July 16, 2012

“The very first and most important thing is to melt and subdue the soul by presenting our Lord Jesus Christ as the sin-pardoning Saviour. Never should a sermon be preached, or Bible instruction in any line be given, without pointing the hearers to “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. Every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words.”

Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 54

Editorial: The “We” Factor

One of the squirmiest (to coin a word) moments for many public evangelists is the moment the identity of Daniel's little horn is unveiled. We often apologize for what we're about to say with a statement like this: “Now remember, we're talking about a system and not the people.” The motivation for those kinds of statements it is right - but I've often wished for a better approach. I'm not convinced it's really that simple to separate people from their churches.

Put the shoe on the other foot for a moment, just to see how it fits. Someone approaches you with a critique of the Seventh-day Adventist church, saying, “now don't forget: I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about the church.” Are you so easily distinguished from your church? I am not. I am utterly and completely invested in the Seventh-day Adventist church: not a day goes by when I don't contemplate the fact that I am a member. It is not the church - it is not a church - it is my church. I am here by choice, and at some level, a critique of my church is still a critique of me.
For years, however, I used this "systems, not people" approach when preaching Daniel 7 - for lack of something better. It mostly worked, but I craved a smoother onramp for my audience. And interestingly, it was Daniel himself who finally gave me the answer.

If you haven't read it in a while, go back and read Daniel's prayer in the ninth chapter. "O Lord, great and awesome God," he prays, "who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments." (Daniel 9:4,5)

We? Was Daniel personally guilty of the sins that led to the Babylonian captivity? His young age at the time of the Jerusalem conquest and the sterling character portrayed in inspiration would suggest not - and yet Daniel claims the sins of Israel as his own. He has a corporate mentality. He stands with the sinful human race as someone in need of divine grace and forgiveness, even though he is not personally responsible for those particular sins.

I was not party to the atrocities committed by Christians in the Middle Ages, and yet I am a Christian, and a sinner. I may not have condemned heretics to the pyre, but there is no question I have committed sins against the God of heaven. Christians are my family; I am one of them.

It was the key was I looking for. I still give the audience the identifying marks of the little horn as I always have. The audience is not stupid; they know exactly what the Bible is identifying. But as I conclude my first presentation on the subject, I never single out a specific denomination. Asking the audience not to say anything for a moment (unfortunately, to keep some of our own members from blurting out something insensitive), I conclude with a statement that goes something like this:

"You know who this is, don't you? It's us. This is describing our Christian history during the Dark Ages. It's one of the reasons I'm convinced that the Bible is more than just religious propaganda, because propaganda would try to cover up human atrocities. But God is honest enough and loves us enough to show us what we're really like. He warned us in advance where we'd go if we quit following Christ. And the whole world knows we did this stuff - skeptics use it to scoff at the Bible and at Christianity - so it's about time we admitted it, apologized for it, and started living as if we really were following Jesus Christ."

And that's it. I can afford to get far more specific in later presentations, when we deal with the Mark of the Beast, and I call people to actually become part of the Seventh-day Adventist church. At that point, huge bridges of trust will have been built. But when first approaching the subject, I stand with the audience in a moment of corporate self-examination. I am one of them. There was no Seventh-day Adventist church during the 1260-year prophetic period, after all. We were all there. We are all guilty, and we are all called to repent.

Daniel's sense of corporate identity is a powerful evangelistic tool: I have yet to hear a guest protest or express feelings of hurt. The facts of history are hard to deny, and if we all lay claim to our tarnished Christian history together, it's hard to for individual people to feel singled out. We are calling them to join us in repenting of sin.

How to Participate in Best Practices for Evangelism

We need your help!!!

Each month, we'll include editorials and articles that share or illustrate key evangelistic principles. We'll bring you news about evangelistic projects and initiatives from across the Division. We'll hear from pastors in the trenches who have discovered solutions to common problems, and we'll take time to share our best outreach ideas with each other.

The best ideas always come from the front lines; tell about the ideas/tools/tips that have helped improve your evangelistic outreach.

