Ministry

Toward A Balanced Life, Part 1: Are You Set Up to Burn Out?
by John R. Landgraf

My boyhood pastor was a great minister. He planted a church and grew it from 18 to 1800 during his 30 years there. More than 50 of us went into the ministry because of his ministry. He was a compelling role model.

But he was blind about some things, and in that sense he was a terrible role model. He worked 24/7. We sang a chorus in Sunday School: "After all he's done for me, After all he's done for me, How can I do less than give him my best and live for him completely, after all he's done for me." I thought it was about Pastor Bill! Many times I heard him say, "I'd rather burn out than rust out." As if it were one or 'tother.

One Saturday afternoon Pastor Bill got his wish. As he washed his car in the parsonage driveway, he dropped dead. He was 56.

Life in the stained glass fishbowl ain't easy. One is expected to be the "big fish" who radiates luminescence (I call it "numinosity"); always accessible and available; and a moral exemplar to boot. One is counseled to befriend every parishioner but not pursue a David/Jonathan relationship with any one of them. One is to be an evangelist, a fundraiser, a Bible teacher, a liturgist, a theologian, an administrator, a community leader, a social change agent, a masterful preacher, and a wise caregiver to people in crises. How's that for the doggonedest general practice profession in the modern world? Oh, I almost forgot; one is to be a reflective practitioner of the arts of ministry, so as to keep improving one's skills. That's the nature of ministry. It's a complex profession with a complicated trajectory.

Couple that with the nature of the Christian faith. Attorneys admire great lawyers and their teachings, but they are not personally dedicated to those leaders. Physicians take the Hippocratic Oath and honor it, but they are not personally devoted to Hippocrates. In ministry we have a supernatural model, the God/man Christ Jesus, and not only are we captivated by His teachings, we are devoted to His person. He is at once our model, Savior, and Lord.

Now add to the nature of ministry and the nature of our faith, the nature of those inclined to answer the "call," and one begins...
to understand the roots of potential imbalance and incipient burnout in ministers. Who are we, we who hear and heed God's call? Typically we are intelligent, idealistic, inner-directed, creative, and sensitive to interpersonal interactions and to how we come across in an acceptance/rejection sense. We vulnerable to criticism, self-aware, sympathetic, altruistic, communicative, and often too passive for our own good (many of us are conflict-avoidant, for example).

In his 1992 book *Ministry Burnout*, John Sanford detailed its etiology. He described how the white flag of idealism often morphed into the yellow flag of disenchantment, which then morphed into the red flag of bitterness (Sanford called this stage "burndown") which, left unchecked, would morph into the black flag of burnout - an exhausted ego, depressed and ready to throw in the towel. I think of Elijah's plaintive "It is enough; now let me die."

It can be very lonely at the top.

Question: Who is the healthy minister who embodies and models maturity?

Answer: One whose journey keeps moving toward a balanced life.

The following is my own "Twenty Questions" checklist. It is not meant to be comprehensive. Its ingredients are simply my attempt at a recipe auguring a minister toward a balanced life. Checkmark each item you honestly "own," where you agree, "That statement characterizes my life."

1. _____ I regularly read fiction and non-fiction not related to my work
2. _____ I maintain my personal prayer life
3. _____ I actively participate in a ministerial support and accountability group
4. _____ I honor my weekly "day off" except in a dire emergency, such as a death
5. _____ I engage in a fresh educational adventure each year, such as a retreat to ingest and digest Scripture
6. _____ I tend my primary relationship as if it is he/she I want to grow old with
7. _____ I laugh and play! I am regularly and intentionally playful and maintain my sense of humor
8. _____ I carefully attend to my physical well being - nutrition, exercise, weight control, and regular "wellness" check-ups with my physician
9. _____ I never fail to take a full month's vacation
10. _____ I assertively court potential friends of my own choosing
11. _____ (If you have children) Parenting is among my highest priorities
12. _____ The telephone is my servant, not my master. Likewise, the internet.
13. _____ When I have staff problems, I don't try to solve them by myself; I ask for help from a consultant.
14. _____ I romance my wife/husband faithfully, such as a weekly "date night"
15. _____ I lead my family spiritually, e.g., by praying with my spouse and children
16. _____ Regarding personal/professional boundaries, I set limits and keep them
17. _____ I joyfully tackle my work with a calculated amount of reckless abandon
18. _____ I almost never work more than 55 hours a week.
19. _____ My home is my haven. My work stays at the office, or in my study.
20. _____ I consistently spend at least three evenings a week away from work

