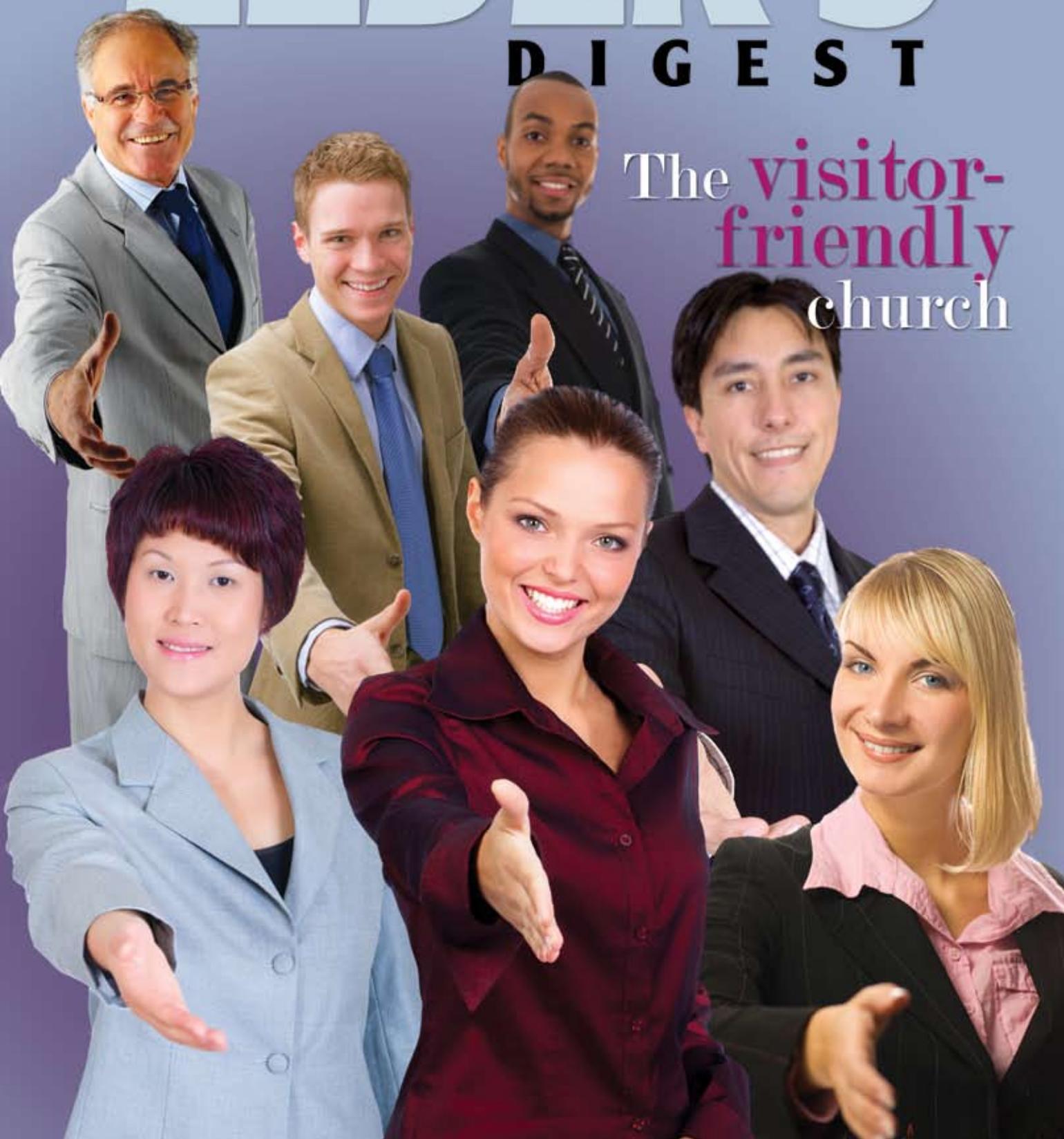


quarterly resource for local church elders † october/december 2008

# ELDER'S DIGEST

The **visitor-  
friendly**  
church



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# WHAT THE DISCERNING ELDER SEES

As church leaders, we would do well to study Paul's prayer for the church leaders in Philippians. "This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9, 10).

The ability to discern good and evil is a gift from God. Ellen G. White says, "The power of discerning good and evil is an attribute from God, and unless the human agents are in vital connection with God, they cannot discern spiritual things" (*Manuscript Releases*, No. 926:26.2). It is good to know that each one of us can have good discernment as a result of a close communion with God.

Let me share with you some ideas a discerning elder sees in the church that others may not:

**Discerning church leaders notice details.** Such leaders see fine details in the church that can make a huge difference. For example, they are able to ascertain why some worship services are attractive and meaningful, while others are boring and weak.

**Discerning church leaders know how to differentiate.** For instance, such leaders see the difference between positive and negative, important and trivial, spiritual and secular, urgent and patient.

**Discerning church leaders see connections.** Such leaders notice the links between how the church is doing today and how it was doing last year. These leaders help church members retain their hope in the Second Coming of Jesus, remembering that the world is not our eternal home. Their feet are on this earth, but their minds are in heaven.

**Discerning church leaders see what is happening beneath the surface.** Such leaders see behind the facade of a member's smile to understand how that person is really feeling. Discerning leaders feel the pain that may lie behind such external indicators as a snide remark. These leaders know that behind an unloving action is a heart in need of spiritual support.

**Discerning leaders see what many people in the same circumstance cannot see.** This spiritual ability provides a deep perception to promote excellence in the church. Church leaders with this gift have a good sense of what is really happening. Such leaders see little things that can make a big difference. They sense what people around them are feeling. They perceive how one thing is related to, different from, or important than another.



Jonas Arrais  
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

## ARE YOU A DISCERNING ELDER?



**Early** in life, Pastor Dale Galusha felt called to ministry. After attending Pacific Union College, he entered the ministry in the Northern California Conference. He earned his M.Div. degree at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and then returned to pastoral ministry in northern California. He later spent six years in full-time evangelistic work. For the past 13 years, he has worked in various areas of ministry at Pacific Press—first with *Signs of the Times* magazine and then as a vice president. For the past three years, he has served as president of Pacific Press.

#### **WHAT IS PACIFIC PRESS' MISSION STATEMENT?**

Pacific Press has a mission statement that reflects its role as a publisher of materials for evangelistic outreach and spiritual nurture of church members. The statement reads:

"The Pacific Press® Publishing Association, established in 1874, is owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its sole purpose is to uplift Jesus Christ in communicating biblical teachings, health principles, and family values—in many languages—through various types of printed materials, video products, and recordings of Christian music.

"The Pacific Press® perceives itself primarily as a spiritual enterprise. This perception governs the selec-

tion of personnel as well as of all materials published, including advertisements.

"With this purpose in mind, the Pacific Press® has made a substantial investment in human and material resources to carry out a world mission."

#### **PACIFIC PRESS HAS AN INCREDIBLE STORY OF ITS MORE THAN 130 YEARS OF EXISTENCE. COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT HOW GOD HAS HELPED PACIFIC PRESS OVERCOME THE MANY OBSTACLES IN ITS WAY?**

When James and Ellen White established Pacific Press in the early 1870s, the church's "mission field" was the west coast of the United States. The church had officially organized only about a decade earlier, and for some years its work and membership was concentrated in New England and New York. From there it spread across to Michigan and the upper Midwestern portion of the United States. At the time the Whites established Pacific Press in California, there were fewer than 500 members in the entire western part of the United States. Evangelistic materials were difficult to obtain since virtually all Adventist publications were printed at the church's publishing house in Battle Creek, Michigan. With few members and few resources, the Whites stepped out in faith and established a publishing house in Oakland, California. That took courage and faith! They did it to advance God's

work and advancing God's kingdom has been Pacific Press' goal ever since.

Over the years, there have been disasters. Pacific Press was hit with two major calamities in 1906: an earthquake in April and a major fire just a few months later. But the employees—recognizing their mission—rallied together and rebuilt.

At times there have been financial challenges. But through sacrifice, hard work, and prayer, Pacific Press has weathered these storms and come out stronger and more committed to sharing the gospel.

#### **HISTORICALLY, CHURCH GROWTH COINCIDES WITH PUBLISHING HOUSE PROSPERITY. HOW DO YOU FEEL THESE TWO ENTITIES SUPPORT EACH OTHER?**

In the early years of the church, the message was carried primarily by preaching and via the printed page. Publishing—along with preaching—was the major focus of the church's ministry. Ellen White had much to say about the importance of the printed page and of sharing the gospel in this way. In those early years when there were just a few members, she said that a time would come when more than 1,000 people a day would join the church, most of whom would trace their first convictions to a reading of the printed page. Today, far more than 1,000 people join the church daily. But we still see that many of those who join us do so because of reading an Adventist book or magazine or tract.

For many years, literature evangelists (formerly called colporteurs) have been the front-line workers of the church—the ones knocking on doors in communities. Many members trace their conversion, or the conversion of parents or grandparents, to publications sold or given by a literature evangelist. So when the publishing houses are producing and distributing soul-winning material, the church is growing and vibrant.

