True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life," to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands - whether of individuals or entire peoples - need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.

-Paulo Freire

By Louis R. Torres, Guam-Micronesia Mission

Giving is basic to life. All nature was made with the innate inability to hold back, or not give. It is only the human being that was created with the ability to give, or refuse to give. So when we give, it is different than the locked-in, preprogrammed bestowal of nature. This makes our gifts of special meaning because giving brings with it emotions and feelings that inanimate objects cannot convey. And the giving even becomes more dear and cherished when it is given from our want.

When Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem, he "saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury" (Luke 21:1). He also noticed "a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites" (verse 2). To this he said, "Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mark 12:43, 44).

How was it possible for this woman to give more "than all they which have cast into the treasury"? Let's suppose that Mary works at a store that pays her $100.00 per week. But John makes $100.00 per hour. In church Mary drops $50.00 in the offering plate, and John gives $50.00. Who gave more? Technically speaking, they gave the same. But when comparing the time spent to earn it, Mary's gift represented half of a week's wages, while John's only represented half an hour of labor. It took more of Mary's investment of her life to earn what she gave.

Our earned wages are a representation of an exchange made for a portion of our life lived out in time and talents. When we go to work, our employer is paying us what they think our time and talents are worth. Consequently, when we give, we are giving a portion of our life to benefit another life. The value of a penny or dollar is measured by heaven not by the value of the instrument itself, but by the amount of life expanded to earn it.

God so loved that he gave. He did not redeem us "with corruptible things, as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:" (1 Peter 1:18,19). It was life in the person of his son. So God's request that we give is not about his needing our metal, paper, or plastic but rather what that represents: returning to Him a portion of the life he has given us, and by so doing demonstrating our belief that He is our life-giver and that we are in tune with His value of life. Thus we lay treasure - saved lives - in store in the kingdom.

How do you explain the reasons for giving? Discuss this with Louis on our Facebook page.
THOUGHTS ON BEING THE GUEST SPEAKER

by Loren Seibold

If you're like me, most of your preaching life revolves around a set of people whom you know well: your parishioners. You're comfortable with them, you know how to relate to them, and have some sense of what they need and how they're receiving what you say.

It's different when you're away from home, though. After speaking at camp meetings in other conferences this summer, some reflections on being the guest speaker:

1. It feels good to be asked. Let's admit it: though we go to do God's work, we like to be recognized. Nothing wrong with that, within reason. It's a validation of what you've achieved that someone believes you're worth flying across the country to bring them a blessing. But, of course, you can't let it go to your head. I know that here at home I rarely impress anyone: I'm just a regular pastor doing the regular things pastors do week after week.

2. And, I know perfectly well that there are pastors in those conferences who are better preachers than I am, with fantastic messages from God. I was chosen, at least in part, because I'm from somewhere else! (It reminds me of Mark Twain's line: "An expert is just some guy from out of town.") I feel like I should apologize to the local pastors who are doing all the really hard work, like leading youth and putting up tents and chairs, that I get to breeze in and talk for a few hours, and be recognized as The Guest Speaker, when in reality I'm doing a lot less than they are!

3. The Holy Spirit works, and people are kind. I'm always amazed when someone comes up and says, "That was just what I needed." I may have thought I gave a rather clumsy presentation, and am feeling somewhat self-critical. And of course, I had no idea that was just what you needed, because I've never met you before in my life. But the Spirit speaks for us. Plus, Christian people are gracious and good, and because they come to be fed, they listen and receive. It's God's doing, not mine.

4. It's hard to read a congregation you don't know. I unconsciously know who to watch in my congregations. I know whether to expect "amens" or nods or smiles. The camp meeting crowd has a lot of people, and I know few of them. (In Northern California, where I preached six times, I found that as the week progressed I began to learn the emotional texture of the group, and even though I didn't know people personally, I knew who to look to for response.)

5. Finally - although it's been said many times - I never cease to be impressed by the Seventh-day Adventist community. You go someplace where you assume you'll know no one, and people come up to you and say, "Remember me?" It's lovely, and one of the great blessings of being a part of this church.

What are your thoughts on being (or having) a guest speaker? Discuss with Loren on our Facebook page.

BE THE CHANGE

"It feels weird to count my baptisms; it's just not who I am. There are countless people who are a part of this kid's journey-I just get to be the one to 'pull the grain,'" she says.

Pastor Krystalynn Martin, pastor of a boarding school church believes that her true calling is to mentor students to become followers of Christ. Throughout the past ten years, her students have fed the homeless, preached in the streets, and freed slaves around the year. Her challenge to her students? "BE the change in the world today."

Read the rest of the article to find out how God has blessed Pastor Martin with hundreds of baptisms over the years.

RENEWING OUR CALLING

I just returned from the NAD Teachers Convention where over 6,000 gathered on an Upward Journey to Excellence. My role was to be a spy on behalf of NAD Ministerial to look at the logistics of pulling off such a herculean task. We have penciled in a similar event for pastors June 28 - July 1, 2015 for pastors and chaplains.

I was not prepared for the sheer joy that exuded from 6,000 educators, as they prepared for the upcoming school year. Teacher after teacher told me that this event gives them affirmation, inspiration, and knowledge. To stand with 6,000 other educators with the same passion for Jesus gives a rich solidarity that can give a boost through the lonely times of teaching. I asked the educators if they thought pastors would benefit by something
similar and they said ‘absolutely!’ As pastors, let us pray and plan together for our gathering in 2015, that we too can taste the joy that comes from huddling together with thousands of our closest friends and colleagues and renewing our calling from heaven.

-- Dave Gemmell

**READING FOR PASTORS**

**Does the President’s religion matter?** *Yes, says Judd Birdsall in CT.* Quote: "Ironically, the curious American integration of piety and the presidency largely stems from our separation of church and state. Without an established religion led by an archbishop, ecumenical patriarch, or grand mufti, the President acts, for better or worse, as the nation's senior religious figure."

