May 14, 2013

Come, ye disconsolate, where’er ye languish,
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

- Thomas Moore
by Loren Seibold

Not infrequently I'm called to do funerals for people about whom I know little, or nothing at all. "Grandma always said that if she'd be anything, she'd be a Seventh-day Adventist," the voice on the phone says. Or "He had a great uncle he always liked out in Colorado who used to be a Seventh-day Adventist." I've always felt that the top priority for a pastor is to care for the dying and those left behind after death, no matter the quality of their connections to my church. So I generally agree to do it.

It can be a challenge. The circumstance of their introduction to me have warned me that they probably don't have a lot of spiritual resources. I do what any of you would do: try to make it as personal as possible by probing about the deceased, get them to write a history, and invite them to say something at the funeral - which has brought about some unusual moments, such as someone telling grandma's favorite dirty joke, or a story about ... read the rest here

Like us on Facebook

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

REGISTER NOW!!!

On May 21, 2013 at 1:30 pm e.s.t., we invite you to join us for a NAD Ministerial Best Practices Webinar presentation from Sung Kwon, Director of Adventist Community Services for the North American Division and Co-founder of the Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program. He will present, "Sharing the Good News in the 21st Century."

Because community outreach is the essence of our mission, Dr. Kwon will address why we have dualistic piety in our approach to community and church. He will focus on the essentials of community connectedness and share examples of church growth addressing these essentials. He also will share a better understanding of serving God and His people in Isaiah 58. Join us as we discuss the real essence of reaching communities around our churches.

THE CHALLENGE OF 2ND GEN BELIEVERS

By Roger Hernandez

The 2nd Generation (sometimes abbreviated 2nd Gen) in immigrant churches has always been of interest to me, and it became especially real when I had teenagers of my own. I believe that, outside of death, one of the worst things that can happen to a parent is to see his or her child decide to leave the faith. Since my kids are 2nd Gen, and I want to see them in heaven, I want to do everything I can to show them Jesus, not the exit sign.

2nd Gen is commonly used for young people of Hispanic descent who are born in this country of immigrant parents, but as I am finding out, it's no different for children of West Indies, Russian, Korean, and African parents. Here are three spiritual challenges to this demographic:

- Exiles in their own country. Says Daniel A. Rodriguez in his book A Future for the Latino Church, "We have always been treated as foreigners in our own countryside - exiles who never left home". The 2nd Gen isn't accepted in their ancestors' churches because ...

Like us on Facebook

MEDIA STRATEGY FOR NAD

Adventists have always taken the lead in using media to proclaim our message of hope and wholeness. From the first printing press in James White's living room to the foundational ministries of Voice of Prophecy, Faith For Today, It Is Written, Breath of Life, La Voz and Jesus 101, Adventists have been at the forefront of taking advantage of broadcast and print media. Now NAD is presented with fresh opportunities as new medias are becoming established. Listen to NAD president Dan Jackson and Executive Secretary Alex Bryant share some of the most recent developments in the NAD media strategy. Read the story here.
With these transitions the NAD is more eager than ever to leverage media to assist congregations with their their local mission. I invite you as a pastor help the NAD flesh out a vision of how media could help you. Take a few moments and dream up some ideas and share them in the accompanying facebook discussion. Here are some specific questions to respond to:

1. How can the foundational ministries sharpen their focus to serve your local congregation
2. Could the NAD assist in more effectively connecting media interests with local congregation
3. Could the NAD assist congregations in creating local content for their local community?
4. Should NAD resources be given to creating a national brand and then connecting that brand to local congregations?
5. What other ways can you think of where NAD could assist your congregation in mission?

--Dave Gemmell

READING FOR PASTORS

A Gallup poll shows that 46% of Americans believe human beings were created in essentially the same form we have now - a percentage that hasn't changed much since '82. Unsurprisingly, non-church-goers aren't as likely to believe it.

I've always believed extroverts make better pastors. But there's a downside to being an extrovert, too: talking too much, listening too little. Quote: "I know a lot of people who out of nervousness or excitement think the best way to engage people is to talk them into utter submission. As if their endless words, jokes and anecdotes infused with Red Bull and hooked up to a V8 engine will fast-track them into the Connection Economy. What so many don't realize is that the secret to building relationships isn't in the words you say, but in the questions you ask."

Another good one from LeadershipFreak: Top 12 reasons leaders fail. Number one? Neglecting culture building.

From BeliefNet: three pieces on Christians and homosexuality:

- Anti-gay beliefs can make Christians a hated minority. Quote: "Changing attitudes toward homosexuality have created a new victim: closeted Christians who believe the Bible condemns homosexuality but will not say so publicly for fear of being labeled a hateful bigot."
- Justin Lee says "Gay Christian isn't an oxymoron." Quote: "I'm no longer a person to them; I'm a symbol of a culture war. A battlefield. And when I don't want to be treated that way, they assume I'm turning away because I didn't really want to hear the truth."
- Ex-NFL player gets church appearances canceled after defending a gay athlete

Five ways to deal with criticism. Quote: "It's a myth that only poor leadership will incite criticism. The truth is all leadership, whether good or bad, will result in some level of criticism."

If you invite bikers to church, you may have to ride with them.

Marvelous sermon from Stanley Hauerwas: The Lord's question, "Do you love me?" is not just for Peter but for all of us. What does our love of Jesus mean for ministry?

TRANSITIONS AT NAD MINISTERIAL

Esther Knott, part time NAD Ministerial associate and associate pastor of the Pioneer Memorial SDA Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan has accepted the invitation to serve full time as NAD Ministerial associate director and the new InMinistry Center director and with focus on continuing education through graduate studies and training, and professional growth for pastors. Read More...
Shawn Boonstra, NAD Ministerial associate and veteran of Seventh-day Adventist media outreach and evangelism, has accepted a call to be the new speaker/director of one of radio's longest-running religious programs, The Voice of Prophecy. Boonstra says, "Working with the NAD Ministerial team has been a phenomenal experience. Read More...

TO THE POINT: GRIEF

I will not say, do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.
- J.R.R. Tolkien

Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them.
- Leo Tolstoy

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.
- C.S. Lewis

When someone you love dies, and you're not expecting it, you don't lose her all at once; you lose her in pieces over a long time-the way the mail stops coming, and her scent fades from the pillows and even from the clothes in her closet and drawers. Gradually, you accumulate the parts of her that are gone. Just when the day comes—when there's a particular missing part that overwhelms you with the feeling that she's gone, forever—there comes another day, and another specifically missing part.
- John Irving

To weep is to make less the depth of grief.
- William Shakespeare

There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.
- Washington Irving

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.
- Henri Nouwen

MANAGING THE RISKS BETWEEN PULPIT AND PEW

Did you miss the last Best Practices Webinar? If so you missed Arthur Blinci's presentation entitled Managing the Risks Between Pulpit and Pew:

In this litigious age, pastors deal with many challenges surrounding people, places, and things. Being aware of relational landmines and legal pitfalls is half the battle as you lead your congregations. Each year the Seventh day Adventist Church spends millions of dollars on employee issues. Arthur Blinci provides pastors with a better understanding of the risks they face on a daily basis and provides them with resources that will assist in their ministry.

The good news is that the webinar was recorded and you can view or download the video or listen to the podcast on the NAD Ministerial Webinar website.

IDEAS, EVENTS, RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS


"Cards for Mom and Dad", another Dan Jackson Special on The Adventist Channel and the Hope Channel. Dan Jackson, Elizabeth Talbot, Mike and Gayle Tucker, Carlton Byrd talk about their mothers.

