

quarterly resource for local church elders † july/september 2008

ELDER'S DIGEST



**COWBOYS,
STOCKMEN AND
ELDERS: SOME COMMON PITFALLS**

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IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE CHURCH THAT MATTERS!

I've heard many people say that the greatest characteristic of the twenty-first century Adventist Church is not its size but its quality. If we divide our 16 million baptized members into the almost 140,000 Adventist churches and companies in the world today, each congregation would have 114 members. In the United States, the average ratio is 100 members per congregation. This means that, regardless of the great value media puts on large churches, we are still a denomination of small- and medium-sized churches.

Church leaders who serve small congregations may be tempted to downplay the importance of their ministry. They may look at larger churches and feel insignificant. But this is not true! No matter its size, each church is holy ground, a precious place, because Jesus gave His life for those people. Each church is important to God, and He expects His pastors to do their best for the members. All pastors should have a sense of dignity and value.

In other words, there are no small tasks, and no one should feel insignificant and depreciated in leading a small church. There is a great work to be done, and God wants to use His pastors in a powerful way. Our major concern should not be the size of the church but the healthy characteristics within the church. Here are some pointers that can help you to evaluate your church:

- **Good doctrinal foundation.** Do the members of your

church have a clear understanding of the major Adventist doctrines? Do they receive helpful training which prepares them to defend or witness to their faith?

- **A clear vision of mission.** Is mission the central purpose of your church? Is this goal being successfully reached? What is the main focus of the departments, musical groups, sermons, and use of funds? Is your church truly mission-oriented?

- **Financially stable.** Is the income appropriate for the number of members and their socio-economic status? Are members being instructed regarding the blessings of being faithful stewards?

- **A positive image in the community.** Has the church developed social and community projects suited to the needs of the community? Is it a friendly church? What do the neighbors think of the church?

- **Good self-esteem.** Are the members happy to be Christians? Are they proud of their church and their pastor?

- **Warm and caring.** Is there an environment of fraternity and fellowship among the members? Are the members' social, material, and spiritual needs being met?

This list is not comprehensive; you may add other characteristics that you consider important. But one thing is certain: your church — large or small — needs you. The difference in your ministry will be your motivation, ideas, spiritual credibility, and commitment. God has given you a unique opportunity to serve Him right where you are! ED



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary

BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Gerhard Pfandl, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute

WHAT IS BRI?

BRI stands for Biblical Research Institute. In 1943 the General Conference established the *Defense Literature Committee* to study and answer publications against the church. It issued replies to attacks on the church and dealt with the teachings of off-shoot groups. Then in 1952 the *Committee on Biblical Study and Research* was appointed to examine church manuscripts prior to publication. In 1969 the two committees were combined into one, the *Biblical Research Institute Committee* which today has about 40 members from around the world. It consists of theologians/Bible teachers and administrators. The *Biblical Research Institute* is the office which oversees the work of the *Biblical Research Institute Committee*.

1. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE?

The different functions of the Biblical Research Institute can be grouped under three main headings: Research, Apologetics, and Service to the church. Among its more specific functions are the following:

A. Theological Research:

Identifying areas in which biblical research is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Exploring new areas of truth and studying issues of biblical interpretations. Organizing and conducting research using institute personnel and theologians from the world field as needed.

B. Apologetics:

Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines as held and understood by the church and preparing materials as needed by the church in defense of truth. Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities in order to reduce tensions, misunderstanding, and prejudice against the church.

C. Service:

Assisting the General Conference administration and the world field in matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends. Providing seminars in biblical studies and theology for pastors, Bible teachers, administrators, and other interested workers, and teach intensive courses in theological seminaries around the world as requested. Organizing and conducting Bible Conferences.

2. WHAT RESOURCES DOES BRI PROVIDE FOR OUR WORLDWIDE CHURCH?

The Institute provides theological resources (books, pamphlets, newsletter, website, papers, CDs, etc.) for the administration and departments of the General Conference and the world church. It identifies areas of doctrinal and theological discussion, seeking to enhance their understanding, and builds commitment to the truths of Scripture.

3. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS TO PROMOTE THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH?

Church leaders can promote their church best by living out the Adventist faith in their community. This can include organizing the church for missionary outreach, holding various seminars (e.g., on health), making a positive contribution to the needs of the society (food bank, etc.), and by advertising the activities of the church in the community.

4. CONSIDERING THE TIMES WE LIVE IN, WHAT KIND OF MESSAGES SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED FROM THE PULPIT?

From our pulpits balanced Christ-centered sermons should be heard that are anchored in Scripture, and that include distinctive Adventist doctrines, such as the Sabbath and our understanding of end-time events, e.g.,

the three angel's message. Furthermore, church members need to be instructed on God's will for their lives.

5. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE SOME IMPORTANT QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING EFFECTIVE CHURCH LEADERS?

Commitment to Christ and His church; knowledge of the Scriptures, acquaintance with the writings of Ellen White; good interpersonal relation skills; love people and be a team player; balanced judgment; spiritual discernment; organizational skills, e.g., the ability to train others, set goals and develop programs to fulfill the mission of the church; as well as having a clear understanding of the message and the mission of the church.

6. WHAT KIND OF THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IS OUR CHURCH FACING TODAY?

The large increase in membership in recent years, for which we praise the Lord, has also had a negative side. It has produced a theological pluralism in the church, unknown before the 1980s. Whereas prior to 1980, theological issues in the church were mainly confined to specific Adventist issues, e.g., the sanctuary truth, the Spirit of prophecy, the remnant, and the nature of Christ, the issues today concern primarily fundamental truths of Christianity – Is God omniscient? Is the Trinity biblical? Was the world created in six days or over millions of years? Did Christ die as our substitute or only

as our example? Is the historicist principle of prophetic interpretation still valid? Can we still identify the Roman Catholic Church as Babylon? These are some of the issues we are facing today in addition to specific Adventist questions.

7. HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS HELP PASTORS OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES TO OUR DOCTRINES?

Some of these challenges come from critical independent ministries. Local church leaders, therefore, should not support these ministries, distribute their publications, or invite their representatives to the pulpit. Furthermore, church elders should become familiar with these issues and the church's positions on these matters so they can help the pastor protect the church members from the inroads of these teachings. An excellent help in this regard is the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* edited by Raoul Dederen (Review and Herald, 2000) which is available in English and Spanish.

8. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST TEMPTATION IN PREACHING TODAY?

One of the greatest temptations for any preacher is to entertain the congregation. Pastors should avoid giving shallow messages, ride hobby horses, or address social and psychological concerns instead of preaching God's Word.



CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

THE CHURCH ELDER IN FACE OF CONTROVERSY

One of the church elder's most exhausting tasks is dealing with controversy. Some elders, however, do not care for nor are scared by polemics. They argue that there is little chance of progress where there is absolute conformity and no interest in improvement.

In truth, a healthy congregation that is united and always working on behalf of lost souls has the spiritual resilience to overcome tensions and conflicts. The leaders of these congregations are not alarmed by the possibility of conflicts that could morph into crises.

The word "conflict" comes from the Latin *fligare*, literally meaning "to fight as a team." In his book *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration*, James D. Berkley explains that when two or more people pursue goals that are not shared or when one person's will clashes with another's, conflict occurs. Berkley further quotes the book *Church Fights*, in which Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus differentiate three ways in which conflict is felt:

(1) *intrapersonal* (restricted to one's conscience), for example, "Should I wear this or that?"

(2) *interpersonal* (battle between egos); and

(3) *substantive* (dispute over accomplishments, values, aims, and beliefs). A specific conflict may be a combination of these types. Such is the case when discussion about something *substantive* (the argument between two department leaders over who is "doing" the Christmas program) generates an *interpersonal* conflict (someone's feelings get hurt).

In immature congregations, people are often frustrated when their ideas are not accepted. They take this rejection personally, believing that resistance to their ideas is the same as rejecting them as people. Leaders, however, cannot run away from positive, substantive conflicts that emerge during the developmental process of a church. For example, church members might ask questions such as these: "What type of evangelism program should we have: 30 continuous nights of preaching or three meetings per week?" "What is

the best time for Youth Meetings: Friday night or Saturday afternoon?" "What type of seats should we get for the sanctuary: chairs or pews?"

To achieve good results as they consider these conflicting subjects, church elders must act constructively. Leading a church while avoiding crisis is essential for the success of the church's mission. In principle, doctrinal controversies (related to beliefs) have been the worst kind of controversies. During such crises, elders are wise to obtain advice from the church pastor or from conference leadership.

The Bible describes a case of doctrinal controversy in the apostolic church that started when some Jewish masters began to impose circumcision among new converts; the story is found in Acts 15. The apostles and elders who faced this controversy (verses 1, 2) did not postpone searching for a solution, nor did they behave like ostriches who hide their heads in the sand. Because they believed that the local church should be in harmony with the church in Jerusalem, they met with their leaders (verse 6). After hearing several testimonies, they concluded that the controversy had been started by people "with no authority" to teach the church about this subject (verse 24). The leaders decided to "elect some men and send them" as speakers to announce the "agreement" that had been reached (verse 25), and they considered that the final verdict "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" and to themselves (verses 28, 29).

Regarding that council in Jerusalem, Ellen White says, "The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The 'apostles and elders,' men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches. Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and fault-finding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 196).

In general, when negative controversy occurs between church members, the elder always has two alternatives: to ignore the situation or intervene.

The following statements are taken from the Spirit of Prophecy and may be helpful when you are faced with a controversial situation:

(1) "As a witness for Christ, John entered into no controversy, no wearisome contention" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 555).

(2) "But be not too ready to take a controversial attitude" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 118).

(3) "We should be guarded, that the spirit of controversy does not control our discussions of the Sabbath school lesson" (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 27).

(4) "Do not present subjects that will arouse controversy" (*Evangelism*, 142).

(5) "Many dwell almost exclusively upon doctrinal subjects, while the nature of true piety, experimental godliness, receives little attention. Jesus, His love and grace, His self-denial and self-sacrifice, His meekness and forbearance, are not brought before the people as they should be" (*Ibid.*, 163).

(6) "In most of the religious controversies, the foundation of the trouble is that self is striving for the supremacy" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 71).

(7) "Let not controversy arise over trifles" (*Mind, Character, and Personality*, 2:498).

(8) "None are to be forward or obtrusive, but we are quietly to live out our religion, with an eye single to the glory of God. . . . Then we shall shine as lights in the world, without noise or friction" (*Sons and Daughters of God*, 317).

If you lost control of a situation or cannot avoid or inhibit the propagation of negative controversy, do not behave like an ostrich or lose hope; rather, pray to God and ask Him for wisdom and serenity. Arguments are often caused by lack of communication regarding a specific matter. Therefore:

1. *Listen, individually, to each person involved in the controversy.* Be careful not to show bias or label people beforehand as being "problematic." Be attentive to each explanation. Maybe some explanation needs to be given to the person. Praying with the person and asking God for illumination are essential for the conversation.