**Is it selfish for clergy to take care of themselves?** *No, says the Duke Clergy Health Initiative.*

Seminarians are racking up big debts - *for a profession that usually doesn’t bring big returns.*

Think it would be great to have a big Hollywood celebrity come to church? *This church is getting tired of it.*

A stunning example of taking the gospel to the sinners, and ministry outside of the church’s usual comfort zone: "Finding Jesus at Burning Man". Quote: "We wanted to see if Jesus was there. Like missionaries to an aboriginal culture, we were hunting for hints of the witness of God's Spirit in the midst of it all. If it is true that 'where sin abounds, grace does much more abound,’ it seemed that Burning Man would be on fire with great grace."

As NY13 takes our church to the city, *Andy Crouch talks about celebrating the city.* Quote: "The church has tended to have two postures toward the city. One has been indifference, a kind of pragmatic separatism that happens when we don’t acknowledge either the problems or the gifts of our cities.... The other posture would be a pathologizing of the city, in which we talk about it as a place that desperately needs charity or service, which the church then is called to help provide. That’s a step up from indifference, but it still falls short of what we are trying to get at with the phrase “this is our city.”

**TO THE POINT: GENEROSITY**

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can
- John Wesley

If you can’t feed a hundred people, then just feed one.
- Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Generosity during life is a very different thing from generosity in the hour of death; one proceeds from genuine liberality and benevolence, the other from pride or fear.
- Horace Mann

In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it’s wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices.
- Elizabeth Gilbert

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again.
- Quaker saying

**IDEAS, EVENTS, RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Humor:** *Come on - you know you’ve wanted to do the same thing!*  

The Seven Campaign: *Stop Child Abuse Now* has just been launched by Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) and its partners. *More info here.*

Join with the rest of the Division in *Breaking the Silence* about any and all types of abuse against women,
children, elderly and men through your participation on August 25 (always the fourth Sabbath of August) and by observing Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day in your church.

The NAD communication office is looking for stories about the sharing of The Great Hope booklet. If your church has shared it and received responses that indicate a life change, a new philosophy or interest because of the book or having that contact with church members, NAD would like to receive your short story for possible use in a collection of such stories. Have your churches been involved with passing our huge numbers of the books? Have your members been involved and do they have great stories to tell? Send your very short stories as soon as possible to the NAD Office of Communication. Include a photo and caption information.

Family Ministries has a new Facebook page. The page will allow you to share quotes or information which was not possible in their previous group. If you would like to access and be a part of the NAD Family Ministries Facebook page you will need to “Like” it on Facebook to join it.

Previous resource links:

- Summary: mandatory reporting by clergy about child abuse
- eGracenotes mobile app
- New PlusLine at AdventSource
- NY13
- GODencounters, Arlington, TX, August 30
- Pastor’s convention, NAD Ministerial Department
- The NY13 Satellite Evangelism and Prayer Rally

“It feels weird to count my baptisms; it’s just not who I am. There are countless people who are a part of this kid’s journey—I just get to be the one to ‘pull the grain,’” she says.

Pastor Krystalynn Martin, pastor of a boarding school church believes that her true calling is to mentor students to become followers of Christ. Throughout the past ten years, her students have fed the homeless, preached in the streets, and freed slaves around the year. Her challenge to her students? "BE the change in the world today."

This season comes around every year. The school year is beginning, church elders are getting back together again, and for Pastor Krystalynn Martin, this is the time when she really starts getting excited. Her church is coming back to school.

Krystalynn has been pastoring at Rio Lindo Adventist Academy Church for almost a decade. Her unique position as a pastor at an Adventist boarding school requires her to set the spiritual tone for almost two hundred attendees not just on Sabbath but during the week as well.

Krystalynn teaches religion classes, coordinates worships, gives Bible studies daily, and keeps her office open for students to drop by for some encouragement or just to play guitar. The thing that brings Krystalynn and her husband, Steve, back each year is the yearning to mentor students; to see them discover their gifts and begin to put those gifts into action.

“The moment that sparkles for me is when I see students realize that God can use them and then they begin living out their spiritual gifts,” Krystalynn says.

Students at Rio are able to live out their gifts through all sorts of means. Pastor Krystalynn and Steve have introduced students to Open Table Ministries, a quarterly day spent in a nearby town where students minister to homeless people through music, preaching, clothing drives, and bike repair.

Over the course of Krystalynn’s junior religion class, she challenges her students to learn Adventist doctrines, Daniel and Revelation and how to defend those beliefs as well. Then she gives an assignment called “Be the Church” in which students discover their spiritual gifts and create a project to change something in the world using their gifts. This assignment spurred one group to package leftover cafeteria food from Sabbath lunch and deliver it weekly to area homeless and migrant workers. Another group collected enough money from their friends to free a child slave from India through the organization, International Justice Mission.
Krystalynn isn’t interested in discussing her own accomplishments as a pastor. Although she has baptized hundreds of young people over the years, she hasn’t kept careful track.

“It feels weird to count my baptisms; it’s just not who I am. There are countless people who are a part of this kid’s journey-I just get to be the one to ‘pull the grain’,” she says.

Krystalynn’s role in many of these kids’ lives is life-changing. She has challenged them to seek God for themselves, pushed them to face their fears, and carefully guided many to become devoted followers of Christ. Her undeniable calling is to empower each individual to be a minister for God, no matter their age, race, or gender and she answers that call each and every day.
Is the President America's Pastor in Chief?
Why Mitt Romney's Mormonism does matter.
Judd Birdsall [ posted 8/13/2012 ]

*Editor's Note: This piece is a response to "Our American President: The 'Almost Pastor' of an 'Almost Chosen' Land."

Against the backdrop of "can I vote for a Mormon?" unease among many religious voters, the Romney campaign has downplayed the relevance of religion for the presidency. We're told not to worry about a candidate's faith because the President is not a "pastor in chief." In 2012, that may be a politically savvy truism, but is it really true?