But the ministry of Pacific Press goes beyond soul-winning publications. The church's publishing houses also produce materials that provide spiritual nurturing and training for members.

We are all concerned when we hear that those who once worshiped and prayed with us have left the church. Much has been said about member retention. Ellen White counseled that the printed page was one of the best ways to "hold members in the church." She said: "Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Great Controversy* are books that are especially adapt-

ed to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth" (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 366).

#### **ARE PRINTED BOOKS AT RISK WITH TODAY'S TECHNOLOGICAL BOOM?**

Certainly we see that people are getting information in new and different ways. The Internet is just one of the newest technologies that has changed the way that people obtain information. Over the years, radio, television, and satellite have come along and offered new means of transmitting and broadcasting information. However, people still read—and they read in record numbers. Wherever you go, you see people reading books, magazines, and newspapers. The printed page is still something that you can take wherever you go. You don't need electricity, batteries, or equipment—just the printed page.

Yes, times do change; no one knows what the future holds. But I believe people will always want printed material, regardless of whether they get information through other technologies.

#### **DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT: "IF YOU CAN'T READ, YOU CAN'T LEAD"?**

I wouldn't want to over-state that. There may be times and places where circumstances call someone to leadership who has not had the privilege of learning to read—or who can't read well. I believe God calls people to leadership who are willing to listen to His voice and follow Him. Having said that, I believe that reading is very important to leadership at all levels. Especially in the day in which we live and in which the church operates, the ability to read, gather, and analyze information from printed sources is crucial to effective leadership. The following research findings are interesting:

Barna Research, a Ventura, California-based polling firm, reported in January 27, 2003, that "pastoral longevity seems to be tied to an active reading life. Those who have lasted the longest in ministry tend to read more than do their short-lived peers. The research firm also discovered that pastors who have been at one particular church for more than five years tend to read less." Although the data does not indicate why these trends exist, Barna feels that "the bottom line is that pastors who want to stay fresh and mentally focused read throughout all stages of the leadership lifecycle."

This is not just true for pastors—it's true for people in all leadership positions, including elders. Paul said

it this way: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." We need to be reading—first, the Bible (God's Word); second, the Spirit of Prophecy; and third, the many books produced by the church for training, growth, and nurture.

#### WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SPIRITUAL BOOKS, SUCH AS ELLEN WHITE'S WRITINGS, FOR CHURCH LEADERS?

A number of years ago, Andrews University did extensive research into the effects of reading the writings of Ellen White. These studies showed very strongly that those who studied the Spirit of Prophecy on an ongoing, regular basis had a closer walk with Christ and were more likely to share their faith.

#### IS PACIFIC PRESS CURRENTLY PUBLISHING A NEW LINE OF BOOKS RELATING TO IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING MINISTERS/ELDERS AND THE CHURCH?

Each year we study our new line-up of books to make sure we offer a balanced diet for the church. We publish book titles for children as well as adults. We publish books of general interest to church members, and we publish books of theological and doctrinal importance that will be of particular value and interest to pastors and other church leaders. We want to make sure that the freshest theological thought is available. We try to make sure that there are a number of books that foster a positive prayer/devotional life for leaders and members.

#### DO YOUR RESOURCES REACH MOST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD?

Pacific Press works closely with many publishing houses around the world. Through them, our books are distributed in many areas of the world where English is widely used. We also work with Adventist publishing houses around the world to translate and publish Pacific Press books in local languages as these fields see a need for a particular title. Also, due to the Internet, we are able to feature our books online at [www.AdventistBookCenter.com](http://www.AdventistBookCenter.com) so that anyone, any-

“ Pacific Press has a mission statement that reflects its role as a publisher of materials for evangelistic outreach and spiritual nurture of church members. ”

where in the world, can have access to the products we produce.

#### HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS PURCHASE THESE RESOURCES?

Spend time at your local Adventist Book Center—most conferences around the world have a book center and provide a selection of valuable resources. And by visiting [www.AdventistBookCenter.com](http://www.AdventistBookCenter.com) on the Internet, church elders can see the entire selection of products available from the two official Adventist publishing houses in North America.

#### WHAT GRATIFICATION DO YOU PERSONALLY RECEIVE IN KNOWING THAT THROUGH YOUR WORK AT PACIFIC PRESS, MANY ARE HEARING THE MESSAGE OF JESUS AND SALVATION?

We receive many letters each week from individuals who tell us what the books and magazines have done in their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. These letters come from prisoners who have found a Pacific Press book. They come from individuals who have picked up a copy of *Signs of the Times* from a newsbox in their town or who have purchased a book from a literature evangelist. They come from individuals across North America and from countries around the world.

#### WHAT MESSAGE CAN YOU LEAVE US WITH TO ENCOURAGE WORLDWIDE LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS?

Take time to do two things. First, read a book. Let its words touch your heart. Second, share a book or a magazine. Let the printed page do its work in soul-winning! When you share a piece of literature, you may not see immediate results, but God promises that the day will come when we will see wonderful results! Keep reading. Keep sharing. 



Dale Galusha  
President of Pacific Press

# The art of speech:

## OVERCOME THE FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

“ Now go; I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say! ”

Exodus 4:12 

There are many Christians who are afraid of preaching. Fear of public speaking is so ancient that even the Bible makes reference to it.

Moses is a good example of a leader who was afraid of public speaking. In his argument against the Lord's order to free His people through speech, he avoided it by giving some excuses. But God assured him with a voice that inspired conviction and trust:

“Now go; I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say!”

But still Moses pleaded fearfully:

“O Lord, please send someone else to do it!” (Exodus 4:12, 13 NIV)

I believe this story was registered in the Bible to show us how challenging it is to deliver some messages. Moses only stopped arguing when God suggested his brother, Aaron, could speak for him.

How about you? Have you let other people speak for you because you were afraid? The following suggestions can help you overcome the fear of public speaking:

1. Choose in advance the subject you plan to present to the church.
2. Organize your thoughts and break them into parts or divisions within the sermon.
3. When you start talking, go straight to the subject. First, captivate the public by telling a story, a testimony, a reflexion, or showing the benefits the church will gain from studying the subject.
4. Avoid starting your message by giving a personal opinion about the subject, which might oppose

the listener's opinion. Show the common ground first and then, in a very pleasant way present opinions that might cause an impact.

5. When presenting a subject, clearly state the theme you want to develop, the problem you wish to solve, and the topics you are going to deal with. Thus, the listeners will be able to better follow your thoughts.

6. Follow through within the stages you outlined. Apply the theme to their current reality, give examples, but do not exaggerate so that it doesn't become unbelievable.

7. Make your conclusions and leave the best part, the greatest emotion, for the end. End with a reflection or something that makes them think or act according to the message.

Think about this:

Those who are able to overcome the fear of the unknown and the fear of someone else's evaluation are the ones who truly have surrendered themselves to Divine guidance; they are the ones who allow the Holy Spirit to use them. Therefore, stop criticizing yourself, stop thinking about yourself and think about the good your message will bring to others.

May you be able to reach this goal, by God's grace! 

Alexandra Sampaio  
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

## TAKING THE GOSPEL TO PEOPLE **one-by-one**

**Standing** in front of his small congregation Rajah looks like most people. He wears a pressed button-up blue shirt and dark pants. He moves his hands as he speaks with conviction and energy. But Rajah isn't ordinary. He's taking the gospel to an unreached part of the world, where his neighbors don't understand him and don't always welcome his efforts.

He is telling the world about Christ in Sri Lanka's central hill country. His congregation is made up of men and women who work this region's tea plantations during the day and crowd into a small concrete-block room with open wooden-frame windows several evenings a week. They sit in sea-foam green chairs with brown wicker backs. Children gather on the floor at the front of the room eagerly listening to Rajah's message of hope.

Rajah is just one of some 2,500 Global Mission pioneers around the world. These lay church members typically spend at least two years working to establish a new congregation within their culture. Pioneers understand the community, speak the local language, and blend with local people. Rajah has spent the past four years helping to establish two different congregations.

Global Mission's frontline pioneers share the gospel through a holistic ministry that many include caring for the sick, running literacy programs, holding evangelistic meetings, and giving Bible studies. In a previously unreached North Asian city that can't be named, a group of Global Mission pioneers started a health evangelism program to help the community with chronic health problems. The result is six house churches and some 30 new church members. Law student Jacob is grateful that an Adventist English language school in Bangkok, Thailand, showed him the purpose and meaning in life for which he was seeking. In Lesotho—a country in Southern Africa—Futho went door-to-door asking people if they'd like to take Bible studies until he found enough people for an evangelism seminar. Now he has a congregation of 12 people.

Global Mission is the frontline mission arm of Adventist Mission, an office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's world headquarters. Since 1990 Global Mission has established some 11,000 congregations in previously unreached areas of the world. This can vary from a North American suburb with no Adventist presence to an entire country in the 10/40 Window—a region stretching from West Africa to the Far East, which is home to many of the world's major religions, relatively fewest Christians, and fastest growing cities.

