4:00 a.m. to bring the cows in for milking. They rode their motorbikes over their properties in the steep Strzelecki Ranges; they chased cows on foot ("There's nothing quite so stupid as a cow," they'd often tell me); they'd run to get their 80, or 100, or 120 cows through the milking sheds.

After all this activity they'd *always* be at Sabbath school on time. But then, Sabbath school was fine because of the interaction during lesson time. Hymn singing in church was OK, because they were involved. But then came the sermon.

I knew I'd preached well if I could keep all the dairy farmers awake. That was my aim every week. I enjoyed the successes. I try to forget the failures, especially the Sabbath one farmer not only slept through the sermon and the final hymn, but staggered bleary-eyed out of church some 15 minutes after everyone else!

There's a dairy farmer in every congregation. Find him or her. Is it a teenager who sits in the back row? the businesswoman who just can't get her mind off her business? the father who is distracted by his children?

Find your dairy farmer and accept the challenge of reaching him or her each week. Your preaching will be the better for it.

7. Preach with enthusiasm.

It's hard for the congregation to get excited about something for whom the preacher isn't enthusiastic. We don't have to yell, thump the desk, or stalk across the platform to show enthusiasm. The listeners will pick up on a preacher's genuine enthusiasm.

With the best news ever (the good news) as the basis for our preaching, shouldn't we be just a bit excited?

8. Live the life.

All things considered, the very worst advertisement for our preaching is to say one thing in the pulpit and live something else outside. The old proverb "What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you

say" is especially true for preachers.

Besides, the pressure (guilt) of not living a life consistent with the Christian qualities we espouse will sap the energy and enthusiasm we need to be great preachers. People will tend to sense this kind of inconsistency, even on an unconscious level.

Let's never set ourselves up as if we believe we're the perfect example of Christian living. We're part of the people in the pew in this life pilgrimage.

9. Preach the Man.

Part of our ordination commitment is to preach the Word. Doing anything less belittles the worship hour. Let's search for ways to best explain the Word. Illustrations from world news, the latest psychological and sociological findings, and historical research are all valid, but we go too far if these illustrations become the center of our preaching.

Neither is preaching the time for expounding our pet theories, pet theology, or pet prophecies. It's meant for the preaching of the Word, and for the uplifting focus on that Word who became flesh, Jesus Christ.

Let us determine to fix the congregation's eyes on the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, NIV). It's worth remembering that we fail miserably if the people see the preacher rather than the Man.

10. Preach powerfully.

Powerful preaching can come only from one plugged into the power source. This means our lives have to be organized enough so that we spend time with God. Or better, our lives need to be organized around the time we spend with God.

When it comes to the bottom line, there is no preaching method, no technique, no creative ability that can take the place of the Spirit working through the preacher. The Spirit working through the preacher is the source of powerful preaching.

What a challenge! But we preachers love a challenge—that's why we preach.

Pastor's role on the worship committee

For the past 12 months I've been a member of my local church's worship

committee. You might find the following suggestions helpful:

- *Work with the worship committee.* The worship program should be a team effort. You don't have to be the chairperson of the committee, but you should be involved.

- *Share your philosophy.* If the worship committee knows your philosophy of worship and the approach you prefer, you both are better able to work together to produce an approach that fits your church.

- *Be willing to negotiate.* Not all church members will share your philosophy of worship, and neither will the committee. Be willing to negotiate.

- *Be appreciative.* When the worship committee does well, don't fail to show your appreciation.

- *Be honest.* When things don't work, talk it through frankly with the worship committee. Prepare the committee early in its life (first meeting) for honest appraisals of worship programs.

- *Share the theme.* Plan well ahead so that the worship committee can build the program around the preacher's theme for the day. They should have at least four weeks notice; eight weeks is better. A longer lead time is needed for big events.

- *Assign responsibility.* You and the worship committee both need to know

who is responsible for what. Who chooses the hymns or songs? Is there a scripture reading each week? A children's time? Who organizes them?

- *Occasionally plan a big project.* Special-event Sabbaths will challenge worship committee members. It's a challenge they should enjoy, and when they pull it off it becomes one of their warm memories and a memory for the church.

- *Solicit suggestions on preaching topics.* Ask the committee members occasionally if they have any suggestions for your preaching. You will be surprised at the response.

- *Trust the committee.* Let the committee do its work. Checking on every detail will add to your burden and may betray your distrust of the members of the committee.

- *Support the committee.* Talk hard and fast in the committee if you have to, but support the committee outside the committee room. The members will find it difficult to support you if you don't support them.

- *Talk of ministry.* Let the committee know that you consider its work to be an important part of the ministry of your church. ■

* Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), p. 44.

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Mission as worship

Gary Patterson

If you want to revive your worship and your church, embrace the world view of mission.



Gary Patterson, D.Min., is the director of the Office of Mission Awareness at the General Conference.

Phillips Brooks, pastor of the Boston Trinity Episcopal Church during the mid-nineteenth century, is best known for writing the great Christmas carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem." During his pastoral days he was nationally noted for his pulpit oratory—no small feat in a denomination in which liturgy is the primary focus of worship.

On one occasion, when asked what he would do to build up and revive a struggling congregation, he replied: clean up the church, announce a revival, ring the bell loudly, and gather the congregation for a powerful sermon on preaching the gospel to all the world. Then take up an offering to support foreign missions.

Indeed, such was the missionary spirit of the time. And such is the tradition and heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which sprang up during this missionary era. By 1870 the mission offering, as part of the Sabbath school program, was an established feature of the giving pattern of the church. Not long after its beginning, this offering totaled 25 to 30 percent of the tithe. This level of giving continued into the 1960s.

World mission in today's church

Today the world church scene has changed. We have a growing church with a complex financial structure. The development of educational and institutional facilities and the proliferation of "project giving" in recent years make it difficult to compare and describe giving patterns for world mission funding. But best estimates would place current mission giving in North America

at around 10 percent of tithe. Given both our heritage and the challenge of the gospel commission, we would be wise to remember the counsel of Brooks. If you really want to revive your church, don't neglect the worldview. This world challenge, provocatively presented, elicits a mature spiritual and stewardship response in our congregations.

With today's technology and abundant availability of materials, the possibilities for creative worship in the context of world mission seem limited only by one's willingness to imagine. Unfortunately, the diligence with which the Sabbath school has traditionally undertaken the mission emphasis of the church has seemed to cause us as pastors to assume that this part of the work of the church has already been covered. And thus the worship service rarely—if ever—focuses on the broader aspect of world mission.

How one church did it

What a tragedy to leave such a rich experience out of the worship calendar. Surely any church would enjoy a "World Mission Sabbath" such as we recently enjoyed with the Kettering, Ohio, church. Pastor Dan Stevens focused the experience of the entire day on world mission. The Sabbath school program featured the Asia-Pacific Division—the recipient of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering for the quarter.

The church service opened with a parade of nations processional. Church members who had lived in or served as missionaries and student missionaries in some 49 countries of the world—many of them in costume—carried their flags to the front of the auditorium and

placed them in the chancel area, where they graced the worship service with their multicolored beauty.

All parts of the service focused on the theme of world mission, including the scripture reading, the hymns, prayers, anthem, offering, children's story, and sermon. At the close of the sermon the congregation read the following litany as a response to the challenge of the gospel commission. Then during the recessional the flags were removed from the chancel and placed in the fellowship hall, where an international fellowship dinner was served. This in turn was followed by the presentation of mission videos and the children's mission story, called "Junior Journal on Missions," a new production of *Mission Spotlight* for junior-age children.

The occasion was festive, and the spirit of the church was one of rejoicing at the blessings of God on His people. Such events should not be used as an occasion for "hard-sell" fund-raising, or for "guilt trips" designed to raise money. These are worship experiences in which the congregation rejoices together at the wonders of the grace of God as He includes His people in the glorious work of giving the good news of salvation to the whole world. Nor is such a mission service only for larger congregations. An inspiring mission-oriented worship can easily be adapted to virtually any congregation.