2. *Be careful not to accelerate accusations or feelings of rage.* Start the conversation on a friendly note, as far as possible from emotional triggers. Try to keep the conversation on a spiritual level. The objective should be to reach a satisfactory outcome that is in harmony with church principles and Christian ethics. Fear and offense are hardly ever beneficial.

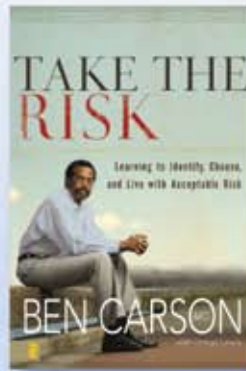
3. *Don't rush.* Prioritize a list of possible solutions, considering the positive and negative aspects of each. Pray for wisdom to make the right decision.

4. *Consult with each party again to discuss possible solutions.* Share the positive and negative consequences of each option. Try to reach a consensus between both parties, always in a constructive, Christian atmosphere.

Paulo Roberto Pinheiro is editor of *Elder's Digest* in Portuguese in Brazil.

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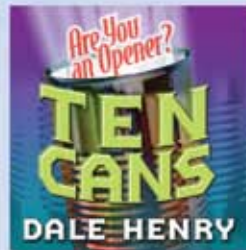


OPEN MIND— INSERT FRESH PERSPECTIVE

TEN CANS

Are You an Opener?

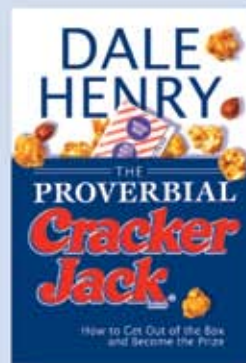
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| QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S POSITION ON WOMEN BEING ELECTED AS LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS? DOES THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH HAVE A DOCUMENT WITH INSTRUCTION ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

On October 14, 1984, during Annual Council, the General Conference Committee prepared the following statement about the election and ordination of women as local church elders.

WOMEN (LOCAL CHURCH) ELDERS - ELECTION AND ORDINATION

Voted:

1. To reaffirm the Spring Meeting action of the General Conference Committee of 1975, *Role of Women in the Church* (GCC 75-153).

2. To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders.

3. To suggest that the following guidelines be used in the selection and ordination of women as local church elders:

a. The concept should be carefully examined, discussed, and properly accepted at the local church level.

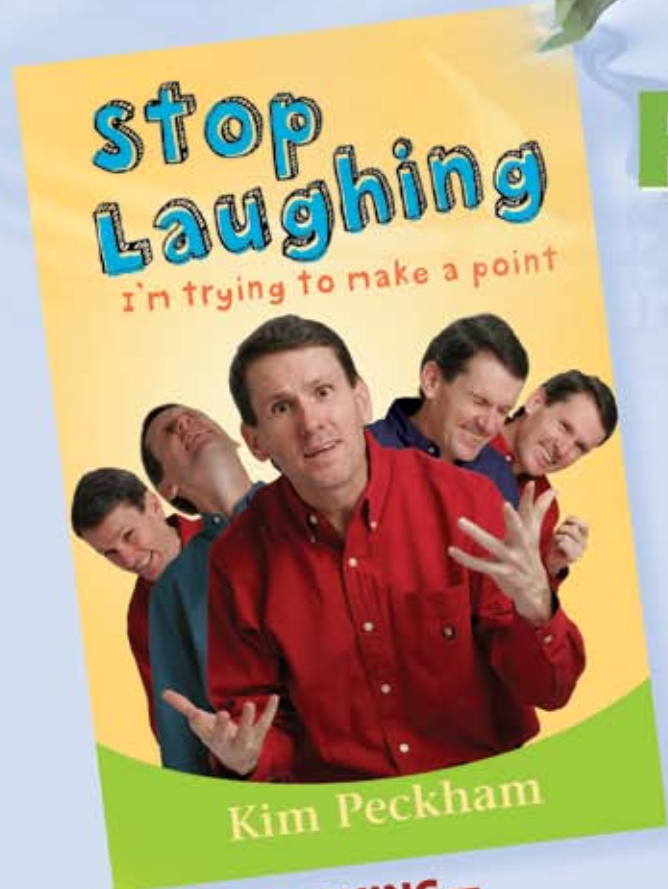
b. If a church contemplates such an action, the entire matter should be discussed and approved by the conference committee after the conference administration has sought counsel from the union leadership. The negotiation between the church and the conference should occur in advance of the final decision and vote by the local church.

c. The action to elect and ordain a woman as a local church elder must not be taken unless a clear consensus exists that the ministry of a woman elder is desirable and even essential to the spiritual well-being of the local church family. It should also be the consensus of the church that a woman elder will be respected as a spiritual leader and soul-winner. The church should also express its belief that there are dimensions of spiritual service and counsel which cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.

d. A clear majority of the voting members of the local church must be in favor of the action. The matter should be considered at a specially-called church business meeting. Every church member should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue rather than only the few who might be present at a regular meeting where routine items of business are on the agenda. Although preliminary study could be given to this question by the church board, any final action should be taken by the church in a business meeting.

e. Whatever the decision of the church, it should result in unifying the members and not be the source of divisiveness or alienation. The body of Christ, the Church, must not be tarnished in any way. In this important issue, as in all things, the name of our Lord and Savior must be exalted. ED

General Conference Ministerial Association



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COWBOYS, STOCKMEN AND

So you're an elder! Your high calling to leadership invites some words of advice. Whether your eldership is shiny-new or well-worn, your God-ordained role carries certain dangers. In many ways, the pitfalls you face are common to cowboys and stockmen. The commonality lies in the responsibility taken for and care given to herds of cattle and flocks of sheep.

The magnificent horsemen and women of the high country and plains know that if their horse throws a shoe, they are in trouble. They understand the need for regular food and water and the dangers to both rider and beast if either is in short supply. They are wellaware of the paths to avoid when leading their flocks and herds to safe pasture. So whether you're saddling up for the first time or easing back into the saddle for another year of leading your congregation, avoid these dangers:

DON'T PRETEND YOU'RE THE "MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER."

Be yourself and ride in your own saddle. Don't imagine you're someone you're not. A common pitfall of leadership is to compare oneself to others. The danger lies in imagining that you possess someone else's special talents and skills. You can easily fall off your horse if you pretend to be someone else. Stick with your own skill set! The preferred trail is the one on which your God-given gifts and passions guide your way. Don't pretend to be someone you're not.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all . . . for to one is given . . . to another . . . to another" (1 Cor. 12:7-11). Paul is describing the principle of unity in diversity. God created you as a unique being, and the church needs your uniqueness! If you ride in your own saddle, the church will be blessed.

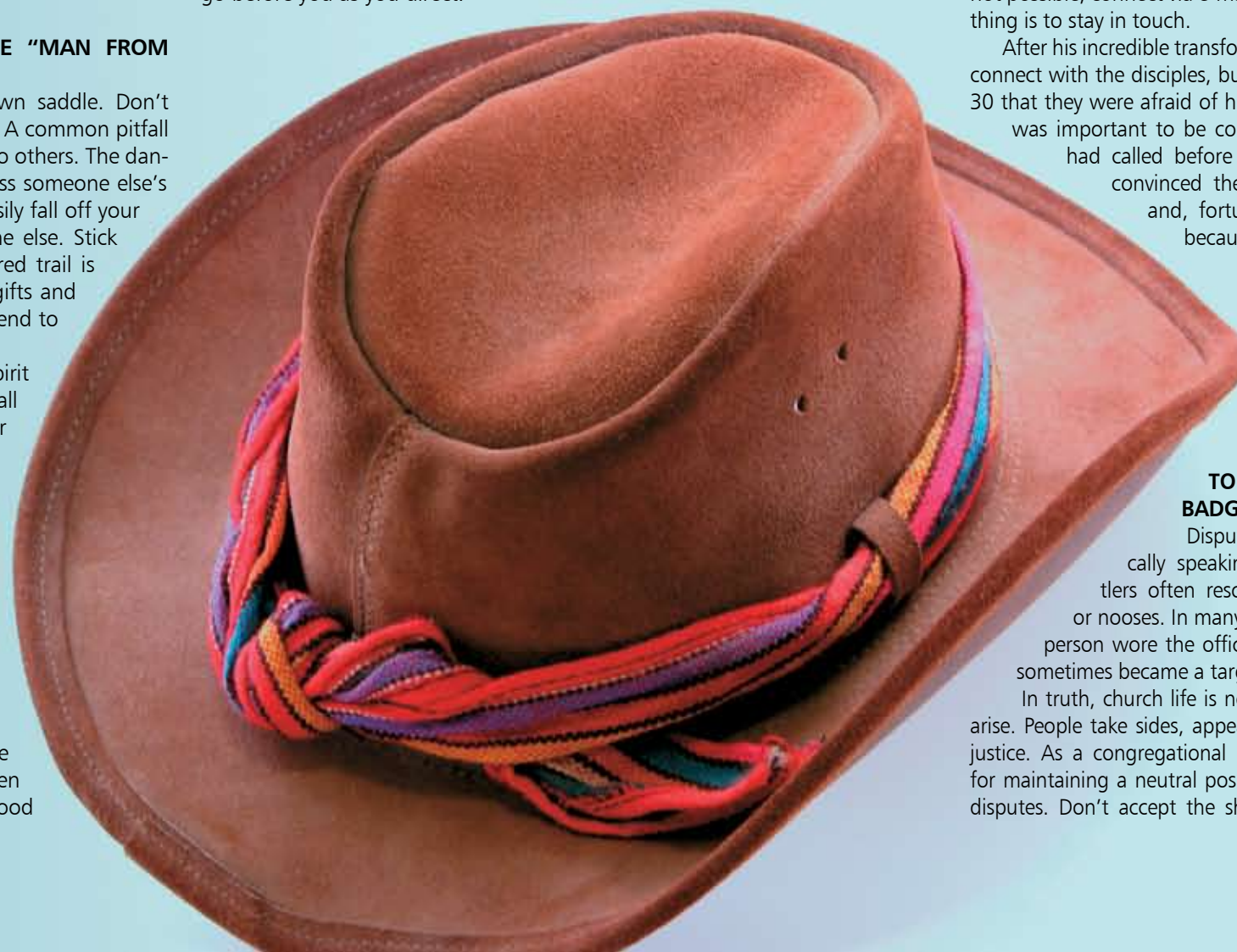
AVOID RIDING FROM THE REAR OR WAY OUT FRONT.

Balance! Stockmen understand that this is not just gravitational poise but also a sensitive balance between task completion and stock care. Good

cowboys know the critical equilibrium between driving the stock forward and gently leading them to the next pasture.

Congregational leaders are often trapped when they attempt to drive their church from the rear, shouting and barking orders to get the job done. Equally dangerous are pastoral efforts to lead the congregation from way out front, urging members to follow while leaving them further and further behind.