Find out how to contribute to the discussion here.
The Baldwin Park Bilingual Seventh-day Adventist Church in Los Angeles, California is impacting the surrounding community.

In 2009, members of the church noticed many people from the surrounding community looking to the church for help because of the economic downturn. Many people were out of work and struggling with providing even basic needs - as basic as food. The members of the church gathered for prayer and came up with a plan for opening a food bank. By helping with a weekly supply of groceries, they would meet the need.

Click here to read how God blessed the Baldwin church's outreach efforts, and to watch a community Bible study in action!

Message of Hope Blankets Dallas

Something spectacular happens when 44 sites in one city come together to proclaim the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Restore DFW, an evangelistic event that involved Seventh-day Adventist churches from across the Greater Dallas area blanketed the ninth largest US city with messages of hope and restoration.

You've really got to check out what God is doing in Texas! Read about this incredible initiative at our ministerial website.

Tools of the Trade

SkyGrid

Own an iPad, iPhone, or Android-based smartphone? You might want to check out SkyGrid (www.skygrid.com), an app that provides a customized and well-organized news feed. It's particularly useful for evangelists and others who want - or need - to keep current in the pulpit. It not only provides useful broad news categories that will help you find a current story (something that happened today) to illustrate your point, it also allows you to create custom news categories that will follow your favorite topics daily.

Set Adventists as a news category, for example, and you will receive all of the stories - from around the world - that mention Adventists, every single day. It's remarkable just how much good information will land on your device.

Imagine the potential this has to enrich your evangelistic preaching. Presenting the health message this evening? Open a smoking or alcohol category and get the latest statistics and research delivered to you daily. Over the course of a couple of days, it's virtually guaranteed that you'll find something powerful to help you make your case. Preaching about prayer? Open a "prayer" category and become remarkably well-informed about what prayer is doing for people all over the world. Preaching on Matthew 24? Open the categories earthquake, war, cult, or famine, and you'll always have something new to talk about. The sermon you take into the pulpit this Sabbath - or to your evangelistic hall tonight - will be illustrated with something that actually happened in the last 24 hours.

As one user states on the SkyGrid website, "if you've ever wished there were a single site that pulled all your varied interests together in one place, SkyGrid could be your new best friend."

You can watch a very brief description of how the app works here.

Send your evangelistic ideas and descriptions of your best ministry tools to bpevangelism@gmail.com. Please be descriptive in your submission and follow the guidelines posted in this article.
How To Participate in Best Practices for Adventist Evangelism

Not only is this the maiden voyage of *Best Practices for Adventist Evangelism*, it’s also my inaugural attempt at serving as an editor - so I thank you kindly, in advance, for your patience as I grow into my new role.

Here’s what I’m thinking: each month, we’ll include editorials and *articles* that share or illustrate a key evangelistic principle. We’ll bring you *news* about evangelistic projects and initiatives from across the Division. We’ll hear from pastors who are actually in the trenches and finding solutions, and we’ll take time to share our best outreach ideas with each other.

Recently, I sent word to the field that I was looking for ideas from pastors active in outreach, and I was overwhelmed - nay, *swamped* - with responses. You’ll see a few of them included in this edition of the newsletter, and I would absolutely love to hear from more of you. Simply send your ideas to *bpeevangelism@gmail.com*.

A few guidelines: I am looking for submissions that share specific ideas and give details on how those ideas are being implemented. There were many responses in the initial wave that were too general to be useful to the broader audience, such as “we use Christ’s method alone,” or “I like to get out into the community to meet people.” *Best Practices for Adventist Evangelism* - rightly or wrongly - will assume that pastors know and understand these basics, and will favor ideas that:

- **give specifics.** “Get people used to appeals and altar calls,” is not specific. “I like to have people pick up their free books and handouts at the front of the auditorium so they become comfortable coming to meet me well in advance of an altar call,” is much more specific.
- **share tangible results.** “This approach has resulted in the response to altar calls increasing by as much as 10%.”
- **report something that has actually been tried/implemented.** As opposed to ideas that you wish someone would try, or ideas that you want the conference/union/division to implement. We’re looking for a community classroom rather than a suggestion box.