A new approach

The Atlanta North Seventh-day Adventist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, recently initiated a new approach to world mission emphasis. Judy Carter of *Mission Spotlight* directs the program. The materials she uses are available to other churches. On the third Sabbath of each month all Sabbath school divisions from the juniors up meet together. Flags of the countries in the world divisions being featured for the quarter provide color and an expanded atmosphere. The one-hour program varies. From time to time it includes such features as a quiz on Adventist mission, narrated pantomimes, a junior story, Adventist world news, devotional materials, music,

Mission Spotlight, and an appeal for the world mission offering.

On this day the kindergarten and primary groups meet together for a program called "King's Kids." It is similar to a Vacation Bible School program and is likewise available through *Mission Spotlight*. These materials can be obtained by writing to *Mission Spotlight*, 4280 Memorial Drive, Decatur, Georgia 30032.

The mission A litany of service and the Word

Hear the Word

Leader: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.¹ The word of God is living and active.

Congregation: *Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Leader: Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Congregation: *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.²*

Leader: Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.³

Congregation: *As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."⁴*

Acknowledge the call

Inquirer: How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of

whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?⁵

Leader: I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

Congregation: *And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"⁶*

Accept the challenge

Church Elders: The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

Deacons and Deaconesses: He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, . . . to comfort all who mourn.

Congregation: *And provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. . . .⁷*

Join the service

Inquirer: Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, . . .

Congregation: *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—*

Inquirer: When you see the naked, to clothe him, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Congregation: *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;*

Leader: Then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Congregation: *Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

Leader: If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,

Congregation: *Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*⁸

Know the mission

Leader: And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations,

Congregation: *And then the end will come.*⁹

Leader: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Congregation: *And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*¹⁰

Singing

(to the tune of "God of Our Fathers")

*Heralds of Christ,
who bear the King's commands,
Immortal Tidings in your mortal hands,
Pass on and carry
swift the news you bring:
Make straight, make straight
the highway of the King.*

*Through desert ways,
dark fen, and deep morass,
Through jungles, sluggish seas,
and mountain pass,
Build ye the road, and falter not, nor stay;
Prepare across the earth
the King's highway.*

*Where once the crooked trail
in darkness wound,
Let marching feet and joyous songs resound.
Where burn the funeral pyres,
and censers swing,
Make straight, make straight
the highway of the King.*

*Lord, give us faith
and strength the road to build,
To see the promise of the day fulfilled,
When war shall be
no more and strife shall cease
Upon the highway
of the Prince of Peace.*

Enter the joy

Leader: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. . . . Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Inquirer: Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

Leader: The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."¹¹

Receive the benediction

Leader: Before the Father, from

whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name, I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.¹² ■

* All scripture references in this litany are from the New International Version.

¹ Deut. 8:3.

² Heb. 4:13, 14.

³ Rom. 10:17.

⁴ Verses 11-13.

⁵ Verses 14, 15.

⁶ Isa. 6:8.

⁷ Isa. 61:1-3.

⁸ Isa. 58:6-10.

⁹ Matt. 24:14.

¹⁰ Matt. 28:19, 20.

¹¹ Matt. 25:31-40.

¹² Eph. 3:14-21.

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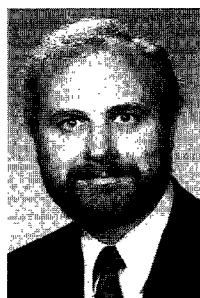
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Resolving conflicts between pastors and parishioners

David VanDenburgh

Between pastor and congregation: applying the principles of Matthew 18:15-20



David VanDenburgh, D. Min., is the senior pastor of the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kettering, Ohio.

Conflicts between churches and their pastors are becoming more frequent. Reasons are many and varied. Whatever the causes, pastor-parishioner conflicts are so frequent that they absorb too much time and energy and inhibit God's work at many levels.

Scope and purpose

This article does not attempt to solve all the problems of pastors and parishioners. It does not explain why the conflicts arise. It limits itself to outlining a process by which the conflict can be resolved. It advocates a process that is biblical and consistent with the principle that all things be done decently and in order.

This proposal is undoubtedly biased in favor of pastors. I am a pastor and tend to see things from the pastor's point of view. Often enough the pastor ends up as the scapegoat for conflict in the local church. The conflict may even be the result of the pastor doing precisely what he or she needs to do for the good of the congregation. An intensified episode of conflict may also be the result of deep and systemic issues that have been a part of the congregational family system for years and rooted in circumstances that happened long before the pastor arrived. So my purpose in this article is to look at dealing with congregational conflict constructively, seeking a resolution that justly involves the pastor, but does not hang everything on him or her.

One problem this proposal addresses is what may be seen as the overinvolvement or premature involvement of the conference president in pastor-parishioner conflicts. This kind of

"firefighting" is death to proactive conference leadership and creative visioning. The conference can ill afford to have its primary leader embroiled in such disputes. This article rather proposes the use of the conference ministerial association secretary as the chief negotiator in pastor-parishioner conflicts that cannot be resolved, first of all, in and by the local congregation. This reserves the conference president for those rare situations that escalate beyond local and ministerial confines. The ministerial secretary has the confidence of the pastors, and having in most cases most recently been a pastor, understands congregational dynamics. There should be added benefits in utilizing one person for all such conflicts: before long he or she should become an expert.

Situations addressed

In most cases, conflict situations begin with one or two church members who become unhappy with their pastor over something he or she has said or done or has not said or done. From there the conflict spreads as more and more church members are brought into the conversation. Eventually the conflict comes to involve a sufficient number of parishioners so that it begins impairing the life, well-being, and ministry of the flock. By this time people will have spent more time and energy talking about "the problem" than talking of Christ and His ministry through the church. Trust between pastor and parishioner will have declined. The pastor's preaching and teaching will have become suspect; motives will be questioned on all sides and character called into doubt.

The core issue may be perceived as theological, procedural, or personal, but all too quickly the issue ceases to be the issue. In fact, in virtually all cases the "issue" is not the issue, but rather some underlying systemic dysfunction.

Ultimate resolution may come by addressing issues that seem to have nothing to do with "the issue" and may involve the congregational family, along with the pastor, passing through considerable but necessary pain. Unfortunately, few people have interest in experiencing growth if it involves pain, so ultimate resolution of the conflict is unlikely without persistent and consistent commitment to it.

The process outlined here hopes to create an environment that will facilitate healing and conflict resolution.

Priorities of the process

The process is built upon three priorities derived from Jesus' direction about how to deal with interpersonal conflict among believers as outlined in Matthew 18.

1. *Contain the conflict at the lowest level and resolve it there.* If the conflict is between two people, then containing the conflict at the lowest level means that no third person ever needs to know about it. For one thing, this precludes gossip. No party should talk to others about their conflict with the other person. The commandment "not [to] bear false witness" precludes telling my friends about my conflict with another when he or she is not present to relate his or her side of the story. My side of the story is never the truth: it is simply the truth as I see it. The whole truth has not been told until both sides have a chance to hear what the other side is saying and to respond to it in as limited a setting as is called for by the scope of the conflict.

Gossip has caused incalculable harm to the church and its ministry. Saddest of all is the blindness of Christians who can't or won't see that talking about the failings of a person without having talked about those failings to that person first is always gossip.

In other words, stop gossiping, and

you contain the conflict at the lowest level.

2. *Do not hold meetings in secret.* Holding secret meetings to which the person under discussion is not invited is inappropriate. There is no need to counsel with others: Jesus has already given us clear instruction on what to do.

3. *Make the conflict an opportunity for growth rather than sickness.* Conflict is both inevitable and a potent means of growth. If contention is

handled correctly, all parties will come out of it stronger and more mature. We can't afford to avoid problems. We must bring them to the surface, face them, resolve them, and learn from them.

Conflicts are inevitable. Church membership doesn't save one from conflict. The book of Acts frankly describes the conflicts of the New Testament church.

