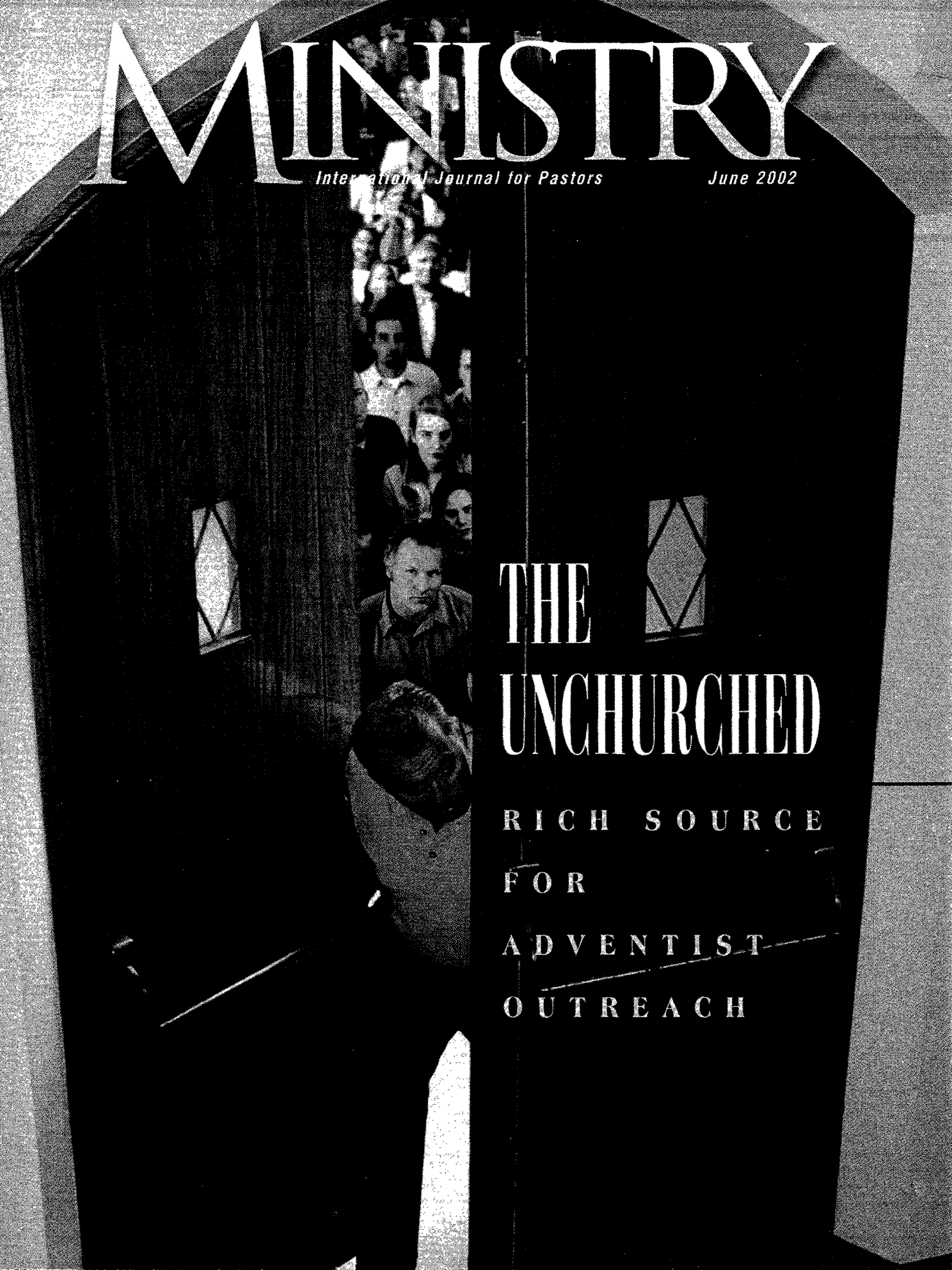


# MINISTRY



*International Journal for Pastors*

June 2002

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FOR  
ADVENTIST  
OUTREACH

EVERY  
ISSUE

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## MINISTRY

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# THOUGH THERE MAY BE A PLACE FOR THE USE OF DRAMA, THE QUESTION IS, SHALL IT BE IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE?

## Affirmation: Crippling or healing?

The article "Affirmation: Crippling or Healing?" (Julia Vernon, January 2002) was right on point.

One is reminded of the pithy comment by martyred Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer in another (but not unrelated) thought context, when he thundered the truth that "cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the Church." So, too, is "easy" or "early" or "over-used" affirmation an "enemy" of effective counseling.

—Michas Ohnstad, North Branch, Minnesota.

## Genesis 1 and the building of Israelite sanctuary

I was intrigued with Angel Rodriguez's summary of recent scholarship linking the Old Testament sanctuary with the Creation account ("Genesis 1 and the Building of the Israelite Sanctuary," February 2002). His mention of two "sevens" in the tabernacle construction narrative sent me scurrying to my Bible.

Sure enough, there they were: seven divine speeches in Exodus 25–31, and seven repetitions of the phrase "as the Lord commanded Moses" (40:17–33).

My curiosity took me a little further. It appears that there is a third series of seven similar statements in chapters 38 and 39, where the phrase "the Lord commanded Moses" appears seven times in verses 38:22; 39:1, 7, 21, 26, 31, and 32.

This led me to wonder: Could the

summary statement in 39:42, 43 be seen as a chiasmic link between the series in 38 and 39 (construction of the tabernacle) and the final series in 40 (erection of the tabernacle)?

Bible trivia? Perhaps, but the more I study this amazing Book, the more it is evident that a divine hand put it all together, and that we've not yet plumbed the beautiful depths of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

—Dale Wolcott, Midland, Michigan.

## 1+1=1: The impossible possibility

I've just read the editorial and John Fowler's wonderful article, "1+1=1," in the February 2002 issue of *Ministry*. Thank you so much for publishing it. Tears came to my eyes as I applied those words to those who suffer rejection because of their sexuality. In a way, I wish they could have been mentioned in the article, too, but if the principles presented here take root in people's hearts, one hopes that someday the rejection of homosexuals will cease.

—Carrol Grady, Snohomish, Washington.

## March 2002 issue

I enjoyed greatly the March 2002 issue on health. However, I was disappointed that it failed to include an article on exercise. I was not surprised, because typically exercise is the least addressed issue in our health message.

For many years I did not exercise. But almost eight years ago, when I turned 40, I started walking. I had been

a vegetarian since college. I changed my diet to vegan. Even though I was healthy, I was not as healthy as I should have been because of the lack of exercise and a few extra pounds.

My exercise program has evolved from walking to cycling. I now ride a racing bicycle for exercise, as riding is easy on my joints and pushes my heart harder than walking ever did. Last year I rode more than 3,600 miles. I have found that I have to make time to exercise, but it pays rich dividends.

I wish there was more emphasis on exercise in our health message. Too many do not exercise regularly. In my opinion, when we fail to exercise, the health of the Holy Spirit's temple, our bodies, is compromised, which inevitably results in excessive spending of God's money for our health care.

—Vialo Weis, Jr., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

## Using drama in Christian ministry

Though there may be a place for the use of drama ("Using Drama in Christian Ministry," Gary Tolbert, April 2002), the question is, shall it be in the worship service? It seems to me that of all the things that we do in church life, the worship service should be real, not virtual. I do not think we ever need to get to the place where we feel that preaching is no longer an effective means of communication. I believe that what the church needs is not more actors, but more preachers. ■

—Richard O'Fall, Orlando, Florida.

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# Qualities of a dying generation

WILL EVA



Deep down don't we all know how desperately we need more of these characteristics ourselves, here and now? Despite the serious mistakes that generation made (as did every other generation before them), did they not leave us a legacy of immense social and spiritual good?

With all the hindsight faults we critically observe in that generation and how it ran the world and the church, we cannot afford to inhibit the instinctive, sobering question that presents itself so forcefully to our hearts; the one which suggests that some of the fault lines our later generations have come to indulge are decidedly more serious than theirs were.

I sense an immense need to return to these values, which are simply, and fundamentally, Christian. They have the earmarks, or rather they are the benchmarks of the genuine selfless love we all are called to seek out and exemplify. They are indeed the ways of a King who died, not recently, nor at a 101, but long ago at a much younger age. Yet One who is eternal.

I have come to wonder with a new uneasiness and urgency, if the absence of the qualities so present in my father and grandfather, both of them departed leaders from a bygone church era, are not exactly what I and my church now lack and need most.

Such qualities are worth something that transcends a mere spasm of inspired or inspiring thought. Characteristics and values of such worth demand, yes, demand, our most earnest prayer, application and the full force of all our grace-inspired, Spirit-assisted efforts. ■

Perhaps one of the most telling negative marks of subsequent generations, mine included, is the way we have tended to devalue the qualities of this great generation, qualities that we are now just beginning to recognize again for their surpassing value. Now and again we even enjoy a deprecating chuckle at their expense. With condescension we trace—for the sake of our own conversational entertainment—our critique of their stoic excesses and their neurotic politeness.

And then there are their notorious notions of modesty and decency, their respect for authority and other people in general, not to mention their penchant for precise honesty and conscientiousness in arenas that actually matter. And to our generations, their unpretentious, uncompromising stand for "principle" may have seemed far too elaborate, along with their stiff, automatic dignity and their recognition of the value of things kept private and unexposed to prurient eyes and ears. But were they not irritatingly positive and usually full of good will . . . and love?

It was in the United Kingdom in March 2002, when the Queen Mother died at 101.

Along with the outpouring of sorrow so obvious in that nation as it faced the loss of the "Queen Mum" herself, there was a further sense of reduction and a deeper sum of assembled national sadness among the people.

Tony Parsons, a British newspaper columnist, was able to identify and describe with pathos the extent of his nation's loss. His commentary in *The Mirror* on April 1 speaks volumes to all nations and, I think, to Christian clergy everywhere.

Writing not only of the British Queen Mother but of her generation, he said, "A braver, better generation are dying off and we will never see their like again. A generation who had it harder than ourselves, yet who seemed happier . . . who understood the meaning of selflessness, stoicism and courage."

Parsons wrote of "the millions of men and women [of that generation] who are also dying . . . whose names will never make it to the headlines." He wrote of "that great dying generation" so very special in their self-effacing valour, their modesty, and their sense of understatement. He talked of "their resilience that masked a will of steel" and their integrity.

A sense of tragedy tinged these words: "They are saying goodbye now, the generation that lived through the war as mothers, as soldiers, as children. A mixed bunch, of course [who] share certain qualities . . . decency, humour, courage . . . This generation had a sense of duty that we find hard to comprehend."

# The unchurched:

## A rich source for Adventist outreach

Russell Burrill



Russell Burrill, D.Min., is director of the North American Division Evangelism Institute (NADEI) and chair of the Department of Christian Ministry, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

The United States of America is now one of the greatest mission fields in the world. Out of a population of about 300 million, over 200 million can be classified as unchurched; that is, they do not attend a church regularly on any given weekend.

This unchurched population is not secular anymore. The secularism of the 1960s and 1970s has been replaced by experiential religion. In the 1960s, Harvey Cox forecast in *The Secular City* that religion would decline as secularism took over. But he now admits that America is in a postsecular age. Secularism as such is dying, while religion remains a dominant factor in people's lives.<sup>1</sup> America may be in the midst of one of the greatest "revivals" in history and yet this revival has left the organized church almost totally out of the picture, while a species of consumer religion takes its place.

George Barna groups the unchurched in the United States into five categories:<sup>2</sup> atheists, 14 percent; those belonging to faiths other than Christian, 16 percent; nominal Christians, 42 percent; Christians with moderate commitment, 20 percent; Christians with absolute commitment, 8 percent.<sup>3</sup> Imagine eight percent of the unchurched absolutely committed to the Christian faith and yet not attending any church! If the church could reap just this 8 percent, its membership would increase by 16 million.