Of the 20 items, how many did you check? Is your life/work balance to your liking? If not, ask yourself, "What do I want to change or improve?" What, if anything, would you add to this checklist? I would greatly appreciate your telling me (info@landgrafretreats.com).

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Next week: It's not enough to be holy; you must also be whole.

Your Best Idea
Best Ideas from Pacific Union Conference Pastors

In August 2011 Pastors of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists were asked to share their best idea for ministry. For the next few weeks these will posted on the Your Best Idea vimeo channel.

"We did an outreach series in our area entitled "9 life Changers." Nine of our church members told stories of what God has done in their lives. Each night they gave a biblical presentation related to a theme that came out in the testimony. We made friends in the community and our church members grew closer, learning each others stories."

"What if we had a Friends and Family day once a month designed specifically for those who we already have a relationship with?"

"What if there was a mobile an online down loadable ministry resources for pastors?"

Reading for Pastors

Previously apolitical pastors are jumping into politics, organizing churches, Common sense activism, or a frightening church-state mix?

While we hear how 9/11 made Americans hostile to Islam, in fact it helped some reach across the divide to create interfaith relationships, according to the CSM. Quote: "Over the past 10 years, the percentage of US congregations involved in interfaith worship has doubled - from 7 to 14 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of congregations performing interfaith community service nearly tripled - from 8 to almost 21 percent - according to a new survey by Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research."

A potential student-base for us? Attracted by conservative standards, Muslims are enrolling in Catholic schools.

Mormons continue to emphasize marriage as a sacred obligation - and it worries them that men aren't getting married as young as they should be. Quote: "Mormon marriages appear to last longer. The divorce rate for Mormons is about 20 percent, according to Holman. For non-Mormons, it's more than 40 percent, he said. LDS leaders promote marriage more than most faiths - they even have entire congregations for singles only.

To the Point

I believe that being successful means having a balance of success stories across the many areas of your life. You can't truly be considered successful in your business life if your home life is in shambles.

- Zig Ziglar

Toleration is the greatest gift of the mind; it requires the same effort of the brain that it takes to balance oneself on a bicycle.

- Helen Keller

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.

- Thomas Merton

I balanced all, brought all to mind, the years to come seemed waste of breath, a waste of breath the years behind, in balance with this life, this death.

- William Butler Yeats

Difficulties are opportunities to better things; they are stepping-stones to greater experience... When one door closes, another one always opens; as a natural law it has to, to balance.

- Brian Adams

Remember that poise and power are inseparably associated. The calm and balanced mind is the strong and great mind; the hurried and agitated mind is the weak one.

- Wallace D. Wattles

Be moderate in order to taste the joys of life in abundance.

- Epicurus

Fortunate, indeed, is the man who takes exactly the right measure of himself and holds a just balance between what he can acquire and what he can use.

- Peter Latham
Be aware of wonder. Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- Robert Fulghum

A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life.
- William Arthur Ward

We come into this world head first and go out feet first; in between, it is all a matter of balance.
- Paul Boese

So divinely is the world organized that every one of us, in our place and time, is in balance with everything else.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

News, Ideas & Reminders

- Free InMinistry fall classes across NAD unions, Oct. 30 - Nov 10. Subjects such as Church & State, Small Groups, Christian Leadership, SDA Theology, Youth & Young Adults, Sabbath, Deuteronomy, NT Exegesis, Innovative Evangelism, World Religions, Church Conflict, NT Theology, and Preaching will be available. Visit www.inministry.info for complete listing and information. From Walt Williams, InMinistry Center Director & NAD Associate Ministerial

