

quarterly resource for local church elders † january/march 2009

ELDER'S DIGEST



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THE BIBLE

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2009: Your Best Time

We are beginning a new year, with 365 brand-new days ahead. What kind of year will 2009 be? What will happen during this period? How will we use this gift from God?

The Bible helps us to answer some of these questions. Ephesians 5:15-17 says, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (KJV).

Here are some important points we need to consider as we start the new year.

Our time in this world is limited. David the Psalmist wrote: "O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life" (Ps. 39:4). "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have strength; yet their span is trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (90:10).

If the average life span is approximately 75 years, that means I have only 9,490 more days ahead of me. This makes me want to reflect upon my life. The Bible does not tell us to count on tomorrow because tomorrow may never come; the only time we have is today. This has taught me that the time I have now is very valuable.

Always do your best. "Redeeming the time" means to make good use of our time in the best possible way, or to take advantage of all the opportunities we have. Paul presents a good argument for that—"because the days are evil." Wasting time or using it foolishly can be a problem. An overload of work and responsibilities can keep us from using our time wisely. One year contains 8,760 hours. That's enough time to accomplish a great deal of good if we use it wisely.

Understand the will of God.

Do you think God wants our minds to be filled with worry and anxiety and our agendas full of appointments? No! He wants us to

make time for spiritual things, for the important things in life. Discovering God's will for us in the new year should be our first priority, before we do anything else. Consider these suggestions before establishing your priorities.

1. Ask yourself who or what is most important in your life. I hope you will say, "My relationship with God." If so, this priority will influence all other areas of your life. Putting God first means dedicating time to prayer, Bible study, church attendance, and witnessing.

2. Spend time with your family. Not only do we make a mistake, we also commit injustice when we do not dedicate enough time to our spouse and children. Moments together without the interference of cell phones, the Internet, and television strengthen good relationships and restore those that are dying.

3. Don't let work rule your life. Today's unemployment and financial crises mean that people are very concerned about their jobs. As Christians, we should be the most dedicated workers out there, but we must remember that we work to live; we don't live to work.

4. Live in the present. Two things might prevent us from fully living in the present: the past and the future. Sad remembrances of things we've done or left undone in the past, and anxiety and worry about the future—these may destroy our ability to make good use of today. While it is important to learn from past mistakes and plan for the future, it is also important to enjoy the beauty of the present.

Another year is beginning, a new page in the story of our lives is about to be written, and the hope of a happy new year beats strong in our hearts. God wants to help us live for today, just as He wants us to focus on eternity. He wants us to bring the hope of salvation to those who do not have it. May we make the Lord's will our own in 2009.

Happy New Year!



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

WHY CHURCHES GROW



Dr. Joseph Kidder is a professor of Church Growth and Leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Two interesting aspects of his biography are that he was born in the city of Nineveh (in Iraq) and that he was converted at a young age in that country. He suffered severe religious persecution within his own family, yet because of his testimony, his mother, brother, and cousin joined the church. In fact, his cousin is now the church pastor at the Baghdad Seventh-day Adventist Church. Kidder and his wife Denise have two college-age children. Besides holding a doctorate in theology, Dr. Kidder also studied engineering. He's been an Adventist pastor for 28 years and has been teaching for the last eight years.

TELL US BRIEFLY ABOUT YOUR CONVERSION EXPERIENCE.

I was born in Nineveh, now called Mosul, in northern Iraq. I was part of a Greek Christian Orthodox family until I was 19, when I decided to become a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When my father learned of my conversion, he called my entire family together and humiliated me before them. I was beaten nearly to death and cast out of my home. I was then helped by an Adventist family who led me to our college in Lebanon. Later, I came to

the United States and studied engineering and theology.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST?

Because of the truth. Jesus said He is the truth, and if we follow Jesus, we have to accept the whole truth He represents.

FROM THEN ON, HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN WITH GOD?

It gives me a lot of joy. I'm always enthusiastic about knowing Him more and more and walking with Him. I didn't have a passion for God before; I had a passion for the truth. It was the truth that made me leave my family and friends to become an Adventist. However, later on I dedicated more time to being with God. Every day, I "walk" with God for one or more hours when I commune with Him in prayer and Bible study. I also like to hold spiritual retreats. I like to share God with other people. In the Seminary, I'm trying to create a new evangelism culture. I encourage my students to pray among themselves. I like to meet people who invite me to pray. I believe something wonderful happens when we are in communion with God.

WHAT METHOD DO YOU FEEL JESUS USED TO ATTRACT PEOPLE?

The book *The Ministry of Healing* describes Jesus' method: "The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His

sympathy for them, and ministered to their needs and, and won their confidence" (p. 142). It is only in following Christ's methods that we will have true success in evangelism.

WHY DO SOME CHURCHES GROW WHILE OTHERS DON'T?

There are several factors that contribute to a church's growth. The first factor is leadership. The church grows when leaders point the members' vision in the right direction. At the Seminary, we did a study to discover the differences between growing churches and non-growing churches. One of the things we discovered is the leader's influence. The growing church has leaders (pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders) who desire to see its growth and are willing to pay the price of growth.

The second factor is the members' enthusiasm about God. They are enthusiastic about the idea of growth; they talk about it and have an attitude that says that God will make wonderful things happen among them.

The third factor we discovered is sharing. When members are enthusiastic about their experience with God, they tend to share it with other people.

The fourth factor in church growth lies in the involvement of members, not only through their enthusiasm but through their involvement in church activities, especially in community activities. Members make a difference. They witness at work, in their neighborhoods, and at home.

The fifth factor is worship. Liturgy is very important; growing churches tend to have an inspiring and vibrant liturgy. Their worship services are occasions where people are connected to God and feel His presence in a very intense way.

The sixth factor we discovered in growing churches is that the leadership is involved in training other people. The church cannot grow if the members are not trained in church ministries and evangelism. Our research has shown that growing churches spend at least 10 percent of their budget on training. They also spend about one third of their time training people. That means the pastor and other leaders invest one third of their time empowering others. On the other hand, non-growing churches spend little or no time on training.

IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH GROWTH AND APOSTASY RATES?

Yes. Growing churches tend to retain more of their members because there is enthusiasm. Growing churches give members a sense of belonging. Church is a place where something is happening. Another factor that keeps members in the church is having a cause. Members are involved in an undertaking. These churches have a clear mission and a focused program. Churches that accomplish little or nothing lose members because there is no enthusiasm, no cause, no vision, no training, and no challenges.

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH?

I believe that the number one reason people leave the church is because they don't feel that they belong. Church members usually belong to groups of family and friends. I call them "church structures." When a new member arrives, he or she needs to be helped to become part of a new circle of friends. But if new members find it hard to join one of these older structures, they may leave the church. Another reason people leave is the lack of a ministry for them. This was very clear in our study. Growing churches always involve new members in advancing God's cause, both inside and outside the church.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRONG CHURCH LEADER?

First, the church leader needs to be wise, spiritual, and committed to God; when deacons were being chosen in the apostolic church, this was the criteria used. Today God wants strong spiritual leaders in His churches, people who are fully committed and connected to Him.

The second characteristic is being full of hope and enthusiasm. Leaders must believe that God can do the impossible. They need to believe that the impossible is going to happen because we serve a powerful God.

Third, leaders need to have a "growth vision." They must believe that every church can have a better future. They must be able to envision

what that future will look like for their church and be able to share this vision clearly with the members.

Fourth, strong leaders are always training, empowering, and preparing other people to become leaders.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THE WORD "VISION"?

"Vision" is the ideal God has for us and for our churches.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR A LEADER TO HAVE VISION?

If leaders do not know where they are going, how can they lead? The Bible says that "people perish without vision." Vision includes direction and a better future; it's where we are going from here. Without vision, a church becomes stagnant and dies.

WHAT IS ONE CHALLENGE ELDERS FACE TODAY?

One priority is the challenge of creating a place where people can grow spiritually in a receptive, loving, and joyful environment. It is important that each church becomes a place where people who visit for the first time feel welcome and say with enthusiasm, "I like being here, and I intend to come back!" The church needs to be a loving community, and we need to be patient with visitors and new members. Let's not judge them because they are not exactly the way we would like them to be. New members need time to become more like Jesus. In the meantime, they need our support, love, and patient encouragement.



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LEADERS**

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Touch a Heart, Tell the World

If I were to ask you as a church leader, "What are some of the issues and challenges that the women in your congregation face?" What would you say? At General Conference Women's Ministries we have identified six main challenges that our sisters face in their daily lives. As I travel the globe I have found that these challenges exist in every country, in varying degrees, but they do exist.

Social status, education, financial status, culture, race, first world, developing world – neither of these hinder the existence of these challenges. They are real,

they decimate the lives of their victims and their families, and they are unstoppable.

These challenges are:

- Threats to Health
- Workloads
- Poverty
- Lack of training, mentoring and educational opportunities
- Abuse
- Illiteracy

Let me share a brief description about each of these challenges.



1. THREATS TO HEALTH - Women's health includes her emotional, social, and physical well-being and is directly affected by social, political and economic factors. The quality of a woman's health directly impacts her life and well-being, her family and society.



2. A WOMAN'S WORKLOAD - Women around the world and in all cultures face the problem of work overload. Many women are faced with the challenge of doing 90% of the world's agricultural work which includes long work days, small salaries and then the additional hours of housework and childcare with limited access to basic necessities. On the other hand are women who deal with the balancing act of societal expectations for maintaining an intact and healthy family while achieving in a highly competitive work environment resulting in long days, limited rest and recreation, and little time with God.



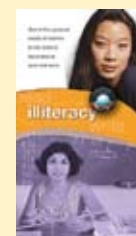
3. POVERTY - The UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) report "Progress of the World's Women 2005" notes that "despite parity in primary education, disparities are still wide in secondary and tertiary education—both increasingly key to new employment opportunities."



4. LACK OF TRAINING, MENTORING, AND OPPORTUNITIES - Education for all is a basic human right. For women to achieve better health, nutrition, and quality of life for themselves and their families they need equal access to education. Lack of education results in women being trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited options for economic improvement which results in sentencing their children to chronic poverty and limited education.



5. ABUSE - Domestic violence, incest, rape, and battering are all too common burdens that women carry. Physical, sexual, and psychological battering happens to small girls, adolescents, single, and married adult women, including elderly women. No stratum of society is immune from the epidemic of violence and as a church we believe that tolerance of abuse is a denial of Christ.



6. ILLITERACY - There are nearly one billion people in the world who are illiterate, one-fifth of the world's population. One out of every three women in the world cannot read and write. Statistics show that two-thirds of the world's non-literate population and one-third of all heads of households are women, yet they carry out two-thirds of the world's work.

I know this information seems a bit overwhelming and as you read you are thinking about your country and if these problems really exist. Let me assure you, they exist. These are real challenges that our sisters deal with not only in the community but also within our church walls.

So how can we, the church help? Is there something that you as a church elder can do to help with these problems? Yes there is, and I'm so glad you asked.