In 1997, nearly 100 years after the first Adventist arrived in Sri Lanka, only 28 churches were established. Over the past 10 years Global Mission has made a concerted effort to work with established churches in Sri Lanka to send pioneers into new communities. The result is 22 new congregations, a growth rate of nearly two-thirds.

Last year Global Mission supported nearly 1,500 church planting projects in unentered areas at a cost of nearly US \$18 million. One hundred percent of your financial support of the Annual Sacrifice Offering in your church on November 8, 2008 goes to Global Mission's ongoing frontline mission work. This vital offering will allow the Seventh-day Adventist Church to continue reaching the world's unreached with hope at home and around the world. 

### WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

- Go to [www.Global-Mission.org/annual-offering/](http://www.Global-Mission.org/annual-offering/) to download this year's Annual Sacrifice Offering program.
- This quarter's Adventist Mission DVD has a specific video to show during the offering call.
- For questions and to learn more visit [www.Global-Mission.org](http://www.Global-Mission.org) or call 1-800-648-5824.

# WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE TO SEE THEM IN HEAVEN?

ADVENTIST  
**MISSION**  
GLOBAL MISSION



2008 ANNUAL SACRIFICE OFFERING  
**NOVEMBER 8**

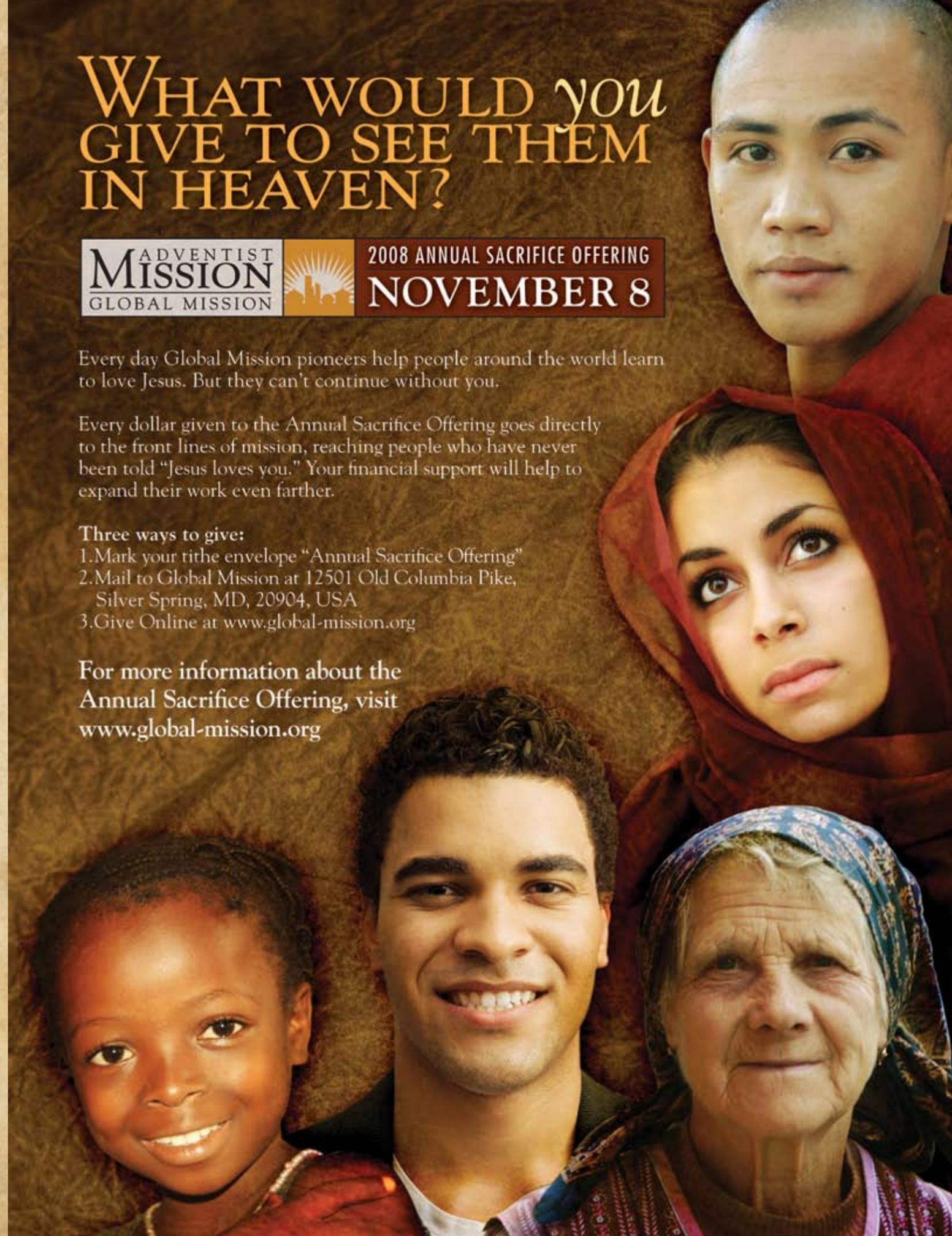
Every day Global Mission pioneers help people around the world learn to love Jesus. But they can't continue without you.

Every dollar given to the Annual Sacrifice Offering goes directly to the front lines of mission, reaching people who have never been told "Jesus loves you." Your financial support will help to expand their work even farther.

#### Three ways to give:

1. Mark your tithe envelope "Annual Sacrifice Offering"
2. Mail to Global Mission at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD, 20904, USA
3. Give Online at [www.global-mission.org](http://www.global-mission.org)

For more information about the  
Annual Sacrifice Offering, visit  
[www.global-mission.org](http://www.global-mission.org)



# THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS



Whatever you do,  
work at it with all your  
heart, as working for  
the Lord, not for men.

Col. 3:23



**What** is the relationship between religion and politics? Can a church member or the church itself be involved in politics? How should we relate to the state and to the political authorities who are in charge?

Dr. Bert Beach began his article "The Christian and Politics"<sup>1</sup> with the above three questions. Many Seventh-day Adventists think that the church has no political role to play and that individual members should not be involved in politics. Many Christians have the opposite point of view and believe that it is the responsibility of every Christian to influence politicians to build a better world. Many Christians also think that to do nothing is to support the wrongs and allow injustice to rule the world, while a minority of Christians thinks that the church's mission is only to build the city of God here on earth.

How do we choose the right position? First of all, we have to look at Jesus. What did He do? What was His position toward politics? Jesus was not a political leader. His temptation in the wilderness had a political dimension. His feeding of the multitude could have been the first step in His assuming kingly power. What about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem? But He resisted the temptation to become a political figure. His mission was primarily spiritual, yet it had strong political implications. He taught justice and honesty. He condemned the leaders and the rich who oppressed the poor. He spent time with the poor and the oppressed.

The boundary between social and political issues is not always easy to determine. Adventist pioneers were involved in some social issues. At the beginning, Adventists were concerned about alcoholism, slavery, the oppression of women, and the educational needs

of children and youth.

Dr. Beach wrote: "Christianity is not a religion of isolated individualism or insulated introversion; it is a religion of community. Christian gifts and virtues have social implications. Commitment to Jesus Christ means commitment begets responsibility for the welfare of others."

I will share some principles which can be helpful when dealing with this very important topic. *The Religious Liberty Leader's Handbook*<sup>2</sup> has been a significant source of suggestions and information for this article.

## THE CHRISTIAN IS A SERVANT

The Bible gives us several examples of people who served their country and their kings in high positions of responsibility and who God was able to use because of their faithfulness. The New Testament principle is that the Christian must love and serve his neighbor. My neighbor is anyone living in a society, in a country, or in the world. To serve my neighbor means also to serve my city, my country, and even the world.

Jesus said to His disciples: "The kings of the Gentiles lord over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:25, 26).

## THE CHRISTIAN'S MOTIVATION IS LOVE

The Christian's motivation for service must be far more than monetary reward or social prestige. It has to reveal the kind of God he or she believes in—a God who loves people. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes

in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus became a servant because He loves us.

Ellen G. White wrote: "The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government. He desires only the service of love, and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened."<sup>3</sup> This is fundamental.

## THE CHRISTIAN WORKS FIRST FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

We are first of all citizens who owe our allegiance to the King of kings. We are not from this world, but we are working in this world as ambassadors of God and His kingdom. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Eccl. 9:10). And "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23).

There is no radical opposition between serving God and serving the community and the country. The two kingdoms have common rules. They also have opposing rules. In case of conflict, the Christian will obey his Master. As Adventists, we believe in the validity of the Ten Commandments, which point to certain values and serve as our guide. We recognize them as the rules of the kingdom of God. The apostle Peter said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The values of our faith and the law of God identify the border between these two sometimes-conflicting realities.