Previous resource links:
- Andrews Study Bible
- The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
- iFollow website
- NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
- Back issues of REACH North America News
- Federal Regulation Forces Crib Replacements in Church Nurseries
- Special creation-evolution edition of REACH North America News
- Tony Morgan's free e-book on big churches getting bigger
- Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
- Exposing Harry Potter
- The one Project
- Facts with Hope, evidence-based health messages for bulletins
- NAD Volunteer Screening Guidelines and Screening Form
- Dr. Matthew Gamble at 2011 GODencontres

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Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.


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Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
Evangelical pastors heed a political calling for 2012

Formerly apolitical preachers in states like Iowa, backed by astute organizers and big donors, are mobilizing congregations for the election.

September 10, 2011 | By Tom Hamburger and Matea Gold, Washington Bureau

Reporting from Ames, Iowa — For most of his two decades as a preacher, Iowa pastor Mike Demastus eschewed partisanship, telling colleagues and congregants that "religion and politics don't mix."

But there he was last month in Ames, making his way across the festive grounds of the Republican presidential straw poll, mingling with political operatives and candidates as he spoke openly about his preference for Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota.

He wasn't alone. The straw poll drew a slew of previously apolitical Iowa pastors — a constituency increasingly heeding a call to speak out on politics.

"There is a concerted assault on everything that we consider sacred — and we pastors need to move to the forefront of the battle," said Demastus, wearing a T-shirt and shorts for the Saturday event.

Demastus is part of a growing movement of evangelical pastors who are jumping into the electoral fray as never before, preaching political engagement from the pulpit as they mobilize for the 2012 election.

This new activism has substantial muscle behind it: a cadre of experienced Christian organizers and some of the conservative movement's most generous donors, who are setting up technologically sophisticated operations to reach pastors and their congregations in battleground states.

The passion for politics stems from a collision of historic forces, including heightened local organizing around the issues of abortion and gay marriage and a view of the country's debt as a moral crisis that violates biblical instruction. Another major factor: Both Texas Gov. Rick Perry and Bachmann, contenders for the GOP nomination, are openly appealing to evangelical Christian voters as they blast President Obama's leadership.

Both Republican and Democratic strategists say that pastors have already helped unleash an army of voters to shape the GOP primary contests in Iowa and South Carolina, two states with large numbers of conservative Christians. They are making plans to do the same in states that are even more important to next year's general election. Those include Ohio, Florida, Iowa, Virginia and Colorado, where evangelical voters make up about a quarter of the electorate and their participation could greatly aid Republicans.

"The Christian activist right is the largest, best-organized and, I believe, the most powerful force in American politics today," said Rob Stein, a Democratic strategist who recently provided briefings on the constituency to wealthy donors on the left. "No other political group comes even close."

Religious leaders have long been active in political causes. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used his Baptist pulpit to agitate for civil rights, and fiery televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell awakened the religious right in the 1970s and 1980s with calls to fight what they saw as America's moral decay.

But the current awakening is different. It springs from the grass roots — small and independent churches — and is fueled by emails and YouTube videos. And it is driven less by personality than by the biblical teaching to be the "salt" and "light" of society — in other words, to have a beneficial influence on the world.

"This is the congregational version of the 'tea party,' " says Richard Land, president of the conservative Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "Pastors who in the past would dodge my calls are calling me saying, 'How can we be involved?'"

The pastor movement is being guided and ministered to by a growing web of well-financed organizations that offer seminars, online tools and a battery of lawyers.

Tim Wildmon, who runs the American Family Assn., one of the most generous underwriters of Christian conservative activism, predicted that evangelicals in 2012 will match the fervency of the Ronald Reagan era — in large part because so many pastors are prodding their flocks to the polls.

"They're going to be telling their parishioners to get registered and to make sure to go vote," he said. "I think it's huge."