The first thing you can do is to create an awareness of these problems in your church. Do an assessment of your church, talk with the pastor, church leaders and some of the women in your church. Ask them which of these problems they think are challenges to women in the church and in the community. Why the community? Because the problems of the community are also the problems of the church. Baptized members don't leave their social challenges and issues behind when they get baptized. They bring them into the church and they need to be acknowledged and then helped.

But the greater challenge for us as leaders is not only to help those in our pews in need but reach out to "Tell the World" about Jesus.

What was Jesus' mission to the world? These prophetic words about the Messiah found in Isaiah 61:1-3 reminds us,

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those
who are bound..."*

*To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the
spirit of heaviness..."*

But what method should we use to touch the lives of those in need? Ellen White is very clear on the method.

"Christ's method ALONE will give true success in reaching people. The Savior mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. THEN He bade them, 'follow Me'." *Ministry of Healing*, p. 143 (Emphasis mine).

Did you see it? Don't miss what Sister White is saying in this quotation – Jesus dealt with the needs of the people first, their challenges, their social issues, and THEN He told them to follow Him. First He met their needs, He touched them where it hurt the most, He dealt with their issues; then He gave them spiritual food.

Dear Elder, can we do less? God has called us to lead by His example. We, the women of your church and your community are waiting for a touch of love from God, and that means from you.

For more information: Department of Women's Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600
USA - 301-680-6608 - womensministries@gc.adventist.org
<http://wm.gc.adventist.org>

Heather–Dawn Small is the Director of General Conference Women's Ministries.

MISSION WEEK FOR KIDS

BE PART OF IT!



HOW ELDER'S CAN HELP

Uses for Mission Week:

- Children's Church
- Devotionals at church school
- Special programs
- Mission-themed sermons presented by kids to the congregation

Mission Week's Aim:

- Teach the importance of mission work around the world
- Present mission service as a soul-winning adventure

- Inspire kids to support mission work through their prayers, offerings, and involvement
- Instill a sense that each of us can do something for Jesus

For your free copy of *Mission Week* - log onto www.AdventistMission.org or call 1-800-648-5824

Remember those mission stories back when you were a kid in Sabbath School? You sat on the edge of your seat as each thrilling detail of the story unfolded. Would the witch doctor poison the little boy before help arrived? Would the villagers get the missionary doctor's jeep out of the mud in time? Would the girls find their way through the jungle before the tiger discovered their trail? Would the teacher ever come back and teach them about Jesus? In those days, it seemed as though spreading the gospel to all the world was the most important thing we did as a church. Today, it still is.

Lately there has been a resurgence of interest among adults who remember those days with nostalgia. Of course, mission service and the opportunity to financially support the global work of the church has never gone away, but now parents and teachers want their kids to experience the same excitement about missions that we did.

The Office of Adventist Mission intends to bring back this excitement with a second edition of an interactive program called *Mission Week*. The new curriculum, based on the theme "Be Part of It," contains mission-focused devotionals for the classroom for grades 3-8, or for children ages 8-13. It's been designed so that children can fully participate by leading the programs and taking part in the activities.

The program is similar to a Week of Prayer or a Week of Spiritual Emphasis, only in this case, every devotional program is focused on missions. Complete programs contain video stories, print and PowerPoint stories, mission factoids, activities, and contests. Programs are easily adjustable according to grade or age level, and it is easily adaptable for Sabbath School pro-

grams. Primaries and Juniors can even choose their favorite stories and videos to present a mission-themed sermon for the adults. Most pastors and elders would be delighted to involve children in a special church service dedicated to missions.

The *Mission Week* program begins with a video welcome from Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission, challenging kids to find opportunities to get involved personally. "I hope you'll catch a vision of what your mission is," says Krause, "and help people just the way Jesus did when He was here. You can be part of it!"

Initially, the most attractive feature may be the price. It's free, one per teacher. Sabbath School teachers, home school teachers, and other interested adults are welcome to use *Mission Week* in their classroom, children's church, or other appropriate programs. Simply log onto www.AdventistMission.org and ask for your free copy, or call 1-800-648-5824.

Now kids can experience missions right in their own classroom or church and become a vital part of the mission team. Why not volunteer to join them? After all, we all want to be part of it!



Nancy Kyte is the marketing director for the Office of Adventist Mission. She says the best part of her job is getting people excited about mission. Through the years she has been a leader in the Primary division of her local church, making mission come alive in her Sabbath School through the stories and activities in the *Children's Mission* magazine.

ADVENTIST MISSION MISSION WEEK

Be Part of It!

Mission-focused devotionals for the classroom. Let your students lead the programs!

Contains complete programs for grades 3-8 or ages 8-13, including:

- Video Stories
- Print and PowerPoint Stories
- Mission Factoids
- Activities
- Essays
- Posters
- Extras



A Sunday church that my family regularly drives past displays banners with pithy sayings. One day, my seven-year-old daughter, perched in our car's back seat, sat up and noticed the newest sign recently erected.

Carefully pronouncing each word, Carissa read aloud, "Say... it...boldly." As the church disappeared into our rearview mirror, she repeated it again, mulling the words over, tasting the meaning of their message. Then, with a flash of realization, Carissa declared, "If they are really going to 'say it boldly' they need to go to church on Sabbath and not Sunday!"

While my daughter is correct, boldness can be abused when we don't "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). I've met a few recklessly bold church members through the years. At a church social where a number of people from other faiths were present, I overheard a sincere member lecturing our guests in stern tones on the right day for worship and damning them if they didn't show up at church the next Sabbath. This is not the type of boldness that I aspire to.

There is a sanctified audacity, however, that we all can benefit from. It is the boldness that the fledgling Christian church beseeched God for while facing beatings, imprisonment, and death. "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word" (Acts 4:29).

We too face real risks when witnessing. Rejection. Ridicule. Failure. Even death in some cultures. Human nature shrinks from these and less hazards. And more often than we like, this is where we may find ourselves. Bereft of boldness while opportunities to share Jesus pass us by.

Recently though, I've discovered apostolic boldness in the 21st century. On a visit to the church's Hope Channel studios in Brazil, I was inspired with our members' holy courage to claim their land for Christ. They have applied for more than 1,600 television broadcast licenses to put Hope Channel in millions of homes. The Brazil Central Union, in the São Paulo metro area, is in the process of purchasing a television station to reach 22 million residents in one of the five

most populous cities in the world. Eager to help others find Jesus, South America is also broadcasting their Portuguese Hope Channel to the Portuguese-speaking nations of Africa.

During my visit I was also introduced to *Viva com Esperança—Live with Hope*. This was the Division's bold campaign to give the gospel to 100 million people in a single day. On September 6, members united together to distribute 50 million *Live with Hope* magazines filled with Christ-centered articles and Bible studies.

Ten thousand billboards, commercials on Hope Channel's network of more than 200 television stations, and radio spots provided an additional boost by inviting people to the *Live with Hope* website.

Such efforts are born of boldness and a keen appreciation of our mission. Erton Köhler, South American Division president, explains, "God is in a hurry and we should be too."

Returning home, I encountered a similarly bold plan for North America—The Year of Evangelism. North America averages roughly


35,000 new members a year. But pastors and church leaders have asked themselves if this reflects enough boldness on their part.

Recognizing that Jesus yearns to reconnect with His lost children, the church in North America has designated 2009 as the year to win 100,000 persons to Christ. It has never been done before. And it can only happen as every member and pastor prays like the early church for a bold faith.

At the beginning of the year, every church is requested to dedicate a Sabbath to earnestly seek God for His Spirit. We need Him to do for us what He did in the first century. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

Bold goals include big plans and resources. So every pastor and church district is being asked to conduct two evangelistic meetings during 2009: one starting April 17 and the other on September 11. The Adventist Church Channel, Hope Church Channel, and www.yearofevangelism.org will provide a full range of videos and training materials to walk you through the entire evangelism process of personally connecting with people, holding meetings, and the important job of helping new members grow in their faith.

2009 is a call to boldness for all who carry the name Adventist in North America. A call to not only *say it boldly*, but more importantly, to put our words into action and to *live it boldly* in The Year of Evangelism.

Visit www.yearofevangelism.org for more information. 

Gary Gibbs is a Vice President of the Hope Channel.



SHARE THE HOPE

Our desire is to reach as many people as possible in 2009.

1 Year • 1 Goal • 100,000 Souls

Every Pastor Hold a Spring and Fall Evangelistic Series.

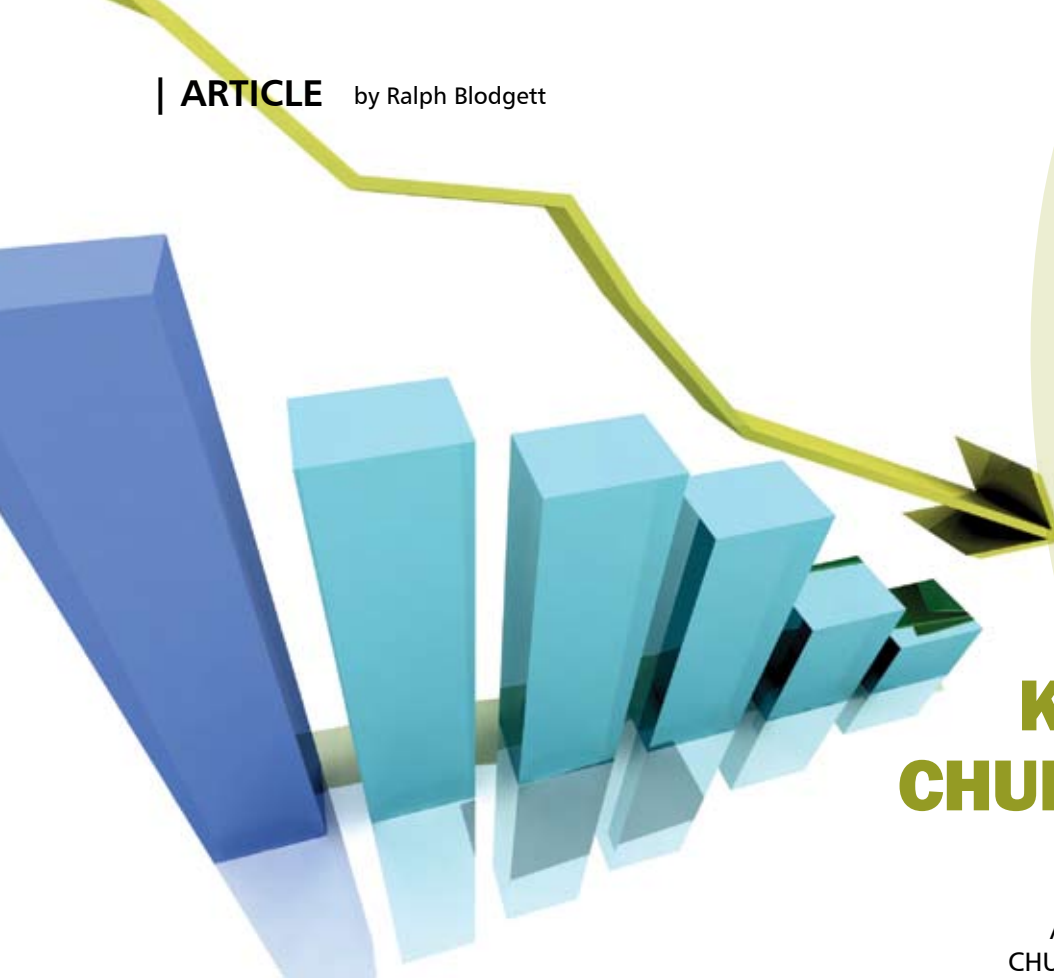
www.sharethehope2009.com
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- January Prayer Conference on the Hope Channel
- Monthly interactive programs on the Hope Church Channel (and on the web)
- Adventist Ministries Convention keynote address live on the Hope Church Channel
- Professional brochures available



The 2009 Initiative of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.