With a Mormon challenging President Obama, a Protestant, several Christian leaders have urged voters to consider credentials instead of creed. Franklin Graham spoke for many when he told ABC News: "Listen, we're not voting for the 'pastor in chief' of the United States. We're voting for the President. We're looking for the person that is the most qualified, a person that shares common values, a person that loves the country, a person who can lead this nation out of the economic mess that we've gotten ourselves in, and that's I think the main thing for most people today."

Romney, a former Mormon bishop, has been emphatic in response to questions posed about particulars of his religious beliefs: "I'm not running for pastor in chief. I'm running for commander in chief."

Romney would, of course, not say otherwise. Suggesting that the President does play a significant, albeit informal, religious role would be perceived as committing theocratic heresy that runs afoul of the U.S. Constitution.

Article VI of the Constitution makes it perfectly clear that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office." But when the President pledges to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution in his oath of office, he customarily does so with his hand on the Bible and concludes with the words: "So help me God."

From George Washington's first inaugural address to President Obama's remarks following the recent shooting in Aurora, Colorado, American presidents have routinely invoked God in ways that more or less reflect mainstream religious opinion.

To be sure, that mainstream is ever evolving and expanding. But the mainstreaming of minority groups is often a contentious process, as witnessed by the consternation over Kennedy's Catholicism in 1960, Romney's Mormonism today, and the preposterous yet persistent rumor that Obama is a Muslim. Even though the nation is home to an increasing proportion of nonbelievers, a June 2012 Gallup poll found 43 percent of Americans still say they would not vote for an atheist presidential candidate.

Ironically, the curious American integration of piety and the presidency largely stems from our separation of church and state. Without an established religion led by an archbishop, ecumenical patriarch, or grand mufti, the President acts, for better or worse, as the nation's senior religious figure.

Cambridge University professor Andrew Preston makes this point in his massive, 815-page work *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy*: "There is no official hierarchy in the American civil religion, but as the nation's head of state as well as its chief executive ... the president has acted as its de facto pope."
What exactly are the President’s papal duties? Preston explains: "Since George Washington, the president has been the interpreter of rites, symbols, and meanings of the civil religion, with some—particularly Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman—significantly recasting it under the pressure of war."

Obama's and Romney's faith-infused interpretations of the Aurora shooting are case in point, and the most recent chapter in the long history of the presidential pastorate. Both politicians denounced the killing as "evil," and both turned to the Bible for meaning, solace, and hope.

In his public statement after meeting with victims' families in Aurora, Obama quoted the famous eschatological promise found in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Focusing on the here and now, Romney encouraged his audience to "mourn with those who mourn," a reference to Romans 12:15. In poignant remarks packed with Christian language, Romney expressed his prayer that "the grieving will know the nearness of God" and "the comfort of a living God." Citing the apostle Paul by name, Romney quoted from 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, "blessed be God, who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble."

Many commentators applauded Romney for sounding "presidential." Especially in times of tribulation, Americans expect their President to be their pastor—not in any formal sense as a leader of a church but in the general sense as a provider of spiritual care and theological perspective for the nation.

"Moments like these call for our commander in chief to act as a theologian in chief, and Romney did that today," Boston University religious studies professor Stephen Prothero told CNN. "He offered a theology of comfort, compassionate conservatism if you will, consistent both with the biblical witness and with the needs of the country on tragic days like today."

And it's not just tragedies that oblige the President to don his cassock. The President invariably offers theological and pastoral reflections in his proclamations on Religious Freedom Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and in his remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast, the White House Iftar and Seder, and many other occasions throughout the year. The State of the Union and other major addresses would feel oddly incomplete without "God bless America," the obligatory presidential sign off since Ronald Reagan. And let's not forget that many presidents appeal to biblical passages and Christian principles as inspiration or justification for their policies—something Obama has done numerous times.

Americans differ widely in their views toward the presidential pastorate. Some want even more religion in the Oval Office. Others adamantly argue for less. For many it probably depends on what religion we're talking about. Whatever our views of what ought to be, let's not kid ourselves about what is—the pastoral dimension of the presidency is an enduring feature of American life.

In the face of feverish speculation about what Romney's Mormonism may mean for America, his supporters should situate his faith in proper context rather than dismiss any notion of its relevance. A candidate's religion is not everything, nor is it nothing. It's something to consider as one important factor among many, because among the President's many roles is that of "pastor in chief."

Judd Birdsall is a former U.S. diplomat and a current Ph.D. candidate at Cambridge University. From 2007 to 2011 he served at the U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom and was founding chairman of the Forum on Religion & Global Affairs. Previously he wrote on Obama's faith.
Caught up in the day-to-day demands of ministry, clergy often find it difficult to take time to attend to their health. But in North Carolina, UMC clergy are learning that it’s more than OK to care for themselves.

August 14, 2012 | When the Rev. Jeanette Hicks graduated from seminary in 2010, a mentor cautioned her about overwork. A retired pastor, the mentor hoped that Hicks and other young clergy would do better at staying healthy over the long run than she and her contemporaries had done.

But just six months later, Hicks, a United Methodist pastor then serving in the Kentucky Conference, was a sleep-deprived wreck, surviving on sugar-fueled energy and calorie-dense church meals. Despite the good advice and her best intentions, she was a walking portrait of exhaustion, with dull hair, brittle fingernails and dark circles under her eyes.

“I’ve always been a physically healthy person,” she said. “But many days I’d look at the clock, and it’d be 3 p.m. and I hadn’t eaten yet. If I took time to eat, well, that was time away from getting something done.”

Hicks’ experience is not unusual. Even with the best intentions and all the knowledge and advice in the world, clergy of all ages often find it difficult to take care of themselves, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has found. On the long list of items that must be done every day, they often put themselves last.