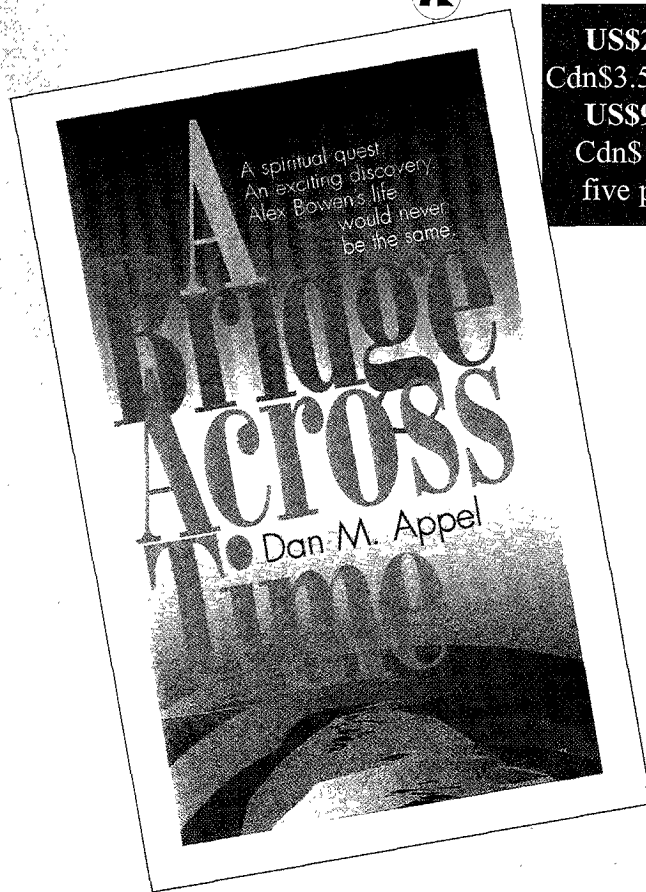
In Matthew 18 Jesus says, "If another member of the church sins against you,

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go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17).*

Here Jesus prefaces His direction with "if another member of the church sins against you." That phrase frames the first question that must be asked before a biblical conflict resolution process can be initiated: "Has my brother or my sister sinned against me?" If the answer is no, then I should not pursue the matter any further. If the offense is not a sin, then it is simply a matter of individual difference. For instance, this would be the case if my brother or sister has done something unconsciously and with clear conscience that I don't happen to like, but he or she didn't do it to hurt me. I don't like it, and if I disagree with it, I am free to go to him or her and talk about it, but it should go no further.

If, on the other hand, I am angry with my brother or my sister for no reason and attempt to enlist others in my anger over this imagined or exaggerated grievance, then I have sinned against my brother or my sister, and I become the object of the process Jesus described.

Clearly Jesus intended His directions to be followed whenever there is a conflict between Christians. When we apply Jesus' directions to a conflict between a congregation and its pastor, we come out with a protocol that involves five steps.

Four practical steps

1. *Go to the pastor directly.* The person with the complaint should go to the pastor personally and privately, without discussing his or her complaint with any other person. In a spirit of love and humility, recognizing that he or she may have misunderstood, lay the conflict before the pastor and ask for clarification. Is this actually what was

said or done? Is this what was intended? Why is this objectionable? What would he or she like to see done about it?

If satisfactory resolution is achieved at this step, the matter is closed and ought not to be shared with any other person—either by the pastor or the parishioner.

If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, and if the situation still seems to call for it, then the parishioner should go on to the next step.

2. *Take one or two elders and go to the pastor again.* At this point the aggrieved parishioner should meet with one or two elders and tell them the complaint and that he or she has already shared it with the pastor directly, but to no avail. Either the pastor refused to listen to the complaint or gave an explanation that was unsatisfactory. Perhaps the pastor refused either to apologize or to change. Whatever the outcome, the parishioner still believes that the pastor is wrong and needs to be corrected.

If the elders advise the parishioner that he or she has no case, the process may stop right there, and nothing more should be said about it. If the parishioner feels strongly that he or she must talk with the pastor with the elders present, the elders should accommodate him or her.

If the resulting conversation results in satisfactory resolution, again, the matter is closed and no one else should ever hear about it.

If satisfactory resolution is not achieved, then the parishioner should go on to the next step, again with no discussion of the conflict with anyone beyond the pastor and the elders.

3. *Ask for a formal hearing before the church board with the pastor present.* Up to this point the conflict has been private; it now becomes public. The church board should hear the complaint against the pastor, then the board should ask whatever questions are necessary to determine what the real issues are. It is a fundamental principle of justice, and a fundamental biblical principle, that an accused person has the right to face the accuser and hear

firsthand the accusation. Therefore, all parties to the conflict should be present for the entire discussion. Time should be given to both parties to explain their positions. The board may be tempted to exert influence to keep the conflict under the table, but the conflict should be explored and discussed. Conflict denied creates sickness.

Hopefully, discussion will bring a resolution in which both parties will emerge satisfied. If not, the board should take its time in making a decision that will be just and merciful, and will preserve the best interests of the church. Paul's statement to the Corinthians might be kept in mind: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?" (1 Cor. 6:2).

If, however, the church board cannot bring about reconciliation and the parties continue divided, the next step is to involve the conference leadership—the larger church.

4. *Ask for the ministerial secretary from the conference to meet with the church board and the pastor.* This is the first time the conference is involved. Only after every effort has been made to resolve the conflict at the congregational level should the conflict escalate to the conference level.

The contact person for pastor-parishioner conflicts is the ministerial secretary. He is the person charged with pastor-conference relations. He has recent and extensive knowledge of pastoral and congregational life. If the conflict cannot be resolved even at this level, appeal to the conference president is available, only after the process outlined here has been tried in good faith.

The ministerial secretary should meet with the church board and the pastor. Again, all parties should be present to hear the discussion. Nothing is to be gained by secrecy. Conflicts are not resolved without frankly airing the issues.

Far-reaching resolutions are needed

Often conflicts are not merely

misunderstandings or concerns that can be easily resolved. They may stem from deep, foundational differences in philosophy about the church, ministry, theology, leadership, or relationships. The pastor may be in conflict with the parishioners involved, or they with him or her, not because they don't understand each other, but because they do, and they see that they are locked in a struggle for the identity and/or mission of the church. For example, the pastor believes that worship should be a celebration of adoration and praise, and the parishioners believe that worship should be a solemn time of repentance and soul affliction. The two are likely to continue in conflict as long as they are together.

At this point it falls to the church board to decide whether the pastor's vision of church and ministry and leadership is the one they want, or the one the contending parishioners want. The board must face this responsibility clearly and make a decision. There is no point in trying to compromise or harmonize. If the conflict stems from foundational, fundamental, essential matters of vision, direction, and leadership, then the board must decide which way the congregation will go and act accordingly to affirm one group's vision or the other's.

If the ministerial secretary can help all parties come to a satisfactory resolution, the process has worked and God is honored. If not, the board should decide the question of vision, ministry, direction, mission, and leadership—apart from the question of the pastor. Here the conference should be employed. The decision should be What do we choose as our vision for this church? Only then should the board ask the question Do we believe this pastor can lead us into that vision?

One thing that needs to be recognized in any conflict situation is the inevitability of conflict whenever change is sought. The church board must be very sure that the conflict that creates so much discomfort in the congregation isn't simply the result of an inevitable, necessary, and even desirable change

that is occurring among them. It is important to remember that good pastoral leadership almost always produces change, and change is always uncomfortable, especially in institutions that are inherently conservative. It would be a mistake to fire a pastor for orchestrating the very change that the church needed in order to be more effective.

One person's "strong leadership" is another person's "dictatorship." It is frequently confusing and difficult to tell which is occurring in a specific situation. Entrenched lay leadership will always resist change, especially the kind of change that brings new people into leadership roles. In my experience, this is frequently the cause of complaints against pastoral leadership. Such entrenched leadership has almost no capacity to see that change is good, and the pastor is almost always identified as the source of their discomfort over what is changing in their congregation. An objective church board would see the issues and vote for change, however painful. In practice, it is more common for church boards to vote to get rid of the pastor. If the ministerial director can help the board to be objective and see the larger issues, well and good. If not, perhaps the best that can be achieved is a quick pastoral move to a more open and teachable congregation.