Sometimes Jesus led the way and encouraged others to follow Him (Matt. 4:19, 20), and sometimes He instructed others to go before Him and promised to follow (Luke 10:1). Jesus accomplished these leadership tasks because He took time to connect with those whom He sought to lead and shepherd. Don't be detached from your congregation. Maintain your balance and stay connected. People will follow as you lead and go before you as you direct.



ELDERS: Some Common Pitfalls

DON'T BE A "LONE RANGER."

There's something quite poignant about a lone horseman set against a remote landscape. Many identify with the emotion of such an image. Yet traveling alone in vast, untouched terrain can also be dangerous.

The reality and responsibility of decision-making make "lone rangers" taboo when it comes to congregational leadership. Whether your pastor has only one congregation or cares for multiple communities, you as an elder should communicate with him regularly. After all, the wilderness is a dangerous place. You don't want to be out there all alone, bitten by a snake, with no one to help you.

Connect regularly with your pastor every week if possible. You both need to spend quality time together seeking God's counsel. You need his support just as much as he needs yours. Schedule times for sharing, study, praying, and planning. If a weekly face-to-face meeting is not possible, connect via e-mail or phone. The important thing is to stay in touch.

After his incredible transformation, Saul (Paul) tried to connect with the disciples, but we are told in Acts 9:26-30 that they were afraid of him. Saul understood that it was important to be connected to those the Lord had called before him. Eventually, Barnabas convinced the disciples to accept Saul, and, fortunately for Saul, they did, because they later saved his life.

So don't be a lone ranger. Stay in touch with your superiors and maintain open lines of communication. It might just be a lifesaver!

DON'T BE SWAYED TO ACCEPT THE SHERIFF'S BADGE.

Disputes are common. Historically speaking, pioneers and first settlers often resolved disputes with bullets or nooses. In many pioneer communities, one person wore the official badge of authority and sometimes became a target by virtue of the badge.

In truth, church life is not much different. Disputes arise. People take sides, appeal to authority, and call for justice. As a congregational leader, you are responsible for maintaining a neutral position during congregational disputes. Don't accept the sheriff's badge! You will be

appealed to for decisive action. You will be called upon to deliver the bullet or administer the noose. Don't do it! Stay neutral. If action is required, incorporate others in the decision-making process. Above all, don't take sides. The moment you do, your ability to shepherd is lost. Jesus understood and practiced this principle of leadership. In response to someone calling for arbitration, the Lord replied, "Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"

Listen, stay connected, and offer support. Seek counsel. Take the advice of Paul to Timothy: "Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Tim. 2:23). Practice the counsel of Paul to the Galatians: "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

NEVER LOVE YOUR HORSE MORE THAN YOUR HOME.

Cowboys love riding. Stockmen live for the thrill of the cattle drive. Horsemen dream of sitting astride a galloping steed, the wind in their hair, chasing, capturing, and branding. The adrenaline rush during these moments is intoxicating, addictive, and entrapping. It is no secret that some horsemen love their horses more than they love their homes.

Elders are faced with a similar situation. Pastoral care can be a rush. Nothing compares to the thrill of gathering souls, sharing the gospel, and being used by God to win another soul for heaven. Jesus warned that doing God's work can become so all-consuming that our families are neglected (Mark 7:9-13).

Make time for your family. Remember that God expects you to shepherd your family just as surely as He wants you to care for others. Neglecting your family for the work of God is sin in its most subtle form.

TRAIN OTHER COWBOYS.

The best stockmen share their skills and knowledge with young, inexperienced cowboys. They know the value of skilled fellow riders. Cowboys have to rely on each other, trust one other, and work together. Failure to do this may result in long days chasing beasts that slipped the line unnecessarily.

When you serve as an elder, you are responsible for sharing what you know. Give freely of the wisdom of your experience. Help your fellow elders become stronger in their own roles. Jesus was master at this, and we should also practice this task of leadership. Calling the

12 disciples together, Jesus gave them “power” and “authority” (Luke 9:1). Never be afraid to empower others; it is what Jesus did.

Take time to mentor younger members into leadership roles. When you invest yourself in those around you, you build leaders for the future. You never know—the next time you face a tight situation, when you need some skill, expertise, and assistance, those in whom you invested may come to your aid. Begin now to teach others how to ride in leadership.

DON'T BE CONSUMED BY THE PONY EXPRESS.

The Pony Express was established to provide the fastest mail delivery between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. It was a relay of mail by horses and riders and ran day and night, summer and winter.² Riders traveled at breakneck speed, changing horses every 10-15 miles at one of the 165 stations. An average ride for a single rider was between 75-100 miles. Depending on the territory, a day's ride could last 10 hours. There was no stopping. “The mail had to get through,” even at the risk of total exhaustion.

Church leadership is like that. Our message must get through. Sometimes we are so consumed by the daily and weekly demands to “get the message through” that we fail to maintain our connection with God. Rushing from one day to the next, week after week is not healthy. Stop regularly and spend time alone with God. Your eldership demands a living connection with Jesus. To get through, our message needs healthy messengers who take time to build a personal relationship with God.

Jesus carried the greatest and most treasured message in history. It had to get through! His days were full. Constant interactions, never-ending demands, and an ongoing list of needs did not stop Jesus from developing His own living connection with the heavenly Father (Matt. 14:13, 23; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:18).

DON'T BE A HIGH-PLAINS DRIFTER.

Cowboys are tough hombres, often loners. Their independence is weathered as they drift from one camp to the next, battling the elements and dangers of the trail. Their hard, crusty exteriors and impenetrable demeanors belie an inner need for companionship, friendship, and support.

Ministry can be lonely if you ride alone. Sharing the journey and the experiences with someone who understands makes the ride more enjoyable. Treasure those individuals with whom you can share your spiritual journey—your spouse, close friends, and others who may know your heart. These relationships involve loyalty, vulnerability, trust, and truthfulness. Paul experienced this kind of relationship with Barnabas (Acts 15:12) and with Silas (Acts 16:25). Don't travel another day without seeking to develop and cultivate individuals who will ride along with you.

So you're an elder! Congratulations! Yours is a high calling to leadership that may be brand-new or well-worn. Beware of the pitfalls, stay close to Jesus, and as you administer your responsibilities and care for your congregation, may His Spirit lead your journey to pastures green.



¹“The Man from Snowy River” is the title of a poem by revered Australian bush poet Banjo Paterson. The poem tells the story of a horseback pursuit to recapture the colt of a prizewinning racehorse that escaped from its paddock to live with the brumbies (wild horses) of the mountain ranges. Eventually the brumbies descend a seemingly impassable steep slope. The riders give up the pursuit. But the man from Snowy River, whose horsemanship is unrivalled, spurs his pony down the “terrible descent” to catch the mob.

²<http://www.americanwest.com/trails/pages/ponyexp1.htm> This site provided the source for the information about the Pony Express.

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There is a definite relationship between the proper receiving of new converts and their remaining active in church fellowship.

What can newcomers expect from the church? This is an extremely important question because it has a direct bearing upon the success of church membership. It is one thing for us to expect much from new converts; it is even more important to be mindful of what we must be and do for new believers.

The responsibility of the church to new believers is clearly explained in the Word of God. In fact, the high point of the Christian charter includes the words “teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). The Great Commission is a command for both evangelism and conservation of church membership. This is what Dr. John A. Broadus had in mind when he made his oft-quoted statement: “Much of the work of discipling has not included that of teaching; and much of the work of teaching has ignored that of discipling.” In other words, establishing converts goes hand-in-hand with receiving converts.

The words of the apostle Paul present a simple and effective outline of the church's responsibility to new members. Paul wrote to the Christian flock: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10). Obeying the call of the gospel, often through much suffering, new converts expect to enjoy the blessings of church fellowship, to become fully established in the household of God,

to become strong in faith, and that the church will be their spiritual home. It is the church's responsibility to see that these expectations are realized. By the new birth, souls enter the church, but that is only the beginning of new life. A moment is enough for life's beginning, but the growing of a soul should be the holy, happy business of a lifetime. To a large degree, it is the church's responsibility to bring about this prolonged, happy experience in the things of God.

New converts have a right to expect certain things from the church. First of all, converts expect that their church will have faith in their sincerity. They are beginning new, unfamiliar lives. Their pasts, doubtless known to others, are still fresh in their memories. With fear and trembling, they enter the household of the saints. At the very least, the saints should believe in the sincerity of these newborn children of faith.

At this time, Paul's admonition should be very carefully heeded: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves. . . . Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:1-7). An influx of new converts necessitates numerous changes and adjustments in church life and procedure. The receiving of new members into the church is not time for the saints to please themselves and say in their hearts, “I can't be bothered.” Instead, the saints are to remember when they were first received into the church. They must make room for these new members and receive them in the name of Jesus Christ.

New converts can also expect that the church, in which they assume full responsibility of membership, will give



adequate instruction in the meaning of church affiliation. The emphasis here is on instruction, not criticism. New believers are learners. They are entitled to the right kind of instruction. Too often the saints have become set, formal, and inactive in church service and are therefore irked by the earnestness and zeal of new converts. They want to stifle and crush that first love, and in so doing, they deeply wound the newcomers. The attitude of such stereotyped, complacent saints brings to mind a certain incident. A preacher once asked a farmer why oxen always walked so slowly. The farmer replied, "I don't know, except that they always break in the young oxen with the old ones. The old ones walk slow, and they teach the young ones to walk slow." Let's leave this method with the oxen and keep it out of the church.

New converts can also expect a program of Christian education adjusted to their special needs. This education pertains to doctrine, church organization, missionary (home and overseas) information, the essential qualities of Christian character, the successes of Christianity, lives of noble church leaders, and many other areas touching the work and experience of men and women of the church.

Often new converts are bombarded with criticism of church leaders and with policies by which the work of the church is accomplished. Instead of seeing that the church is following a consistent program of positive education of its members, newcomers in the faith are too

often confused and left to struggle by themselves. This usually results in discouragement and separation from the church.

New converts can expect the church to provide an atmosphere of heartening goodwill and pulsating, heart-warming fellowship. New members should discover that they are among friends. They should be made to feel at home. Close friends, respected superiors, trusted consultants, and dear companions should be found in the church.

Finally, new converts can expect early integration and enlistment into the life and service of the church. It is a great honor to be a part of and participate in the activities of the church. The part may be small, yet it means much to a new believer to be called upon to serve. In this way, new members become an integral part of the body and feel wanted and needed.

The subject of receiving and holding converts requires serious and constant attention. It is hoped that the few thoughts presented here will serve to stimulate greater concern for those who seek fellowship with God's people. If followed sincerely and prayerfully, the simple steps described above will result in holding more of our dear people in active, happy fellowship. ED

H. L. Rudy was the president of the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists when he wrote this article.

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YOUR EYES ARE ON CANAAN, BUT YOUR MIND IS IN EGYPT!

Exodus 16:1-3

Exodus 16:1-3 tells us that on the way to Canaan, the Israelites were in the wilderness, and they had had a few very bitter experiences along the way. Periods of hunger and thirst had frightened them. They had traveled only a few days and were but a few miles from Sinai when they became discouraged. They began to reminisce about their life in Egypt. Even though God had freed them from bondage and created a path for them through the Red Sea, the Israelites wanted to go back to making bricks from mud, to become slaves again. They wanted to sell their futures for a bite to eat.