Yet in spite of all the evangelism done by all the denominations, the percentage of Americans not attending church has remained constant. In other words, few respond to the vast amounts of energy expended to convert them. Mike Regele, in his book *Death of the Church*, declares that most churches have been growing by simply switching members from one denomination to another.<sup>4</sup> His study also discovered that only two denominations successfully reach the unchurched, but they are so small, they don't make much difference.<sup>5</sup>

Regele found that nondenominational sects in the United States and churches such as New Age, Unitarians, Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses were on the winning side when people switched denominations. Adventist, Reformed/Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Catholic denominations came out on the losing side of all the switching of denominations.<sup>6</sup> According to Regele, Seventh-day Adventists are doing a very poor job of "sheep stealing."

Regele's research also focused on who was reaching the unchurched. The top four groups reaching the unchurched were either not Christian or not Evangelical. They were, in descending order: New Age, Unitarian/Universalist, Hindu/Shinto/ Buddhist, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The next two groups were non-denominational ones. Close behind them were Seventh-day Adventists, followed by Presbyterians/ Reformed. The rest of the denominations were not very successful in reaching the unchurched.<sup>7</sup>

While Seventh-day Adventists can take comfort from these findings and pride themselves in being one of the denominations<sup>8</sup> that is successfully reaching the unchurched, they must not forget Regele's conclusion that they don't make much of a difference because they are so small.

Seventh-day Adventists often decry the charge that they are not very successful in reaching the unchurched. However, the reason Adventists look good in this arena is that the record of everyone else is deplorable. Adventists need to remind themselves that our small drop is not making a major impact overall.

### Adventists and the unreached

One of the surprising results of Regele's study was his discovery that Adventists are not

good “sheep stealers.” Most Adventists have assumed that the majority of people who join the Adventist Church come from some other denomination. That may have been true in the past, but it is no longer true. The vast majority who join the Adventist church are coming from an unchurched background.

This has at least two implications.

First, we can no longer assume that people understand the basics of the

series. However, as the meetings advanced, I noticed it was the churching who began to drop out and the unchurched who stayed. We then ended the meetings, baptizing primarily unchurched people.

I usually use two handbills in my meetings and compare the results of each. Handbills with Jesus on the cover, usually draw a more churching crowd, whereas handbills with all the prophetic beasts featured have a ten-

evangelism, but finally realized that they were apparently just wasting the money expended. They eventually came back to using traditional public meetings.

### Trying new approaches

Does this mean we should not try new evangelistic strategies? Absolutely not. At the same time we must realize that we have yet to discover a strategy that actually brings in people better than the relatively traditional approach of public evangelism.

Many complain about public evangelism, but again, we have not yet discovered anything that comes near to being as successful in reaching unchurched people. Therefore, common sense tells us that we must not abandon the one thing that is at least reaching some segment of the unchurched population. At the same time, we must keep searching for something that will help us reach even more of the unchurched people.

It is also possible that the success of the more traditional public meeting is partially due to the fact that Seventh-day Adventists are so familiar with it, having had it so much a part of our cultural and ecclesiastical infrastructure for so many years. It is now so integral to our evangelistic approach that not only do congregations, pastors and evangelists more naturally gravitate to it, but we are more adept and thus successful in carrying it out. This could imply that if we stayed with and refined some of the new approaches to the unchurched to the same extent as we have the more traditional approaches, in the long run the results may prove more satisfying.

Over the years, I have watched several new churches arise, attempting to target unchurched people. They have tried an array of innovative approaches to attract the unchurched population. The ones that have been successful usually have been planted in areas with a heavy Adventist population. They have been very successful in reaching “unchurched Adventists.” However,

## THE VAST MAJORITY WHO JOIN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH ARE COMING FROM AN UNCHURCHED BACKGROUND

Christian faith when they join an Adventist Church. We must begin by teaching them the basic gospel.

Second, we need to improve our outreach to the people of other denominations. Here Adventists have given up too much to the non-denominational churches. According to Barna, as many as three out of four regular attendees are not biblical Christians, but simply attend the most visible of Christian events—the weekly worship service.<sup>9</sup> These people must be reached with the distinctive Christian message that is central to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

If Seventh-day Adventists are doing better than any other denomination in reaching the unchurched, then certainly some of our methods to reach them must be working well. Since most Adventist evangelism has been in the form of traditional public evangelistic series concentrating on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, it is easy to conclude that this form of evangelism must be successful in reaching the unchurched.

When I first read Regele's findings on Adventists and the unchurched, I was skeptical. I then began to analyze the fruits of my own evangelistic series. I discovered that initially we had churching, as well as unchurched people attending our evangelistic

dency to draw a more unchurched crowd. Evidently, unchurched people are drawn, initially at least, by the Adventist prophetic approach.

Which of the unchurched groups are we reaching with this approach? In terms of Barna's identifications, we are probably reaching the eight percent who are totally committed to the Christian faith and some of the 20 percent who are moderately committed to Christianity. What about the rest? I believe no one has been successful in reaching the other 72 percent of unchurched Americans. That is the challenge for all Christians.

In preparation for the international church-planting conference, SEEDS 2001, I asked Dr. Joseph Kidder, a colleague at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, to contact every conference in North America to find out what innovative types of evangelism were being used successfully today. After contacting nearly every conference, he reported that, almost without exception, none of the many innovative approaches tried had worked.

The only approach that was working was public evangelism in one form or another. One conference administrator indicated that his conference had put nearly a million dollars into innovative approaches to

there is usually only limited success here. Thus, they eventually plateau.

Very few have been successful in reaching the unchurched beyond the unchurched Adventist. They have attracted some unchurched people to their services, but have been unable to take them much beyond the initial contacts. Churches of this nature have rarely had success outside of the Adventist population centers.

### Evangelism, a process

Where lies the solution? There is no easy answer. Again however, nothing seems as successful as the tried Adventist prophetic approach. Even though many unchurched will never be reached by this emphasis, it should be clear to us that we must not abandon our traditional prophetic approach. It is working and will continue to reach many people. The truth is that we still need to refine and increase our effective use of this medium to reach unchurched people.

It is important to remember that evangelism is a process. There is no one event that can do all the work. Sowing, cultivating, and reaping may still be reminders of our agrarian past, but they still illustrate the process nature of evangelism. Our problem with public evangelism is that we have expected it to do all three: *sow*, *cultivate*, and *reap* in just five weeks or less. Impossible. Public evangelism was never meant to do that; it is only the reaping arm of this threefold process.

I have discovered that church members involved in evangelism tend to err on two different sides of this process. Either they spend all their time sowing and some cultivating, or they major in reaping. Some even think that they can just go to the church, turn the satellite on, hoping that Mark Finley or Dwight Nelson will do all the rest. They may then even pronounce with certainty that they have tried "satellite evangelism" and it has not worked.

Of course, that's not surprising. Evangelism is a process and one can-

not reap if nothing has been sown. Despite the fact that God, of course, is always working and preparing people whom evangelists might reap in a series of meetings, usually if there is no human sowing, there will be very little reaping.

On the other side, there are those who focus on innovative ways of making friends with the unchurched, inviting them to church events and attempting to involve them in an array of ways in the life of the church community. Unfortunately many of these initiatives fail to ever see many people being baptized and joining the church. They just become good friends. The reason: They are sowing and cultivating, but never hold a reaping event. My observation is that a lot of things we have tried have been successful and did what they were intended to do. However, we have not seen them as part of a holistic process; sowing, cultivating, and reaping.

If we desire to increase our ability to reach the unchurched, we must all keep on doing what we are doing, but add the things we have left out. If we have been focusing on reaping, keep up the reaping events, but add to it much sowing and cultivating.

If a congregation has been majoring in sowing and cultivating, inviting people to the feast, but have not held a reaping event, then continue the sowing and cultivating, but add reaping. It does not have to be a traditional prophetic approach, but some kind of reaping event is definitely needed.

Our research discovered some innovative forms of public evangelism that are working. Many are shorter events than the five weeks of the traditional model, but there is a definite event for reaping. Without it the harvest will be lost.

If Adventists could successfully marry reaping events to the innovative sowing and cultivating we do, we have the potential to reach a much greater segment of the unchurched than at present. ■

- 1 See Preface to Thomas G. Bandy, *Kicking Habits* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997), 11.
- 2 George Barna Seminar, Indianapolis, May 2001.
- 3 The Barna study identifies the desire for increased knowledge and understanding of the Bible as being critical to the interest found in this 8 percent of committed Christians among the unchurched. Seventh-day Adventist approaches to evangelism should be aware of this as they seek to reach this segment of the American population.
- 4 Mike Regele, *Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing), 154-160.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 160-164.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 8 Nondenominational churches by their very nature are not considered denominations, hence Seventh-day Adventists would be doing better, according to Regele, than any other denomination in reaching unchurched people.
- 9 George Barna, Barna Research Online, 2001.

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Help and Anointed One

Jesus, Jesus, Holy and anointed one, Jesus.  
Your name is like honey on my lips.  
Your Spirit like water in my soul!  
Your work is a lamp unto my feet  
Jesus, I love you, I love you,  
Jesus, Jesus, risen and exalted one, Jesus.



# Finding a faith-based optimism

Skip Bell



*Skip Bell, D.Min., is associate professor of church leadership and director of the Doctor of Ministry program, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

The din of the restaurant faded. The clink of knife on plate and spoon in bowl slowly receded into an expectant silence. A nod of the head from my conference president was all I needed to see the hopes and dreams of my congregation realized.

I carefully studied the strong, imposing figure of my president. He was tall, dignified, a bit unapproachable. I was part of the North Dakota Conference, a young pastor in his third year of ministry.

This was not the first time I'd approached this impressive man. Twice, I had gone to his office to plead the cause of our small congregation.

## Our vision

Now my church had a vision, an evangelistic strategy that would double our current membership of 92 in three years. We had the enthusiasm and energy, but such an expanded membership would never fit into our current facility. It was tired and old, a white-gray building, just too small for our plans. We needed a new one.

Already, our land search committee had located the perfect property, three acres one block from a well-traveled road. We made the purchase. The new church would be located in an area that was both easily accessible and reputable. Building plans were underway; the new building was certainly going to be ade-

quate. Unfortunately, one rather large hurdle stood in the path of our potential. In order to begin building, standard policy stated that we needed to have at least 50 percent of our total project expense in hand. Being a small congregation, we just had not been able to scrape the money together.

Surely the president saw how important this new church was. Our city included not only the state university, but a large nearby airbase. Surely he saw how easily he could assist. Why had he and the conference treasurer merely said, "We'll pray for you"? That seemed to be just a nice way of saying "No."

What I wanted to hear, of course, were the words, "The conference will provide an additional \$40,000 above what the policy ordinarily allows."

Now, I stood before this man for the third time. As I waited, the cheery morning sounds of the restaurant in which we had met again filled my ears. Carefully, I presented my case. I talked of our evangelistic plan. I talked of our vision and enthusiasm. Excitedly, I mentioned all the baptisms we had had. The new church was something the Lord could use to bless a major city.

"We're such a small congregation," I reminded him. "We need help!"

The next moment is indelibly etched in my mind. Knowing exactly what he was doing and why, our conference president straightened to his full height, looked me in the eye, paused, and said in a quiet, firm tone, "Yes, you are small, aren't you?"

A chill raced through my body. I was ashamed and grateful.

Suddenly I saw. . . .

\*\*\*

The servant of Elisha was dismayed. The early morning light glinted off the armor and chariots of what seemed to be an immense mass of soldiers. Horses—apprehensive and alert—pawed the ground. The Syrian army had the city of Dothan surrounded, and no escape remained. Overcome with fear, the servant backed away from the scene before him. Trembling, he ran to Elisha and cried, "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15)

Calmly Elisha replied, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed, "Open his eyes that he may see." "So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and



chariots of fire round about Elisha”  
(2 Kings 6:16, 17, RSV).

Suddenly he saw. . .