The final step: the conference president

If the conflict cannot be resolved by meetings between the factions, the church board, and the conference ministerial secretary, the last court of appeal is the conference president. This is the end of the resolution process, not its beginning. The president probably should refuse to meet with any delegations from the church until the ministerial secretary tells him that the process is over and hopelessly deadlocked. As long as the ministerial secretary is working with the process and is willing to continue, it is wise for the president to be removed from it.

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* All Scripture passages in this article are from the New Revised Standard Version.



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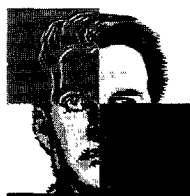
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Counseling
people in
crisis

The crises of children —a special ministry

Karen and Ron Flowers

**Viewing children as
persons will
significantly shape
our ministry to them
and their families.**

For the most part pastors view children in a congregation as a welcome and healthy sign. Young families bring energy and enthusiasm, vibrancy and growth. Most churches put considerable energy into drawing families with children into their fellowship. However, few pastors would deny that ministry to children and their families presents a challenge that can stretch pastoral limits.

Under some serious circumstances there is no responsible course of action except to refer a family to someone with the additional professional qualifications necessary to provide help. But we can also grow in our understanding of children and families and develop skills for ministry that will enhance both our abilities to handle situations as they arise and to know when we are in over our heads.

Understanding children

In a seemingly insignificant moment, our view of children was unforgettably set. “Look out, Pastor; there’s a person behind you” was all a mother said as Ron was stepping back, about to plant his size 11 shoe behind him without looking. Turning to apologize to the person he had nearly bumped, Ron was surprised to see no one, at eye level at least. Down about three feet, however, there was a little girl smiling up at him. “There’s a person behind you” has rung in our ears many times since as we have considered the needs of the little people in our congregations. All persons deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, to be heard and understood, to be ministered to according to their needs, to receive care when in trouble. Viewing children as persons will significantly shape our ministry to them and their families and will heighten the importance of such a ministry.

“Train up a child in the way *he* should go” is a slight twist on the usual reading of Proverbs 22:6 that emphasizes the importance of making allowances for the differences in children—differences based on temperament, gender, developmental stage, position in the family constellation, and patterns of growth. Many difficulties with children grow out of unrealistic expectations that often arise from a lack of understanding of the significance of these differences. Adults, for example, who expect a 3-year-old to share willingly, a choleric child to put aside his or her agenda readily, primary-age boys and girls to like each other, or children approaching puberty to share everything with their parents, are setting themselves up for frustration if not confrontation.

Parents need reassurance that their children are quite normal. We recall hearing Adventist child psychologist Ruth Murdoch respond to a parent who was concerned

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about toilet training difficulties with a 3-year-old. "Most children have this worked out by the time they turn 15," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "If you are still having problems then, we'll need to get to the bottom of it!" Normal behavior for children covers a wide spectrum. Opportunity to exchange stories with other parents and to learn from counseling with individual families will provide many avenues for parent education and bring much comfort.

The feel for normalcy

A parent's feel for normalcy may be skewed in some areas because of some personal occurrence experienced while growing up. Pastors who intentionally confront personal issues and seek whatever help is needed to grow steadily toward wholeness in their own lives will have a better sense for the concerns that arise with a family in the congregation. They will also be in a better position to recognize behavior that needs professional evaluation and to encourage and assist families in accessing the resources available. For example, a child who demonstrates sexual behavior beyond his or her understanding and experience, a child who is suddenly failing at school, a child who bears the brunt of savage put-downs at the hands of other children, an exceptionally bright child who cannot tolerate the routine of schoolwork—should more than pique your attention.

Your pastoral success in ministry to children and their families will be largely proportional to the quality of the personal relationships you have established with them. Visiting the homes of your members regularly not only enhances relationships but also allows you to observe the patterns of family interaction at home. A warm relationship of trust and the open, natural dialogue you have established over time provide you with the best hope that you will be able to coach the child(ren) and family through any problem that presents itself to them.

Pastor as coach

Family therapist and rabbi Edwin Friedman speaks of the pastor as coach in his book *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (1985). Typically, pastoral training places its emphasis on preparing pastors to officiate at family events—i.e., providing how-to's and creative ideas for performing a wedding, a child dedication service, a funeral, a baptism, a graduation. However, Friedman points out that the most effective pastors are exceptional not so much because they are skilled officiators, as important as that may be. Rather the extraordinary success of their ministry lies in their ability to maximize their unique entrance into people's lives that their position affords and to envision themselves as coaches of families through life's transitions and crises.

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of trust and dialogue
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of being helpful to
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families in times
of crisis.**

Thus it becomes more important that pastors know the families within the circle of their care and establish strong relationships of openness and trust with them than it is that they preach polished sermons from the pulpit. For it is such close relationships that open the way for the pastor to enter the family system in moments of need, offer encouragement and hope, expand a family's imaginative capacities toward more satisfactory alternatives, and provide a nonanxious presence wherein a problem time can be reframed as an opportunity for growth.

We cannot overemphasize, however, that in instances in which child abuse is suspected, moral responsibility and the laws in most states in the U.S.A., at least, mandate that a report be made immediately to child protective services. This course of action provides the best hope for healing the victims involved, and the rehabilitation of the abuser. The pastor's responsibility is to report the evidences of abuse, to cooperate with government agencies, and to render pastoral care and support to the entire family as appropriate legal processes are followed and as abusers undergo professional therapy and rehabilitation.

Adopting a needs orientation

Many times our response to children is reactive rather than proactive. We tend to react to behavior and seek to reshape it according to our adult standards without much consideration of the reason for the behavior. We need to remember that most behavior is driven by need. In his books *How to Really Love Your Child* (1977) and *How to Really Love Your Teenager* (1981), child psychologist Ross Campbell convincingly argues that if we placed more emphasis on meeting a child's needs for love, focused attention, affectionate touch, spiritual nurture, open dialogue, reasonable limits, kind but firm discipline, and healthful physical care, we would go a long way toward correcting inappropriate behavior and toward raising all-around healthy children.

A boy suddenly became quite introverted and appeared to be avoiding contact with his peers at school. The teacher observed the usually friendly lad slinking into his chair just before the bell and leaving school through the back fence as soon as classes were dismissed. Made aware of such puzzling behavior, a pastor who has adopted a needs orientation will first wonder what is making him or her do that. In this instance a few minutes of warm, casual talk and active listening opened the way for the boy to reveal the source of his problem. It seems the boy's frugal father had bought his son several pairs of new pants at a sale. Unfortunately, they were bell-bottoms when all the other boys were wearing straight, fitted cuts. As soon as the pants were replaced, normal behavior patterns immediately resumed.

Thinking family systems

It has been said there is no such thing as an individual, only pieces of families. In every family these "pieces" are networked together in a system. Relational ties exist between every person and every other individual in the family. Movement by any individual or group of individuals within the network has repercussions for all the others. Often young people are less equipped to adjust appropriately to change or conflict in their intimate relational systems. They also tend to be less sophisticated than adults in masking disturbances at home. They act out the pain and distress they are feeling. The behaviors and attitudes of children often serve as a barometer for the inner working of the family as a whole and are indicative of the influence the family system has upon its individuals.

We once heard Dennis Guernsey, professor of family sociology at Fuller Seminary, tell of an experience he had as a youth pastor when he made friends with a troubled teenager at odds with the law. Wanting more than anything to see the youth make a new start, he encouraged him to take care of his body, provided him with some new clothes, helped him get a part-time job, and drew him into the inner circle of the church youth group and his own family. Dennis was so proud of the progress he saw in the young man that he began telling his story as a testimony to the power of God. Then the phone rang at midnight. It was the police with his young friend in custody. At the station, where he faced the boy in whom he had invested so much, Guernsey's eyes reflected the questions of his heart: Why? "You just don't understand," the boy muttered, scarcely lifting his head. "You don't live where I live."