Boosting the movement are veteran figures such as Ralph Reed, former head of the Christian Coalition. His new organization, Faith & Freedom Coalition, is developing a list of Christian voters in key states, a tool it used to reach thousands of voters in Wisconsin's recent recall elections.

New players are even more ambitious. United in Purpose, financed by an anonymous group of Silicon Valley venture capitalists, aims to register 5 million conservative Christians to vote. The organization boasts a sophisticated database that identifies millions of unregistered evangelical and born-again Christian voters around the country.

Bill Dallas, the group's chief executive, said pastors would be pivotal to its efforts. "They're the shepherds of the flock," he said. "It's a great mass media channel."

The power of pastors to transform their congregations into potential political blocs came into sharp focus in Texas in 2006, when Christian organizers David Lane and Wayne Hamilton invited ministers throughout the state to voter mobilization meetings, some of which Perry attended.

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Two years later, Jim Garlow of Skyline Church in La Mesa, Calif., rallied fellow pastors to push for the passage of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage.

"This country is at a critical crossroads," said Garlow, who is now working with several national organizations to encourage their brand of biblically inspired political activism. "Pastors have to understand their unique role."

In 2010, pastors in Iowa helped lead a successful campaign to force out three state Supreme Court justices who had ruled in favor of gay marriage.

"When I heard about the decision, there was an anger — a feeling of righteous anger that swept over me," said Pastor Kerry Jech of New Hope Christian Church in Marshalltown. "I have no hatred toward people who engage in a homosexual lifestyle. All that I know is that marriage — biblically and morally — is between a man and a woman."

The Iowa judges campaign is viewed by conservative Christian leaders as a model for political engagement by pastors. Dubbed Project Jeremiah, the effort was spurred in part by Jeff Mullen, pastor of Point of Grace Church in Waukee, whose website IowaPastors.com encourages ministers to speak out on political matters.

The preachers were organized in large part by Lane and Hamilton — reunited from their days in Texas. The effort was backed by nearly $1 million that poured in from groups such as the American Family Assn. and the National Organization for Marriage. Today, Hamilton is the political director of Perry's presidential campaign and Lane is actively organizing gatherings of pastors in early primary states.

The political engagement of evangelical pastors signals a reawakening of the conservative Christian activism that atrophied in the last decade. This time, organizers say it could be even more powerful, a reflection of the sharp backlash against the current administration.

Dismay about Obama's stances on gay rights and abortion — as well as anxiety about the growing national debt — has overcome the ambivalence of many pastors about speaking out.

"Preachers are being emboldened because of the great need in the nation," said Pastor Richard Lee of First Redeemer Church outside of Atlanta.

The change is producing some conflict. Some of Demastus' longtime Democratic parishioners have left the Fort Des Moines Church of Christ because of his outspokenness. But he and others are pushing ahead in the view that pastors must lead in "the fight to restore Christian values."

"There is a fire in my bones to do this," Demastus said, citing the passion of a Revolutionary War pastor who dropped his ministerial robes before his congregation to reveal the uniform of the Continental Army.

The story of the Rev. Peter Muhlenberg telling his flock "there is a time to pray and a time to fight" was repeated across Iowa this summer, as pastors signed up worshipers to become "prayer warriors" and, they said, help take the country back to its Christian roots.

As pastors speak out on political matters, they've drawn admonitions from groups such as Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which warns that such activism could jeopardize their churches' nonprofit status. But the religious leaders are bolstered by well-funded Christian legal organizations supporting their cause.

The most prominent — the Alliance Defense Fund, a group based in Scottsdale, Ariz., that spent $32 million in fiscal year 2010 — is challenging a 1954 tax code amendment that prohibits pastors, as leaders of tax-exempt organizations, from supporting or opposing candidates from the pulpit. The group sponsors Pulpit Freedom Sunday, in which it offers free legal representation to churches whose pastors preach about political candidates and are then audited by the Internal Revenue Service. (So far, no IRS investigations have been triggered.)

