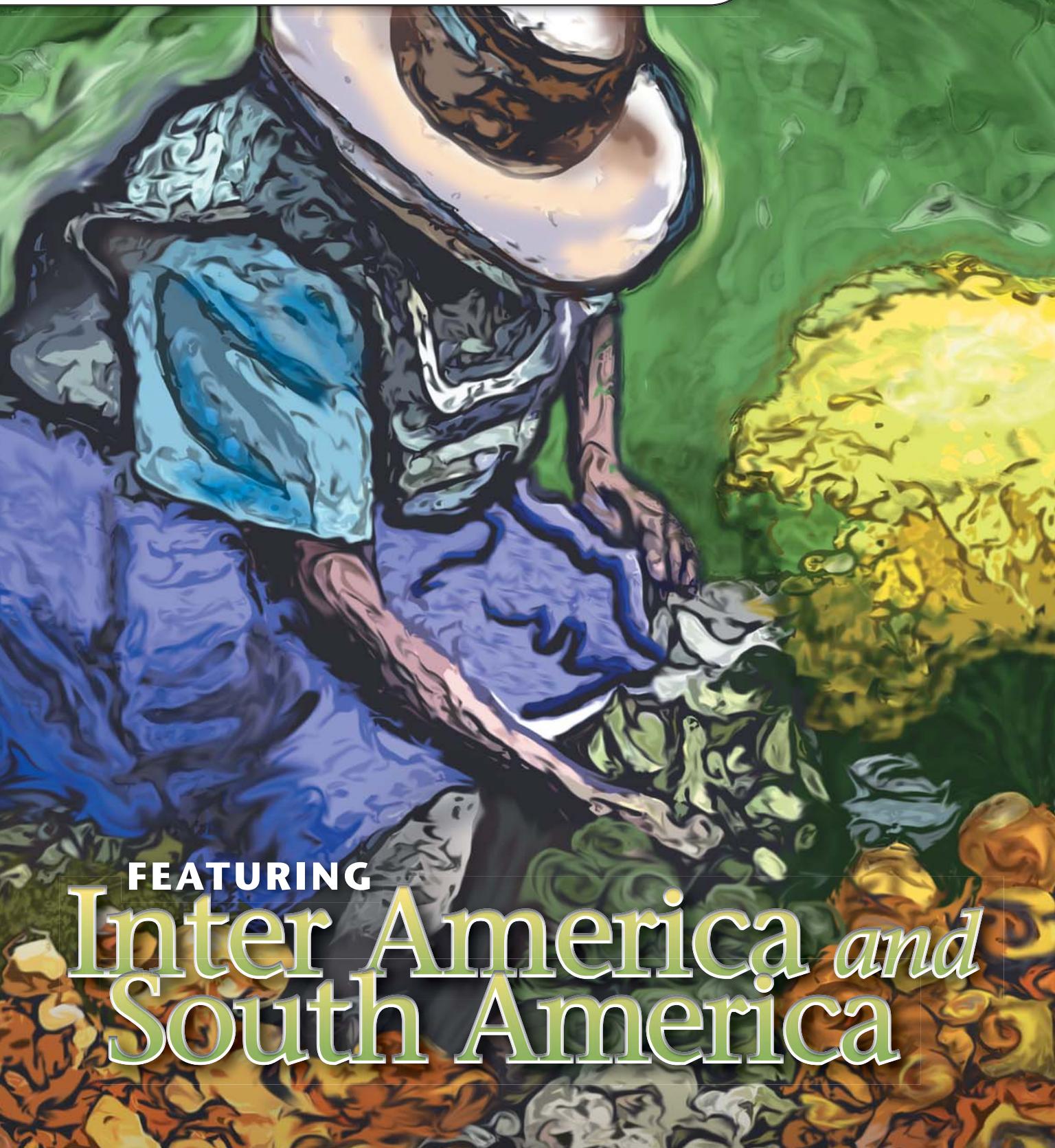


# MINISTRY®

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS  
OCTOBER 2008



FEATURING  
**Inter America and  
South America**

IN  
EVERY  
ISSUE

Letters  
**3**

Editorial  
**4**

Dateline  
**28**

Book Review  
**29**

Pastor's Pastor  
**30**

## 5 The Church in Inter and South America: An interview

*The division presidents of the Adventist Church in two divisions share their thoughts about God's work in their regions of the world.*

Nikolaus Satelmajer and Willie E. Hucks II

## 10 Murder or deserved death? Ministry under fire

*What is the message in the story of Nadab and Abihu for today's pastors?*

Efraín Velázquez II

## 13 An interview with George Brown

*A former division president shares valuable insights about leadership.*

Sandra Doran

## 17 Small groups in the Adventist Church in South America

*See how the power of small groups resulted in rapid church growth.*

Jolivê Chaves

## 20 Building a growing church: The South American experience

*How has membership grown in South America? What lessons can others learn from them?*

Alberto R. Timm

## 24 An interview with Alejandro Bullón

*A well-known evangelist talks about ministry in South America.*

Marcos De Benedicto

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# OUR READERS RESPOND...

## Pastors' spouses

**T**hanks to Ellie Gil for her heartfelt article ("Finding Purpose in a Multichurch District"—August 2008) about pastors' wives. As a pastor's wife, I deeply appreciated her sentiments and advice. There is so much emphasis on how pastors are called to a sacred ministry but very little to help and support young ministers' wives. I believe that every pastor's wife is equally called to ministry as is the pastor—and we have as many shades of expression in that call as there are individuals.

One thing I've learned the hard way is when it comes to getting involved in church as the pastor's wife, it's important not to just take the first job thrust upon you. If you're asked to do something that you're neither gifted at nor passionate about, consider carefully whether God is calling you to do it. Accepting a position too quickly can lead to burnout and frustration, or even resentment of ministry in general.

I have also discovered that when things get tough, or my husband the pastor is working through church conflict, it can be easy to start thinking of members as "those people."

But I have learned to call them "our people." And I do so because these are the people whom God has called my husband to shepherd and whom we are called to serve. Without them, we wouldn't have a reason to be here.

—Sarah K. Asaftei, Marietta, Georgia, United States

## Ministerial associations

**A**s someone who also recently transitioned from a post in church administration to the pastorate, I appreciate Jeff Scoggins's article titled "The Local Ministerial Alliance: Strengthened by Differences" (August 2008). Shortly before I made this transition, a mentor shared with me that this was an important area of support, and that I should seek to become involved with my local ministerial alliance.

Right from the first day, I got involved with our local ministerial alliance—it has been a source of tremendous encouragement. In addition to our monthly

meetings, I've made friends with whom I have met outside of our regular meetings. Some of the best advice that I've been given about ministry has come from these friends. Recently, as I dealt with a potentially explosive situation, one of my ministerial friends gave me practical advice from his ministry that saved me from making some pretty tragic mistakes! Another colleague is an expert in preaching, and because we worship on different days, we have used this to our advantage so that he can come to my church and constructively critique my preaching.

My involvement in the local ministerial alliance has also boosted the reputation of our church in the community. I was asked by its president if our church would host an Easter prayer service during the Passion Week. I wasn't sure what to expect, since this was our first time hosting a joint ministerial event. When I showed up to our own church, it was packed with people from our community. Soon thereafter, I was asked to give a short talk about the meaning of the Cross. People came up to me, expressing to me that they were so happy to know that Adventists believe in the death of Jesus Christ. As I ran errands over the next couple of weeks across town, I had numerous people come up to me and ask me if I was the Adventist pastor. When I replied "Yes," they told me how delighted they were to attend that prayer service and how they now know that Adventists are Christians.

—Michael Campbell, pastor, Montrose, Colorado, United States

## Evangelizing the world

**I** have appreciated Mark Finley's many years of tireless commitment to evangelism. As I reflect upon the Mark Finley interview ("Evangelism—The Heartbeat of the Church: An Interview With Mark Finley"—June 2008), it makes sense to use every avenue available to us, including advance technology to proclaim the message with which we've been entrusted. However, our reliance on technical resources should be secondary to the human resources within the church.

As I read the prophecies, it seems to me that it will not be so much technology that will finish the gospel work, but members of the church that are awakened through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has ordained each member to be a living demonstration of His saving power and truth. It is this manifestation of the Spirit that we need to be earnestly seeking. It is through this power that God will finish His work through His people. Technology will undoubtedly be a part of the mix, but must not be seen as a substitute for a people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

—Jim Reinking, email

## Biblical canon

While as a conservative Christian I appreciate John C. Peckham's article ("The Biblical Canon: Do We Have the Right Bible?"—June 2008) and efforts to frame the current debate over the canon in easily understood terminology, and while I found his arguments and description to be solid and disarmingly simple, I think that many of us in the conservative wing of Christianity like to think that the issues are simpler and the answers more easily arrived at than they really are. To be fair to the importance of the issue and to those who seriously are studying this very important topic, we need to acknowledge that simplistic formulations do a disservice to the Bible. In his article, he was gracious and positive and as thorough as he could be in a short space as he discussed the issues. I am more concerned about those who will read what he wrote and sigh contentedly that, yes, once again someone affirmed their position, and go on without carefully considering all sides of the discussion which is occurring today.

Many of us feel that the church—as it slid away from the simplicity of the gospel—made many and serious mistakes in its church councils. To affirm what those very councils, or others peopled by the same persons, decided about the canon is correct because they agree with our preconceptions, is at best naive.

*Continued on page 29*

# Learning from each other

In the history of *Ministry*, 1928 has become a very important year. The first issue of *Ministry* was published in January of that year. We are delighted that for 80 years we have been able to serve Seventh-day Adventist ministers; and since the 1970s, the journal has been made available to clergy of various denominations. The magazine has come a long way—the first issue was distributed to approximately 1,200 Seventh-day Adventist ministers in North America, while today more than 750,000 copies are annually printed in English and other language groups.

While we are happy to recognize that *Ministry* started 80 years ago, we've devoted this issue to the work of the church in Inter-America and South America. These two organizational units represent some 45 countries that start south of the United States and go as far south as Chile. With 1928 as a significant year for us, what did the church look like in 1928 in Inter and South America, and what does it look like today? In 1928, the total membership of the two divisions was just under 32,000. The total membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was about 285,000.<sup>1</sup> Now, the Inter-American and South American Divisions have a combined membership of nearly six million members.<sup>2</sup> These two geographic units of the church represent a very significant part of the world membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that now numbers more than 15 million.

Not only do we recognize the change in membership numbers as significant, but also the makeup of church workers. In 1928, nearly 40 percent of all of the missionaries that left North America were sent south of the border into Inter and South America.<sup>3</sup> Today, the picture has changed. Inter and South America send missionaries to other parts of the world.

As important as statistics seem, they do not tell the whole story. We hope that the articles in this issue of the journal will show to our readers around the world the quality of work, leadership, and writing that exists in these two

NIKOLAUS SATELMAIER



divisions. In this issue, you will find commentaries that deal with biblical topics, evangelism, leadership, church growth, and other aspects of the church work. All of the articles are written by individuals from those two divisions or deal with subjects from those two divisions.

Why should we take an interest in the work of the church in other parts of the world? For one, Seventh-day Adventists have always accepted the entire world as their mission field. That in itself is sufficient reason to share with the readers of *Ministry* what happens in other parts of the world. But there's another reason; it can be a great learning experience. I have traveled extensively in both of these divisions and I believe there are some specific things that we can learn from these two church units.

*Elders.* These two divisions give us some of the best examples of how to train, utilize, and empower church elders. It's all too easy to talk about the importance of church elders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But these two divisions have carefully trained these individuals, and thus they perform a very significant role in the growth and nurture of the church. I have, on several different occasions, addressed groups of elders when more than 500 elders have gathered for training. Also significant, the conferences treat the elders as co-laborers with pastors in many parts of these divisions. In several locations, the conferences brought together the pastors and the elders to spend days in prayer and training. That represents teamwork of the best kind.

*Small groups.* For a number of years throughout the Seventh-day Adventist Church, attention has been focused

on the function of small groups in congregations. I have noticed that many parts of the world have tried to implement the concept with varied success. I believe somewhat of a misunderstanding exists on the part of many that in these two divisions, baptisms always result from meetings. Yes, they have large meetings, but I have noticed that much of the growth comes from the work of the small groups. Many parts of the world have recognized this, and as a result, they have sent individuals to various countries in these two divisions to observe firsthand how small groups function.