10 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR CHURCH FROM GROWING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR THE
CHURCH LEADER WHO ALREADY
HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS.

Many churches today struggle with the burden of crowded pews, packed children's classes, and filled parking lots. Unfortunately, pastors and local elders in these situations have few places where they can turn for help. Scores of books on how to increase church membership line the shelves of Christian bookstores everywhere. But no one, apparently, has authored a single book on how to avoid growing, how to keep unwanted people from the community out of a church that already has too many members.

Keeping people away from a church can prove difficult at times, especially when they seem determined to attend. However, if you adhere to the following guidelines, you can feel confident that your church has done every-

thing possible to keep them away, or at least prevent their return should they accidentally wander into your service. These ten rules really aren't too difficult to put into practice; many churches do so with apparent ease. By putting forth only a minimum effort, yours can too.

Check the box for each rule that you feel your church is following. Be as objective and honest as possible; if you aren't measuring up, leave the box blank and go to the next one. At the end, add the number of boxes you have checked and find where your church stands by using the handy scoring device.

1. MAKE YOUR CHURCH DIFFICULT FOR VISITORS TO FIND.

This is one of the best ways to discourage visitors. When you

build a church, get the cheapest piece of land you can buy—preferably well out of town and on a seldom-used road. (Better yet, have some members donate a piece of property for the new church. That way your chances of having the right kind of property for discouraging visitors is almost guaranteed.)

Above all, don't put up any direction signs that would help strangers or out-of-town visitors locate your building. Don't provide brochures that reveal the location or time of your service. Be careful not to list your church in the yellow pages or online. These are some of the first places a person will look when trying to locate a church. Besides, think of the money you will save by not listing your church along with the others.

2. DON'T LET YOUR MEMBERS INVITE PEOPLE TO ATTEND YOUR CHURCH.

If you're serious about keeping strangers away, you naturally don't want to invite anyone to attend. One survey revealed that 40 percent of the people who started coming to church did so because someone invited them to attend. Many people simply won't attend a new or different church without an invitation. They fear they won't be welcome, or not want to sit by themselves among total strangers. A personal invitation only makes it easier for them to decide to visit.

3. GIVE ALL VISITORS A COLD SHOULDER.

If a stranger is persistent enough to attend your church in spite of the barriers you have erected, nothing will communicate a lack of welcome better than to ignore him or her. Giving visitors a cold shoulder is easy; you don't have to say a word. If perchance the stranger looks your way, simply turn your head. They will quickly understand from your excellent body language that you don't need them in your church. Few who have experienced such treatment will insist on returning.

4. BE ON YOUR GUARD FOR STRANGERS IN YOUR CHURCH.

When someone walks in the door for the first time, be sure they find no one posted there to greet them or give them a church bulletin. Let them discover for themselves where the cradle roll or youth department is located. Also, be sure to change classes around frequently. Better yet, don't place the correct class name of age levels on the doors of the different classrooms. Maybe they will feel so embarrassed walking

into the wrong class that they'll never return.

5. DON'T ENCOURAGE YOUR MEMBERS TO INVITE VISITORS HOME.

If a visitor insists on returning a second or third time—in spite of all your precautions—make sure no one invites that individual home for dinner. Dinner invitations are as dangerous as giving a bowl of milk to a stray cat; the person might never stop coming to your church.

6. HAVE A LIMITED CHURCH PROGRAM.

A church with a lot of different programs related to people's needs draws visitors like a winter feeder draws birds. Need-oriented programs can totally wreck your game plan for keeping people out of your church. Don't conduct Vacation Bible Schools—not only do they encourage children to attend your church, but they often inspire the parents to show up, too! Don't offer classes such as Family Enrichment, Pre-marital or Health Seminars. Too many people might be attracted to such topics.

7. MAKE YOUR CHURCH AS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR VISITORS AS POSSIBLE.

Anything goes in this category. Don't print weekly church bulletins—all they do is help visitors understand your service and make them feel comfortable. Be sure your church has hard wooden pews. They keep people from enjoying the service.

In addition, make sure someone talks about church finances from the pulpit every week. Nothing will turn people away from a church faster than a secular service that focuses on money,

fundraising, and charts. Even Jesus, visiting the temple, got pretty upset over the money-changers of His day, didn't He?

Other tricks of the trade that will discourage most people include lack of heat in the winter, slippery sidewalks when it snows, and of course a hot, stuffy service in the summer.

8. NEVER CONDUCT ANY COMMUNITY-OUTREACH PROGRAMS.

Studies show that rapidly growing churches always employ a variety of outreach programs—letters from the pastor to newlyweds, letters to new residents of the community, cooking classes, sermon tapes for shut-ins, etc. Don't publish a monthly pastoral letter. Nonmembers might get hold of it and become interested in the announced topics and upcoming programs. They might even assume that your church has a progressive program and want to attend. Many people avoid churches because they don't realize how much the fellowship could benefit them personally; you don't want anyone deciding your church has something to offer!

9. KEEP YOUR CHURCH OUT OF THE PAPER.

If you're serious about keeping visitors away from your services, be sure to elect an ineffective, unconcerned individual to the office of public relations. Stories in the local papers about the activities of the church and its members will only create a lot of goodwill in the community and encourage the unchurched to attend. A lot of lonely people and those searching for help in their lives are just looking for a church to belong to.

10. ABOVE ALL, KEEP THE CHURCH BUILDING ITSELF IN A RUN-DOWN CONDITION.

Nothing will tell the visitor you don't care about him or her better than forcing that individual to worship in an unkempt, shabby building. Little things say a lot: walls needing painting, water-stained ceilings, a piano out of tune, the absence of tissue paper in the restrooms, torn up songbooks.

Many other techniques to keep the visitor (and member) away can be used, of course. The guidelines outlined here should serve only to stimulate your thinking. Most likely you have already detected the single motivating principle behind all ten: If you want to keep visitors from attending your church, do nothing!

However, if for some reason you should want people from the

community to visit your church, you'll have to develop your own rules. But be forewarned—growing churches always encounter problems. It's much easier just to keep people away!

Ralph Blodgett was the associate editor of *These Times*, which was published in Nashville, Tennessee, when he wrote this article. This article has been adapted to fit this magazine.

SCORE YOURSELF!

If the number of boxes you checked was:

(8-10) You have no cause to fear rampant growth and its attendant problems. In fact, you have no cause to fear growth of any kind.

(5-7) You're probably safe, but don't let your guard down. At the first sight of an unfamiliar face, put into practice the boxes you didn't check.

(3-4) You're vulnerable and definitely ought to review these ten guidelines with your church as soon as possible. A segment of your congregation doesn't understand how important nongrowth can be.

(0-2) Quite likely you're experiencing many of the difficulties of a growing church. Go back over the guidelines and determine to put into practice an active program of doing nothing. It's never too late!

AUSTIN C. ARCHER, PH.D.

Austin Archer was born to Adventist parents on the island of Tobago in the West Indies. He was baptized at the age of nine, and since then, has served in every church in which he has fellowshipped, including churches in Trinidad, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and now in Washington State.



Elder Archer and his wife Beverly have been members of the Walla Walla University Church since 1991, when he joined the faculty as a professor of psychology and education. Their three daughters were all baptized there, and are actively involved in the church. Soon after coming to Walla Walla, Elder Archer and his wife were invited to serve as elders, and in 2004, Austin was appointed as the head elder. The elders are involved in soul-winning endeavors such as serving on the Church Board, assisting pastors in visiting members, and planning and leading out in weekly worship services. Elder Archer says, "I consider it a great privilege to be entrusted with the leadership of the church as its head elder. It is a particular joy to work cooperatively with the pastoral staff in nurturing the membership of this church, the largest in our conference. As head elder, my responsibilities include chairing monthly Board meetings, as well as joining with the pastoral staff in planning meetings where a significant amount of time is spent on Bible study and prayer for the members of our church."

BIOGRAPHY

HOW TO FIND SUCCESS IN 2009

Joshua 1 and Deuteronomy 34:9

The word of the Lord to His people is that we lift the standard higher and still higher. If we obey His voice, He will work with us, and our efforts will be crowned with success.

Ellen White

The Colporteur Evangelist, p. 25

for you in 2008 to prepare you for His purpose in 2009? Can you say with the songwriter, "Where He leads me I will follow . . . I'll go with Him all the way"?

II. HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES

Read Joshua 1:2-4 to see how God tells Israel and Joshua exactly what He will give them. A map. A global positioning system. God keeps His promises. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." As we prepare for 2009, how is your faith?

III. BE ASSURED OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God promised Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (verse 5). Jesus makes the same promises to us as Christians. Wow! God the Holy Spirit will live in us and move in us and give us reason for being (Acts 17:29). Remember, we are to live by faith, not by feeling. As someone once said,

"God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me."

You may be saying, "You don't know what I'm going through! You don't understand." No, I don't. But God does, and He will be with you forever. So lean on Him and get ready for 2009!

IV. HAVE COURAGE AND ACCEPT GOD'S POWER

Years after the deaths of Moses and Joshua, much of David's courage came from his knowledge that God had blessed the commitment and devotion of these two men and other Bible patriarchs. David knew that God could accomplish great things when His followers were to-

tally committed to Him and relied on Him for strength. This courage helped David kill a bear, a lion, and the giant Goliath, and gave him the strength to cope with King Saul's tirades. It helped David to be a good king, to repent quickly when he sinned, and to obey God even when his own son Absalom turned against him and tried to kill him.

More than 40 years before Joshua became Israel's leader, he was one of 12 spies sent into Canaan. Only he and Caleb believed that God could fulfill His promise; the other spies were afraid of the giants in the Promised Land. What giants are you anticipating in 2009? The God who was faithful to Joshua will be faithful to you in 2009. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (verse 9).

