The life of a pastor is complex and constantly changing. Ministry today is strikingly different than it was a generation ago. The expectations are higher, the demands more numerous, and the pace of life faster. In recent years, several studies have reported that ministry life is hard on the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of a pastor. Many pastors today feel that life in ministry is unsustainable. Perhaps you have felt that way, too.

So, what do we do? The strategies for sustaining pastoral ministry are wide-ranging, and include setting and maintaining healthy boundaries, physical exercise, and being part of a peer accountability/support group. I personally implement each of those, but I believe another strategy that is critical, yet often ignored, is creating and pursuing a lifelong learning plan. Read More.

Join the discussion on Facebook.

Ron Aguilera is vice-president of administration for the Illinois Conference

Book Review

Leading With a Limp
Dan B. Allender, PhD
Water Books, 2006

With bookstore shelves piled high with books on leadership such as *Leading from Your Strengths*, *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*, *The One Thing*, or most any of John Maxwell's books on leadership, one could easily get the impression that all you need to do is read their book, put into practice their principles and you are off and running - that now that you really are a leader, you will face each difficult leadership challenge with grace and aplomb, and of course,
smashing success.

But what if your leadership stint, particularly pastoral leadership, turns out to not be as easy as following a set of steps that worked for somebody else? In fact, what if you've read all the books and done all the right things but your leadership attempts are rejected, resisted, or ineffective? What if your own personal flaws begin to inhibit your ability to lead? Read More.

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Mic Thurber is ministerial director for the Mid-America Union Conference

Stories We Tell by Barry Kimbrough

When a Pest is Your Best Friend

A monument to a pest stands in Enterprise, Alabama. The honoree is a Mexican boll weevil.

In 1915 the bug destroyed the cotton crops in Coffee County. Something had to be done or the local economy would collapse.

Local farmers switched to peanuts. Within two years profits soared far beyond those of the previous cotton business. Enterprise became the peanut capital of the world. Little wonder that the people began to see the old pest in a new light.

The plaque reads: “In profound appreciation of the Boll Weevil and what it has done as the Herald of Prosperity, this monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama.”

In life and ministry we face many potential “pests.” Possibly a difficult church member, a major church conflict, feeling spread too thin over a large district...you name it. These or any one of a thousand other irritations can easily get us down. We don’t often consider that the very problem can be a catalyst for growth and change if we learn to adjust and persevere by God’s grace. “In times of change,” writes Eric Hoffer, “learners inherit the earth.” Read More.

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Let’s Talk: Good Reads

What ministry development book have you read this year that has most rocked your world? Share the title, author, and a descriptive line about the book with your fellow pastors here in Best Practices for Adventist Ministry.

Ideas, Events, Resources, Announcements

The North American Division has launched a new website for seekers, My Way to Jesus. This website is ideal for sharing with people who want to know more about the Seventh-day Adventist faith. One of the highlighted features of the new site is the Did You Know? series of 28 90-second videos that explore Adventist beliefs. Each video is presented by a church member who shares how the belief relates to real life, either through a story or concept that everyone can relate to. The site also features Bible studies for adults and children, a place to share prayer requests, a weekly devotional e-mail, and a church finder.

In Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction the Barna Group shares some surprising insights from a recent research project for today's pastoral families.

Previous resource links:

- The One Project
- Just Claim It 4
- NAD Prayer Conference
- Adventist Ministries Convention
- Why Men Have Stopped Singing in Church

Reading: Fuel for the Road

By Ron Aguilera

The life of a pastor is complex and constantly changing. Ministry today is strikingly different than it was a generation ago. The expectations are higher, the demands more numerous, and the pace of life faster. In recent years, several studies have reported that ministry life is hard on the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of a pastor. Many pastors today feel that life in ministry is unsustainable. Perhaps you have felt that way, too.

So, what do we do? The strategies for sustaining pastoral ministry are wide-ranging, and include setting and maintaining healthy boundaries, physical exercise, and being part of a peer accountability/support group. I personally implement each of those, but I believe another strategy that is critical, yet often ignored, is creating and pursuing a lifelong learning plan.

Reading is a critical part of any learning plan. Maybe that is why my favorite question to ask pastors is, “What are you reading these days?” The answers never fail to surprise me. Many times, I get no answer, or some hemming and hawing, or a comment like, “I just don’t have time for it.”

But, I have discovered reading is a critical part of a pastor’s life, health, and growth. I believe a pastor who does not read is like a driver who wants to journey across the country without stopping for gasoline. You can’t get very far on empty. To put it another way, you can’t give what you don’t have. I believe this is especially true for pastors, and reading is an important way of refilling the mind, heart, and soul. Pastors must make time to read.

These days, I am an avid reader, so inevitably I get asked, “How do you fit reading into your daily schedule?” It can be a challenge, with meetings, visits, counseling, committees, etc… But, I have discovered that I must do three things:

One: The first thing I must do is to make reading a priority. This means I must remove some things out of my life, in order to put some things in. For example, it is amazing how much more time I have if I don’t watch TV.

Two: You need a plan. For me, this means sitting down at the beginning of the week to think through my priorities for the week and how they line up with my passion and purpose. I know that if I just react to the requests and the expectations of others, I will not get any reading in. I know there will be exceptions, unforeseen crisis, urgent requests, but if I have not prepared through planning based on biblical priorities, I will be overtaken by the tyranny of the urgent.