Last fall, 100 churches participated — up from 33 in 2008. This year's Pulpit Freedom Sunday, scheduled for Oct. 2, is expected to draw more than 500 churches.

"Unfortunately, there are groups out there who try to scare pastors into censoring themselves," said Kelly Shackelford, president of the Texas-based Liberty Institute, another legal defense group, who said he was increasingly fielding calls on the topic from preachers. "My encouragement is, 'Don't be intimidated from fulfilling what God is calling you to do.'"

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From fear of Islam to outreach: how 9/11 prompted interfaith efforts

In the decade since 9/11, the percentage of US congregations that participate in interfaith worship has doubled, a study says, and more mosques are engaging in outreach and dialogue.

A man walks past a memorial pool at ground zero in New York, Wednesday, Sept. 7. Over the past 10 years since 9/11, the percentage of US congregations involved in interfaith worship has doubled, while more mosques are engaging in outreach and dialogue. (Seth Wenig/AP)

By Patrick Wall, Contributor
posted September 8, 2011 at 5:57 pm EDT

New York

After the deadly attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the first person Rabbi Ted Falcon called was his friend, Jamal Rahman, a Sufi imam. On the following Sabbath, the rabbi invited the imam to his Seattle synagogue to speak to the congregation.

Soon after, the two spiritual leaders, along with Pastor Don Mackenzie, commenced a series of frank conversations about their beliefs, both shared and exclusive. The talks eventually inspired a radio show, a pair of books, and worldwide speaking tours.

The men’s willingness to ask and answer tough questions about faith in the wake of 9/11 had clearly struck a nerve with many Americans. In particular, many people wanted to talk about a religion they had barely considered before the attacks, but which now consumed their thoughts: Islam.

RECOMMENDED: Helping young people champion religious tolerance

“One of the things that 9/11 showed was that, generally speaking, Americans had an abysmal ignorance of Islam,” says Rabbi Falcon, who founded his Bet Alef Meditative Synagogue in the 1990s.

In the decade since 9/11, despite some Americans’ fears of and hostility toward Islam, many individuals and institutions have followed the path of the rabbi, the pastor, and the imam: They’ve reached out across faiths to increase their understanding and to address common concerns.

Over the past 10 years, the percentage of US congregations involved in interfaith worship has doubled – from 7 to 14 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of congregations performing interfaith community service nearly tripled – from 8 to almost 21 percent –
according to a new survey by Hartford Seminary’s Institute for Religion Research in Connecticut. In doing so, these congregations have joined the colorful, decades-old American interfaith movement. Since 9/11, the movement has gained new momentum and, more than ever before, has drawn Muslims into its ranks.

As America marks the 10th anniversary of 9/11, several interfaith events are planned around the country, including, prominently, the 9/11 Unity Walk in Washington, D.C.

“To think about 9/11 without thinking about the interfaith movement would almost be a travesty,” says Maureen Fiedler, host of “Interfaith Voices,” a nationally syndicated radio program that was created in the days after the Sept. 11 attacks.

“Islam was so misunderstood and so vilified by those events,” says Ms. Fiedler, “that a real interfaith understanding has to be brought to bear on the issue.”

In the days and weeks after 9/11, when Muslim extremists killed nearly 3,000 civilians, some Americans came to view Islam itself as the enemy. Around the country, mosques were vandalized, people who appeared Muslim or Middle Eastern were harassed and, in Arizona, a Sikh man who was wearing a turban was mistaken for a Muslim and shot and killed.

In recent years, anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States has diminished, but not disappeared. A proposal to build a Muslim community center near the World Trade Center site provoked heated protests last year. This year, Congress held controversial hearings on Muslim radicalization within the US.

Curiosity about Islam

While America’s post-9/11 Islam fixation filled some people with dread, others were filled with curiosity.

“Many people realized, maybe for the first time, that, ‘Hey, there are mosques in our town,’ ” says Diana Eck, a comparative religion professor at Harvard University and director of the Pluralism Project, which documents America’s religious landscape.