Seeing that freedom was costly, they were afraid to pay the price. They had their eyes on Canaan, but their minds were in Egypt. They talked of freedom but thought of slavery. They watched as God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, but they missed the familiar, the known. To reach Egypt, they would have to trek across the burning desert sands, back across the sea, to where slime and slavery held sway. But to reach Canaan, they would travel over the hills, walking among the cedars and the whispering pines. Canaan or Egypt? To reach one, you had to turn your back on the other.

Many times we act like the children of Israel. We would rather return to the bondage of the enemy than fight for victory. Sometimes we can't reach Canaan because we're too busy thinking about Egypt. Yes, our eyes are on Canaan, but our minds are in Egypt.

How can we focus our minds and eyes on the "Canaan experience" of our lives? How can we reach the "promised land" of our lives without being diverted by the enemy? Exodus 16:1-3 teaches three lessons.

I. CHANGE YOUR FOCUS.

As soon as they hit the highway, the Israelites began to murmur and complain. They missed their old lives. Isn't it strange how we often live in the past? We concentrate on how things used to be, what we used to have. The Lord is constantly proving Himself to us, protecting us from dangers seen and unseen. Yet every time He tries to take us to the next level, we stand looking over our shoulder, contemplating the past!

The Israelites were willing to give up a land flowing with milk and honey if they could only return to their former

lives. Likewise, we may get so caught up in our yesterdays that we can never reach our tomorrows.

The Word of God says that we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Only our renewed thinking can allow us the mindset of success that God called us to have. Although the Israelites had changed their location physically, they needed a mental relocation to grasp what God had in store for them.

II. HAVE FAITH IN YOUR LEADERS.

God doesn't haphazardly appoint leaders without considering what His people need; He knows who and what is best for us (Jer. 3:15). Remember, Moses didn't volunteer for his job; he was appointed, chosen, and called. And whom God calls, He also qualifies.

Moses couldn't even speak clearly, but God chose him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses wasn't a geography major or an excursionist, but God chose him to lead His people. Often we want to pick our leaders based on their stature or what qualities we see in them. But God looks at the heart.

After Israel rejected Saul, the Lord sent Samuel to anoint a king of Israel. Samuel looked at all of Jesse's sons. But it wasn't until he saw David that the Lord told him who was to be anointed king. God looks at what's on the inside.

When God chooses a leader for His people, we must trust Him enough to follow the one He has appointed over us. God placed this person in that position, and He doesn't make mistakes.

If we are to continue on our journey to Canaan, we've got to stop thinking about Egypt, take God at His word, and have faith in those whom He has appointed over us.

III. MOVE AND OPERATE IN THE FAVOR OF THE LORD.

To move and operate in the favor of the Lord means three things: (1) to have the accessibility of His presence; (2) to have the advantage of His power; and (3) to have the availability of His promise.

The accessibility of His presence means having access to the Father at all times. We have access to His presence 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Jesus is the avenue by which we can enter into the presence of the Lord. That's why ev-

erything we do should be done in Jesus' name (Acts 4:12).

When we find ourselves in the presence of the Lord, we'll discover that things begin to move and operate according to God's plan. Situations work themselves out. Circumstances begin to change. Dark nights turn into bright, sunshiny days. In His Presence, we'll find sweet relief.

Once we have the accessibility of God's presence, we'll be able to grasp the advantage of His power. Although it may seem that the enemy has the upper hand, we actually have the advantage over him. Because God is our Father and we are His children, we have the power to move in His authority. We have the power to cast out demons. We have the power to lay hands on the sick and heal them. We have the power to tell the enemy to take his hands off of our families, our finances, or anything else that belongs to us. That's the advantage of God's power.

And because we have the accessibility of His presence and the advantage of His power, we will be able to receive the availability of His promise. Just as He promised the Israelites a "land flowing with milk and honey," He also promises us eternal life, a life more abundant, a life without sorrow and pain. ED

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 Let us allow Christ to anoint our eyes with the heavenly eyesalve that we may see. We do not want to be blind; we want to see everything distinctly. We do not want to be marching one day toward Canaan, and the next day back to Egypt, and the next day toward Canaan, and then back to Egypt again. Day by day we are to march steadily forward.”

”
 Ellen G. White - *Mind, Character, and Personality*, Vol. 2, page 727

SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

Exodus 33:18-33

Exodus 33 describes a conversation between God and Moses. Moses boldly asks God to reveal His glory. Can you imagine such a request? Our first reaction may be shocked amazement. Then we might condemn Moses for his audacity. We would never do anything as presumptuous as that, would we? Wrong! We often do the same thing. So did Job. So did the scribes and Pharisees. Mankind has always made demands of God. "God, just zap me with a divine bolt of lightning and make me instantly pure and holy so that I will never think evil thoughts or say bad words again." How strong our faith would be if we could just catch a glimpse of God now and then and know that He is real.

When Moses made his bold request of God, the Lord replied: (Read Exodus 33: 19, 20). These texts suggest the ways God reveals Himself even today. At times God passes so near one can feel His presence. We feel sure He is there. Although there is a dimension to God that we will never be able to see or comprehend with our puny, finite minds, there are times when God reaches us in special ways. Let me share five areas where I think we can sense the nearness of God.

I. IN NATURE

We can see God's handiwork in the nature that surrounds us (Ps. 8:3). The psalmist, staring up at the sky on a moonlit night, experienced the serenity of the evening and realized that it was God who made the heavens and put the moon and stars in their places.

Psalms 19:1, 2 presents a similar thought. The psalmist reminds us that when we look into the heavens, we see the glory of God's creative power. The sky itself proclaims the work of His hand. Day after day, God speaks to us. Night after night He reveals His glory to us. (Read also Job 12:7-10.)

The book of Romans suggests that we all have reason to know God. Even if we have never heard a sermon about God, we are without excuse because nature shows us what God is like and what God has done. Maybe we can't see His face. Maybe we can't comprehend His vastness, but He is there nonetheless. Look around. Open your eyes. Learn from nature and feel the presence of God.

II. MORAL ORDER OF LIFE

Like it or not, rules and regulations govern our lives. They have been and will

always be there. For example, God says, "Whatever you sow, that's what you'll reap." God says again, "Be sure your sins will find you out."

God has ordained certain rules and regulations to govern the way we live. But the world today stands in defiance of God's rules and regulations. The world says, "We'll live life our way. We don't believe in God, so there is no need to listen to His Word." But God's moral order stays in its place, and man is powerless to change it. You will still reap what you sow.

The opposite is also true. If you sow good seed, you will harvest a good crop. God formed you and knows you inside and out. Since He created you, you will receive His blessings if you follow His instructions. God says, "Live life the way I have designed it to be lived and you will find that everything goes better for you." Moral order exists and is a testimony to the nearness of God. He is always close to us.

III. IN OUR WORSHIP SERVICES

We ought to experience God all the time when we come together for worship. He promised that He would be with us, saying, "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there I will be."

What a blessing it can be week after week to enjoy one another's company and fellowship, to enjoy the food that comes from God's Word, to enjoy times of praise and worship together, and to experience the honor of the Lord's presence.

Sometimes God comes so close in moments of worship that you can almost reach out and touch Him. You may not see His face, but you know He is there, and you can feel the wind of His presence as He passes by.

IV. AS YOU SEE THE CHURCH

Sometimes we experience the presence of God when we see the church operating as the body of Christ, when it functions as it was designed to function. You feel the presence of the Lord in the fellowship of the saints. I have seen this many times throughout my ministry as people pray for and encourage others, being sensitive to their needs, helping when people are sick or hurting. How beautiful it is to see the church operate as it should. This is a visible demonstration of the presence of God.

V. IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

We can also see God in the lives of people who have lived faithfully for Him. Looking into their faces, you can see God's radiance. You know God has been part of their lives and that He is near.

Our scripture text tells us that God is close yet distant. It's a paradox, isn't it? You and I will never understand everything about God, but this is an aspect that we can experience.

God is so near that we can't help but hear and see Him. It is like stepping into the sea and feeling the refreshing sensation of water rushing over your toes. It is like the sea is saying, "Come on in, there is more. Take another step and see how good it feels." That is the way it is with God. He says to us, "There is part of me that is close to you, but there is more. Step out and experience more and more of my presence."

Jesus stood before a lonely world. The people of His day looked at Him and asked the same thing that Moses asked: "We want to see the Father." In response, Jesus said, "When you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." As we study the gospel, we see God. We read about God becoming flesh, breathing our air, eating our food, experiencing our temptations; we learn of His concern for the lost, ill, hungry, and poor. And as you see more of Jesus, you will see more of God.

Jesus shows us what God is like. While Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock, God's hand covered him as His glory passed by. What a place of safety—to be covered by God's hand. When we are covered by the hand of God, there is nothing in this world that can harm us.

CONCLUSION

Today we stand in the presence of God, and we're privileged to comprehend just a little of His glory. We can't see His face yet, but one day we will look into His eyes and see Him in all His glory.

Right now we listen and watch and wait. We hear and sense and know that God is near. He is in the sounds of voices lifted in praise to Him. He is in the moral order. He is in the church as it works together as a functioning body. He is in the people who have lived faithfully for Him. Look and see. Listen and hear.

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PRAYER HELPS WIN BATTLES

Exodus 17:8-16

In Exodus 17, we read of Israel going to war with the Amalekites. Moses sent Joshua out to battle but remained behind to pray. While Moses' hands were lifted up, Israel was victorious. When Moses' hands were weary and slipped down, Israel suffered defeat. So Aaron and Hur supported Moses and lifted his hands. As a result of Moses' prayers, Israel had a great victory that day.

Let us consider how battles can be won through prayer.

I. INTERCESSORS MUST PRAY WHILE SOLDIERS FIGHT.

Exodus 17:9 tells us that while his spiritual son fought the war, Moses remained behind to pray. What an example of a spiritual father! No wonder Joshua became a great leader; he had a spiritual father who prayed for him. Many people enter into spiritual warfare without prayerful support. Perhaps this is why there are so many casualties in the Christian faith. People fail to pray. Many do not have spiritual fathers to pray for them.

Let us look at what Moses did.

A. *He stood.* Standing speaks of alertness. An intercessor is not a watchman; an intercessor pleads for or intercedes on behalf of someone else.

B. *Top of the hill.* Standing at the top of the hill gives a person an overview of the battle. An intercessor should be able to see God's overall purposes so that he will have spiritual insights on how to pray.

C. *Rod of God in his hand.* Holding the rod speaks of authority. The rod was given to Moses as a sign of Moses' leadership. Moses used the rod to defeat the Egyptian sorcerers and to open the Red Sea.

We must use our authority over the devil when we pray. When we come against the devil in the name of Jesus, we have authority over him. We are to pray with the authority God has given to us.

II. A WEAKENING OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER WILL LEAD TO DEFEAT.

The evidence in Exodus 17:11 is clear. When prayer stopped, the Amalekites prevailed.