For the Christian, rulers are God's servants, whether they acknowledge this responsibility or not. Ellen G. White wrote: "Rulers are God's servants, and they are to serve their time as His apprentices. . . . They are not to connive at one act of dishonesty or injustice. They are not to do a base, unjust action themselves, nor to sustain others in acts of oppression. Wise rulers will not permit the people to be oppressed because of the envy and jealousy of those who disregard the law of God."<sup>4</sup>

## A CHRISTIAN CAN HOLD A HIGH POSITION

Great opportunities exist for Christians who are employed by the government in positions of leadership or public service. They must use their God-given gifts and talents for the good of the community and the nation. They must continue to work for the good of all and "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31), rather than for selfish purposes or their own promotion and interest. During Bible times, God's men and women who held prominent positions of power and authority were committed to their work, to their people, and to God. Think of Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah. All of them faithfully fulfilled an important role in God's plan.

## A CHRISTIAN CAN HAVE A GOOD INFLUENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT

When church members are elected to significant positions of public office and responsibility, the influence of their lives and their example becomes even greater and demands careful attention. By their ac-



## LOCAL SABBATH SCHOOL EXPANDS ITS HORIZONS

For too many Adventists, Sabbath mornings consist of little more than going to Sabbath School (maybe) and listening to a sermon. But then what? How do these activities connect to “real life”?

At Sunnyvale Adventist Church in central California, “LifeTogether” groups were developed to address this question. These small groups help members grow deeper in their walk with God and with one another.

The small groups meet throughout the week in members’ homes for six-week periods. During this time, the groups focus in-depth on the topic of the Sabbath School lesson, which is introduced each week through the sermon. This combined emphasis has truly helped members to better experience and live out the topic.

“Just as there is compound interest in finance, there is compound interest when people hear a message on a topic, discuss it in Sabbath School and/or a mid-week small group, and also prayerfully study on their own each day. This combination of sermons, small groups, Sabbath School, and solo time really helps people integrate these truths into their lives,” says Pastor Sam McKee.

### HOW THE IDEA CAME INTO BEING

After participating in a Natural Church Development survey, the Sunnyvale Church discovered that while it scored high in many areas, its lowest score was in passionate spirituality. Passionate spirituality measures the level of spiritual disciplines in church members. As in so many churches, Sunnyvale had a team in place to prayerfully plan for the church’s future physical structure, but there was not a similar vehicle to plan for the church’s spiritual future. In response to this alarming discovery, a spiritual vision team—comprised of one person with spiritual depth and influence from every church demographic—was developed with the aim of “growing the soul” of the church.

Attendance was great on Sabbath mornings, and people were genuinely inspired by worship, so the question became how to help members take their Sabbath spirituality and live it out during the week. With a high percentage of people already attending Sabbath School—an Adventist curriculum already designed for small groups and personal devotions—the team decided to launch its small groups in tandem

tions and their lifestyle, they can have a powerful influence for good or evil. They have opportunities to be important witnesses to the truth, just like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon.

Frequently the church is judged by the witness and lifestyle of its members who serve in prominent places. Many times they are a positive witness, but sometimes they can be an embarrassment and a poor advertisement for the church. Peter urged Christians to maintain good conduct among the Gentiles in order to glorify God (1 Peter 1:12).

### A CHRISTIAN HOLDING A HIGH POSITION CAN HELP PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Through careful representation and diplomacy, dedicated Christians in positions of responsibility can help to avert trouble. Joseph helped save Egypt from famine and provided protection for the children of Israel in Goshen. Ezra and Nehemiah obtained assistance from Artaxerxes to complete the rebuilding program. Esther had a prominent role in saving her people from genocide. To those Christians who are serving their country during times of crises, God says, as Mordecai said to Esther, “And who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

### THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IS NEUTRAL TOWARD PARTY POLITICS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church avoids advising its members in political matters and does not support any particular political party. Some church members have become involved in politics, which is their personal decision. However, because of the rivalry that often exists between political parties, it is better, when feasible, for Christians who wish to stand for positions of responsibility in elections, to do so as independents.

### THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IS NOT NEUTRAL ON MORAL ISSUES

Christian values must be shared, promoted, and protected. When a political program is in opposition to Christian values such as justice, temperance, freedom, and separation between church and state, the Adventist citizen has to accomplish his/her task according to his/her beliefs and conscience. To refuse to vote is not an effective way to contribute to a better society. Some laws and political programs can have very negative results.

Ellen G. White wrote: “In our favored land, every voter has some voice in determining what laws shall

control the nation. Should not that influence and that vote be cast on the side of temperance and virtue?”<sup>5</sup>

### THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH DOES NOT DICTATE HOW TO VOTE

The decision on how we vote or whom we support is an individual decision. It should be made prayerfully based on what we believe will be the best for the country and for the continued proclamation of the gospel. The church should not be involved in political campaigning.

Never should the pulpit or church meetings be used as a platform for political campaigning. Ellen G. White wrote: “Would we know how we may best please the Savior? It is not engaging in political speeches, either in or out of the pulpit.”<sup>6</sup> For Adventist pastors and teachers to do so would potentially be very divisive for the church.

### THE CHRISTIAN WILL STAND FOR SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

No earthly power or government has the right to legislate in matters of religion, and never should the church use its influence or its power to bring about religious legislation or force others to conform to its beliefs or practices.

Ellen G. White points out the Satanic nature of compelling conscience: “All persecution, all force employed to compel conscience, is after Satan’s own order; and those who carry out these designs are his agents to execute his hellish purpose. In following Satan’s cruel proposals, in becoming his agents, men become the enemies of God and His church, and will be judged in that great day by that man whom God had ordained; for He had committed all judgment into the hands of His Son.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dialogue, 1997, vol. 9, no. 1:5.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, South England Conference, 1993.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen G. White in *Review and Herald*, October 1, 1895.

<sup>5</sup>Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 387.

<sup>6</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 331, 332.

<sup>7</sup>Ellen G. White in *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1893.

John Graz is the director of the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty at the General Conference. This article is from the just-published book *Issues of Faith & Freedom—Defending the Right to Profess, Practice, and Promote One’s Beliefs*, available at <[www.AdventistBookCenter.com](http://www.AdventistBookCenter.com)>.

with the Fall 2005 study on the book of Ephesians.

One or two LifeTogether series are done each year, with topics chosen carefully and prayerfully to meet the needs of the congregation.

### LEARNING BY DOING

Since the inception of the LifeTogether idea, Sabbath School attendance (which was already high) has seen an increase, and at least 50 people who otherwise would not have been connected have joined classes or groups. Those who were already connected marvel at how much richer their spiritual lives have become through involvement in the LifeTogether series. Seniors remark that the Bible came alive for the first time in their lives, and young adults say they "get" the Gospel and finally feel like they're part of the church family.

Besides the importance of Bible study, the small-group format allows for a fellowship and accountability too often lost when people attend worship services only. This is evidenced in the Sunnyvale groups' ability to reach across demographic lines and allow for intimate fellowship among church members who perhaps would not have gotten acquainted in any other way.

The biggest challenge has been recruiting and developing leaders across demographics and geographic regions. The first group of leaders was trained by the pastor and the visioning team. To be most effective, the leaders need multiple resources, including the Collegiate Quarterly and the Teachers' Quarterly for the given Sabbath School lesson, as well as other study options on the same passages or topics, such as those available from Serendipity and NavPress.

While the Sabbath School quarterlies cover 13 weeks, Sunnyvale has found that far more people will commit to a six-week study. Once people participate in a small group and experience the fellowship involved, they tend to keep the group rolling if there's good momentum, or they join a Sabbath School class if they are not already involved in one.

"For most," says McKee, "six or seven weeks is a good growth cycle before the holidays hit in the fall. Many people tell me they wouldn't have volunteered to run a perennial cell group, nor would the people they invited have come to an endless group. So you have 12 people gathering quarter by quarter, bonding, reading Scripture, sharing experiences, and praying for each other. And they wouldn't have come together if we hadn't made it an achievable six- or seven-week mission."

Gary B. Swanson - Associate Director, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries, General Conference

## BRUCE FENNER

Bruce Fenner has been an elder in the Caldwell, Idaho, church for the past five years and has served as first elder for the past year. He and his wife Leticia, with their two boys, came to the church in 2003, when he accepted a position at Pacific Press® Publishing Association.



Fenner compares his elders to a team of football players who hold different and unique positions but who perform different tasks based on their individual talents or gifts; he believes the church should be organized in the same way. Each elder has a unique spiritual gift, and his/her role of responsibility in the church should be matched up with that gift. In this way, each elder can address a specific area of ministry.

Fenner believes that service starts with an intimate relationship with God. "When we are working for the church or doing God's work, it is very easy to get caught up in the work of 'the Work' and lose sight of what we are doing and why we are doing it. If we are going to serve God well and present Him to others, we must stay committed to growing in our own personal spiritual walk with God."

In his free time, Fenner enjoys snow skiing with his boys or camping with his family in the beautiful mountains and forests of Idaho. He closes with this wonderful thought: "It is truly amazing when you stop and think about the fact that God, the Creator of the universe, the Savior of all mankind, the One who has the power to simply speak things into existence, actually loves us so much that He wants to have a real and personal relationship with each of us. It is so humbling and such an incredible honor when we come to fully understand this. It is a real privilege to serve a God like that."