V. DO EXACTLY AS GOD COMMANDS

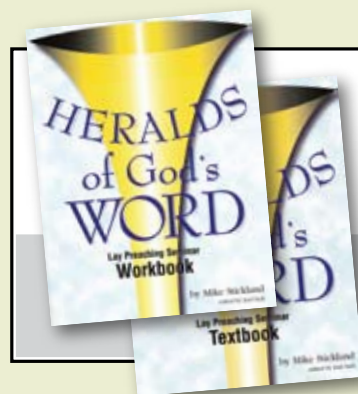
In 1 John, we are reminded that if we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with Jesus and our sins will be cleansed. Remember the words to the old hymn: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

To be happy, we must walk with the Lord—not to the right or left but in the narrow way that leads to life. Many in this world are traveling the broad way that leads to destruction. We must stay close to God. We must live lives of holiness and walk carefully along the highway of holiness. We must worship and respect God enough to pay attention to His plans.

CONCLUSION

In verses 16 and 17, we read that Joshua delivered God's message to Israel. The Israelites submitted to the will of God by following Joshua's leadership. Joshua and the Israelites were successful, and God gave them the Promised Land. To prosper and have success in 2009, we must submit our wills and surrender our all to God. God wants our total commitment. When we give Him that, He will fill us with His Spirit (see Deut. 33:9), and we will have joy as He gives us success and prosperity. I want God's best in 2009. Do you?

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SIN IN THE CAMP

Joshua 7:1-13

Nothing is so damaging and hurtful as when a person, especially a Christian, lives in sin. In this lesson we will see what happened to the nation of Israel as the result of one man's disobedience to the Lord.

Moses had died and Joshua was now the leader of Israel. His task was to lead the nation of Israel across the Jordan River and into the land of Canaan. Canaan suggests a parallel with the Christian life. The battles the people of Israel faced as they entered Canaan represent the battles we face today. The Israelites faced three main types of battles.

I. THE BATTLE OF JERICHO (CHAPTER 6).

The city of Jericho symbolizes the world. God told the children of Israel they were not to take anything out of Jericho as they went in to fight. But one man did not listen to God and sinned by taking what God said was to be destroyed or was to be saved for Him.

II. THE BATTLE OF AI (CHAPTER 7).

One lesson from the battle of Ai is the danger of self-sufficiency. As you study Chapter 7, you will find that the children of Israel underestimated their enemy (read Joshua 7:3-5). The lesson we can learn is this: We must never overestimate our personal strength. The instant we think we are strong enough and have control over the flesh, we are headed for a fall. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." The second lesson is also found in Chapter 7. Israel has just been defeated by the people of Ai. Thirty-six people lost their lives for nothing, and Joshua and the Israelites were discouraged. They fell on their faces in prayer, searching for answers. God explained to them why they lost the battle (read verses 10-13): there was sin in the camp! A man named Achan had stolen 200 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold, and a Babylonian garment from the city of Jericho. As a result, the whole nation of Israel suffered defeat, and Achan and his family lost their lives.

You may have heard the saying, "One bad apple spoils the whole lot." We must understand that if one individual in our church is living in sin, the rest of the church will suffer as a result.

The religion of Christ means much more than the forgiveness of sin. It means taking away our sins and filling the vacuum with the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ.

Ellen White
The Upward Look, p. 38

III. THE BATTLE AGAINST THE GIBEONITES (CHAPTER 9).

The battle against the Gibeonites was not a flesh-and-blood battle; it was a spiritual battle of deception. God told Joshua to wipe out all the inhabitants in the land. God was not unmerciful; He knew the people in Gibeon were pagan and would soon have the whole nation of Israel worshipping the same false gods they did. But the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites and caused them to sin.

If we allow sin to rule our lives, many of our prayers will go unanswered, and the work of the church will not move forward. Two types of sin merit special attention:

A. Sins of the flesh. When I speak of "the flesh," I am referring to activities such as drinking, infidelity, sexual misconduct, pornography, and so on.

B. Sins of the spirit. These sins include pride, anger, bitterness, greed, unbelief, rebellion, etc. When we do not confess and repent of these sins, God will withdraw His Spirit, and nothing will happen in our church.

If sin remains in our lives, three things can happen:

Our prayers will be hindered (verse 10). In 2 Chronicles 7:13, 14, we read, "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble

themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Our power will be limited (verse 12). God's presence brings power. Isaiah 64:1-3 says, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you."

It is an uncomfortable experience to stand behind the pulpit when there is unconfessed sin in our lives. God cannot bless our ministry until our sins are removed.

Our prosperity will be limited. Joshua 1:8 says, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (See also Ps. 119:10, 11, 102, 105, 133.)


Considering this reality, we need to do four things.

Examine your heart. Your first concern is not your brother or sister—it's you. Don't examine others. Examine yourself (2 Cor. 11:31, 32). Search your own heart, your own motives, your own priorities, and your own relationship with God.

Confess. Agree with what God has to say about your sin. Go to Him in contrition, confessing your failings. Recognize the ways in which you have broken God's law.

Repent. Turn from your wicked ways. Turn to God in genuine sorrow and seek His Spirit's guidance.

Resolve. It is only through God's strength that you can change. With the power of His Spirit, you must resolve not to return to your past way of life. As you spend time with God, He will strengthen your resolve.

Each of us—from the pastor to the youngest church member—must do some serious soul-searching. Let's get our hearts right with God—and get sin out of the camp. Then the church can grow and prosper. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

GOD'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Joshua 1:6-9

Every person wants to be successful. We often measure our worth by how successful we are, and our measure of success is often a worldly standard rather than a godly standard. Worldly success means luxury, wealth, possessions, achievements, notoriety, fame, beauty, brains, and brawn.

God's definition of success is completely unlike the world's definition. And His standard works for every person in every situation, whether at school, in business, in our families, or in our church. The path to true success cannot be traveled by anyone who does not follow God's principles for success. Let us consider these principles as found in Joshua 1:6-9.

I. BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

Notice the number of times God states this command to Joshua (verses 6, 7, 9). Why did God tell Joshua that he needed to be courageous? What would Joshua face that would require great courage? Besides making him the leader of the nation of Israel, God gave Joshua a huge project to complete: to lead the army into Canaan and drive out the people who lived there.

Forty years before this, Moses had sent 12 spies into the land of Canaan. They came back with stories of giants in the land who made them look like grasshoppers. When the Israelites heard this, they were afraid and refused to enter the land.

Seven nations lived in Canaan, all of them larger and stronger than Israel. By human standards, Joshua faced an uphill battle. He had every reason to be afraid. That's why God encouraged him to be strong and courageous.

Do you ever feel like you're facing an uphill battle? Do you sometimes think the odds are against you? There may be hundreds of times in our lives when we're faced with situations that, to our eyes, seem impossible. There are outward circumstances such as illnesses and disabilities, broken relationships, financial hardships, or job losses. Inner conflicts may test our faith—attacks on our personal integrity, remaining faithful when no one is looking, enduring the sting of loneliness and separation, standing alone when you're misunderstood. There are many times in our lives when we need to hear God's command to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous."

God has given us His Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Its teachings have a vital bearing on our prosperity in all the relations of life. Even in our temporal affairs it will be a wiser guide than any other counselor. Its divine instruction is the only way to success.

Ellen White
Lift Him Up, p. 130

There's another key factor we dare not overlook. Even though Joshua and the Israelites were small compared to the enemy, they had God on their side. This tipped the scales in their favor. Read Joshua 1:9 and Deuteronomy 7:17-19, 21. This is what provides the foundation for our courage. "For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Real success is not a result of our own strength and courage; real success comes from the strength and courage we receive from the knowledge that God is walking with us.

For Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan and claim God's promise, he had to be strong and courageous. The Israelites couldn't be like their fathers had been a generation ago, grumbling and complaining and refusing to enter the land because of their fear. Moses recounts the story of their failure in Deuteronomy 1:26-32.

The outcome of their fear and unbelief was . . . what? God became angry with them and took away from that generation the blessings He had reserved especially for them. God didn't want Joshua and his generation to make the same mistake.

In God's formula for success, the first thing we must do is be strong and courageous, "for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

II. BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S COMMANDS

Notice how the Lord delivers this message to Joshua in verse 7: "Be careful to obey all the law."

It would be convenient if we could pick and choose which of God's principles and laws we could follow and which we found to be too demanding and harsh. Ellen G. White affirms, "But God requires obedience to all His commands. The only way in which it is possible for men to be happy is by rendering obedience to the laws of God's kingdom" (*Our High Calling*, p. 24).


The law that Joshua was given was very detailed, and God expected him to learn it, meditate on it, and apply it. Ellen G. White says, "When we are daily under the control of God's Spirit, we shall be commandment-keeping people. We may show to the world that obedience to God's commands brings its own reward, even in this life, and in the future life eternal blessedness" (*Our Father Cares*, p. 281).

III. BE SATURATED IN GOD'S WORD

We make mistakes when we buy a new gadget and don't read the instruction manual. The same is true when it comes to the Christian walk. Many of our mistakes could be avoided if we immerse ourselves in God's Word.

ILLUSTRATION: When I first bought my new computer, I tried using it without referring to the manual. I made frequent errors. My mistakes were made in ignorance, but that didn't stop me from suffering the consequences as I deleted unsaved material or lost files. My ignorance was voluntary ignorance. The information I needed was available—if I had just taken the time to read it.

When we live our lives without consulting God's Word, it's a deliberate, voluntary ignorance, but that ignorance will not stop us from suffering the consequences. The wisdom we need is available, and it's vital that we don't just read our instruction manual, the Bible; we must also meditate on it and let God's Word saturate our spirit.

God's formula for success works, but there are no shortcuts. His plan calls us to be strong and courageous. It calls us to be obedient to His commands. It calls us to saturate our spirit with His Word. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

LIVING WITH A BAD DECISION

Joshua 9:1-27

We all make many decisions every day. And all of us have made decisions that we have regretted. No doubt we can all remember making bad decisions. Some decisions were serious while others were not. Today we will examine a decision made by Joshua and the other elders of Israel which had grave consequences.

I. BLESSINGS AND FIGHTS CAN OCCUR AT THE SAME TIME (VERSES 1-6).

Even while Israel had gathered to worship in Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30), her enemies had gathered to plan an attack (verses 1, 2). While Israel was worshipping God and reviewing God's law, the kings of Canaan rallied to form an alliance to meet the challenge of Israel's invasion. Though all the kings gathered to form this military alliance, the Gibeonites decided to pursue a different course of action because "the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai" (verse 3).

The Gibeonites had heard the same reports as Rahab, but they reacted differently. They had heard about Israel's strength and may have even realized that the power of God was behind that strength. Rahab also heard about the God of Israel, but her heart was open to learn more of Him and worship Him. The Gibeonites' knowledge led them to be afraid and to do everything they could to save their lives.

Instead of repenting, the Gibeonites decided to deceive the Israelites (see verses 4-6). They wanted to deceive Joshua about their origin. We do not know if they knew that God had told Israel not to make any alliances with the people of Canaan or if they believed that although Joshua might not make an alliance with neighboring nations, he might make one with a country that was far away.

Many people today still live by the Gibeonite philosophy—expediency rules. They do whatever they have to do to get through life's difficulties. If the Gibeonites had simply turned to God in repentance, as Rahab had done, no deception would have been necessary.