In Matthew 26:40-45, we find that Jesus' disciples could not stay awake to pray with Him for even one hour. The dis-

ciples paid a high price for not praying. Within a few days of their prayerlessness, they were scattered as Jesus was crucified. Peter denied Jesus three times. The rest of the disciples ran away as Jesus died on the cross. Only the women were left to look after His body. I often wonder if the scenario would have been different if the disciples had prayed with Jesus at Gethsemane.

III. ONE STRONG INTERCESSOR IS INSUFFICIENT; A TEAM IS NEEDED.

Exodus 17:12 tell us that Moses' arms grew tired and had to be supported by two strong men, one on each side. Sometimes we think we can leave prayer to those we consider God's appointed intercessors. The truth is that we can't. Everyone is called to be an intercessor. Even the Son of God needed His disciples to pray with Him at Gethsemane (Matt. 26). How much more we as mortal beings need intercessors to pray with us in our time of need.

IV. INTERCESSORS MUST RECORD, RECOUNT, AND PASS ALONG THEIR PRAYERFUL LIFESTYLE.

In Exodus 17:14, Moses gave two instructions: write and recount the story, especially in Joshua's hearing. Moses wanted Joshua to know what had happened on the hill while the battle was being fought in the valley.

Are you recording your prayers? Are you recording God's answers to your prayers? Are you sharing your testimony? Are you passing this praying lifestyle on to the next generation? Much is lost when the prayerful lifestyle of the revival generation is not passed on to the next generation. All revivals are birthed in prayer, and revivals must be sustained by prayer.

V. INTERCESSORY PRAYER CREATES A BANNER OF PROTECTION.

We read in Exodus 17:15 that Moses built an altar and called it "the Lord is my banner." God's name Jehovah Nissi comes from this passage. Intercessory prayer creates a banner of protection over God's people. What better way to end this lesson than by remembering that God is our banner. People often assume that the banner will always be there; in fact, when Moses failed to pray, Israel lost the battle. The banner is over us only when we pray.

CONCLUSION

What a powerful example of how prayer can make us victorious! Many are living in defeat because they do not pray. If you want a triumphant spiritual life, start praying today. Record your prayers and God's answers to your prayers. Prayer will surely bring new vigor to your spiritual life.

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Let every hour be one of trust and prayer and faith. You may expect trials. We must all be purified from dross, and made white and tried. In the time of trial, seek to bring every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ. One foe after another may come in unexpected ways, but dismiss the temptations of the enemy. In this way, we go on from grace to grace, from strength to strength, obtaining one spiritual victory after another.



Ellen G. White - *Daughters of God*, page 184

Sermon Notes:

WHEN THE SITUATION SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE

Exodus 14:1-2, 13-15

Can you imagine the scene described in Exodus 14? After the tremendous challenge of escaping from Egypt, Israel faced the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army rapidly approaching from behind. Everyone saw the cloud of dust coming. There were no boats to ferry the people across the water. There was no arsenal to distribute so the people could fight. No one had to tell the Hebrew people that they were in an impossible situation.

The Hebrew people quickly started complaining (a common occurrence throughout their wilderness wanderings); read their words in Exodus 14:10b-12. Then Moses responded (verses 13, 14). He told them to stand there, do nothing, and let God take care of the problem. But it is evident that God wanted the Israelites to do more than just wait for Him. Notice what God said (verse 15).

We must not make light of the Israelites' situation. They had no way to cross the sea in front of them. Even boats could not have easily carried all the people across before Pharaoh's army arrived. Extra-biblical material reveals that approximately 2 million Jews left Egypt; this underscores the difficulty of their situation.

The Scriptures say that Pharaoh sent 600 of his best chariots, all the chariots of Egypt, and their officers. The Hebrew word used for "officers" is *salisim*, which was used to describe three-man chariots. There were about 1,800 soldiers in the best chariots, plus drivers for the rest of the chariots, not including the horsemen described in verse 19. No wonder the Israelites were terrified!

There is a spiritual principle here. Moses told the people to stand still and let God take care of things. But God countered, "Get the people moving forward." The Christian life is not static or passive; it is dynamic and active. This principle doesn't change when an obstacle is placed in our path. This principle doesn't change when the road gets a little bumpy. This principle doesn't change when there's a sea in front of us and we have no boat. This principle doesn't change when the enemy attacks us and our situation looks impossible. God requires us to keep moving forward. But how do we do this?

I. WE MUST HAVE CONFIDENCE IN GOD (EXOD. 14:13, 14).

When seemingly impossible situations arise, we must maintain our confidence in God. Let's consider three aspects of this principle.

A. *Our confidence in God must be freely extended.*

Because our confidence in God is personal, it must be freely given; it cannot be coerced. I learned a long time ago that you cannot make people trust you. You may convince them to say they trust you, but actually trusting you may be another story. You may say you trust and have confidence in God, but only God knows your heart.

In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul tells Timothy that their trust in God has prepared them for their work and their suffering. Their laboring and suffering for Christ have not forced them to trust Him—just the opposite. We learn to freely rely on God.

B. *Our confidence in God must be firmly expressed.*

Trust or reliance is not a loosely-applied principle. Any deviation is "not trusting." We may allow many things to weaken our trust. It is easy to attend church and give testimonies about trusting God for all your needs. It becomes more difficult to trust when you are diagnosed with a terminal illness, have a prodigal in your family, or lose all your material possessions. We need to remember the words of Jesus found in John 16:33. We must trust firmly in the One who gives us victory. We learn to proclaim with Paul (1 Cor. 15:57).

C. *Our confidence in God must be fully experienced.*

When we rely fully on God, we are proving God. In my life, I have experienced and seen in the lives of others that human efforts will not bring success; in fact, they will make our situations more difficult. Our anxieties and restlessness hinder the work that God is trying to do through us. We can have full confidence in God because He is able to help us. Remember Paul's words in Ephesians 3:20.

In Exodus, Moses told the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see." This was good advice. Moses wanted the people to have confidence in God's abilities. As in those days, we know we can freely, firmly, and fully have confidence in God for the seemingly impossible situations in our daily lives.

II. WE MUST PRACTICE OBEDIENCE TO GOD (EXOD. 14:15).

When God makes His will known, our only option is obedience. Obedience follows confidence.

A. *Our obedience should be unwavering* (verse 15).

For Israel, going forward meant walking right into the sea. The lesson here is that God doesn't want us to waver. If we truly have confidence in God, unwavering obedience is a natural response. This is the idea the author of Hebrews had in mind when he said, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:23). James says it like this: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6).

B. *Our obedience should be guided by authority* (Exod. 14:21).

The rod of Moses was the symbol of divine authority, power, and discipline. The rod pointed the way that the people needed to follow. Today the Word of God points us in the direction we are to go. Often people say that God wants them to do this or that. But their decision is often based on emotion, not on God's Holy Word. Our obedience needs to be guided by the authority for the Christian life, God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

C. *Our obedience should lead to separation* (Exod. 14:27-29).

For the Israelites, moving forward caused separation. They were being separated not only from Pharaoh's army, they were being separated from their old lives. They were seeing the mighty hand of God at work in their midst. If the Israelites had not moved forward, they would have faced Pharaoh's army, his wrath, and either slavery or death. Our obedience to the Lord will separate us from sin's power (Luke 9:62).

III. WE MUST HAVE A PURPOSEFUL EXPERIENCE OF GOD (EXOD. 15:1).

The Israelites' experience with God was real and dynamic. It did not happen by chance. It had purpose! Consider God's leading in this situation.

A. *Their experience happened at God's place* (Exod. 15:4).

The place the Israelites found themselves was a real place. It was the place or-

dered for the people to make a decisive move. They had to either return to Egypt with Pharaoh or move forward through the sea with God. There are places God is taking us. In each place He chooses, God will allow us to experience His working on our behalf. God leads us to places where we can fulfill the purpose He has for us. This was Abraham's experience (Gen. 12:1). God had a definite plan for Abraham, just as He has a definite plan and purpose for each of us.

B. *Their experience happened as God had planned.*

What was God's purpose in the Israelites' experience? It was at least three-fold.

1. There was the experience of wonder (Exod. 15:11).

As Moses and the people continued their song of praise, they sang of the wonders God had performed. The word "wonders" (Hebrew *pele*) means "the extraordinary, a miracle, or something marvelous." God was doing marvelous things, and the Israelites were personally experiencing them.

2. There was the experience of worship (Exod. 15:1).

Verse 1 says they "sang . . . this song unto the Lord." This was the experience of worship. In our worship, there needs to be a time when we praise God for what He has done in our lives.

3. There was the experience of witness (Exod. 15:14, 15).

What the Lord had done for the Hebrew people would soon be told abroad. The mighty works of God should be shouted from sea to sea. We need to tell others what God is doing in our lives. Listen to what Jesus told the demoniac in Mark 5:19: "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

Our experience with God has a purpose. When a situation seems impossible, we must have confidence in God, practice obedience to God, and understand that God has a purpose in all the experiences we have with Him.

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So it is with every other one of God's requirements. All His gifts are promised on condition of obedience. God has a heaven full of blessings for those who will co-operate with Him. All who obey Him may with confidence claim the fulfillment of His promises.



Ellen G. White - *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 145

MARIA ESTEBANELL

Maria Estebanell is a local church elder on the island of Lanzarote in Spain. Her husband is a pastor, and she is developing a Women's Ministries program in their church. They have two adult children; their son works for the church, and their daughter is married to the president of the Spanish Union of Churches. Maria's passion for starting churches led her to open Lanzarote church in July 2007. She says, "There is nothing more gratifying for the church member than to preach the message of salvation to unbelievers. God needs men and women who put their lives in His hands and who desire to follow His voice. God needs people to take the gospel and present it to the world." Maria is a dedicated church elder who believes she will never be too old to be used by God. She remarks, "Even though my husband and I are of retirement age, there is no such thing as retirement when we are working for God."