As interest in American Muslims surged, many Muslim leaders went to great lengths to explain Islam to outsiders and to develop partnerships beyond the Muslim community – often, for the first time.

“Before 9/11, most mosques were fairly insular. Today, most mosques, if not all, have intensive programs of reaching out and having dialogues,” says Imam Rahman, who helped found the Interfaith Community Church in Seattle.

In the weeks immediately after Sept. 11, mosques and Islamic community centers around the country held open houses. Then, in 2008, a multinational group of 138 Muslim scholars, called Common Word, invited senior Christian leaders to Yale University to discuss commonalities among their faiths.

Real-world collaboration

Interfaith interaction can sometimes amount to little more than religious show-and-tell: you show me your strange rituals, and I’ll show you mine. But often, the theological icebreaking leads to real-world collaboration.

In Seattle, Falcon, Rahman and Pastor Mackenzie, who lecture and publish as the Interfaith Amigos, decided to turn their talk into action. They joined various interfaith service projects – including one where the men worked with the congregants of an evangelical megachurch to build a Habitat for Humanity home for a Muslim family.

In an area of Brooklyn, New York known as “Little Pakistan,” a local entrepreneur founded a nonprofit agency in early 2002 to serve low-income South Asians and Muslims, including many who were detained after 9/11.

Since then, the group has expanded its mission to serve non-Muslims and has worked with Jewish and Christian leaders on several initiatives, including a public health campaign, hate crime prevention, and youth leadership training. In August, the group honored rabbis and pastors at a series of public iftar dinners during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Successful interfaith coalitions must focus on shared concerns, rather than theological differences, says Mohammad Razvi, founder of the Brooklyn nonprofit, known as the Council of Peoples Organization.

“It’s not a Kumbaya dialogue,” says Mr. Razvi. “We’re working on serious issues, concrete issues, [so] that we can actually have accomplishments.”

Mobilizing youth
In 2002, Eboo Patel, a Muslim then in his mid-20s, founded the Interfaith Youth Core with a Jewish friend. They hired one full-time staff member: an evangelical Christian. Today, the nonprofit employs 31 staffers and operates on a $4 million annual budget.

The group trains college-aged leaders – “interfaith fellows” – who then return to their campuses to organize interfaith events and community service projects. This year, the organization trained leaders on 97 campuses who enlisted around 10,000 participants of various faiths to tackle issues such as homelessness, hunger, and sustainable living.

“We’ve seen an outpouring of interest in our programs,” says Mr. Patel. “There’s a lot of people watching blatant bigotry and saying, ‘We cannot let our country go in that direction.’ ”

Patel and his staff helped the White House develop an initiative that it launched this year, called the “Interfaith and Community Service Challenge.” So far 278 colleges have promised to sponsor interfaith programming and community service projects next year.

9/11’s interfaith casualty list

People often treat interfaith as a tool – religious coalitions that are built to achieve some shared goal, such as education or social justice. But sometimes, interfaith can be an end in itself.

In New York City, the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary offers a two-year interfaith ordination program. Among One Spirit’s graduates is Reverend Lisa Bellan-Boyer, an interfaith minister who lives in New Jersey and teaches college courses on religions of the East and West.

On the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001, Ms. Bellan-Boyer stood near the Jersey City harbor and scanned the Manhattan skyline for the Twin Towers, only to find rising curls of coal-black smoke. When she turned and saw a young Muslim woman, her head fully covered, Bellan-Boyer had the sudden urge to scream at her.

Instead, she headed to the city, where she volunteered to serve as a Red Cross chaplain. As it turned out, the first person she counseled was a Muslim woman, whose daughter died in the World Trade Center.

“So I learned my lesson right then and there how much of a world disaster and how interfaith the casualty list really was,” she says.