Integral to family systems theory is the notion that networks of close relationships constantly move toward *homeostasis*. That is, they seek a stillness, a "being at rest." Similarly, families seem to operate by unspoken laws that seek emotional equilibrium, power balance, and a sense of being normal. Children often assume difficult, stressful, life-altering roles to help their families attain and maintain this equilibrium—roles such as that of the *hero*, who shoulders the responsibility for maintaining the system's integrity and preserving its positive image; the *mascot*, who seeks by clowning to distract the family from its internal pain; and the *scapegoat*, who draws the blame for system difficulties to himself or herself and achieves a kind of harmony among others because their focus has shifted to the scapegoat's misbehavior. Observation of such roles in children dictates a closer look at the relational functioning of the family. While the child may appear to be the patient in need of treatment, in reality the patient is the family itself.

The family systems hypothesis that significant symptomatic behavior in children is linked to conflict in their parents' relationship has proved so helpful that it should be considered in counseling children and their families. For example, a mother wondered why her primary- and junior-aged sons fought more when their father was home than when he was working. In a subsequent interview with both parents, we asked about their marital relationship and discovered that they did not communicate, were often in conflict, and had virtually no

private couple life. As they described the typical scenario of fighting between the sons they were helped to see their family system in predictable action: (1) fighting upsets and angers dad; (2) dad administers discipline; (3) boys appeal to mother for help; (4) mother approaches father to discuss the boys' needs; (5) boys play contentedly nearby while father and mother are together and talking. We suggested that an intentional improvement in the parents' relationship that is visible to the sons will likely lead to improved behavior on the children's part.

Conflict or dissatisfaction in the marriage may result in a child either intentionally or inadvertently being drawn into the marital relationship in a manner called *triangulation*. As in the illustration just given, a child may seek to close the gap between the parents by acting in ways that bring the parents together by their joint focus on the problem child. Another type of triangulation occurs when a child becomes a *surrogate spouse*—i.e., one of the spouses seeks emotional fulfillment inappropriately from the child instead of from their marriage partner. Similarly, a child may become a *surrogate parent* because of the physical or emotional absence of one of the parents. The remaining parent finds a parenting partner in the child and, by assignment or default, parental responsibilities for other siblings are assumed by this child.

In either of these types of triangles, a child is drawn across the generation boundary and is shifted from his or her appropriate position in the family system. Thus anything that can be done to improve the marriage relationship and allow the child to be a child among siblings will strengthen the appropriate generation boundary, help in the differentiation process, and restore healthier system functioning.

The ultimate goal

The spiritual goal of ministry to children and their families is to strengthen the family unit as a center for making disciples. Early in our parenting it broke over us that our own children were little nonbelievers placed in our care. Thinking of our two sons as non-believers changed our perspective toward them considerably.

Studies of children (Schickedanz, J. A., Schickedanz, Hansen J., and Forsyth, P.D., 1993, in *Understanding Children*) show that there are particular environmental principles critical for healthy child development. These principles include the presence of warm, positive relationships, a few basic rules formed by the family to protect the needs of all, open dialogue, an atmosphere of caring support, and an environment in which children can readily take up the tasks of preparing for adult responsibilities. Families possessing these traits are most likely to produce children who will adopt the spiritual values

Coming in November

Crises in marriage

of their parents in adulthood, develop higher levels of spiritual maturity, and consider the needs of others as well as their own.

Parents need to see this style of family management modeled in their midst. They do not need a perfect model. No pastoral family can provide one anyway. Far more significantly, pastors can provide a view of a family stretching toward God's ideals while at the same time opening a window on how Christian families find forgiveness and reconciliation when they fall short. Our task is to lead our children to the Saviour we have found.

One of life's greatest challenges is to achieve a level of maturity in which we are responsibly independent, while being healthily interdependent. To prepare our children for both is the responsibility of parenthood. Pastors who serve children and their families well will seek to empower parents to steadily release their children as separate individuals, enabling them to take on the decision-making and responsibility appropriate to their age and level of maturity. Children need both roots and wings.

Helping the child in times of crisis

In case of child abuse

- Take the child's report seriously.
- Protect the child.
- Make a report to and cooperate with any available child protection services.
- Listen to the child's feelings. Help release him or her from personal guilt and respond to spiritual questions.
- Help the family access available community resources.
- Encourage the abuser(s) as they undergo professional treatment.
- Provide supportive pastoral care for abuser(s) that helps them take responsibility for their actions, make all possible restitution, and become engaged in the change process.
- Facilitate family reconciliation if and when it becomes possible.
- Assist with grief recovery when grief is present.

Divorce

- Help divorcing parents find ways of telling their children about the divorce.
- Listen to the child's feelings, i.e., anxiety, fear, rejection, abandonment, hurt, confusion, frustration, resentment, and discouragement.
- Assure the children that the divorce is not their fault and the reunion of the parents is not their responsibility.
- Help children identify the positive attributes of both parents.
- Encourage parents to settle their differences without drawing in their children.
- Provide hope for the future and practical support when life seems to be crumbling.
- As children go through stages of grief and loss, help them with the reestablishment of trust.

Death

- Help children accept the reality of death.
- Listen to their feelings; let them weep as they need to and feel pain as a necessary part of healing.
- Invite them to talk about the loved one who has died, but be tolerant of silence; let your presence show that you care.
- Talk to children about the loved one, recalling memories, even humorous anecdotes; let them know you have not forgotten the one who has died.
- Provide the comfort of physical touch—a gentle squeezing of the hand, an arm around the shoulder.
- Provide hope for the future, to know that life can go on, even though we must say goodbye to the hopes and dreams that will never come to pass.

CONTINUING EDUCATION EXERCISE

The crises of children—a special ministry

1. Review your last month's pastoral visitation. In what ways will your experiences enable you to be a coach for families confronting difficulties or moving through important transitions in the near future?
2. During the next few weeks, observe your children in Sabbath school divisions or in church school. What needs are readily apparent through their behavior? In what ways can your ministry better meet these needs?
3. A family suddenly requests a membership transfer to a nearby congregation. You pick up rumors that they are unhappy because their son is being bullied by another boy in the primary class. Outline what your approach will be.

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A synopsis of the SDA Theological Seminary faculty for field use

Benjamin D. Schoun

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary faculty is as international and diverse as the seminary student body. Presently it consists of 57 members, including seven part-time professors emeriti. In addition there are 31 adjunct professors, two visiting professors, 22 affiliated professors, and a number of occasional contract and guest teachers. Twenty-six regular faculty members either were born outside the U.S. or have a non-North American culture. There are six women, one Asian, four Blacks, and six Hispanics.

Of the 57 regular members, 30 have doctoral degrees from schools other than Andrews University and 13 are Andrews alumni. Ten are soon to obtain doctoral degrees. The accumulated years of experience in pastoring, evangelism, missions, or church leadership by the faculty before joining the seminary amounts to 452 years. Faculty members continue their heavy involvement in the church throughout the world.

The following directory gives a synoptic profile of the seminary faculty. It may also serve as a reference source for church leaders who may want to call upon the faculty for special services.

Christian Ministry Department

Douglas R. Kilcher: department chair; director, Center of Continuing Education for Ministry and the M.A. in pastoral ministry; church planting, equipping of laity, church growth, church leadership, and field education. *Lilianne Doukhan:* Beltz Chair of Church Music; worship and church

music. *Roger L. Dudley:* director, Institute of Church Ministry; research, counseling, and religious education. *John F. Duge:* part-time, health ministry and physician-minister relationships. *R. Clifford Jones:* urban ministry, preaching, and Black church ministry. *James J. North:* seminary chaplain; counseling and chaplaincy ministries. *Ricardo Norton:* church growth, evangelism, and Hispanic ministry. *Benjamin D. Schoun:* associate dean; director, Master of Divinity program; church leadership, church organization, and conflict management.