Three: Discover what others are reading and read outside your comfort zone. Reading can contribute to a healthy and long life of pastoral ministry, but it needs to be varied and enjoyable. Both pastor and congregation will benefit from this – the pastor in sermon preparation and pastoral care, and the congregation in listening and discussing.

I am convinced that reading is one way pastoral life can be sustained and a blessing to all. So, be a reader. You won’t regret it!

Ron Aguilera is vice-president of administration for the Illinois Conference
Book Review: Leading With a Limp

Review by Mic Thurber

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Dan B. Allender, PhD
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With bookstore shelves piled high with books on leadership such as Leading from Your Strengths, The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive, The One Thing, or most any of John Maxwell’s books on leadership, one could easily get the impression that all you need to do is read their book, put into practice their principles and you are off and running – that now that you really are a leader, you will face each difficult leadership challenge with grace and aplomb, and of course, smashing success.

But what if your leadership stint, particularly pastoral leadership, turns out to not be as easy as following a set of steps that worked for somebody else? In fact, what if you’ve read all the books and done all the right things but your leadership attempts are rejected, resisted, or ineffective? What if your own personal flaws begin to inhibit your ability to lead?

Leading With a Limp will speak to you as few other books if your leadership journey has not been the soaring success you imagined it would be. It has important things to say to those who have put themselves out for their congregations, only to be criticized for it. It offers essential encouragement for leaders who wonder if they are their own worst enemy, or if God may have had the wrong number when calling them. Allender addresses the hard questions that many leadership books shy away from.

Allender wrote this book primarily out of his own experience by what he calls “a reluctant leader” at Mars Hill Seminary, of which he was a founding professor.

Does he understand a pastor’s issues?

“At a church I once visited in a neighboring town, I heard a man say, ‘I just don’t know why he has to dumb everything down to a point of trying to reach the most immature.’ I was stunned at such a public assault. And then at coffee I heard another saint say, ‘Our pastor always feels like he has to make his sermons so theologically complex. I just wish he would put the cookies on the lower shelf so the rest of us could get it.’

“I wanted to scream for the pastor of that church. Every week he enters the pulpit with a rope around one arm and another around his leg, and perhaps one around his neck. When he begins his sermon, clusters of his community gather around one rope or another and begin to tug and pull. By the time this pastor finished a half-hour sermon, he has been drawn and quartered, but he still must greet his people at the end of the service. We require our leaders to be perfect – or at least much more perfect than we are – and then we reserve the right to pick them clean like vultures that have patiently waited for the wounded beast to stop twitching.”

Allender goes on to courageously name the dragons pastoral leaders face:

“A good leader will, in time, disappoint everyone. Leadership requires a willingness to not be liked, in fact, a willingness to be hated. But it is impossible to lead people who doubt you and hate you. So the constant tug is to make the decision that is the least offensive to the greatest number and then to align yourself with those who have the most power to sustain your position and reputation in the organization.”
Ouch! Leadership often turns out to be not at all like we thought it would be. When we discover that, we might be tempted to run. But Allender sees potential, even in the running:

“When we’re reluctant to lead, doubting ourselves and our call, we are ripe for growth as a leader. Likewise, when we hear the call to lead but we run in the opposite direction, God has a way of having us thrown off the boat, swallowed by a large fish, and spit onto the shore where we are to serve. If the situation weren’t so serious, it would be hilarious. God invites us to run and yet to know that He will arrive at our place of flight before we arrive so He can direct our steps yet again.”

Allender is especially helpful to reluctant leaders, reluctant for whatever reason. He addresses the unhealthy ways in which we might respond, and along the way he points us to what it means to be a healthy, even if reluctant leader:

“Reluctant leaders don’t aspire to hold power; in fact, the avidly work to give it away. They attempt this even as they use power to create a context where power is used fairly, wisely, and with checks and balances. A reluctant leader does not hoard power because doing so creates more pressure and demand...The reluctant leader detoxifies power by empowering others to bring their vision, passion, and gifts to the enterprise. She creates an environment of open debate that honors differences and where no one fears reprisal. In the leadership approach of a reluctant leader, it is a blessing to give away power and a calling to monitor its faithful use.”

Allender touches on so many different leadership issues it’s hard to encapsulate them for a review such as this. But rest assured that if you’ve ever had doubts about being in leadership, felt abused, misunderstood, or maligned because of your efforts, or ever wonder if you are person enough to be a leader in the context in which you serve, there will be something on almost every page of this book for you. It’s not for everyone. But if it speaks to you, it will leave you nourished and encouraged in ways other books on leadership won’t.

*Mic Thurber is ministerial director for the Mid-America Union Conference*
By Barry Kimbrough

When a Pest is Your Best Friend

A monument to a pest stands in Enterprise, Alabama. The honoree is a Mexican boll weevil. In 1915 the bug destroyed the cotton crops in Coffee County. Something had to be done or the local economy would collapse. Local farmers switched to peanuts. Within two years profits soared far beyond those of the previous cotton business. Enterprise became the peanut capital of the world. Little wonder that the people began to see the old pest in a new light.

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Paul wrote of the spiritual perspective of trials, “…we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28 ESV). The ultimate good is our personal transformation: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (verse 29).

The greater the pain, the more profound the learning experience. And the bigger the spiritual and ministerial profit we will realize. But only if the experience drives us to prayer and the Savior. He alone can guide us through the maze and lead us to the heights of freedom. From that vantage point, we will remember our worst challenge in ministry as our best gift because we found that it helped us far more than all compliments and honors put together.

Barry Kimbrough is a pastor in the Southern New England Conference