Adventist Sesquicentennial (150th Anniversary): A brief history of the Church, with photos of early pioneers, is online at
The Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) Offering is scheduled for June 8. ACM develops, promotes and supports Adventist chaplaincies and serves as the ecclesiastical endorsing agency for the denomination.

From Allen Martin: “Do you love your traditions more than your children?” Barna Group President, David Kinnaman posed this poignant question to over 600 registrants attending You Lost Me. Live! this Spring, hosted by Arlington Seventh-day Adventist Church in Texas. The question struck close to home as local congregations are witnessing 59% of their young adults evaporate from church life - the Adventist church not spared. Younger Generation Church has produced free downloadable resources: LIVE Next Steps video and the companion talksheet.

Previous resource links:
- eGracenotes mobile app
- New PlusLine at AdventSource
- NY13
- Pastor’s convention, NAD Ministerial Department
- The Seven Campaign to stop child abuse
- Family Ministries Facebook page
- Andrews University Press, Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church
- General Conference International Field School of Evangelism
- NAD Theology of Ordination Study Committee
- General Conference Annual Council response to ordination without regard to gender
- Jesus 101 Biblical Institute with speaker/director Elizabeth Talbot
- The ADVENTISTS - 2, by Journey Films
- The Great Controversy Project e-newsletter
- Real Family Talk
- Interactive health program on Hope Channel
- “Meet Hiram Edson”
- Free guide to using Facebook for your church.

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Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
A Stranger in the Casket
by Loren Seibold

Not infrequently I'm called to do funerals for people about whom I know little, or nothing at all. "Grandma always said that if she'd be anything, she'd be a Seventh-day Adventist," the voice on the phone says. Or "He had a great uncle he always liked out in Colorado who used to be a Seventh-day Adventist." I've always felt that the top priority for a pastor is to care for the dying and those left behind after death, no matter the quality of their connections to my church. So I generally agree to do it.

It can be a challenge. The circumstance of their introduction to me have warned me that they don't have a lot of spiritual resources. I do what any of you would do: try to make it as personal as possible by probing about the deceased, get them to write a history, and invite them to say something at the funeral – which has brought about some unusual moments, such as someone telling grandma's favorite dirty joke, or a story about the deceased so embarrassing you wish you could crawl under the pulpit, and once a long and obscene rap spontaneously started by a deceased young man's friends. Everyone has his or her own way to say goodbye, I suppose.

What to say in a homily? It's not the time to give a theological education. Sometimes you want to be a bit careful about what you say, because just because you've been asked to officiate doesn't mean you're dealing with believers. There are a few neutral themes that I've found work for almost everyone. Even an unbeliever can understand Psalm 90's "teach us to number our days," because life is short. I've used "Jesus wept" as an invitation for people to use their grief to be more sympathetic to others.
And no matter their religious beliefs, I'll always talk about the resurrection, and remind them that when the deceased comes forth, he'll be healthy, energetic, free of disease, and thrilled to be reunited with them.

Which reminds me: it's hard to be honest at some funerals. Sometimes the deceased doesn't appear to have had any discernible relationship with God. I've also buried people whom everyone thought grouchy or even horribly unkind. But we overlook a lot when we say goodbye for the last time. I simply tell them what the promises are, and trust the rest to God's judgment.

Years ago I was doing a graveside service for someone I didn't know. I had finished reading and explaining a passage and delivered a benediction, when one man looked at me uncomfortably. "Ain't we gonna say the Our Father?" he said. It was a reminder that funerals are a time for the familiar. The more tenuous their connection to a formal faith, the more the mourners need to hear things they might recognize, like John 3:16, Psalm 23 and "Amazing Grace". (I've even sung grandma's favorite hymn a capella for families that don't have resources to provide music for themselves.) And I have never again concluded any funeral service without praying the Lord's Prayer.

What are your experiences officiating for people you don't know? What are some of the themes that you've used when comforting an audience with little (or unknown) religious interest and knowledge? I'd love to hear your experiences and thoughts.
The Challenge of 2nd Gen Believers

By Roger Hernandez

The 2nd Generation (sometimes abbreviated 2nd Gen) in immigrant churches has always been of interest to me, and it became especially real when I had teenagers of my own. I believe that, outside of death, one of the worst things that can happen to a parent is to see his or her child decide to leave the faith. Since my kids are 2nd Gen, and I want to see them in heaven, I want to do everything I can to show them Jesus, not the exit sign.

2nd Gen is commonly used for young people of Hispanic descent who are born in this country of immigrant parents, but as I am finding out, it's no different for children of West Indies, Russian, Korean, and African parents. Here are three spiritual challenges to this demographic:

* Exiles in their own country. Says Daniel A. Rodriguez in his book A Future for the Latino Church, "We have always been treated as foreigners in our own countryside – exiles who never left home". The 2nd Gen isn't accepted in their ancestors’ churches because they don't speak the language well (among other things), and they don't fit well in an Anglo church, because they feel outnumbered and out of place. Many attend, but don't belong, so they say “so long”. * Culture vs. gospel. There is no biblical basis or spirit of prophecy support for what has become reality in churches: culture trumping the gospel. Fights in church boards about adapting to new ways or a new language send the message to the 2nd Gen that culture is more important than people. The result is, we have kept our language, and lost many of our kids. "If our effort to maintain our culture in a foreign country makes our children leave the church, we
have gained nothing," says Rodriguez. * Leadership opportunities. For many of the 2nd Gen, their family tongue has become an oral language that they understand fairly well, but in which they don’t communicate with a high degree of proficiency. People in the immigrant congregation get frustrated with their accent, or the need to translate, and the nuances of both languages may be lost. Leadership positions are usually reserved for people who are fluent. Generally the 2nd Gen has had better access to education, higher paying jobs, and opportunity for upward mobility. When their leadership skills are not used at their local congregations, sitting on the sidelines results in them leaving the game altogether.

What have you observed in ministering to 2nd Gen believers? What can we do to keep 2nd Gen Seventh-day Adventists in both immigrant and Anglo congregations? I’d love to discuss this with you.
4-29-13 Adventist Media Center Board of Trustees Meet to Discuss the Future of Media in North America

The Adventist Media Center (AMC) Board met on Monday, April 29, to discuss the future of media in the North American Division. Chaired by Dan Jackson, president of the North American Division, the meeting took place at the Adventist Media Center in Simi Valley, Calif.

This meeting comes after two years of research, concentrated studies, continual meetings (which included two major summit meetings), as well as private interviews with stakeholders. From these meetings, North American Division leadership has developed documents that summarize the aspects of the summits, meetings, and interviews. Participants of the summits included media ministry speakers, innovative Adventist pastors who are already using innovative media effectively, as well as Church administrators and communication personnel.

According to Division administration, the specific goal of the proposal is to find the brightest possible way into the future. “This proposal will put the Division on a trajectory that serves our overarching vision of how God wants to use media in these end times,” said Jackson.

At the AMC Board Meeting, Board Members reviewed a proposal regarding the future operation of the Adventist Media Center, as well as the media ministries, and other support services that are housed in the Simi Valley production house. The proposal included the following issues:

1. **Allowing the present Media Ministries to relocate.** The Division would grant permission for the media ministries to relocate outside the Adventist Media Center, urging them to move with expediency. Further, to whatever degree is appropriate, the Division would assist them in doing so. This transition should not disrupt the delivery of programming and services such as Bible correspondence and study requests.

