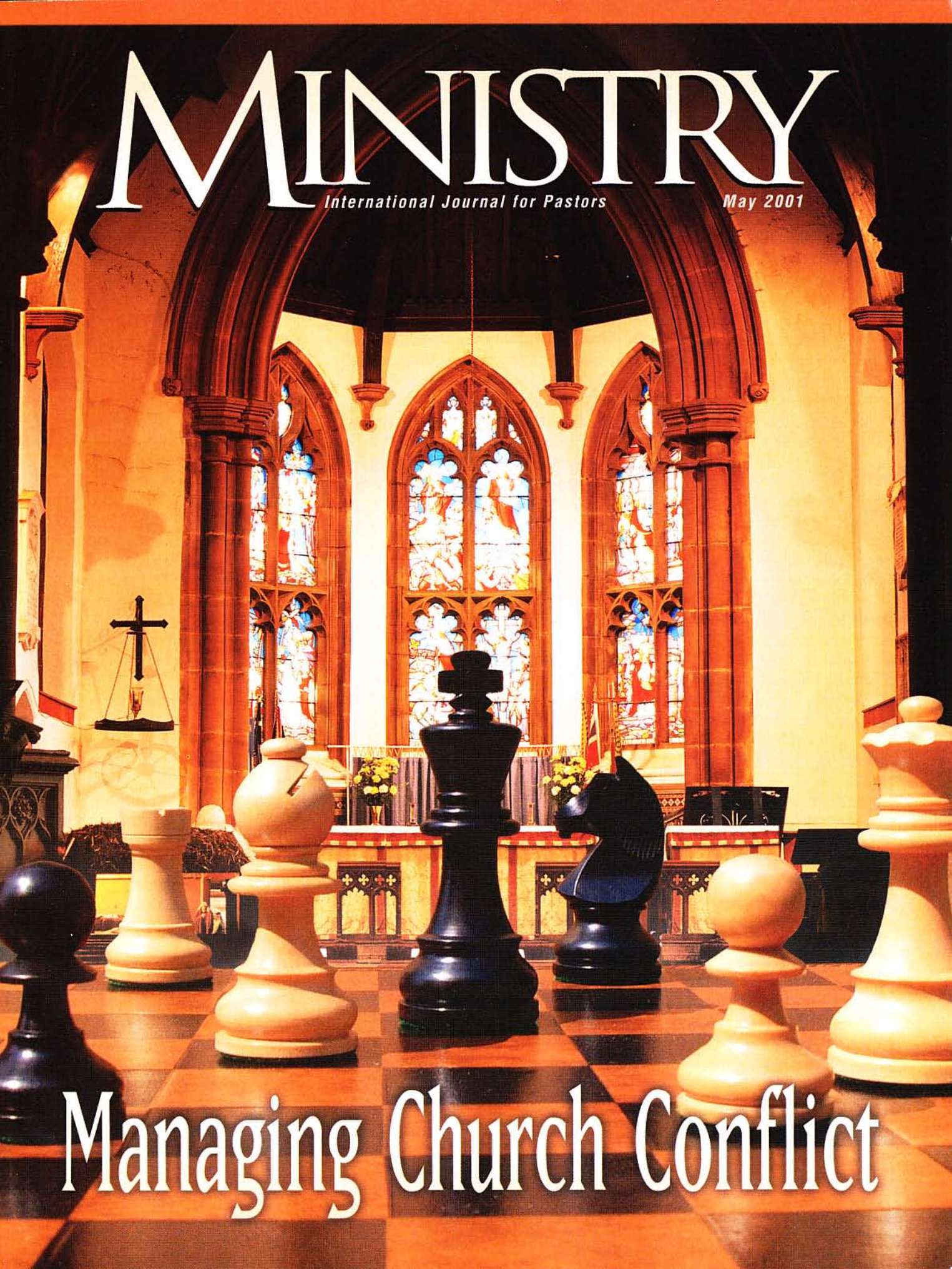


MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

May 2001



Managing Church Conflict

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MINISTRY

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AFTER PROVIDING AN OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT CATHOLIC-LUTHERAN CRISIS OVER JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: DARE WE NOW PROCEED BY SWEEPING OUR OWN BACKYARD . . . ?

Ministry's new format

I have just gone through the new *Ministry* and want to congratulate you for its new design and reading format. The articles were superb and very practical. Even though each pastor in our conference receives *Ministry* I will refer them to many of the articles written in this issue at our next ministers meeting. Keep up the good work!

—John Loor, Jr., President, Montana Conference, Bozeman, Montana.

I just wanted to say [about the new *Ministry* design] F-A-N-T-A-S-T-I-C! Great job on the whole thing! I am very impressed! Keep up the good work!

—Jerry Smith, pastor, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada.

Fearing the Pharisee . . .

I am sorry that I have taken so long to write to you in the *Ministry* office. First, I have benefitted many times from the fine articles in *Ministry*. Thank you for all that you are doing with this publication.

However, I must call to your attention a grievous error. It has long been accepted by prominent Bible and theological scholars that the New Testament depiction of the Pharisees is not accurate to them, to the Jewish people, and to a better understanding of first-century Christianity.

The author of the editorial (Will Eva, "Fearing the Pharisee More Than the Sinner," March 2000) compounds this ancient error but takes his approach even further by stating that his definition indicates that he identifies his

religion as being the true one and consequently, all others including Judaism are false!

Pastor Eva is of course entitled to his opinion and his beliefs. However, it is troubling to pass such negative judgments on all religions. I am thinking particularly that this unfortunate comparison has been a source of anti-Semitism as well as a downgrading of Judaism over the centuries.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Best wishes to you for the continuation of this publication.

—Rabbi Daniel Goldberger, Denver, Colorado.

Editorial note: *I regret giving the impression to anyone that I believe all religions, other than my own, are false. The intent of my editorial was to point to the fact that all of us, including my denomination, which I was particularly addressing, have the universal problem of struggling with the need to move beyond the claims of judgment and justice into the fresh air of grace and generous forgiveness. It was certainly not my intention to single out Jewish people.*

Conviction and truth in Adventist education

The clarity and balance in Charles Scriven's "Conviction and Truth in Adventist Education" (January 2001) suggests that this article could easily become a discussion paper for any Adventist faculty from K-16. His appeal to Ellen G. White was well-placed. Her educational principles could well be summarized by Scriven's "Marriage of

Conviction and Learning."

—Herbert E. Douglass, Weimar, California.

Though, no doubt, I come with pre-suppositions that Charles Scriven doesn't have, and no doubt I probably interpreted his words in some places differently than perhaps he meant them, I nevertheless thank *Ministry* for one of the best written and well-thought-out articles I've read from within our Church in a long time. I agree wholeheartedly with the need for openness and conviction in our schools. Though perhaps it was understood (if not explicitly stated), I would assume those moral convictions he says we must have are to be based on the clear testimony of the Scriptures; in other words, right and wrong are not culturally conditioned but based on a "Thus Saith the Lord." Of course, once you make that claim, there are automatic limits to just how open "open" is supposed to be. But that's another article. Thanks again for a great read.

—Clifford Goldstein, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Conviction and Truth in Adventist Education" by Charles Scriven is a gem.

Ancient Athenian Aristophanes and his son were cheated when the young man graduated from Socrates's school with no more conscience than when he entered. Their counterparts may be seen all around us—2,500 years later.

"Liberal" education without conviction always has had a way of simply producing more mixed-up minds and

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Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

What causes fights?

What causes fights and quarrels among you?" asks James. Quite a question, and a perceptive answer follows: "Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1, NIV).

A dispute in the early Jerusalem congregation where James was, illustrates the truth of his thesis and adds an important dimension: "In those days . . . the Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1, NIV). The word "overlooked" is powerful in the context of this and all conflicts. The quarrel centered on the matter of one group being neglected or brushed aside and another, of different ethnic origin, being favored.

This scenario is reflective of the conflict which pervaded the life of the first century Christian community, when interpersonal discord was compounded by the rift that existed between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Evidence of this struggle is omnipresent in Paul's letters, because it threatened the viability of the early church. Perhaps it threatens the church even more today. The mass of our contemporary ecclesiastical antagonisms are not all that significant in themselves, but they can rapidly become heavy with nationalism, racism, ethnicism, tribalism, and culturalism. These "isms" manifest themselves in our post-colonial era with unprecedented potency and on a global scale the church has never faced before.

What was the all important alpha principle that the first-century Christian community summoned to derail this threat to the church? Here's Paul's own description of its surpassing strength and beauty: "But now in Christ Jesus

WILL EVA



you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:13-20, NIV).

Is it a violation of Paul's context to claim that the blood of the Cross has not only abolished religious "commandments and regulations"? Hasn't it also in fact demolished the national, racial, and ethnic norms of our time? Hasn't it tackled our elitist codifications and definitions, withering the haughty roots of intemperate self-preoccupation and those worldviews that build walls of conceit, hostility, and division between people? Our new standing and identity in Christ ruins the pride and confidence I have invested in my whiteness, angloness, nationalness, and ethnicity. It disgraces all my supposed advantage, and shames the hollow distinctives I accentuate in an attempt to inflate my value in relation to other races, cultures and people. Such things become dis-

tinctly secondary in the light of the new "nationality" we now all equally share as the citizenry of Christ's kingdom.

This magnificent principle transcends all others as an operational base for lasting interpersonal peace. It surpasses the pervading approaches used in facing difference and conflict between people, the approaches which dominate the political and social outlook of our time. The cross put human hostility to death and produced a revolutionary way for people to appraise one another. It literally gave the world an effective weapon with which to vanquish the onset of "the desires that battle within" them.

Thinking of how he had boasted in his heritage as a circumcised Hebrew, a Pharisee, and an elite Benjaminite, Paul also said "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. . . . I consider [all of] them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. 3:4-9, NIV). Here is the prism through which early Christians came to view themselves and one another in their multicultural world.

In the presence of such a reality, how must one respond? Beaming the light of this Christian worldview on the extensive European migrations and colonizations, especially of Africa and North America during the last 300 years, brings me shame and deep conviction. So much of the exploitative nerve center of those movements are still potently present in our world and in the church. Their underlying spirit still subtly or not so subtly governs the way we view one another, whether from one side or the other. And it is not just

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Managing conflict in the church

H. Jack Morris



H. Jack Morris, D. Min., is pastor of Largo Community Church, Mitchellville, Maryland.

Conflict and division destroys faith and blights the Christian witness in the community. Some churches with a great history of evangelism and growth have been torn apart by dissension and factions and are now only a shadow of what they used to be.