*Focus.* I have been impressed with the focus evident in these two divisions. The focus seems to be more on the implementation of the mission of the church rather than prolonged discussion as to what is the mission of the church. Of course, we need to ask ourselves to define the mission of the church; but the best definition will not accomplish the mission. It seems to me that these two divisions are good examples of going beyond the discussion of the theory into the implementation of the mission of the church.

In this second issue, we showcase a geographic area of the world, and in future *Ministry* publications, we plan to feature all areas of the world. In all instances, we do it for the purpose of sharing among ourselves what our brothers and sisters are doing in other parts of the world and then asking ourselves what blessing we can gain by learning from our church in other parts of the world. M

1 1928 *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, DC, 1928.

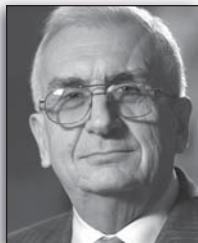
2 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2008*, Review and Herald Publishing Association: Hagerstown, MD, 2008.

3 *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 106, no. 4, Washington DC, January 24, 1929.

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# The Church in Inter and South America: An interview

Nikolaus Satelmajer  
and Willie E. Hucks II



Nikolaus Satelmajer,  
DMin, is editor  
of Ministry.



Willie E. Hucks II,  
DMin, is associate  
editor of Ministry.

Photos by:  
John Feezer

*Editor's note: The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in order to care for its worldwide mission, has 13 world administrative regions. Two of these regions, known as the Inter-American Division and South American Division, are among the fastest growing areas in the world. The editors interviewed the leaders from these divisions, Israel Leito and Erton Köhler, respectively, and spoke about a wide range of issues.*

**Nikolaus Satelmajer (NS):** Pastor Leito, what is your vision for the church for the next five to ten years?

**Israel Leito (IL):** We see the church in Inter-America as strong and growing—a church that's growing spiritually, numerically, and internationally; a church that's becoming more and more identified with the basic culture of Adventism. Most of our believers come from and live in a Catholic environment. They come to our church, know our doctrines, but their worldviews are still, in many instances, what they grew up with. But the worldview and the culture of the Adventist Church are quite distinct, and our people today as part of their maturing process are beginning to understand the difference.

We also anticipate a strong financial growth. The faithfulness of the members in stewardship is reflected in the strong economic trends of the church in our area. We also envision a mature church that can deal with its own challenges and manage them in such a way that those

challenges do not become a crisis for the higher organizations. Our members are keen on being involved in the communities where they live, to take the church to the community, and let the community know their life and faith. In places like Jamaica, for instance, this is achieved in very significant ways. For instance, in most places, the Seventh-day Adventist pastor is considered the parish priest. If there is a burial or a wedding, Adventist pastors are often invited to participate. As Pastor Jan Paulsen, the General Conference president, once said, "Let people disagree with our doctrines, but never let them say that we are not good people." This is what we're stressing.

**NS:** Brother Köhler, how do you see the church in your area—in South America?

**Erton Köhler (EK):** Two key words describe our vision for the church in South America: *communion* and *mission*. Our dream is to grow in quality and quantity. Our dream is to lead the church into a closer relationship with God and as a result to lead the people to witness about that relationship. Communion and mission will achieve these results.

We are also working to strengthen our unity. South America has multiple countries with divergent cultures. Within a single country, such as Brazil, we have variant cultures. As we work to maintain spiritual unity, we are challenged to develop integrated programs that provide training and opportunities to church members to participate in administrative issues and strengthen the representation from each area.

Our goal is to involve each member in the mission of the church. At present in South America, it takes twelve members to bring one person to Jesus. We are trying to improve this ratio to one member bringing one person. That's our goal. We believe that the mission of the church belongs to every church member. The pastor's function: to train, equip, and motivate members to accomplish this dream.

In addition, we have three targets: First, we want to see the church doing some impact projects. The church expects quality leadership from pastors and administrators. Such impacting projects can continually keep the church challenged. Second, we want to involve more youth in ministry. We need to build a new generation who are more connected with the church and its mission. Third, we want to build a receptive church, more open to accept those who come. We want to attract people and give them the feeling that they belong to a spiritual family.

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**Willie Hucks (WH):** *The church is known for its growth in Inter-America and South America. What are the reasons for growth in these regions?*

**IL:** I don't know if the reasons are similar, but to start with, most of our people in Inter-America believe in the church. The church is not something foreign to them in the sense that it's something they go to on Sabbath. The church is life. And then there is the trust of the members in the leading of the Lord through His earthly leaders. Therefore we, as leaders, are helping our pastors to understand that church growth depends on our attitude towards the church. Another strong reason is the self-understanding of pastors in our field. They view themselves as coaches. And as coaches, pastors allow the church to be the church and not one's private property. Last year I conducted an evangelistic series in a remote area in south Mexico. I found that the district had over twenty congregations with one pastor. I saw a district working and growing. The secret is the involvement of laity. They are involved in everything.

**EK:** Our situation in South America is similar. We have a dynamic church base in our members. Their ownership and leadership role is vital to the growth and stability of the church. The church board plays a fundamental role in the mission of the church. We have pastors with large districts, ranging from one church to as many as eighty to ninety churches and companies. This is a challenge but also a blessing. I can summarize church growth in South America in two words: *focus* and *unity*. Two more things are very important for us. First, spiritual growth. We emphasize intercessory prayer and integrated Bible study. Second, small groups. Through the small group, church members feel well cared for. As a result, they are better mobilized and motivated for outreach.

**NS:** *Working at the General Conference world headquarters, we have the opportunity to observe the church worldwide. There's no question in my mind that the elders play an exceptionally significant role*

*in your two fields. Tell us how you view the role of the elders and what we can learn from the function of elders.*

**EK:** We have about twenty thousand churches in South America, but only about three thousand pastors. Each Sabbath about seventeen thousand church pulpits are filled by lay people. They not only preach, but they are also involved in the administration of the church. The ministry of elders is a priority in our field. We are working in different ways to provide recognition to those involved in this ministry and acknowledge their value to the church. We have a magazine addressed especially for elders, and provide *Elder's Digest* for them. We are committed to motivate, equip, and empower elders in our churches.

**IL:** We, too, rely heavily on our church elders. Were it not for them, we couldn't cope. We believe in motivation and in many, if not all of our unions, the church administration has gone so far as to allow church elders to baptize. So with that kind of motivation, the elders feel that they are not working for us, they are working for their church, and this keeps them going.

**EK:** In South America, sometimes we allow the elders to enter the baptismal waters to be with those candidates.

**WH:** *Looking at your areas of ministry, what are the challenges that you face in Inter-America and South America?*

**IL:** One of the main challenges we have, ironically, is the speed of our growth. We're growing so fast that our acquisition of new pastors is not keeping pace with growth. The problem is not due to lack of money; but that pastors are not there to hire. Our schools are not producing pastors fast enough to handle our situation. A pastor, to be effective, should not be ministering to more than six hundred members. That means having more pastors, and here we're losing. The church in south Mexico, for instance, last year hired all the pastors that their university produces. They then

went to Montemorelos University and hired all the pastors from the other three unions that didn't get a call, and still they needed more. A second challenge we have is very disconcerting to us: throughout our field, we have unfinished church buildings—buildings with no windows or doors and buildings that are mere shacks. We also have communities that do not allow the building of too many churches.

A third challenge is the role of members in church governance. We are committed to empower our elders and other lay people, but we must make sure that the notion is not there that they are a balancing force for the conference.

**EK:** In South America, our biggest challenge is to involve each church member in mission. This involves pastors working with church members as individuals and as congregations as a whole. We know that pastors have numerous functions, and in the midst of it all, it's easy to lose the focus of the mission. We need to help pastors perform a balanced ministry.

Another challenge is to make sure that the number of pastors, churches, and districts keeps up with the enormous growth that is taking place. Yet another challenge is to retain the members we baptize. While we should have large front doors to the church, we must make sure that the small back door of the church is shut. The small group ministry, we are finding out, is one way to address the problem.

Last but not least, we need to give more support to our pastors. Our pastors are often stressed, and their families are under a lot of pressure.

**IL:** May I add something to what Pastor Köhler mentioned on the importance of quality preaching? We have independent preachers who come from outside our field. They have formed their own brand of Adventism, and they come back to preach that. Those people are becoming very popular. Our pastors tell us, "Do something! Prohibit them from coming." My response is, "I can't prohibit them from coming. But what I can do is help you to take away the need for our members to be attracted to them."

Improve your preaching and we won't have a need for them."

**WH:** A little earlier you touched on the importance of small groups in the churches. Could you elaborate more?

**IL:** In Inter-America, especially in Colombia, Venezuela, and the three Central American fields, small groups have really taken off. In other areas, they don't see the use for small groups. It becomes an issue for the church because the members don't want to leave their congregation, but in these five unions, what we have achieved is to let the members feel that the small groups are small congregations. They become very effective in keeping the members together. It is not only the core of elders in the church who are leading, but those leaders of small groups become potential elders because they are in charge of spiritual life, the social life, and everything church related in that small group.

**EK:** In South America, we have around sixty-five thousand small groups, and

they are important for several reasons. First, they help us retain church members. The new members come in and become part of a small group, and they do not leave. Our experience shows that many who left the church have done so not because of any problem with our doctrines but because they were not involved in the church, and they didn't feel like they belonged. Second, the small group helps us involve members in church life and activities. If I present one special project to a church with five hundred members, maybe that project will not go so far. But if I present the same special project to a group of twelve people, they will get involved. Third, when we work in small groups, we involve them in the church's mission. Fourth, small groups give special values and recognition for members. In a large church, sometimes one member is only one more among many members, but



Erton Köhler

in a small group, each member feels personal recognition of their value as a person, as a member. Lastly, small groups provide the best avenue for preparing leaders. Many church members may not be able to lead a church with three hundred members, but they are motivated to lead out in a group of twelve people.

There is a further reason for small groups. Many may not wish to talk about

A photograph showing the back of a man in a dark suit and tie, standing at a podium and gesturing with his hands as if speaking to an audience. The background is dark with some blue lighting.

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Israel Leito

it, but I do believe in it strongly. Small groups prepare people for the end of the age. In the last days, a situation may arise when the church may not be open or may not openly perform its functions. We may not have anymore pastors or church buildings. We are going to live as a small group of the church. I believe that this awakening that the church around the world has about small groups is God's preparation for His people for the end of time.

**NS:** *We're all ministers sitting around this table. We've done different things in our lives. You have specific roles now, you're both division presidents. How does your*

*work impact your spiritual life?*

**IL:** Let me start by telling you a story that happened to me as a student. We had a terrific theology teacher, a master teacher, and he was called to become a conference president. I remember in a private conversation with him that I told him it's too bad because you may let this gift of preaching slip. Administrators don't preach well. And because

I was aware of that then, I have made it my determination not to lose the edge of being a pastor, a preacher, to feed God's people.

This is not only in theory, but it's very much real to me—in living the life of a minister in front of God's people, in my behavior, in my way of portraying Christ's love, and in my relationship with the Lord. Very early on in my ministry, my wife and I discussed this. My wife has never allowed me to forget that. Whenever she sees that I didn't get up to read my Bible, she says to me, "You didn't study your Bible today." I appreciate that. I feel very happy when I feel that the Lord is near me. We can go back and take actions in

committee, and we decide things, and then we can say, "You know, truly the Lord has led in this."

I recognize the Lord in my life on a daily basis. Not only when I'm standing there in front of thousands of people, but privately I want to keep this relationship with my God. I feel accountable to Him in everything I do. Therefore, I pray, and I ask my brothers and sisters and everybody to pray for me, for me not to lose that edge of being close to the Lord, for me to reflect His love in my life so that I can share that love with others. We can become very administrativelike and forget that we have to be Christlike and reflect the love of Jesus.

**EK:** At thirty-eight years of age I was elected to become the president of the Adventist Church in South America. I never worked as a conference president or union president. When the church elected me for this function, I felt like a flea, so small because I was young and because I had not enough experience. That led me to depend more on God's direction. The South American Division has a lot of challenges: big projects and big problems. I pray every day to God, asking Him for wisdom because I want [to make] only the decisions that God wants for His church. Every day I have the feeling that I need to be more of a pastor than an administrator; but to achieve this, I need God's direction in my life. As a pastor or a Christian, I have my personal devotion with God, but today I spend more time than I spent in the past. When I lead out in an administrative committee, I spend more time praying, asking God for wisdom. I realize that I need to depend more on God's direction, power, and wisdom. And that is the difference that my devotional life has made.