2. **A time period of 12-18 months for the media ministries to carry out the planning, and accomplish relocation.** Specifically associated with this proposal is the provision for allowing 12-18 months for each media ministry in which to wind down activity at the Media Center location. Efforts will be made to minimize the impact on employees who will be affected by and during the transition and relocation period.

3. **Sell the property housing the current Adventist Media Center.** Concurrent with this move, the Division would begin moving toward an attempt to sell the Adventist Media Center property in a commercially viable fashion. While the creation of equivalent facilities to those at the Media Center in California is not anticipated, it is the intent of the Division to create in the facilities occupied by the Division (in Silver Spring, Md.) studio facilities adequate to meet the needs required by the Division that lie outside the specific needs of the various media ministries.

4. **Utilize the studio facilities at the Division offices for production.** While the creation of equivalent facilities to those at the Media Center in California is not anticipated, it is the intent of the Division to create in the facilities occupied by the Division (in Silver Spring, Md.) studio facilities adequate to meet the needs required by the Division that lie outside the specific needs of the various media ministries.

5. **Ongoing commitment to providing funding for the media ministries.** As a part of this process, and in clear understanding that the media ministries are part of the NAD ministry effort, funding levels from the Division would be identified for each of the media ministries in order to allow them to fulfill their mission.

6. **Commitment to explore new possibilities for media development.** The Division anticipates a significant role for the media ministries in the future of media in North America; beyond the role they currently play.

“The media ministries’ mission and messages of hope and wholeness have helped to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout North America and beyond. We appreciate the tireless efforts of the many media center employees and ministry staff members,” said Jackson. “We expect the media ministries to continue to maintain and provide the level of programs and services which will meet the future needs of the Division,” he said.

The Media Ministries of the North American Division include Breath of Life Ministries, Faith For Today, It Is Written, Jesus 101 Biblical Institute, La Voz de la Esperanza, and The Voice of Prophecy.

The North American Division Committee will receive the recommended proposal from the AMC Board. For more information, please contact George Johnson, communication director, at george.johnson@nad.adventist.org.

About the North American Division media ministries...
Virtual Festival of the Laity - Sep 11, Wed - A Festival Of The Laity is coming to your church and your...

Let's Move Week - Sep 22, Sun - The North American Division has set aside Sunday...

Let's Move Day - Sep 22, Sun - The North American Division has set aside Sunday...

Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program-II - Sep 23, Mon - Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program (NLCP) is...

Breath of Life Ministries is dedicated to discovering the truth of God's life-enabling concern for their well-being. The mission of Breath of Life Ministries is to present the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ to all people groups from a contemporary, urban perspective.

Faith For Today is a television ministry committed to sharing God’s grace with the world through broadcast media. Founded in 1950, Faith For Today launched its live inspirational television drama on ABC from New York City. That was more than 60 years ago making it the oldest religious television broadcast in the world! Today, Faith For Today produces a family of programs, including Lifestyle Magazine, The Evidence, Faith For Today, and McDougall, MD, as well as an Internet ministry, live seminars, a mobile device channel, and community concert events as well.

It Is Written is an international Christian television ministry dedicated to sharing insights from God’s Word with people around the world. Founded in 1956 by Pastor George Vandeman, the theme of this ministry can be found in Matthew 4:4: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

Back when the Second World War was bringing uncertainty and death to millions, and hope itself was under siege, La Voz de la Esperanza (The Voice of Hope) was launched for the benefit of the Spanish-speaking people throughout the world. It has been broadcasting God’s Hope en Español for over 65 years to the more than 400 million Spanish-speaking people around the world. It does so through radio, television, its Bible School, the Internet, and its various worldwide evangelism activities.

Jesus 101 Biblical Institute is a Christ-centered teaching/training media ministry using Biblical studies as its main methodological framework. The primary purpose of the Institute is to offer Biblical training for seekers, church members, lay leaders and ministers, using sound gospel interpretive tools.

The Voice of Prophecy is a long-running religious radio broadcast founded in 1929 by H.M.S. Richards, Sr. Initially aired on a single radio station in Los Angeles, Calif., it has since grown to numerous stations throughout the United States and Canada.

Stay Socially Connected with NAD

Find an Adventist Church in your neighborhood

Your Church can have a beautiful website for free!

What has helped you most in your personal Christian growth?

More
June 1, 2012

In U.S., 46% Hold Creationist View of Human Origins

Highly religious Americans most likely to believe in creationism

by Frank Newport

PRINCETON, NJ -- Forty-six percent of Americans believe in the creationist view that God created humans in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years. The prevalence of this creationist view of the origin of humans is essentially unchanged from 30 years ago, when Gallup first asked the question. About a third of Americans believe that humans evolved, but with God’s guidance; 15% say humans evolved, but that God had no part in the process.

Gallup has asked Americans to choose among these three explanations for the origin and development of human beings 11 times since 1982. Although the percentages choosing each view have varied from survey to survey, the 46% who today choose the creationist explanation is virtually the same as the 45% average over that period -- and very similar to the 44% who chose that explanation in 1982. The 32% who choose the "theistic evolution" view that humans evolved under God’s guidance is slightly below the 30-year average of 37%, while the 15% choosing the secular evolution view is slightly higher (12%).

The Most Religious Americans Are Most Likely to Be Creationists

Gallup's question wording explicitly frames the three alternatives in terms of God's involvement in the process of human development, making it less than surprising to find that the more religious the American, the more likely he or she is to choose the creationist viewpoint.
Two-thirds of Americans who attend religious services weekly choose the creationist alternative, compared with 25% of those who say they seldom or never attend church. The views of Americans who attend almost every week or monthly fall in between those of the other two groups. Still, those who seldom or never attend church are more likely to believe that God guided the evolutionary process than to believe that humans evolved with no input from God.

Majority of Republicans Are Creationists

Highly religious Americans are more likely to be Republican than those who are less religious, which helps explain the relationship between partisanship and beliefs about human origins. The major distinction is between Republicans and everyone else. While 58% of Republicans believe that God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years, 39% of independents and 41% of Democrats agree.

Those With Postgraduate Education Least Likely to Believe in Creationist Explanation

Americans with postgraduate education are most likely of all the educational groups to say humans evolved without God's guidance, and least likely to say God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years. The creationist viewpoint "wins" among Americans with less than a postgraduate education.
Implications

Despite the many changes that have taken place in American society and culture over the past 30 years, including new discoveries in biological and social science, there has been virtually no sustained change in Americans' views of the origin of the human species since 1982. The 46% of Americans who today believe that God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years is little changed from the 44% who believed this 30 years ago, when Gallup first asked the question.

More broadly, some 78% of Americans today believe that God had a hand in the development of humans in some way, just slightly less than the percentage who felt this way 30 years ago.

All in all, there is no evidence in this trend of a substantial movement toward a secular viewpoint on human origins.

Most Americans are not scientists, of course, and cannot be expected to understand all of the latest evidence and competing viewpoints on the development of the human species. Still, it would be hard to dispute that most scientists who study humans agree that the species evolved over millions of years, and that relatively few scientists believe that humans began in their current form only 10,000 years ago without the benefit of evolution. Thus, almost half of Americans today hold a belief, at least as measured by this question wording, that is at odds with the preponderance of the scientific literature.

Survey Methods

Results for this USA Today/Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 10-13, 2012, with a random sample of 1,012 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.
Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

View methodology, full question results, and trend data.

For more details on Gallup’s polling methodology, visit www.gallup.com.
I recently met a local Portland politician for lunch whom I’ve respected for a long time. I went into the meeting planning on asking him about his political career and to get some tips on a few communication questions I had. Basically, I was planning on talking about one hour.