RECOMMENDED: Helping young people champion religious tolerance

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Muslim students enrolling in Catholic schools

By KATE HAMMER
From Tuesday’s Globe and Mail

*Shared Abrahamic traditions and an emphasis on modest dress help make Muslim students feel at home at Catholic schools*

At a time when progressive sex education and gay-rights clubs are becoming an increasing part of the secular curriculum, many devout families in the country’s most populous province are looking for a faith-based approach to learning. In Ontario, however, the only publicly funded faith-based option is Catholic schools - and that's just fine for some Muslim parents, even if it's someone else's faith.

For Seid Oumer, an observant Muslim and a father of four from Ethiopia, Catholic education has a lot going for it. He sells the other Muslim parents on the benefits of uniforms, discipline and the faith-based approach.

Mr. Oumer's 16-year-old daughter, Daliya, has been attending Catholic religion classes at Cardinal Ambrozic Catholic Secondary School in Brampton, Ont., for two years.

"I find it very interesting, I like getting an idea of how our religions are very similar," she said.

Ms. Oumer feels comfortable using the chapel whenever she needs to pray. The only time she feels a little awkward is on special occasions such as Christmas, Easter or Remembrance Day, when the school attends Mass, and she’s left alone in a pew while her classmates line up to take the Holy Eucharist.

"They suggest that non-Catholics go up for a blessing, but I don't know, I don't want to do that," she said. "So I sit down and everyone's like, 'Why aren't you going up?' I tell them I just don't want to."

Though at least one parent must be Catholic in order for a student to enroll in a Catholic elementary school, at the high-school level faith doesn’t matter as long as there's room. Declining high school enrolment has meant that there often is room - about 10 per cent of the pupils attending Catholic boards in the Greater Toronto Area are non-Catholic.

Shared Abrahamic traditions and an emphasis on modest dress help make Muslim students feel at home at Catholic schools. Over the past decade, there is anecdotal evidence that more and more of them have been taking advantage of the fact that at the secondary level, Catholic schools are open to any local family who wishes to register, be they Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Rastafarian.

In the Catholic board, religious accommodation hasn't ignited controversy like it has at the Toronto District School Board.

This spring, when it became widely known that a Toronto middle school was allowing an imam to lead prayer sessions in the school cafeteria on Fridays, critics including Jewish, Hindu and secular groups accused the school of taking accommodation too far, saying such services were inappropriate during class time. This summer, they rallied outside that board's headquarters protesting "the mosqueteria."

One of the reasons Muslims students attend Catholic schools is because many Canadian Muslims are recent immigrants from East Africa and South Asia where "often, the best schools are the ones run by nuns," said Shafique Virani, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto. "That image may have remained from when they were back home."

So far, no one has tried to quantify the trend or study the reasons behind it, he said.

Mr. Oumer said he is grateful that in Catholic schools his children will be taught a conservative approach to reproductive biology, sex education and same-sex relations.

Sometimes the local Catholic school does have a better reputation or higher standardized test scores than its secular counterpart.
That's what prompted Saadia Sediqzadah to ask her parents if she could attend Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy in Markham, Ont., east of Toronto.

She says her father was worried she might convert, but that his biggest concern was that she might face discrimination or bullying at her new school.

"He said it was okay if I didn't tell anyone I was Muslim," she said. "But I decided I had to be up front and I went around to everyone and told them, 'Hi my name is Saadia, I'm Afghan and I'm Muslim.'"

The fall of her Grade 9 year, Ms. Sediqzadah said there were only a few Muslims at her school, but by the time she graduated, in 2006, there were close to 40.

"It's word of mouth, parents talking to other parents," she said. "Often families are related or from the same community and they're telling each other good things about the Catholic schools."
Marriage is a fundamental tenet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But church leaders now face a matrimony problem within their flock: Young single Mormons are delaying marriage.

Becky Maher, 29, attends the American River Young Singles Adult Branch in Sacramento. She is active in the congregation and has held leadership positions in the church. But getting married has so far eluded her. "I would like to be married as soon as possible," she said.

Ben Forsyth, 28, is also a member of the singles congregation. Sunday, he led the congregation in the benediction. But he's not ready for marriage. "I don't think I've put it off, I just haven't found the right person," he said. This week he enters graduate school. "Marriage is something I'm aware of, but I'm not ready."