\*\*\*

### The faith factor

The primary challenge in both the story of Elisha's servant and in mine was faith—extraordinary miracle-claiming faith—the quality of faith that actually provides unmovable optimism to a Christian leader. I call it faith-based optimism.

In both stories God provided the lesson of a very present providence and of grace. In both stories the mentoring of another encouraged the lesson of faith to penetrate.

Today I realize the importance of a conference president's insistence that my church members and I depend on prayer and God's leading for our new church. I needed a lesson in faith, just as Elisha's servant needed the vision to see God's providence. We both needed to exercise faith-based optimism.

I see faith in four dimensions. Through the progression of these dimensions, the Christian leader gains a deeper understanding of real faith and he or she experiences a deeper calling to Christian leadership.

The first dimension is *belief*. The fundamental bedrock of faith is simple: a conviction that God exists; belief in an all-powerful Creator who reveals Himself through Jesus, prophets, visions, and His Word. This belief is not, in itself, a saving belief. It is here, however, that the Christian life begins.

It is in this dimension of faith that the Holy Spirit first impresses us with the implications of the gospel: He not only exists, but He loves humankind. He not only exists, but is the Savior of humanity. The Holy Spirit convicts us of these truths, and the young Christian takes the first timid steps toward a relationship with Christ.

The second dimension is a *changed life*. It is the belief that God is, accom-

panied by the power of the Holy Spirit which leads to a moral transformation. This is also of faith.

Whereas the first dimension expresses a confidence that God is, dimension two applies that belief. In this dimension, the relationship with God continues to form, the life is transformed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and a person begins to experience personal holiness. At this point a relationship with God becomes a priority—something the Christian cannot do without. We no longer permit any pursuit or interest to replace prayer and the study of Scripture.

It is this dimension that keeps the Christian leader *safe* for the church. It provides insulation against abusing leadership. It assures that leaders will not use people to serve their own agendas, to rule over others, or to stray from dependence on God. Through this relationship, God reveals His plan for their ministry.

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Without this reality in the life of a church leader, he or she becomes more interested in self-glorification than in the will of God and is likely to begin, in one way or another, to use the congregation to his or her own ends.

"Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Their leadership must be rooted in a permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus. Every Christian leader needs to find there the source for their words, advice, and guidance."<sup>1</sup> There is no safety in leadership apart from this kind of deep, current, ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

The third dimension is having a *social concern*. The Christian is not supposed to be so focused on personal morality that social morality is neglected. Personal holiness and social morality, with the responsibilities that accompany it, must be held together.

Faith involves both a personal experience and a connectedness to other people. If an individual leads the church without social concern, lacking genuine love for people, they will merely become an ecclesiastical bureaucrat. The church needs leaders with a vision for reaching out to others, for changing and improving people's lives. The church is not dying for politicians or even statesmen.

Through the love and life of Jesus Christ and how He lived, the Christian leader is drawn to social action, ministering to the needs of those around them. Faith gives Christian leaders concern, love, and passion for all humanity.

To this point the experience of faith for all Christians is alike. Every believer must experience faith in these three dimensions—belief, changed life, and social concern. But it is in the fourth dimension that a Christian leader experiences an extraordinary calling.

This fourth dimension is *miracle-claiming faith*. Christian leaders need miracle-claiming faith to equip them for their ministry. Faith that lays claim to the power of God to do what humanity cannot accomplish.

Dynamic Christian leaders are willing to step out in faith because they believe that God *will* fulfill their prayers as He wills. Thus the Christian leader prays, believes, and actually anticipates the decision of God.

This leads a Christian leader to attempt things that cannot be accomplished except by the power of God. This is what we call a miracle and it is precipitated by the gift of what I have described above as faith-based optimism. Faith-based optimism is much more than mere possibility thinking, because faith and the presence of God are crucial to its existence.

Faith-based optimism is clearly illustrated in the story of David and Bathsheba. Lured into temptation by Bathsheba's beauty, David's moral faith failed. He committed adultery and murder. When the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, David immediately acknowledged his transgression and opened himself to the judgment of God.

Later, the child Bathsheba bore was dying. In deepening repentance, David pleaded with God for the child's life. For one week he gave himself entirely to prayer and fasting.

When the child died, David's servants were afraid to tell him, concerned that the news would throw him into deeper depression. David heard them talking amongst themselves and realized that the child had died.

To the servants' amazement, David got up, washed his face, changed his clothes, and ate. He had prayed and believed, and he immediately accepted God's decision. He testified, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" (2 Sam. 12:22). His faith was not a manipulation of God to accomplish his personal agenda,

rather it was an utter abandonment to the will of God, and a confidence that God's plan was best.

### Faith-based optimism

Thus, when the conference president said those words to me—"You are small, aren't you?"—everything suddenly became clear. He taught me a lesson that stands as a permanent marker in my spiritual journey.

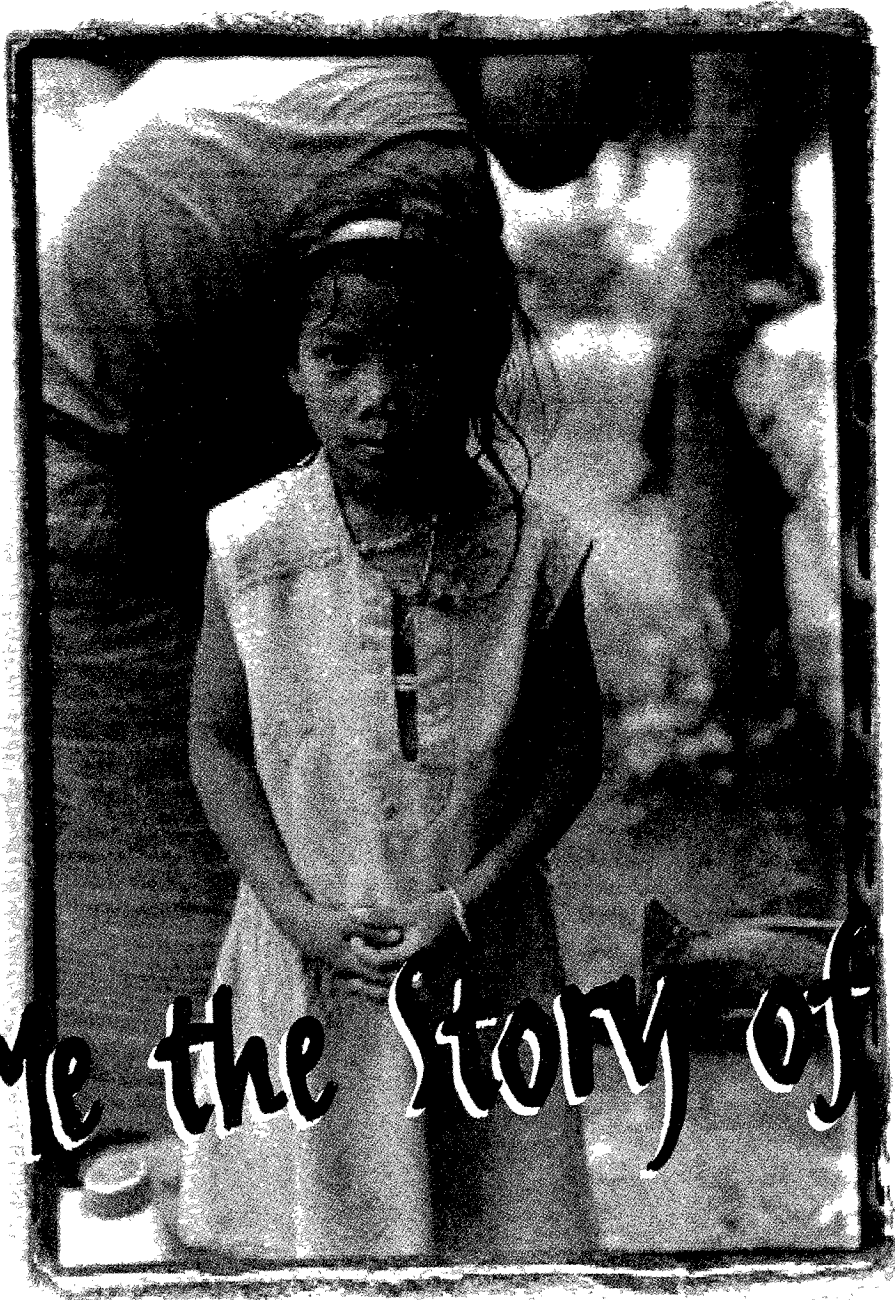
This leader wanted me to demonstrate faith-based optimism. His "I'll pray for you," was in no way a refusal to help, rather it was a plea for me to depend on the power of an almighty God to work out His will in the Grand Forks church. In that experience I came to know what I needed most, and it was not money from the conference office.

I began to pray as I had never prayed before, clarifying and claiming both the promises of God and the answer to my prayers and believing God would provide.

I discussed the problem with my church members. After searching our experience, we firmly believed that the new church was God's will. Without reservation, we gave ourselves to the project. The church was built. In three years, the members had given enough to pay the mortgage.

And the servant of Elisha? Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant so he could see what the Lord was doing. When the servant saw horses and chariots of fire surrounding them, his amazement surpassed his previous dread.

Faith-based optimism. A leader's faith is contagious. To every Christian leader God extends a marvelous opportunity. He offers all the power of heaven if the Christian leader is willing to believe. "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21:22, NKJV). Genuine faith-based optimism—so much more than possibility thinking—does empower Christian Leadership. ■



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# Youth apostasy and recovery

**Barry Gane and  
Steve Case**



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*Steve Case, D.Min., is president of Piece of the Pie Ministries, Sacramento, California.*

**L**et's face it: Many of our young people are leaving the Church. The questions are: How many are leaving? Why? and What can we do about it?

The first serious attempt to truly discover on a large scale how many youth are inactive was a ten-year longitudinal study undertaken by Roger Dudley at the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University (1989). Funded by the North American Division, Dudley obtained names and addresses of 1,523 baptized young people ages 15 and 16. Approximately half attended Adventist academies with the other half attending public schools.

At the end of this longitudinal study, when the original 15- and 16-year-olds were 25 and 26 years old, self-perceived standing with the Adventist Church showed approximately one-fourth as enthusiastic members, one-fourth as so-so members, and the remaining one-half divided between being on the books but not in heart and dropped out.<sup>1</sup> Even this most accurate statistic to date is still quite nebulous.<sup>2</sup>

The Valuegenesis study included a projection of one's intention for future church participation. The results indicate that 28 percent of today's 12- to 18-year-olds are not planning to be in the Church when they are 40 years old.

Figures for those who leave the Church in

many congregations and conferences range between 35-65 percent. One congregation claimed that generating a list of the names of youth that had left the church would be easy since they didn't lose many of their youth. After two sittings the youth committee had compiled a list of 135 names of youth who had once attended the church but no longer did. This figure represented 40 percent of the youth who had left over a five-year period. The time that a young person leaves varies from culture to culture and country to country, but some believe the critical period is at the end of high school as youth either enter the workforce or begin tertiary study.<sup>3</sup> As young people assert their independence, one of the ways they do it is by questioning and often rejecting the values and beliefs of their parents.

The crucial question is: What can we do to stop this hemorrhaging of one of our most valuable assets?

## Reasons that youth leave the Church

In just the last five years a number of studies have given us an insight into what encourages youth to sever connection with the Church. The Young Adult Valuegenesis Results from the South Pacific Division gave us the following reasons. They appear in descending order from the reason most given down to the response that occurred the least.

- ◆ Adult members are living phony lives.
- ◆ The Church places too much emphasis on nonessentials.
- ◆ Attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring.
- ◆ Church leaders are preoccupied with organization, not concerned with people.
- ◆ Worship services are dull and meaningless.
- ◆ Do not want to be a hypocrite.
- ◆ Church is too restrictive.
- ◆ Attracted to a different lifestyle.
- ◆ Do not have any real friends at church.
- ◆ Church does not allow me to think for myself.