Then something incredible happened.

We sat down, he opened up his laptop, and proceeded to take notes while asking me engaging question after engaging question about my work, my family, my interests, and more. When it was all said and done, he hit me over the head with one more: “How can I help you?”

He’s a politician, but his interest in me wasn’t disingenuous. He wasn’t trying to schmooze me. I have no money to give him, no political connections of any value. But for 45 minutes he made me feel important.

The result? I will vote for him in every possible scenario I can. I will tell my friends to vote for him. I will attend his events. I will support his initiatives. I will put up a yard sign. I will put up two yard signs.

... 

Seth Godin calls this the Connection Economy

“Friends bring us more friends. A reputation brings us a chance to build a better reputation. Access to information encourages us to seek ever more information. The connections in our life multiply and increase in value.”

Thriving in the connection economy is based on one important principle: Getting people to like you.

People who like you will support your ideas, buy your product, hire your services, introduce you to their friends, and go out of their way to make your life better.
If you’re an extrovert, getting people to like you is simple: Stop talking so much. No seriously. Stop it.

I know a lot of people who, out of nervousness or excitement think the best way to engage people is to talk them into utter submission. As if their endless words, jokes and anecdotes infused with Red Bull and hooked up to a V8 engine will fast-track them into the Connection Economy.

What so many don’t realize is that the secret to building relationships isn’t in the words you say, but in the questions you ask.

If you’re an introvert, the same truth applies. Don’t change who you are, just be more strategic in how you foster dialogue.

• • •

Asking the right questions is an art form and it has a name: Social Jiu-Jitsu

Popularized in an article by Jeff Haden, he breaks down this scenario:

You meet someone. You talk for 15 minutes. You walk away thinking, “Wow, we just had a great conversation. She is awesome.”

Then, when you think about it later, you realize you didn’t learn a thing about the other person.
Remarkably likeable people are masters at Social Jiu-Jitsu, the ancient art of getting you to talk about yourself without you ever knowing it happened.

Social Jiu-Jitsu masters use their interest, their politeness, and their social graces to cast an immediate spell on you.

And you like them for it.

Social Jiu-Jitsu is easy. Just ask the right questions.

As soon as you learn a little about someone, ask how they did it. Or why they did it. Or what they liked about it, or what they learned from it, or what you should do if you’re in a similar situation.

Before our lunch order had even arrived, my politician friend Social Jui-Jitsu’d me into submission. And I love him for it.

• • •

Here’s a tip: From here on out, in every meeting or meaningful conversation you have, work to try and get the other person to stop and say, “Hmm, that’s a really good question.” That’s the goal. If you’ve gotten them to say that, you’ve won.

Becoming a remarkably likable person in the Connection Economy is a crucial step to building the network you need to make a real impact in the world.

“Be interesting, be enthusiastic, and don’t talk too much.” – Norman Vincent Peale
The Complete List of Reasons Leaders Fail

May 29, 2013

Top 12 reasons leaders fail:

1. Neglecting culture. Culture building is job-one for all leaders.

2. Lack of paranoia. The paranoid think about what could go wrong and make contingency plans.


4. Task rather than people focus.

5. Accepting complexity.

6. Lack of political awareness. Successful leaders build relationships with powerful players.

7. Failure to sell successes and accomplishments with humility. If the right people don’t know your value, you aren’t valuable.

8. Trusting the untested. Talent without a track record is dangerous.


11. People pleasing.

12. Refusing to adapt. Adaptability is the greatest ability.

Bottom 20 reasons leaders fail:


2. Disconnecting with others due to the blindness of power.

3. Failure to build strong teamwork.
4. Neglecting to develop skills, both theirs and those of others.
5. Needing to outshine others rather than letting others shine.
6. Confusing leadership with management.
7. Cowardice. It takes courage to lead. If you don’t think so, you haven’t led.
8. Brown nosing those above and neglecting those below.
9. Too much doing and not enough helping others do.
10. Withdrawal.
11. Over-promising.
12. Fence sitting.
13. Lack of clarity.
14. Lack of follow through.
15. Favoritism.
16. Blaming.
17. Rejecting uncomfortable ideas.
18. Excluding themselves from accountability. “Do as I say, not as I do.”
19. Lack of alignment with board members and organizational values.
20. Relying on authority.

What’s at the top of your list of reasons leaders fail?

What should be added to the complete list of reasons leaders fail?

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When Christians become a 'hated minority'

By John Blake, CNN

(CNN) – When Peter Sprigg speaks publicly about his opposition to homosexuality, something odd often happens.

During his speeches, people raise their hands to challenge his assertions that the Bible condemns homosexuality, but no Christians speak out to defend him.

“But after it is over, they will come over to talk to me and whisper in my ear, ‘I agree with everything you said,’” says Sprigg, a spokesman for The Family Research Council, a powerful, conservative Christian lobbying group.

We’ve heard of the “down-low” gay person who keeps his or her sexual identity secret for fear of public scorn. But Sprigg and other evangelicals say changing attitudes toward homosexuality have created a new victim: closeted Christians who believe the Bible condemns homosexuality but will not say so publicly for fear of being labeled a hateful bigot.

As proof, Sprigg points to the backlash that ESPN commentator Chris Broussard sparked recently. Broussard was called a bigot and a purveyor of hate speech when he said an NBA player who had come out as gay was living in “open rebellion to God.” Broussard said the player, Jason Collins, was “living in unrepentant sin” because the Bible condemns homosexuality.

“In the current culture, it takes more courage for someone like Chris Broussard to speak out than for someone like Jason Collins to come out,” says Sprigg, a former pastor. “The media will hail someone who comes out of the closet as gay, but someone who simply expresses their personal religious views about homosexual conduct is attacked.”

When is disagreement hate?

Bryan Litfin, a theology professor at Moody Bible Institute in Illinois, says Christians should be able to publicly say that God designed sex to take place within a marriage between a man and a woman.

“That isn’t so outrageous,” Litfin says. “Nobody is expressing hate toward homosexuals by
saying that. Since when is disagreement the same as hate?"

But quoting the Bible doesn't inoculate anyone from becoming a bigot or hater, some scholars say. There's a point at which a Christian's opposition to homosexuality can become bigotry, and even hate speech, they say.

Crossing such a line has happened many times in history.

A literal reading of the Bible was used to justify all sorts of hatred: slavery, the subjugation of women and anti-Semitism, scholars and pastors say.

"Truly damaging speech cannot be excused just because it expresses genuine religious belief," says Mark D. Jordan, author of "Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality."

"Some religious beliefs, sincerely held, are detestable. They cannot be spoken without disrupting social peace," says Jordan, a professor at the John Danforth Center on Religion & Politics at Washington University in St. Louis.

The point where religious speech becomes hate speech is difficult to define, though, scholars and activists say.

The Southern Poverty Law Center in Alabama is a nonprofit civil rights group that combats and monitors hate groups. Three years ago, it designated the Family Research Council, the group that Sprigg represents, as a hate group – a characterization the group stridently rejects.

Mark Potok, a center spokesman, says there’s no shared definition of what constitutes hate speech.

“There is no legal meaning. It's just a phrase,” Potok says. “Hate speech is in the ear of the beholder.”

'One of the most hated minorities?'

Intolerance may be difficult to define, but some evangelicals say they have become victims of intolerance because of their reverence for the Bible.

The conservative media culture is filled with stories about evangelicals being labeled as "extremists" for their belief that homosexuality is a sin.