Many pastors misunderstand self-care to mean “self-ish,” said Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, the initiative’s research director and assistant research professor at the Duke Global Health Institute.

“As a participant in Spirited Life, the Clergy Health Initiative’s wellness program, Hicks is learning how to give herself that permission. A two-year program of intervention services -- part of a broader study of clergy health among UMC pastors in North Carolina -- Spirited Life emphasizes stress management and healthy eating, underscored with scripturally based reasons for taking care of oneself. The initiative has found that this scriptural connection is essential for clergy, for it makes the practice of caring for themselves a part of their calling, not an additional task to complete.
Now an associate at Trinity UMC in Jacksonville, N.C., Hicks is making an effort to set boundaries and create time to care for herself and her family.

As the Clergy Health Initiative learned in a series of clergy focus groups in 2008, pastors can get caught up in trying to meet what may be unrealistic expectations -- both the congregation's and their own. One of the most pervasive and damaging is the notion that clergy should be available around the clock, seven days a week.

“I can't tell you how many times people say to me, 'Well, I know Friday is your day off, but ...,'” Hicks said. “I know maybe two clergy that I think of as being good at [setting] boundaries, and they get a lot of flak about it.”

In the face of such expectations, it's easy for pastors to fall into the trap of feeling guilty when they take time to care for themselves.

“When you do take care of yourself, there's a sense that you're not taking care of other people,” Hicks said.

Hicks points out that even when she's not at work, she is still caring for others. Each evening, she returns home to find her four children and husband waiting for her attention.

Back in Kentucky, fatigue became a huge factor as she felt pressure to do ever more. As each new task presented itself, she felt compelled to address it immediately. Otherwise, it would take time away from her family later.

In the clergy focus groups, the Duke researchers found that many pastors believe that church members do not understand the breadth and depth of pastoral ministry. One pastor remarked that congregants “are aware we work one hour on Sunday, and they don’t realize [we work] the whole rest of the week. There’s no such thing as a 40-hour week.” Another pastor pointed out that “every person sitting in the pew has a separate job description for our job, and when you put it all together, it’s an impossible task.”

Only a few months into a new appointment -- his first as a solo pastor -- the Rev. John Michael McAllister is already beginning to feel the weight of such expectations.

In July, McAllister became pastor of Trinity UMC in Raleigh after four years as an associate at a larger church across town. After 10 years of declining membership, Trinity had asked for a younger pastor to help them identify ways to be engaged in the community. As their new pastor, McAllister wants to deliver.

“There’s a real vibe here that we are ready for some change, to have someone who is keen on making some connections in the community,” he said. “I’m really trying to capitalize on the new-guy, new-thing capital that I have right now.”

In his first month at Trinity, McAllister held 45 meetings with community leaders, made at least as many pastoral care visits, and wrote and delivered four weeks' worth of sermons. He knows his pace isn't sustainable, but he's not quite sure how to cut back when the time comes.

Eventually, he hopes to return to a pattern that worked well for him at the church where he was an associate. There, the senior pastor made sure everyone understood that Fridays were the pastors’ official day off. McAllister also set aside Saturdays for sabbath and time with his wife, a practice that he says is “not really optional” for sustaining his mental health. He spent the first half of the week on visits and administrative tasks and used Thursdays for writing his sermons.

The schedule worked, but like many pastors, McAllister still felt strong pressure -- from both himself and others -- to put other people first. And also like many pastors, he felt deeply rewarded whenever someone praised him for going above and beyond.

Fortunately, McAllister has a team of supporters who help him fight the guilt and resist the temptation. His wife and a covenant group of other pastors help him remember to set boundaries.

It can be easier for other people -- especially people who know and care about you -- to see when life is starting to get
out of balance, McAllister said.

But it’s not enough to just set boundaries. You also have to keep them. When church members call about non-urgent matters on his day off, McAllister has been kind but firm, asking them to wait.

“Just because you can always reach me in an emergency doesn’t mean that I’m available 24/7,” he said. “Some people get that inherently. Some people do not.”

At the same time, self-care doesn’t mean pastors have to set impenetrable boundaries. Hicks, for example, found that she was able to integrate self-care into her ministry, engaging the congregation in the process.

Realizing that her own guilt would make it impossible to schedule time just for herself, she looked for ways to incorporate those opportunities into her ministry. During Lent, she taught yoga to her congregation as a discipline of body, mind and spirit.

“I was surprised by how many people came and how readily accepted it was,” she said.

As instructor, she would move around the room and, when necessary, ask participants if she could guide their bodies into more effective positions. The class -- and the connections it forged -- became an unexpected and effective opportunity for ministry.

Moving the participants into a new yoga position, she could often feel the tension in their muscles, and when she commented, they would inevitably tell her about some stressful event that had happened recently.

“When I just see people on Sunday, I don’t have that interaction with them,” she said. “There was a surprising amount of vulnerability.”

More than just a health class, the yoga group became a spiritual experience. The group incorporated communion and prayer into some of the sessions and ended each session in silence.

“People would really talk about the inner peace that that gave them and how God spoke to them,” Hicks said. “They didn’t want to get up. They didn’t want to leave. And I would think, ‘Why can’t church be like this?’”

Approaches that tie together mental, physical and spiritual health are often the most effective in convincing clergy to take better care of themselves, the Clergy Health Initiative has found.

Hicks is a believer. She’s seen too many pastors run into the ground by ministry.

“We’re not honoring the vessel that God has given us to work with when we do that,” she said. “Honoring our bodies and our time, taking sabbath -- these are as important as caring for others.”

McAllister, too, remains hopeful -- and for very practical reasons. He loves ministry and wants to be in it for the long run.

“If I don’t establish some healthy rhythms, some healthy boundaries, I’m not sure 15 years from now if it will still be the coolest job in the world,” he said.
August 13, 2012

**Today's Seminary Students "Too Poor To Take Vow of Poverty"**

Surging student debt may push seminary out of reach for budding pastors.