Many youth cite the fact of a lack of friends at church as a major reason for not wanting to attend. Others speak of the irrelevance of the Church to their daily lives and also of the meaningless worship rituals. Others experience trauma or crisis and feel that the church did not respond to their needs. Still others cite the family as being such that they do not want to belong to the

church. Many use any or a number of these reasons as an excuse to experiment with the world.

Some studies highlight the family as a key in understanding why young people leave or stay in the Church. Brad Strahan has surveyed over 200 college students in an attempt to see if there is a connection between the relationship a young person has with their parents and their images of God. He is convinced that the quality of the parent-child bond is a more powerful predictor of whether or not there will be a positive faith in the child than the religiosity of the parent. The young person's understanding of God is greatly enhanced when they have a model of God's love demonstrated to them. The most effective parenting style for building the faith and the psychological and emotional health of the youth is one that is high on care (shows affection and warmth) and at the same time allows freedom and empowers youth to be independent.

Many Adventist homes are seen by young people as restrictive and not caring. Their parents' faith is viewed as more important than they, the children, are. Even the temptation to be protective or overly protective if balanced with warmth and love can make youth more dependent and less able to make decisions and affects sons more than daughters. Strahan is convinced that if the parents use religion to control, the young person will use religion to assert his/her independence.

### **The attitude of the local church**

John Savage has studied what happens in the church when someone leaves:

Out of a youth's personal anxiety, and perhaps even from events separate from the church, there comes a "cry for help." This can be obvious and audible, but it is often indirect. If the church fails to recognize and respond to the cry for help the hurting youth begins a predictable

dropout track that ultimately leads to a self-protective decision to leave the church. If the church responds at this stage it may avert the loss; however, the church frequently screens out the cry and the young person. Because of this rejection the young person stops coming to church.

The church begins to feel the pain of rejection when the young person continues to skip church. In reaction, the church may punish the young person for rejecting them. When this occurs the young person becomes

## **THIS WHOLE PROCESS CAN HAPPEN IN AS QUICKLY AS SIX WEEKS AND END IN PERMANENT WITHDRAWAL.**

angry, only feeling further rejection, hurt, and misunderstanding. In the next step the young person goes into denial where s/he says that it doesn't matter and acts as if s/he doesn't care.

This whole process can happen in as quickly as six weeks and end in permanent withdrawal. If the young person is not visited or if the problem remains unresolved during this time, he or she feels that the decision to leave the church is a correct one. Savage has shown convincingly that visitation by a person with good listening skills any time in this first six weeks can facilitate the return of the youth to the church family.

### **How do you make a friendship visit?**

Roger Dudley's study, mentioned earlier, has revealed that only about 15 percent of youth who stop coming to church ever receive a follow-up

visit or even a call from anyone at church. That means that 85 percent never have anyone who visited or said that they cared. Some who decide to return to church find it difficult, if not impossible, to break in.<sup>4</sup>

Before your visit spend time in prayer for the person you are visiting.<sup>5</sup> You could explain that you have missed the person at church and that you and the youth team have decided to visit all the youth who haven't been at church for a while. Your approach may not make much difference if you are praying for the person and if you are sincerely friendly. One important step you must not forget is that sometime before leaving you should let the person know that you have enjoyed the visit and that you will be back. Try to work out the best time to get together.

The visit at first should never be more than 30 minutes, and it is much better to make it 20 minutes. Do not do all the talking yourself. Discuss what the youth is interested in and you will be surprised how soon he or she will bring the conversation to things that have to do with Christ. This isn't a "green light" to initiate a Bible study. The purpose of your visit is to create an interest by your friendship so that the youth will want to come back to church for consistent spiritual involvement.

### **Listening skills**

Because parents and church leaders do not always understand what is happening, youth feel rejected and take their questions elsewhere to be answered. For those involved in reclaiming youth, one of the major skills needed is the ability to listen, and to listen with empathy.

The place to begin is where the young person is. You will need to understand his or her thinking, world, and dilemmas. Good communication is dialogue. Often youth leaders want to do all the talking. To reach youth that have severed their connection with the church you must:

♦ Have a genuine desire to *listen*.

- ♦ Be willing to read and accept feelings and emotions.
- ♦ Not have the need to always be right.
- ♦ Be accepting, noncritical, and nonjudgmental.
- ♦ Let the young people know you feel honored to share their story.
- ♦ Be open enough to share some of your journey and even some of your struggles.
- ♦ Be prepared to keep in touch and sacrifice enough to support.

It is essential to build a relationship, and this will take time and commitment on your part. Relationships are built on understanding, empathy, and nonjudgmental attitudes. Warm, kind, genuine, and trustworthy people build relationships.

Empathy is of extreme importance in seeking to understand what is being said. Empathy is not sympathy. "Empathy is the capacity to imagine the teen's experiences . . . as well as to express those experiences to show understanding."<sup>6</sup>

You must be prepared to speak the language of the young person and deal with areas of interest to him/her. Listen for his or her concerns and be prepared to explore them a little. Demonstrate that you have high esteem for people, and don't put anyone or any faith down. At the same

time don't be afraid to challenge the young person's thinking.

When you win trust and youth place confidence in you they will begin to share, and this sharing will become deeper and more intimate as the relationship grows. Keep a high level of confidentiality, for if you break the person's confidence, you may destroy the relationship and hinder the process of his or her return to the church.

### Friendship evangelism

All young people are searching for meaning or endeavoring to make sense of the world in some way. For some it is the pursuit of pleasure. But for many there is the desire for relationships and spirituality. They want to know where they fit in the scheme of things.

The atmosphere and the attitude of the church is important in bringing youth back to church. There must be a spirit of inclusion as opposed to exclusion. You must be willing to take a risk and know that sometimes these young people will let you down. You must be willing to meet their needs.

### Meeting the needs

What are some of the youth needs that we already know? David Stone, looking at youth needs, highlights what he regards as the five major needs:

1. *Self-esteem*—an innate need to be important in the eyes of others, especially peers and parents.
2. *Self-confidence*—a need to know that "I can handle it, you don't have to wipe my nose for me." A sense of knowing that he or she can use his or her ability well.
3. *Self-regard*—a need to care about how he or she looks, feels, and thinks in relation to everyone else.
4. *Self-worth*—a need to know that his comments, feelings, and thoughts really do count and can make a difference.
5. *God awareness*—a need to have a power, a force, or authority which is ever present or available to eliminate

the caustic, inevitable encroachment of loneliness. A need to believe in a God who is loving and forgiving and always with him. Youth need a God who is not a magician, but a constant companion whom he can turn to not only in an S.O.S. situation, but who also walks beside him or dwells within him as a friend, confidant, and guide.<sup>7</sup> Individual needs will only be discovered in a relationship where youth trust you enough to tell you what is happening for them.

### Church climate


Valuegenesis results showed that with academy teens, only 54 percent considered their churches to have an atmosphere of warmth and caring, significantly lower than all six other Protestant denominations who conducted similar studies. When Roger Dudley used the same questions with the 20- and 21-year-olds in his study, the number dropped to 41 percent. The issue of a warm and caring environment is problematic not only of adult attitudes to youth, but also the way young people relate to each other. The cliques among Adventist youth isolate them from caring for people, including their peers.

A similar negative trend could be noted in regard to a church thinking climate from the teens into the twenties. Valuegenesis showed a paltry 34 percent of Adventist teens consider their congregations to have thinking climates. With Dudley's 20- and 21-year-olds, the number again dropped, this time to 28 percent. This means that while a questioning mind characterizes the collegiate-age category, less than 30 percent of Adventist young people find their churches to be a place conducive for their approach to truth. When they question existing truth, they easily could encounter reactionary insecurity. In reality, they are beginning to internalize their faith, not to give it up. Questioning is misunderstood as unbelief rather than the pathway to belief. Faced with such options, most young people opt for the integrity of

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growing in their faith and discovery of truth, even if they are squeezed out of their religion.

### Programs to attract and incorporate young people

Many seek that all-encompassing program that will attract and keep young people in their church. No such universal program exists. In fact, what works with one church or one community may fall flat with another. It would be wise to program variety for those within the church and to attract those outside of the church.

Overtly religious programming such as Friday evening vesper programs and weekend retreats will reach some. In North America, recreation in the form of volleyball and basketball seem like favorite activities for many, including those wary of religious activities. The need for social activities continues to be strong, especially when young people graduate from Adventist school programming and an increasing number marry later. Service activities are "in," and will continue to have appeal to a number of youth since these are years of heightened horizontal expressions of spirituality.

Have the young people provide input on specific programming ideas. Be prepared to do something traditional or something totally out of the ordinary. In general, the three F's tend to attract people—Friends, Food, and Fun. Involvement is a key to maintain interest, but remember that young people, especially collegiate-age, flee commitment. That means that their involvement must be in manageable amounts and backed up by more stable leadership.

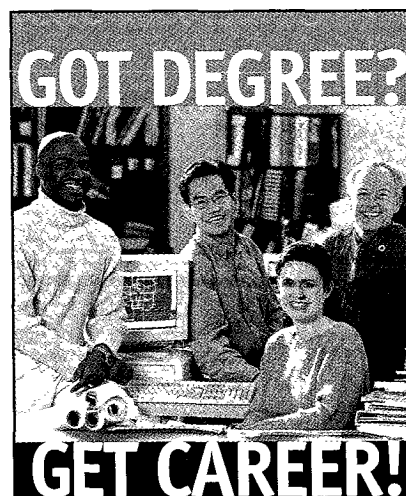
### A final word

If a person has been inactive for a while, realize that to get involved again requires battling a number of fears. Of course there will be a fear of acceptance. If their current lifestyle isn't completely in harmony with Adventist practices, there may be a fear of behavioral changes, which the

person may or may not want to be changed. There is also a fear that should they become involved with the church again, there will be a loss of most of the friends they've made outside of the church. At the same time, being fearful that the church hasn't changed much since they left, they probably expect a fair amount of criticism for being away as well as possibly not fitting in if and when they return.

While no environment is germ-free, a congregation's overall attitude and behavior towards returning young people must be primed periodically. Featuring young people, including returning inactives in the church newsletter or on the platform for various duties or sharing church life can serve as reminders of the church's ongoing ministry to young people. Frequently some of the young people remain in contact with inactive youth. Knowing the church will welcome them back and having something to invite them to equips them to restore the inactive back to the life of the church. ▀

- 1 Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From A 10-Year Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000).
- 2 For a more complete review of the first two years of this ten-year longitudinal study, see Roger Dudley and Janet Kangas, *The World of the Adventist Teenager* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1990). Reports for each subsequent year may be obtained from the Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, U.S.A.
- 3 Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), sees this period as crucial in the development of a faith that is owned and lived by.
- 4 Roger Dudley shared this part of a letter with me that illustrates this point on visitation. "I wanted to write and thank you for allowing me to participate in this survey. I think it is wonderful that people at Andrews are concerned about Seventh-day Adventist youth. Being a participant in this study has meant a lot to me, and I look forward to filling out the questionnaires. So far, you are the only person who has responded to me and my decision to leave the church. I have never been visited by a single person from my SDA church here, nor have I ever been encouraged to return."
- 5 The missing youth should be an ongoing part of your prayer list.
- 6 Ibid., 410.
- 7 J. David Stone, "Youth Ministry Today: Overview and Concept," in *Complete Youth Ministries Handbook*, 2 vols., ed. J. David Stone (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 1:9.



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# The gospel commission has another side

## Responding to human need

Rudi Maier

**M**ost of the unreached people of the world are located in what missiologists call the "10/40 Window"—that mass of land between 10 to 40 degrees north of the equator, stretching from northwest Africa through the Middle East and into Asia. Nearly 2.4 billion people (about half the world population) live in the 10/40 window. Eighty-two percent of the world's poorest people live here, with an annual income of less than \$500 per person (compared to \$12,500 elsewhere).