Their sense of persecution goes beyond their stance on homosexuality. There are stories
circulating of evangelical students being suspended for opposing homosexuality, a teacher fired for giving a Bible to a curious student, and the rise of anti-Christian bigotry.

A blogger at The American Dream asked in one essay:

“Are evangelical Christians rapidly becoming one of the most hated minorities in America?”

The reluctance of evangelicals to speak out against homosexuality is often cited as proof they are being forced into the closet.

Joe Carter, editor for The Gospel Coalition, an online evangelical magazine, wrote a blog post entitled “Debatable: Is the Christian Church a ‘Hate Group’?” He warned that young people will abandon “orthodox” Christian churches that teach that homosexuality is a sin for fear of being called haters.

“Faux civility, embarrassment, prudishness and a fear of expressing an unpopular opinion has caused many Christians to refrain from explaining how homosexual conduct destroys lives,” Carter wrote.

Some Christians fear that opposing homosexuality could cause them to lose their jobs and “haunt them forever,” Carter says.

“It’s easier to just go along,” says Carter, who is also author of “How to Argue Like Jesus.” “You don't want to be lumped in with the bigots. That's a powerful word.”

Edward Johnson, a communication professor at Campbell University in North Carolina, says we are now living in a "postmodern" era where everything is relative and there is no universally accepted truth. It's an environment in which anyone who says "this is right" and "that is wrong" is labeled intolerant, he says.

There was a time when a person could publicly say homosexuality was wrong and people could consider the statement without anger, he says. Today, people have reverted to an intellectual tribalism where they are only willing to consider the perspective of their own tribe.

“They are incapable of comprehending that someone may have a view different than theirs,” Johnson says. “For them anyone who dares to question the dogma of the tribe can only be doing so out of hatred.”

Sprigg, from the Family Research Council, says his condemnation of homosexual conduct does not spring from intolerance but a desire to protect gays from harmful conduct, he
Sprigg, a senior fellow for policy studies at the council, wrote in a council pamphlet that homosexual men are more likely to engage in child sexual abuse than are straight men. He also wrote that gay men are also afflicted with a higher rate of sexually transmitted diseases and mental illness as well.

Sprigg says he does not believe homosexuality is a choice and that “personal testimonies" and "clinical experience" show that some people “can and do change from gay to straight.”

“Maybe we need to do a better job of showing that we are motivated by Christian love,” Sprigg says. “Love is wanting the best for someone, and acting to bring that about.”

'That's a lie'

Potok, from the Southern Poverty Law Center, has little use for the love Sprigg talks about.

He calls it hatred, and his voice rose in anger when he talked about the claims by Sprigg and other Christian groups that gay men are more predisposed to molest children and that homosexual behavior is inherently harmful.

He says the Southern Poverty Law Center didn’t designate the Family Research Group a hate group because they view homosexuality as a sin or oppose same-sex marriage, Potok says. There are plenty of Christian groups who hold those beliefs but are not hate groups, he says.

A group becomes a hate group when it attacks and maligns an entire class of people for their “immutable characteristics,” Potok says. The Family Research Council spreads known falsehoods about gays and lesbians, he says, such as the contention that gay men are predisposed to abuse children.

“That’s a lie,” Potok says. “These guys are engaging in straight-up defamation of a very large group of people. There are not many things much worse than you can say in America about somebody than they are a child molester.”

Potok scoffed at Spriggs’ claim that the council and other evangelical anti-gay groups are victims of intolerance.

“That’s whining on the part of people who spend their days and nights attacking gay people and then some people criticize them and they don’t like it," he says. “That’s pathetic. It reminds me of slave owners complaining that people are saying ugly things about them.”
What the Bible says

What about the popular evangelical claim, “We don’t hate the sinner, just the sin” – is that seen as intolerance or hate speech when it comes to homosexuality?

There are those who say you can’t hate the sin and love the sinner because being gay or lesbian is defined by one’s sexual behavior; it’s who someone is.

“Most people who identify as gay and lesbian would say that this is not an action I’m choosing to do; this is who I am,” says Timothy Beal, author of “The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book.”

Beal, a religion professor at Case Western University in Ohio, says it should be difficult for any Christian to unequivocally declare that the Bible opposes homosexuality because the Bible doesn’t take a single position on the topic. It's an assertion that many scholars and mainline Protestant pastors would agree with.

Some people cite Old Testament scriptures as condemning homosexuality, such as Leviticus 18:22 – “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” But other Christians counter by saying they are not bound by the Old Testament.

There are those who also cite New Testament scriptures like Romans 1:26–27 – “… Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men. …”

Beal, however, says Jesus said little about sex. And the Apostle Paul, who wrote Romans, was probably referring to male prostitution and men having sexual relations with boys, a practice in the Greco–Roman world.

“Paul does not understand genetics and sexual orientation the way we understand it now as something much more than a choice,” says Beal.

Some evangelicals say Christians can’t change their view of biblical truth just because times change. But some scholars reply:

Sure you can. Christians do it all the time.

Denying a woman’s ability to preach in church was justified by scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:11–12 – “… I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she
must be quiet.” But many churches have abandoned that teaching – and some scholars say a woman preached the first Christian sermon, when Mary Magdalene proclaimed that Jesus had risen.

Slaveholders in 19th century America justified slavery through a literal reading of the Bible, quoting Titus 2:9-10 – “Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything. …” And anti-Semitism was justified by the claims that Jews killed Jesus, such as Matthew 27: 25-26 – “Let his blood be on us and on our children.”

Litfin, from Moody Bible Institute, acknowledged that the Bible once sanctioned slavery, but he said that practice was a “cultural expression” that changed over time. Evangelicals who oppose same-sex marriage by citing the Bible are on more solid ground, he says.

“Marriage is a universal and timeless institution that God set up for maximum human flourishing. He set it up in the first book of the Bible with the story of Adam and Eve. It is consistent throughout the whole Bible. ... Marriage is in a different category than those cultural things.”

Public jousts over the Bible's stance on homosexuality rarely change people’s minds. What changes is when people get to know gay and lesbian people as friends and hear their story, says Beal, author of “The Rise and Fall of the Bible.”

“If you open up to that other person genuinely, you basically come to a point where you have to sacrifice them to your ideology or crack open your ideology to make a hospitable place for them,” Beal says.

One Christian pastor who is gay says the uproar over the ESPN commentator’s comments can actually be good, because debates help settle moral disputes.

“What appears to us as antiquated and prejudicial now was once a disputed issue that required debate,” says the Rev. Richard McCarty, a minister in the United Church of Christ and a religious studies professor at Mercyhurst University in Pennsylvania.

Until the debate over homosexuality is settled – if it ever is – there may be plenty of evangelical Christians who feel as if they are now being forced to stay in the closet.

Carter, the evangelical blogger, says he foresees a day when any church that preaches against homosexuality will be marginalized. Just as many churches now accept divorce, they will accept sexual practices once considered sinful.

“It’s getting to the point,” he says, “where churches are not going to say that any sexual
activity is wrong."
My Take: ‘Gay Christian’ is not an oxymoron

Editor’s note: Justin Lee is the Executive Director of the Gay Christian Network and author of Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.–Christians Debate.

By Justin Lee, Special to CNN

In high school, I was a Christian know-it-all. My nickname was "God boy," and I was known for regularly preaching at my friends about social issues of the day. I dismissed their objections – and accusations of homophobia – as intolerance for my faith.

"I'm just telling you what God's Word says," I'd argue.