## BIOGRAPHY

## | SERMON 1

# THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24, 25

What is the importance of a spiritual family? Someone has said, "To begin our Christian life, we must commit ourselves to Jesus Christ; to grow in our Christian life, we must also commit ourselves to other people." That's what the church is: a group of people committed to each other because of Christ.

Together let us consider five reasons why it is important to be a committed part of a church family.

### I. WE MEET CHRIST IN A SPECIAL WAY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP.

In Matthew 18:20, we read these familiar words: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Jesus is present when believers are gathered together. Kent Hughes writes, "It is true that one does not have to go to church to be a Christian. He does not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases, if he does not, he will have a very poor relationship" (commentary on Hebrews).

### II. THE CHURCH GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OUR LOVE TO GOD.

A little old man was seen walking to church every Sabbath morning. He was deaf, so he could not hear the sermon, the music of the choir, or the hymns sung by the congregation. A scoffer asked, "Why do you spend your Sabbath in that church when you can't hear a word?" He replied, "I want my neighbors to know which side I'm on!"

Our involvement in a local church gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for God, and it shows where our devotion lies in at least two ways:

*By our commitment to weekly worship.* We give our time to activities that are most important to us. When we make our weekly meeting with God a priority in our schedule, we demonstrate the Lord's importance in our lives.

*We demonstrate our love through our giving.* In the book of Malachi, God asks a penetrating question (read Mal. 4:8-10). In this passage, the people are charged with robbing God. Why? Because they are not giving God ten percent of their income as He instructed them to do.

The church gives us the opportunity to show our love for God in a tangible way through our attendance, our service, and our giving.

### III. THE CHURCH IS WHERE WE FIND STRENGTH DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.

In Hebrews 10:24, 25, Paul talks about the difficulty of our spiritual walk and the necessity of persevering in our faith, and he gives us practical help. He tells us not to stop meeting together. Why? Because he knows we are more susceptible to falling when we are alone. We draw strength from one another. In gathering with members, we find sympathy, encouragement, accountability, and wise counsel. We strengthen each other by our presence.

### IV. THE CHURCH IS WHERE WE FIND WHOLENESS.

In Romans 12:3, 4, Paul's point is clear: we are incomplete when we are in isolation, and we are whole when we are together. God designed the Christian community to be interdependent. We cannot manage on our own. God has not given all His gifts and abilities only to one person; talents are spread among the group. We need each other to be complete.

### V. THE CHURCH IS A LABORATORY FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING.

You might be able to learn about hope and peace by yourself, but you cannot learn about love in isolation. In solitude, we can't learn how to forgive, how to deal with anger, or how to be compassionate. To learn these things, we need to be around other people. The church also gives us a community of people to "practice on" (1 John 3:16-18).

### CONCLUSION

These five points remind us of the importance of being united as a church family. If we want to grow and maintain our spiritual health, the church can help us. If we need support in difficult times, we also can find it in the church.

How can we strengthen our personal involvement in the church? We need to be more involved in the church. We need the church, and the church needs us. We also need to take our role as church members seriously. As church members, are we doing enough?

Remember, the church is not a building. The church is the people who have been irrevocably changed by God and who have joined together to bring honor

to Him. May God help us grow, and may He be honored in all that we do.

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“There is, I am sorry to say, a great want of earnestness and interest in spiritual things on the part of the heads of many families. There are some who are seldom found in the house of worship. They make one excuse, then another, and still another, for their absence; but the real reason is that their hearts are not religiously inclined. A spirit of devotion is not cultivated in the family.”

Ellen G. White - *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 425

Sermon Notes:

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# CHRISTMAS

John 1:1, 2, 14; 1 John 4:9-11

How easy it is to miss the magnificence of the story of Christmas. We know the facts. We have heard about the shepherds, the Magi, and Mary and Joseph. And because we're familiar with the story, it's easy to miss its incredible power. In difficult times as well as in good times, this is precisely the message we need to hear. It is our basis of hope, our source of strength, and our reason for joy.

Let's look at the story with fresh eyes and address the basic questions once more. If you were hearing the Christmas story for the very first time, you might ask several questions: Who was this man Jesus, and what makes His birth so significant? What was the purpose of His coming? What difference does this make in my life?

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT JESUS?

Was Jesus just another man or was He someone special? Was Jesus, as some say, the Son of God or not?

At the beginning of his biography of Jesus, the apostle John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Through the Word all things were made; without the Word nothing was made that has been made. In the Word was life, and that life was the light of men. The light of the Word shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:1-5).

John says that the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is an incredible idea. It's incredible because of what John told us in those opening words. Let me read them again, substituting "Jesus" for "Word."

"In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Jesus was with God in the beginning. Through Jesus all things were made; without Jesus nothing was made that has been made. In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:1-5).

Do you hear what John is saying? He says Christ was preexistent. Jesus was and is God! He was the agent of creation. He was the Creator. He is the source of life.

The idea of God becoming man sounds crazy. But look at the evidence. He claimed to be God. He claimed divine authority. He claimed divine power. He even applied to Himself the divine names "I Am" and "Son of Man." He lived a life free from sin and

mistakes. When the soldiers came to arrest Him (not for a crime but because He was getting too popular), the church leaders couldn't find anything valid with which to charge Him. Jesus performed miracles that changed people, circumstances, and even the weather. He fulfilled prophecies uttered hundreds of years before His birth.

Based on this evidence, we can conclude that Jesus was indeed God in human form. But this leads to our second question. If Jesus was God, why would He bother with mere humans when we are barely specks in the infinite universe in which we live?

### WHY WOULD GOD COME TO EARTH?

To answer this question, you may quote a Bible verse: John 3:16. In the most famous verse of the Bible, John tells us that Jesus came to earth to make it possible for you and me to live forever in God's presence. When Jesus became human, He did several things:

*He declared His love for us.* God became man so that He could communicate His love to us. Most of us feel that we have disappointed God. We say, "I sure hope God grades on a curve." We know we have made mistakes. Consequently, we feel that God could not really love us. But Jesus came to earth to tell us in person that God does love us. Read 1 John 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

God didn't declare His love because we were deserving; He did it because He was loving. Jesus was God's love song to us. The birth of Christ is God saying, "You matter to me." Jesus came to tell us that we are loved.

*He demonstrated His love for us.* God became man not only to declare His love, but also to demonstrate it. In each of the verses we looked at earlier, there is an additional idea. John 3 talks about God "giving" His Son. In 1 John we read about Christ making "an atoning sacrifice" for sin.

Jesus came to demonstrate His love by dying in our place. The cross and the cradle go hand in hand. He was born so He could die. God's standards are unflinching. Wrong is dealt with. Sin is punished. The truth is, we are so in debt that we are morally and spiritually bankrupt. We deserve hell. And most of us know it.

Christ came to set us free from the past so we could walk with Him. Christ-

mas reminds us of the depth of God's love and points us to the reason we have hope for the future.

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THIS INFORMATION?

God became man to tell us that He loves us and wants to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Now what? Understanding Christ's incarnation leads to two important decisions.

*How will I respond?* If you understand what Christmas is about, then you are faced with a decision: Will you accept what God offers, or will you merely discuss the theological implications? Will you receive His forgiveness or just think about it? Will you respond to His love, or will you put it off for another day? These are the questions our belief in Jesus provokes. These are the questions of Christmas.

The message of Christmas is the message you need to hear. God became man to declare and demonstrate His love, to pay your debt, and to set you free. All you have to do is take His hand and follow His lead. Have you done that? Have you responded to that great Christmas gift? If not, why not?

*How will I act?* There is one more response that God wants from us. He wants us to rest in Him, but He also wants us to love one another (1 John 4:11). As John tells us, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:9-12).

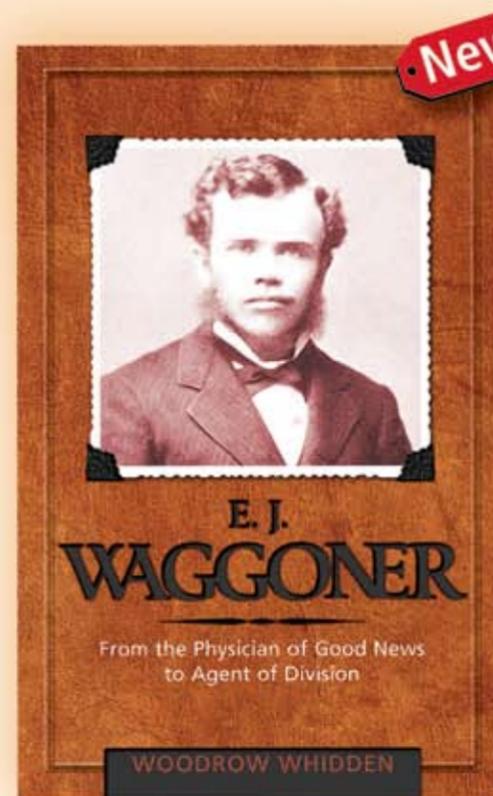
When we receive Christ, we also experience love, perhaps for the first time in our lives. When we experience God's love, we feel compelled to share that love with others. Christmas is a great time to do just that. This Christmas I encourage you to show genuine love to each other. Christmas is our chance to show others the love of Jesus.