II. DON'T BASE DECISIONS ON SUPERFICIAL EVIDENCE (VERSES 7-15).

Verses 7-15 tell us that the Gibeonites tricked the men of Israel. Notice in verse 8 that they did not answer Joshua's

question: "Who are you, and where do you come from?" Instead they said, "We are from a far country," implying that "we are from so far away that you would have never heard of us."

The Gibeonites were deceptive not only about their origin, they also lied about their intentions. They told Joshua that they wanted a covenant because they had heard about the wonders of the Lord God (see verse 9). They gave the impression that they longed to honor God. But they did not offer to repent; they offered only to serve. Then they presented their proof—moldy bread, patched wineskins, and ragged clothes (See verses 12, 13).

It seems incredible that Israel's leaders accepted as evidence things that were highly questionable. Envoys with the power to conclude a treaty with another nation should have had substantial credentials. However, verse 14 tells us that "then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD" (See also verse 15).

So Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites without first bringing the matter before God. This treaty was a promise not only to spare their lives but also protect them if they were attacked.

Perhaps the reason Joshua neglected to consult God was that he thought the evidence was so strong that it was not necessary to ask God. Perhaps Joshua did not ask God because his own decision looked so right and so obvious.

III. DECEPTION WILL ALWAYS BE DISCOVERED (VERSES 16-20).

The writer of Proverbs says, "A lying tongue is only for a moment" (12:19). The story of the Gibeonites' deception shows that dishonesty may work temporarily, but it is never a permanent solution. Sooner or later trickery and deceit will be exposed and the truth will come out. When Israel checked out the story, they discovered the truth (See verses 17, 18).

When the Israelites discovered the deception, they complained bitterly against Joshua and the leadership and accused them of being gullible. Realizing that they had been tricked, Joshua and the leaders did not defend themselves. But they did acknowledge that a covenant was a covenant and could not be taken lightly (See verses 19-21).

IV. WHEN YOU MAKE A BAD DECISION, YOU MUST LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES (VERSES 22-27).

It took only three days for Israel's leaders to discover that they had made a mistake, but they had to live with that mistake for the rest of their lives. The story of Joshua's reaction to the deception of the Gibeonites shows us how important it is to keep our promises, even when it is difficult. Other people's well-being may depend on it. God's people are called upon to live obediently amid mistakes of their own making.

An obvious present-day application is marriage. Sometimes a Christian will marry an unbeliever. What can be done then? The world says, "Get a divorce. You have a right to be happy. Do what is right for yourself." But the truth is that you cannot! The Word of God says that the decision is one with which the Christian must live (1 Cor. 7:12).

Joshua and the leaders of Israel erred in trusting their own judgment and failing to consult the Lord about the Gibeonites, but they did not compound the error by breaking the covenant they had made.

Some Christians believe that there are no consequences to sin if we confess and seek God's forgiveness. Although repentance does bring cleansing, it does not erase the consequences of sin. That is the great problem with a failure to consult the Lord in all matters: we must live with the consequences of our wrong decisions.

Israel was called upon to honor the covenant with the Gibeonites soon after the agreement had been made. Five kings of the Amorites, angered and threatened by the Gibeonite strategy, decided to attack the Gibeonite cities (10:3-4). Joshua was obligated to defend them. The covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites was respected for centuries. On a later occasion, when King Saul broke the covenant, God sided with the Gibeonites and brought judgment upon Israel (2 Sam. 21:1).

The story of Israel's deception by the Gibeonites is just one of many examples in the Bible that remind us that we must live with the results of our bad decisions. May we learn from these stories to take our decisions to God as we humble ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

General Conference Ministerial Association



According

to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and the *Minister's Handbook*, ordained pastors—usually with ministerial credentials—can perform baptisms. According to the *Church Manual*, church elders may also perform the rite on certain occasions with the authorization of the conference/mission president. It is also possible that a retired minister may perform a baptism in coordination with the conference/mission and the local church pastor.

According to the Bible, who is entitled to baptize new church members? The Gospels and the Pauline epistles give us insights as to who should perform the rite. The earliest reference to baptism is found in the Gospel of John when it is mentioned that John "was baptizing" (John 1:28).* By what authority was he baptizing? The Gospel of Luke mentions that John the Baptist was appointed and called by God to do this work (Luke 1:5-25). The angel presented John's mission to his parents: "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient

to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17, NIV). This mission was clearly acknowledged by Jesus. "But what did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26). John the Baptist fulfilled his mission as a prophet and baptized people with the authority given to him by the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John also tells us that Jesus' disciples baptized. "After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized" (John 3:22). "The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples" (John 4:1, 2). It is important to note that the disciples baptized because of the mission and authority entrusted to them by Jesus; they were called and appointed by Jesus for this ministry (Matt. 10:1-4). After Jesus' resurrection, He again entrusted them to continue this ministry. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus gave specific instructions regarding who may baptize. In this particular event, the disciples (also called the apostles) were supposed to perform the rite. They continued making disciples, and as the numbers of believers grew, they took steps toward church organization.

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples continued in their ministry (Acts 1:12-17). Interestingly, it is Peter who mentioned that they were entrusted with this ministry of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching the gospel of Jesus. And when they were gathered together, they elected Matthias to continue in the "apostolic ministry" (Acts 1:25). Clearly, those appointed as leaders were also authorized to baptize new candidates by the authority of the early church and the apostles.

As the church grew, a more elaborate form of church service and ministry was needed. The disciples and the church gathered again to appoint seven additional leaders who could minister to the church in their need for the daily distribution (Acts 6:1-4). Once more the early

church chose men who appeared to be full of wisdom, faith, and the Spirit (Acts 6:3-5). It is important to note that the whole group made the decision and “presented them [the chosen men] to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6). Again these seven men were selected, appointed, and ordained by the authority of the church and the apostles for the continuation of the ministry.

As the early church faced persecution, it is worth noting that Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. He acted as a representative of the church under exceptional circumstances. Philip clearly felt that the Holy Spirit guided him to fulfill this ministry (Acts 8:29). And Philip was entrusted by the Holy Spirit to perform the baptism of the Ethiopian. “And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out from the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38, 39). This was an extraordinary case under the explicit instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Early baptismal experiences were performed and guided by the Lord Himself. A disciple named Ananias lived in Damascus. The Lord called to him in a vision (Acts 9:10). The Lord gave him clear instructions to look for Saul because he was the chosen instrument to carry the name of Jesus to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 16). The disciple Ananias did not act on his own initiative to baptize or lead in Saul’s baptism; he was instructed by the Lord to do it. But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:15,

“
**Keep watch over
 yourselves and all the
 flock of which the Holy
 Spirit has made you
 overseers. Be shepherds
 of the church of God,
 which he bought with
 his own blood.**

Acts 20:28

16). Luke recorded that after Ananias’ prayer, “he got up and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Again it was under the Lord’s direction that this particular disciple received the authority to baptize the apostle Paul.

The apostle Peter worked for the Jewish community; however, he also had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Again in this case, it was under the Lord’s instructions that he went to visit Cornelius’ home, family, and friends. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). After Peter’s speech and testimony about Jesus Christ, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44). Therefore, the apostle Peter, with the authority entrusted him by Jesus, the apostles, and the church, “ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48).

So far we have observed that when baptisms occurred in the early church, they were performed in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Those

who performed the baptisms were guided by the Lord and the Holy Spirit as well as by the early church and the apostles after more than three years of ministerial training from Jesus Himself. As disciples of Jesus, the apostles had watched His ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching. As the church grew, they passed the Great Commission on to the next generation.

In the epistle to the Galatians, we see that it was the decision of the Jerusalem apostles under the leadership of James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:8) to appoint Paul for the mission to the Gentiles. “They agreed that we [Paul and Barnabas] go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews” (Gal. 2:9).

It was the Holy Spirit and the church of Antioch, as well as apostolic endorsement, which appointed both Paul and Barnabas for the ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3). They would continue making disciples and appointing elders among the Jewish synagogues and proselytes. Were they also responsible for performing baptisms? Certainly they followed the church appointment and authority to perform the rite. Paul also delegated authority to their associates and local church elders who were the shepherds of the local church.

In Philippi, for example, they baptized the jailer. Confronted by the question “Sir, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:30, 31). That same night, the jailer and his family were baptized (Acts 16:33). We may infer that Paul and Silas baptized them. They performed the baptism according to the Great Commission and church-appointed authority entrusted to them by the apostles and the church of Antioch.

During Paul’s missionary trips, he and his associates appointed

elders in every city and committed them to the Lord to nurture, teach, and preach (Acts 14:23). As the apostle mentioned to the elders in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). I would like to suggest that their responsibilities may have included baptisms. It is the apostle Peter who also suggests the function of the elders as shepherds. “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because of, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples of the flock” (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

It is interesting to note that in his epistle to the Romans, Paul made a connection between baptism and the sacrifice of Christ: “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). Actually, baptism points to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is the means for the Church’s redemption, justification, and reconciliation. However, we must ask ourselves one important question: Who baptized the Roman saints? It was not Paul, since many times he planned to go to them. He writes of his willingness to visit them in the near future (Rom. 1:13). Looking to the list of greetings at the end of the epistle, it is possible to find an answer. Paul said to greet “Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Jesus Christ. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them” (Rom. 16:3, 4). Therefore, I would suggest that Priscilla and Aquila were the ones responsible for baptizing new converts. Thus, it is clear from these examples that whenever there was

a baptism in the early church, the baptism was performed by leaders appointed by the apostles and the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As the church grew, it was necessary for the church to continue appointing leaders to serve as elders/shepherds and to continue with the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ to the 12 disciples.

According to our current *Church Manual* and by the authority of the General Conference, the Seventh-day Adventist Church authorized those ordained to the gospel ministry to perform baptisms, as in apostolic times. Also, the Church has made provision for local church elders, as authorized by the church organization, to perform the rite. In general, ordained church elders may perform baptisms by the appointment and authorization of the president of the conference/mission. The *Church*

Manual and also the *Minister’s Handbook* have been written to guide the church in following the principles contained in the Gospels. It clearly states that “in the absence of an ordained minister, the elder shall request the president of the conference/mission/field to arrange for the administration of the rite of baptism to those desiring to unite with the church. A local church elder should not officiate in the baptismal service without first obtaining permission from the conference/mission/field president” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, rev. ed., 2005, 17th edition, 52). ED

*All texts quoted in this article are from the New International Version of the Bible.

Miguel Luna is the Ministerial Secretary of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD).