Kenneth B. Stout: chair, H.M.S. Richards Lectureship Committee; preaching and evangelism. *H. Peter Swanson:* pastoral counseling and psychological testing. *Alfonso Valenzuela:* associate director, Institute of Hispanic Ministry; marriage and family, pastoral counseling, and Hispanic ministry. *Ronald H. Whitehead:* director, Center for Youth Evangelism. *Randal R. Wisbey:* director, M.A. in youth ministry; youth ministry, preaching. *Stephen P. Vitrano* (emeritus) part-time: preaching and worship.

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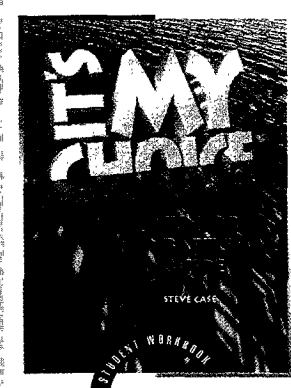
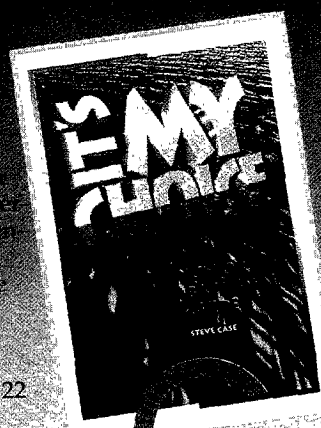
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North American Division Evangelism Institute (NADEI):

Russell Burrill, church growth and public evangelism; *Cynthia Burrill*, felt needs; *Donald C. James*, small groups; *Eduard E. Schmidt*, personal evangelism and Hispanic evangelism; and *Ernest B. Young*, African-American evangelism.

Church History

Walter B. T. Douglas: department chair; history of religion, world religions, English reformation, and mission. *P. Gerard Damsteegt*: historical theology and Adventist history. *George Knight*: Adventist history, modern church history, and educational philosophy. *Jerry Moon*: associate editor, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; Reformation and Ellen White studies. *C. Mervyn Maxwell* (emeritus) part time: early church history, Adventist history and theology. *Kenneth A. Strand* (emeritus) part-time: Reformation, Sabbath, and Revelation.

New Testament

Robert M. Johnston: department chair; gospels, Judaism and Christian origins. *P. Richard Choi*: writings of Paul, advanced Greek, and New Testament ethics. *Jon Paulien*: New Testament interpretation, apocalyptic, and reaching the secular mind. *W. Larry Richards*: director, Greek Manuscript Research Center; New Testament exegesis and New Testament formation.

Old Testament

Richard M. Davidson: department chair; Old Testament interpretation, sanctuary, and Old Testament theology. *Niels-Erik Andreasen*: university president; Old Testament studies. *Jacques B. Doukhan*: Hebrew, Old Testament exegesis and eschatology. *Roy E. Gane*: Hebrew Bible, ancient Near Eastern languages, and sanctuary. *P. David Merling*: curator, Horn Archaeological Museum; archaeology and history of antiquity. *J. Bjornar Storfjell*: archaeology and history of antiquity. *Randall W. Younker*: director, Ph.D./Th.D. programs and the Institute of

Archaeology; archaeology and science and religion. *Leona G. Running* (emerita) part-time: biblical and other ancient Near Eastern languages.

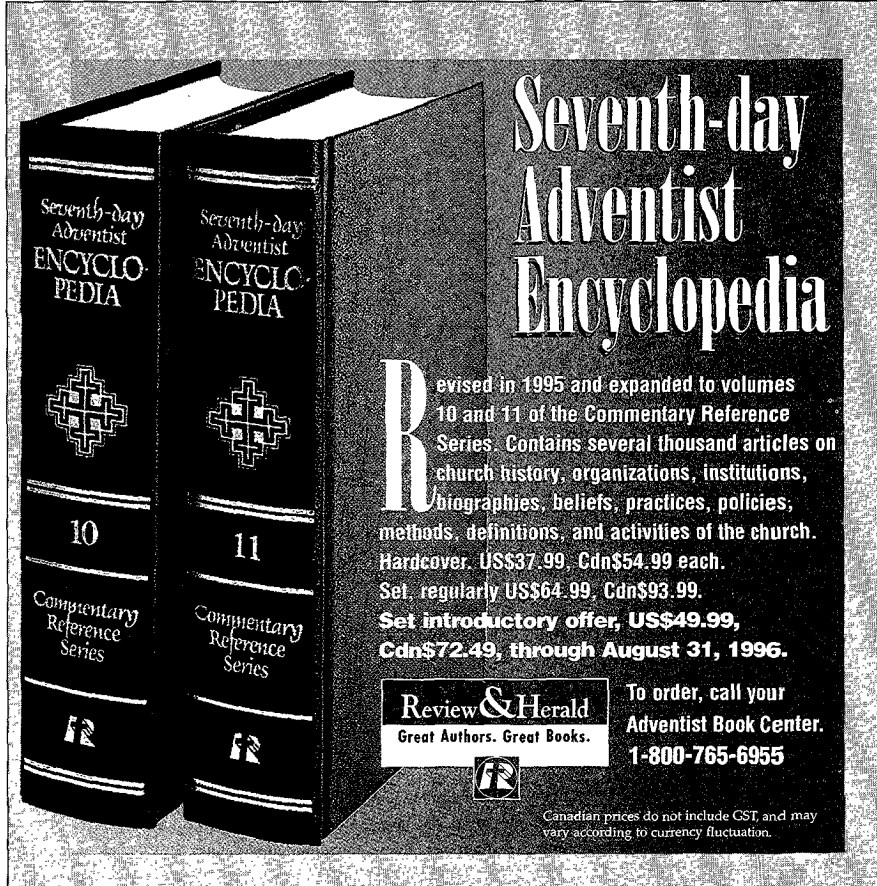
Theology and Christian Philosophy

Miroslav M. Kis: department chair; ethics and church and society. *John T. Baldwin*: acting director, M.Div. program, and director, seminary chorus; science and religion, systematic theology. *Antonio Bueno*: historical theology, salvation. *Fernando L. Canale*: philosophy and systematic theology. *JoAnn Davidson*: under study. *Atilio Dupertuis*: director, Institute of Hispanic Ministry; theology and courses for Hispanics. *J. H. Denis Fortin*: historical theology, Adventist theology, Ellen White studies. *Warren Johns*: seminary librarian. *Peter VanBemmelen*: biblical theology, eschatology, righteousness by faith. *Daniel Augsburg* (emeritus) part-time: historical theology and church history. *Raoul Dederen* (emeritus) part-time: historical theology.

World Mission

Jon Dybdahl: department chair; theology and practice of mission. *Bruce Bauer*: director, D.Min. program; mission. *Erich Baumgartner*: coordinator, Global Data Bank; leadership development, church growth, and mission preparation. *Patricia Jo Gustin*: director, Institute of World Mission; mission preparation. *Rudolf Maier*: director, M.S.A. in International Development; mission and development. *Bruce Moyer*: director, Center for Urban Mission; urban mission and mission preparation. *Nancy Vyhmeister*: editor, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; mission, biblical languages, and research. *Werner Vyhmeister*: seminary dean; history of mission. *Russell Staples* (emeritus) part-time: theology of mission. ■

Benjamin D. Schoun, D.Min., is the associate dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.



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Service Station—open for business

Fred Cornforth

A full-service ministry to those in need

Fred Cornforth is the executive director of Service Station in Boise, Idaho.

Mexican yellow jackets swarm from their hole in the ground around his legs, stinging him several times, but the 28-year-old bank president continues to hold the stick until the surveyor gets his reading. "Hey," he says, "we needed the reading from that point to build this orphanage. If I hadn't done it, someone else would have had to do it."