Missiologist Luis Bush writes: "As the Christian presence has expanded around the world, it appears that those people living in the 10/40 Window have suffered not only hunger and a low quality of life compared to the rest of humanity, but have also been kept from the transforming, life-giving, community-changing power of the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

### The poor in the world

While much has been said and done (as indeed it should have) in recent years about the immense need to reach especially the poor and disadvantaged in this 10/40 window, we must not neglect another area of immense concern: reaching the poor in word and deed with the liberating power of the gospel *wherever they are*.

For many the idea of ministering to the disadvantaged in the countries in the 10/40

window has a sense of arresting drama about it. It captures the imagination. The fact is however, that quite aside from any 10/40 window, in the case of almost every one of us, the poor and disadvantaged may be living much closer to where we live without our actually thinking about it, let alone acting on it in any significant way.

It is virtually a truism of our time that every day the world is becoming much more complex and urbanized. Around the globe large numbers of people are moving from the rural areas into the urban centers—the cities. Many who make these migrations do so because they are illiterate and poor and are searching for something better. As often as not, this movement only makes matters worse for them. Thus it may be said that the major cities of the world (and even in the smaller cities) have become places in which there are staggeringly large numbers who are down and out.

One quarter of the world's population is urban poor. Many of these people must live off the garbage of these vast populations. These people are poor physically and they are poor spiritually.

Metropolitan Mexico City, for example, has a population of over 18 million. That is larger than the individual population of 134 nations of the world. Squatter and slum communities have become the fact of life there, as in Manila where an estimated two million squatters are scattered across the city in 415 squatter communities, or Bangkok which has 1,042 slum neighborhoods. Similar circumstances exist in Cairo, Kolkata (Calcutta), Mumbai (Bombay), Jakarta, and many other cities of the world.

Western cities (well outside the 10/40 window) are no exception to poverty and homelessness. New York City has over 75,000 people who rummage through trash cans for food each day. Drive through the streets of downtown Washington, D.C., or Los Angeles on any night and you will see row upon row of homeless people sleeping on sidewalks. Less visible, but equally devastating, are such areas of human need as domestic violence, child abuse, prostitution, and drug and alcohol addiction.

Of course, extreme human need is not confined only to cities. Some 18 million poor and needy people live in refugee camps around the world. Millions in East Africa and else-



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where on the African continent are precariously poised on the verge of starvation as ravaging famine threatens them.

The challenging question is How can we win these helpless, hopeless, masses of people for God and disciple them if we hardly minister to their physical need? Each one is a person to whom the church needs to respond. Jesus was touched by human need and responded to it with acts of mercy. He left us the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of how He expects Christians to respond to human suffering and misfortune. As Christians, we can do no less than follow His example in word and deed.

### Meeting real human needs

We are all familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs: *material* needs, *social* needs, and *moral* needs. Upon what level are we prepared to meet these needs in our ministry? No doubt we are prepared for the "highest one," the moral, dealing with the spiritual truths of love, righteousness, and grace. These are important, but we must be reminded of the starving man who told a missionary who wanted to share the gospel with him: "I can't hear you, I am too hungry."

To us Christians, especially those of us who have never felt the pinch of hunger or deep poverty, a person's spiritual needs may be the most pressing and obvious. However, we simply cannot effectively minister to the spiritual until we have dealt with the immediate needs the individual is feeling—be that for food, shelter, medical care, or simple respect. This is especially true of these needs that are extreme and therefore, naturally, all-absorbing.

Meet these needs first and the person is more likely to lend a listening ear to the gospel we have to share. There is the truest sense in which living the gospel through ministering to the whole person is by all means the most effective proclamation the gospel can have. Through this approach, not only do we have the

chance to tell people about Jesus, we have the opportunity to actively portray His love for them.

We tend to see people only in terms of physical and spiritual need; we reduce people's problems to one or two types. But Christ ministered to people in all their needs. Clearly, the eternal salvation of people is our highest priority, but we must bring them the whole gospel. Salvation, in the biblical sense, has to do with all the dimensions of life.

**B**UT BROKEN, SUFFERING, AND LOST PEOPLE LISTEN  
TO PEOPLE WHO MEET THEM WHERE THEY HURT;  
WHO MEET THEM WITH REAL, PALPABLE LOVE.

In separating people's spiritual needs from their physical needs we all too easily make too sharp a distinction between evangelism and social concerns. Adventists often have a way of seeing themselves as ministering in the first of these spheres. Preachers definitely tend to limit their concern to eternal salvation. But broken, suffering, and lost people listen to people who meet them where they hurt; who meet them with real, palpable love.

I have often heard people in the church say, "Jesus told us the poor and the needy would always be with us; therefore, He does not want us to be too concerned about their condition. After all, no amount of effort is going to solve the problem." Saying this is to admit our failure to see Jesus as He actually was. He spent His life responding and ministering to an array of real human need. Of course He did not erase poverty, but that did not deter Him from reaching out in love and from actually meeting people where they were. Didn't Jesus say that in ministering to hungry, thirsty, naked people we would, in fact, be ministering to Him (Matt. 25:40, 45)? And didn't He strongly imply that these realities would indeed be our

acid test in the final judgment (verses 31-45)?

### Becoming part of the community

I remember my own ministry in Sri Lanka. We lived on a beautiful school campus, "Lakpahana," the "Light of Sri Lanka." I have seen many Lakpahanas around the world. Adventist schools and churches are established to be the light on a darkened globe. But we sometimes have a

way of putting the bushel over our light—the bushel of isolation, self-centeredness, and even self-righteousness.

At Lakpahana we wanted to make a difference to the people in our little community. The first and the most important step for us was to become a part of that community and the lives of the people who lived there.

Christian ministry begins with relationships. I remember sitting in a village council meeting under the coconut trees. We told the community leaders that we wanted to work together with them to solve some of their health problems. A village leader wanted to know if this was a new way we were using to make them Christians. No, I don't think that was a new way. It was an old and hugely effective way, especially if it is done out of disinterested love for the people served. This is a way Jesus had taught us, but which we often have forgotten. It is absolutely vital to the doing of authentic evangelism.

In becoming a part of the Lakpahana community, we saw the problems of the people, experienced their suffering and entered into it with them, searching with them for solutions. At the end of our stay, as I

"There is need of coming closer to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

"True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree."—Ellen G. White, 1881. "Doing For Christ." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 58(8):113.

"There are many who ask, as did the lawyer, 'Who is my neighbor?' The answer comes down to us in the circumstances that happened near Jericho, when the priests and the Levite passed by on the other side, and left the poor, bruised, and wounded stranger to be taken care of by the good Samaritan. Everyone who is in suffering need is our neighbor.

"Would that children might be educated from their babyhood, through their childhood and youth, to understand what is the missionary work to be done right around them. Let the home be made a place for religious instruction. Let parents become mouthpieces of the Lord God of Israel, to teach the precepts of true Christianity, and let them be examples of what the principles of love can make men and women. We are to think and care for others who need our love, our tenderness, and care. We should ever remember that we are representatives of Christ, and that we are to share the blessings that He gives, not with those who can recompense us again, but with those who will appreciate the gifts that will supply their temporal and spiritual necessities. Those who give feasts for the purpose of helping those who have but little pleasure, for the purpose of bringing brightness into their dreary lives, for the purpose of relieving their poverty and distress, are acting unselfishly and in harmony with the instruction of Christ."—Ellen G. White, 1895. "Duty of Man to His Fellow-men." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 72 (46):721, 722.

"Many can be reached only through acts of disinterested kindness. Their physical wants must first be relieved. As they see evidence of our unselfish love, it will be easier for them to believe in the love of Christ."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1948), 84.

"The world will be convinced, not by what the pulpit teaches, but what the church lives. The minister in the desk announces the theory of the gospel; the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power."—Ellen G. White, 1948. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1948), 16.

was walking with the headman through the village, we reviewed our work together—work that built toilets and water systems, fed the hungry, and developed friendships. As we walked, he turned to me, and with the dignity that only a chief can have, told me that for 32 years he and his people had been afraid of us as Seventh-day Adventists, because they thought that we would make them and their children Christians. "But now we have seen Christianity," he said, "and we like it."

We Christians give the impression that we're only interested in saving souls and building up our churches and institutions. We must dispel that notion by taking the love and compassion of Jesus to the poor and needy in this world. It's time for us to incarnate ourselves in the community where we live.

While we are most certainly all for evangelistic proclamation, the truth is that the world does not need more fancy evangelists trumpeting a message of gospel truth mixed with a thin veneer of slick consumerism or manipulative strategy. What the world needs is an army of caring Christians who, through mercy and love, will demonstrate Christ to the poor and needy of this world, people who will sit and listen, who will respect the poor enough to learn from them, and who will respond to them in a way that affirms their dignity and value before God and their fellow human beings.

We are right in obeying the commission of Jesus to go, teach, baptize, and disciple (Matt. 28:19, 20). Should we not be equally mindful of the command of Jesus to the young lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37)—to do as the Samaritan did: to bind up the wounds of the suffering with our own hands, to care for the needy, to be involved with the life of our neighbors? ■

1 Luis Bush, "The AD 2000 & Beyond Movement: An Overview," *AD 2000 and Beyond Handbook: A Church for Every People And the Gospel for Every Person* by AD 2000, 1992, 1.

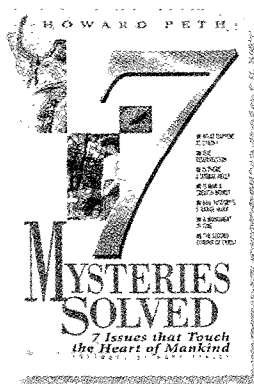
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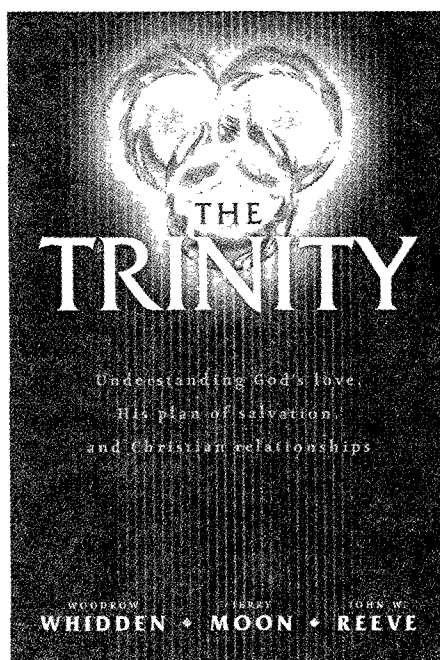
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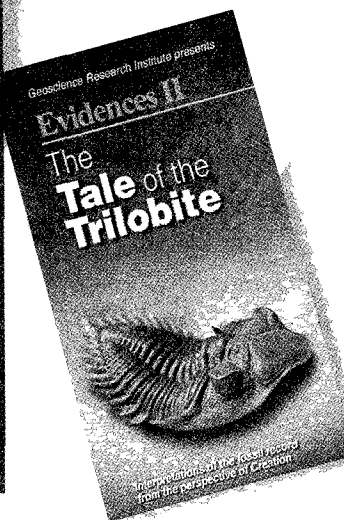
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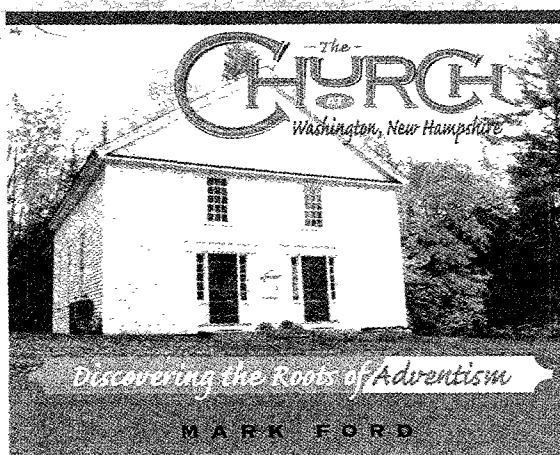
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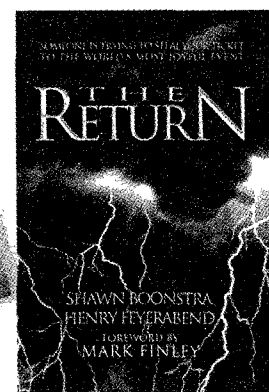


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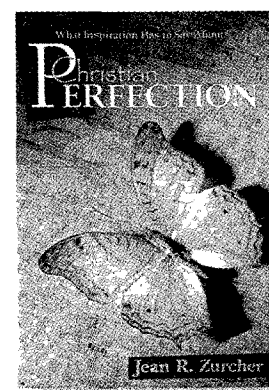
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# Read or trivialize

Harold Calkins

**T**he record of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry reads: "When He had opened the book . . ." Books are still a minister's major tools.