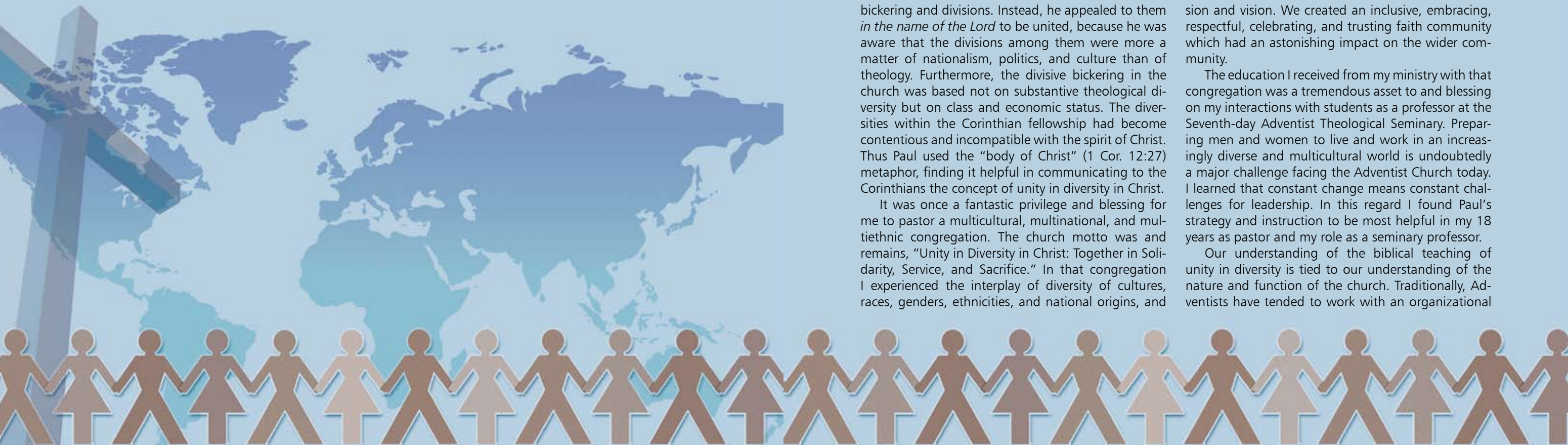
BIOGRAPHY

COSTEL POENARIU

Costel Poenariu is a local church elder at the Craiova 1 Church in Romania; he has been an elder in this 630-member church for five years. He is married to Gabriela, and they have two daughters. Costel is deeply committed to the work of being an elder. He says, "I enjoy giving Revelation Seminar Bible studies and leading evangelistic seminars. I also enjoy visiting church members with my pastor once a week. I believe that reaching out to the church member, especially in their homes, not only can be a blessing for them, but blesses me as well, and encourages me to continue my ministry as a local church elder." Because of Costel's ministry, three churches have been founded, and he has even helped to construct the new church buildings. Costel believes that the definition of ministry is "the act of serving" and understands this is his duty in the church.



BIOGRAPHY



GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE - PART 2

UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN CHRIST

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a community of believers from diverse countries, cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. The church sees its mission as taking the everlasting gospel of Jesus to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6). This diversity is a good and necessary thing; indeed, it can be a strength to the body of Christ, just as the diversity of gifts is. However, the expression “unity in diversity,” helpful as it is, does not express enough by itself. A further element is indispensable. If unity is to be achieved among us, the church must authentically experience and demonstrate unity in diversity *in Christ*.

Consider Paul’s metaphor of the body as he tried to share with the Corinthians the fundamental importance of unity in diversity in Christ (1 Cor. 12). The church, Paul says, is a body made up of diverse elements. Unity among diverse elements comes through

the deep sharing of a relationship of mutual responsibility that includes the various members of the body. But when diversity disrupts the unity of the body, it often gives rise to a dangerous condition. For example, disruptive diversity becomes destructive and sinful when one part of the body claims that it will not function if all the other parts do not go along with it. For authentic unity to become a reality, every part of the body must judge its distinctive position and examine its faithfulness to unity in terms of the ministry and mission of *Christ*.

Paul was aware of the state of affairs in the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, he challenged the believers to overcome dissension and division to present a picture of real unity and interpersonal faithfulness to the world. Although some would have liked to claim Paul’s support for their particular position or faction, the apostle refused to become part of their

bickering and divisions. Instead, he appealed to them *in the name of the Lord* to be united, because he was aware that the divisions among them were more a matter of nationalism, politics, and culture than of theology. Furthermore, the divisive bickering in the church was based not on substantive theological diversity but on class and economic status. The diversities within the Corinthian fellowship had become contentious and incompatible with the spirit of Christ. Thus Paul used the “body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27) metaphor, finding it helpful in communicating to the Corinthians the concept of unity in diversity in Christ.

It was once a fantastic privilege and blessing for me to pastor a multicultural, multinational, and multiethnic congregation. The church motto was and remains, “Unity in Diversity in Christ: Together in Solidarity, Service, and Sacrifice.” In that congregation I experienced the interplay of diversity of cultures, races, genders, ethnicities, and national origins, and

sion and vision. We created an inclusive, embracing, respectful, celebrating, and trusting faith community which had an astonishing impact on the wider community.

The education I received from my ministry with that congregation was a tremendous asset to and blessing on my interactions with students as a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Preparing men and women to live and work in an increasingly diverse and multicultural world is undoubtedly a major challenge facing the Adventist Church today. I learned that constant change means constant challenges for leadership. In this regard I found Paul’s strategy and instruction to be most helpful in my 18 years as pastor and my role as a seminary professor.

Our understanding of the biblical teaching of unity in diversity is tied to our understanding of the nature and function of the church. Traditionally, Adventists have tended to work with an organizational

their impact on what the church can and cannot do. From time to time, I was surrounded by controversies in which certain members from different cultural realities and experiences were opposed to certain practices in worship and sincerely sought change with which they would be more comfortable. They wanted things to be done as they were “back home.”

My experience in that congregation taught me that helping members from diverse cultures and backgrounds to become respectful and trusting of each other had nothing to do with conversion; rather, it was about developing strategies to create cultural harmony and build a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial congregation. We achieved cultural harmony through brainstorming sessions and seminars on managing and leveraging diversity to achieve bottom-line goals and fulfill our mission: unity in diversity in Christ. Our goal: together in solidarity, service, and sacrifice. In our seminars and brainstorming sessions, we focused on race, customs, traditions, stereotypes, gender equality, world views, and national origins.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy were the two sources of divine revelation that provided the framework for our conversations. Through these interactive initiatives, we triumphed over barriers that were preventing the successful implementation of our mis-

or structural definition of unity. Within that definition there is an increasing tendency to interpret diversity as being acceptable only in the light of a unified institutional structure that is one in polity and hierarchy. But a more accurate biblical and theological image of the church is the unity demonstrated in organism rather than in organization.

CHURCH AS AN ORGANISM

When we view the church as an organism, a body or community of believers different in gender, culture, ethnicity, nationality, etc., the question of unity in diversity tends to take on theological and biblical meaning with cultural and sociological implications, rather than the limited institutional implications that often tend to dominate our vision of the church.

We know that as the church moves into the future (and the future is already ahead of schedule), it will have to become more responsive to its broadening environments without sacrificing its essential faith and unity. If the church is seen primarily as an organizational machine, the question of unity in diversity will be threatened or seriously jeopardized. This way of viewing the church will cause us to assume mistakenly that as long as the machine is properly serviced and cared for, it will function in precise and predict-

able ways no matter who issues the directives, where they originate, or to whom they are directed. We will also tend to expect that when a similar “machine” is reproduced, it will possess the same predictable features and respond in almost identical ways in any part of the world.

Organisms are quite different from machines. To influence an organism, you must look into its personality and take into account the circumstances to which it is exposed. You must reckon with the elements of unpredictability and individuality. You have to be prepared to listen, reason, revise, and develop new strategies for the different environments in which organisms live. If this is done responsibly, the process need not threaten or endanger the essential unity of the body; on the contrary, it will enhance authentic unity. This is consistent not only with the principles of unity in diversity but with the further divine dimension of unity in diversity *in Christ*, who is the head of the body (Col. 1:18).

This organism paradigm is legitimate and consistent with the diversity of the New Testament images of the church. While Paul refers to the church as a body or as the body of Christ, John speaks of it as a community. Peter describes it as the people of God and the household of faith. All three apostles apply the description “bride of Christ.” These designations are more consistent with the organism paradigm than with the institutional one.

The New Testament genuinely advocates unity in diversity—unity in core doctrines, in love, and in diversity of forms expressing the variety within the community. This diversity does not threaten the essential unity of the church, nor does it compromise the proclamation of the gospel. For example, valuing diversity with inclusion as a mission strategy need not lead to disruption of the church’s unity in places in which it is appropriate. Rather, it may provide the church an opportunity to correlate possible diversity with necessary unity. It will enrich and strengthen fellowship, deepen spirituality, create new possibilities for mission, and multiply the church’s effort to accomplish its task in the world. Embracing the differences inherent in the diverse races, cultures, and ethnic makeup of the world church will enhance the unity of the church if national, cultural, and racial identities are not made to

be definitive over and above the makeup of the whole body as it receives its collective identity in Christ. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV).

We must acknowledge that, unlike method, mission does not have a single universal pattern. We need to remind ourselves that diversity of form does not threaten the essential unity of the body. The biblical understanding of diversity allows us to engage every legitimate gift God has placed in His church when it

comes to gender, race, language, culture, ethnicity, tribe, and nationality. What really holds us together is not unity through polity but our common confession of “one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” This oneness is articulated and set forth in what we consider to be the core beliefs of Adventism. The face of Adventism will change with growth, but our essential core teachings must remain constant. Diversity of form is acceptable and should be respected. The degree of diversity required to fulfill our mission will vary from place to place, from situation to situation. The Holy Spirit has not yet exhausted the structural possibilities and forms of ministries possible in the church. The New Testament does not encourage us to think that something should not be done simply because it is being done for the first time. The apostolic church and the Adventist Church have done things that Jesus did not do. And this thinking by no means applies only to cultural and ethnic diversity; it also applies to age, gender, and race.

As I review our global diversities, I am led to conclude that the danger lies not in the decision for or against such issues as cross-cultural, multicultural, and demographic changes; the danger lies in a structural fundamentalism in which unity is derived through polity, as though polity is almost to be equated with absolute truth. My plea is that we not allow structure to distract us or to sabotage our essential oneness in Christ and His mission.

The beauty of the biblical view of unity in diversity in Christ versus unity through polity is the freedom of God to work through His church in fulfilling His mission in the world. He may add a new step in one place while practice continues unchanged elsewhere, for He

takes all facts, including sociological and culture ones, into account.

The crucial question is whether the Church in a particular place and time is willing and bold enough to follow God’s leading. Within the biblical and theological framework of unity in diversity in Christ, the Church must be responsibly open to experimentation and variety or it may fail to follow the promptings of the Spirit Himself.

Historically, within the context of Adventist mission, we have sometimes allowed the church to determine when a particular element in a culture is capable of becoming a suitable expression of the good news and a vehicle for telling the Adventist story. What yesterday was considered objectionable in our missionary endeavor in a given country may today be considered a culturally-appropriate opportunity for the evangelization of the people.

When I started out in the ministry as a young pastor in the Caribbean, the use of steel drums as musical instruments was prohibited in the churches. They were deemed inappropriate for the praiseful worship of God. Today, some Adventist churches have steel orchestras, and the drums are now legitimate musical instruments for worship. From time to time, they have even been used at our General Conference sessions. For many Adventists, such diversity in musical instruments may not feel safe, but theologically and biblically it is right on the path of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. What is required today of both leaders and laity is to act faithfully and responsibly in seeking to discover how God is at work in a particular culture, time, and place.


Let’s consider another issue that has created barriers to the successful implementation of the Great Commission in certain cultures: women’s ordination. Against the backdrop of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s dynamic understanding of diverse local and cultural realities in a rapidly-changing Church—demographically, ethnically, economically, and culturally—perhaps a decision is needed to reconsider and support North America members in their efforts to do what is best in the interest of God’s mission where they are.