This banker is just one of a growing number of young adults who are plugging into a new resource for pastors and interested others. Called Service Station, the organization is based in Boise, Idaho. Its purpose is to create short-term volunteer opportunities for young adults (high school and college students) that helps them see the impact they can make on the lives of others. Currently the Service Station operates in Mexico, Guatemala, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Thailand helping to build orphanages, clinics, and schools. Service Station also operates sites in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, where volunteers assist in soup kitchens, food banks, homeless shelters, environmental projects, and safe houses for runaway teens.

Pastor Dennis Nikel, from British Columbia, who traveled with groups of volunteers to San Francisco in 1995 and Mexico in 1996, says, "Our members had a rich time learning about all the needs that are out there—and how we can help meet those needs." Amy Pallo, 19, who traveled with both groups, says, "I've never seen the things I've seen there. It is totally different from my life back home. I kind of hate to go back and start my own little selfish life again. I want to do more things like this where I live."

Service groups have come from

different parts of the world—Europe, Asia, and North and South America. No matter where they come from or where they go, the result is the same: their lives change on these trips, making them more aware of what people's needs are back home, and most important, how they can help meet those needs. In a very real way, participants are becoming the "gospel with the skin on" to the people they serve.

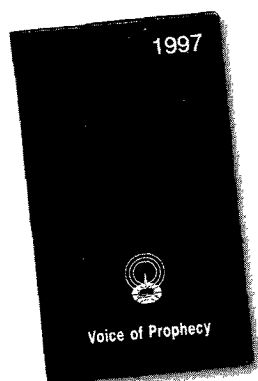
Helping those in need

She always wanted to be an attorney. She had good grades, is charming, and possesses a drive that leads her to fulfill the goals she focuses on. Asked why she wanted to be an attorney, she replied, "The money is good, and you hold clout." Then her life changed. After spending time with Service Station, she decided that she still wanted to be an attorney, but for a different reason altogether. Now she wants to start her own law firm and help battered women and other struggling people to get the legal care they need but can't afford. She says, "I've discovered that true fulfillment in life comes from using my talents and skills to help others." When people emulate the life of Jesus, they become more caring and contributing people.

It has been observed that Jesus did more healing than preaching. But can the same be said of those who claim to follow Him today? Far too often we excel in preaching and come up lame in healing. However, through experiences such as those provided by Service Station, many are becoming healers of international and domestic wounds.

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community and global needs creates a shift in the basic thinking and attitudes of young adults, families, schools, churches, and civic groups. That shift transforms them into a positive force in their neighborhoods. In their inmost being they begin to see their neighborhood, country, and world in a different way. They strive to help others because they know from experience, such as the experience found through Service Station, that they can make a difference in people's lives.

What actually happens on the trips?

So what kinds of things happen on Service Station trips? Each site is a completely different experience. Inner-city projects might find participants spending one night in a cardboard box, simulating a homeless person's life. The next day might find them as part of a team of 20 helping to feed 4,000 people. Experiencing the situation (homelessness) and then becoming involved in a practical way to help the homeless (assisting in a soup kitchen) is an example of intentional planning.

Michael Stevens, 17, of Cleveland, Ohio, describes one of his nights this way: "I knew people lived this way—I'd seen it on TV. I just had no idea what it was really like. It blew me away! I'm starting to understand the homeless problem a little better." The night may be over, but the experience will be with him forever. After serving breakfast for others and themselves at a local soup kitchen, volunteers may help at a local recreation center, where urban kids, some of them homeless, do crafts, receive tutoring, and play games with Service Station participants.

Kari Johnson, a counselor with 15 years' experience, says, "It is impossible to understand the homeless situation by simply spending one night in a cardboard box. However, the sounds and smells of the street that the homeless experience every night are etched in my mind. Seeing what people are doing for others and actually getting involved with their shelters, soup kitchens, and recreation centers really sparked my interest. I hope to be involved in some kind of outreach

to the homeless when I get home to Phoenix."

International outreach

International trips involve building projects. Each project offers highly meaningful experiences as volunteers get to know other cultures and interface with varied problems. In Guatemala an orphanage operated by International Children's Care (ICC) attends to more than 220 orphans. The needs in this area urgently call for this ministry to expand.

One boy who is now being cared for at the Guatemala site tells of his father's suicide in jail. The father had just been arrested for the murder of his wife, whom he had killed two years earlier. This boy and his two younger sisters tell a graphic story of unimaginable horror involving them personally, as they lived through their mother's murder by their father. These children are one example of the kind of ministry Service Station volunteers become involved in.

In Mexico it is estimated that 20 to 25 children are abandoned each day in

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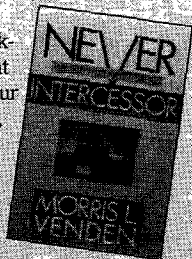
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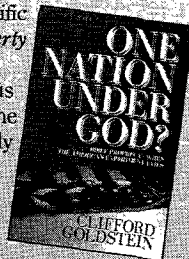
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Tijuana as parents flee to the United States in search of a better life. Service Station volunteers manage more than 600 people a year for ICC as they build a receiving center and orphanage that will help care for these children.

Opportunities to serve offered through Service Station

Want to change your congregation, your youth or young adult group, or the families in your community? Check out these opportunities.

Los Angeles, California: December 26, 1996-January 3, 1997. Teens 14-18 years of age are needed to clean up graffiti, help families get the immunizations they need, and work with soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and food banks. Then we will head over to Venice Beach for beach cleanup, and work on several Habitat for Humanity homes in sunny southern California. (Call for other dates and age group opportunities.)

San Francisco, California: December 26, 1996-January 3, 1997. Young adults (19-35) are needed (call for other dates

and age group opportunities). Few cities are capable of conjuring up the images of progressiveness and romance that San Francisco does. Constantly rated as one of the top 10 cities people around the world want to visit, San Francisco is a mix of the best and worst of humanity. More than 7 million people claim the Bay Area as their home, but tens of thousands live in conditions unfit for human beings. We'll be involved in service projects such as food banks, feeding more than 8,000 people per day, beach habitat restoration, and Habitat for Humanity!

Washington, D.C.: March 23-29, 1997. (Call for other dates.) Open for all age groups. The stark realities of living in Washington, D.C., are almost incredible. Home to the most powerful government in the world, the city is also home to some of the most discouraging living conditions. What can be done?

There are many potential answers, but the biggest challenge is to try to turn lives around in a personal way. You will find yourself assisting at homeless shelters, soup kitchens, orphanages, and Habitat for

Humanity homes. You will be mending much-needed clothing, renovating existing homes and run down shelters, and more.

Baja, Mexico: year-around. Open for all age groups. Nestled in the mountain region of the Baja, Valley of the Trinidad is home to a real need. Operated by International Children's Care, the Oasis, an adoption and orphanage organization, is under construction. The Oasis will be home to about 150 orphans from the Baja and other parts of northern Mexico. Abandonment, death of parents, and other human tragedies plead for a safe place for these children. You and your group can help make the orphanage operational by being involved in completing the facilities.

For brochures and other information on our sites in Guatemala, Haiti, Thailand, the Dominican Republic, and all the opportunities listed above, please call our toll-free line, 800-617-2498. You can access our homepage on the Internet at <http://www.servicestation.org>. E-mail addresses are fred@servicestation.org or Compu-Serve 74617,335. Our address is P.O. Box 190167, Boise, ID 83719-0167. ■

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Common sense pastoring

James A. Cress

What do pastors most need to accomplish their ministry? After personal spirituality—a daily walk with Jesus Christ—I would suggest the next essential is common sense.

The very term, common sense, is an oxymoron since it is an uncommon trait to possess. Likewise, the term is difficult to define because like water held in our hands, common sense is more difficult to grasp than it is to observe. Common sense may best be described by the greek word, *phronesis*, meaning practical wisdom. Aristotle considered *phronesis* to be about the most important of all virtues.

Common sense pastoring suggests that practical wisdom reigns over theoretical concepts. It suggests that head knowledge is most effective when applied to useful experience in the crucible of daily life.