Woodsmen used to consider that time spent sharpening their axe and saw was more important than the time spent using them. So it may be with a minister and the way he or she uses good books.

Basic to a minister's library are the old standard reference works. We say old because they have a time-tested survival rating. For example, back in the 1950s, officers of the Christian Booksellers Association selected 50 basic books for the American White House Library. While not listed here, many of these are the Christian classics that are basic reference sources, helping in our understanding the Bible and Christian history.

Granted, this kind of volume may sometimes feel a bit heavy, especially for our fast-food, feel-good generation, but we do well to get beyond the menu of milk and sugar to the solid food. While our preaching may need to "translate" much of what we find in sources like these, that same preaching has much more credibility and substance when we use them.

It is a compliment to be well read. One who does not read suffers a great loss, one the minister especially cannot afford. It is reported that Admiral Perry discovered the North

Pole in a Washington bookstore. The same Ben Franklin who, at age 17, was a penniless runaway without any college experience, borrowed books and read.

## The value of good books

In a book we can stand with Martin Luther before Emperor Charles V and hear him say, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Or with Benjamin Franklin before the Continental Congress as he warns, "We must hang together, or we shall hang separately."

Lincoln, with little formal schooling, borrowed books and lay by the fireplace and read himself to wisdom, succinctness, and verbal fluency. What Emily Dickinson wrote in her poem was probably not about Lincoln, though it might well have been: "He ate and drank the precious words, his spirit grew robust, he knew no more that he was poor nor that his frame was dust. He danced along the dingy ways and this bequest of wings was but a book: What liberty a loosened spirit brings!"

A number of years ago, the press reported that just before his suicide jump from a Bethesda Naval Hospital window, Secretary James Forestal had been reading the Greek poem "Ajax," which culminates in the hero's suicide. It is not a giant leap to conclude that today's print and electronic media for adults and the electronic media for children contributes to what Chuck Colson calls a morally wounded America.

## Quality reading

Our watchword as thought leaders must be "something better." To find that which is better, we must become connoisseurs of the best of literature. In their attempts to retrieve a quarter of a million precious books, stolen from Holocaust victims, Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, observed, "In the end, books are more precious than gold."

Books are born, much as babies are, often of sweat and mental anguish. Truly good books offer creative inspiration and mental stimulus to energize our neurons. Worthwhile books inspire us to challenge our hearers to replicate the moral and spiritual qualities exemplified within them.

J. D. Snider, in *I Love Books*, writes of "a lonely monk [who later became an archbishop] who said, 'Our house is empty, save only



Harold Calkins is a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister and lives in Loma Linda, California.

the rats and mice. . . . I sit here with no company but books . . . . I keep Egypt and the Holy Land in the closet next to the window. On the side are Athens and the Empire of Rome . . . I call "Plato" and he answers, "Here." "Aristotle," "Here,"—Demosthenese, Cicero, Caesar, Tacitus, Pliny,— "Here" they answer and they smile at me in their immortality of youth. They never speak unless spoken to . . . never refuse to answer. . . . My architects are building . . . my painters design, my poets sing, my historians and theologians weave their tapestries, my generals march without noise or blood."<sup>1</sup>

### But read the best

In our hectic world and pressured programs, let us seek the peace and creativity of the best thought and inspiration available in good books. "Books are keys to wisdom's treasure; books are gateways to lands of pleasure; books are paths that upward lead; books are friends—come let us read."<sup>2</sup>

Again, the record of Jesus' early ministry begins: "When He had opened the book . . ." Here, of course, "the book" was the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:17), the Bible. While here we have emphasized the reading of good books, there is none to compare with that one that is above all others and in whose pages we do not hear the voices of Caesar or Cicero, but the voice of Christ; Jesus Himself, the Word of the eternal God. This is our ultimate volume, our quintessential literary resource. This Book is most truly alive. Here we are to be immersed and to live, and from this platform we do our ministry.

Let us become avid readers of all good literature, but especially of this volume that is our spiritual food and drink; this best of all that is called the Word of God. ■

1 John S. Snider, *I Love Books: Love Books: A Guide Through Bookland* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1951), 27, 28.

2 Emilie Poulsson, cited in Snider, 104.

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# Pastoral witness

Trust Ndlovu



*Trust Ndlovu, Th.D., is a former pastor who recently completed graduate work and is presently doing freelance writing.*

A few years ago every Seventh-day Adventist ministerial college student was expected to take at least one course on evangelism. Classes of this type had the effect of suggesting to students what they should and should not do, even what they could and couldn't do. I learned quickly that either I needed more than a few classes on public evangelism, or perhaps that evangelism was "not my cup of tea"!

When I did do public evangelism, I did it trying to fulfill the letter of the law and the results were not reassuring. After that experience, I decided that inasmuch as it was not realistic to expect every minister to excel in every area of ministry, it should not be expected that every minister should be a successful public evangelist. After all, I thought, the Holy Spirit gives differing gifts to each of those who make up the Body of Christ.

Jesus chose 12 apostles (Luke 6:13-16). Except for Judas, all of them were with Jesus from the time of their calling to the time He was taken up from them. Consequently, He left them to be His apostles, those He sent, to tell the good news of His life, death, and resurrection.

Even though all of these apostles were witnesses, only three that we know of wrote about this good news that has become central to our Bible. Jesus also chose the Seventy whom He sent out (Luke 10:4-12). Then

many others were sent out by the time Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:12-26), Paul being the most outstanding. Of course beyond these there are the countless thousands since then, coming on down to our time and place.

Why review these things? First, because only one indispensable factor must define one's essential qualification to be a witness to Jesus Christ: a personal encounter and ongoing experience with Him. All the witnesses of the New Testament knew Jesus experientially. They each had an immediate encounter with Him. Second, the form and content of witnessing for Jesus was not a uniform activity. Again, each of those who wrote accounts of what Jesus said and did, wrote them in their particular way. Thus we may all witness in different ways, depending on our personalities, experiences and backgrounds.

Although this is true there are certain indispensable characteristics to our Christian witness, no matter where or when we do it: First there is the matter of the content of our witness. We must present the good news, the gospel. Second, it must be contextual. Third, it should be a congruent message that its presenter can give without having to blush. Finally, it must be community conscious. These four characteristics of witness are what I call the four Cs of the Christian witness.

## Content

The message we bring must be good news. It must be truthful, yet pleasant to the ear. "The Second World War has ended. Hitler and Mussolini will never rise to haunt us again. We can pursue the dream of freedom unhindered. Their menace is removed. It is time now for justice."

"The Mau Mau is over, and Jomo Kenyatta is the new Prime Minister of Kenya!"

"Vietnam is over at last. Our son was among the first of the veterans to land back on U.S. soil."

"Our son has completed his medical degree. I can hardly contain myself!"

"Mandela has been freed and the nightmare of apartheid is over!"

I was in South Africa the day Nelson Mandela was set free. Most divisions in society ceased for a few hours that day because farm laborer and farm owner converged on television, transfixed. Teacher and student, priest and parishioner, boss and servant both

drank in the proceedings of that day.

When you have news to tell, but you have a hard time telling it, then perhaps it is not good news. When I was a boy my father used to go out witnessing, using picture rolls. One picture in particular used to terrorize me. It was a picture of the lake of fire that depicted people in an agony of fear. I was shaken by that picture. It was frighteningly graphic! You could smell the fire, hear its crackling beneath the wailing of its victims. I do not know how much good that picture did me. I used to dream about it. When I snapped out of those nightmares, I was not thankful for the news that God was going to cleanse this world of all its pain. I was only glad I was not a victim of that awful fire.

What is better news than proclaiming that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV), that consequently He has made us who "were no

people" into "God's people" (1 Peter 2:10, RSV), and that soon He is sending this same Jesus to rescue His children from all over this earth, to take them to a home where none shall either suffer or die (Rev. 21:1-4)?

### Contextuality

The message of Jesus is one message. But it not only survives, it thrives when it is told in different

Zululand in southern Africa. He worked with the Emperor of the Zulu people, Shaka Zulu, attempting to bring him to Christ. A problem in the approach of the missionary revealed itself when he apparently seemed to have been more interested in "taming" the Emperor with the aim of making him less of a threat to the settlers and colonists who were moving into his part of the country.

## WHEN NEW MEMBERS JOIN THE CHURCH, THEY ARE TO BE WELCOMED IN AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY, THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST.

ways with sensitivity and understanding for the many different settings in which it is proclaimed.

Years ago a missionary went to

Evidently Shaka showed some interest in Christianity and began to ask questions about Jesus. But when the missionary described how Jesus

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died on the cross, the king replied: "Are you telling me about a foolish man? What kind of man fails to defend himself?"

What the missionary should have known was where to begin with a military man such as Shaka. It might have impressed the king more had the missionary first helped him see the greatness of the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord, the eternal Ruler of the world, the King of kings! What he said was probably true, but at best inappropriate for his audience at the moment he told it.

All four of the Gospels tell essentially the same story. What makes each one different is that each evangelist had a particular purpose and a particular audience or readership in mind as he relayed the same message. More specifically, each had an audience to reach.

Is anyone of the gospel writers

twisting the facts? Not at all! Each has a mission. Each has an audience and thus an emphasis. In each the story of the Messiah is alive and powerful. Likewise, we can tell the story of Jesus on the factory floor, in the lecture room, in the kitchen, wherever people will listen. It is always best to tell the story on the backdrop of the kinds of lives we live.

Context also has to do with time. Even Jesus told His apostles that there were some things He wanted to tell them, but that He could not right then because they were not ready to hear and would not understand. Thus there are times when it is not quite appropriate to say something, because the ground has not yet been cultivated.

## Congruency

The third factor that will make our witness to Christ effective is a lifestyle

that is consistent or congruent with what we proclaim about Him. As much as we may have talked about this quality, it is still extremely important to our witness.

If we preach the love of Jesus that love must reveal itself in the effect it has on human lives. Unless this miracle of grace has begun to do its work in our own lives, what we say will have tentativeness and uncertainty and dishonesty behind it. Being hypocritical we will be trying to live down the dissonance between our words and deeds. It is ever critical to our witness that we "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22, NKJV; see also Matt. 7:15-21; Rom. 2:13; 1 John 3:18).

Effective witness to the Lord Jesus Christ requires our talk to be one with our walk. In doing this, we will, of course, have our personal limits. When we do not have an answer to a question, we may try our best to give a reasonable response and still be truthful enough to be tentative, owing to the fact that we still "see through a glass darkly." We are not under pressure to make it seem that we are above weakness, foibles, or even sin. We will always suffer setbacks, but through it all, we shall seek to be transparent before the world.

## Community-consciousness

Jesus called the Twelve to follow Him not only because twelve would do better than one. Rather, it was because He was building a new kingdom. He was creating a people. He was making a community.

The church He established has the right to see itself as His new Israel. What does this imply? Among other things, it implies that whenever we preach the good news, we must be conscious of the church as one. When new members join the church, they are to be welcomed in as members of the body, the community of Christ.

In my first year as a minister, I studied the Bible with a family of Pentecostal people. The husband was interested in the Adventist perspec-



tive and so it was not difficult to get him to come to my church.

The problem was that even in his outlying village the "Saturday people" were known to be the uppity crowd. He really wondered how he was going to be accepted. I was sure everything would work out well. I thought he would be blessed by his visit. But I was wrong.