The potential for conflict exists where two or more people are present, and the church is people. People often experience conflict as a result of divergent ideas and opinions, conflicting ambitions and goals, and varying needs and concerns. The potential for conflict is never far away. It crouches at the door ready to move in to disrupt, divide, embarrass, and destroy all that is sacred and holy.

The church must ever be prepared to become actively involved in the ministry of reconciliation. We are a new creation, a community of love, living in answer to Jesus' prayer, "Father, make them one, even as we are one." We are a prophetic people empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim by word, action, and example the redemptive, reconciling message of Christ. For a gathering of people to call itself a church, it must be a reflection of the first assembly that congregated in the upper room where there was prayer, fellowship, and oneness.

Conflict and people

All conflict is not necessarily bad. Conflict

that is dealt with, discussed, managed, and resolved can be good. This kind of conflict provides an opportunity for growth and creative change. On the other hand, conflict that is left unattended and ignored can destroy unity, hinder growth, and render ministry ineffective.

Conflict is caused by people. It does not simply begin and then evolve within a vacuum. The apostle James gives some insight into the personality types who are instrumental in stirring up and participating in church conflict. He asks a pointed rhetorical question, "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" (James 4:1, NIV). Then he answers it by telling us that church conflicts are caused by:

1. *Self-centered people.* James points to self-centeredness as a source for the origin of church conflicts. He refers to "your desires" (verse 1); "You want something"; "You kill [literally hate] and covet" (verse 2); "You [have] wrong motives"; "You . . . spend what you get on your pleasures" (verse 3). Notice how often the words "you" and "your" appear. Church conflict occurs when people in the congregation put their personal ideas, thoughts, and motives above what is best for the congregation.

2. *Angry people.* Another source of church conflict is anger or hate. The hallmark of the church and its most perfect means of ministering to the world is love. Yet James tells us that Christians are capable of killing (figuratively speaking) one another with hate. When a Christian manifests a hateful attitude toward another Christian it is misplaced anger. Psychology uses the technical term "transference" when referring to misdirected emotions.

Transference occurs when a person is angry with someone or something but expresses that anger elsewhere. For example, a wife may have pent-up feelings of anger at her husband, but unconsciously transfers and expresses her feelings toward the pastor or someone else in the church. The pastor and church are usually thought as "safe" places to express angry feelings because there is often little or no retaliation. Many a church conflict is the result of some angry person looking for a "whipping boy" to vent on. Often the church, the pastor, or someone else becomes the recipient of anger transference.

3. *People with emotional problems.* The experience of salvation does not necessarily mean

freedom from physical ailment. Sins are forgiven, but the physical condition often remains unchanged. The same is frequently the case with people who suffer from an emotional or mental disorder. Depression, anxiety, and fear persist, along with other problems associated with poor emotional and mental health. In verse 1, James speaks about “desires that battle within you.” These inner, untreated and unresolved emotions “battle within” and cause conflict that may be brought into volatile congregation-

On the other hand, smaller churches with no vision for growth sometimes become unchallenged and bored with the status quo. As a result, they turn in on themselves and begin to dicker and pick at each other.

Should a conflict erupt, every effort should be put forth to resolve it early. When a conflict is resolved in the spirit of submission and love, believers will be unified and the church’s mission will be refocused and pursued. If there is a conflict, make it a good conflict by resolving

regarding the issues and outcome. The primary concern and responsibility must be managing the process and dynamics of the dispute to a satisfactory resolution. The manager will function much like the facilitator or chair of any ad hoc committee, seeing to it that there is fairness, thoroughness, and agreed-upon rules of debate that can be adhered to.

3. *Select a secretary.* A secretary of high spiritual qualification and maturity should be selected to record thoroughly and accurately the proceedings/conversations as the process moves toward resolution.

4. *Gather information.* The manager and the recording secretary should interview all the disputants in an effort to gather relevant information. A convenient date, time, and place should be arranged with each person to listen to and record his or her views and concerns. These initial meetings with the various people involved are not a time to argue or dispute the problem. Rather they provide the occasion to listen and collect information. This allows the manager to be better informed as the next phase of conflict managing is initiated.

5. *Scheduling the initial meeting.* With the preliminary phase of information gathering completed, the next step is to schedule a date, place, and time for the disputants to come together and discuss the issues. Each person must be contacted and agree to the schedule. This procedure will allow everyone involved to feel significant and respected, with some “ownership” of the process.

6. *The meeting.* The manager should arrive early so as to be on hand to greet each person with a smile, a handshake, and a word of greeting. Such effort will reduce anxious feelings and make everyone feel more comfortable. When all are present, the manager should:

a. Greet the group with a general welcome.

b. Open the meeting with prayer, invoking the presence of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CHURCH DO NOT NEED TO BECOME DESTRUCTIVE.

al situations. The result often exacerbates any existing church conflict.

Churches that become involved in conflict

We have no stereotype to help us predict the kind or type of church that has the potential for conflict. Any church of any size—large, small, in between—has the potential for conflict. Churches that are growing because of their strategic ministries of evangelism, pastoral care, and discipleship have been victimized with inner turmoil and conflict. These aggressive, forward-looking congregations will inevitably have problems and challenges. Often conflict arises when individuals, committees, or groups are forced to grapple with the various issues of a dynamic ministry.

it, capitalizing on the growth it offers. The results of resolved conflict are worth all the effort that may be required: unity among believers and a renewed focus on ministry.

Resolving conflict

Problems within the church do not need to become destructive. As soon as they appear to be turning in that direction, the following helpful guidelines can be used for managing and resolving church conflict.

1. *Acknowledge the conflict within the church in its early stages.* Procrastination or avoidance can be disastrous. Conflict grows and spreads with time. Hoping that it will go away or resolve itself is like hoping a cancer will simply recede by itself. Untreated conflicts are like untreated cancers: they will inevitably spread destructiveness. In a calm but straightforward manner, we should acknowledge the conflict, identify the issues, and recognize the persons involved.

2. *Select a manager.* The manager should be a person of spiritual maturity who is accepted by all parties involved. He or she should know something about the procedures and processes of managing church conflict. The person should be one who will not take sides but be neutral



c. State the purpose of the meeting while giving a brief historical account of the events which led up to this moment.

d. Describe the process and procedures that will be followed, such as who speaks, how long each person should speak, etc. A person may be interrupted only if that person departs from the agreed-upon subject matter or if he or she goes beyond the allotted time limit. (At this point, the manager should pause and get the group to acknowledge their understanding and acceptance of these "ground rules.")

e. The person who originally expressed the concerns that precipitated the conflict should be allowed to speak first. Everyone present should then be given the opportunity to speak in turn.

f. After everyone who wishes to speak has spoken, the manager should take the first step toward conflict resolution by reading the church's mission statement or the local assembly's purpose for existing. Each concern that seems to contribute to the conflict should be examined as to how it relates, complies with, or deviates from the church's mission statement. In this context, a consensus should be sought that might help to resolve the conflict.

g. Subsequent meetings may be necessary to focus on any remaining areas of disagreement, using the same general procedure for achieving conflict resolution. The founding mission of the church should be the polar star that guides the church in its witness and ministry for Christ.

Conclusion

A church conflict can be managed and resolved with a good outcome. It is the church united that receives the upper room fire, ushering in a strong and convincing witness. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18, NIV). His prayer was "... that all of them may be one, Father, ... that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21, NIV). ■

Would you like to write for *Ministry*?

Here are some areas of emphasis in which *Ministry* is interested:

- ◆ Pastoral practices, such as preaching, evangelism, lay training, counseling, conflict resolution, time management, continuing education, congregational leadership and administration
- ◆ Personal needs of the minister
- ◆ Professional skills of the minister
- ◆ Pastor-spouse team ministry
- ◆ Pastoral family needs
- ◆ Worship, music, and church nurture
- ◆ Theological and biblical topics within the framework of Seventh-day Adventist belief and practice
- ◆ Current issues in church life and mission, particularly as they affect the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- ◆ Health and lifestyle issues as they affect the pastor
- ◆ Reports on unique events of interest to pastors, such as church growth, empowerment of laypersons, etc.
- ◆ Shoptalk items: ideas on how to better the work of the local church
- ◆ Brief reviews on books relevant to ministry
- ◆ Letters of comment on recent *Ministry* articles (no payment for these)

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When writing, it is good to avoid as far as possible the use of any phraseology or allusion that may be mystifying or irrelevant to readers outside a given national culture.

Article submission

It is advisable to consult with the editor before writing and submitting an article for publication.

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ONE-STEP

A five-facet plan for creating four-minute devotionals

Dick Duerksen



Dick Duerksen is director of mission development at Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida.

Good morning, pastor . . .” I took a deep breath before responding because the telephone voice had the sound of, “This won’t take much of your time, so I expect you to say *Yes!*”

Although petitioners and requests are varied, there is a haunting similarity to the plea. Most are asking me to prepare a personalized sermon, make it super-short, and get their meeting off to a good start.

“Could you please give us a brief devotional at Rotary Club next Tuesday?”

“Pastor, would you please share a few words at the beginning of our Ladies’ Aid Society?”

“The Senior Alliance meets on Fridays at noon. Would you be able to talk for four or five minutes before we begin?”

I used to fear these calls, knowing that preparing a meaningful four-minute devotional could take as long to prepare as a full sermon. Sometimes I confess I was a bit insulted that they wanted me to be only a four-minute introduction to the “real meeting.”

I’ve discovered a method, though, that reduces preparation time while giving me a chance to be “meaningful” in only four minutes! Now when I receive one of these invitations, I reach for my calendar with anticipation, pleased for another opportunity to open the gospel door to a new group in the community.

The ONE-STEP process has five parts: *ONE* message point only; *Sense* the interests and needs of the audience; *Target* your study and plans to the audience; *Educate* them with a new nugget of truth, and *Personalize* your message with a dash of yourself.

One message point only!

This is an opportunity to say one thing, and say it so well that the listeners will remember it for 24 hours.

I love to talk about the Lord’s Prayer and am tempted to share great information about temptation, forgiveness, daily bread, and the kingdom. But, if the message is to be memorable, I can talk about temptation or forgiveness, but not both!

One point. Only one point.

Sense the interests and needs of the audience.

Invitations come from wildly diverse groups: The city business council, the senior alliance, a Pathfinder club, nurses, X-ray technicians, teachers, the pastors’ association, thrift shop volunteers.

Three questions guide me as I try to sense the needs and interests of each group.

1. What topic will the group be discussing at this meeting?
2. What unique needs does their work open up for these people?
3. What current news issue touches this group?