Melissa Steffan

Today’s budding pastors and theologians are entering and exiting seminary with more debt than ever before, according to new research from The Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary.

Auburn research reveals the number of master of divinity graduates who borrow money is surging, as well as the total size of their loans. Debts of $30,000 to $80,000 are now common — with little hope of a high-wage job to repay them, given that Department of Labor statistics estimated a clergyman’s average yearly wage to be about $44,140 last year.

Those who acquire substantial debt before seminary may be “too poor to take the vow of poverty,” Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate told the ARDA's David Briggs. The center has found that many religious institutes have turned away candidates due to educational debt.

CT has noted how seminaries hope to follow Christian colleges in helping students repay loans. Some seminaries are turning to online education in order to cut costs and allow enrollment to grow.

posted by Jeremy Weber | Comments (0)

http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2012/08/seminary_costs.html
Alec Baldwin upsets church over 'theatrical' readings?

Published Thursday, Aug 9 2012, 8:15am EDT | By Alice Stewart | Add comment

Alec Baldwin has allegedly upset his local church.

The star reportedly angered some of the members of the congregation at the Most Holy Trinity Parish in East Hampton, New York.

The 30 Rock star is thought to give 'very theatrical' readings at Sunday services and other parishioners do not approve.
A source spoke to the *New York Post*, saying: "Alec loves to be the center of attention and often reads from the pulpit, which really annoys some in the congregation.

"It is so bad that, one recent Sunday, he went up to read, and part of the congregation stood and rudely turned their backs on him."

The other church-goers reportedly recognize the generosity that the star has shown to the church and town as he has donated a lot of money to his local community.

However, another insider claimed: "He has a need for attention and shows up at every event. When people go to the church, they don't want to see the movie star up there."

[link to article](http://www.digitalspy.com/celebrity/news/a398410/alec-baldwin-upsets-church-over-theatrical-readings.html)
Finding Jesus at Burning Man

How God used us at one of America's most hedonistic gatherings.

Phil Wyman [posted 8/08/2012]

Jesus was walking across the barren landscape, carrying a cross. I shouted to my friends, "Look, it's Jesus! Let's get a picture of him."

The three of us started walking across the desert toward Jesus, but he turned away, walking further into the nothingness. I hastened my pace and left my friends behind.

When I finally caught up to him, I said, "Hi, my name is Simon, and the Romans sent me to carry your cross." I hoped he'd get the reference. He did. Relieved, he handed me his cross, saying, "Oh, thank you. It's not too heavy, is it?"

I walked and talked with Jesus, and I told him my real name. "My friends and I created an art installation in honor of one of your saints, Simeon Stylites. We'd love to show it to you."

Jesus stopped. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Are you Phil Wyman?"

"Um, yes."

Jesus teared up. He said, "I've been looking for you. I was lost and couldn't find you."

Okay, that's weird, I thought. Jesus was lost, and now he's found. How often does that happen?

But this was Burning Man. And anything can happen at Burning Man.

Hedonism and Spiritual Searching

Burning Man is a late-summer festival held annually in the bleak Nevada desert north of Reno. Fifty thousand people gather on the barren alkali lakebed called Black Rock Playa to camp, party, create art, and burn things—big things—culminating in the immolation of a large effigy, the source of the festival's title. During the week it exists, it is Nevada's fourth largest city.

Touting the dual values of radical self-reliance and radical self-expression, Burning Man is a notoriously hedonistic event. There are some naked people, but not as many as the urban myths suggest. There are campsites that are adult playgrounds for a variety of sexual activities. Burning Man has drugs and an excess of free alcohol. By night the event becomes a series of large raves and dance parties, with walls of woofers and tweeters thumping and squealing until dawn. It might be expected that even angels would fear to tread the dust of this nomadic adult party. But art and hedonism are not the only things one finds at Burning Man.

For many, Burning Man is a spiritual pursuit, about finding a countercultural, nonmonetary way to live. You cannot buy or sell things at Burning Man. "Gifting" is the prime value, and most Burners bring enough supplies and gifts to give a great deal away to others—art, food, skills, and crafts. At our camp, espresso was being gifted, and when the espresso machine broke down, a 70-ish "Mr. Fix-It" gave us the gift of repairing it.

That wild combination of hedonism, art, and spiritual pursuit is what dragged me and four adventurous friends to Burning Man late in the summer of 2011. We wanted to see if Jesus was there. Like missionaries to an aboriginal culture, we were hunting for hints of the
witness of God's Spirit in the midst of it all. If it is true that "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound," it seemed that 
Burning Man would be on fire with great grace. Opportunities for sharing the gospel could be limitless.

I wondered why Christianity had not typically embedded itself into these festivals, why we weren't among the leaders of new cultural 
developments and wildly creative thought. Certainly God is wildly creative—enough to find his way into human hearts in other cultures 
around the world. But at these festivals, and in the newly developing cultures of postmodernity, there seem to be so few people of Jesus. 
Yet, as the five of us would discover, we were not alone. We camped with about 40 Christians from all over the country, with the 
common goal of outreach. And at least two other Christian-themed camps were under way at the festival.

Witches and Other Developing Cultures

Since beginning pastoral work at a small California church 26 years ago, I've always sought unique opportunities to share the gospel, 
envisoning newly developing American cultures as part of the mission field. I brought that vision with me when I moved to Salem, 
Massachusetts—"Witch City USA"—which half a million people visit for the activities formed around Halloween, the history of the 1692 
trials, and modern-day witchcraft. Every October since 1999, our church has been one of the city's most active organizations. We seek 
to be the hands and feet of Jesus among these visitors, and our Burning Man outreach is an extension of this approach.