**WH:** *Thank you both for what you have shared with our readers. May God continually bless your ministries and your families. □*

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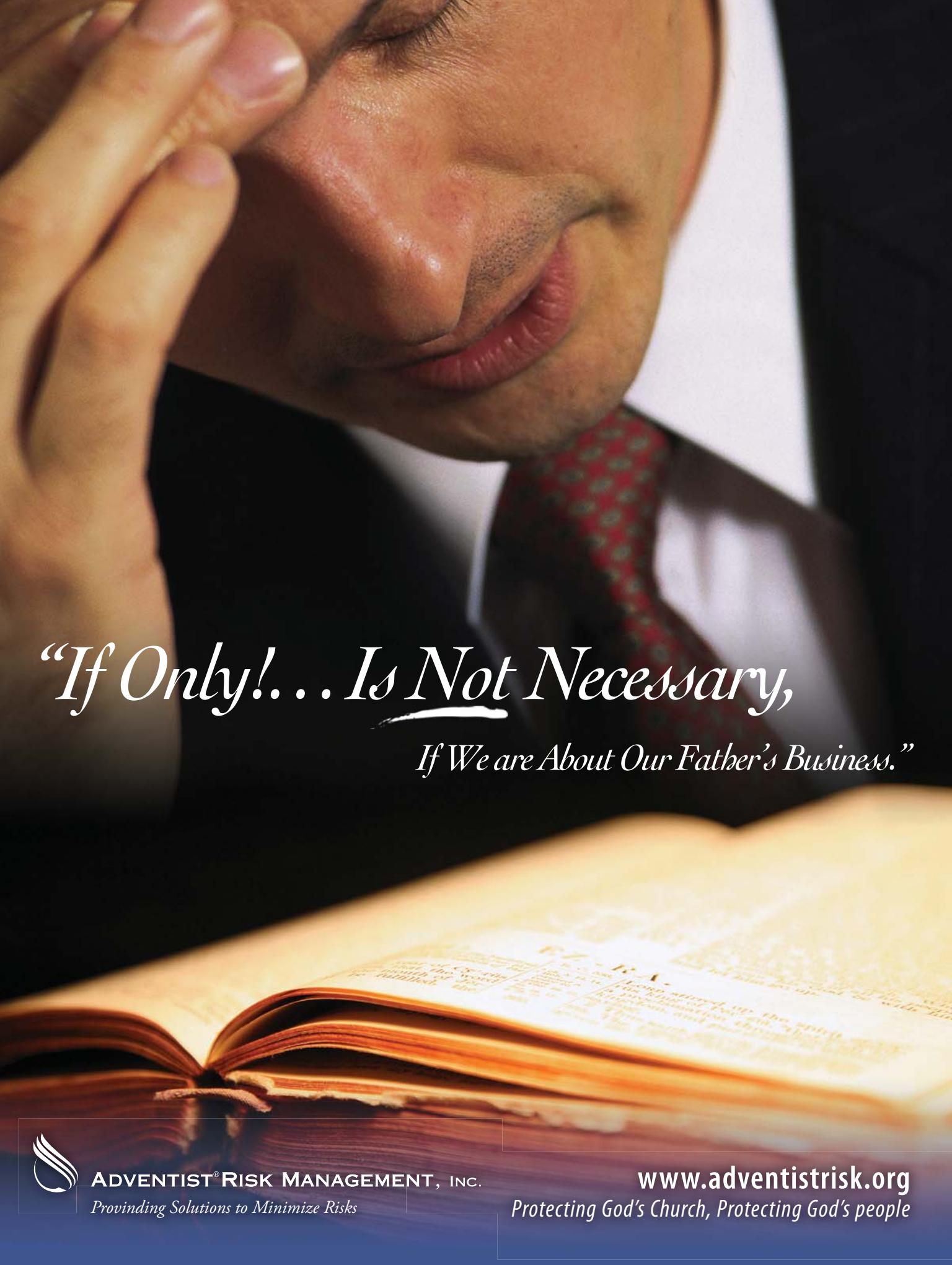
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# Murder or deserved death? Ministry under fire

Efraín Velázquez II



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*"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD" (Leviticus 10:1, 2, NIV).*

**L**eviticus 10:1, 2 describes two promising young priests of Israel being struck dead by God before the multitude. Nadab and Abihu were killed by fire shortly after being anointed as priests.

**Why?** Readers have speculated for millennia about the reasons for their deaths. This is the essence of theodicy<sup>1</sup>—the perennial questions over justice and death.

The story of Nadab and Abihu was known by the Judeans who were listening to Malachi in the fifth century B.C.<sup>2</sup> They identify themselves with the story because they also had recently returned from living in a foreign land but with a less glorious “exodus.” They had inaugurated a sanctuary, but without any of the fireworks that inaugurated the first one, and they had irreverent ministers who had not been struck dead as were Nadab and Abihu.

Thus, readers of the story of Nadab and Abihu in the early fifth century B.C. had questions about the justice of Yahweh (see Mal. 2:17).<sup>3</sup> Malachi, in response, presents a “dialogue” between Yahweh and the Judeans. I suggest that Malachi had Leviticus in mind when he proclaimed his oracles.<sup>4</sup> Malachi deals with holiness in the context

of theodicy and tries to warn his people to be ready for the eschatological Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

## Nadab and Abihu

Nadab and Abihu are main characters in two of the four narrative passages of Leviticus. Nadab and Abihu were supposed to be familiar with the holy. They went up to Sinai with the 70 elders (Exod. 24:1), they had the privilege of seeing the wonders of the Exodus (Exod. 13; 14), and even stood in the presence of Yahweh (Exod. 24:9–11). In contrast, the Judeans who had returned to the land had seen no such miracles or wonders. Some in Malachi’s audience had experienced the “second Exodus,” but that was nothing like the first and, now, they were worshiping in a less than glorious temple that had no supernatural demonstrations when inaugurated. Perhaps, for these reasons, they saw no reason to be careful in the cult of Yahweh, and Malachi thunders against them for their shoddy religious practices (e.g., Mal. 1:6–10).

## Why did Nadab and Abihu die?

In the eyes of many of Malachi’s contemporaries, the death of Nadab and Abihu was probably murder. The priests of Malachi’s day were doing worse cultic practices and, because no fire was coming down from heaven or elsewhere, the people were being irreverent in their worship to Yahweh as well.

So, why the “murder” of these two priests? In the Judeans’ experience, Yahweh does not seem to be so concerned with the details of the cult. The Judeans have even suggested that “Everyone who does evil / Is good in the sight of the LORD, / And He delights in them” (Mal. 2:17, NKJV; cf. Ps. 73; Hab. 1; 2). This idea was also coming from the lips of priests! However, Malachi echoes a solemn call and warning about the importance of holiness.

Nadab and Abihu died due to an improper relationship with the holy. The author of Leviticus states that they offered strange fire before the LORD” (10:1, KJV). The book of Numbers also points to the same reason for the tragedy (see 3:4; 26:61).

Indeed, the Bible describes Nadab and Abihu acting without any command given to them. They go forward to perform worship on their own initiative, without a clear order from Yahweh. There are clear commands for the temple cult given to Moses (Num. 8:2) and Aaron (9:2), which contrast with the defiance of Nadab and Abihu (10:1). The elderly brothers were ordered to act with authorization, while the two young brothers acted without it.

What about the “censers” that they used to bring the “fire”? Archaeologists have found pans of different styles and shapes that have been associated with cultic activities.<sup>5</sup> In Leviticus 10:1, the term is translated as “snuff dishes” or “trays,” which could refer to just a utilitarian pan or a more sophisticated ritual vessel. The Pentateuch mentions items used in the Israelite tabernacle (e.g., Exod. 25:38; 37:23; Num. 4:9) that were mainly for moving coals and removing ashes rather than for ritual activity.

Some of the pans found in the ancient Near East are in the shape of hands, others are of zoomorphic forms, while some are just plain shovels. Iconographical representations in seals, paintings, and carvings provide more variety to the possibilities of the shapes. However, not all decorated fire pans have to be connected with ritual activities; they can simply be examples of human creativity for daily use. Moreover, decoration on the pans was not necessarily a problem. The extreme ban of images by certain contemporary groups that follow Judaism should not be written into biblical history. The Israelite sanctuary cannot be classified as without any imagery as there was a variety of representations of nature in the Yahwistic tabernacle. Nevertheless, an offensive fire pan that was connected to other deities or a rival worship could have been reason enough to deserve punishment, for that was considered blasphemous. Even a simple fire pan that had not been consecrated for ritual use, thus classified as “holy,” could have been a reason to reject the “fire” or the incense on it. On the other hand, in no account of this event in the Hebrew Bible is there an emphasis on the fire pans; the problem was “unauthorized coals,” not “unauthorized pans.”

The origin of the fire could have been the problem. The word translated as “fire” is not specific. One of the ways that fire was brought from one place to another in antiquity was in the form of burning charcoals. The problem with the coals used by Nadab and Abihu could have been that they had not brought the coals from the fire that Yahweh had just ignited on the altar (Leviticus 16:12). “Fire” here is derived from a word

translated as “strange” but had the more precise meaning of “unfit” or “improper.” The text points as the major problem the source of the fire; they did not use the holy fire. They did not differentiate between the common and the holy.

### **Textual parallels between Leviticus and Malachi**

Whatever the specific reasons for their deaths, Malachi clearly had in mind Leviticus when he proclaimed his oracles. Malachi invites his audience, especially the clergy, to remember the Pentateuch (4:4). The story of Nadab and Abihu, central to the book of Leviticus, is echoed in Malachi, who focuses on the unfaithful priesthood of his time.

Malachi describes the priests offering blind, lame, and sick animals for sacrifice (1:8; cf. Lev. 22:19, 20). The priests, the ones who were supposed to inspect the animals, were guilty of permitting these defective animals to be sacrificed.<sup>6</sup> J. Berquist notes that “Malachi 1:6–2:9 expressed grave concerns about the current status of the priest’s sacrifices and offerings and condemned them harshly before calling them to a renewed commitment for their vital task.”<sup>7</sup> Malachi warns the priests and the Judeans that they will suffer a fate similar to Nadab and Abihu.

Several threads in Malachi’s oracles link it to Leviticus. Structured around a “dialogue” between Yahweh and the Judeans, the disputation ends with the writing of a book of memories (Mal. 3:16), which is a recurring theme in the Pentateuch (Exod. 12:14; 13:9; 17:14; 28:12, 29; 30:16; 39:7; Lev. 23:24; Num. 5:15, 18; 10:10; 17:5; 31:54). Moreover, there is an expectation of the great day (Mal. 4:5), which will come and that “functions as both warning and comfort, depending upon what one has learned from this story.”<sup>8</sup>

The theme of the fire, so closely related in the Pentateuch to Yahweh’s appearances (i.e., Exod. 3:2; Lev. 10:6), is followed in Malachi. The fire can reveal Yahweh’s presence or judgment. His fire purifies, as in Leviticus 9:24. On the other hand, Malachi refers to the imagery of fire when he warns of a coming judgment (4:1). In that context, the wicked are reduced to ashes and end up under the

feet of the spared (4:3), as in Leviticus 10:1 when Nadab and Abihu were consumed. In Leviticus, there are detailed instructions about the disposal of the ashes (e.g., 6:11), including the disposal of the burned remains of Nadab and Abihu (10:5; cf. 4:12). This description closely relates to the disposal of dung outside the camp mentioned in Malachi’s indictment of the priests (Mal. 2:3; see above).

The oracles of Malachi reveal concern about the proper worship of Yahweh in post-exilic Judah. There are several allusions to different aspects of worship: the altar (1:7, 10; 2:13), the fire that was kindled (1:10), and the incense (1:11). These are all linguistic echoes of Nadab and Abihu. Moreover, Malachi emphasizes that Yahweh must be honored (Mal. 1:6; cf. Lev. 10:3). In the eyes of Malachi, the priests dishonored Yahweh by accepting sacrifices not in accordance with the traditions on holiness (see Lev. 22:17–25).<sup>9</sup> Malachi emphasizes honor in the context of worship, and the priests have dishonored the Deity (e.g., Mal. 1:6). Honor and fear are inseparable (Lev. 10:3).

The author of Leviticus inspires the fear of the Lord with the story of Nadab and Abihu. Malachi also stresses several times that Yahweh must be feared (1:14; 2:5; 3:5, 16). However, the base of the relationship between Yahweh and His people is the love that He declares at the beginning of the book: “ ‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD” (1:2), and ending with the tender “ ‘They will be my people,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘On the day when I act, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient and dutiful child’ ” (3:17). The questions of theodicy will be totally answered then as “ ‘Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not’ ” (3:18).