Maher and Forsyth reflect a shift that worries national church leaders. Women want to marry. Men want to wait. And church leaders are concerned because they believe marriage is a prerequisite for life in eternity.

Last weekend, Sacramento King draft pick and former Brigham Young University basketball star Jimmer Fredette announced his engagement via Twitter. At 22, he is following the traditional path for Mormons and is marrying young.

Church leaders want other Mormon men to follow his lead and not that of the nation as a whole. Last week the U.S. Census Bureau released figures indicating marriage is at an all-time low and people are waiting longer to tie the knot.

Mormon church leaders say Mormon men are postponing marriage either for financial, career or educational concerns. And sometimes for other reasons, according to church President Thomas Monson.

"Men are having a little too much fun being single, taking extravagant vacations, buying expensive cars and toys, and just generally enjoying the carefree life with your friends," Monson said in a speech to the Worldwide General Conference of the church in April.

Mormons believe that marriage in the temple is mandatory to reach the celestial, or highest level, of heaven. Only Mormons who marry can reach this level and expect to share eternity with their spouse and children.

Marriage is also important to the church because married men typically hold high leadership positions such as bishop and stake president.

Marriage is more important than education or career, said Thomas Holman, professor of family life at Brigham Young University. "When you scrimp and sacrifice together when you're young, that
brings you closer."

The average age of first marriage for LDS church members is approximately 23, said Holman.

Monson alluded to the marriage age increasing, but specific numbers have not been released.

"In research I've done, 25 years old seems to be the breaking point," Holman said. "At that age, they should seriously start thinking about getting married."

According to the recent census figures, the median age for first marriage in the United States between 1970 and 2009 increased from 22.5 years to 28.4 for men, and from 20.6 years to 26.5 for women.

Mormon marriages appear to last longer. The divorce rate for Mormons is about 20 percent, according to Holman. For non-Mormons, it's more than 40 percent, he said.

LDS leaders promote marriage more than most faiths – they even have entire congregations for singles only.

In the Sacramento area, nearly 2,000 men and women, ages 18 to 30, attend one of 15 singles adult LDS congregations. Church members worship, socialize and perform volunteer work together. They also share a common goal – to meet and marry their spouse.

"We encourage them to date and to date often," said Richard Montgomery, regional director for public affairs.

Josh Robertson, 24, has dated but has not found the right person, "though I don't believe there is one right person for me." He is starting McGeorge Law School and doesn't foresee a lot of dating in his immediate future. "It takes two things I don't have right now, time and money."

Chandra Brown, 28, also attends the singles ward. She met her boyfriend at a Scripture class a few months ago. "So far it's going really well," Brown said.

She stressed the many benefits of joining a singles congregation, such as the opportunity to make friends, serve in the church and, of course, date people with similar beliefs.

The singles congregations aren't for everyone. Singles older than 30 and those with families are encouraged to attend family congregations, according to Montgomery. And singles who meet and marry their spouses move on to other congregations after they are wed.

In the past year, five couples who met at the ward have married.

Maher said she and her girlfriends want to marry but she has faith that it will happen at the right time. "God is in charge," she said.

And so are church leaders who are reminding men of their religious obligations.

"Brethren, there is a point at which it's time to think seriously about marriage and to seek a companion with whom you want to spend eternity," Monson said. "There is nothing in this life which will bring you greater happiness."

Editor's note: Comments on this story were closed Aug. 30 because of inappropriate comments, hate speech and personal attacks.

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Call The Bee's Jennifer Garza, (916) 321-1133.

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# InMinistry Center Class Schedule

The class schedule is organized by semester, beginning with summer semester, and the North American Division union in which the classes are located. Please click on the course title to go to the class web page. The course title links are activated once all information has been received from the professors. To sign up for a class, or classes, please fill out the electronic reservation form available on the class web pages.

## Summer Semester: July 10-29, 2011

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**Spring Semester: March 18-29, 2012**