I see Burning Man as a developing festival culture in American society. Like the children of Israel, who gathered for holy days like 
Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, millions of people throng to festivals such as Burning Man, the Rainbow Gatherings, 
and Mind Body Spirit. Such events are imbued with a hedonistic party culture, but they often foster a search for deeper spirituality. That spirituality is typically not Christian—it's not specifically or predominantly anything. Rather, it's at root the search for meaning. Like the Jews running out to the desert to see John the Baptist, these spiritual seekers run to festivals and find new crazed prophets.

But I believe these "developing cultures" cannot run far before finding that God is running with them, embedding hints of the gospel into the DNA of their own creative momentum. Discovering the hidden work of God in their midst is like discovering a reluctant prophet of the living God.

I found the grace of God in Burning Man's "gifting" principle. I found the heart of Martin Luther's "priesthood of all believers" in its emphasis on interactivity and encouragement for every person to create. I saw my Creator God in the innovative art being erected on the playa. I saw a call to a primitive simplicity in the location of the event: the barren desert, a wilderness.

Like a missionary among unreached people groups, I trusted that God was already at work. The Jesus who has adeptly embedded his presence into the myths and histories of cultures around the world is also at work in newly developing ones. He is not surprised to find 50,000 people running around the desert acting crazy, burning massive art installations. He was there 25 years ago, when they first burned a small wooden man on the beach in San Francisco.

And he preceded us to Burning Man last year. It was as if he had been walking the playa for years, lost and invisible to the eyes of the church, yet hoping we would find him. In finding him, it seemed that all we needed to do was offer people an opportunity to search for Christ themselves—to hear his voice, to sense his gentle urgings, and to see his handiwork laid out on the desert canvas.

So we decided to create something that would allow people to "listen for the voice of the Spirit" without our mediating the process, and we believed God would show up. Or at least we hoped and prayed he would.

Pillars of the Saints

Like others at the festival, we devoted ourselves to building a large art installation—one of more than 300 built on the playa that week. Ours would be something of a sociological experiment. We were looking for people who were hoping to hear something—a still, small voice, perhaps.

I found some friends to help me—Hope Deifell, Dennis Huxley, Scott Veatch, and Matt Bender—and we built something we called Pillars of the Saints. It was an interactive meditation project based on the life of Simeon Stylites, the 5th-century Christian desert father and ascetic mystic. Simeon lived on a pillar for 39 years, seeking God and sharing wisdom with the multitudes who sought him out. Even popes asked for his advice, and Simeon's work started a small movement of "pillar saints."

It took us four days to build the installation: three pillars 10 to 12 feet tall and three blank walls with a flame altar in front of each. Each of the elements—the pillars, the walls, and the flame altars—had its own purpose.

Alone atop the pillars, they
would 'listen for the voice of the Spirit.' Some sat for a few minutes, some for hours. Some cried. Some laughed. Some sat silently and seriously. Many had spiritual encounters.

in droves, Burners began to visit the Pillars of the Saints. Standing at the altar flame, we would say, "This is not an art installation. It is merely a blank canvas for the art. Your experience, and the things you write on the walls, will become the art."

At the flame altar, Burners were instructed to write on a piece of magician's flash paper words describing things that hindered them from hearing the voice of the Spirit. They tossed the paper into the fire and watched it suddenly flash and disappear. They gasped. They cried. They often stood at the altar a long time, considering necessary changes to their lives. This was the beginning point in the process of hearing from God.

The pillars were designed for people to climb up from the inside, step out onto the top, and close a trap door behind them. Alone atop the pillars, they would "listen for the voice of the Spirit" while looking out over the desert. They were encouraged to remain on the pillars until they heard something. Some sat for a few minutes, some for hours. Some cried. Some laughed. Some sat silently and seriously. Some lifted their voices and their hands to the heavens.

Many people had spiritual encounters upon the pillars.

When they were done, they would climb down and write upon the walls, giving public expression to what they had heard. Some of the writings were founded in pantheistic New Age perspectives, others appeared to be driven by personal struggles or pop philosophies. But many of them evidenced the true God's influence.

**A Voice in the Wilderness**

A week later, toward the end of the festival, the walls were filled with scores of simple, graceful, and intensely personal expressions. Sayings covered the walls like holy graffiti:

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Why do people hurt others only to hurt themselves?
You can stop an invasion of armies, but you cannot stop an idea whose time has come.
It's no good measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.
Let go of everything you know and all will be revealed.
Joy is a community that loves. Love heals.
Discipline is Freedom. Laughter is Medicine.
And darkness has no tickets for this event.
To find God one must forgive.
The truth will find you.
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On the first day of the event, a man named Daniel came down from the pillars in tears. "This," he said, waving at the Burning Man city, "is not what my life is about any more. It's time for me to move on with my life and make some changes." Dennis told Daniel the meaning of his name: "Beloved of God." Hope prayed with Daniel for some time, and both she and Dennis hugged him before he wandered off into the desert.

A young woman wrote with her fingers in water letters upon a black tablet we provided during the hot days. The word *me* evaporated into nothing. I asked her what significance it held. "I've got some changes to make," she said, adding that she knew she was the one who was in the way, hindering the voice of God from speaking into her life.

These are just two of hundreds of meaningful interactions we experienced at Burning Man. People cried for joy. People thanked us profusely. People returned daily to find peace. People sat upon the pillars each morning to watch the sun rise.

**Burning Man is notoriously hedonistic. There are naked people, and a lot of sex, drugs, alcohol, and all-night raves. But for many, Burning Man is also a spiritual pursuit.**

We prayed with people. We spoke blessings over them. We encouraged them to make a habit of listening to God, and we shared the crazy story of a 5th-century saint who sat on a pillar like these before us for 39 years.

The Spirit of God rode in the winds above the pillars and helped people inch their way toward eternity. They surrendered their struggles and their addictions. They reached out with open arms to the heavens. They discovered peace they had been seeking. These are the things we saw, and the things they
shared with us.