### **Ministry under fire**

The Judeans should recognize that they are in a process of purification with the ministry under fire. They are becoming holy in order to serve a Holy God. The ministers, the descendants of Levi, have a covenant to fulfill. Malachi has some of the tenderest invitations of the Hebrew Bible from Yahweh to His people.

Yet Yahweh expects proper worship. Proper worship is not synonymous with legalism. Wellhausen presented Yahwism after the Exile as institutionalized and very propositional,<sup>10</sup> with the assumption that the second temple religion was separate from daily life. Some tend to contrast the God of the Old Testament with Jesus in the New Testament. However, the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and the parables of Jesus of Nazareth cast doubt on that idea. Yahweh expects a sincere heart, not just one concerned with the mechanics of ritual activity.

"So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:2, NIV).

Yes, fire fell from God. In Malachi there is the expectation that more fire will come, this time on the ones who have not experienced holiness because some have not been purged by the removal of their iniquities.

The message is clear: clergy that fails to differentiate the common from the holy will suffer dire consequences. The fate of Nadab and Abihu was not murder, but a deserved death; and all who follow their path will experience similar results. Their action of approaching without a clear order, and the fact that they presented other fire that was not sanctified, revealed their arrogance. Many others will be eradicated as they experience the retribution of their actions. However, the invitation still remains open: " 'Return to me, and I will return to you'" (Malachi 3:7, NIV). ▀

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Gottfried Leibniz in the eighteenth century, coined the term "theodicy" when he dealt with the issue of a powerful God that allowed the existence of evil. (See J. Crenshaw, *Theodicy in the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 17). J. Nogalski suggests that theodicy is at the center of the "Book of the Twelve," being Malachi at the climax of the discussion of the problem of evil, justice, and retribution ("Reading the Book of the Twelve Theologically: The Twelve as Corpus: Interpreting Unity and Discord," *Interpretation* 61 no. 2 [April 2007]: 125–136; on Malachi, see pages 134, 135).

Nevertheless, the proposal that the book of the twelve, or even that the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus are the fruit of one pen or several redactors cannot be properly sustained (against this see P. L. Redditt, "Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi," *Interpretation* 61 no. 2 [April 2007]: 184–197). Redditt recognizes the theme of theodicy in the Haggai-Zechariah-

Malachi corpus (on Malachi, see pages 187, 191–193).

A full exposition of theodicy with a high view of Scripture can be found in R. Gane's work *Cult and Character* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), which explains theodicy in terms of the Yahwistic ritual. He deals with the experience of Nadab and Abihu in connection with the Yom Kippur as part of the two-stage process where impurities are removed from the people and then from the tabernacle. The question over the justice of God is answered in terms of the balance between mercy and justice.

- 2 On the suggestion that the Pentateuch was written during the Persian period, see E. Velazquez, "An Archaeological Reading of Malachi" (PhD diss. Andrews University, 2008), 212, 238, 239; cf. J. L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 138.
- 3 Issues about literacy in ancient Israel are outside the scope of this work. Listeners and/or readers were the ones that were familiar with the ancient traditions.

4 Not precisely a Midrash as the genre later evolved, but it shares some characteristics of the commentaries that later rabbis did on the Torah.

- 5 L. F. DeVries, "Cult Stands: A Bewildering Variety of Shapes and Sizes," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13 (1987); 4; E. Stern, "Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27 (2001): 3.

6 The role of the priests was central in Yahwistic worship, and Malachi appears to be disappointed with the performance of the religious professionals of his day. Malachi gives a negative assessment of the fifth-century Jerusalemitic priesthood. The worship that was taking place in Jerusalem's temple was not in accordance with Yahwistic stipulations. Malachi denounces the priests for being responsible for the blatant desecration of the sacrificial system in the temple (e.g., 2:1–4). Berquist comments that Malachi "clearly deals with the current status of the priesthood" of Judah (*Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 94). Malachi presents the religious professionals of his day as ethically questionable in their private lives as well as their public office.

- 7 Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 95.

8 Redditt, "Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi," 136.

- 9 Another theme that can be developed extensively is the covenant (see Velazquez "An Archaeological Reading"). Malachi alludes to a covenant that Yahweh had established with Levi (Mal. 2:4, 8). Berquist (*Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 98) notes that "even though the Hebrew Bible records no covenant with Levi known by that name, Moses' blessing of Levi contains several parallels of note (Deut. 33:8–11)." Redditt notes that Jer. 33:21 speaks of God's covenant with God's "ministers the Levites" ("Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi," 187). See B. Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 68–80; J. M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 104–106.

- 10 Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 4.

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# An interview with George Brown

Sandra Doran



Sandra Doran, PhD, is associate superintendent of education, Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Winter Park, Florida, United States.

*Editor's note: Prior to retiring in 1993, George Brown served as president of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists for 13 years. He began his ministry as a pastor in the Virgin Islands. His rich and varied career includes service within the Caribbean Union as dean of men and theology teacher for the college, youth and education director, and president. On the division level, he served for five years as field secretary before being appointed to the presidency.*

**Sandra Doran (SD):** You have spent many years in the ministry in so many different capacities. Tell me about some of your most gratifying experiences.

**George Brown (GB):** The most rewarding aspect of my ministry for the forty-plus years that I've served our church has been the opportunity to work with young people. When you are working with the younger generation, you know that you are preparing a generation for the future. I found young Seventh-day Adventists to be very responsive to the messages, instruction, and guidance. And then how rewarding it was to see them become active participants in the work of the church—either on the payroll or involved in the local church or community!

**SD:** That's interesting. Some people feel that it is quite challenging to work with young people.

**GB:** It all depends on your approach and the

subject matter that you are dealing with. One of the most rewarding programs we conducted was our Youth Bible Conference, where we taught our young people to do serious, inspiring, life-transforming Bible studies. We conducted an in-depth study of the Bible, and then taught them how to give Bible studies, how to witness, and how to develop their own devotional experience. This became very popular in the Inter-American Division, with groups being conducted in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and several hundred dialects.

**SD:** What would you consider to be among the greatest challenges you faced in your service to the church?

**GB:** You can understand that leading a division as large as Inter-America, with forty different countries, speaking four languages, with different political, cultural, and governmental entities would call for a great deal of wisdom, tact, diplomacy, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In my leadership of this division, over and over again, I was confronted with the challenge of maintaining unity in diversity. As I am in retirement, I look back with gratitude that in those years, despite challenges, we were always able to keep the church united.

**SD:** How did you manage to do that?

**GB:** Unity in diversity does not come by osmosis. It can only be done as we keep before our people the biblical principle of oneness before God. Paul's appeal in Ephesians 4 has been our directive, where he makes the point that we are to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We have deliberately emphasized that phrase in all of our dealings. And when we make that effort, despite the areas of difference, the result will always be positive.

**SD:** Pastor Brown, you have been involved in the work of this church for many years. Have you seen many changes?

**GB:** Oh, yes. And the great majority of the changes are for the good. We are fine-tuning the policy, structure, and organization of the work so it becomes more understandable, more efficient, and more effective. From the theological perspective, we've also come a long way. I remember the day when our presentations were more confrontational. But I've seen the day when they are friendlier, more sensitive. And I

don't mean to imply that we have watered down the content of our message. We have retained our strong, unique doctrine, while presenting it in a way that is respectful of people. We have also made significant changes in our use of technology for the promulgation of the gospel. Who today is not acquainted with the satellite evangelism that

Mark Finley and others have done so effectively? Hundreds of thousands of people are blessed with the gospel with this method.

**SD:** *Have there been any surprises for you as you have watched things change in the church?*

**GB:** One of the most delightful surprises has been the positive involvement of church members around the world in government service. Today, in one place, we have a governor general who is a sterling example of a Seventh-day Adventist witness. We have members of Parliament in Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua.

**SD:** *What would you consider to be your most meaningful experience as a division president?*

**GB:** I suppose I run a risk in answering, because there are so many. Perhaps the most exciting experience I've had was that of seeing the Inter-American Division become the first division of the world church to reach the magic number of a million baptized members. That has such a fascinating history. The division was organized in 1922 with just eight thousand members. For many, many years, leadership struggled to intensify the growth of the church in that division.

**SD:** *What changed things?*

**GB:** We began by conducting a massive division-wide training for the laity. With a great deal of prayer and guidance

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from the Holy Spirit, we were able to motivate, inspire, and marshal the laity. By 1972 we had reached fifty thousand baptisms a year. From that point on, we felt the results were so achievable that we went all out in what is known as "evangelism explosion."

**SD:** *Has the growth continued?*

**GB:** When I retired from the Inter-American Division in 1993, we had more than one million members. Today we have three million members.

**SD:** *Have you found that those who are being baptized stay in the church?*

**GB:** I am grateful to the Lord that the program we are conducting leads people to remain in the Lord. We have a three-part motto: Win, Train, Retain. These three key factors in church growth have given us outstanding results. The retention of members has to do with a continuation of the indoctrination and preparation of candidates. When people are baptized, you don't just abandon them. You set up a buddy system.

**SD:** *What can the world church learn from the explosive growth in Inter-America?*

**GB:** The key is to train and mobilize and motivate the laity for action. In our division there are pastors with ten and fifteen churches. Were it not for well-trained, motivated, dedicated lay men and women, there would be no way that these churches could prosper. And the lay people are not only mainly responsible for bringing new members

into the body of Christ, but for retaining them. I am eternally grateful for the effectiveness of the laity in the Inter-American Division and what they are doing to keep the church growing—spiritually, materially, numerically, and in every other way.

**SD:** *How do you train the laity to be so effective?*

**GB:** Let me give you one example of a specific tool that is used to motivate and challenge and encourage and empower our laity. "Festivals of the Laity" is a program that was instituted in the Inter-American Division in 1997. In this program, lay men and women are brought together in an attractive venue for an entire weekend for fellowship, inspiration, and training. Then they go back home and put into practice what they have learned. The Festival of the Laity is now a standard program sponsored every five years. Results have been extraordinary in terms of evangelism and church growth.

**SD:** *What differences do you see between secular and Christian leadership?*

**GB:** First, secular leadership tends to be vertical in authority, while church leadership, if it is properly understood, is horizontal. We are not above anybody or below anybody. It is a horizontal experience: Christ-centered, Spirit-led. Church leadership is essentially based upon the philosophy of Christ, which is servant leadership. In the church we don't have CEOs or bosses. At least we shouldn't.

Second, secular leadership tends to be driven by the desire for power, reward, and prestige. On the other hand, church leadership is driven by love. It is redemptive and transformational. Not only does our focus relate to our present world, but our ultimate goal extends to the coming of Christ and the world that is yet to be.

Finally, Christian leadership is faith-driven. It is based on confidence in God.



George Brown  
Photo: Sandra Doran

**SD:** In closing, what advice can you offer the world church?

**GB:** First, leadership should remain Christ-centered, Spirit-led, biblically sound, and mission-driven. Leadership must encourage our people to remember our rich heritage as a church: our prophetic calling, our global mandate as found in Revelation 14:6–12. Fulfilling this mandate should be our magnificent obsession. We should always remember that Adventism is a prophetic movement with a unique global message.

Second, I would caution our leaders to do everything possible to avoid three deadly end-time evils that can affect our church: (1) institutionalism, (2) secularism, and (3) Laodicean apathy.