Sometimes I call the group leader, or someone who works closely with members of the group, and ask them to help me work through the questions. Asking for help always strengthens my presentation.

Often I discover an issue that is causing stress among the group, an illness that has focused their concern or a current news item that energizes their conversations. That information focuses my preparation.

Target your study and plans to the audience.

When the senior alliance lost their leader to cancer, my message was on comfort. The Pathfinders were studying flowers, so I talked about Solomon and the lilies. The student nurses were preparing for finals so I spoke on “God, the Great Rememberer.” The thrift shop volunteers were having trouble with rude customers, so we discussed acceptance.

A n n o u n c i n g

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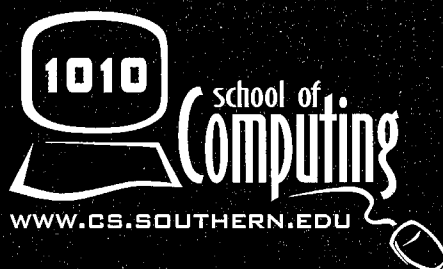
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Sample four-minute outline

Hearing God's Song

A four-minute devotional for the church choir just before the big program.

Zephaniah 3:17: "He will rejoice over you with singing" (NIV).

One point: God loves you so much that He sings a special song of rejoicing over you!

Sense: This group is stressed, worried, and eager. Each one knows his or her part is crucial and that every note must be "perfect." Each is reviewing the hardest musical parts and worrying about making a mistake. Each wants to make God look good during the program.

Target: How does God feel about the music I make for Him?

Educate: Most people do not think of God as singing, yet Zephaniah describes God as a singer! Isaiah even says God rejoices over us like a young man singing songs to his bride (62:5)!

Personalize: What song does God sing over you? Does He sing the same song for all of us? Do His songs sound different in Thailand, Zimbabwe, and in India? It is possible that He has one special song that He sings just for you!

My wife thinks her song sounds like the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. My father thinks God sings him an American folk ballad. And one teenage friend believes God uses an acoustic guitar when singing His song.

He is singing! And His song comes to you because of who He is, not because of how well you sing at the program. His rejoicing comes because He loves you! Listen, and sing along with the music!

Sample four-minute outline

Sharing God's Mind

A four-minute devotional for the secondary school students' honor society

Romans 12:2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (NIV).

One point: Focus on God; He will transform you by giving you a mind like His!

Sense: The students are proud of their successes. They are glad to be in the honor society and are pleased that their minds are "good, quick, and smart." Yet, they would like to do even better, to achieve even greater successes.

Target: The greatest successes happen in those who allow God to transform their lives; who accept God's gift of a mind like His.

Educate: Did you know that the most effective way to increase your Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) is by studying the Scriptures and meditating on the love of God? Many of earth's most respected thinkers have spent years immersed in the words of God. People like Nelson Mandela, Augustine, Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, and Mother Teresa have transformed the world as God renewed their minds.

Personalize: I have tried it, and it works! When I spend my time simply reading novels, newspapers, and magazines, watching movies and TV, my mind fills with empty words and pictures. When, instead, I focus on Scripture, nature, and other spiritual resources, I am more peaceful, wiser, and my mind responds to problems more quickly.

"Now, if you truly want to change the world, here is your assignment . . ."

Targeting devotionals directly to the needs and interests of the listeners is a ministry approach that Christ used with incredible success. In almost every human encounter, Jesus individualized His response.

When Zacchaeus, the ostracized, climbed a tree hoping for a quick look at the Messiah, Jesus looked up and offered friendship.

When Simon, the expert fisherman, wanted to rest in the safety of Capernaum, Jesus insisted on an unheard-of daytime fishing expedition.

When Lazarus died and was buried, Jesus discussed theology with Martha and cried with Mary.

Target your message to the pains of the group. Speak words that personalize hope and put skin on comfort.

If your group consists of elderly women who wonder about their value, tell the story of the widow's mite and remind them of their value in God's eyes. If you're speaking to a group of businessmen busy checking stock prices on the Internet, open with the words of Malachi 3: "The safest place for your money," or explore the hope of Jeremiah 29:11, "God has plans for you."

Educate them with a new nugget of truth.

Your devotional should tell them something they did not know before you came. Explain why Simon thought Jesus was crazy to go fishing in the daytime, why Jesus waited four days before raising Lazarus, why He went into Zacchaeus's house, ate with Simon the leper, spit in the eyes of Bethsaida's blind man, and why He waited till the Sabbath to heal the old man at the pool of Bethesda.

Take a picture from the Bible Atlas and explain what it meant for Lydia to be a "seller of purple." Use a drawing from a book on "life and times of the Bible lands," to describe why David rejected Saul's cumbersome armor. Or use a quote from today's newspaper to explain how God responds to grief. The world is packed

with information, most of it simple and common, that can bring sudden clarity to our understanding of God.

Consider some local sources for "truth nuggets."

Ω Someone who loves flowers and knows where to find the most fragrant blossoms.

Ω Physicians and other health care workers who know why our bodies do what they do, and who give good counsel on how to improve health.

Ω Police and other emergency care workers who know how to respond in moments of great stress and loss.

Ω Children and their primary school teachers. My favorite words of "truth" come from small children. Did you know, for instance, that "you gotta break cookies so all the bad stuff can leak out before you eat them"?

Personalize your message with a dash of yourself

To speak memorable words, you must become personally vulnerable. That's when listeners quit fiddling with their chopsticks and listen.

To connect with the seniors, talk about the incredible spinach crepes your grandmother makes. If your assignment is teens, describe how a popular song has improved your picture of God.

An honest insight into you as a genuine, struggling, victorious, failing, hopeful, eager, laughing human being helps cement your message into the hearts of the listeners.

When I speak on the phrase, "He will quiet you with his love," from

Sample four-minute outline

Living God's Love

A four-minute devotional for volunteers at the local soup kitchen.

Colossians 3:14: "And over all things these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (NIV).

One point: Love changes lives. Without it everything falls apart.

Sense: These volunteers come out once each week to serve a meal to the homeless of your community. The meals go to people broken, hurt, and often helpless. It is easy to think, "These people are not as valuable as I am." Yet the volunteers come because they love giving of themselves, listening to new friends, and offering hope. This is a time for affirmation and for celebrating the gift of love.

Target: It is not easy for you to give of yourselves so freely; in fact, sometimes it hurts so much that your tears flow late into the night. But, I want to affirm you. Your love does change lives!

Educate: Interview the manager of the soup kitchen. How valuable are the volunteers? What impact have they had over the years? How have they changed lives? How has their love touched your life?

Use information from this interview and add a couple statistics from the mayor's office. Tell the volunteers how others perceive their love.

Personalize: Before you can share a devotional with the volunteers, you have to volunteer beside them. Serve soup for a couple evenings. Hug a hungry person and tell a story to some children. Learn what stimulates love in the hearts of the volunteers.

Now, tell what you've learned as a volunteer. Your devotional is no longer "information," it is love, binding you all together in perfect unity.

Zephaniah 3:17, I tell how I eagerly embraced our blood-stained daughter after a bicycle accident—even though I am terribly repulsed by blood. "It's nice to know," I say, "that God is more repulsed by sin than I am by blood, yet He still reaches out to comfort us with His love."

Speak of things you love. Bring a flower from your garden, show off a curio you bought on a recent trip, or pass around a favorite book for everyone to touch. Be real, and use each item as an illustration that

enhances your One Point of the day.

ONE-STEP is simply one spiritual point, personalized with an illustration, targeted directly to the needs and interests of a special audience and delivered with confidence.

ONE-STEP can take the fear of four-minute devotionals from you as it has from me. Instead of gnawing pain in the stomach, invitations for "a few brief words" can give you a burst of creative energy, and a chance to use that "one phrase" you underlined in Romans last night. ■

<http://www.ministrymagazine.com/>

Church conflict

The role of the third voice

Scilla Wahrhaftig



Scilla Wahrhaftig is an active member of the Pittsburgh Friends Meeting (Quakers) with a long-term interest in conflict resolution.

Blessed are those who are willing to enter into the process of being healed, for they will become healers. Blessed are those who recognize their own inner violence for they will come to know nonviolence. Blessed are those who can forgive self, for they will become forgivers. Blessed are those who are willing to let go of selfishness and self-centeredness, for they will become a healing presence. Blessed are those who listen with compassion, for they will become compassionate. Blessed are those who are willing to enter into conflict, for they will find transformation. Blessed are those who know their interdependence with all creation, for they will become unifiers. Blessed are those who live out a contemplative life stance, for they will find God in all things. Blessed are those who strive to live these beatitudes for they will be reconcilers.

—Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas, Used by permission

One of the greatest needs in conflict situations is to nurture the decision-making process. It becomes sorely tested because strong advocates for and against an issue are seldom able to concern themselves with the process. The group most able to do the nurturing consists of those whose voices are least heard. These are the people who are less tied up in the outcome and more with their struggle to find truth in the conflict situation. I call them the Third Voice. They are likely to

be the key to resolving the conflict.

For example: After five years of turmoil, a small Jewish congregation nearly broke apart. Meetings had broken down into harsh debates and contests between the two main factions. One group wanted the congregation to stay the way it always had been—small, intimate, and based on volunteer help. The other wanted a professional rabbi and a Hebrew school. The congregation became ungovernable—no one would run for office.

They finally brought in a conflict resolution consultant who understood that a major part of the problem was that the strong advocates for and against these proposed changes had dominated congregational meetings. An important part of the congregation had become painfully silent or silenced.

This congregation was like most faith bodies in that it had a problem-solving procedure in place. This may be a formalized disputing process, congregational meetings, grievance procedures, prayer sessions, or board of trustees meetings. A common element is that these procedures handle difficult conflicts better when all voices are heard: not just when adversarial factions are considered.

When a Friends (Quaker) Meeting recently was locked in conflict, a member, Ruth Dymond, observed: "I believe people should come to a Business Meeting with strong convictions and that the expression of those views leads to a strong Meeting. It is important to the process and will help, if those who are neutral, as well as the clerk (chair of the meeting), make sure that all are heard. If this is not done, it leaves members not only feeling unheard and angry, but we also miss the joy and excitement of a decision made by true unity." This was a spontaneous plea for Third Voice participation.

The role of the Third Voice

The role of the Third Voice is not easy. One is likely to feel buffeted and indecisive when faced with the strong convictions of others. It is tempting to withdraw or just wait and see. The key tasks of the Third Voice are to reach out to both sides, to ask questions, to listen, to keep the dialogue open in any way they can, and again to listen. This approach is vital because members of the vocal faction often feel isolated, lonely, and estranged from the congregation.