Not everyone thought our project was special. A couple people laughed at the concept. One blogger later wrote that we "had it wrong," and that he believed God did not care about prayers or poetry and did not speak in words, except to say "yes" or "no." Some of our guests wanted to climb and jump around instead of meditate. And a few just wanted to smooch. But most of the time, the mood was respectful and peaceful.

At the end of the week, we burned our art project. Flames from the pillars shot out the trap doors at the top, reaching 35 feet into the night sky. They looked like a set of monstrous Trinitarian candles. The words of those who listened for the voice of the Spirit and had written on our walls burned and rose in the smoke to heaven, but some of those words had already reached heaven before they went up in smoke.

**A Last Word from Jesus**

It was the middle of the week when the man dressed like Jesus arrived. We learned that his name was Bert Flaming; he was a Christ follower and a bookseller from Canada. Flaming had seen a video about our project before coming to Burning Man and wanted to find us, but we found him instead. He spent about an hour with us. He meditated upon the pillars and wrote this on our walls:

> I love you. Be kind to one another, especially to people who hate you. I'll help you, and when you can't do this, I'll forgive you.

Jesus was already at Burning Man. We found him there, and like our friend, the Canadian Jesus, he was looking for us all along.

*Editor’s Note: At this year's Burning Man in late August, Wyman and his team are building a yurt and a large interactive theremin (an eerie electronic instrument that is played without being touched). Wyman says it will "highlight the capacity of individuals to connect with God," and that "it is the attempt to find God that carries a sense of holiness, not the perfection with which we accomplish that connection."

*Phil Wyman pastors the Gathering, a small, independent church in Salem, Massachusetts. He blogs at squarenomore.blogspot.com*.
Across the U.S., churches today are called to embrace the city and to teach their people why cities matter, says the journalist and author.

For generations, American Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, has been built on suburbanization, with the church at best ignoring -- and at worst pathologizing -- the city, Andy Crouch said.

But that is changing as cities have become attractive places to live and a new generation -- valuing location over occupation, place over job -- is flocking to live there, Crouch said.

The author of “Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling,” Crouch is the executive producer of “This Is Our City,” a multiyear effort by Christianity Today to examine how Christians are seeking the flourishing of cities.

“We wanted to ask, ‘What does it mean for Christians to be fully involved in the life of thriving cities?’” Crouch said of the project.

Crouch spoke with Faith & Leadership recently about the church, cities, culture making and power. The following is an edited transcript.

Q: Tell us about “This Is Our City,” the project you’re heading for Christianity Today. What’s that about?

A: At a conference a few years ago, I heard Richard Florida, a well-known student of cities and urban life, say that when baby boomers meet each other, the first question we often ask is, “What do you do? What’s your job?”

But the first question younger people ask is, “Where do you live?” I think he’s right. The cocktail party question has changed, and that resonated with me.

There is a shift happening in American life in how people identify themselves. The roots of identity are shifting from occupation to location, from job to place.
There are a number of dimensions to this. One is that Americans are moving less than they have in at least 40 years. The high-water mark of mobility in America was the 1960s, when roughly one in five families moved in a given year.

That was the era of suburbanization, when people were leaving central cities -- and rural areas, too -- and moving to this in-between, bucolic place where you could have a place of your own and be relatively disconnected from other people. Maybe you commuted into a city, but your identity was in what you did, which is why people could move so readily.

Now, for a couple of decades, mobility has been declining, and in the 2008-2009 financial crisis it fell off a cliff. But at a deeper level, what’s going on is that we are questioning the suburban narrative.

And by that I don’t mean that we’re questioning suburbs, which are still attractive places to live for many people. What’s being questioned is the narrative of being cut off from the cities that ultimately sustain the suburbs.

What’s being questioned is this vision that where you live doesn’t matter; it’s what you do. There’s a new generation that’s not so sure that’s the best life.

If you ask younger Americans where they want to be, they want to be in cities.

That’s because of a couple of things. One is that many cities have addressed the reasons people did not want to live there. It used to be that cities were just a place to work and emptied out at night. Crime was a huge issue.

Well, crime has diminished dramatically. The city has become the place where people want to live and work and play. There’s art and restaurants, and it’s so different from 20 or 30 years ago.

Q: What’s Christianity Today’s interest in this?

American Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, was built on suburbanization. Evangelical Christianity thrived through very entrepreneurial moves to embrace suburbanization, although in many ways the mainline churches, especially in the first wave of urbanization, were there as well.

It felt like we needed to look at how Christians are re-engaging with cities -- not just providing services out on the edges or in suburban neighborhoods. We wanted to ask, “What does it mean for Christians to be fully involved in the life of thriving cities?”

But rather than stay at an abstract level, we picked geographically and historically diverse cities. Our first two were Portland, Ore., and Richmond, Va.

I don’t know if you could pick two more different cities. Richmond was the capital of the Confederacy, founded in 1737, a city of churches, a legacy of Christian presence -- but also a legacy of implication in some of the most tortured parts of American history, site of the second-largest slave market in the United States.

Portland, on the other hand, is a relatively young city in the Northwest, not a city of churches -- never been churched. When we started, we thought Portland would be an example of post-Christian culture, but we got there and we realized it’s not post-Christian; it never was Christianized. It was never part of Christendom. It never had that dominant Protestant establishment that Eastern cities have.

We also have a “seventh city,” which is wherever you live. We’re encouraging people to alert us to stories of Christians in other cities that are interesting places where people are doing really good work.

Q: What are you finding? Do you have any lessons to share yet?

Yeah, I think so.

We are especially interested in stories that go beyond the walls of churches. Churches in every city are doing incredible
things to serve their neighbors. But we were looking for something different, and that was models of Christian public participation that are connected to other institutions.

In Richmond, for example, we found out that the director of the city’s Department of Public Health and one of his key lieutenants are both people whose Christian faith has shaped the way they see their vocation and the city’s public health problems.