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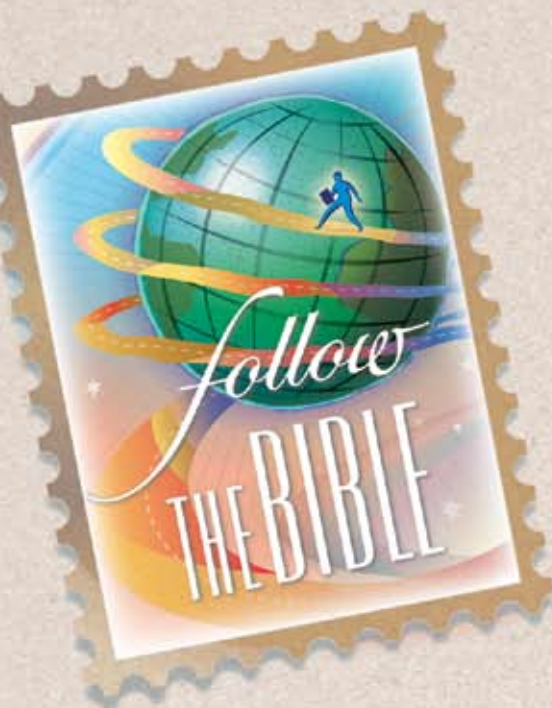
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Seventh-day

Adventists regard themselves as “the people of the Book.” For Adventists the Word of God is central. It is the foundation of our faith. Every doctrine and teaching of the church is rooted in God’s Word.

From the early days of the movement, Seventh-day Adventists have begun their day reading the Bible. It has provided inspiration and guidelines for Adventist parents raising their children. It has been a source of encouragement for Adventists facing life’s challenges. It has been the guiding voice in a world of religious confusion.

An honest analysis of Bible study in some sectors of the Adventist Church today reveals a disturbing trend. A world-wide survey (3,646 surveys returned) by the Institute of Church Ministry at the theological seminary at Andrews University reveals that only 51% of the Seventh-day Adventist administrators, pastors, and lay people who responded have any form of daily devotions and family worship. Another disturbing reality is that only 39% of our members participate in any type of witnessing activity.

These troubling statistics lead church administrators to ask some crucial questions: If it is true that only half of our members have a personal devotional life and conduct family worship,

and an even fewer number share their faith, what can be done to reverse this situation? What can leadership do to raise the importance of reading and sharing God’s Word? What can leaders at all church levels do to increase the number of Adventists spending time each day studying their Bibles and witnessing for the Lord?

Since “no other Book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad enabling truths of the Bible” (Ellen G. White, *Step to Christ*, p. 90), and that “none but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict” (E.G.W., *Great Controversy*, p. 593), Satan will do everything in his power to keep God’s people from the Word.

This downward trend in Bible reading and witnessing among Seventh-day Adventists will not be reversed quickly, and will not change by simply initiating a new Bible-reading program. It will take concentrated effort with continued emphasis on the importance of re-igniting the believer’s on-going relationship with the Word of God over an extended period of time.

“Follow the Bible” is part of a coordinated initiative by church leadership to lift the vision of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide in renewing their commitment to read, study, and share the Word of God.

Church leadership envisions an international “Bible Route” with a copy of a Bible traveling the world between October 2008 and June 2010. It is envisioned that the entire Adventist community will be invited to follow the Bible as it journeys the world. The journey will take it through the cities, towns, and villages, inviting large numbers of Adventists to gather and recommit their lives to following the Bible through reading and study.

From day one of the “Follow the Bible” journey, it is envisioned that millions of Adventists worldwide will participate in creative—old and new—Bible reading activities, such as marathons and other public events as the Bible passes through their areas. Church leaders will have an opportunity to re-focus their church programs by addressing large and small groups gathered to rededicate themselves to the

Word of God as the Bible is brought to their church or school. When considering witnessing outreach, the “Follow the Bible” journey will provide an opportunity to invite others to also follow the Bible. The “Follow the Bible” offers an opportunity to partner with international and local Bible societies in raising the profile of Bible reading as the Bible travels from country to country.

As plans unfold, in just two years, the Bible will travel throughout every world region (divisions) and it is hoped that momentum will build within the international Adventist community, as possibly the most traveled Bible in the history of the world makes its journey. This Bible will be preached from and read in more languages than any other book in the history of mankind.

To assist in making the “Follow the Bible” an exciting activity for all Adventist believers, all communication ministries of the church are involved in promoting the initiative and covering the journey. The communication plan also includes media relations and activities that are featuring the Bible’s journey.

An array of technological options lends itself to assist in “Follow the Bible”—the Internet, radio, television and Adventist publications—to inform, inspire and motivate believers in following the Bible. A web site (www.followthebiblesda.com) covers the journey, and includes features offering Bible readings, study and testimonies. A camera crew is chronicling its travels in a video diary, and church publications are chronicling the odyssey of the traveling Bible.

At the end of the journey, similarly to an Olympic runner carrying the eternal flame, a young person will sprint into the Atlanta Convention Center on the opening night of the 2010 General Conference Session with the Bible in hand to present it to the General Conference president. This will create a moment to call God’s people to follow the Bible.

The purpose of this initiative is to create a significant world event and capture the imagination of Adventists worldwide, fostering Bible reading and sharing God’s Word.

“Follow the Bible” has the potential to lift our vision from what is to what it can be.

ED

Follow THE BIBLE



date * division

OCT - DEC 2008
Southern Asia-Pacific

JAN - FEB 2009
Northern Asia-Pacific

MAR - APR 2009
South Pacific

APR - MAY 2009
Southern Asia

MAY - JUN 2009
Euro-Africa

JUL - AUG 2009
Euro-Asia

AUG - SEP 2009
Trans-European

SEP - OCT 2009
South American

OCT - DEC 2009
Inter-American

JAN - FEB 2010
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean

FEB - MAR 2010
East-Central Africa

MAR - APR 2010
West-Central Africa

MAY - JUN 2010
North America

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**MARK FINLEY ANSWERS
SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT
"FOLLOW THE BIBLE."**

WHAT EXACTLY IS, "FOLLOW THE BIBLE"?

"Follow the Bible" is an initiative sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and its World Divisions to stimulate a deeper interest in reading the Bible. It features a multi-language Bible traveling to countries around the world and large international gatherings to recommit to a study of God's Word.

WHEN WILL THIS PROJECT BE LAUNCHED?

The journey commenced in the Philippines at Annual Council on Sabbath October 11, 2008 in the afternoon program. During the afternoon service delegates at Annual Council were invited to recommit their lives to a study of and faithfulness to God's Word. The Bible then began its global journey by traveling throughout the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR THE BIBLE TO MAKE ITS WAY AROUND THE WORLD?

The journey began in October of 2008 in the Philippines and will be traveling to each World Division until July of 2010 when the journey climaxes at the opening session of the General Conference Session.

WHAT IS THE SCHEDULE FOR THE BIBLE TO TRAVEL TO VARYING DIVISIONS?

Please see the schedule dates on page 23.

WHAT HAPPENS AS THE BIBLE ARRIVES IN A PARTICULAR COUNTRY OR CITY?

There will be large convocations or rallies conducted at each place the Bible travels. Sermons will be preached on the importance of God's Word. Attendees will be invited to participate in a daily Bible Study plan. They will also be offered an opportunity to enroll in the Discover Bible Course.

ARE THESE CONVOCAIONS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS ONLY?

Certainly not! We encourage every member in each area the Bible travels to tell their friends about "Follow the Bible" and invite them to attend. This is an outstanding time for the community to know that Seventh-day Adventists are a people of the Book.

WHAT MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE FOR CHURCH LEADERS IN CONDUCTING THESE CONVOCAIONS?

There are three sample sermons prepared on the importance and inspiration of Bible Study, a daily Bible Reading Guide, Bible Bookmarks and an introductory lesson on the Bible.

ARE THERE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS AVAILABLE?

Yes, there are. There is a poster design, a news story and a short DVD on "Follow the Bible."

WHAT MAJOR FEATURES DOES THE WEB SITE HAVE?

The web site www.followthebiblesda.com has the schedule for the Bible in each World Division, a daily Bible Reading Guide, the exact location of the Bible each day, all advertising materials, and materials necessary for the convocations including the sermons. The web site also features video reports of the Bible's travels, comments by church leaders and a blog for comments on how the Bible is changing the lives of the participants, as well as fascinating stories in this amazing odyssey.

WHAT IF THE BIBLE IS LOST IN ITS TRAVELS OR BADLY DAMAGED?

We are praying that this will not happen and will take all the necessary precautions, but we are prepared for this eventuality by sending three Bibles which are exactly the same to travel together. One will always be kept at the Division Office.

HOW MANY LANGUAGES WILL THIS SINGLE BIBLE CONTAIN?

This one Bible contains 66 languages. Every book a different language. It represents God's message to all people.

HOW LARGE IS THE BIBLE?

Very large. The Bible is approximately 18 inches long and 12 inches wide. It consists of over 1,100 pages and is bound with a padded leather cover. It is very similar in size to the large Bible Ellen White held above her head in vision and repeatedly quoted Bible texts by memory.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WORLD DIVISIONS IN "FOLLOW THE BIBLE"?

Each Division President has been consulted regarding the best time for the Bible to arrive in their Division. The Division "Follow the Bible" Coordinator is responsible for working with their Union and Conference counterparts to organize the Bible's itinerary within the Division territory. The Divisions are responsible for planning all activities for the Bible in their Division including the Convocations and all Division-wide media coverage. They are also responsible for receiving the Bible and passing it on to the next Division.

WILL THE DENOMINATIONAL JOURNALS CARRY ARTICLES ON "FOLLOW THE BIBLE"?

There will be regular articles written in the *Adventist Review*, *Elder's Digest* and *Ministry* magazine as well as the Union Papers.

WHAT ABOUT THE HOPE CHANNEL? HOW WILL IT COVER THE STORY?

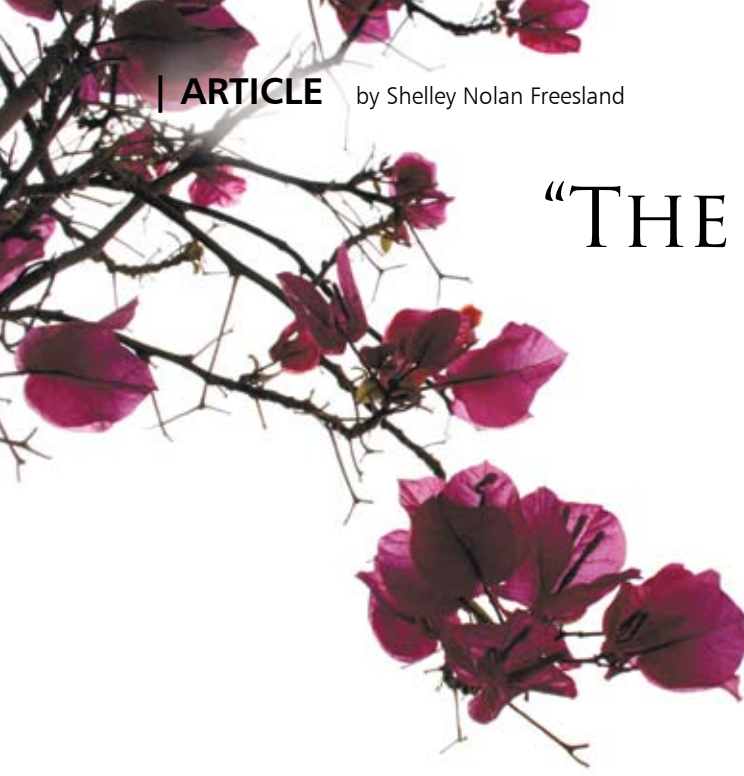
There is a Video team producing short reports for the Hope Channel and chronicling the "Follow the Bible" story. There are regular features on the Hope Channel.