And finally, we must remind ourselves and our people that it is not by might, nor by power, but by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that the work of God is going to be finished. The Holy Spirit does not empower machinery or organizations or institutions or state of the art technology. He empowers men and women who are fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. M

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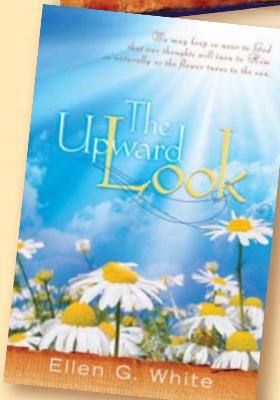
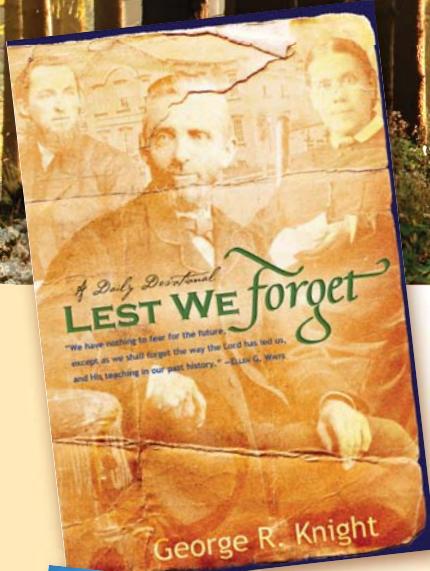
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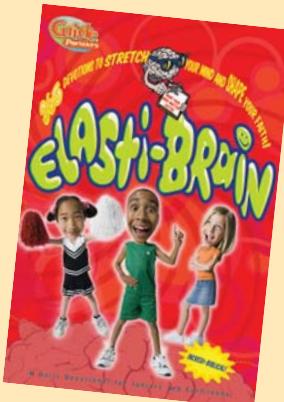
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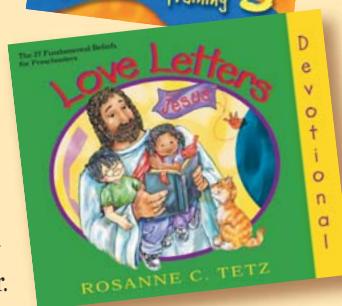
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# Small groups in the Adventist Church in South America

Jolivê Chaves



*Jolivê Chaves, MTh, is director of personal ministries for the Adventist Church in South America, Brasília, Brazil.*

The Adventist Church in South America has a membership of about 2.7 million.<sup>1</sup> Brazil has become the country with the largest number of Seventh-day Adventists in the world, with almost 1.4 million members.<sup>2</sup> There are other populous areas within South America that have experienced tremendous growth; such as Peru, with 525,000 members; Bolivia, with 190,000 members; Chile, with 125,000 members; Argentina, with 115,000 members; and Ecuador, with 75,000 members.<sup>3</sup> Between 1996 and 2005, church membership in South America increased 180 percent—a very good rate when contrasted with the growth rate of the Adventist Church around the world, which in that same period grew 54 percent.

Though many factors are involved in this growth, we consider the use of small groups as one of the most effective. In the Adventist Church in South America (SAD), approximately 65,000 small groups exist, and great effort has been made so that small groups become the basis of the church's missionary outreach.<sup>4</sup> Small groups have proven to be an effective instrument in God's hands to bring us more *growth*—spiritual growth, growth in relationships, growth in preparing disciples, and growth in planting new churches.

## Spiritual growth

We all dream of a church consisting of mature members who have a firm spiritual experience and whose character reflects the image of God. This spiritual maturity results from the daily

activity of the Holy Spirit and happens through communion with God, through the study of His Word, and through prayer and witnessing.<sup>5</sup> The small group encompasses an environment that facilitates these practices.

Walter and Viviana Lehoux told of their experience in ministerial leadership in the city of Libertador, San Martín, Argentina. A small group was started with seven young people and three adults. They had a strong prayer agenda, they emphasized Bible study, and they adopted the theme: "We all belong to the family of God." In nine months, the number of participants rose from 10 to 50. As a result of this experience, five people were baptized, four former church members returned to the church, and many of the church's young people were greatly blessed spiritually.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout these years of experience with small groups, we have learned that traditional methods of doctrinal Bible studies and preparation for baptism did not bring the desired effect. Many church members, who had already been instructed in doctrine, considered these studies a simple repetition of what they already knew. Therefore, it was understood that the studies presented in small groups, including doctrinal studies, should have a greater Christ-centered and relational emphasis, more directly related to spiritual, social, and emotional needs.

So, in contrast with the more cognitive Bible studies presented by missionary partners and in Bible classes, the small groups began to emphasize the application of these topics to their lives. For example, while the conventional study attempts to prove the validity of the Sabbath, the small groups underscore how to make Sabbath observance relevant to daily life.

Church members are encouraged to bring nonbaptized friends and family members to the small group. These individuals, besides attending the small group meetings, also receive a series of doctrinal Bible studies presented by "missionary partners," or in a Bible class. This combination of applied relational studies in small groups with the cognitive doctrinal studies in preparation for baptism has had positive results.

## Relationship growth

Without the informality that the small group environment offers, it becomes very difficult to get the church to experience the relational aspects of what it means to be part of a Christian community. Small groups have helped change that dynamic.

Pastor Silvano Barbosa leads a pastoral district in the city of Pirituba, São Paulo, Brazil.

This district is witnessing the power of small groups. Barbosa states that one of the main reasons why he uses the small group structure is to model Christ's method, as described by Ellen White.<sup>7</sup> Jesus related to people, He attended to their necessities, He won their trust, and then He invited them to follow Him.

Using Christ's method in the small group means practicing mutual love and fraternal care as described by Paul in the expression, "bearing with one another" (NKJV), a concept that Bible authors mentioned 75 times.<sup>8</sup>

Commenting on the so-called social meetings of primitive Adventism, similar to the current small groups, Ellen White states, "What is the object of assembling together? Is it to inform God, to instruct Him by telling Him all we know in prayer? We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another's hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the Source of our strength.

These meetings should be most precious seasons and should be made interesting to all who have any relish for religious things."<sup>9</sup>

Pastor Barbosa speaks with enthusiasm of the results: strong unity among members and greater member involvement in evangelism. In one year, he baptized 109 people. Backsliding, he adds, is practically nonexistent.<sup>10</sup>

### Discipleship growth

The main objective of a small group is to make disciples,<sup>11</sup> facilitated by an informal environment leading to more participation. Those in the general church environment, who previously didn't get involved because of the lack of opportunities or because of shyness, will, in a small group, become involved in ministry, putting their gifts to work. In the SAD, we are starting a project for making disciples, with small groups as a basic component of our outreach.

This discipleship cycle has the objective of finding the unconverted, leading the individual to become a member of the church, and then following the

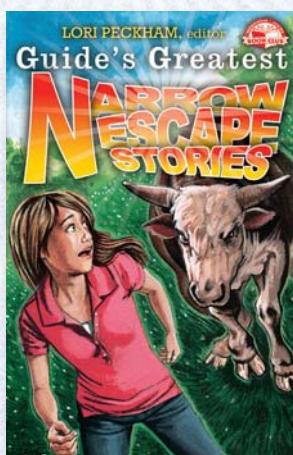
individual through a process of maturity until this new disciple becomes able to reproduce other disciples.<sup>12</sup> (See the sidebar.)

The multiplication of disciples results, of course, in growth. From 1998 to 2000, Dionisio Guevara established between 70 and 150 small groups in his pastoral districts in Peru. With this work methodology, he multiplied disciples and churches; church attendance grew, and some 700 members were baptized each year. Tithe and offerings increased in the groups, and this brought a fourfold increase in resources. Several worship services were necessary in his churches to be able to accommodate so many members.<sup>13</sup>

### Growth in new churches

Actually, "the most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches."<sup>14</sup> We need to have a strategy that leads us to advance in this direction with small groups as a valuable tool to reach this objective. I agree with the affirmation of Dr. Emílio Abdala that "every small

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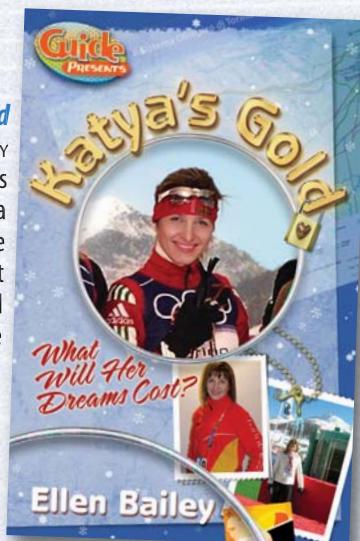
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group is a potential church.”<sup>15</sup> In the SAD, in locations where small groups are more firmly established, this truth reflects the increased number of new congregations.

We can cite three experiences as examples. In the Northeast Brazil Union Mission (NeBUM), there are approximately 290,000 members and 13,000 small groups, equivalent to an average of 22 members per group. This union established the goal of planting one thousand congregations during one quinquennium. From 2004 to 2007, they established 800 new congregations; and small groups have contributed immensely to this work.<sup>16</sup> Another union, the North Peru Union Mission (NPUM), with approximately 320,000 members, has 9,500 small groups, an average of 33 members per small group. Between 2007 and 2008, this union established 40 new congregations.<sup>17</sup> A total of 72 new congregations were organized—an average of 24 per year—in the Santa Catarina Conference (SCC) in South Brazil between 2000 and 2002, when small groups became the center of activities.

Small groups have been a strong ally in the establishment of new congregations in the SAD territory, opening the way for the creation of new pastoral districts and, consequently, the creation of new conferences and missions.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

Because they work so well, the SAD will continue to take more steps toward the implementation of small groups. In the past two years, two documents have explained the central role of small groups in the region. The documents include a vision statement: “That small groups characterize the lifestyle of the church and function as the basis for the relational community, spiritual growth and integral fulfillment of the mission according to spiritual gifts.”<sup>19</sup>

On November 2–5, 2008, the first Small Group Forum will be held for SAD leaders, including SAD administrators, departmental directors, area administrators, local area presidents, and their personal ministries departmental directors.

Discipleship, member retention, and integral church growth still need much improvement in the SAD territory. However, given how well they are working in this part of the world, small groups should be a fundamental part of the process. ▀

1 Data from the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2008*.

2 Alberto R. Timm, “Primórdios do adventismo no Brasil,” *Revista Adventista* (Brazil), Feb. 2005, 14.

3 Data from the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2008*.

4 See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 21, 22.

5 See Ephesians 4:11–16.

6 Walter Lehoux and Viviana Lehoux, *Em las manos de uno que no falla* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamericana, 2007), 12.

7 Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Takoma Park, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1947), 119.

8 See, for example, Colossians 3:12–16.

9 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 578.

10 Information collected in personal interview at Brazil Adventist University—Engenheiro Coelho

Campus on July 21, 2008.

11 David Cox, *Pense em grande, pense em grupos pequenos* (Almargem do Bispo, Portugal: Publicadora Atlântico, 2000), 80.

12 The discipleship cycle was elaborated upon after several months of study with representatives from throughout the SAD and it was voted in the Plenary Executive Committee held May 12–15, 2008.

13 Isabel Rode and Daniel Rode, *Crescimento—chaves para revolucionar sua igreja*, 63.

14 C. Peter Wagner, *Plantar igrejas para a grande colheita* (São Paulo: Abrapress, 1993), 11.

15 Emilio Abdala, *Guia de plantio de igreja* (Guarulhos, SP: Parma, 2007), 90.

16 Information furnished through telephone conversation on July 23, 2008, with Evaron Donato, union personal ministries leader.

17 The NPUM began its activities in January 2005.

18 From 2007 to 2008, a total of 174 new pastors began their pastoral ministries in the SAD churches, and in January 2009, five new fields will be beginning activities.

19 The first action was on November 9, 2005, and the second in May 2007.

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# Three phases of the discipleship cycle

## 1. Conversion

*Objective:* attract the greatest number possible of interested individuals and, through a complete series of Bible studies, prepare them for baptism.

*Strategies:* (a) activities requiring presence (ministry of compassion); (b) proclamation activities with Bible studies; and (c) persuasion activities for decisions.

*Practical requirement:* they need a Bible instructor to assist individuals to become members of Sabbath School, to help newcomers complete a series of Bible studies, and to lead them to baptism.

## 2. Confirmation

*Objective:* affirm the decision of the recently baptized members.

*Strategies:*

(a) *Advanced study course.* At baptism, each new member receives an advanced study course to be studied together with their Bible instructor. Similar to the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, the student studies topics during the week and on a scheduled date reviews

the content with their Bible instructor. The lessons cover three aspects: lessons 1, 2: Communion (Spiritual edification), lessons 3–9: Doctrines and Christian Life, lessons 10–13: Mission.

(b) *Passport with disciple’s baptismal certificate.* Small passport-style booklet containing the baptismal certificate and items included in the discipleship cycle. The stages will be reviewed by the Bible instructor and signed by the pastor as they are concluded.

*Practical requirement:* they need to complete the advanced studies, to have a Sabbath School Bible study guide, and to participate in a small group, which is fundamental in making disciples.

## 3. Missionary training

*Objective:* Train and equip the recently baptized members to involve them in mission.

*Strategy:* *Missionary School (Module 1).* A training school for recently baptized members, aiming to involve them in the missionary work according to their gifts.