When Sabbath came, I was not casually dressed. Nobody was, except this visitor. The truth is, he probably was not casually dressed either. That is, he came in his best: a pair of khaki shorts and a shirt. He was neatly dressed, but he stood out from the rest of us.

It was not my fault that he came to church dressed like that. I did not know what was in his wardrobe. He did not know what was wrong with wearing his best shorts to church on a warm morning. But what was wrong was the fact that I assumed that all

the church members were mature.

One of the deacons approached the man and gave him a lecture; something to the effect that in this church he was aspiring to join he could not come in shorts. He was told he needed clean long trousers!

Needless to say, most of the church was mortified by what happened. But perhaps even that did not matter. But what did matter was that Magwaza never came back to church! Why? Because in my fervor to witness, I had failed to prepare the congregation for the types of people that might be attracted to our community of faith. Jesus likened the whole operation to the result of casting a net. Many different types of fish—and even some "nonfish"—are caught!

Paul and Barnabas did not leave this kind of congregational work to chance. When they saw that some members of the church were not ready for the "net-effect" of preach-

ing the gospel, they had the church leaders call a meeting so that when Gentiles weighed into the church, the shock, judgment, and embarrassment were brought to a minimum. They intentionally planned and prepared the church by general consensus for the entrance of the new members into the community of faith.

Paul insisted that the church was in fact one body; that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In our teaching today we must be careful that we do not fan sectional fires that in the end will burn up the church as it fails to appreciate the united community vision and intention of Jesus for His church in the world.

When we have the content of the message as it should be, live lives consistent with its demands, give it in proper context and we are aware of the way God works with His community, evangelism and witness, I have found, is a piece of cake! ■

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# The use and abuse of authority

## What we can learn from the struggles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of 1901

Andrew Bates

When strong-willed, obedient people end up in charge, they are easily tempted to demand obedience from others. That can lead to an array of undesirable reactions and circumstances. Something like that had been happening in the young Seventh-day Adventist Church as it approached the 1901 General Conference. As an editorial in the General Conference Bulletin put it: "Hardly a delegate appeared at this session who did not anticipate worry, and even disaster. . . . Whispers of disintegration were borne from ear to ear."<sup>1</sup>

This is a story of how Ellen White confronted this unstable situation and how God led in meeting its challenges.

### Diagnosis 1901

This was Ellen White's first General Conference in ten years, but she was not pleased to be there. "I did not want to come to Battle Creek," she said. "I was afraid the burdens I would have to bear would cost my life."<sup>2</sup>

Nine years in Australia might explain her absence from the four preceding biennial meetings. But the tumultuous 1891 session, her last before the brethren asked her to go to Australia, had probably reinforced her resolve to stay away. But now she was back—and first to the podium when President George Irwin opened the session for business:

"I feel a special interest in the movements and decisions that shall be made at this Conference regarding the things that should have been done years ago, and especially ten years ago, when we were assembled in Conference, and the Spirit and power of God came into our meeting, testifying that God was ready to work for this people if they would come into working order."<sup>3</sup>

Her forceful message was printed word-for-word in the *Bulletin*. Some striking excerpts:<sup>4</sup>

"Year after year the same acknowledgment was made, but the principles which exalt a people were not woven into the work. . . ."

"At the last Conference which I attended here, there was gossiping and controversy in every house. . . ."

"Slow to speak, slow to wrath. It only takes a word to fire up a man who has not made a practice of talking with God. This spirit is as contagious as the leprosy. . . . God is not in any of this work. Brethren, before we have finished we shall know whether or not God is handling this Conference. . . ."

"All who are educated in the office of publication should see there exemplified the principles of heaven. I would rather lay a child of mine in his grave than have him go there to see these principles mangled and perverted. . . ."

"O, my very soul is drawn out in these things! Men who have not learned to submit themselves to the control and discipline of God, are not competent to train the youth, to deal with human minds. It is just as much an impossibility for them to do this work as it would be for them to make a world. That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be—that is past. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle. . . ."

"There are those who have . . . not managed after God's order. Some have served on committees . . . and have felt free to dictate just what the committee should say and do, claiming that those who did not carry out these ideas were sinning against Christ. . . . When it is [becomes] evident that the managers are themselves controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, then it is time to consider that you are safe in accepting what they may say, under God. . . ."

"Let every one of you go home, not to chat

Andrew Bates is a pseudonym.

... but to pray. Go home and pray. Talk with God. Go home and plead with God to mold and fashion you after the divine similitude. ..."

"I want that every one who has an impetuous temper, that will flare up and lead him to act like a frantic man—I want him, as he begins to speak in this way, to remember Christ, and sit right down and hold his peace. Say not a word. ..."

"The voice . . . is not lent to you that you may swear; but every one, who gives way to an unholy temper might just as well swear. God help us to submit to Jesus Christ, and to have his power right here and now."

End of speech. Mrs. White sat down.

What can a General Conference president say as he steps back to the podium after words like that have just been spoken? Not a lot. What President Irwin actually said was: "These are certainly very plain words."

Indeed. There had been assent without reform. Scheming instead of praying. Dictating in the name of God. Angry public outbursts. No longer the voice of God. An 1895 testimony had declared that "the General Conference is itself becoming corrupted with wrong sentiments and principles."<sup>5</sup> Mrs. White warned against "the spirit of domination," declaring that the brethren were "following in the track of Romanism."<sup>6</sup>

How did it all happen? We'll explore that question. But first two other questions with brief answers:

1. How did it affect God's work? Significantly. Yet the Lord still blessed. In the 1890s, the decade when things were worst at Battle Creek, the Church witnessed explosive growth in church schools, jumping from 13 to 245,<sup>7</sup> along with dramatic growth in missions.

2. How did the Church escape—or did it? It did escape, miraculously and briefly. A season of prayer followed Ellen White's appeal and the session was transformed. The same editorial in the *Bulletin* which had spoken of

potential "disaster" called it "the most peculiar, yet the very best General Conference ever convened," characterized by a "quiet, deep-seated calm." "Not one unkind word was spoken on the floor."<sup>8</sup>

Ellen White was also moved: "Every time I think of that meeting," she wrote, "a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately stepplings of the Lord our Redeemer."<sup>9</sup>

Now a closer look at the path leading up to the awful struggles of 1901.

### En route to 1901

The "spirit of domination" in Adventism did not develop overnight or in a straight line. But key "moments" in Adventist history flesh out the picture.

*The 1850s: From Babylon to Gospel Order.* Still smarting from the way the established churches had treated the Millerites, many early Adventists opposed the idea of church organization. George Storrs declared in February of 1844 that a church "becomes Babylon the moment it is organized."<sup>10</sup>

In 1853, however, James White began nudging Adventists towards "gospel order" through a series of *Review* and *Herald* editorials. The editorials had their influence. Michigan was organized into the first local conference in 1861; the General Conference was organized in 1863.

*1873: Butler on Leadership: Slipping Toward Babylon.* G. I. Butler, General Conference president from 1871-1874 and again from 1880-1888, was involved first in an alarming move toward "the spirit of domination."

In 1873 Butler published his "Leadership" essay which argued for giving James White preeminence in deciding Church polity. Though the essay was officially endorsed by the General Conference in session, James White's uneasiness along with cautions and a rebuke from Ellen White called forth a remarkable "Confession" from Butler, published in the

*Review*. At Butler's request, the next General Conference also rescinded its endorsement of his essay.<sup>11</sup>

*1875: Highest Authority.* Surprisingly, an Ellen White quote often used to support centralized church authority at the General Conference actually affirms *diffusion* of authority, rather than its *centralization*.<sup>12</sup> In 1875 Ellen White commended a brother for his progressive attitude toward Church leadership. God had given him "a genuine conversion" so that he no longer held "marked, decided views in regard to individual independence." But he had gone to the opposite extreme and deferred completely to James White, who was then General Conference president.

Listen to the group, not the man, Ellen White counseled: "I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private judgment must not be maintained, but must be surrendered."

*1883: Holding Firm: Church Manual Rejected.* The 1882 General Conference authorized a committee to create a church manual and to serialize it in the *Review* so that the Church could be exposed to the material and vote on it at the next session.

The committee did its work, but then recommended that the manual be rejected, arguing that a manual would seem to many like "a step toward formation of a creed" and might tempt some, "especially those commencing to preach," to seek guidance from the manual rather than from the Bible. "Our tendency should be in the direction of simplicity and close conformity to the Bible, rather than in elaborately defining every point in church management and church ordinances."<sup>13</sup> The Conference agreed and rejected the manual. Not until 50 years later, in 1932, would Adventists formally and fully adopt a church manual.

*1888: Landmarks vs. Present Truth.*

A hardening “spirit of domination” became painfully obvious at the 1888 General Conference. Symptomatic was the telegram which the ailing and absent President Butler sent to the delegates in response to the righteousness by faith emphasis from A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner. “Stand by the landmarks,”<sup>14</sup> urged Butler. Ellen White had other ideas:

“Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. . . . That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1896 Ellen White wrote from Australia: “I have been shown that it is a mistake to suppose that the men in positions of special responsibility at Battle Creek have wisdom which is far superior to that of ordinary men. Those who think that they have, supposing them to have divine enlightenment, rely upon the human judgment of these men, taking their counsel as the voice of God. But this is not safe.”<sup>16</sup>

Ellen White’s warnings crescendoed, climaxing in her address at the 1901 General Conference.

## A personal perspective

This troublesome but enlightening chapter of Seventh-day Adventist history needs to be framed within or directly related to the story of Jesus, showing the powerful parallels between the two. But a glimpse at my own story is helpful as precursor to drawing this parallel. Why does explaining Ellen White’s experience with the turn-of-the-century Seventh-day Adventist Church play such a crucial role in my outlook and experience?

Back in the 1970s when I was much younger and more bombastic, I found myself becoming very upset with the “brethren.” I am a hard-driving, energetic person, generally respectful of authority—but, like many preachers, more competitive and egocentric than I would like to

be. So when at times I was told in effect to sit still and be quiet and simply listen to those who were running the Church, I did not respond very constructively.

About the same time, a colleague in ministry mentioned that it was Ellen White’s *Testimonies to Ministers* that moved him from pre-med to ministry while he was in college. I began reading this volume and was delighted, even gratified. In the testimonies comprising large portions of the book, and mostly written from Australia in the 1890s, Ellen White was trying to put the stubborn brethren in Battle Creek in their place! I relished her strong words and found myself exclaiming, “That’s right, Sister White! Hit ‘em harder.” I was assembling a fine collection of missiles.

Then, to my horror, I realized I was destroying my soul. So I made a conscious (and initially quite selfish) choice to follow the way of Jesus and seek to love my “enemies”—for my own benefit, primarily, not theirs. I found that the missiles I’d been gathering so enthusiastically were not in fact for others, but for me. In this way the power of Jesus’ idealism began to strike home, reinforced by the firm counsel of Ellen White.

Here’s one, for example, good for every minister: “Those who do not learn every day in the school of Christ, who do not spend much time in earnest prayer, are not fit to handle the work of God in any of its branches, for if they do, human depravity will surely overcome them and they will lift up their souls unto vanity.”<sup>17</sup>

That one struck my soul squarely.

And what of Mrs. White’s vision for the Church?

“When men cease to depend upon men, when they make God their efficiency, then there will be more confidence manifest in one another. Our faith in God is altogether too feeble and our confidence in one another altogether too meager.”<sup>18</sup>

No wonder Ellen White was troubled by what was going on around 1901.

But where does Jesus come in to all of this? Another crucial part of my story is the transformation that began in my life when I realized that Jesus was not just someone sent from God, but was and is God in the flesh. I am tempted to parallel my “late” awakening to the full divinity of Christ with Ellen White’s.