Years later I realized my mistake. What my peers most objected to wasn't my beliefs – it was my condescending attitude. I debated and preached when I should have listened. I thought that stating my position loudly and unyieldingly was a sign of strength. In the process, I alienated my friends.

I'm still an evangelical Christian, but one thing is now crystal clear to me. American evangelicals' bad reputation isn't just because of what we believe. It's mostly because of how we behave.

When ESPN commentator Chris Broussard was criticized for saying that openly gay NBA player Jason Collins was “openly rebelling against God," some evangelicals argued that conservative theological views are no longer tolerated in America.

But they're missing the point.

Broussard's language didn't just express a religious view about sexual morality; it referred to gay people in ways that were dehumanizing, reducing all gay people's lives to a single sex act. Other outspoken Christians routinely say even worse things, comparing gay people to pedophiles, for example.

No one is immune from criticism in a free country with diverse beliefs. But if Christians feel particularly singled out at times, I'd argue that our perceived lack of empathy for others is
largely to blame.

I can often test a Christian's level of empathy by offering a single admission: When I was 18, I realized that I'm gay.

Empathetic Christians are typically intrigued by such a statement, even if they also question how a conservative Southern Baptist could also be openly gay. They want to know about my struggles, how my family and church responded, and whether I ever feel my faith and sexuality are at odds with one another.

I love these questions, because they show that the other person genuinely sees me as a human being.

But far too often, Christians respond not with curiosity and questions but with politics and preaching.

They quote Bible passages at me, make assumptions about my faith, or tell me why they're opposed to same-sex marriage.

I'm no longer a person to them; I'm a symbol of a culture war. A battlefield. And when I don't want to be treated that way, they assume I'm turning away because I didn't really want to hear the truth.

This kind of behavior is why so many of my LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) friends want nothing to do with the church.

But it's not only them.

In my book, "Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate," I share the story of Cindy, a conservative evangelical mom whose life was thrown into turmoil when her son told her he was gay.

This wasn't a political question for Cindy; it was a personal one. But the dehumanizing rhetoric about gay people she heard from the pulpit made her afraid to talk to anyone at church about her son's sexuality.

Christians are not a monolithic group. I know many empathetic Christians, including many who speak up regularly for their LGBT brothers and sisters.

The loudest megaphones do not speak for the rest of us, but they are still loud, and legion. To them I say: Gay people are not an issue. We're people. Some of us are Christians, too. And if it disturbs you that I refer to myself as both gay and Christian, I invite you to take the
time to get to know me, and read what I write. You don't have to agree, and you might think I’m a sinner, but at least you’ll see me as a human being.

Baptist minister and author Tony Campolo quips that Jesus entreated Christians not to "love the sinner and hate the sin," but to "love the sinner and hate your own sin."

Jesus saved his harshest words for the self-righteously devout and chose the outcasts and sinners as his closest friends.

Perhaps a lesson in Jesus-style humility might do us all some good.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Justin Lee.
Ex-NFL player's support for gay NBA player apparently costs him church appearance

http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/02/ex-nfl-players-support-for-gay-nba-player-apparently-costs-him-church-appearance/

May 29, 2013

By Dan Merica, CNN

Washington (CNN) – LeRoy Butler, a former safety for the Green Bay Packers, is one of many professional athletes to tweet support for Jason Collins, the NBA player who came out as gay this week.

“Congrats to Jason Collins,” Butler tweeted April 29, the day Collins came out in a Sports Illustrated cover story.

But Butler says the four-word tweet cost him a speaking appearance at a Wisconsin church.

He was scheduled to speak at the church (whose name he has not revealed) about bullying and his new book, "The LeRoy Butler Story: From Wheelchair to the Lambeau Leap." That was until the church, according to Butler, told him he was no longer welcome because of his tweet in support of Collins.

"The pastor called me and that's when we got into the old, the whole religion thing about gay people and things of that nature and the conversation just went back and forth for us a couple of minutes," Butler told Anderson Cooper on Thursday.

After the exchange with the pastor, Butler took to twitter to express his frustration.

Butler later tweeted that “some parents went to the church and complained about my tweet” supporting Collins. The church, according to Butler, said that if the football player apologized, he would be allowed to speak.

"They basically said this, if you apologize, ask God for forgiveness and remove the tweet, you'll be able to do this speaking engagement with the kids," he said. "I won't do that. That's taking my dignity and respect away."

He continued: "I told the pastor, blame it on my mom because my mom brought me up to love everybody."

Butler recently tweeted that the church apologized for the incident and thanked him “for not
Butler played 11 years, from 1990 to 2001, with the Packers and helped them win a Super Bowl in 1997. He was a four–time All–Pro selection, the highest honor for a year of work in the NFL, and is credited with inventing the Lambeau Leap, the iconic touchdown celebration in which a Packer leaps into the Lambeau Field stands to celebrate with fans.

As for Butler's stance on gay athletes in professional sports, he said they have "support from straight guys like me that won't judge them."

"If we win a Super Bowl ring, I don't care who you bring to the ring ceremony, I just want to win the ring," Butler said. "That's what it's all about. ... Isn't that what it's all about? Winning the championship? Not who is in my bed when I turn the lights out."

Since retiring, Butler has been active in the Green Bay community, and his Facebook page chronicles appearances and speeches he has given to churches in the area.
5 Ways To Deal With Criticism

http://thepastoroffice.com/2013/04/05/5-ways-to-deal-with-criticism/

May 29, 2013

Its a myth that only poor leadership will incite criticism. The truth is all leadership, whether good or bad, will result in some level of criticism. Because no leader is perfect, every leader will be criticized. It simply comes with the territory. And even for the one leader who was perfect (i.e. Jesus), He too endured criticism, though unjustly.

Given this simple truth, it’s in the best interest of the leader to waist no time bemoaning, avoiding, or trying to mitigate criticism. So the best thing a leader can do is learn how to handle it.

I recently came across an excellent sermon preached by Pastor Freddy Russell at the Atlanta Berean SDA Church in which he dealt with how to handle critics. In this sermon (which you can watch here) he gave 5 practical steps on how to handle criticism that is worth sharing.

1. Don’t reply right away

Take a moment to reflect on what has been said. Objectively weigh the criticism, making sure it is constructive and accurate.

2. Listen to the criticism

Your natural instinct may be to tune the person out, growing defensive and/or annoyed.
This urge is counterproductive and must be resisted. Take time to understand clearly the feedback you’re receiving. There may be some value in it.

3. Understand the criticism is not always about you

There are many people who just like to criticize, and it will only take a few experiences with these individuals for a leader to identify them. Because of this you cannot take criticism personally. Many criticize out of their own insecurity. Thus when your hearing criticism, you must remain objective.

4. Let it go

Once you listen to it, let it go! Don’t carry it with you. Listen to it, weight it, learn from it, and then LET IT GO! Don’t take it into your next meeting. Don’t take it home. And do not take it to bed with you!

5. Keep your daily balance

Understand that every great leader has experienced criticism. Don’t let it rattle you, and know that handling it appropriately is the most important thing you can do.

Posted by peterseth on April 5, 2013

http://thepastorsoffice.com/2013/04/05/5-ways-to-deal-with-criticism/
More On This Topic

May 7, 2013 | What in the world was I doing riding on the back of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle? My parents would have had a stroke.

I am not a biker. I do not have tattoos nor wear black leather. In fact, I think motorcycles are dangerous.

I am a middle-of-the-road, married mother of two grown children who is befuddled to find herself the pastor of an increasingly “biker” church.

This could only be the work of the Holy Spirit.