WHAT IS THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE ADMINISTRATION FOR "FOLLOW THE BIBLE"?

The major objective of the General Conference Administration is to inspire millions of Seventh-day Adventists to further Bible Study. Recent surveys indicate that less than 50% of the church membership is regularly studying the Bible. "Follow the Bible" has the possibility of re-igniting the desire to study God's Word. It has the possibility of lifting the average church member to new heights of spirituality through God's Word. What if all 16 million Seventh-day Adventists were faithfully studying God's Word each day? What if they were discovering Jesus personally in His Word? What if they had a new vital experience with our Lord? God would pour out His Spirit in abundance and we would see an explosion of witnessing and evangelism like the church has never seen.



“THE VOICE OF LOVE” PLANTING SEEDS IN CAMBODIA



“Sitting in a circle on the blue tarp directly on the ground reminded me of life in the refugee camp. This is nothing strange to us. We used to live this kind of life, and this is where God had found us in the time of despair and suffering.”

After escaping from Cambodia 25 years ago, Pastor Sorn was back in his home country, this time with a mission for radio ministry. Many changes had taken place, both in his life and in Cambodia. He had spent eight years as a refugee along the Thai-Cambodian border, before the Lord opened a way for him to settle in the United States. At the border camp, Sorn had worked as a district pastor in the Site 2 camp, and in 1989 he became the first Cambodian Adventist to be ordained.

His family was finally resettled with him in Stockton, California, two years later and was warmly welcomed by Stockton Central SDA Church. With the help of Judy Aitken, of the then Frontier Mission, he gathered baptized members from the refugee camp and started a group of Cambodian Adventists. He began working with AWR to produce programs in the Khmer language in 2003. He collaborates with other pastors in the United States and Cambodia, and Pastor Sereivudh Ly of Canada, to produce “Samleung Metreipheap” (“The Voice of Love”).

Sorn and his family had dreamed for years of undertaking a mission trip to Cambodia. With the support of their fellow church members, which included a benefit concert to raise funds for the journey, they were able to embark on a nearly month-long itinerary. They had numerous goals for the trip, including strengthening the radio ministry, meeting listeners from remote areas, and recording their testimonies.

Pastor Sorn was thrilled when the president and secretary of the Cambodia Mission gave him an opportunity to spend time with a group of 82 pastors and church planters from all over Cambodia and discuss ways that “The Voice of Love” could support their work. He says, “I praise the Lord for such a wonderful opportunity, that

we could exceed our plan to share our radio ministry with those who work directly with our listeners in Cambodia. We all can witness the power of God’s spoken Word in this ministry. I was able to see the excitement and willingness of those workers, who are joining us hand-in-hand in the ‘big harvest.’”

Sorn gave the leaders 1,000 promotional postcards, which they are using to spread the word about the radio broadcasts. Khmer-speakers anywhere in the world can also listen to the programs through Internet audio, which is available at the web site voiceoflove.us. Sorn says, “Our postcards contain enough information for people to tune in to our radio program and go to our web site to listen to the broadcast messages, contact us, make requests, and give feedback.”

He also gave a presentation on small group evangelism, and encouraged the pastors and church planters to incorporate radio ministry into their small groups. Finally, Sorn conducted a survey on the radio program to learn about airtime preferences, reception quality, and more. AWR currently broadcasts “The Voice of Love” for half an hour twice a week, but most of the survey respondents asked that the airtime be increased to one hour, he reports.

An important component of the trip was giving hands-on training in radio production to staff at the Cambodia Mission in Phnom Penh. Pastor Nhean Thonsovan is in charge of media at the Mission, and he was given a room in the back of the Mission church to set up a studio.

One Sabbath, a testimony-sharing session was held, and people lined up patiently to give life-changing testimonies. “There was a great turnout,” Sorn says. “Amongst them were some listeners of ‘The Voice of Love’ from Takeo province and from Preah Vihear prov-

ince. A women’s lay ministry group from Phnom Penh also was present. We encouraged them to use the radio for small group outreach and evangelism. They can pre-record programs via the Internet and play them at any of their meetings, or they can listen directly at the computer. We invited them to join hands with us and to utilize the radio program as a tool for local ministry. Overall, 28 radios were given out.”

The Sorn family encountered many moving testimonies as they met with local Adventists, such as during their visit to the Tuol Toting house church. Sorn describes the morning: “It was raining hard when our van turned in a small grassy road and stopped in front of a masonry house, with a house of worship behind. This small house church was crowded with about 35 people, and a dozen more stayed underneath listening to the worship service. At first, they did not have a place to worship God, so a widow member opened her house as a place of worship.

“Amongst them was a district leader who had become an Adventist through listening to ‘The Voice of Love.’ He now is a Bible teacher leading the worship service in his group. Pastor Thonsovan and Sao Saruth, a church planter, have been in contact with him, and before leaving, we gave him a new AWR self-powered radio and hands-on instruction on the digital frequency.”

One of the many highlights of the trip was recording music of Khmer hymns.

“We worked straight through without air conditioning, and recorded with our young guitarists and lead singers,” Sorn says. “Despite my portable mixer getting short-circuited and burned, we continued using laptop direct-recording methods. The four singers sang so beautifully. My heart rejoiced to have them sing untiringly for our ‘Voice of Love’ program.”

Sorn also recorded testimonies from church members, and his daughter, Sofia, was touched by their faith. She says, “They have all been through so much, all in a different way. Even so, they all have one thing in common. They found Jesus, their personal Savior. God is powerful, and I witnessed it firsthand while listening to these testimonies.”

“Of the 16 million people in Cambodia, only 6,000 are Adventists,” Sorn concludes. “Though we do not have big numbers of baptisms yet, with AWR we have planted the seeds in their hearts and have inspired their interest in finding out the truth from God.”

Shelley Nolan Freesland is the Director of AWR Communication.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT AWR

HOW CAN I HEAR AWR PROGRAMS?

Adventist World Radio is the mission radio arm of the Adventist church. Our mandate is to enter the hardest-to-reach places on earth, and we focus on broadcasting to people groups that are difficult to reach in other ways. There are countries where mission workers cannot be sent because of political, religious, or geographic barriers.

North America does not have those restrictions, and many Adventist media ministries are already active here, so we concentrate on broadcasting to other areas. However, if you have a shortwave radio, you occasionally may be able to pick up an AWR signal. Also, more and more of our programs are accessible through Internet podcast at www.awr.org.

WHY DO YOU USE SHORTWAVE? ISN'T IT OBSOLETE?

AWR broadcasts many hours on shortwave radio because it is the most widely-heard broadcast vehicle in the world. As well, the signals can travel for thousands of miles, unlike AM or FM radio waves, enabling our programs to reach into countries that are closed to religious broadcasts in local media.

More than 2.5 billion people, using 1.5 billion shortwave radio receivers, tune in somewhere in the world on a regular basis. Research shows that shortwave listeners are growing globally, with shortwave penetration at its highest level in developing countries. For example, 98 percent of households in Zimbabwe have shortwave radios. People in North America don't listen as much to shortwave because of the widespread availability of local AM and FM stations.

In addition to shortwave, AWR also broadcasts programs via AM and FM stations, direct-to-home satellite, and the Internet.

HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU BROADCAST IN, AND HOW MANY COUNTRIES DO YOU COVER?

We currently produce programs in 75 languages, such as Amharic for people in Ethiopia, Kirghiz for residents of Kyrgyzstan, and Malayalam for listeners in India. Our non-Internet broadcasts cover more than two thirds of the world, through shortwave, AM and FM stations, and satellite. It is a challenge to calculate the exact number of countries we reach, since signals fluctuate and radio stations access our downlinks throughout the year.

HOW ARE GIFTS TO AWR USED?

All gifts made directly to AWR go to advance our broadcast ministry. For example, AWR uses direct gifts to cover the cost of air time and add new languages in areas such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Operating expenses are covered by appropriations from the General Conference and other sources of income, such as investments, endowments, and estate gifts.



Church Administration: Strategies for the coming year

Your church will be more productive and work more harmoniously if the entire leadership participates in the 2009 planning process.

At the beginning of 2009, the head elder needs to prepare a church activity program for the next 12 months of the year. The pastor, who usually receives the denominational calendar from the conference/mission office, should share the calendar with the head elder, providing guidance and goals for the year's activities.

Once the elder has the calendar in hand, church leadership should begin planning, taking into consideration the dates that the pastor, administrators, and department leaders will be present at the church. From this point on, the calendar may be called the ecclesiastical calendar. It should include special dates in the denominational calendar: visits from guest speakers; conferences/camp meetings; communion services (one service per trimester is ideal); Sunday-evening evangelistic meetings; weeks of prayer; prayer meetings on Wednesday nights; church committee meetings; and the names of the people responsible for special programs.

Everything should be done "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of

the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). Below are some steps that occur between the planning and execution of the calendar.

DEFINITION OF CHURCH MISSION

The strategy starts with defining the church's mission. Texts such as Matthew 28:19, 20; 24:14; and Revelation 14:6, 7 help to clarify that the church's mission is to proclaim the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission, church leadership needs to develop strategies that involve planning, organization, training, and member participation to reach the local community.

DEFINITION OF GOALS

To reach the church's goals, the elders and the pastor should work together to establish local objectives, organize the ecclesiastical calendar, prepare church committee agendas, give attention to baptismal candidates, visit members under discipline, and solve conflict situations. The pastor should also provide elders with material from the conference/mission office for organizing church evangelistic campaigns; offering training for new leaders and Bible instructors; preparing missionary twosomes; and establishing small groups and new churches.

DEFINITION OF PROCEDURES

To avoid conflicts between departments and leaders, elders need to understand the rules that govern procedures for both the world church and the local church. It is important that each church department leader knows the procedures that are expected from his or her area. That is why leaders need to be familiar with the *Church Manual* and with the guidelines for each area (Elder's Guide, Deacons' Guide, Sabbath School Guide, etc.). Ellen G. White warns church leadership of the danger of paying too much attention to small matters that might draw them away from the church's mission focus (*Church Leadership*, p. 102).

DEFINITION AND APPLICATION OF THE CHURCH PROGRAM

Every church program needs to be clearly defined and repeated as many times as possible for the leaders and the congregation. Having an ecclesiastical calendar helps to establish programs in advance, giving each church department time to plan and organize, thus avoiding conflicts with programs that come up at the last minute. It is important to follow certain steps during the process of developing the calendar:

(1) Before the ecclesiastical year starts or at its beginning, the pastor and head elder should meet to prepare the calendar's frame, considering first the pastor's preaching schedule and the denominational program brought from the last pastoral council.

(2) The head elder and other elders should meet to evaluate the calendar and to make suggestions.

(3) The head elder and the pastor should then have another meeting to finalize the program.