# Building a Growing Church: The South American Experience

Alberto R. Timm



Alberto R. Timm, PhD, is rector of the Latin-American Adventist Theological Seminary, Brasília, DF, Brazil.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in South America today has one of the highest rates of numerical growth and geographical expansion in all of Adventism. With the so-called integrated evangelism strategy and the “communion and mission” motto, ministers and members implement a well-planned, integrated program of sustainable growth for the church. Impressed by Brazil’s enthusiasm, G. Ralph Thompson, a former secretary of the General Conference, once referred to the country as a place where people seem to “breathe evangelism!”<sup>1</sup> The same can be said about the other countries of South America as well. Yet, one may wonder how the church on that continent reached such a level of growth.

Some may imagine that the growth expansion of the Adventist Church in South America comes just naturally from preaching to a receptive population. Undoubtedly, that region can be classified as much more open to the gospel message than some other parts of the world. Yet, instead of being just an accident, that positive experience was built across time through many efforts and ongoing methodological experiments.<sup>2</sup> The present article highlights major turning points in the development of that experience.

## Literature evangelism

The first Seventh-day Adventists to arrive in South America were, as far as we know, a few German-Russian families who had been baptized in Europe and who immigrated in the 1880s to

Rio Cunha, near Rio dos Cedros, Santa Catarina, Brazil.<sup>3</sup> But sometime between 1879 and 1880, a package of *Die Stimme der Wahrheit* (*The Voice of Truth*) magazines had been already delivered at the harbor of Itajai in the same state of Santa Catarina.<sup>4</sup> More literature in German and French reached various places of that continent, raising the interest in the Adventist message. Some correspondence from South America reached the Review and Herald office in Battle Creek, Michigan, begging for the visit of Adventist missionaries.

In December 1891, three literature evangelists, E. W. Snyder, C. A. Nowlen, and A. B. Stauffer, arrived in Montevideo, Uruguay. Soon they moved from there to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Since neither of them understood Spanish or Portuguese, and only Stauffer spoke German, they started working mainly among German and English immigrants, trying to reach, whenever possible, people already interested in the Adventist message. Many other literature evangelists came during the 1890s. The first baptisms were held by F. H. Westphal (who arrived in Argentina in 1894)<sup>5</sup> and other ministers.

## Public evangelism

Many of the early literature evangelists held small evening evangelistic meetings with families who became interested in the Adventist message through their literature ministry. As time went by, some evangelists ventured into larger public meetings. In early 1927, the South American Division Council recommended not only an “aggressive evangelistic effort on the part of evangelists” themselves, but also “that every president, superintendent and departmental man plan definitely, as far as possible, to unite with at least one evangelistic effort in 1927.”<sup>6</sup> The next year, the area president, Carlyle B. Haynes, led the way. The well-known evangelist conducted a large evangelistic series at Prince George’s Hall, Buenos Aires, for the English-speaking residents of that city. In addition to the evening evangelistic meetings, the series also became “a workers’ institute for ministerial training.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, lay involvement surged ahead under the motto, “every convert a convert maker.”<sup>8</sup>

Up to the 1940s, public evangelism in South America followed largely the Protestant apologetic approach, not well received by the predominantly Roman Catholic population. A little later, evangelism underwent a major paradigm shift. Walter Schubert, a German immigrant to Argentina, replaced the traditional approach with a new method more sensitive to “the basic psychology of Catholic society.”<sup>9</sup> According to Daniel Belvedere,

the Schubert series "began with a classic and religious music concert, followed by a lecture series on world problems; then another on the solution to the difficulties people face, and another on human relations. Finally, he introduced the great truths of the Bible"<sup>10</sup> with terminology familiar to his Roman Catholic audiences. "Mr. Evangelism," as Schubert came to be known, inspired a whole score of outstanding evangelists, some of whom followed the strategy of having multiple parallel series in the same town.<sup>11</sup>

In 1970, Belvedere introduced in the Buenos Aires Conference the so-called *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) evangelism, with preaching taking place every evening during the week prior to Easter. That experiment was composed of 147 parallel series in different neighborhoods, 17 "Voice of the Youth" programs, besides several meetings conducted by pastors. There were 262 lay preachers, young adults and adults, involved, supported by some 600 lay people. More than 4,300 non-Adventists attended the meetings.<sup>12</sup> From there the *Semana Santa* evangelism has spread throughout South America, becoming an important outreach tool.

### **Radio and TV evangelism**

During the unstable days of World War II, people became more receptive to the prophetic element of Scripture and the hope of Christ's second coming. So, in 1943 the *Voice of Prophecy* radio program went on the air throughout the South American area. The program was presented in Spanish as *La Voz de la Profecía* (renamed 12 years later to *La Voz de la Esperanza*) by Braulio Pérez Marcio<sup>13</sup> and in Portuguese as *A Voz da Profecia* by Roberto M. Rabello.<sup>14</sup> Bible correspondence schools were established to help listeners interested in receiving further studies. Under the title "Empezó ya la 'Ofensiva Aérea'" ("The Air Offensive Has Already Begun"), L. H. Lindbeck suggested that, as the Air

Forces were playing important roles in that war, so *La Voz de la Profecía* would most certainly do the same in "the war against Satan."<sup>15</sup>

In those days, radio was very popular, and such high-quality programs helped both to build a good reputation for the church and to raise much interest for the Adventist message. Local areas even used the name "Voice of Prophecy" in advertising the evangelistic campaigns conducted in their territories. The strategy helped to not only open the doors of places not yet receptive to the name "Seventh-day Adventist Church" but also to more effectively reach at least some of the scattered listeners of the program. But many listeners remained

### **GROWTH COMES AS A RESULT OF MUCH PLANNING, MANY EXPERIMENTS, AND PERSISTENT LABOR WHILE TRYING TO INTEGRATE ALL PERSONAL/INSTITUTIONAL FORCES INTO A MAJOR, WELL-PLANNED OUTREACH PROGRAM.**

unreached and ended up joining other evangelical denominations.

With the intent to bridge the gap between program production and its listeners, the Brazilian *Voice of Prophecy*, in the late 1970s, encouraged the main church of each pastoral district to establish a "Voice of Prophecy Mini Branch."<sup>16</sup> The addresses of people requesting Bible study courses were sent by the *Voice of Prophecy* Bible Correspondence School to the minibranch, closest to each address in order to be visited by the local pastor, a Bible instructor, or somebody else skilled in sharing their faith. In April 2001, a new interactive online Bible study program was posted at [www.bibliaonline.net](http://www.bibliaonline.net), with an interesting network of volunteer "instructors, visitors, intercessors, counselors, and pastors," to provide personal assistance to those interested in the Adventist message.<sup>17</sup>

A systematic production of TV programs began in the early 1960s. In November 1962, Alcides Campolongo launched over TV Tupi, São Paulo, the *Fé Para Hoje* (*Faith for Today*) program, which was broadcast soon after in Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre.<sup>18</sup> In June 1963, Enrique Chaij began, over TV Channel 13 of Buenos Aires, a midnight five-minute program called *Momentos de Meditación* (*Moments of Reflection*). The program continued until 1970 when Chaij began telecasting a TV version of his *Una Luz en el Camino* (*A Light on the Way*).<sup>19</sup> In the 1980s, the Brazilian *Voice of Prophecy* began another TV program called *Encontro Com a Vida* (*Encounter With Life*),<sup>20</sup> which was replaced in the early 1990s by *Está Escrito* (*It Is Written*).<sup>21</sup>

These and several other initiatives reached their climax with the development of a network of radio and TV stations called Novo Tempo (in Portuguese) and Nuevo Tiempo (in Spanish). The TV stations are branches of Hope Channel. Meanwhile, the Web sites [www.esperanca.com.br](http://www.esperanca.com.br) (Portuguese) and [www.esperanzaweb.com](http://www.esperanzaweb.com) (Spanish) provide basic outreach support. The whole communication network is coordinated by the Adventist Communication System, located initially at Nova Friburgo, Brazil, and presently in Jacareí, in the same country.

### **Preaching to larger audiences**

A new outreach phase, resulting in large audiences, was introduced in the late 1980s in Brazil by the Peruvian youth director Alejandro Bullón. In 1986, Bullón organized a youth camp meeting in Itabuna, Bahia, with a gathering of more than 10,000 Adventist young people from several parts of the country.<sup>22</sup> That successful camp meeting provided the basic experience for launching even larger stadium-level revival and evangelistic crusades. The first crusade took place in 1988 under the name "Projeto SOL" (*Week of Prayer and Praise*) at the Ibirapuera Gymnasium, in downtown São Paulo, with an estimated

audience of more than 30,000 people.<sup>23</sup> In preparation for the event, Adventist young people were encouraged to (1) develop a closer friendship with another non-Adventist young person, (2) encourage that person to participate in an interesting Friday sunset worship in the family circle, (3) study the Revelation Seminar, and (4) attend a church service in a special Sabbath setting.<sup>24</sup> A specific appeal was made at each of the eight evenings of Projeto SOL, for those visitors to accept Christ as their Savior and Lord. During the following two decades, Bullón held similar events in many other cities of Brazil and every other country of the South American area with a program of Christ-centered and existential emphasis that could last for a whole week (Projeto SOL) or just a weekend (Projeto Revive).

Inspired by the North American "NET '95,"<sup>25</sup> a nine-day evangelistic program with Mark Finley was launched in the city of São Paulo in June 1999 as "Atos 2000" (Acts 2000). From the Brazil Adventist College—São Paulo Campus—the program was satellite broadcast to many Brazilian churches and other Portuguese-speaking countries around the world, being watched by an estimated 200,000 people.<sup>26</sup> The next year, Henry Feyerabend and Joel Sarli presented the series "Esperança 2000" (Hope 2000) at the Vila Formosa Church in the city of São Paulo. Comprised of 27 evangelistic doctrinal sermons, the program was satellite broadcast to the countries of Brazil and Portugal. In central Brazil alone, 1,800 satellite dishes had been installed in churches, auditoriums, and private homes so that some 300,000 people could watch the program.<sup>27</sup> Since then similar projects have been implemented in other parts of Brazil and, to a smaller scale, in some other South American countries.

## Small groups

Over time, experiments have been conducted to establish small groups throughout South America. Shortly after the branch Sabbath School plan was launched in 1934 by the General Conference,<sup>28</sup> it was implemented also in South America. Later on, plans were made

to reorganize, as much as possible, the Sabbath School classes into "evangelistic units" by the geographical proximity to the members' homes. In the early 1970s, Mario Veloso began at River Plate Adventist University, Argentina, the so-called *koinonias*, which were evangelistic units of young people who "met once a week at the home of one of its members."<sup>29</sup> From there the project spread to the Austral Union Conference and eventually throughout South America.<sup>30</sup>

In November 1981, the Executive Committee of the Adventist Church in South America voted to implement the so-called Pioneer Project. It was recommended specifically that on Sabbath, March 27, 1982, at least one evangelistic unit Sabbath School class of each local congregation should leave its "mother church" on a permanent basis in order to establish a new Adventist nucleus.<sup>31</sup> Such projects paved the way for the adoption and consolidation of the small group plan.

By 1982, Paul Yonggi Cho's influential book *Successful Home Cell Groups*<sup>32</sup> was available in English, Spanish,<sup>33</sup> and Portuguese.<sup>34</sup> Soon the small group strategy took off in different parts of South America but without much continuity. Yet, with time, it became one of the most significant church-growth strategies of the church in Peru.<sup>35</sup> The success of the Peruvian experiment inspired the church's leadership to adopt that strategy into its basic outreach program.

## Integrated evangelism

"Integrated evangelism" took into account all of the previously mentioned outreach programs of the church. The integrated evangelism concept evolved into major evangelistic projects, including denominational administrators, department directors, institutional workers, district pastors, and lay people.<sup>36</sup> More recently, the program was broadened in order to encompass a much larger spectrum of strategies with every segment of the denomination using its own resources to fulfill its evangelistic mission as effectively as possible.

A good example of such integration of forces and methods is the "Impacto Esperança" project (Hope Impact)

implemented in 2008 throughout South America. The project reached its climax on Sabbath, September 6, 2008, with the distribution of 20 million printed brochures and 25.5 million printed pamphlets about the Second Coming, besides a massive sharing of the whole content of the brochure in audio, video, and PDF formats. Special issues of the *Revista Adventista* in Portuguese<sup>37</sup> and Spanish<sup>38</sup> described how every department and institution should participate in the project. For instance, the area's two publishing houses donated the printing of the pamphlets, its two food factories sent out large quantities of brochures for their clients, and many educational institutions organized special distribution projects in towns and villages without a significant Adventist presence. Besides its spiritual-evangelistic potential, the project generated a strong psychosocial feeling of belonging to a dynamic church that enthusiastically fulfills its mission to the world.

