When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas time. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?

~G.K. Chesterton

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THE MANY NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE NAD CHURCH

Going between them is enough to give you whiplash

by Loren Seibold, editor, Best Practices for Adventist Ministry

A couple of weeks ago I spent a day at Andrews University Theological Seminary with the D.Min. faculty, church administrators, and other advisors.

It was a marvelous day. I met some great people and learned a lot. (I was also impressed by the efforts of Skip Bell and his team to create a parish-needs-sensitive educational program. If you're looking for a D.Min. program, I'd recommend you check out this one.)

It struck me again, as it often does when I go between my congregations and the educational or administrative parts of the denomination, how separated these neighborhoods are from one another. Each knows of the other, but really don't know one another very well. The lay people in the non-institutional small churches - roughly four out of five NAD congregations fall in that category - know a little about the institutions (physicians come from Loma Linda, pastors from Andrews University, the Adventist Review and the Sabbath School Quarterly from the General Conference, and they all, in some way, ask us for money) but don't really know them except through the official PR channels or the angry critics - there are plenty of each. Consequently some are proud of what happens "up there," and some are suspicious.

There is as little understanding going the other way. Even in institutions staffed by people who were once pastors or who teach pastors, there seems too little acknowledgment of what it's like where most of the church is.

Moving back and forth between these neighborhoods can give you whiplash.

At a meeting in Silver Spring, I'm surrounded by beautiful buildings, professionalism and ability. Things get done with a conversation and a vote, because there's money and authority. Back home, we have to call a few folks to make sure we can raise enough to pay the utility bill. (What the church spent to get me to the meeting would be one congregation's budget for a month!) The roof leaks, and there's mold in the basement. The bathrooms are cleaned - if they're cleaned - by whomever gets around to it. Only a handful show up for worship. At the university, I brush shoulders with learned people who have fantastic ideas and a redundancy of talent. Back home, we don't have a piano player for church. No children's Sabbath School, because there are no children. Our religious conversations wander into topics that the educators quit talking about 40 years ago. Usually I'm the most educated person in my congregations, though most of what I have to do draws far less on my theological knowledge than on simple compassion.
And that's just in the NAD.

We pastors are the go-betweens, the ambassadors from the leaders and educators to the people. We're the catalyst to make their formulas work out here, to put their ideas to work. We're cross-cultural translators. The denomination, in turn, generates a tsunami of stuff for us - ideas, programs, resources, plans - that we try to implement.

What would happen if we knew one another better? If every person who provides anything for these many ordinary congregations had to spend some time immersed in them? Perhaps we would understand one another, rather than being as strange to each other as mission fields.

What do you think? Discuss this at our Facebook page.

READING FOR PASTORS

American demographics, from the folks at Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: Protestants in a minority, those without religious affiliation increase. (Read the original study here.)

American politics: Evangelical leaders want to convince conservative Christians that it's OK to vote for a Mormon. (Christianity Today also has a piece on the topic.)

A neurosurgeon says he toured the afterlife while in a coma. A positive testimony, or a misleading deception? Quote: "According to current medical understanding of the brain and mind, there is absolutely no way that I could have experienced even a dim and limited consciousness during my time in the coma, much less the hyper-vivid and completely coherent odyssey I underwent." What do you think?

TBN and Daystar are prepared to cover the rapture on the Mount of Olives, thanks to new studios in old Jerusalem that overlook it. Quote: "Christian broadcasters have donated tens of millions of dollars in recent years to build Israeli schools, community centers, hospital wards and even synagogues. Part of the support is based upon their belief that the return of the Jewish people to Israel will usher in the second coming of Jesus."

Are you a workaholic pastor? Here are four reasons you need time away.

Twelve things pastors probably won't hear when they get to heaven.

Research from Thom Rainer of Lifeway: pastors are hurting. Quote: "Most pastors experience intense loneliness at times. When we conducted our survey, over one-half said they were lonely."

Can Ed Stetzer possibly be right when he says that less than 20% of church-goers read the Bible daily?

"I'm spiritual but not religious" is a cop-out! says Alan Miller. Quote: "It seems that just being a part of a religious institution is nowadays associated negatively, with everything from the Religious Right to child abuse, back to the Crusades and of course with terrorism today. Those in the spiritual-but-not-religious camp are peddling the notion that by being independent - by choosing an 'individual relationship' to some concept of "higher power", energy, oneness or something-or-other - they are in a deeper, more profound relationship than one that is coerced via a large institution like a church."

TO THE POINT: GRATITUDE

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

- John F. Kennedy

I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

- Gilbert K. Chesterton

There are minds so impatient of inferiority that their gratitude is a species of revenge, and they return benefits, not because recompense is a pleasure, but because obligation is a pain.

- Samuel Johnson

In normal life we hardly realize how much more we receive than we give, and life cannot be rich without such gratitude. It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of other.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison
Wherever I have knocked, a door has opened. Wherever I have wandered, a path has appeared.
- Alice Walker

I feel a very unusual sensation - if it is not indigestion, I think it must be gratitude.
- Benjamin Disraeli

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.
- Marcel Proust

IDEAS, EVENTS, RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Breath of Life Reunion Weekend, live stream**, from the Oakwood University church, November 2-3. Featuring Carlton Byrd, the Aeolians, Breath of Life quartet. **Also check out the Breath of Life mobile app.**

Pacific Press® has released two low-priced sharing books for 2013, *End-Time Hope*, by Mark Finley, and *God’s Love Song*, by Ginny Allen.

**North American Division organizes Theology of Ordination Study Committee**

The North Pacific Union has a great newsletter for Adventist leaders and pastors. **Read it here**, or sign up for email delivery.

Elder Ted Wilson has written a new book entitled *Almost Home*, that identifies the components essential for the development of a living faith that will help God's people live through the end times and witness Jesus' return.

**Adventist Review week of prayer issue** is available in paper or online, for early November use.

The first new ministry to be launched by the NAD at the Adventist Media Center in over a decade officially began Monday, October 1. It is the **Jesus 101 Biblical Institute with speaker/director Elizabeth Talbot**, which has been running since 2009 under the auspices of The Voice of Prophecy and Faith for Today media ministries. The primary purpose of the Institute is to offer Biblical training for church members, lay leaders, ministers, and seekers, using sound gospel interpretive tools.

**General Conference Annual Council responds to recent actions by unions concerning ordination without regard to Gender**

Are we going to get a coordinated media outreach at last? **That's the appeal from a recent communicator's meeting.**

Previous resource links:

- Summary: mandatory abuse reporting by clergy by state
- eGracenotes mobile app
- New PlusLine at AdventSource
- NY13
- GODencounters, Arlington, TX, August 30
- Pastor's convention, NAD Ministerial Department
- The Seven Campaign to stop child abuse
- Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day
- Short stories about The Great Hope
- Family Ministries Facebook page
- It is Written goes on radio, gets a new name.
- Andrews University Press, Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church
- General Conference International Field School of Evangelism
- Church Plant Coaching Certification