They feel that no one is interested in their views and that their perspectives are not heard or understood. Additionally, opponents lose their identity as individuals and become subsumed in the will of the group. The Third Voice can help to remind everybody that people have names; that they are still the persons we knew and loved before the conflict. By doing so they help to separate the problem from the person, and remind fellow members of the presence of the Divine Spirit. These activities help break through the paralysis caused by the strong positions articulated and help open up avenues of communication. Without Third Voice involvement the congregation will probably stay divided and polarized.

How did the consultant for the Jewish congregation involve the Third Voices? She organized a series of small, well-facilitated living-room meetings to discuss the future of the congregation. Every member was expected to and did attend one. The home environment, a prayerful beginning of each meeting, and the small size of the groups created a less threatening atmosphere. That encouraged the Third Voice members to participate.

The consultant also conducted a written survey of each member's thoughts about the synagogue's future. This established a non-threatening way for the less vocal members to express their views. Further, she monitored membership and board of directors meetings so they would encourage Third Voice participation. Their commitment to the continued existence of the congregation as a top priority led the members to find win/win solutions.

They agreed to establish a religious school with limited funding, to expand the role of the cantor (liturgical singer) rather than hire a rabbi, and, most importantly, to establish a reconciliation task force to assure that all voices would be heard in future meetings. This syna-

gogue's attitude toward conflict is now much healthier.

What the Third Voice accomplishes

Ron Kraybill, a Mennonite conflict resolver, in an article entitled "Conflict in Groups: The Cross Stitching Effect,"¹ points out that "what people expect in conflict happens. The key is [the] member's attitude to conflict." He goes on to say that in a healthy congregation, "Members know that conflict is inevitable, even necessary to healthy group life. Disagreement in a group is evidence of caring and involvement. When issues arise, members move toward each other, not away, and they enjoy the vigorous exchange of views that follow." The middle, or Third Voice can help the congregation to be less afraid of conflict and to welcome it as an opportunity.

Any reconciliation process is a continual search for divine guidance. Out of that search will come creative and new ideas. Often with strong voices all around, and with an exaggerated sense of urgency to find resolution, we lose faith. It is the job of the Third Voice to remind us to allow time and patience for the process to work.

In the long run, the Third Voice provides stability and a sense of security to the congregation. The people of the Third Voice keep the institution going. By their presence they reassure people that, even though things seem in chaos, the congregation will survive. A solution will be found, and they are there for the long haul. They are also there to remind their fellow worshipers that a conflict buried destroys. A conflict resolved brings new depth and growth to the congregation as well as drawing the group closer in love and friendship.

Blessed are those who strive to live these beatitudes for they will be reconcilers. ■

1 Ron Kraybill, "Conflict in Groups: The Cross-Stitching Effect," in *Meditation and Facilitation Training Manual*, Ed. by Carolyn Shrock-Sherik. (Akron, Penn.: Mennonite Conciliation Services, 1999), 247.

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Growing a healthy church

part 3

**Greg Schaller
and John Grys**



John Grys is administrative pastor of the Hamilton Community Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



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This is the final article in a three-part series by John Grys and Greg Schaller. Greg Schaller is the sole author of this article.

My wife loves red raspberries. The trouble is, raspberries are expensive. So I planted three healthy raspberry plants in our garden. I added fertilizer, wood chips, and water. A year later the three little plants multiplied—to fifty! I was amazed, and so was my wife, who is enjoying the season's daily supply of mouth-watering raspberries.

The analogy, of course, is simple: what dynamics cause a church body to thrive and multiply, like the raspberry plants? What is the environment in which God is free to step in and make a church grow? "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6, NIV). Researcher Christian Schwartz sought to understand church development from studying growing churches.¹ After researching 1,000 churches on six continents, he concluded that eight characteristics were closely linked to spiritual and numerical growth (see *Ministry*, January 2001, p. 9). The preceding article in this series of three discussed the first four of these eight principles (see *Ministry*, March 2001). This final article addresses the remaining four of these characteristics exposed in the church program called Natural Church Development (NCD).

Passionate spirituality

Sadness and depression had gripped the two men traveling the road to Emmaus as Jesus approached them. As He opened the Scriptures to them and showed that the Word pointed to Him, a new passion burned inside the two men. Overcome with joy they ran to tell friends.

This kind of passionate spirituality is found in a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship based upon God's grace and kindness and the disclosure of Himself to us. The practice of spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, and meditation have the purpose of opening us up to recognizing the Lord's presence and hearing the Spirit's joyful assurance that we are, indeed, the children of God (Rom. 8:16). Knowing that Jesus lives and getting in contact with God's grace through Him is what fires passionate spirituality!

Practical actions that increase passionate spirituality in a congregation include:

- ◆ Encouraging church leaders to devote time to Bible study and prayer.
- ◆ Making sure church members are serving in roles best suited to their spiritual gifts.
- ◆ Mobilizing those with the gift of intercessory prayer into a prayer ministry.
- ◆ Leading involvement in weekly small groups.
- ◆ Preaching sermons on God's grace and how to know Him.

Loving relationships

Passionate spirituality affects our relationships with others. Jesus said that "all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV). The expression of God's love in a church body generates a magnetic attraction. And with love comes unity.

It is difficult, however, to enhance loving relationships in the church if love is absent at home. The expression of love between a husband and wife needs encouragement. Parents need empowerment to repeatedly show and tell their children, "I love you." Increasing the expression of love in a congregation takes time because it is not done simply through a program but through the building of relationships.

Small groups are an exceptional way to nurture love and form positive relationships. The acts of spending time together, getting

acquainted with one another, and learning to trust each other in God's presence helps create an environment in which love grows. In a loving climate, fear dissolves.

Simple steps to increase loving relationships in a church body include:

- ♦ Activating the formation and practice of attending small groups.
- ♦ Proclaiming a sermon series on the way Jesus loved people.
- ♦ Planning marriage and family events facilitating the expression of love and appreciation at home.
- ♦ Using the art of listening in order to better understand others.

Need-oriented evangelism

The forging of loving relationships is a vital key to outreach. Jesus put the needs of others first. Jesus first fed the five thousand and then shared, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, NIV). Jesus stood up for the condemned adulterous woman. Then he shared, "Neither do I condemn . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11, NIV). Jesus earned the right to be heard. When we reveal God's compassion and meet the needs of others we begin to win a hearing. Meeting felt needs can lead to meeting spiritual needs. Jesus' way of reaching people still works today: "The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow me.'"²

Need-oriented evangelism means focusing on the needs and questions

of non-churched friends. Evangelism is not merely a program or event. It is loving and reaching people with the gospel. "Most men and women are not looking for religion, nor do they have the time or inclination to ask themselves questions about the meaning of life . . . but most men and women are looking for love."³

Some ways of developing a program of need-oriented evangelism in a local church include:

- ♦ Identifying and empowering those with the spiritual gift of evangelism.
- ♦ Equipping members to pray for their relational network, which consists of friends, family, neighbors, and work colleagues.
- ♦ Inviting those receptive into small groups.

Holistic small groups

The most compelling characteristic for healthy church growth lies in the area of holistic small groups.⁴ Many church leaders will find this claim simplistic or too challenging. The reality is that many churches sustain no small group life. Yet small groups are the principal way to empower nurture, fellowship, spiritual gift discovery, evangelism, and leadership development.

What happens in a holistic small group? A healthy emphasis is placed on applying the Bible to personal needs. Here immediate personal concerns are shared and brought to God in prayer. In groups edification and mutual encouragement can occur more easily than in larger congregational gatherings.

In our local church, the first NCD survey revealed small groups as our weakest characteristic. As a result we focused for nine months on raising up small-group leaders. Coaches supported and equipped our small group leaders. Assistant leaders were groomed to launch new groups from existing groups.

Considerations for starting a small group ministry include:

- ♦ Asking God for a vision for reproducing small group ministry.
- ♦ Starting with clearly defined group leaders and apprentices in training under the leaders.
- ♦ Providing coaching to every small group leader.
- ♦ Multiplying the group once it reaches ten people.

Church leaders can then empower the church body to strengthen weak characteristics. Our church did. We moved from one small group to more than ten. Be innovative and adaptable, and pray for a vision, involving your local leadership in the development of an effective small group ministry.

We're now planting two churches and hope to eventually start the whole process over, and then over, and over again. . . .

It's not quite as easy as growing raspberries, but the fruits last for eternity. ■

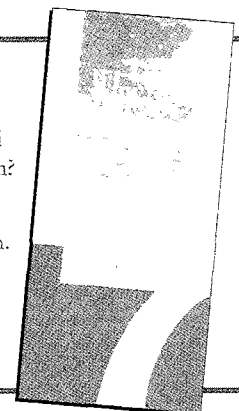
- 1 Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, Ill.: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998).
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.
- 3 Arther G. McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 56.
- 4 Schwarz, 33.

Why the Seventh Day?

Did the gospel rest Jesus introduced at His first advent make the rest of the seventh-day Sabbath of Eden and Sinai obsolete? How does the "new covenant" affect the "old," particularly as it relates to the question of law and Sabbath?

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Mentoring children into ministry

Dan Stevens

Children are the church of tomorrow." I cringe every time I hear that cliché, either from the pulpit or the pew. It's been used to cajole people into working in the children's divisions, or spoken with pride after a cute kids' program. Often implied is the sincere hope that someday the children will take over the reins of church leadership and ministry.

In our church we've decided that if children aren't recognized as the church of today they may not be around to be the church of tomorrow. If we are not actively involving our children in ministry now, how can we expect them to be active in their youth or adulthood?

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" can work negatively if in their formative years we've encouraged children only to be still and listen.

Good programs aren't enough

As a children's pastor for 16 years, I have done lots of creative programming for Sabbath School, Children's Church, and Vacation Bible Schools, all with the hope of inspiring children to give their lives to God now and keep that commitment into adulthood. Usually children are grateful for quality programming geared for them, and they readily respond to invitations to accept Jesus as

their Savior and Lord. Their smiles and hugs are thanks enough.

The rub sometimes comes when, as they grow into their high school years, their commitment to Christ becomes overshadowed by peer pressure, entertainment, and simply the natural drives of normal adolescence. Many quit coming to church and are lost to our fellowship. Youth leaders and parents have been concerned about this, but many of them have come to see this as normal teenage behavior. They may say hopefully, "Maybe they'll come back when they have children of their own."

When one of my young members has been lost to the fellowship it has felt like all my efforts, energy, thoughts, and prayers have been wasted. I have asked myself how I could best prepare children for the difficult years ahead in their youth.