Once a month from April through September, my small church in rural North Carolina invites bikers to worship with us and join us for a continental breakfast provided by members. After breakfast, they depart on a 100-mile-long scenic ride that ends with lunch somewhere near the town of Rougemont.

Despite repeated invitations to climb onto the back of a motorcycle, I never intended to take one of these trips. It’s one thing to allow the Holy Spirit to shake things up in church, quite another to allow the Spirit to disrupt your own life.

However, I realized that although I enjoyed seeing all those Harley riders sitting in the pews on Sunday, I wasn’t really connecting with them as a pastor.

In my defense, I did not arrive four years ago at a biker church. I was appointed pastor of a three-point rural charge consisting of three small churches within a dozen-mile radius, each with its own personality. None of those personalities screamed “biker.”

But one of the first things I noticed during worship services at Rougemont United Methodist
Church my first summer was the constant roar of motorcycles on U.S. Highway 501, where the church is located. The noise was deafening, even inside the building. I became a master of the thoughtful pause in my sermons or prayers, as I waited for the roar to pass. The noise was so persistent and obnoxious that I began to wonder: Is God trying to tell us something?

So in response to the noise of Harleys on the highway, we placed an invitation on the church sign: “Bikers Welcome.” I worried about it, though, and wondered out loud at an Administrative Council meeting, “Would bikers really be welcome here?” The council discussed it, and their honest answer was yes.

Despite the sign, bikers did not flock to church. However, the wife of a biker did come -- and eventually joined -- and soon afterward, her husband joined, too. They quickly became active members and organized the Biker Sundays, with my encouragement.

After the first successful worship, I gleefully told my husband, “I’m going to be the pastor of a biker church!” It was exciting to see empty pews filled by large bearded men wearing black leather and bandanas. The Holy Spirit was definitely blowing through this fusty, musty old church.

“You’re not a biker; how can you have a biker church?” my husband inquired. It’s true: I wear a black robe most Sundays and preside at a traditional service. I drive a Honda Accord. In all honesty, I often suspect I am a part of the fusty–musty–ness. I don’t know how to be any other way.

How could I be in ministry with people from a subculture about which I knew nothing?

In fact, my presence seemed to make most of the bikers uncomfortable. The church sanctuary made them uncomfortable. Those who attended worship would rush inside 30 seconds before the service started and rush back outside when it was over. But gradually, a few of them began to attend worship on a more regular basis. I heard they were calling Rougemont “my church” on Facebook.

Meanwhile, Robin, our active biker member, kept asking me to ride with them, on the back of his Harley.

The thought unnerved me, so I joked about it. “Shall I wear my black robe?” I said. “Unzip it maybe; let it fly out like bat wings behind me?”

“Ha ha. No, seriously, you need to ride with us,” he said.
Twice I scheduled a ride and then chickened out. Finally, in prayer, I surrendered to the feeling that God might actually be calling me to do this. I swallowed my fear and agreed to participate in the first ride of 2013.

That morning, in our worship service, I told the congregation the Holy Spirit brings wild and creative disruptions into the church. Just look: the pastor has shucked her black robe and is wearing bluejeans -- proof positive that the Holy Spirit is shaking things up! They laughed.

After breakfast, I squeezed into a borrowed black leather jacket, put on a helmet and climbed onto the back of Robin’s motorcycle. The bikes took off from the church parking lot like rockets, and I didn’t open my eyes for the first three miles.

The ride was exhilarating, no question, and after about 15 minutes, I managed to relax enough to enjoy it. When we stopped to stretch our legs at the halfway point, there was a lot of easy laughter and good-natured ribbing of the pastor, something that would not have happened inside the church building.

At the end, I stayed for lunch at a local tavern, and they even asked me to bless the food. The next day, half a dozen bikers wanted to “friend” me on Facebook.

I have two reminders of my ride. One is the purple bruise on my shin, the result of a clumsy dismount. I didn’t even feel it at the time, because I was distracted by the improbability of the whole experience.

The other reminder comes from the photos taken that day. When I look at the pictures, I am struck by the way I am grinning in all of them. Was I smiling so broadly because I was frightened out of my wits -- or because I knew Pentecost was descending upon me? Or, God help me, both?
April 30, 2013 | Editor’s note: Faith & Leadership offers sermons that shed light on issues of Christian leadership. This sermon was preached on April 18, 2013, in Goodson Chapel for closing convocation at Duke Divinity School.

In this time -- a time called modern, a time when those that bear the name Christian always seem to carry the burden of proof ...

In this time when the church seems consumed by scandal and self-doubt ...

In this time when those going into the ministry are unsure what that may entail or, indeed, whether they will even have a job after graduating from seminary ...

In such a time, it is difficult to avoid a defensive posture when asked why we persist in being Christian.

God knows we try. Let us show you, we seem to say to anyone polite enough to listen, why we think believing in God makes all the difference. Let us show you why participating in worship may be refreshment for the soul. Let us show you why the Christian way of life is good for Christian and non–Christian alike. Let us show you how being a Christian can and should put you on the progressive side of history. Let us show you that our faith does justice, making possible a politics otherwise unavailable. I have no doubt we believe such “showings” to be true, but too often such “showings” are desperate attempts to assure ourselves we know what we are about by calling ourselves Christians.

But then the Lord asks, “Do you love me?” It seems an odd question for Jesus to ask. We can’t help but wonder if some redactor got it wrong. Or perhaps some failure in communication may have taken place; someone must have misheard Jesus’ conversation with Peter. It was probably the person who counted the fish. We are not even sure we can trust John to have gotten it right. The disciples have been with the resurrected Jesus, but they go on fishing? They go back to the ordinary life they had prior to following Jesus? It seems unimaginable.

Moreover, Jesus is not supposed to ask Peter -- or us -- to love him. His job is to love us. In spite of our failures to be faithful disciples, in spite of our confusions about what it means to be Christian, in spite of our prideful presumption that we are our own creator, in
spite of our sins, Jesus is supposed to love us.

Is that not the heart of the gospel? -- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.” This passage from John seems to have gotten off script; we are to be assured of Jesus’ love for us, and not the other way around.

God’s love of us, moreover, is crucial for what we take to be our fundamental task as Christians. That is, because Jesus first loves us, we must and can love one another. Our love for one another is crucial for our “showings” to the world. Thus, the world, the unbelieving world, often gives us credit as Christians because we at least seem to love and care for one another. Some say, “Look at those Christians. See how they love one another. They may believe some crazy things, but they usually make pretty good neighbors.”

It is even the case that because we have been loved by Jesus, the love Christians show in response is not restricted to other Christians. Again, the unbelieving world notes that God’s love of us makes possible our love of the world. Those Christians love the outcast, the unlovable, the destitute, those ravaged by illness and pain. They even love their enemies. Such a love is surely only possible because they think they have first been loved by God. That is the way it is supposed to work. God loves us, and we love everyone in return.

But in this Gospel passage, Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” Three times he asks Peter if he loves him. He even asks Peter if he loves him more than his other disciples love Jesus. We are tempted to think Jesus’ question is meant specifically for Peter. Peter and Jesus have had a tangled relationship. Jesus is testing Peter to see if in fact he is a rock on which the church can be built. So there is probably good reason Jesus asks Peter this question three times -- one for each time Peter had denied him. Jesus is giving Peter a chance to “take it back,” so to speak. But surely he wouldn’t ask it of us.