Common sense means thoroughly examining any idea for its real-life usefulness. Its genius is application more than description. To use the vernacular of the automobile tire moving the vehicle, common sense is “where the rubber meets the road.”

Those who lack common sense usually out number those who possess it to such an extent that the few who actually utilize common sense are considered gifted. I disagree.

While pastors sometimes bring about their own defeat by failing to employ common sense, I believe that it is a skill that can be learned and sharpened.

I reject the popular concept that either you are born with common sense or you will never possess it at all. While many individuals innately focus on practical applications more readily

than some of their peers, I am convinced that certain methods can be used to gain a practical quality of wisdom, if an individual is willing to pay the price for this knowledge. What would it cost you personally to embrace the following concepts?

Attitude is more important than aptitude. Placing yourself in the position of a seeker is vastly more important than considering yourself to be the fountain of knowledge. If you believe that you have all the answers, you will seldom ask the important questions. If you believe your opinion is more valuable than all others, you will seldom listen to the wisdom that begs for entrance to your closed mind. If your way is the only way of doing things, you need an attitude adjustment.

What you learned yesterday is more important than what you do today. Experience is a difficult teacher. She gives the test first and the lesson afterward. Common sense can be learned from what worked or failed in your own past experience. Capitalize on that knowledge now. Grow from the challenges you have already faced.

Trying something different may be the wisest course. Repetition for the sake of consistency destroys progress. Recently I read this definition of insanity: “doing the same things over and over and expecting different results.” If change is needed, set a vision for the future and invite your members to move forward with you.

Trying something different may be the most risky course. Any change costs something. Some members will resist any innovation, so alterations just for the sake of change may be foolish.

Carefully learn the history of your church. Your congregation has a story that has brought it to today's situation. Build on your church's strengths and apply what you have learned from the past. Make sure that your leaders are with you and willing to help pay the cost.

Offer alternatives rather than decisions. Common sense pastoring means seeking consensus in any matter that does not involve moral issues. Pastors should also remember that moral issues are far less in number than we might imagine. You are safe to confine such issues to the 10 commandments. Matters such as the color of carpet or what songs are sung in Kindergarten or who leads VBS crafts are seldom of such magnitude that they should ignite divisive controversy. Suggest alternatives to a committee for their selection or input. Then be willing to live with their choices.

Attempting something is more important than doing it perfectly. I'm always amazed at how the Holy Spirit uses an atmosphere of evangelism in the congregation to reduce other problems. If you wait until you possess the expertise of a great evangelist, you may never get around to active outreach. However, if you use your talents to proclaim the gospel in a public presentation, you'll discover heaven's blessings on both your efforts and your whole congregation.

Common sense pastoring is an ongoing adventure and this is a topic we will consider again in this column. In the meantime, please share your own ideas of common sense pastoral skills with me, and you will bless us all with your wisdom as I share it in this column! ■

Contemporary Comments

As a pastor, I like to keep my Sabbath school teachers on the cutting edge by providing them with a variety of resources. A new resource can be found each week on the CompuServe Adventists On-line forum called "Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath school lesson."

The one-page commentary is fresh, written each week, and downloadable to anyone on the Adventist forum. It's available by Thursday each week and can be found in the Church Resources section of the forum library. The commentaries are written by a variety of pastors and Sabbath school teachers, who highlight a contemporary event and draw a spiritual parallel to the lesson study for that week.

It is a great discussion starter for teachers and is provided as a service by the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division. You can copy and distribute as many sheets as you would like to your Sabbath school teachers. You can even forward an E-mail copy to anyone who might use the resource.—Curtis Rittenour, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Preaching questionnaire

Here's a preaching questionnaire that I recently used in our congregation with very practical and profitable results. You may find it useful too.

1. How many minutes do you think the pastor's sermon ought to be?

() 20 () 30 () 40 () 50 () 60

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 as highest) I would rate the pastor's preaching: _____

3. This is what I like most about the pastor's preaching: _____

4. This is what I dislike most about the pastor's preaching: _____

5. I believe that the pastor could improve the effectiveness of his or her sermons by: _____

6. In order to meet my spiritual needs, I would like the pastor to preach sermons on the following topics or themes in 1997:

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

7. The types of sermons I find most interesting are (check three):

- () textual () topical
() prophetic () doctrinal
() ethical () narrative
() expository () experiential
() evangelistic
() life situation
() questions/answers
() other _____

8. More than anything else, our church needs a sermon on: _____

9. I wish the pastor would invite the following ministers to preach:

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

10. I wish the pastor would invite the following ministers to preach *again*:

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

11. I wish the pastor would refrain from inviting the following ministers to preach again:

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

12. Is there a passage of Scripture or doctrinal teaching that you would like the pastor to make clear in a sermon? _____

13. I need to hear a sermon every year on: _____

14. It has been a long time since I heard a sermon on: _____

15. I would like the pastor to repeat his or her sermon on: _____

16. I have the following advice for the pastor on his or her preaching: _____

—Patrick E. Vincent, Orlando, Florida

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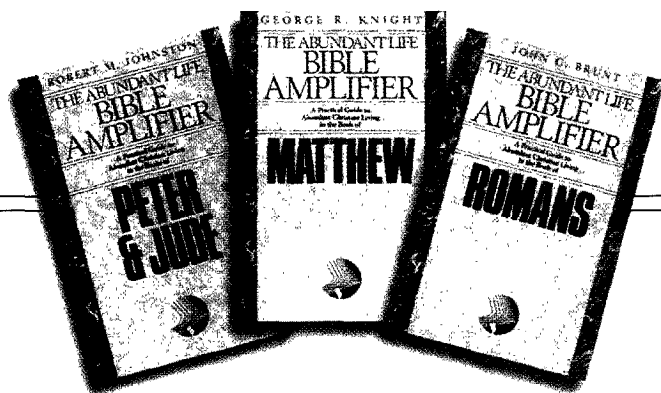
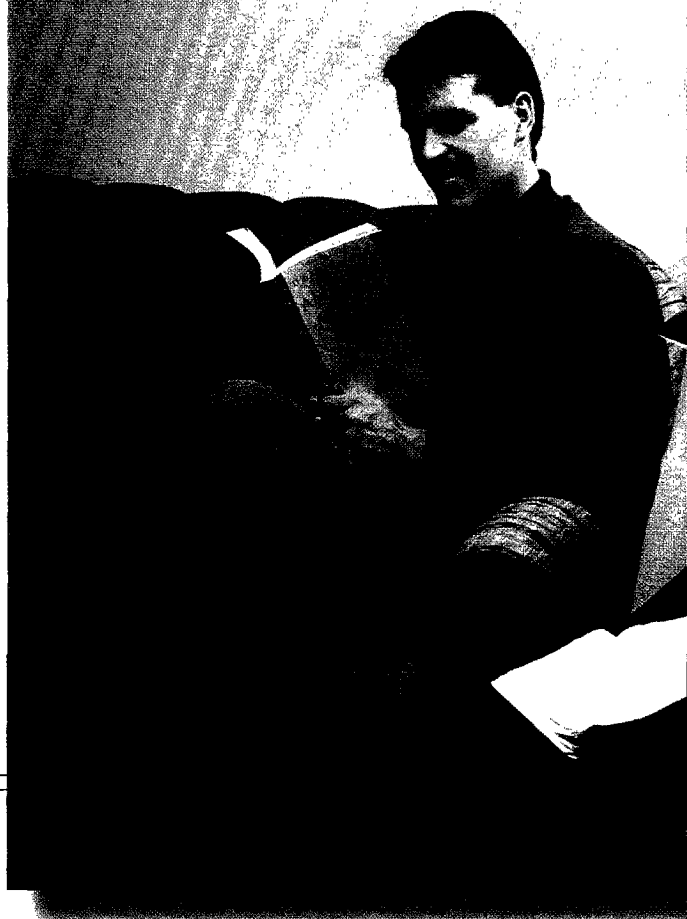
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