Unity in diversity in Christ will allow that if the Church in North America is ready to ordain women to the gospel ministry, such action should not be per-

THE PROMISE OF THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE SPIRIT MUST BE THE FORCE THAT DRIVES THE CHURCH TO DISCOVER NEW AREAS OF SERVICE AND NEW DIMENSIONS OF MISSION THAT WILL CHALLENGE AND ENRICH ITS LIFE AND WITNESS IN THE WORLD.

ceived as divisive, insubordinate, or threatening to the essential unity of the global Church. North America should not be held back by other regions of the world where it might be perceived as premature and culturally inappropriate to do the same. If the North American Church—with all its racial, cultural, ethnic, and demographic diversity—has found a way to work out some of the issues that confront it in our time, the rest of the Church should not only respect but celebrate the advance and be open to change. We believe that the Spirit leads where it wills. And as Gamaliel succinctly put it, “If this plan or this understanding is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it then. You might even be found opposing God” (Acts 5:38, 39).

We have to trust that what is true and good in Christ will succeed. Like Peter and Paul, we must trust God to ensure the continuity of unity in diversity even when men and women are unsure of it. We honor God as the originator of unity by expressing unity through the diversity we have and share in Christ. I believe that Christ who is Head and Founder of His Church empowered it with His Holy Spirit, not only to keep its memory keen regarding how He has led in the past, but also to enable and encourage the Church to move confidently and creatively into the future (see Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8). The promise of the presence and power of the Spirit must be the force that drives the Church to discover new areas of service and new dimensions of mission that will challenge and enrich its life and witness in the world. Indeed, the Church, under the power of the Spirit, will learn how to deal not only with new data for new times but also with old data through research and experimentation, guided by the Spirit.

As members of the body of Christ, we must therefore continually examine our presuppositions and assumptions regarding our tenacity in defending and justifying practices and positions based on something other than authentic biblical and theological doctrines. The Church must seek to work realistically with its unity in diversity in every aspect of its life and mission. 

General Conference Ministerial Association

ECUMENISM OR GOOD RELATIONS? RELATIONS?



Almost every week a church member or pastor calls my office asking the same question: Is the General Conference a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC)? My answer is always the same: No! It is not “No, but . . .” It is a “No, period!” However, most callers seem to feel they know the answer better than I. They believe we are secretly members or in a sub-category similar to membership, but this is not true. Visit the WCC Web site and read the list of members. You will not find our name. We are not a member of the WCC, and we are not planning to become a member. Period!

Others may ask, Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church have a relationship with the WCC? Yes, we do. From time to time we attend the WCC Central Committee and their General Assembly as observers. This fact is not a secret, and articles about it are published in the *Adventist Review*.

Others say they have heard that a delegation from the General Conference attends the Conference of Christian World Communions (CS/CWC) meeting every year. Is this true? Yes, it is! But the WCC is not the CS/CWC. The confusion may arise from the names of these two groups.

Let me explain the difference. The World Council of Churches is the official organization of the ecumenical movement. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. Approximately 340 denominations are members of the WCC, representing 592 million Christians, a little more than 25 percent of the Christian world. The purpose of the WCC is to promote Christian unity. “To promote” would have been too weak for the founders, who wanted to build a visible unity of Christians. The dream was conceived after two World Wars between so-called Christian countries turned the world upside down. Christian unity would have been the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer and a major factor for peace in the world.

Today, unity—even among the members of the WCC—is a real challenge. Orthodox and Protestant members cannot share the Eucharist together after a



In photo from left to right: (1) Victor Vitko, PARL director for European-Asia Division; (2) the metropolitan Kirill, the head of External Relations for the Russian Orthodox Church; (3) John Graz; (4) translator.

half century of meetings, statements, and studies. The majority of Christians are not members of the WCC, and the most dynamic wing of the Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals has not expressed an interest in becoming members. The Roman Catholic Church is very influential within the WCC but is not a member.

When we think about the WCC, we must remember its purpose: the visible unity of Christianity. This concept may have different interpretations, and attaining this goal may seem a long process, but the WCC is the only religious organization totally committed to this goal.

What is the Conference of Christian World Communions? The Adventist Church is not a member of the WCC but is a member of the CS/CWC. The difference is that the CS/CWC is not an organization but rather a conference of Christian leaders. It is made up of Secretaries General or other top officials representing world church organizations. Its purpose is not to build the visible unity of the Christian family but to share information, concerns, and reports, and to become better acquainted with one another. No one is encouraged to change beliefs or create new Christian churches. Doctrinal issues are not on the agenda. Leaders represent their denominations and their beliefs. They are accepted as they are.

This group of Secretaries represents about 2 billion Christians and covers more churches than any other organization, including the WCC. The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church are represented, as are the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Mennonite Convention, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Baptist World Alliance, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and many others. Adventists have played an important role in this conference in opening it to Evangelicals. Dr. Bert B. Beach was the Secretary of the conference for 32 years. I have held this position since 2002. Our presence in such an elite group, which represents the Christian world, has been extremely helpful for our church around the world. It

ADVENTISTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OPEN TO DEVELOPING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS WHILE STAYING FAITHFUL TO OUR MISSION AND BELIEFS.

has shown that we are a Christian church recognized by the Christian family of leaders, that we are not a cult or a dangerous group of fanatics but a Christian denomination.

How are the relations between the WCC and the CS/CWC? The relations between the WCC and the CS/CWC were difficult in the beginning but have since improved. The CS/CWC accepted churches as they were and respected their differences; the WCC believed that this did not build unity. Today the WCC has a representative within the CS/CWC. Will the CS/CWC join the WCC? Some people on both sides think a close cooperation would be good for all, and a consultative commission was set up last year. But other members of the CS/CWC don’t want the conference to change its main purpose, which is to be a unique fellowship of Christian leaders who spend time together, pray together, read the Bible together, and try to better understand each member of the larger Christian family.

Adventists have always been open to developing good relationships with other churches and religious groups while staying faithful to our mission and beliefs. We are not an isolated church, but we believe God has called us to fulfill a specific mission and to proclaim a specific message for the last days. Meeting other Christian leaders gives us a great opportunity to be better known and to share our mission, as we are able to respect others without compromising our identity and our faith.

Building one Christian church is the dream of many sincere Christians. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also prays for Christian unity based on the Word of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But our church is not a member of the WCC even though we respect this institution and recognize its positive initiatives. We believe we can build good relations and show respect for everyone without being a member of the WCC!

John Graz is director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department.

REFOCUSING

OUR PRIORITIES

God's priority is reaching lost people with the gospel; nothing is more important to our heavenly Father. He has poured out all of heaven's resources into the plan of salvation. Jesus—heaven's most priceless gift—came to earth on a redemptive mission. The gospel of Luke states it in clear, unmistakable words: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Ellen G. White adds this clarion call: "Evangelistic work, opening the scriptures to others, warning men and women what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God's servants" (*Evangelism*, page 17).

When the church fails to place priority on reaching the lost, it fails in accomplishing its God-appointed mission. Any church not passionate about soul-winning has missed its calling. Soul-winning churches are vibrant, growing, living churches. Whenever a church turns inward, focusing predominantly upon its own needs, it will begin a downward spiral toward spiritual death. In the spiritual as well as in the natural world, activity is the law of life.

In 2008, Seventh-day Adventist churches throughout North America and around the world will have the unique opportunity via the Hope Channel to participate in *Discoveries '08*. Each meeting will be sent via satellite live from

Orlando, Florida. The series will begin on October 24 and continue through November 29.

Discoveries '08 will take you on an incredible journey through the ancient past to unlock millenniums-old mysteries which speak to us in the twenty-first century. Eternal truths will leap off the pages of Scripture with a new freshness and relevance to a generation seeking answers to the deepest questions of life. Each presentation will be fully illustrated with all-new graphics, presenting Bible truth with clarity and power.

During *Discoveries '08*, you will hear the best in Adventist music. Soloists and musical groups from across North America will inspire you with uplifting music. Throughout *Discoveries '08*, we will feature YouTube-type questions so your church can be actively involved. Your members and guests will

be able to videotape a question locally, post it on a Web page, and listen for the answer during *Discoveries '08*. Questions will be selected for the following evening. Lecture outlines will be posted on the Internet so every church can download

materials free of charge to be passed out locally.

Satellite evangelism has been a highly successful form of soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The first satellite series, "Discoveries in Prophecy," was launched in 1995, live from Chattanooga, Tennessee, with 676 churches participating. Since that time, more than 200 satellite events worldwide in more than 50 languages have resulted in over 1 million baptisms. But satellite evangelism is not a substitute for member involvement in witness; rather, it is a focal point for involvement. Some satellite series in local churches have not been successful at all. Why? The answer usually lies in a failure to prepare adequately. Someone has said it well: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."



Here is what you can do to be absolutely sure *Discoveries '08* will be successful for Christ in your church:

- With your church board, develop a master plan for evangelism.
- Set aside times to pray earnestly for specific people who need to know God's end-time message.
- Launch an active visitation program to former members and others who have expressed interest in your church.
- Organize social events, concerts, picnics, and other church activities for your guests.
- Prepare for *Discoveries '08* just as you would if the pastor or a conference evangelist were coming to town.

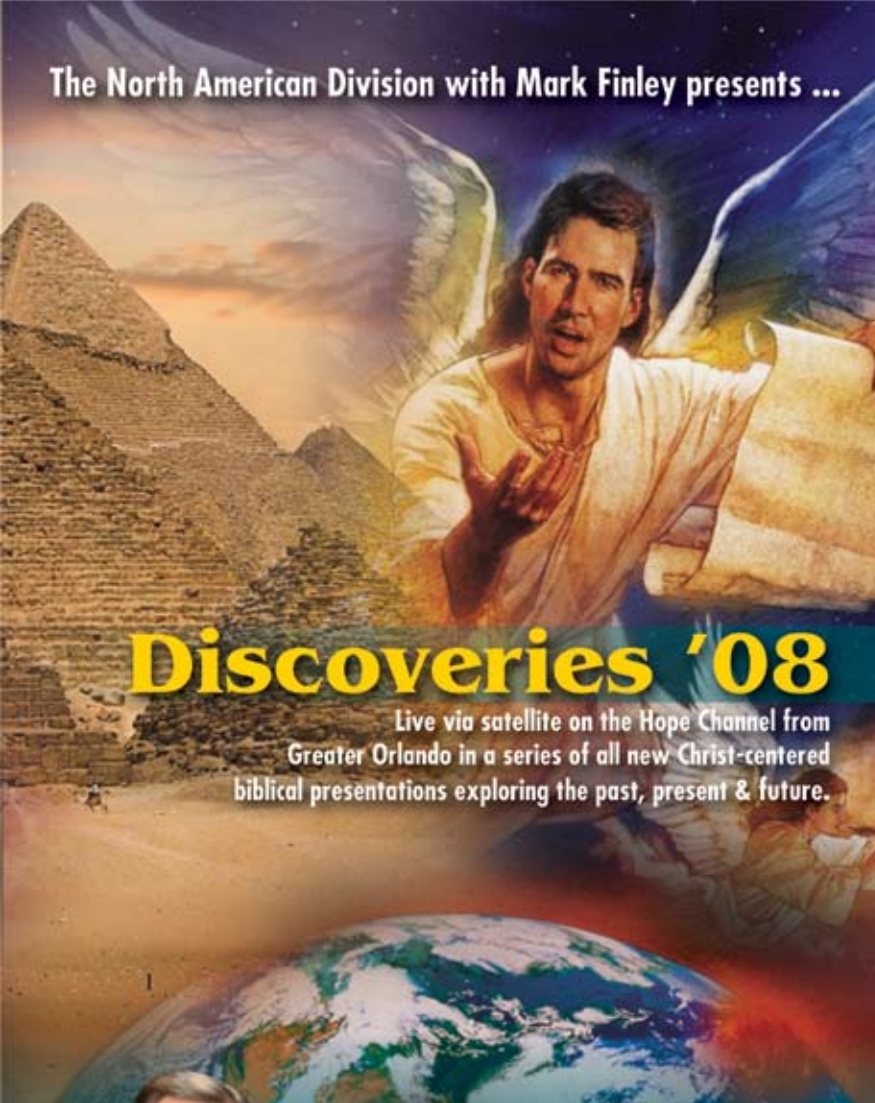
• Order handbills, put up posters, place an ad in the newspaper, invite your friends, and watch the Holy Spirit work.