I have no doubt that Peter has a particular role in God’s providential care of creation through the church, but I do not think that means we can restrict Jesus’ question, “Do you love me?” as one relevant only to Peter. It is surely right that all that Jesus is and does manifests God’s love for us, but it is no less true that Jesus asks us, as he asked Peter, “Do you love me?”

If you are like me, you would prefer to read the passage as one limited to that particular context in order to excuse yourself from having to answer. How on earth can I answer that question without immediately feeling trite? I suspect I am more ready to believe in Jesus than I am to love him. I am, after all, a theologian.
I fear the education you have received may reproduce a similar effect. Seminaries, at least this seminary, are schools rightly committed to teaching you what the church believes. Those of you who are about to graduate have hopefully been well-formed theologically. You have been prepared to read the Bible as the very word of God. You are prepared to believe in Jesus as God’s Messiah. You are prepared to believe that Jesus is God incarnate, very God and very man. You have been prepared to say “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” while affirming that God is one. You have been prepared to know that not all liturgical orders are created equally.

By the very fact you have endured your education, your formation for the ministry, you have witnessed your willingness to make sacrifices on behalf of Jesus. Upon graduating, most of you will go into some form of ministry. The ministry is no longer a profession of status. You are willing to sacrifice status. You also are not going to make much money. Moreover, you are going to be subject to the omnivorous desires of people who think you have all the time in the world to meet their needs because you do not work for a living. In short, you are already -- or will soon be -- doing everything required by anyone who believes God loves them.

But today Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” I suspect most of us are not prepared to answer that question, because we fear, if we answer honestly, what we may have to say. We are not at all sure we love Jesus. We are not at all sure we even know what such a love entails. What could it possibly mean that Jesus asks us to love him? To ask to be loved suggests a vulnerability that we are not sure Jesus should have. That Jesus might want our love suggests he might even be like us, that is, a human being. We think if Jesus is the manifestation of God’s love for us, he must not need our love. What he needs is our belief that he is who he says he is.
Esther R. Knott, part time NAD Ministerial associate and associate pastor of the Pioneer Memorial Adventist Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan has accepted the invitation to serve full time as NAD Ministerial associate director and the new InMinistry Center director, and will focus on continuing education through graduate studies and training, and professional growth for pastors.

Dan Jackson, NAD President, said the division Administrative Committee voted on May 8 to ask Esther R. Knott, associate pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University, to join the Ministerial department full time. According to Ivan Williams, NAD Ministerial Director, Knott is already a well-known part of the Ministerial department team, having served part-time as associate director since 2009. Her focus has been on initiating division-wide special projects and providing support and professional development to more than 100 Adventist women clergy employed in various capacities across the Division.

Williams said that in the new full-time position, Knott will transition into different responsibilities. She will direct the division’s efforts to support local conferences in building a comprehensive, sustainable continuing education system for pastors, with similar standing and expectations that are required of professionals in other fields.

Williams said Knott will also direct the Division’s InMinistry Center, a joint program with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews that provides field-based master’s level programs to practicing pastors. In this latter position, she replaces Walton Williams, who has held this position since 2001 and is retiring this summer. As an employee of the Division, Knott, like her predecessor, will be based at the Seminary and serve as the Division liaison with the Seminary in developing and running these programs.

“Esther Knott is a connector,” Ivan Williams said. “She is a change agent. She has proven that she has a special administrative talent as a pastor to bring people together to develop new ideas and new ways of doing things. She also has a passion for continuing training and education. All of these skills are exactly what we need for the portfolio of responsibility we have for this position in NAD Ministerial. Her talents will be an especially important part of our team as we look forward to the first ever division-wide ministerial convention that will be held in Austin, Texas in 2015.”

Williams said that Knott has been developing a broad perspective of the needs of pastoral development for many years. Among other responsibilities beyond her congregation, she has been a very active member of the Michigan Conference Executive for 15 years. She serves on the re-organized NAD Board of Ministerial and Theological Education and is a member of the General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee.

Knott has been a pastor for more than 28 years. She has served as campus chaplain at Broadview Academy and Andrews University. From 1987 to 1990 she was the director of the NAD Education department’s Harvest 90 Education Project, where she developed a curriculum for teachers to use in educating Adventist K-12 students about early Adventist leaders and the history of Adventism. From 1990 to 1997 she was associate pastor at Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Md.

In 1997 Knott joined the staff at Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University, where for the last 16 years she has focused on congregational nurture, discipleship, small groups, personal evangelism and community engagement. This year, she and Dwight Nelson, senior pastor, along with the staff, launched a major initiative to move Pioneer into a strong small group model for intentional discipleship. In the first semester of the program, more than 800 members were involved weekly in small groups. “We as a university congregation have been especially blessed with Esther’s creative leadership,” Nelson said. “Her passion for ministry and soul-winning and her devotion to God have kept her on the
cutting edge of pastoring, and I know she will significantly impact the new team she is joining. We will miss her!”

Working with a team from Pioneer and AdventSource, Knott was a lead developer of Contagious Adventist, a new seminar that helps Adventists learn to recognize and create contagious Adventist moments where they can naturally introduce specific Adventist teachings to other Christians. Knott has also been very active in developing strong relationships with various organizations and agencies and leaders in the surrounding community through her involvement with Rotary, Big Brothers/Sisters, and Christian Worlds Services’ CROP Hunger Walk.

Knott holds a BA in religion and a MA in religious education from Andrews University. She is married to Ronald Alan Knott, who is director of Andrews University Press, the Adventist Church’s only regularly established academic publishing house, and the publisher of the Andrews Study Bible. The Knotts have one daughter, Olivia, a junior religion and communication major at Andrews University.

Knott will begin her new responsibilities with the North American Division on July 21.
Shawn Boonstra Transition

Shawn Boonstra, NAD Ministerial associate and veteran of Seventh-day Adventist media outreach and evangelism, has accepted a call to be the new speaker/director of one of radio’s longest-running religious programs, The Voice of Prophecy. Boonstra says, “Working with the NAD Ministerial team has been a phenomenal experience.

It’s not often that you see a team so dedicated to the support and success of pastors, and it’s been rewarding to be part of that. My primary area of focus is evangelism, and I’m happy to report that it’s alive and well throughout the Division. Our pastors have a heart, not just for winning their communities, but for seeing their church members enjoy the outreach potential that God has in store for them. They have a vision worth supporting, and Ivan’s ministerial team is clear evidence of the Division’s commitment to being that support. Even though I’m now moving on to new responsibilities, I will always be a part of this in some way."

Ivan Williams, the NAD Ministerial director says, “It has been an awesome experience having Shawn Boonstra serve with us on the NAD Ministerial team. His gifts and talents have been an essential part of the relevant ministerial work. Although Shawn’s responsibilities will take him elsewhere, we will continue collaborating on winning souls for God’s kingdom in the North American Division.”

Dan Jackson, president of the Voice of Prophecy Board and of the North American Division, said in a statement, “Shawn has clearly demonstrated that he has a heart for evangelism and for reaching those who need to hear the messages of Christ’s love and redemptive power.”

Boonstra was from 2004 to 2011 speaker/director of It Is Written, the church’s pioneering television outreach. He had earlier spent six years at the Canadian It Is Written program, including five as speaker/director there. Earlier, he pastored a number of Adventist congregations in British Columbia.

Boonstra’s selection to head the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) ministry was voted April 30, 2013, by the organization’s board of directors, meeting in Simi Valley, California.

Boonstra has also authored more than 15 outreach-oriented books. He and his wife Jean, social media coordinator for Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines, have two daughters. Boonstra replaces pastor Fred Kinsey who served the Voice of Prophecy for five years.