Given the limits of an electronic newsletter, submissions should also be short(ish) - say four paragraphs or so. I realize that I violate this principle with some frequency myself, but hey, I’m the editor.

By God’s grace, this edition of *Best Practices* will blossom into a tool that helps us all stretch and grow as outreach leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist community.
The Baldwin Park Bilingual Seventh-day Adventist Church in Los Angeles, California is impacting the surrounding community.

In 2009, members of the church noticed many people from the surrounding community looking to the church for help because of the economic downturn. Many people were out of work and struggling to provide even basic needs - as basic as food. Church members gathered for prayer and came up with a plan for opening a food bank. By helping with a weekly supply of groceries, they would meet the need.

The church made a general call to its members to join in this God-given mission. Members answered by donating money and trucks, and by signing up volunteers who would help. A room was set up to store fresh groceries and lots of promotion was done around the community. The food bank would be opened on Wednesdays from 6:30-7:30pm.

The first day the food bank was open, there were 105 families in line to reserve a bag of groceries. That was more than expected, and more help was needed, so members of the church rallied to increase their support for the food bank. They arranged to help, if needed, up to 200 families.

The church also began to notice that people from the community were standing in line as early as 3:00pm. That gave them another idea. “What if we have a community church bible study and worship service?” the church asked. It was another God-given idea which resulted in opening a community Bible study which hosts between 120-150 people weekly.

In summary, in 2011 the Church helped 5,214 heads of families with a weekly supply of fresh groceries. A total of 24,103 people were fed. Also, weekly, 130 non-Adventist community visitors are attending Bible studies. The Bible studies conducted in a small group format led by two church members in each group. A total of 50 church members volunteer to give a Bible studies and to help with the food bank. By God’s grace, in the past two years the church has witnessed 20 community people baptized. The Church’s Sabbath attendance has also increased as community people join in the weekly worship service.

Baldwin Park Bilingual’s Church’s goal this 2012 is to help 6,500 community visitors families and to keep the community Bible study going. The church will hold 5 Evangelistic Meetings as well as many other initiatives that deal with a variety of topics for as families, children and youth.

You can watch part of the community Bible study here.
Photos: (1) Oscar Aguiarre, member of the surrounding community, is baptized in an evangelistic meeting. (2) Community Members graduating from a Bible study course.
Something spectacular happens when 44 sites in one city come together to proclaim the gospel message of Jesus Christ. RestoreDFW, an evangelistic event that involved Seventh-day Adventist Churches from across the Greater Dallas area blanketed the ninth largest US city with messages of hope and restoration. Presenters for the May 4 – 12 series included local church pastors, Texas Conference evangelists, lay leaders, teachers and seminary students from Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Topics were identical across all sites and included an overview of biblical prophecy, the message of salvation, the gift of the Sabbath and the presence of God in our lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. All 44 sites, sponsored by 24 Dallas-area churches, made use of the same marketing material produced in partnership with SermonView. The same website approach used for It Is Written’s Revelation Today event was implemented in Dallas, uniting all sites under one city-wide umbrella and creating a simple interface for searching for participating sites and topics presented.

The event culminated with a Saturday evening celebration, which drew a crowd of over 2,200 members and visitors. The Friendship West Baptist church provided a facility large enough for the rally, which included local musical artists and a stirring message from Shawn Boonstra, Associate Ministerial Director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. The event also included a welcome ceremony for dozens of new Seventh-day Adventist members, baptized since January 1, who flooded the stage to stand with their local pastors and 12 baptisms performed that evening. Additionally, around 50 people came forward that night to indicate their desire for baptism. While approximately 300-400 baptisms are expected as a result of the harvest cycle, which included RestoreDFW, the equally important result is a sisterhood of churches unified under one purpose: bringing the residents of Greater Dallas to the foot of the cross. Next up is RestoreSanAntonio in October 2012. Our prayers are with the city’s churches and members as they prepare to engage San Antonio for Christ.