## Conclusion

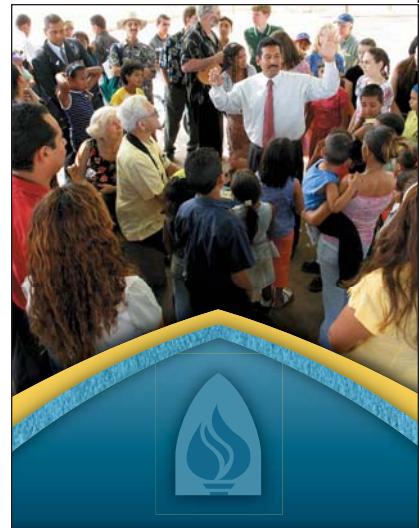
Sociocultural realities differ from one place to another, and there are places more resistant to the everlasting gospel than others. But the experience of the Adventist Church in South America demonstrates once more that sustainable church growth and expansion does not happen just by itself. Growth comes as a result of much planning, many experiments, and persistent labor while trying to integrate all personnel and institutional forces into a major, well-planned outreach program. The president of the Adventist Church in South America, Erton Köhler, notes that "concerns with growth in quantity should never undermine quality. We can grow much, but we should grow well. For this, we need to stimulate every church member to fulfill their role as a missionary."<sup>39</sup> In reality, the strong outreach focus in South America is largely due to the solid cooperative involvement of church workers and lay members in the mission of the church. M

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# An Interview With Alejandro Bullón

Marcos De Benedicto



Marcos De Benedicto is book editor at Brazil Publishing House, Tatuí, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Editor's note: The Adventist Church—from Mexico through the Caribbean and southward through South America—is known for its strong emphasis on various forms of evangelism.*

Alejandro Bullón, now retired, is a well-known public evangelist in South America and served as ministerial secretary for the Adventist Church in South America.

**Marcos De Benedicto (MD):** Tell us a little bit about your new phase in ministry. How is life now that you have retired?

**Alejandro Bullón (AB):** By God's grace, I am living one of the most exciting and productive moments of my life. I continue to preach and evangelize, but now I have more time to read, write, and produce without the pressure of a formal job. At this point, I realize that what causes us to grow tired is not the work itself but the obligation to render an account. Of course, accountability is an indispensable part of the structure, and I gladly did it for almost four decades.

**MD:** When did you start your ministry? How has ministry changed over the years?

**AB:** I began in 1969. I was a young pastor, full of dreams and plans. I looked up to my older

colleagues and was inspired. God's work came in first place. At that time, for example, a pastor never would dare raise objections to being transferred from one district to another. Well, things changed. Ministers are more learned today. Now we hardly find a pastor without a master's degree. Pastors have more freedom to express what they think.

**MD:** What has been the key to your ministry?

**AB:** I never will have enough words to thank God for the blessings that I received from His hands. My own weaknesses, mistakes, and personal struggles gave me this awareness. This caused me to seek Jesus as the only Source of inspiration and strength. I put my life in His hands, loved Him, and tried to serve Him.

**MD:** If you were to give a speech to a group of beginning pastors, what would you highlight?

**AB:** Love Jesus with all your heart, strength, and life.

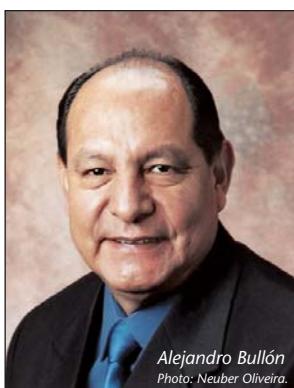
**MD:** Spirituality plays a vital role in the life of a pastor. What is its role in the life of the pastor?

**AB:** Pastors fail basically for two reasons: lack of spirituality and deficiency in human relations. I never saw a pastor leave the ministry for lack of theological knowledge. Theological education is necessary. However, pastors are only truly pastors

when they are spiritual. Without spirituality, a minister can even be an efficient professional, but never a real pastor.

**MD:** What are the strengths that you see in ministry in the Adventist Church in South America? Are there any areas where you see improvements need to be made?

**AB:** I think that our strength still lies in the commitment to the mission. Thanks to God, our leaders see very clearly the purpose of the church—to prepare a glorious people to meet Jesus. For this purpose, God gave us three tools: daily prayer, study of the Bible, and involvement in the mission. Ministry in South America still has such a vision. This does not mean that there are no perils. One of the greatest dangers is to adopt a cold professionalism and be infected by secularism—a great plague of our time. The secularist may be religious, but is not spiritual. As a result, they turn into nothing. They



Alejandro Bullón  
Photo: Neuber Oliveira.

are salt, but have no flavor. They are light, but do not illuminate. They are a trumpet, but do not sound.

**MD:** How do you see the future of the Adventist ministry in South America?

**AB:** I close my eyes and imagine spiritual ministers preparing a spiritual people for the return of Jesus.

**MD:** What are the keys to the growth of the Adventist Church in South America? Are the key features of this growth strictly related to the cultural climate of the region or do you see them as applicable in other parts of the world?

**AB:** The first aspect to emphasize is dependence on God. The second is a vision of the mission. It is not a theoretical vision. The vision that I am talking about goes from the paper to the practical arena. In the last year, for instance, fifty-one percent of the budget of the Adventist Church in South America was dedicated directly to the fulfillment of the mission: radio, TV, Bibles, public evangelism, voluntary evangelism, youth, and women. A third aspect is the importance given to the personal work of every member. In South America, the fulfillment of the mission is not the responsibility of an extraordinarily gifted team of "professionals of preaching" (in the good sense), supported by the church, but of all members, supported by the pastors. Accordingly, the leadership put many tools of witness in the hands of the members. In 2008, more than three hundred thousand Bible studies in video and half a million Bibles were delivered to them. All these efforts certainly produce fruit. In my view, the key has nothing to do with the receptive or nonreceptive culture, facility, or difficulty of the region. It has to do with the vision of the leaders at all levels.

**MD:** Do you agree with the thesis of Philip Jenkins, in his book The Next Christendom, that within the next fifty years Christianity will experience a profound transformation and will change its center of gravity from Europe and the United States of America to Africa, Central America, and South America?

## Ministerial Student Writing Contest

**Ministry, International Journal for Pastors, announces its second Ministerial Student Writing Contest. All students enrolled in a full-time ministerial preparation program on the undergraduate or graduate level may participate.**

### Submission requirements

1. Writers must choose a category from the list below for their submission.
  - a. Biblical studies
  - b. Historical studies
  - c. Theological studies (including ethics)
  - d. Ministry (preaching, leadership, counseling, evangelism, etc.)
  - e. World missions
2. **All submissions must follow the Writer's Guidelines as to length, endnotes, style, and other features of the manuscript. Please carefully read the guidelines found at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org).**
3. Submit your manuscript in MS Word to [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org). Please include the following information at the top of the manuscript: your name, address, email address, telephone number, category for which you are submitting (see above), religious affiliation, name of college/university/seminary you are attending, and title of your manuscript.
4. Ministry will accept only one submission per writer.

### Prizes

<b>GRAND PRIZE: \$750</b>	<b>FIRST PRIZE: \$500</b>	<b>SECOND PRIZE (five possible): \$400</b>	<b>THIRD PRIZE (five possible): \$300</b>
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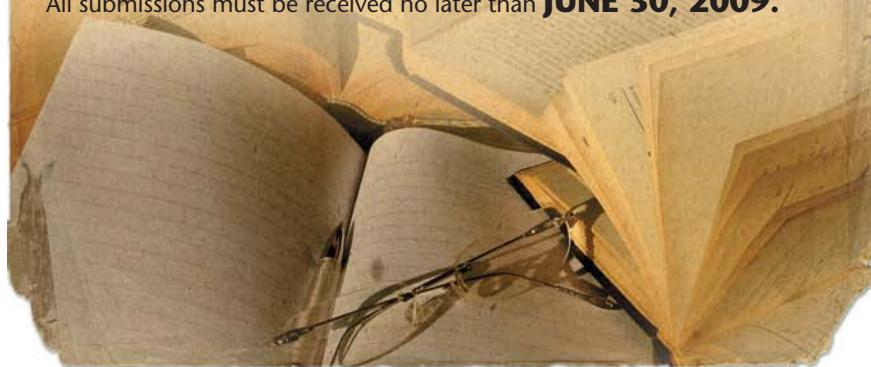
The evaluation panel will determine if all prizes will be awarded. The decisions of this panel are final.

### Publication

1. All submissions become the property of *Ministry* and will not be returned.
2. Writers who are awarded a prize give the rights to *Ministry* as outlined in the Writer's Guidelines. While the editors intend to publish such manuscripts, publication is not guaranteed.
3. Manuscripts that are not awarded a prize may be purchased at a price to be negotiated.

### Submission deadline

All submissions must be received no later than **JUNE 30, 2009**.



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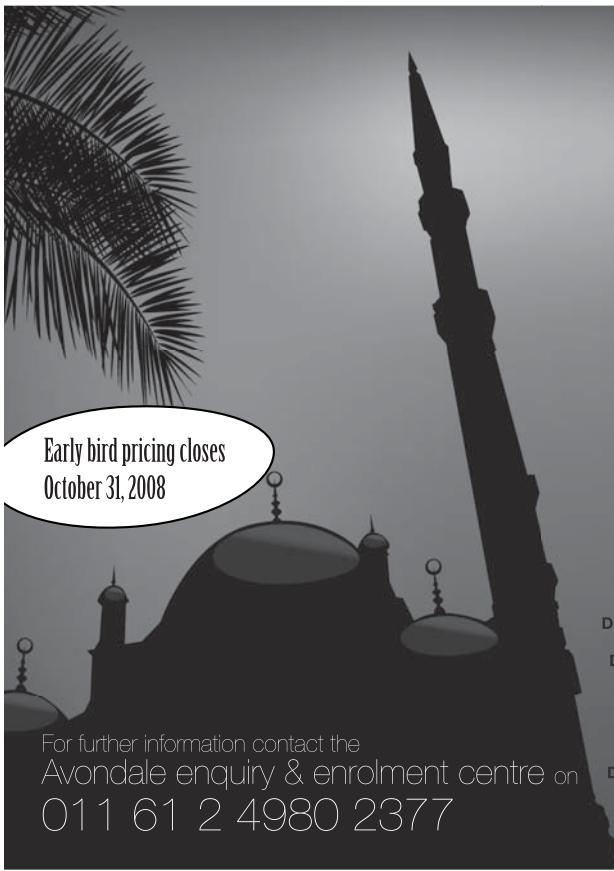
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**Dr William Johnsson:** Former editor of the *Adventist Review* and now assistant to the president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church for Interfaith Relations.

**Dr Borge Schantz:** Founding director of the Seventh-day Adventist Global Center for Islamic Studies.

**Dr Gacoune Diop:** Director of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church Global Mission Study Centers. As a consultant and lecturer in interfaith dialogue, Dr Diop travels extensively worldwide to promote conversation with world religions.

**Dr Jerald Whitehouse:** Director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations (Loma Linda, California, USA).

**Dr Lucile Sabas:** Dr. Sabas holds a Master's degree in Economics from French West Indies University and a Ph.D. with distinction from La Sorbonne University in Paris. Before coming to Cosendai she was head of the Adventist Church's Education Department in Guadeloupe and taught at the French West Indies University. She is currently President of the Adventist University in Cameroon.

**AB:** In my opinion, it will not take fifty years. With the swift spread of the gospel in these continents, they will be the center of the world evangelization in less time than Jenkins estimates. The time is far past when fortunes can be spent on advertisements for an evangelistic series with most of the work centered on the evangelist. Today, the resources must be channeled to inspire, challenge, and equip the members.

**MD:** In South America, is the balance of "power" between the various segments of ministry—for example, administrators, editors, teachers, local pastors—good or can it be improved?

**AB:** One wonderful thing about the church is that we are a body. Each sector of the work has a place and a function. The administrators usually are those who give guidance. The editors think, write, publish, and feed the church with good literature. The professors teach. And the pastors shepherd the flock of God. An ideal administration, though it has the mission of deciding, never should do it without listening to the body. In this sense, as always, there is much space

for growth in any place of the world including South America.