Church publications are now saying more clearly that only with the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (1898) did a full trinitarian theology burst upon the Adventist scene. M. L. Andreasen, for example was so “astonished” when he read that “in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived,”<sup>19</sup> that he actually went to Elmshaven to see Ellen White and check the original manuscript to see if that sentence had come from her own hand. It had.<sup>20</sup>

My hunch (it’s moving toward conviction) is that Ellen White’s vision for the Church became even more vivid as she realized what it meant for Jesus to be God in the flesh. So here is a brief commentary from an “obedient rebel” on how knowing Jesus might shape our thinking about “authority” within the Church—and how it might have shaped Ellen White’s.

## Jesus and authority

From my study of Scripture two convictions have emerged:

*First*, that perhaps the most devastating result of sin is its distortion of our understanding of authority.

*Second*, that one of the most significant results of the Incarnation is the way it transforms our understanding of authority and restores the divine ideal.

For clarity’s sake we may contrast two extremes: “Demonic” authority is anchored in the coercive use of power. Its goal is self-preservation. It appeals to fear and ultimately resorts to violence to gain its ends.

In contrast, “divine” authority is anchored first in the prosperity of true goodness, that is, using power only in support of goodness. Its goal

is reciprocal love. It appeals to joy and seeks to win through a demonstration of goodness rather than through coercion by a show of force.

Some might argue that the Old Testament God often appealed to fear and resorted to violence. At Sinai, for example, God said: "Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death" (Exod. 19:12, NRSV). And Moses explained the divine purpose to the frightened people: "God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin" (Exod. 20:20, NRSV).

True, in the Old Testament, God did appeal to fear and He used violence. But how does that coincide with the approach and work of Jesus? The Old Testament was Jesus' Bible and the God of the Old Testament was His God. Indeed, even more pointedly, when Jesus said "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58, NRSV), His Jewish audience clearly understood that He was claiming to be God, the God of the Old Testament.

So between the old and the new we do confront a certain contrast, not between the demonic and the divine, but between two manifestations of the divine: At Sinai God came to kill, at Golgotha God came to die. Jesus never flinched at such contrasts. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, He told audience again and again, comparing His "new" way with the "old": Don't kill—don't even hate (Matt. 5:21, 22); don't commit adultery—don't even think the lustful thought (Matt. 5:27-28); an eye for an eye? No, rather, turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-41)! He even contrasted hate for an enemy with love for one's enemies (Matt. 5:43-44).

The way these contrasts meet in the life of Jesus help us understand why He is so basic to our understanding of God and His plan for the universe and for His church. Quite frankly, I could not interpret the Old Testament the way I do if it were not for my conviction that Jesus is the clearest and best revelation of God—yet a revelation thoroughly consistent

with God's way in the Old Testament.

For me the story only makes sense by placing it within the framework of the great battle between good and evil. It is the book of Job in cosmic perspective: Evil seeks to prove that selfishness is more powerful than love, and attacks God's people to prove it. The God of love so values the freedom of His creatures that He allows evil to have its day in the sun, to "prove" itself. The ugly results are there in the Bible for all to see.

God allowed Lucifer to show how pure selfishness engenders fear and violence. It began in Eden when Adam and Eve hid from God. From there, humans became ever more fearful of authority and the authorities ever more violent.

The gods, too, were seen to be increasingly violent. By the time of Abraham, child sacrifice—the ultimate violence—had come to be seen as *the* gift to the gods. The true God of heaven daringly adapted to that perverted view by commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac—but then intervened at the crucial moment to teach Abraham that only God can provide such a sacrifice, a foreshadowing of Golgotha.

So Jesus comes, God in the flesh, to show us what God is really like. Note how the ideal contrasts with the old:

Violence? None. He did not defend Himself, but turned the other cheek. He killed no one; never laid a hand on anyone. As one scholar put it, even when He cleansed the temple, Jesus attacked the furniture, not the people.

Violent punishments? None. Go and sin no more.

Enemies? Father, forgive them.

Authorities? He treated them with respect, but challenged them when they overstepped their power (cf. John 18:19-23).

And finally, how did Jesus model authority when He came as *the* Authority, as God on earth? He came to serve, winning devotion, not demanding it.

And that brings us to the two key passages in which Jesus tells us about

authority in the church. In Matthew 23:8-12, He contrasts His way with that of the honor-hungry scribes: "The greatest among you will be your servant" (NRSV), He said. Even more striking are His words to the mother of James and John when she requested the two highest places for her boys: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28, NIV).

The God of all creation came among us to serve. He calls us to follow Him within the Body of Christ and has promised His Spirit to help us make it happen.

That was the vision of the Church which drove Ellen White to plead with the General Conference delegates in 1901: "Let every one of you go home, not to chat, chat, chat, but to pray. Go home and pray. Talk with God. Go home and plead with God to mold and fashion you after the divine similitude."<sup>21</sup>

When obedient rebels follow Jesus, it changes everything. They do not exercise authority over their brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray that I'll ever remember that truth. ■

1 General Conference Bulletin [GCB], 25 April 1901, 457

2 GCB, 12 April 1901, 204

3 GCB, 3 April 1901, 23

4 Cited from GCB, 3 April 1901, 23827

5 Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* [TM] (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1923, 1944), 359 [1895].

6 TM 362.

7 See George R. Knight, "Spiritual Revival and Educational Expansion," *Adventist Review*, 29 March 1984.

8 GCB, 25 April 1901, 457.

9 Review and Herald [RH], 26 November 1901, 761.

10 *The Midnight Cry*, 15 February 1844, cited in Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1976, 1977), 127

11 RH, 25 Feb. 1875, 26 Aug. 1875

12 Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1948), 3:492 [1875].

13 RH, 20 Nov 1883, 733.

14 Cited in Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years*, 282n

15 Ibid., 282, [Ms. 8a, 1888].

16 TM, 374 (July 5, 1896)

17 TM, 169 [1892]

18 TM, 214

19 Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), 530.

20 Cited in George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 116, 117.

21 GCB, 3 April 1901, 26

## Found at the Festival!

**U**nder the overall theme "Our Portion of the Power," North American Division's (NAD) Festival of the Laity combined a cornucopia of spiritual food and training seminars with an abundant array of resources for practical church growth.

I visited dozens of displays at this extraordinary event chaired by J. Alfred Johnson, director of NAD Adult Ministries, and was repeatedly reminded of the plethora of materials and programs by which the Church and allied agencies equip laity and pastors to prepare people for Jesus' coming. You deserve to know about some of these unique ideas which sparked renewal for me.

*Adventist Risk Management (ARM)* hardly sounds like a description of finishing the work. But by presenting solutions that maintain or rebuild stability in uncertain times, ARM stays on the frontline of enabling the Church's ministry ([www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org)).

*Virtual Impact Productions* provides local churches and conferences with useful tools to track membership growth, programs to enhance congregational communications, as well as professional development and continuing education for pastors and teachers ([www.virtualled.org](http://www.virtualled.org)).

*Voice of Prophecy* keeps pace with today's technology by offering dynamic Discover Bible Guides online. Imagine, your congregation operating a successful Internet Bible School ([discover.schools@comopuserve.com](mailto:discover.schools@comopuserve.com)).

*Life Ministries International*, a supportive Christ-centered ministry, works through the local church to provide people with resources and relationships leading to healthy sexuality. It attempts to enable people to walk from the bondage of sexual addiction from within God's unconditional love ([www.freedomeveryday.com](http://www.freedomeveryday.com)).

*Bite Back* from Florida Hospital Church makes a difference in your com-

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munity. It helps you answer questions about your community ([www.hospitalchurch.org](http://www.hospitalchurch.org)).

*NAD's Commission for People with Disabilities* offers training materials and awareness events dedicated to making God's house physically accessible to all who would come if they could ([www.NAD-adventist.org/humanrelations](http://www.NAD-adventist.org/humanrelations)).

*Bibleinfo.com* shares Bible answers via Internet or telephone 24/7. A variety of topics can be easily accessed or callers can speak with an information specialist ([www.Bibleinfo.com](http://www.Bibleinfo.com)).

*La Sierra University* campus ministry programs include assisting homeless, mission ventures in Mexico, and distributing food, clothing, toys, and God's love to the poor ([www.lasierra.edu](http://www.lasierra.edu)).

*Someone To Talk To* offers opportunity for Adventist families and friends of homosexuals to learn and interact with others encountering similar situations ([www.someone-to-talk-to.net](http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net)).

*GC Health Ministries* presents ready-to-use exhibits and resources for celebrating healthful living benefits ([www.healthconnection.org](http://www.healthconnection.org)).

*Golden Harvest Fruit Company*, shows local churches and schools that money really does grow on trees by helping groups with proven fundraising training, advertising supplies, and the finest citrus fruit ([www.goldenharvest@worldnet.att.net](mailto:www.goldenharvest@worldnet.att.net)).

*Children's Daily Bible Guides* bring the

brightest and best resources to family worship ([www.mybiblefirst.org](http://www.mybiblefirst.org)).

*Lifestyle Centers of America* change lifestyles to restore health and hope ([www.lifestylecenter.org](http://www.lifestylecenter.org)).

*Andrews University* emphasizes life is not just a career, it's a calling. Excellence in education is coupled with commitment to God's leading into personal service ([www.andrews.edu](http://www.andrews.edu)).

*PlusLine.Org* serves when you seek to connect people with resources and ideas. They will help you find answers ([www.plusline.org](http://www.plusline.org)).

*Book Systems Inc.* develops your library into ready usability with software and search access ([www.booksys.com](http://www.booksys.com)).

*Adventist Deaf Ministries* helps your church reach the hearing impaired with sign language videos, easy-reading books and tracts, and attractive materials for kids ([www.deafadventist.org](http://www.deafadventist.org)).

*Real Truth Ministries* is a thrilling evangelistic outreach which focuses on preaching the gospel while addressing health, family, and youth needs (RTruthInc@aol.com).

*Loma Linda Broadcasting Network* keeps you connected 24/7 by satellite at Telstar 6, Channel 11 ([www.llbn.tv](http://www.llbn.tv)).

*Tagnet.org* offers you the tools for an empowering online ministry at the local church through their easy-to-use WebSite Builder ([www.TAGnet.org](http://www.TAGnet.org)).

*Adventist Reconciliation Services* assists individuals and congregations with peacemaking relationship restoration ([www.adventistreconciliation.org](http://www.adventistreconciliation.org)).

*SEEDS*, NAD's annual church planting conference, brings you the best inspiration, intensive training, and how-to resources for effective church plants ([www.nadei.org](http://www.nadei.org)).

And my favorite display? Our own *Ministerial Resource Center*, of course! Useful materials for developing excellence in pastor and laity leadership ([www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com)). ■

## BOOK REVIEW

**Death and Bereavement Across Cultures**, edited by Colin Murray Parkes, Pittu Laungani, and Bill Young. London: Routledge, 1998, 260 pages.

I would highly recommend this book for chaplains and pastors who must deal with people from outside their religion and/or culture in matters of death and bereavement. The book is written by professionals experienced in different cultures from around the world. They look at how different people view death and how they deal with it; their ways of expressing grief, associated rit-

uals, taboos, ceremonies, and customs.

Typical cultural/religious cases are always observed and their meanings are explained. Then the authors give suggestions on ways that support workers (chaplains, pastors, priests, psychologists, medical staff, etc.) can be of assistance to each particular people group. It is professional and well-written—an excellent handbook!

—M. Daniel Walter, Southeast Asia Union Mission, Singapore.

**Note:** Have you read a book recently that has influenced your ministry and thinking? Do you believe the book would interest other readers? Send us a brief review (150-200 words); if we publish it, we'll send you U.S.\$25.00.—Editor

## SHOP TALK

### Recycling church literature

Pastors, wondering what to do with all those old Sabbath School supplies, evangelistic materials, and other such literature that are gathering dust in a closet? Set up a box for materials to be sent to overseas fields where Christian literature is scarce, costly, and at times unavailable. The supplies can be boxed up, sent to the mission field via M-bags (very reasonable rates because it travels by ship), and can be used as the "foundation" for God's work in other parts of the globe. ■

—John Baxter, Jalandhar, Punjab, India.

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