Expanding a new vision

Our church seemed to stumble upon a new idea for using kids in ministry. The pastoral staff wanted to make the church a friendlier place for members and visitors alike. One thing we decided was to have people stand at the entrance doors of our church to assist and greet people.

"That's a job the kids could do!" I said. Thus was born the "Doorkeepers," a ministry tailor-made for Primary and Junior kids. They readily signed up for their post and were faithfully on duty each week. As people approached the entrance, they were greeted by the child with a smile and a warm greeting. The children assisted the elderly, the mothers with babies, and people with potluck dishes or Sabbath School supplies. On rainy days, armed with large umbrellas supplied by the church and with the church's name imprinted, they met people outside, escorting them into the vestibule. This ministry was an instant success. Members and visitors alike appreciated it and regularly thanked the children for their service. More importantly, the kids felt they provided a useful service for their church. After five years, it's still a regular ministry here.

That was the seed that inspired a new way of doing children's ministry in our church: team ministry for kids. We don't have to wait until they're teenagers or older to begin ministry. Children can be active ministers now.

This idea, along with its accompanying philosophy, happily coincided with our



Dan Stevens is children's pastor at Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kettering, Ohio.



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Children's Ministry Teams at Kettering

DoorKeepers

"Front-line" greeters on Sabbath morning at the entrances of the church

God's Handworks Puppet Team

The art of puppetry, used to share the gospel within and outside our church

God STIX With You

A creative way to illustrate Christian music through the use of dowel rods

Christian's Choir

Giving choral instruction for children's praise and worship songs

Children's Handbell Choir

Playing for worship services and in neighboring churches

Clown Ministry

Giving Christian care a happy face at special events, hospital and nursing home visitation, and just plain good fun

PETZ

Children take puppies and kittens from local animal shelters to patients in nursing homes

KIT

Kids in Training, an introductory program that gives children the tools to equip them for ministry, helping them choose which ministry they would like to join.

church's efforts at the time to establish a new statement of mission and core values. Two values that surfaced had particular bearing upon children: (1) that every person in the church is being equipped by the Holy Spirit for ministry, and (2) that the best way to disciple people is to mentor them in spiritual growth and service. Our newly formed children's ministry team took the position that God doesn't wait for kids to grow up before He pours the Holy Spirit upon them. And what better way to grow faith in children than for them to rub shoulders in ministry with adults who love and value them?

Unlike many adults, children want to serve. They are looking for ways to put hands and feet on the faith they have received from their parents and teachers. What really turns them on is when they see God come through, even in the simplest ways.

Children doing ministry

Pete Hohmann, a children's pastor at the Mechanicsville Christian Center near Richmond, Virginia, has

been equipping kids for eight years in outreach and missions. He tells of a time when his children experienced first-hand the faithfulness of God: "We were scheduled to do outreach at a drug rehabilitation center. Normally the kids would do an hour of singing with choreography, drama, and testimonies and then individually pray with the people who came to listen. An advance team was supposed to arrive an hour early at the ministry site with sound equipment so that all would be set up and ready when the kids arrived. Well, the kids arrived, but the van with the sound equipment was lost and was almost an hour late. To make matters worse, we had accidentally left the backup tapes and emergency boom box in the same van. What were we to do now? Minutes before the outreach was scheduled to begin, one of the children said, 'We need to pray.' Of their own initiative, they gathered in a circle and began to pray for the missing van. After several of the children prayed, one of the children ended the prayer time and said 'Amen.' At the

exact moment the 'Amen' was sounded, the van turned up the driveway of the rehabilitation center. The kids were so excited to see that God had come through for their ministry, they went crazy!" Pastor Hohmann knows from experience that children who discover ministry in their preteen years are much more likely to be active leaders in their adulthood than those who don't.

Ironically, large churches with more resources available to them are not usually good at empowering children for ministry. Small churches have done the best at including children if for no other reason than they don't have enough adults to do everything. Jobs like taking up the offering, ushering, folding and handing out bulletins, and helping their parents clean the church have helped young people feel that this is their church and that they are contributing in their own way to its upkeep.

It's been two years now since our Children's Ministry Team consciously moved away from entertaining our children with good programs toward the goal of mentoring kids for service, leadership, and outreach. We recognized that this would necessitate finding adults who love children and enlisting them to work with a few kids in joint ministry, that is, team ministry. Since we couldn't ask others to do what we hadn't tried ourselves, adult team members started the first teams. We chose to launch a puppet team and had 16 children join us. No one told us that puppets was the hardest ministry to do.

Everyone loves puppets and we use them often in Children's Church and outreach. But the greatest benefit has been seen in the kids on the team, who now demonstrate a greater commitment to their faith and each other than ever before. They are progressively taking on more responsibility and leadership, just as we hoped they would.

Because of this and because puppets are popular, we soon had more applicants than we could handle ask-

ing to join the team. Space constraints and leadership issues did not allow for more to be a part of the puppet team. So we started another ministry, STIX, which uses dowel rods to creatively choreograph Christian songs. It is very inspirational to our audiences, often bringing tears to the eyes of those who are ministered to by the children. But it's the kids on the team who get the greatest blessing.

Expanding the ministry teams

Teams demand quite a commitment. They meet every week for an hour to practice. However, before every practice, a half hour is allotted for worship, sharing prayer requests, and answers to prayer, and team building activities. This really sets the mood for cooperation and caring among team members. Minimum age limits for being on a given team are set according to the ministry requirements. We have also discovered that parents are the most valuable support. They often serve as assistants both at practice and at programs. They help with team socials and transportation. Teams very quickly become a family affair.

As the ministry team approach for kids began to snowball, financial support from the general membership of our church began to grow. People were increasingly eager to assist in a ministry or to help start a new one when they saw that something significant was being done for the children. We even attracted new members who wanted to see something for their children. And, of course, we had a growing list of kids who wanted to join the two ministry teams.

So in the second year of our adventure, we started five additional kids' ministries (see sidebar: "Children's Ministry Teams at Kettering" on previous page). We had a sign-up in September for the upcoming school year (teams take the summer off) for the kids and for adults who want to lead or assist in a particular team.

If we don't have an adult leader, we don't have the ministry, even if

we advertised it at the sign-up. Some may think it necessary to have leaders ready to go before a ministry is announced, but we have found that in our congregation God sends the leaders when we share the vision. After all, we don't want to rob the blessing for the kids of praying for an adult volunteer to lead the ministry they want to join.

Developing other ministries

Last year, we had ten children sign up for a clown ministry, but we didn't have a leader, even after talking it up among some likely "clownish" adult candidates for several months! Finally, I had to write the children asking them to pray that God would send a leader. Within the month we had both a leader and an assistant who were excited about the team. We are also currently equipping them by sending them to workshops related to this ministry.

One new ministry we launched recently is PETZ, where children take puppies and kittens from a local animal shelter to visit patients in nursing homes. This simple ministry can be done by younger kids, especially since their parents are required to go with them. It's an outreach that can be done by the whole family. We had 35 children come to the orientation, twice what we expected. The children were divided up into smaller groups of four or five, and they take turns carrying the pet to the patients. The

seniors look forward to their visits and enjoy both the pets and the kids.

Our waiting list for some ministries continues to grow. Not wanting those kids to be left out while they wait for openings on a team, we started a once-a-month training event, called KIT (Kids in Training) that will give them a sampling of some ministry skills. Parents are encouraged to come take the workshops with their children.

Future plans

Our goal is to have kids be in charge of things during children's events. We would like our kids to run sound equipment, create PowerPoint presentations, advertise with posters and artwork, pray for both those who minister and those being ministered to. And so the vision expands.

This coming fall we are gearing up for Children's Ministry Clubs. The clubs differ from teams in that they meet only once a month for acquiring a particular skill that can be used in particular ministries. But clubs could grow into teams, depending upon the interest. Right now our club list is Sound, Graphics, Art and Drawing, Practical Helps, Drama, Mime, and Intercessory Prayer. But the list could grow even longer before we actually introduce these ministries.

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Courage: A learned skill

Marlon T. Perkins, Sr.



Marlon T. Perkins, Sr.
is pastor at Calvary
Seventh-day
Adventist Church in
Davenport, Iowa.

I could feel the hair begin to rise on the back of my neck. I stiffened every muscle as his six foot, six inch, 280-pound frame loomed over me. I expected him to swing violently at me as he grimaced and mumbled threateningly under his breath. Yet, as I stood facing his nervous wife, I still felt confident that my tactful chastisement of her was in perfect order, regardless of what he might do to me. After all, she had spoken disrespectfully to an elder during a church business meeting and I thought it was my place, as pastor, to tell her so. Apparently her husband (himself an elder) did not agree.

Thankfully, I don't have one of these episodes every day! But this experience underscores a truth I've discovered about the indispensable human quality known as courage: It can be a learned skill.

Grace under pressure

Ernest Hemingway once defined courage as "grace under pressure." Somehow I didn't feel so "forceful" that Saturday evening in the church foyer facing this behemoth of a man. When I say that courage is a learned skill, I mean that it can be acquired through various life experiences. Coming to this realization was a defining moment in my life. For years I struggled with a fearful spirit, afraid to face anything that made me feel threatened. This fear had had a paralyzing effect on me and I often wondered if I would ever be free from it.

Pastoral ministry, oddly enough, has taught me how to better handle threatening situations. Facing conflict in ministry is inevitable, whether it be between someone else and me or when I am mediating conflict between others. Although fierce conflict is never pleasant to deal with, I have learned that it must not be feared either. This is not to say that I am now so tough-minded that nothing scares me, but I have come to recognize that perhaps the greatest thing to be feared in conflict is fear itself.

How does one muster the strength, or courage, to face conflict in life or to make tough decisions? Three principles can help to deal more effectively with these difficult matters: Remember that God is all powerful, reinforce your confidence from a divine perspective, and resolve to face the difficult matter.

Remember that God is all-powerful

"Have no fear of sudden disaster" says Solomon "or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared" (Prov. 3:25, 26, NIV). Sometimes when we are facing a difficult situation, such as a disrespectful church member, an unruly child, an abusive spouse, or an intimidating neighbor or co-worker, we have the tendency to feel as if we have no control over the matter. We may then feel afraid and powerless. This, in turn breeds frustration and anger in us. I have found that whatever the nature of the matter that leaves us feeling powerless, it is comforting to know deep down that God is in control. The scripture declares confidently that "[He] will keep your foot from being snared."