(4) The pastor should take the calendar's frame to the church committee for final consideration (eventual changes and approvals). Following that, a final copy of the calendar is distributed to each department leader and posted on the church's bulletin board.

(5) Once the church calendar is ready, church leadership may prepare the budget and vote it in the church committee meeting, and eventually with the entire church during an administrative meeting.

(6) The next step is to act, delivering the training, motivation, execution, supervision, and evaluation promised in the church calendar.

CONCLUSION

Good Christian leaders are conscientious about the church's mission, executing projects with objectivity and prayer. The leader and team inform the church regarding the content of the church program to evangelize their community. Leaders pray with the team, asking God to help them work efficiently. "The cause of God demands [leaders] who can see quickly and

act instantaneously at the right time and with power" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 133).

Even while conducting the church within the biblical patterns, Christian leaders should be satisfied with mere technical and leadership abilities; they need to be completely dependent upon God and empty of self and from feelings of superiority, independence, and presumption. In all circumstances, our leadership role model is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paulo Pinheiro is the editor for *Elder's Digest* in Brazil.

TIMOTHY ATOLAGBE



Timothy Atolagbe is the Head Elder/Lay Pastor at the New Hope SDA Church in Fulton, Maryland, USA. His church has 630 members. He and his wife Lidia have been members for over 20 years, and they have a son and daughter.

As a Lay Pastor, some of Timothy's roles are to assist the pastors in nurturing the members and attendees. This includes teaching classes, baptismal preparation, counseling and prayer. He especially enjoys teaching on the subjects of Marriage, Family and Parenting. At New Hope, ten elders/lay pastors serve the congregation visibly during services and also behind the scenes during the week. During the service, there are lay pastors assigned to pray with the worship teams, pastors and the various ministry groups, as well as assist in welcoming members, serving during communion celebrations, as well as helping with baby dedications. For the past four years, the lay pastors have ministered to the church family members in subgroups called 'parishes'. Birthdays, anniversaries, births, sicknesses and all other life's events are ministry opportunities for the lay pastor. Timothy's vision for the church is "... that our church family members and attendees will radiate warmly with the radical love and passionate commitment to Jesus Christ like the New Testament church at Pentecost." When Timothy is not busy with church, he is a scientist at a Pharmaceutical company. In his spare time he enjoys volleyball, table tennis, and soccer.

BIOGRAPHY

The art of speech:

STUTTERING WHILE SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

Many times one can observe that stuttering, while speaking in public, is a problem, even for people who do not usually stutter. Is this normal?

According to the Houaiss Dictionary "Stuttering is the repetition of syllables and involuntary stops at the beginning of words." However, it is much more serious than that for about 1% of the world's population victimized by this disorder, in a proportion of four men to one woman. In Brazil, the Specialty Center for Speech Therapy (Cefac) estimates a number of 1.8 million Brazilians who suffer from this problem, usually beginning between the ages of 2 and 4.

Lack of rhythm fluency, atypical interruption in the speech, with repetitions, hesitations, stoppages, body and facial tensions and prolongations are symptoms that may victimize anyone from any race or culture. According to specialists, the disorder is treatable; however, it may also be cured naturally.


Many times, the anxiety of those who live with the person who stutters is greater than that of the "disfluent," as they are called. Many children stutter when they are acquiring and developing their speech. But, if treated naturally, the stuttering goes away, receiving the name of "normal speech disfluency." However, parents should not criticize or complete the phrase of the child. He or she is only learning to elaborate their speech and should be listened to attentively and naturally.

Anyone, under pressure, has difficulty controlling their speech. At these moments, the individual isn't usually asked to slow down, be patient or take a breath. We need to respect everyone's timing when pronouncing the words and wait with calmness, trying not to hasten the person or increase the stutterer's stress focus.

Disfluency is normal. Everyone has certain hesitations when speaking. When we speak, we elaborate thoughts and think more, which causes a delay in the pronunciation of words.

It is possible to imagine the word coming out naturally, without thinking. No one thinks to speak. When you notice, you already have said it. It is an autonomous and independent act and this needs to be clear to those who stutter.

Once I was invited to preach, and I was really concerned about what people would think of me if I stuttered. My uncle, a natural public speaker, told me, with a smile: "It's easy to speak in public. All you have to do is think that you are talking to a bunch of cabbage heads."

Of course, as time goes on, you forget about the cabbage heads and are better able to face the public without stuttering. 

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil



THE WRONG CROWD

Jesus was always "hanging out" with the wrong crowd.

In fact, Jesus generally offended people because His behavior did not match their expectations of how ministry "ought" to proceed. They thought the Messiah would associate with the high and mighty and lead a vast army to deliver Israel from the Romans. Instead, Jesus associated with the low and powerless and led a ragamuffin bunch of sinners and outcasts to deliver souls from Satan.

Not that He hadn't clearly announced His intentions. Quoting Isaiah and applying the prophecy to Himself, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

And when they comprehended that His ministry actually would follow this pattern, they sought to kill Him. Just as they were offended that Jesus hung out with the wrong crowd, so today many reject the reality that Jesus wants His church to recruit from, care for, and minister with the same bunch.

Jesus targeted the disabled. Moved with compassion by the needs of the multitudes, Jesus intentionally focused on those who were distressed, diseased, disabled, despised, and disenfranchised. He returned sight to the blind who themselves would extend light. He restored lame limbs and the newly-abled built belief in others. He resurrected dead bodies and created new born believers who, themselves, shared everlasting life. In loosing their physical pain and suffering, Jesus bound people with mighty cords of love to His own loving heart.

Jesus did not heal every person. Not every prayer was answered. Not every cripple walked. Even though Scripture describes Jesus healing one lame man at the pool of


Bethesda, there is no record of every sick person leaving that place restored. Jesus must have passed by the crippled beggar at the temple's Gate Beautiful on numerous occasions without stopping. Only weeks after Christ's ascension was the beggar contacted by the church.

And His selection process follows no logical pattern. For example, if I were designing heaven's system for answering prayer requests, I would surely respect the desires of the Apostle Paul who was informed not only that his thorn would not be removed, but that he should stop praying for deliverance and depend solely upon God's all-sufficient grace.

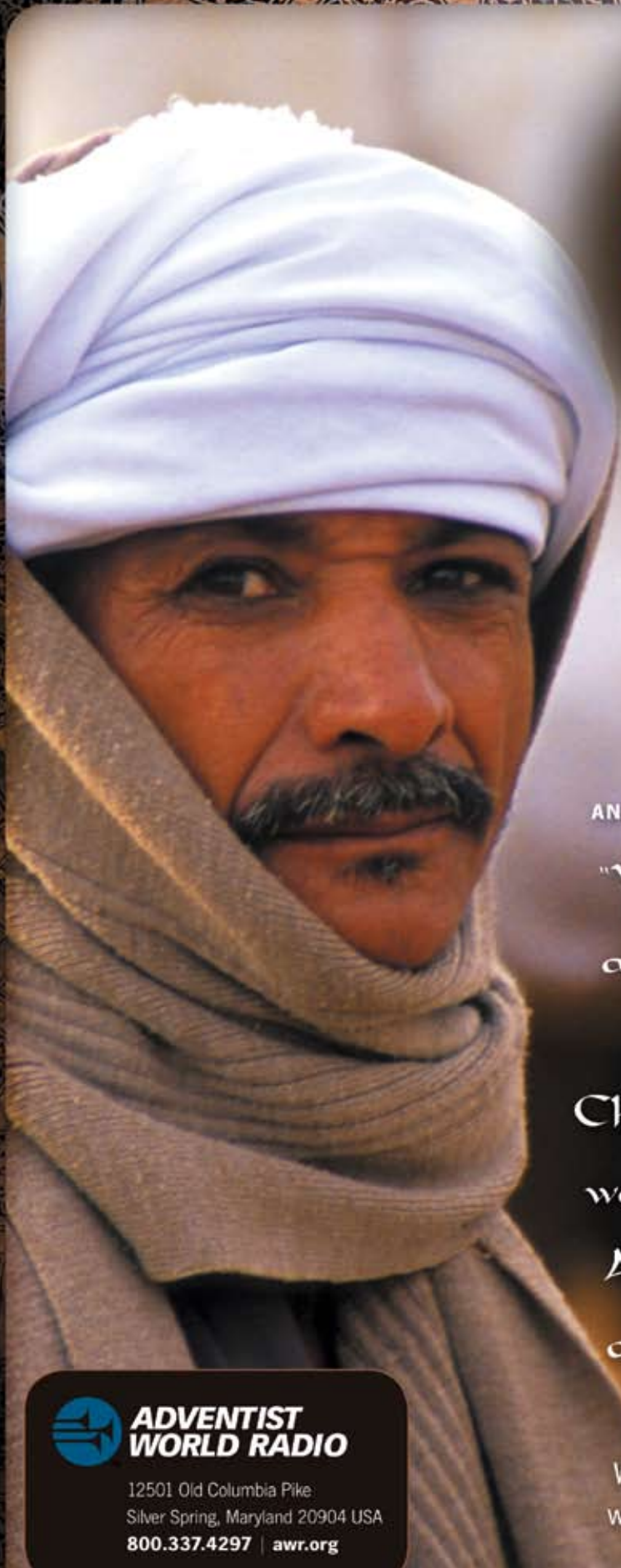
Jesus expects His followers to continue His own works. "Reaching out to the disabled community is part of evangelism," says Dr. Rosa T. Banks, Associate Secretary and Human Relations Director for North America's Adventist Church, and chair of the Commission for People with Disabilities. The commission has defined seven types of disabilities that must be accommodated by congregations: cognitive, hearing, hidden (i.e. chronic, inflammatory, and debilitating diseases), mobility, psychiatric, speech, and visual. Further, many disabled members do not attend church, so ministry must be conducted with them in their homes. Members must be sensitized to both the needs and the opportunities to welcome persons with disabilities and to utilize their capabilities in service. Disability Commission member, Catherine Burks, says "Accessibility doesn't just mean ramps and physical aids. Those with disabilities need to be encouraged to use their spiritual gifts. Each time you do that, you lose more and more fear. Some change is not easy, but change can be for the better. Usually the change involves a struggle, but the struggle promotes development." Try inviting the disabled of your own congregation to share their insights and to voice their opinions in how the church might minister more effectively. You could establish a local disability commission.

Jesus anticipates even greater works from the church. In fact, He promises the Holy Spirit's power to energize and accompany the church in performing the same mighty works that He accomplished. As you labor to effectively reach those who are disabled and to include them in all facets of church life and programming, God's blessing will accompany your efforts and His power will guarantee your success.

Jesus judges our treatment of the disabled. In the sobering reality of judgment, both the saved and the lost ask Jesus the same question. "When did we see You hungry, thirsty, naked, or in prison." Neither group recognized that their ministry to or rejection of "the least of Jesus' brethren" was ministry to or rejection of Jesus, Himself.

Imagine that! In heaven's eyes, the wrong crowd just might be the right crowd! 

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

A close-up portrait of a man with a mustache, wearing a white turban and a grey scarf. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

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