### CONCLUSION

Christmas reminds us that we are not alone. God sees us. He loves us. Christmas reminds us that there is a wonderful reason for hope.

Christmas is not about gifts, programs, or family gatherings. Those are not the reason for the season; Jesus is the reason. God became man because of His great love for us.

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# Lest We Forget ...

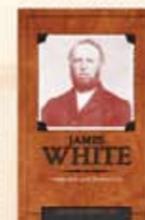
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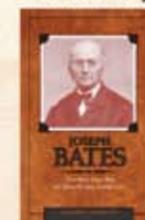


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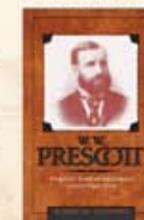


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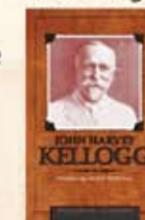


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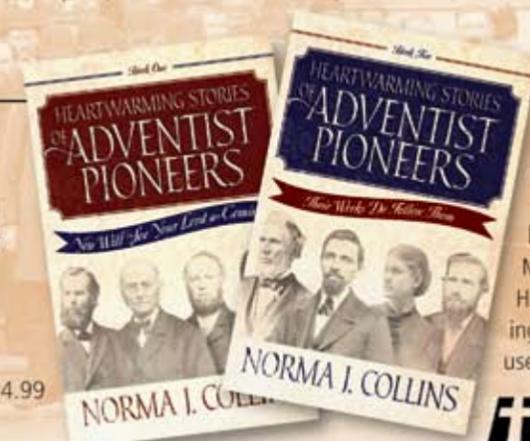
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# The visitor- friendly church

A certain visitor showed up early one Sabbath to attend services. Upon arriving, he pulled into a parking space, not knowing he'd receive a honk from someone behind him, "Hey, that's my parking space, you took my place," yelled the other driver. So the visitor found another spot.

As he entered the church, no one shook his hand to welcome him, so he went and found a seat in an almost-empty room where the teacher was frantically making last-minute preparations before class. When others entered, a middle-aged couple encountered the young man and said, "You're sitting in our place, you took our place." He moved over to let them have "their place."

When Sabbath School ended, none of the other class members introduced themselves to him; it was as if he wasn't even there, other than his taking their place.

Finally, upon entering the sanctuary, he found a spot where no one was sitting, and—you guessed it—someone came by and let him know that he was once again sitting in "their place." "You took my place," said the old lady. Again he found another place to sit.

Suddenly, just before the preacher got up to speak, the visitor stood up, and an incredible transformation took place. Everyone watched as he lifted his arms so the worshipers could see nail scars in his hands. "What happened to you?" shouted someone.

The visitor spoke, "I took your place."

If Jesus Christ showed up in person at your church, what kind of a reception would He receive? We must always remember that Jesus represents Himself as one of the least of these.

Recently two families from my church came back from their vacations over spring break. They told me of how they had visited a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church and that not one person had spoken to them during their entire visit. That was of interest to me and made me think, "I wonder how my church is doing?"

What is a friendly church? What does it look, feel, and sound like? I sat down with my church leadership and asked them that very question. Here's what we came up with.

All of my church members know that they're ministers, which means we're all in this together. More importantly, we're all servants, and part of being a servant is being a greeter. (Every member's a greeter).

If I were to go into a church and someone handed me a bulletin and said "Hi," that would be nice, but if someone met me in the parking lot and offered to help me carry something or held out an umbrella on a rainy day with a huge smile and authentic greeting, that would be great! I'd probably want to go back to that church.

While walking through a store, I heard an incredible little phrase that made me think. Over the loudspeaker, the announcer proclaimed, "The only difference between our store and theirs is the way we treat our customers." Wow! That really opened my eyes as to how we as a church should be treating our members and our visitors.

Is it safe to say that "the only difference between our church and theirs is the way we treat each other?" I believe in everything we teach as Seventh-day Adventists; however, I wonder if we can learn a few things about how to be more evangelistic during our time together on Sabbath mornings. We may have the truth, but is the truth reflected in our every action and in the way we treat others at church?

They say that the first 90 seconds determines whether someone will stay the next 90 minutes or never come back. Here are some suggestions for reaching out as a friendly church:

*Meet people in the parking lot* (umbrella in hand if raining and ready to help with little ones or even your own members' food for the fellowship meal).

*Smile, smile, smile.* A smile never goes up in price or down in value. I tell my members, "Of all the things you wear, a smile is always the most attractive."

*Go out of your way to say 'Hello.'* I've never heard anyone say, "Boy that church is just too friendly. I'm not going back there again!"

Let visitors go through line first during fellowship meals, but *assign friendly members to sit with your visitors*, making the entire Sabbath experience a memorable one. In one church I pastored, we even formed a hospitality committee to invite visitors home on Sabbath when there wasn't a fellowship meal.

If a visitor comes to your church and lives in the area, within 48 hours *bake some cookies and deliver them* to the visitor's front door. Don't stay long—just let the visitor know you're so glad he or she came to your church.

During the first part of the worship service, *invite everyone to reach out and shake a few hands*, saying something like, "I'm so happy you're here today."

If you've ever stayed in a nice hotel, you know that not only does it cost more, it also has more amenities: chocolates on the pillows, fresh flowers on the table, bottled water in the fridge, and a reminder that if there's anything you need, the staff stands ready to serve you. Of course, such service comes with a price; however, the price has already been paid for us, and that's why we want to make our churches as friendly as possible.

Can you imagine the welcome we're going to get in heaven? Now let your imagination run wild and think of things you can do to make someone feel welcome in your church. The possibilities are endless, and you can make it happen. I recently visited the CNN website and read an interesting article about a church where first-time visitors received a \$15.00 iTunes gift card. Pastor David Hughes in South Florida posted a billboard near his church in Glades, and his website got 50,000 hits during the first week. His church is now one of the fastest growing churches in America. While your church may not get the same results, you can develop an intentional strategy to get visitors to come to your church. Once they come, you can be intentional in making sure they come back.

Of course, new and innovative ways go only so far; it's still the personal touch that makes the difference. Like I said, no visitor has ever said to me, "Your members are just too friendly. I'm never coming back." But I have heard visitors say how much they enjoyed being at our church because of how friendly our church members are. We still can improve and are always looking for ways to make our church a place to which visitors want to return and where a connection with Christ is number one.

ED

Dave Ketelsen is the pastor of the Peachtree City Church in Atlanta, Georgia.



## ELDERS ENCOURAGING SMALL GROUPS FOR YOUTH

**When** I look at the youth and teenagers in our church, I notice many are doing very little to advance the gospel. Organizing youth into small groups to do outreach could produce fantastic results to an extent rarely seen in the history of Adventism.

Ellen G. White counsels us, “There are many lines in which the youth can find opportunity for helpful effort. Let them organize into bands for Christian service, and the cooperation will prove an assistance and an encouragement” (*Education*, 269).

After reading widely on church growth and serving the church in several countries and in various regions of Brazil, I decided that the creation of small

groups was not merely a church-growth fad; rather, it is God’s plan for His church today.

The concept of small groups is an interdenominational trend. There is a constant effort among evangelical churches to organize themselves into cells. Dr. Christian A. Schwarz, an expert in church growth, conducted a 10-year study of more than 1,000 congregations from 32 countries. He studied eight basic characteristics of healthy, growing churches and identified them as follows:

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures

5. Inspiring worship service
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships

Referring to small groups in relation to these eight characteristics, he says, “If we were to identify any one principle as the most important, then without doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups” (*Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 32).

I believe that organizing youth into small groups will accentuate the idea of church as family and community. A family ought to be the best small group. A colleague of mine once told me that “the church of the future will learn to live like the church of the past,” which means that the ideal model of worship and fellowship has been and always will be based on the family—from the lost paradise to the restored Eden.

Doug Fields, youth pastor at the Saddleback Church, has written more than 20 books for youth, among them *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*. He says, “The most effective way to produce ‘biblical’ fellowship in the lives of our youth is through their participation in small groups. . . . In the church, small groups are essential, especially to adolescent spiritual maturity” (138).

There are at least three reasons why youth should be involved in and committed to small group ministry:

**1. Small groups for youth will provide a suitable environment to get acquainted.** Young people often choose their friends because of proximity (such as attending the same school) or common interests (sports, hobbies, etc.). Providing a comfortable setting for them to meet other young people from their church will nurture friendships. It will also provide an opportunity for them to become involved in church activities and to feel they are a valued and integral part of their church.