Martin Luther King, Jr., in his book *Stride Toward Freedom*, chronicles the major events that shaped the infamous Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. In the chapter, "The Violence of Desperate Men," King shares feelings of fear he experienced as a result of threats made against his life as a leader of that movement. He writes, "One night toward the end of January [1955], I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to doze off, the telephone rang. An angry voice said, 'Listen, nigger, we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.' I hung up, but I couldn't

sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point.

"I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. 'I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.'

"At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."

The words of Sir Winston Churchill ring true indeed: "Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others."

It is also true that when someone crosses the boundary between respecting and disrespecting me, then that boundary must be defended, unless I willingly abandon it. I firmly believe that boundaries in relationships sometimes have to be defended because what's at stake is something absolutely foundational to any relationship; namely, respect. Divine wisdom, however, teaches me when it is prudent either to defend the boundary or relinquish it. And yes, there are times when I should relinquish it. Just ask any couple married over thirty years.

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How can I relinquish the right to defend myself without feeling powerless? I can if I have the assurance and therefore the security of knowing that God is all-powerful and that He is in control of every possible situation or dilemma that can confront the human experience—my experience. “In all your ways acknowledge him” said Solomon, “and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:6, NIV).

Reinforce your confidence from a divine perspective

The confidence to make courageous decisions is not self-generated. Rather, it is Spirit-generated. “The Lord will be your confidence,” says Proverbs 3:26 (NIV). “Holy boldness” comes from God. When Jeremiah as a young man was called to be a prophet, his initial response was full of trepidation: “‘Ah, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you’” (Jer. 1:6, 7, NIV). Jeremiah’s courage was buoyed up by God’s omnipotence. Taking God’s assurance into his heart gave him confidence. He knew he was being backed by God Himself.

This is what gave David the strength of heart to face Goliath. This is what enabled Elijah to set his face

news of Jesus Christ throughout the Greco-Roman Empire. And this is what gave Jesus Himself the resolve to utter those selfless words in Gethsemane, “‘Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (Matt. 26:39, NIV). Our confidence must be rooted in a divine perspective. There is simply no greater strength upon which we may rely.

Resolve to face the difficult matter

Whatever your dilemma, it needs to be faced squarely, and this calls for a bold, courageous response from you. Resolve to face it. Perhaps that which confronts you is not something in the pastorate itself. Maybe your challenge is a major family conflict or a life-threatening illness. Resolve to face it. We simply cannot run indefinitely from some things in life. Fear, unchecked, can be such a paralyzing agent. Facing and surviving a daunting situation steels our courage more than anything else can.

But how can people who know that they struggle with a fearful spirit (and sometimes fail), speak and act with conviction and courage? Courage and confidence is gained through small victories. The small, less spectacular victories lead to greater ones. “A good character,” Joel Hawes wrote, “is, in all cases, the fruit of personal exertion. It is not

In essence, learning the skill of courage is a form of character development. It is an acquired skill forged upon the anvil of experience. There will be successes, and there will be failures, but we must keep moving forward. Courage can be learned, and when it is learned it must be applied. Life experiences will dictate so. What we gain from exercising courage, however, is a greater sense of well-being and authentic confidence.

Displaying courage is not about dominating another person, issue, event, or experience simply for the sake of overpowering them. The world has had its share of military minions, business barons, political pontificates, and downright foolhardy fellows who, being filled to the brim with pride and arrogance, sought to elevate their own persons or positions at the expense of annihilating themselves or others—figuratively and literally. This is based in selfishness and arrogance. On the other hand, true courage seeks to deal with the fear (an internal element) that can prevent one from dealing effectively with the difficult matters challenging us. It is an active rather than reactive agent. It seeks to master self and not others. True courage values people above things and understands that people can be influenced. It places God at the center of the universe and not the overwhelming issue, experience, or person—even one’s self.

What of the elder who bristled when I confronted his wife? He never apologized for the incident, and although our relationship thereafter was somewhat tenuous, he and his wife surprisingly showed up at a farewell party given by the church in honor of my service. They greeted me with firm handshakes, warm hugs, and genuine well-wishes. I was thoroughly shocked. I have thought about that occasion many times since then. I can’t help wondering if their respect for me had deepened because I exercised a little skill that I had learned along the way. ■

BUT HOW CAN A PERSON, WHO KNOWS THEY ACTUALLY STRUGGLE WITH A FEARFUL SPIRIT (AND SOMETIMES FAIL), SPEAK AND ACT WITH CONVICTION AND COURAGE?

like a flint amid the jeering of Baal’s pretentious prophets. This is what gave unswerving determination to three Hebrew boys to defy Nebuchadnezzar’s decree to pay homage to a statue, even if it meant death in a furnace. This is what ignited the apostles’ zeal to spread the good

inherited from parents; it is not created by external advantages; it is no necessary appendage of birth, wealth, talents, or station; it is the result of one’s own endeavors—the fruit and reward of good principles manifested in a course of virtuous and honorable action.”

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The environment

Created and sustained by whom?

Patrick A. Travis



Patrick A. Travis, D.D.S., is a chaplain at Florida Hospital in Orlando, Florida.

During the past thirty years across the globe, interest in environmental issues has been increasing. Author Charles Rubin notes that in 1955 there were no references in the *New York Times Index* under the term "environment." In 1965 there were two. In 1970 the first "Earth Day" was organized, along with 86 notations under the word "environment" in the *Times*. In 1972 the United Nations held a conference in Stockholm on the human environment. In 1992 we had the "Earth Summit" in Rio.¹ By 1998 we were seeing almost regular national evening news updates on "El Niño."

More recently environmental weather changes were being attributed to the "La Niña" effect as well as to "global warming." Everywhere, even in the churches, voices are crying out; for many the environment has become nothing short of a crusade. What are some of these voices, what are they saying, and how may Christians relate to this growing movement?

The Voices

In *The Green Crusade*, Charles Rubin lists the most significant early "populizers" within the environmental movement over the last thirty years such as Rachel Carson, Barry

Commoner, Paul Ehrlich, E.F. Schumacher, and the Club of Rome. The Club of Rome endorsed *The Limits to Growth* (1972), a book which was based on a "global computer model" analysis done at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This "model," which predicted that the earth would survive for perhaps another thirty years, was later shown to have flawed "system analysis."² Another significant early environmentalist was Lynn White, who in an essay written in 1967 ("The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis") blamed the monotheism of the Bible and man's biblically described central role of having dominion over nature as the primary cause for the present ecological exploitation of nature.³

Bouma-Prediger lists the "Eco-Theological Models" of Reuther and Sittler as important contributors in the present "greening" of the church. Rosemary Reuther was one of the first to mix Eco-theology and liberation or political theology as a single issue. She felt it was necessary to create a "link" between social justice and Christian ecology. Joseph Sittler was an early pioneer of "nature theology" and once wrote an article on "ecumenical ecology."⁴

With the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, political voices have multiplied. Virtually every nation has some policy structure designed to protect the environment. In the United States, most congressional and presidential candidates have a declared environmental policy as part of their candidacy and political platform. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) recently published *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*. This "Interfaith Partnership for the Environment" effort explores earth issues from the various faith traditions and touches on eco-justice, global warming, and other issues it considers linked to the health of the environment. Klaus Topfer of the UN Environment Program states, "We have entered a new age. An age where all of us will have to sign a new compact with our environment . . . and enter into the larger community of all living beings. A new sense of our communion with planet Earth must enter our minds."⁵ The blending of political and religious environmental voices is a global phenomenon. Discussion of the "redemption and rejuvenation" of the planet by "people of faith" is proliferating.

Other Voices

Another high-profile environmental voice is that of Al Gore, former Vice-President and author of *Earth in the Balance*.⁶ In his book Gore laments the fact that Christian theologians who have traditionally supported a liberal agenda such as the social gospel in the early 1900s, seem to be less enthusiastic about the environment even though, Gore insists, social justice "is inextricably linked in the scriptures with ecology . . . today social injustice and environmental problems can be seen everywhere."⁷

The entry of Pope John Paul II into the environmental movement became more conspicuous after he attended the gathering at Assisi. In 1986 at Assisi, the pope met with 150 religious leaders who corporately prayed for world peace and the restoration of the planet's environment. The pope said: "We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendent goal which he sets for us."⁸

Perhaps the pope's most significant environmental work came in 1990 in the publication of his paper written for the World Day of Peace titled "Peace With God the Creator, Peace With All Creation." Statement 6 of that document states, "The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related 'greenhouse effect' has now reached crisis proportions as consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. . . . The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands. . . . It is necessary that the entire human community—individuals states and international bodies—take seriously the responsibility that is theirs." Number 10 says: "The ecological cri-

sis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized."⁹

Today there is the "Eco-Theology" group consisting of persons from a cross-section of many traditional mainline churches. Codel (Coordination in Development) contains 40 Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox groups.¹⁰ There is the "Cosmic Christ" of Sittler and the "New Creation" group of Granberg-Michaels (based on 2 Cor. 5:17).

John De Boer's creation of an interdenominational effort, known as the

THE GROWTH OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS HAS BEEN AMAZING.

"Eco-Justice Task Force," is one of many other similar ecclesiastical organizations that have recently been formed. When the World Council of Churches (WCC) met in Vancouver in 1983, the adopted theme was "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation."¹¹ The Ecumenical Review (of WCC) reports that a resolution was adapted to "promote preservation of creation" at all levels. A different lifestyle was encouraged in relation to "wants and needs" so that "survival of the natural world can be assured." Along with other ethical issues that make up "new Sundays" as special days, it recommended that an "Ecological Responsibility Sunday" be added.¹²

Legitimate cautions

The growth of environmental movements within the church over

the past thirty years has been amazing. While there are many different "voices" they all seem to harmonize in the light of the need for immediate positive environmental action or "eco-justice" in the prevailing "global crisis."

It's important for Christians to understand, however, that "being for the environment" is not necessarily synonymous with being for God. Paul's description of the pagan preoccupation with nature (Romans 1:20-25) could be a legitimate challenge to some of the ecclesiastically oriented environmental organizations. Though Christians should have a healthy and balanced view of creation stewardship, many of the existing ecological movements deserve the focus of a healthy skepticism in at least three areas:

1. The tendency of addressing environmental issues on a purely naturalistic and scientific basis. Does humankind really have the ability to understand such a massive global environmental system, with all its innumerable fluctuations and variations? At the local level it is entirely consistent with the biblical worldview to support such concerns as the movement against the spread of toxic waste, but we need to be realistic enough when thinking globally to remember that "only a stall with no ox is perfectly clean."

2. Then there is the tendency of some ecclesiastical movements to tackle environmental issues on a purely political basis. It is difficult to maintain the integrity of a legitimate Christian worldview while working from a strictly political perspective.