They work in a secular context, but they bring their faith into their work in a very explicit way, and they’re partnering with churches in that work.

For example, they have identified “fatherlessness” as a core public health issue in Richmond. They felt like many traditional public health issues are symptoms of the absence of fathers in families.

That’s an empirical judgment they made, backed up by data, but it also was shaped by Christian conviction. Then they’ve worked hard to get the faith community involved in addressing fatherlessness.

That’s the kind of story we have found not just in places like Richmond, a city of churches, but also in Portland. There, a movement of churches and Christian organizations partners with city leaders to volunteer. They’re doing it in coordination with the public schools and with neighborhood associations.

There’s this close interaction between Christian individuals and institutions and the citywide institutions.

That is new, especially for evangelicals. Evangelicals have a history of not being closely involved in the institutional life of their cities. But this is changing dramatically.

Q: In an essay about the project, you wrote, “When we say, ‘This is our city,’ we’re staking a claim to a certain kind of Christian responsibility.” What do you mean?

The church has tended to have two postures toward the city.

One has been indifference, a kind of pragmatic separatism that happens when we don’t acknowledge either the problems or the gifts of our cities.

One way we can go wrong is to narrate our lives without respect to where we live. We tell stories about what happens in our families or workplace, but we don’t touch on what it means to be part of this particular community.

The other posture would be a pathologizing of the city, in which we talk about it as a place that desperately needs charity or service, which the church then is called to help provide.

That’s a step up from indifference, but it still falls short of what we are trying to get at with the phrase “this is our city.”

We don’t mean “this is our city” as in “This is the Christian city, and the rest of you need to get in line” but in the sense of sharing in something that is worth celebrating.

We have Christian reasons, biblical reasons, to think that cities are worth celebrating. God’s gift to humanity at the end of the story in Revelation 21 is a city. Cities are not just an agglomeration of problems but also an incredible creative fusion of resources.

Q: Cities are places where some of your major interests -- culture making and power -- come together, aren’t they?

That’s right. I’ve been very interested for several years in three topics that all go together: culture, creativity and power, and cities.

Density and diversity are the hallmarks of cities. When we’re in cities, we’re confronted by cultural diversity in a
healthy way.

It is because of their density and diversity that cities are engines of creativity. A lot of creativity comes from unlikely partnerships between people who would not have met if they had not been thrown together.

Christians ought to care about culture and creativity, because it’s God’s intention for human beings to cultivate the world, and because we worship a creator God.

And where does creativity and culture come from? Well, it comes from the exercise -- hopefully, the beneficial exercise -- of power in the world, and cities concentrate power for better and for worse.

Power is the gift of acting in the world, of doing something worthwhile with the world that we’ve been given. But it also can very easily be the act of playing God in the world and misrepresenting the true God in the world, and all that comes together in cities in a very keen way.

**Q: As you’ve pointed out before, the church has a very mixed record when it comes to the use of power. Speak some to that.**

Power in its most basic sense is at the root of activity. You can’t act in the world even in the most mundane way without power. That’s why we eat -- to generate energy that allows us to move and act in the world.

So power is fundamentally a gift, but like every gift ever given to human beings, when it is separated from relationship with the true God and true relationships with one another, it becomes very dangerous and toxic and distorting.

And when you concentrate toxic, dangerous, distorting stuff, it just gets all the more dangerous.

The one thing that people always say when I tell them I’m working on power is Lord Acton’s famous quote, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

This is why cities are so helpful -- because you can’t ignore the concentration of power in cities. Which raises the question, Is there a way to live with concentrated power and have it bring flourishing rather than distortion?

I think that is in some ways the essential ethical question of our time and every time. Can we live with the power we’ve been given? A lot of us have been given a lot of power.

**Q: Tim Keller has written that cities are also places to which people without power flee for safety. He says “dominant majorities often dislike cities, but the weak and powerless need them.” What does that mean for the church?**

I think the call to the church, the biblical hope, is three things. They’re obvious, but they’re important.

One is to embrace the gifts of the city and to teach our people theologically and biblically why cities matter.

Most people who find their way to cities -- especially young people, but also immigrants who come from desperate circumstances -- are there for pragmatic reasons. In creative-class cities like New York and Portland, they’re often there for self-centered reasons.

So part of what the church has to do is give her members better reasons for caring about the city than the reasons that brought them there.

The second thing is that we need to be very clear-eyed about the failures that cities concentrate. Cities are places where not just the wealth and abundance of our culture is on display but also the things that have gone wrong.

The church’s job is not to become complacent about those things but to see the city as a laboratory for assessing the health of our society with honesty, being very clear about power and the ways injustice is woven into our institutions.
That can happen if the church doesn’t become simply a chaplain to the city but is also prophetic in the city.

Then the third thing for the church would be to contribute to the flourishing of the city. The church’s call is to find ways to make enough of a difference that, as Tim Keller has said, the city would miss us if we weren’t there.

Q: What should seminaries be doing to prepare people for the kind of ministry you’re describing?

The challenge with all culture is that we tend to take it for granted precisely at the moments when we should be paying attention and being intentional about how we interact with it.

Culture always fades into the background, whether you’re in a city, a suburb or a small town. We stop paying attention and we take it for granted, but leaders are people who don’t take things -- or the way things are -- for granted.

I don’t mean just in the sense that they’re constantly trying to change things, though that’s part of it. Leaders are also people who preserve what’s good in a place or in an institution, and to do that you have to be discerning and attentive to that place.

So I think that seminaries could do a better job helping us pay attention to the places where we are and to the ways they’re changing and also the continuities that are there.

If we don’t do that, we are going to form churches that have very thin connections to the world that God has placed us in and sent us into. I don’t want to say that we’ll fail in our mission, because the mission is ultimately God’s and not ours. But our participation in that mission will be much thinner than it could be if we don’t learn to really pay attention to where we are.