Feeling rejected can be traumatic for youth. Everyone wants to be part of a group. Young people want to belong, and they want to be part of a community with similar interests. Developing small groups in the church makes this possible.

During the prophet Samuel’s time, the principle of working with young people in groups was very impor-

tant. “In the accomplishment of this object, Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. The instructors were men not only versed in divine truth, but those who had themselves enjoyed communion with God, and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and piety” (Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 96).

**2. Small groups for youth will provide an environment that encourages Christian friendships and caring for one another.** Christianity is a religion of relationships. First and foremost is one’s relationship with Jesus, through private prayer, Bible reading, and witnessing about Him. Second is our relationship with our neighbors, especially the people in “my” youth group.

The Bible is full of Christian exhortations whose purpose is to stimulate fellowship in communities and caring for one another. “But through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). “Therefore receive one another” (Rom. 15:7). “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (Col. 3:13). “Greet one another” (Rom. 16:16). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10). “Able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). “Submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21). “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11).

The biblical expression “one another” occurs 53 times in the New Testament, most of the time challenging us to a healthy relationship with our neighbors. God created us to live in communities. It is in the fellowship of a group that we discover the reason for our being and the true value each person has before God. “The principle inculcated in the injunction ‘Be kindly affectioned one to another’ is the cornerstone of the Christian character. . . . Christian courtesy is the golden clasp which unites the members of the family in bonds of love, becoming closer and stronger every day” (Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, 189).

**3. Small groups for youth will provide an environment for faith development.** One of the

major challenges in youth ministry is to get young people to make a commitment to the church mission, using the gifts each one has received as God's good stewards. Our young people have many gifts and abilities; however, most are not using them because they either don't know how, are afraid of witnessing, or are not given the opportunity to participate.

What is the solution? The answer may be in the creation of small groups for youth, where young people are given the opportunity to develop their gifts. By learning to use their gifts gradually and in a supportive environment, they will lose their fear of witnessing.

It is time to help our youth organize into small groups to study the Bible, to sing praises to God, and to pray and witness to schoolmates or colleagues. This is the challenge today: "Young men and young women, cannot you form companies, and, as soldiers of Christ, enlist in the work, putting all your tact and skill and talent into the Master's service, that you may save souls from ruin? Let there be companies organized in every church to do this work" (Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 96).

According to sociologists, human beings want to be part of a small group, not a multitude. They want to be noted, loved, and protected; they want to be part of a winning team. This being true, there may be no more effective method of working with our youth than in small groups. ED

Otmar Gonçalves - Youth Ministries Director, South American Division

## GIOVANNI NEGRO

"I thank the Lord for the blessings and joy He has given me!" exclaims Giovanni Negro, a local church elder at the Bracciano Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has been an elder at this little country church near Rome, Italy, for two years and has been an Adventist since 1987. He is married to his beautiful wife Lucia, and they have two precious daughters, Elisa and Gloria. He is a very active church member, not only as an elder but also as the director of the Pathfinder Club and evangelism program.



Giovanni believes that every ministry he is a part of is solely for the Lord and that each duty is important and gratifying. He does not care if these functions require a lot of his time and energy. Instead, he focuses on the reason he serves and ministers patiently in the Lord. "In the past, I have often thought of what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:16 (NLT) when he writes, 'And who is adequate for such a task as this?' I realize that working as an elder is a great responsibility because of my accountability to the church and to God; however, God has always given me the strength during my ministry to serve my church with love and humility."

His pastor describes him as a spiritual person, a committed member, and a great helper in the ministry. He says that working with a local church leader like Giovanni is a blessing each pastor desires to have.

## BIOGRAPHY

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## | QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

BECAUSE HE DIVIDES HIS TIME BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CHURCHES IN HIS DISTRICT, THE PASTOR SPENDS VERY LITTLE TIME AT THE LOCAL CHURCH. SINCE LOCAL WORK IS PERFORMED BY VOLUNTEER MEMBERS, SHOULD THE PASTOR RECEIVE INCOME FROM TITHE?



The Levites and even the priests from Aaron's family dedicated much less time to the Tabernacle or Temple than a pastor dedicates to the church today, and that did not take away their right to tithe income. If tithe income is based on the time dedicated to the service of the church, the pastor's dedication is much greater than the Levites' was. On the other hand, the pastor ministers to several churches, and he does not get a salary from each one; a single salary takes care

of all. As for the working time of the Levites, even when they were still a small tribe, they totaled thousands of members (Num. 4:47-49; 1 Chron. 23:1-4), who lived in their "cities of refuge" (Num. 35) and only went to work in the service of the temple following a schedule system which did not include working every day or every week. Not all of them had priestly duties. Thousands served as judges, administrators, and other officials. Some served throughout their entire lives as gatekeepers, wood providers, musicians, keepers of part of the sanctuary, etc. (Read 1 Chron. 23:4 up to chapter 25.) They worked for 25 years but received wages from tithe all their lives, before and after they reached 50 years of age, when they became counselors of the younger generation (Num. 8:24, 25). In fact, their pay was not based on what they did in the temple, but on their total and exclusive dedication as ministers for life. They taught, administered, and represented their God before the people—they were doctrine-keepers. This is the type of ministry God expects as described in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy. Despite its imperfections, that is how the Adventist ministry is. It cannot be measured using the same criteria as other common duties. ED

General Conference Ministerial Association



# Welcome, Pastor!

You may not fully understand the joy and anticipation with which we welcome you to our church. We know that we will love you and look forward to getting acquainted with you and your family.

We have had many pastors through the years. Our congregation is small (less than 200 members), and for various reasons, the pastors have left one by one. They have gone on to retirement or are drawn to a warmer climate; others need to be closer to family members. The mission field has called, as have larger churches and the work

of full-time evangelism. We understand why our pastors have chosen to move on to new and different challenges, for this is how we all grow. Saying farewell to each pastor has brought sadness to our hearts.

Again we have been searching for just the right person to be our pastor. We are so glad you and your family are the ones who will capture a warm spot in our hearts and memories forever.

Our congregation is diverse. The occupations the people have chosen are varied: some are laborers, some are in businesses, some are professionals, and some have

retired. Most are successful in whatever career they have chosen. In spite of difficulties, they try to maintain a cheerful attitude.

Our needs are many and varied. Some have just lost a loved one. Others are coming to terms with a doctor's diagnosis of a terminal illness or of a disease that will disable them for the remaining years of their lives. Our senior members face the prospect of entering nursing homes. Businesses have financial struggles. Farmers cope with weather conditions and low prices for their crops. Parents have many concerns for their children.

We need you to feed our souls. We want you to give us sermons that will uplift us and guide us through the week. Visit us in our homes. Be sensitive when we are hurting and rejoice with us through the good times. Let your pastoral heart touch us personally.

We are aware that some find it easy to divide the congregation into the young and the old, the wealthy and the poor, or the well-educated and the uneducated. We prefer to be known as a family that works, plays, and prays together.

Some church leaders have held their positions of leadership for several years. Some members may think these people want to be leaders because of the prestige and "power" of their positions, whereas the leaders believe it has been their duty to serve when asked by nominating committees through the years. Our pastors have taught us that we each have talents, and that it is our responsibility as followers of Jesus to use these talents. Whether our leaders are young or old, male or female, we appreciate their talents and welcome their willingness to serve.

Many of us have lived in our community for our entire lives, and we have worked to keep our church a thriving church. Without the ministry of our strong leaders, this church might not have survived long enough for you to be our pastor.

Perhaps you may think one of us is the Patriarch or the Matriarch of the church. Thank you for the compliment, for that puts us in a class with Abraham and Sarah and others whom God considers it well for us to study and emulate. We would rather think of ourselves as God's children whose lives and hearts and souls are involved in living for Christ. Part of that life is being a faithful church member.

Love us through all our faults and mistakes. Help us to grow in

the grace of Christ. May we never leave God's house, when you have spoken, without feeling Christ's love projected through you.

Help us know your needs. Allow us to be your comforters when you need comfort. We want to be understanding when your children are (like ours) less than perfect. To see you tired and weary does not make us happy, so take time to relax and enjoy your family. Uphold and support your spouse. If you have children, reserve time in your busy schedule for them. By placing your family first, you will set the right example for us.

**LOVE US THROUGH ALL OUR FAULTS AND MISTAKES. HELP US TO GROW IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST. MAY WE NEVER LEAVE GOD'S HOUSE, WHEN YOU HAVE SPOKEN, WITHOUT FEELING CHRIST'S LOVE PROJECTED THROUGH YOU.**

Join with us in our family celebrations. We want to fill the void in your life when your family is far away. Our tables, homes, and hearts always have room for one more.

Pastor, you are new to our congregation, and you may feel that you know us by visiting for a moment or two whenever you have the opportunity. Most of us are more complex, and we appreciate when you take the time to really get to know us. In the same manner, we want to develop a relationship with your family that we will treasure through the years to come.

We have chosen to be a part of

our local community, and we want you to participate with us in community programs and events. When friends and neighbors comment on your friendliness and helpfulness, it will bring joy to our hearts. We will have another reason to be thankful for your ministry.