**MD:** Let's go back to evangelism. What are the greatest challenges to evangelism and church growth in South America? What must pastors and other church leaders do to address those challenges?

**AB:** The greatest challenge still is the engagement and mobilization of a greater number of members. Not because it is necessary to reach a goal, but because the Christian that does not witness shows that they never have been converted and are not growing in their spiritual experience. Then, what kind of church are we preparing for the second coming of Christ?

**MD:** You conducted many evangelistic meetings in South America and now are preaching in North America. Is there a great difference between both audiences?

**AB:** No. Before I arrive at a place to conduct evangelism in the United States, I ask for, as a basic requirement, the mobilization of the church months in advance. The leadership must put materials and evangelistic tools in the hands

of the members. The results have been extraordinary, beyond any expectation. Both pastors and churches are happy. This proves once more that we need to reappraise and renew the traditional methods of evangelism. There is no hard soil when the members seek for wounded people. Families are full of problems and, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, they run to it. That light is Jesus.

**MD:** Unless there is a spectacular intervention of God, is it realistically possible to preach the gospel to the whole world? What is your recipe to fulfill that seemingly impossible mission?

**AB:** The final preaching of the gospel to the whole world will be a miraculous act, a direct intervention of God. What miracle? I do not know. I dream of the day when that miracle will happen. In that day, I would like to be part of the church that God will use.

**MD:** Thank you, Pastor Bullón. □

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

# Dateline

## One thousand percent increase in baptisms

**W**ahroonga, New South Wales, Australia—**Gary Webster**, the ministerial secretary for the Adventist Church in the South Pacific, changed his evangelistic focus this year—and he has experienced far more success than ever before. He is literally seeing a 1,000 percent increase in baptisms from his evangelistic campaigns this year.

He attributes this success to several changes to his program: tremendous prayer focus, conducting follow-up meetings, greater emphasis on preaching the love of God, calling for decisions every night, and lengthening his series from two weeks to three weeks.

Webster says that all of the new techniques he tried this year came from Ellen G. White's book *Evangelism*. And what were the results of the meetings that he conducted in Papua New Guinea? The audiences remained the same over last year's attendance—between 700 and 800—but he baptized 75 people this year; ten times more than last year. As for the meetings he conducted in Honiara in the Solomon Islands? The average attendance was 7,000 each night, and 376 were baptized. And 300 more baptisms are expected.

What is Webster's advice? "Go in there as if you are going to get people across the line now," he says. [Phil Ward/ Australian Union Evangelism News]

## Adventist Church in Lithuania receives state-recognized status

**V**ilnius, Lithuania—On July 15, 2008, the Lithuanian parliament granted the Seventh-day Adventist Church the status of a religious community.

Lithuanian law concerning the religious communities divides them into traditional, state-recognized, and other registered religious communities.

The Adventist Church applied to the Lithuanian parliament for state-recognized status in 2003. They considered the request twice, the first time postponing the decision. Two months after the first hearing of the request, with a few corrections, it was presented for an additional hearing. This time it was approved by a majority, with three members of the parliament abstaining.

"This is an important and significant event for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lithuania," said **Bertold Hibner**, president of the Adventist Church in Lithuania. "State recognition for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lithuania means that its contribution to public life and culture is recognized and appreciated together with other churches that have deep historical roots. It means that the Adventist Church is recognized as a church that has established its own name and identity in society."

The Adventist Church in Lithuania currently has approximately 1,000 members. [M. Kucinskas/G. Bukalders/TED News]

## Townsend commissioned as Navy chaplain

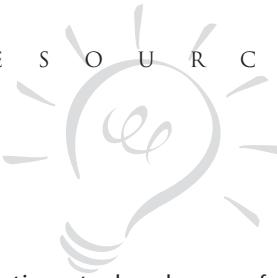
**B**errien Springs, Michigan, United States—Dressed in official Navy whites, Lieutenant **Adrienne Townsend** was officially sworn in as the first Seventh-day Adventist woman to serve as an active duty chaplain in the United States Navy. The event took place on July 24, 2008, at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary chapel in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. Townsend has become a well-known and beloved face on campus since she joined the Andrews University staff in July 2004 as a dean of women for Lamson Hall. Service as a military chaplain has been a dream of Townsend's for quite some time and she spent years in preparation. "The



Lieutenant Adrienne Townsend

military is a huge mission field with the same aged people as those I have been working with here at Andrews University. I feel God has laid the foundation for me here to go out into the military and reach those who need to hear about Christ," she says. Lieutenant **Christopher Carmichael**, a Navy representative from the Navy Officer Recruiting Station in East Lansing, Michigan, presented Townsend with her Presidential Appointment. "We know everyone here today is sad to say goodbye to Lieutenant Townsend, but the United States Navy is standing by to welcome her with open arms," said Carmichael. The Oath of Office was delivered by Chaplain **James North**, Andrews University Seminary chaplain, followed by a Charge and Welcome to Chaplaincy. "I am delighted," said North, "to preside over a ceremony that is at once both secular and religious in nature."

**Tanya Bindernagel** was also recognized as the first woman to be endorsed for ministry as a chaplain in the United States Army by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Bindernagel was unable to assume active duty due to family commitments. [AU News]



## BOOK REVIEW

**Mixed Ministry: Working Together as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society**, by Sue Edwards, Kelley Mathews, and Henry J. Rogers, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008.

Many books cross my desk in the editorial office; but not every book fits the needs of our readership. *Mixed Ministry* does; and it does so because pastors work closely with both male and female associates, and the temptation to behave inappropriately with members of the opposite sex can exist at any given time. As the authors of the book say, "We believe sexual temptation is the elephant in the family room that everyone knows is there, but nobody talks about" (150).

The authors stress early on their scriptural premise for navigating potential sexual temptations (1 Tim. 5:1, 2; Matt. 12:50). They then proceed to divide the 16 chapters of the book into two sections. The first part, "Seeing One Another as Siblings," is a mix of the scriptural, theoretical, and scientific. The second part, "Safeguards for Siblings," consists of practical suggestions that are buttressed by numerous anecdotes, both scriptural and contemporary.

The hardest-hitting chapters are the last five. One of the more interesting facts cited is that 90 percent of the women surveyed admitted having experienced an attraction (read: sexual attraction) to a man who was not their husband. James 1:13–18 is dissected to reveal the three steps to sexual downfall: attraction, deliberation, and consummation. John Ortberg's three tests that are to be employed in building fences to protect the sanctity of marriage are outlined: sibling test, screen test, and secret test (191). The authors also address pornography and offer practical

suggestions to break away from its grip. Finally, they conclude by sharing safeguards for spouses.

The greatest benefit of this book, in my opinion, is that it encourages self-awareness and discussion of the reality of sexual temptation and its power. This book should be in the bookcase of every pastor. Furthermore, church administrators should start a conversation on this subject with the pastors under their care. Finally, pastors should start a conversation on this subject with the leaders in their local congregations.

—Reviewed by Willie E. Hucks II, DMin, associate editor of *Ministry*.

## RESOURCES

### Ministering to the blind

Do pastors who have no blind people in their congregations ever wonder why? After all, there are millions worldwide who are blind or visually impaired.

Whether a congregation's ministry plan already includes those with visual disabilities or not, pastors will welcome joining hands with Christian Record Services for the Blind, a nonprofit organization whose work deserves more visibility, just as do the blind individuals it serves.

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Here are some of the helpful ways Christian Record Services directly serves blind adults, teens, and children:

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New products recently released by Christian Record Services are Braille editions of Scripture portions, such as the Gospel of Mark and several of the writings of Paul (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians).

Because of the generosity of individuals and groups, all of these publications and programs are provided free of charge to blind individuals, including those who are legally blind.

More information is available at [www.crsb.org](http://www.crsb.org). Christian Record Services for the Blind can also be contacted at 4444 South 52nd Street, Lincoln, NE 68516-1302 or PO Box 6097, Lincoln NE 68506-0097. [Doris Burdick]

## LETTERS *concluded from page 3*

It is reminiscent of what takes place at a smorgasbord: we go through line and pick what we want and reject the rest.

The tendency to argue that 2,000 years of tradition and church councils cannot be wrong does not make much sense for a group of people who have been protesting the work of church councils for centuries. We cannot use an argument for something one minute and turn around and use it against something else the next and hope to be credible.

There are good reasons to accept the biblical canon as we have it today, but to gloss over the difficulties by simply affirming the canon and trying to make those who have honest serious questions look foolish, misinformed, or heretical at heart does not reflect the honest scholarship which has traditionally characterized the best of Protestant theology.

—Dan M. Appel, Auburn, California, United States

# Visitation expectation

JAMES A. CRESS



**E**very pastor ought to visit the members. Every visit ought *not* be made by the pastor. These two statements summarize the crux of overwrought expectations for pastoral visitation. Another denominational magazine recently opined on the insensitivity of shepherds who published instructions in their bulletin for members to request pastoral visits.

Systematic, consistent visitation of church members does need to occur, and members have reasonable expectations that such pastoral visitation will occur. However, members have unreasonable expectations if they believe the pastors should personally perform the visitation process that rightly belongs within the assignment of the local church elders and other laity leadership.

For example, in my last pastoral assignment, I could have made a full-time career out of circulating among the seven or eight hospitals in our metropolis where my sick members were being treated. The circuit to just one of those hospitals—the most prestigious in the region—took over three hours from the church to a short visit at the hospital bedside and back again.

Reasonable expectation—sick members will be visited, especially when they are in the hospital. Unreasonable expectation—the pastor will personally do that visitation. An irate member complained that she had been hospitalized, and I had failed to visit her. I responded, “But you did receive a pastoral visit from two of the elders who reported to me of your progress.” When she retorted, “But you did not visit,” I recalled and repeated the statement I had learned from a wise, older pastor. “Sister, let us right now offer a prayer of thanksgiving that you were not so ill that they had to call for me to visit. You do not want to become that sick.”

In that same pastorate, I surveyed each member right at the beginning of my tenure. Upon analysis, one of the multiple-choice questions produced interesting insight. The question:

*How would you like to receive pastoral visits?*

Drop in anytime.  By appointment only.  Only when I request a visit.

The surprising result was the age demographic for the various respondents. The first option was primarily selected by retirees over age 65. The “By appointment only” option was most typically the response of mid-career members, age 40 to 65. The “Only when requested” group was heavily weighted to the “under 40” group, many of them young adults and overextended parents of small children.

I wonder if the responses would follow the same age/schedule track if the congregation were surveyed again today. I believe that expectations would shift along with the changed circumstances of life. The analysis of that survey encouraged me to reclassify pastoral visitation into several categories of need and responsibility.

**Proactive visitation.** We enlarged our board of elders and divided the congregation into groups for which the laity leaders were responsible for regular visitation on behalf of the pastoral team. Our elders were always to visit with a partner. As pastor, I would rotate among the elders and thus could visit some of the members from time to time while assuring that all the members would be routinely visited over the course of the year.

**Reactive visitation.** Family crisis such as death, traumatic illness and anointing, or unexpected challenges received a higher priority in which our elders knew to involve the pastor in the visitation process. Such reactive visits

could also come at joyous times such as wedding preparations, birth and child dedications, graduation celebrations, or home dedications. Remember how much ministry Jesus accomplished at banquets, funerals, and social gatherings.

**“Deactive” visitation.** If permitted, emotionally unstable individuals would monopolize nearly all of the pastor’s time. Such members must have specific limitations set or nothing else could be accomplished beyond allowing them to vent their frustrations or expound fanciful theological theories. When someone asks to relate their long, involved story, I always respond: “I can give you ten minutes now or a half-hour next week if you wish to write all the information out so that I can read and understand your thinking in advance.” My busy schedule forces them to prioritize or seek other outlets.

**Creative visitation.** Much of my personal visitation was designed around engaging people whose circumstances could make an “influence contribution” to the church. For example, praying with police officers, firefighters, judges, and city officials. I asked my members to introduce me to their business associates, neighbors, and friends whose influence would positively impact the church. I invested time and energy in relationships with pastors of all denominations and unchurched associates of my leaders.

**Instructive visitation.** The most delightful visitation for me develops people for spiritual growth, preparation for baptism and church membership, premarital counseling, leadership development, and creative visioning in areas where the church can expand.

Where have all the shepherds gone? Because they are typically overworked, I hope they have gone for some vacation time, especially if they have the assurance that proper planning provides consistent visitation for their members.

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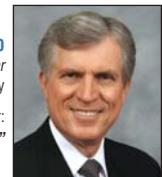
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