3. There is the potential for the widespread abuse of inappropriate, intrusive power over virtually every aspect of human life when it comes to orchestrated attempts to "solve" this "global problem," particularly when the environmental issue becomes the sole concern of a given organization.

Consider some of the theological implications of many of the assertive

contemporary environmental voices. How do these assertions voices relate to the sovereignty of God and His covenant faithfulness to the human family (Gen. 8:22)? How do we understand today the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant as they relate to the weather? (Deut. 28:23, 24). How do we understand the bless-

right, there are times when the "political and cultural agenda is elevated to the status of the gospel . . . all such politicization is an act of implicit excommunication. But, in politicizing its message, the church is actually excommunicating itself!"¹³

Environmental awareness and reform on a global scale is a crucial

ation that is ultimately vital for long-term peace and prosperity.

We do not know the explicit unfolding of future events, but it is today our responsibility to preach the everlasting gospel, proclaiming that "our God reigns" (Isa. 52:7). In Christ, the Father has given to us "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:30, 31, NASB).

It is our responsibility to speak with a courageous voice in a world embracing an essentially evolutionary outlook. It is ours to speak with a true voice in a world undecided between "Baal" or the living Creator.

To worship the creature or the creation over the Creator is foreign to an authentic biblical faith. Our message is to "fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (Rev. 14:7). We look forward to the restoration that will begin when Jesus returns, when we expect that all of the blighted creation order will be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth.

"Turn to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth;

For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:22). ■

TO WHAT EXTENT AND IN WHICH WAYS DOES THE HUMAN COOPERATE WITH THE DIVINE?

ings and the mighty sovereign voice of God echoing over His creation as revealed in Psalms 29, 96, 104, 148 and Job 37:39? Are these expressions simply the articulation of a kind of mythical view of how God relates to His creation?

Affirmations of the Christian faith

Christian faith affirms that Christ actually did create and still maintains all things by His mighty voice (Col. 1:16, 17). To what extent and in which ways does the human cooperate with the Divine? Does God still bring the blessing of rain or the curse of the drying of the Euphrates, or are all such things simply the function of natural phenomena which humanity may increasingly manipulate at will?

In addition, are there political and religious interests and overtures in the environmental movements? Is the "eco-theology-justice wing" nothing but another expression of the "social gospel," dressed in the contemporary garb of "eco-justice"? All Christians should have compassion on the less fortunate and a deep sense of responsibility for God's creation, but that does not mean that we should automatically approve all the political movements designed to bring about social, economic, and ecological justice.

Peter Berger, notable church sociologist, states that no matter the political agenda of the religious left or

concern that is vitally important to be a part of. In fact, openness in this area offers Christians the opportunity, among other things, to spread the gospel. It may well be urged that Seventh-day Adventists, who have been and are so deeply committed to the "conservation" of both the soul and the physical body, should in all consistency also be profoundly concerned with the conservation of the magnificent gifts God has provided through all He has created and made for humankind; that is, the ecosystems of our planet. At the same time, however, Christians must resist blindly syncretizing religious belief with ecological purpose, merely for the sake of creating inter-religious peace and harmony, and considering exclusively the scientific, environmental, and political concerns that are involved. As with any other reform, the creative sovereignty of God must be judiciously brought to the center of the Christian approach to environmental reform.

Conclusion

There is no question that Christians have been called to be good stewards of their environment. We should care about our planet, the purity of its water and its air, and all the other aspects of its magnificent eco-systems. But even such a good can be taken further than it might be, or emphasized in an imbalanced manner. It is the Creator and not His cre-

1 Charles Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 6.

2 Ibid., 18, 26, 30, 53, 85, 155.

3 Robert Royal, *The Virgin and the Dynamo: Use and Abuse of Religion In Environmental Debates* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 34.

4 Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholar's Press, 1995), 12, 14.

5 Earth and Faith. United Nations Environment Programme (New York: 2000), 3.

6 Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

7 Ibid.

8 World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 27 October 1986, no. 5.

9 John Paul II. "Peace With God the Creator, Peace With All Creation," *World Day of Peace*, January 1, 1990.

10 Nancy G. Wright and Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 162.

11 Grandberg-Michaelson. 73-82.

12 *Ecumenical Review* (WCC), vol. 51, no. 4, October 1999.

13 John Neuhaus, *American Apostasy: The Triumph of "Other" Gospels*. Essay by Peter Berger, 12.

Tending to the stranger on the roadside

LARRY LAPIERRE



The older I get, the less willing I am to stop along a road, even a well-traveled one, to give a ride to a stranger. There have been too many stories of tragedy befalling people who offered a ride to someone who seemed to be in need. On the other hand, at least three times in my life I have been one of those strangers on the side of the road who needed help, and I was grateful every time that someone stopped to help me.

Nevertheless, my fear continues to this day to interfere with my natural desire to help someone in need. There was one time, however, when God intervened to help me to offer a ride when it was needed. It was in May of 1980, and I remember that only because I was completing my first year of seminary in Bangor, Maine and I had accepted a four week assignment to lead worship in two little remote towns in far eastern Maine known as Pembroke and Robinston.

The shortest route from Bangor to these two churches lay along a road so winding and bumpy that it was known as "The Airline." It was also 125 miles long. Because I was from Massachusetts, the idea of driving that far, except on a business trip or to see a long-lost relative, was beyond my experience. So I went to bed as early as possible, knowing that I needed a good night's sleep to be up early on Sunday morning so that I could arrive on time for worship. I was to find out, however, that I needed more than sleep to prepare for what I would have to deal with on my way to those churches the next morning. So the Lord sent a dream to help me.

In the dream I saw myself driving along a highway lined with evergreen trees and very little else. All of a sudden, an older man with a gray clergy shirt and wearing a suit and hat appeared alongside the road in the middle of

nowhere. Clearly, this man in my dream needed a ride because he was a long way from anywhere. That was the simple content of the dream.

The next morning I awoke, got up, and drove along "The Airline." I was about thirty miles into the country with no one else around when who should appear but the man in my dream wearing the gray clergy shirt, the suit, and the hat. I had just a few seconds to react, and I decided to listen, not to my fear, but to the dream. I pulled the car over to the side of the road and offered him a ride. He was very cautious and wanted to know who I was and where I was going. After he got into the car he explained to me that he was an itinerant minister from California who felt he had been called to travel to New Brunswick, Canada to lead an evangeli-

cal crusade of some kind. He told me that he had spent the night sleeping in a car in a junkyard just a short distance from where I found him alongside the road. That made me wonder just what kind of a person I had picked up. Worse yet, I was a little suspicious of his clergy credentials—a wallet-sized card, that he showed me. On the other hand, who was I to question someone whom the Lord seemed to want me to help along his journey.

We traveled another sixty miles along that forsaken stretch of highway before I had to turn off at a little town known as Alexander. The man got out of the car, wished me a good day and went on his way. I have never seen or heard about this man since, but I have often wondered who he was and what God meant for him to do. What is clear to me is that God meant for me to pick him up, despite our mutual uncertainties about each other, and bring him a little further along his journey. I have always assumed that God had something for him to do and all I needed to know was that I was supposed to help him along in that journey. ■

Larry LaPierre is chief of chaplain services at the Veterans' Hospital in White River Junction, Vermont.



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What causes fights?

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the people and movements of the past who have violated the beautiful communal mandates inherent in the message of Christ. Collectively speaking, it is each of us, with our own inherited and cultivated condescensions and skewed biases, who keep such things alive and active both in the broad conflicts of the world and even in the mundane, everyday disputes of our churches.

Jesus expressed the comprehensive earmark of genuine Christian discipleship and leadership when He said that "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" John 13:35 (NIV). And Paul said, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view . . . The old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:16, 17 NIV). ■

Letters

continued from page 3

clever crooks. It has well been said that 90 percent of the rascality in Massachusetts politics can be traced to Harvard men.

Let's have more such excellent articles!

—Arnold R. Lewis, *The United Methodist Church, Elk Grove, California.*

November 2000 issue

As Hans LaRondelle, Raoul Dederen, Hans Heinz, Roger Evans, and Will Eva questioned the assumptions of the Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, they spoke with clarity, unseen for a considerable time in our official publications, about the forensic, objective, synthetic, and legal nature of justification, distinguished from sanctification, as thought by Paul and the Reformers.

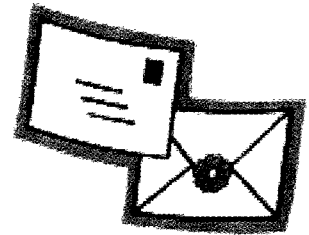
Those articles raised several questions: Has the Adventist Church, twenty years after Glacier View, finally matured enough to face the challenges of the gospel without preconceived prejudice? After providing an objective assessment of the current Catholic-Lutheran crisis over justification by faith, dare we now proceed by sweeping our own backyard, to provide a breath of fresh air so that the gospel, too often disfigured beyond recognition, may finally begin to shine in its intended beauty?

Consequently, we should ask again, how could the Church still maintain that our denominational views about the phased or stretched atonement, character-dependant investigative judgment, and the final justification of God's character through the sufficiently perfect obedience of God's people all of which make salvation dependant on the believers' performance complement the truth of the objective gospel?

Just as much as the "gospel had been lost in an increasingly complicated

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system of merits, good works, sacraments and penances" in the teachings of the Catholic Church, so it is compromised by the increasingly confusing systems of Adventist theology of salvation where individual sanctification frequently merges with the divine act of justification and where our eternal destiny was not decided on the cross as much as in the characters of believers, so that at the end of the day our honoring of Christ's finished work of salvation appears more like a lip service than a genuine belief.

Whether the gospel is infused into indulgences, sacraments, merits of the saints, or into the character shaping doctrines of investigative judgment, vindication of God's character through the lives of the believers and almost immaculate law keeping, it makes no difference. Both approaches are responsible for confusing the believer as to the method and place where salvation takes place, and as such they are an offense to the gospel—a serious deviation that undermines the fullness of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ.

The integrity of the Church and its mission in the days to come does not depend on how skilled it becomes in maneuvering through the challenges our distinctive beliefs will continue to face. Ultimately, the Church will be tested by its honesty toward the integrity of the gospel, for no church or a movement has ever been given commission other than to preach the gospel without strings attached. And how far will the gospel go in the Adventist Church this time depends on those ministers, evangelists, teachers, scholars, writers, editors, and lay members who treasure the gospel above the loyalty to any ideological concept. For all of us the first step should be to stop hinting at the gospel and start preaching it deliberately and without apology.