The story is told of two men who moved into a new community and wondered what their new neighbors would be like. The first man went to a businessman in the community and asked him about the people who would be his neighbors. The businessman asked, "What were your neighbors like where you used to live?"

The man replied, "Oh, they were the worst people you could imagine."

The businessman responded, "That is the kind of people you will find here."

The second man went to the same businessman and asked, "What kind of people are my new neighbors?"

Again the businessman asked the same question: "What were your neighbors like where you used to live?"

"Oh, they were such kind and wonderful people. I really hated to leave them."

With a smile, the businessman replied, "That is just the kind of people you will find here."

If you have had an unpleasant experience in your former pastorate, leave it there and come to us with an open heart and mind. Anticipate that you will find acceptance and love.

Welcome to our hearts! May there be mutual understanding and love. May your ministry be fruitful and productive. May we be that "perfect" congregation of which you have always dreamed. 

Evelyn Glass is the former director of Women's Ministries in the Mid-America Union.



## Church Administration: Resolving conflicts

**Along** with visitation, organization, sympathy, and encouragement, church elders may also be called upon to provide conflict resolution. In this article, we will look at ways in which elders can promote harmony in the church.

I just received a call from an elder. After identifying himself, his first words were, "Elder, I appreciate your advice. I never thought such a conflict, which had no apparent solution, could be resolved so quickly and in such a peaceful way. Thank you for your guidance."

Conflict is just one of the many issues facing church elders. Sometimes conflicts are motivated by diverging ideas; other times, conflict is caused by differences in methods or even in differing interpretations of certain church situations or programs.

Conflicts may be productive if they motivate a deeper reflection about the decisions to be made or if they promote a fusion of ideas, a consensus. For that to happen, people need to be willing to accept differing viewpoints and be open to compromise. The re-

sults will almost always be positive. Leaders who deal effectively with conflict show their parishioners that they can be trusted.

However, it is not always easy for leaders to resolve conflicts. Pride and vanity may turn differences over concepts or methods into personal attacks. That is when emotions erupt. At that point, opposing parties, personal dissension, offense, intrigue, and dispute begin. You probably know what happens next: the church notices that its leaders are not united, the parties and disputes corrupt the members, and the leadership loses its credibility. Those who should act as spiritual guides have jeopardized their influence. Preaching loses its power, and the spirituality of the entire body deteriorates.

Dear elder, do not allow this devilish process to occur in your church, or, if dissent is already present, respond quickly to correct the situation. Here are several suggestions, taken from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, for dealing with conflict in the church. Gather with the elders and, with much prayer, study this article together. If possible, do the same with all the other leaders in a church committee meeting.

### POINTERS FOR RESOLVING OR AVOIDING CONFLICT

**Be one with Jesus.** "In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these disciples, differing so widely in natural characteristics, in training, and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself" (Ellen G. White, *Education*, 86).

**Be humble.** Be humble enough to accept different opinions. Accept that the best ideas are not always yours. "We each need the help we can receive from other minds. God will work in other minds than ours. The various gifts given to different ones are to blend for the 'perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:12)" (Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, 127).

It is not easy, but instead of spending your energy tirelessly trying to promote your own ideas, try adopting some ideas from your leadership colleagues. Try

modifying your ideas. Eventually you will see that others will be more open to your ideas as well.

**For current conflicts, follow Jesus' guidance.** "Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matt. 18:15).

This principle doesn't apply only when the brother is guilty. The text shows us that a personal and direct approach, coupled with love and humility, is the key to resolving conflicts. This is not the time to expose mistakes or point fingers. It is a time to seek reconciliation and freedom from the power of the devil, for there is no greater effort in which the devil strives in the church than in promoting division and intrigue.

The elder mentioned at the beginning of this article, who called to thank me, had called a few days earlier, distressed and wishing to abandon his responsibilities in the church. He was facing a terrible personal conflict with another influential church leader. With prayer and humility, he took the initiative to seek out the brother, admitted his own fault, and expressed with a lot of prudence the points that offended him as well. The result was tears, hugs, and reconciliation. The name of the Lord was honored, the church benefited, and the devil left ashamed.

In the following statement, Ellen White encourages us to adopt the same attitude: "All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong, the Spirit of God binds heart to heart, and there is music in heaven over the union brought about" (*Gospel Workers*, 499, 500).

Remember, the greatest testimony in favor of Christ is the unity of His body, the church: "That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21).



Ranieri Sales is the Associate Ministerial Secretary of the South American Division

# ORGANIZATIONAL MISCONDUCT



**Sexual** misconduct by clergy has dominated the headlines in recent months. Predatory violation of children is particularly reprehensible, and calls for punishment and reform have come from laity as well as fellow clergy who realize their own reputations are besmirched by the sinful behavior of a few miscreants. As the media reports on individual clergy criminals, another level of wickedness—organizational misconduct—should be carefully evaluated by every denomination. When a clergy is transferred from one location to another with judicatory administrators aware of suspicion about, accusations against, or even direct evidence of sexual misconduct by the transferred pastor, then the wider group contributes to the sin of the minister and should be accountable to the victims.

And this is not just a challenge for one religious organization. Evils of pedophilia and every type of sexual misconduct cross denominational boundaries. Sexual misconduct by clergy is everyone's problem, but it is the particular responsibility of administrators who should faithfully serve the congregations and parishioners under their jurisdiction, people who expect more than well-meaning empathy for perpetrators of abuse and who are increasingly unwilling merely to accept reassurances from leaders who are either cluelessly unaware or negligent in their duty.

Various factors motivate administrators who avoid dealing with guilty clergy and, subsequently, transfer them to new locations. Perhaps the greatest contributing factor is the misconception that the church's reputation must be protected at all costs, even by keeping secret the sins of the clergy. Like the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand, they believe that "if we ignore a problem, then the tragic consequences cannot possibly be factual" and the church's image is preserved.

Another factor seems to be the gospel mandate to forgive sinners. Thus, pastoral sexual misconduct is viewed more as a moral lapse than as a betrayal of professional trust. Of course, this ignores the Savior's directive that those who harm little ones should be severely and irretrievably punished. Remember, sexual misconduct is seldom a need for a sexual relationship as much as it is an abuse of power and position.

Denominational policies are often violated by well-intentioned leaders who believe that selective enforcement is more merciful than zero tolerance, particularly for a first offense (often the situation which is reported is not the

first offense, but only the first of which the administrator has become aware).

When organizational behavior does not match organizational policy, pastors conclude they will be disciplined on the basis of "who they know" more than on the basis of "what they did." Consequently, if administrators set up themselves, rather than policy, as the final arbiters of justice, they must hide their actions or disguise their motives when their own variance with policy becomes known.

Likewise, for those denominations (my own included) whose official policies offer no rehabilitation process and anticipate that every moral fall means dismissal from ministry, leaders believe they must selectively ignore policy for some offenses while punishing others. Again, the individual administrator, not the body, becomes the judge.

Furthermore, when an organizational culture refuses to deal with reality, training in sexual ethics and professional responsibility may be woefully lacking.

Too often organizations appear to express greater concern for their employee than for the person(s) victimized. Misguided empathy for the needs of a clergy often takes precedence over the victims' need to see justice. Rushing to forgive errant clergy and to professionally absolve them from employment consequences often ignores the severe trauma experienced by the victims' unheeded need to express their pain. The victims feel violated again by leaders who refuse to hear their cries.

In fact, victims are often blamed for seducing the clergy. One victim said, "I was made to feel that a man's job was more important than my virtue." Because the church must not only "do right" but also "appear right," laity should serve on all committees that deal with issues of misconduct and violation.

Another group of victims are often blamed for clergy sexual misconduct. Pastoral wives are viewed as contributing to their husband's sin (sexual misconduct is almost exclusively a problem of male clergy) by the assumption that they did not "meet their spouse's needs." Do not underestimate the consequential victimization of pastoral wives and families when justice does not consider their situation.

Absolute integrity in disclosure of misconduct and even unproven accusations should inform every transfer of employees. Otherwise, the organization participates in and perpetuates the very misconduct it purports to abhor. **ED**

James A. Cress  
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

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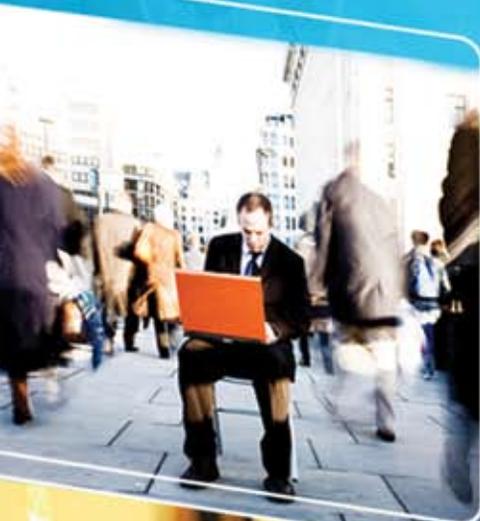
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