• Get involved. Plan something big for God. Don't sit on the sidelines discussing why evangelism won't work. Roll up your sleeves and go to work for God. He will do "exceedingly, abundantly, all that we ask or think" for the glory of His name.

To register for *Discoveries '08*, log on to www.acn.info or call 1-800-ACN-1119 (226-1119). 

Mark Finley is a vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The North American Division with Mark Finley presents ...



Discoveries '08

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MISSION SPOTLIGHT: A TRIBUTE

Every quarter for 37 years, *Mission Spotlight* whisked Sabbath school members off to faraway places to experience the intriguing world of Adventist mission.

It all started with a handful of slides and stories created by Oscar Heinrich, who, as communication director of the Southern Union Conference, agreed to accompany a youth group to Guatemala and prepare a presentation of the trip for his local Sabbath school. It was a hit. Other Sabbath schools requested similar programs, and the concept of *Mission Spotlight* was born.

From its inception, *Mission Spotlight* was a family ministry. Oscar's wife, Judy, traveled with him and wrote the scripts. Through the years, each of their three children contributed to *Mission Spotlight* until its last issue in 2007. Jerry Heinrich handled the photography, audio recording, and program editing. Judy (Heinrich) Carter managed the finances, promotion, and circulation. And Ginger (Heinrich) O'Neil wrote and narrated the scripts.

"To make these reports, we have gone to more than 160 countries," Heinrich said. "We traveled in everything from ox carts to jumbo jets, climbed through mountain jungles from early morning to dusk, waded streams and forded rivers, and spent nights in thatch shelters."

When he was a boy, Heinrich listened in wide-eyed wonder to stories about "wild men from Borneo, cannibals in the South Seas, and man-eating tigers in India." He would never forget these riveting tales or the unselfish spirit of the missionaries who told them. From 1970 until his death in 2002, Heinrich dedicated his life to telling the stories of those who had given their all to reach an unreached world with God's love.

"*Mission Spotlight* is not about the problems of the world, crime, AIDS, famines, terrorists, wars, or natural disasters," said Heinrich. "It is

about faith, hope, love, and promises fulfilled. It is about people."

The Office of Adventist Mission would like to pay special tribute to and thank the Heinrich family for their commitment to keeping the story of Adventist mission alive. Only in heaven will the results of their service be fully realized.



It is about faith,
hope, love, and
promises fulfilled.
It is about people.

Oscar Heinrich



WE'RE STILL TELLING THE STORY OF MISSION



Explore
Adventist Mission Online



Read
Adventist Mission Quarterlies



Watch
Adventist Mission DVD



The art of speech:

WHEN YOUR THROAT IS SORE AND IT'S DIFFICULT TO SPEAK

What could cause someone to feel constant pain in the throat, even when the throat is not infected?

A person who constantly feels pain in the throat is probably abusing his/her throat and not realizing it. Talking too loud, screaming, talking nonstop for a long time, and breathing inadequately are factors that may cause such pain.

When we are tired and tense, we have a tendency to bend forward. This posture makes the diaphragm (one of the muscles that supports proper breathing) move with difficulty.

Observe your posture and try to relax the muscles around your neck and shoulders. If needed, apply a warm towel or heating pad to these areas. This will help the muscles relax.

Practice a light sport such as walking or hydrogymnastics and avoid activities such as body-building and martial arts that may overload the shoulders and neck.

I can't sing because my throat itches and I start coughing.

Lack of water or insufficient water damages the voice. Drink eight glasses of water each day and check to see if your urine is light-colored and your saliva is not too thick. Eat more fruit, especially citrus. Try to control your cough by drinking water every time you want to cough (always carry a water bottle).

I have been teaching for five years. It is hard not to talk loudly, and sometimes I even scream.

Teachers should take care of their voices. It would be best to use a microphone in the classroom; if that is not possible, use new strategies such as asking students to present their work or dividing the class into small groups and explaining the subject separately for each group. Students often talk during class, so the teacher has to compete for their attention. Unfortunately, the voice does not tolerate so much effort and gets irritated. Don't talk at the same time your students do.

Pray and ask God to give you creativity to plan classes attractively without having to scream.

My voice is getting worse every day. It's gotten to the point where, for a few minutes, my voice disappears completely because I talked too loud or screamed.

It is not normal to lose your voice, even for a short period of time. When you lose your voice, are you anxious or nervous? Our voices reveal a lot about us. Evaluating the connection between our voices and our emotions can be very helpful.

I'm allergic to perfume; it irritates my throat.

Allergy is another factor that can damage the voice. Discover the cause of the allergy and try to eliminate it. The air we breathe goes through our vocal cords, and if that air is not pure and healthy, it may irritate the nose and walls of the larynx, damaging the voice. A good alternative is to wash the nose with saline nasal spray, use a vaporizer, and gargle with warm salt water (one teaspoon of salt for each cup of water).

My dental arch is crooked, and my teeth press against my tongue, which makes speech difficult. I've had braces, but they didn't help. The problem could be corrected with surgery, but it is costly and I can't afford it.

Look for a speech therapist to treat your case; he or she could tell you more specifically what to do. You could also go to a school of dentistry that treats cases such as yours at no cost.

I hope these suggestions help you, but don't forget to seek an ear, nose, and throat specialist. These physicians are qualified to perform exams that may aid in getting a more precise diagnosis.

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil



WHAT NEW BELIEVERS NEED

We often neglect the sobering work of discipling in favor of the much more exciting process of gathering new converts. The dazzle of public preaching, coupled with the joy of witnessing thousands being baptized, makes disciple-building seem mundane and, thus, too easy to neglect.

We neglect follow-up at our own peril and at risk to the kingdom we hope to advance. Jesus' great commission intends that newborn believers will be continuously preserved, nurtured, and built into His body as strong disciples. All of this is evangelism—the whole process. As Peter Wagner so eloquently reminded his church growth classes, "Any scheme which separates evangelism and follow-up into distinct functions has already built into the system its own defeat."

So what do new members need? In a word, everything! Just as newborns depend totally upon their parents for survival, so newborn believers depend completely upon their church.

Evangelism must always be understood as a process, not an event. Jesus intentionally chose the familiar imagery of love, family, conception, gestation, birth, development, and maturity to describe the process by which individuals are brought to belief and matured into discipleship. If we wonder what new believers need, we can simply apply what newborns need to the spiritual development of new believers.

TOTAL CARE. Loving nurture, tender care, acceptance, affirmation, companionship, conversation, admiration, high-touch bonding, appreciation, security, simple food, cleaning, copious companionship, and consistent attention are vital for the survival of babies and believers.

DISCIPLINE. Long before reasoning allows an infant to comprehend dangerous situations, a firmly-worded "No!" command is essential to protect the baby from placing its hand in a fire. Such protection is essential to learning the authority of both God's Word and the responsible parent. Discipline is not harshly punitive; it is protective. Abandoning a baby to its own conclusions would be destructive abuse.

INSTRUCTION. The milk of the Word is repetitive assurance of God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness, freighted not so much with information as with reassurance and taught by mentoring example, not reasoned logic. Infants learn to walk not by a discourse on the dynamics of locomotion but by a patterning of "walking with them" until they eventually take their first steps.

EDUCATION. Believers must next be taught to think for themselves. Education is not just an assimilating of information. Education is learning to reason for oneself rather than merely reflecting the thoughts of others. "Why?" questions are essential in the educational steps.

DISCERNMENT. Youngsters must learn to distinguish between the genuine and clever counterfeits. When my brother John was a toddler, he drank a glass of gasoline thinking it was ginger ale. Deadly consequences were averted only by immediate intervention. Believers must be taught to test the "winds of doctrine" that are swept their way by all manner of well-meaning and ill-intentioned individuals.

DEPLOYMENT. Believers must receive ministry assignments; otherwise, they cannot grow and will remain immature and dependent. The work of the pastor is to "work" the members.

PARTNERSHIP. Those being deployed must also be partnered with experienced leaders who teach by associative example what they have experienced themselves. From the very beginning, Jesus designed a partnership role for the most effective pursuit of any good venture. It is dangerous to work alone.

SUPERVISION. The deployed must also be closely supervised to assure their success and to prevent mistakes from becoming habits. When Jesus sent His disciples two-by-two, He also brought them back together after a short time to evaluate their performance, rejoice in their successes, and instruct them for even greater achievements.

ACCOUNTABILITY. Maturing disciples must embrace accountability both to leadership and to their fellow members. Independence in belief or action indicates immaturity. Unwillingness to accept the counsel of the wider body disqualifies anyone.

RESPONSIBILITY. As disciples mature, they will value the things their Savior values. His priorities will be their priorities. His mission will become their mission. They will earnestly pray and diligently work to build up His church and to hasten His coming.

REDUPLICATION. Maturity exists only when disciples are winning other new believers and helping them to become disciples. When these disciples are effectively engaged in birthing new believers, the church's evangelistic process is complete.

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

*It is easy to build a wall.
More difficult to destroy it.
Even more difficult to build a bridge.
Yet easy to destroy it.
Make your online connection for eternity.*

*Become involved.
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NEXT EVENTS:

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July 9 to 13, 2008

Nairobi, Kenya
(regional to East Africa)
August 14 to 17, 2008

Montego Bay, Jamaica
May 13 to 17, 2009



More information: www.gien.adventist.org

The Global Internet Evangelism Network is a community of evangelists and technologists who are committed to using the Internet to share the good news of the gospel. In addition to sharing, it is committed to discipling and preparing people for Christ's return.

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