—Tihomir Kukolja, pastor, Melbourne, Australia.

During the past three years, as a graduate student at a secular seminary, I have found the articles in

Ministry to be both inspiration and intellectually challenging—a combination that is all too rare. Graduate students are usually presented with readings that either have a slightly anti-religious bias or with inspiration and devotional publications from church presses that lack the intellectual rigor that many young people are seeking. *Ministry* does an excellent job of maintaining a strong Christian focus while exploring interesting, as well as difficult topics.

I particularly enjoyed the November 2000 issue, which dealt with Luther's theological differences with the Catholic Church. I was a bit perplexed, however, that with all the discussion and praise of Luther's notion of justification by faith, no mention was made of the centrality of predestination in his thinking. For Luther, as for Calvin, belief in salvation by grace alone presupposed God's predestination of fallen humanity to either salvation or damnation. He believed that for human beings to contribute anything to their salvation was an attack on God's sovereignty. . . .

It is true that modern Protestant theology owes a great debt to the Protestant Reformers, but we must be careful of anachronistically transposing our theology back onto them. In my opinion, Luther's brand of justification by faith cannot be understood without reference to his fundamental belief in predestination.

—Gregory Dodds, doctoral candidate, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California.

Ministry welcomes letters from readers

Letters must be exclusive to *Ministry*, must be signed, and must include the writer's home address. Because of space limitations, published letters are subject to abridgment. Although we are unable to acknowledge letters we cannot publish, we value the views of those who send us their comments. Letters should be addressed to the Editor and may be hand-delivered, submitted via mail, or via our email address at norcottj@gc.adventist.org ■

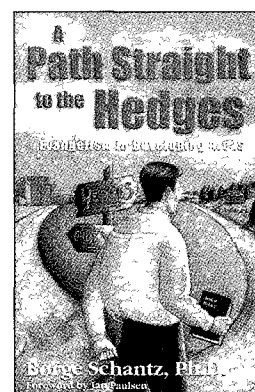
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New way to pray

I had believed that I prayed for my members every day. Without fail I would ask a hurried blessing for my congregates as I rushed to the office or to attend some urgent duty.

Then one day, as I analyzed my personal praying patterns, I realized I was primarily asking only that God would make my membership larger and my problems fewer. I also admit that I regularly threw in a few texts from the imprecatory Psalms, which fervently echoed David's petition for God to smite my enemies and to wreak the havoc I was so certain His vengeance promised.

In reality however, I was seeking short cuts to spiritual discipline. It wasn't that I refused to pray. Instead I neglected a deep interaction even as I convinced myself that I was a "praying pastor."

After all, isn't that what pastors do? We pray! Like a physician dispensing pills, we offer up prayers for any occasion—from opening worship services to opening a hospital room door, from committees to counseling sessions, from prayer meetings to potlucks, pastors pray publicly and often. Like most pastors, I prayed a dozen times or more in a typical day. All my contacts—from the couple struggling with marital problems to the Pathfinder drill team—received their share of the pastor's prayers.

Wanting to bring more depth and greater intentionality to my prayers, I devised a method for systematically praying for my members on a pre-planned schedule. I even published the schedule and invited my members to respond at the appointed date if they wished to inform their pastor's prayers.

I purposed that I would focus on a specific family even if they chose to

JAMES A. CRESS



ignore my offer to pray for particular issues. This process, alone, refocused my prayers and changed me—both spiritually and professionally—as I lifted the names and needs of my members before my heavenly Father. If my members mentioned a particular need, then my prayers grew even more focused on the day I "remembered" them. I came to understand experientially that when I pray for someone, I am not praying in order to change God's mind about that individual or their need; rather, God changes my mind about that person and their situation.

Recently, I have examined a remarkable tool for providing even more effective guidance to my prayers. Pastor's Confidential Prayer Box, offers a simple, beautifully-constructed, secure method by which members can alert their pastor to specific requests which, otherwise, might go unnoticed or unknown (see ad on next page).

Sam Martz, president of Exotic Wood, Inc., has presented a number of these boxes to active clergy. My Adventist pastoral colleague, R. P. Stafford, Nashville, writes, "This locked box has allowed my members to express thoughts and requests, which heretofore was not possible. I am

involved in Bible studies that originated in the prayer chest. I cannot envision ever pastoring a church without the benefit of this spiritual tool."

John D. Morgan, pastor of Houston's Sagemont church says, "I have never seen a tool more effective for ministry. In only three weeks I received over one hundred prayer requests. Many of our members have spoken to me personally as to how much they appreciate my sensitivity to their desire for confidentiality." The administrative assistant to Charles F. Stanley, pastor of Atlanta's First Baptist Church, says they receive requests from their prayer box daily.

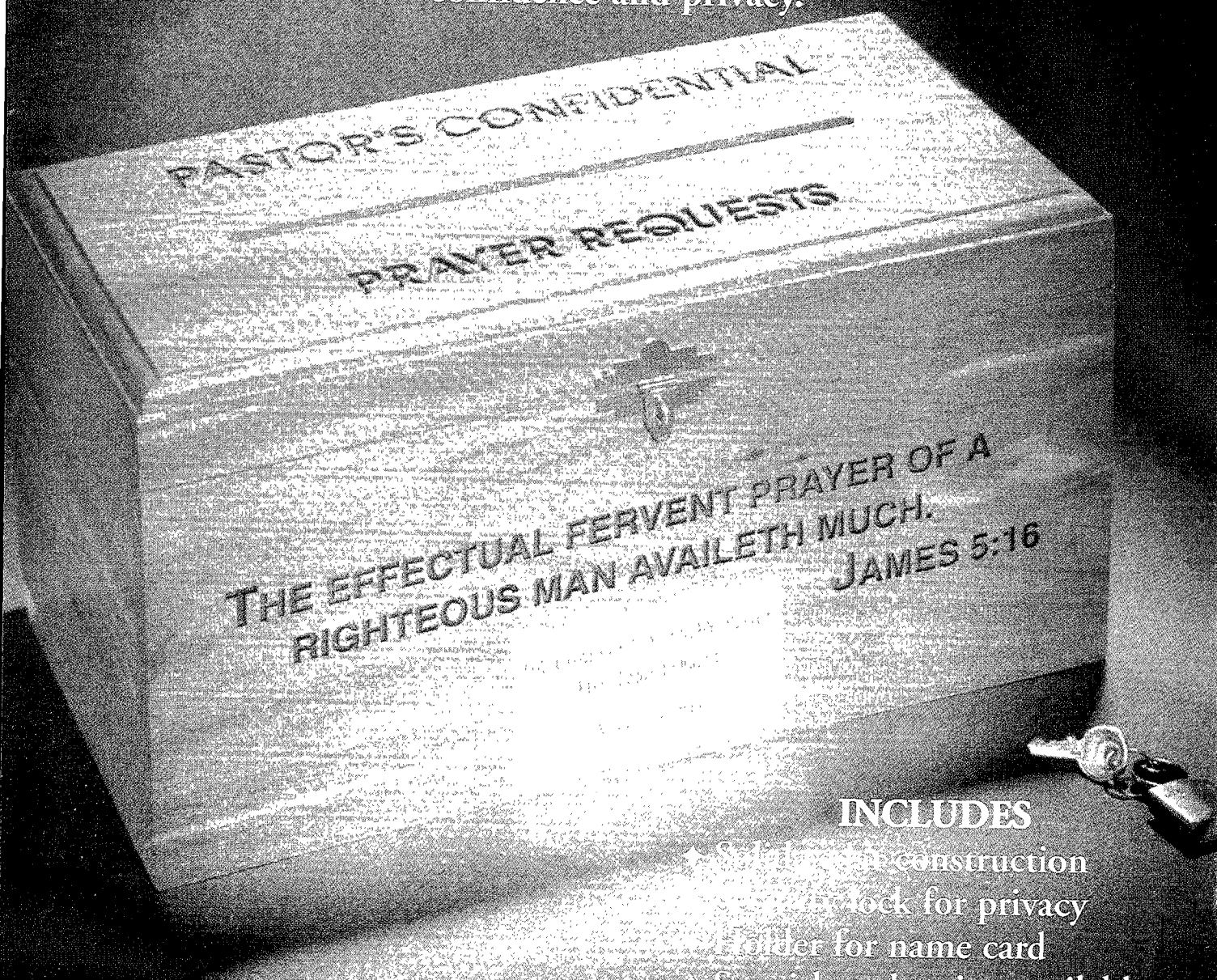
"Beyond your congregation, these prayer boxes can dramatically impact the wider community," says Terry Teykl, a Methodist pastor who places prayer boxes in businesses such as banks, stores, professional offices, and even bars. The most creative placement mounted a box where motorists could drop in requests from their cars. Teykl says, "strategically placed prayer boxes give God's address to people in need."

Clarence Phairas of the Pendleton Church of God, Anderson, Indiana, says his congregation has placed eight boxes around their small community. "While some locations do not generate many requests, you build spiritual relationships even from those who allow placement of the boxes. I told one business owner I was praying for her." He encourages participants to collect the requests from these various locations and give them to the intercessory prayer team.

I encourage you to try this new way to pray for your own ministry. I am convinced it will enhance your personal prayer life as well as the pastoral care you give your members. ■

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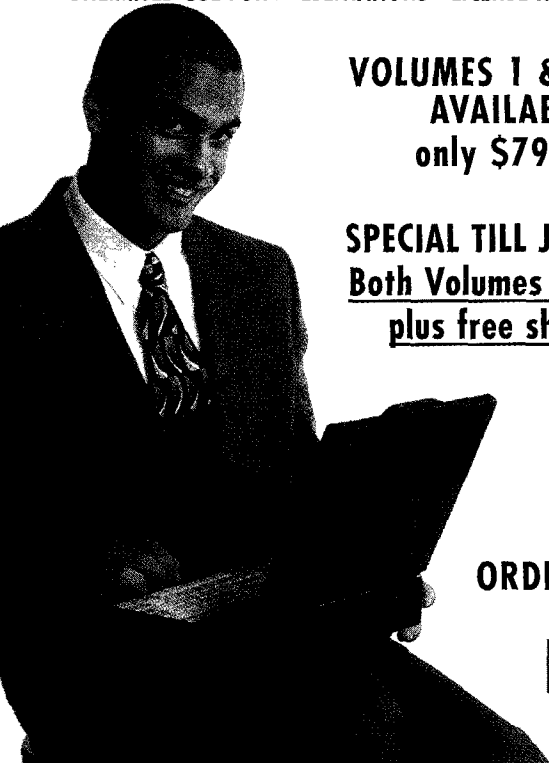
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