The Stresses of Being a Pastor: The Struggle of Pastoral Families in the Adventist Church

Research by Duane McBride, Alina Baltazar, Wendy Thompson, Romulus Chelbegean, Gary Hopkins, David Sedlacek, René Drumm, and Elaine Oliver
The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD) has recently recognized the importance of academic research on the effectiveness of ministry. In particular, the NAD has become concerned about the wellbeing of its pastoral families. It is not uncommon for pastors to become burned-out after several years of pastoring and some leave the ministry altogether. The NAD-sponsored research on the causes of stress on pastors and their families is an effort to combat these trends. Read More

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when it is less than perfect. But would you please stop saying these things?

(By the way, no deacons were harmed during the writing of this article)

And I Shall Dwell: House Dedications
By Kingsley O. Palmer

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Psalms 23:6

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Let's Talk About Your Best Practices for Ministry

Best Practices is looking for articles about what is working for you in ministry. Articles that are one-subject focused and tightly written - 300 to 700 words. We are also looking for top-flight sermon illustrations. Pitch us an idea. Send us an article. Be sure to include your picture and ministry title. Together we can make Best Practices for Adventist Ministry a go-to tool box for NAD pastors and church leaders.

Ideas, Events, Resources, Announcements

Reach Out. Persist. Invite - It is estimated that 80% of first time church guests come because someone invited them. Everyone needs to feel loved and wanted, and for some people all it takes is a ride offer to church. Your homework this week is to find at least one person you can bring to church. Reach out. Persist. Invite.

Asian Americans: Silent No More - It's still possible to miss the ways Asian Americans are shaping American Christianity. With just a few exceptions, Asian Americans rarely headline major conferences, attract media attention, or top Christian publishing's bestseller lists. But thanks to their bicultural heritage and the particular challenges it brings, Asian American Christians are finding they have unique voices and gifts that
allow them to connect with both non-Asian American audiences and segments of the church that no one else can reach.

Previous resource links:

- Enter the Deep
- Scientists Are Beginning to Figure Out Why Conservatives Are... Conservative
- Online Sermons: Church Internet Outreach?
- 6 Insights From the #IceBucketChallenge for Church Communications
- MA in Pastoral Ministry
- On the Unique Headship of Christ in the Church
The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD) has recently recognized the importance of academic research on the effectiveness of ministry. In particular, the NAD has become concerned about the wellbeing of its pastoral families. It is not uncommon for pastors to become burned-out after several years of pastoring and some leave the ministry altogether. The NAD-sponsored research on the causes of stress on pastors and their families is an effort to combat these trends.

In 2012, an interdisciplinary team working from Andrews University became interested in the topic of pastoral family stress. This team, based out of Andrews University, includes Social Work professors Alina Baltazar and Wendy Thompson, Behavioral Sciences professors Romulus Chelbegean, Gary Hopkins and Duane McBride, as well as David Sedlacek, professor of discipleship and family life. René Drumm, dean of the School of Social Work at Southern Adventist University, and Elaine Oliver, associate director of the Department of Family Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, also joined the team. The two-year-long project was jointly funded by the NAD and Andrews University’s Office of Research & Creative Scholarship.

The study included all regions of the United States and was divided into a quantitative and a qualitative study. The quantitative study used a questionnaire based on other studies that had been completed in other Christian denominations as well as the Adventist Church. “We decided that we would use some of the survey instruments that had been used previously and that had already been validated,” explains David Sedlacek, “but we didn’t find one that really captured what we needed from what we would call a ‘challenge perspective.’ In other words, what were the challenges to pastors, their spouses, and their children? We designed that survey instrument ourselves.”

Once the surveys were developed, they were sent electronically to the NAD. The NAD then sent the surveys to the Unions who sent it on to the Conferences. The conferences contacted the pastors directly. Spouses were contacted through Donna Jackson, the ministerial spouses leader for the NAD. Pastors’ adult children were surveyed at Andrews University and Southern Adventist University. The surveys were designed to protect the confidentiality of the pastors and their families, who might have been afraid to report honestly, and did not include identifying parameters, such as the union to which they belonged. A total of 389 pastors out of 4,500 who were presumably contacted by the conferences completed the survey, along with an additional 313 spouses and 171 adult children of pastor’s families, for a
Almost half of the pastors who responded were 50 or older, which led the team to believe that they might be the ones most concerned about pastoral stress and its effects on their lives and their families. The responses indicated that the pastors were being transparent and honest about their challenges. “There is something called ‘face validity.’ In other words, we saw things in the survey responses that the literature suggested we would see,” explains Duane McBride. Financial concerns, such as retirement benefits and the cost of college education, were highest on the list of stresses. Spiritual struggles, such as finding time for prayer and Bible study, were ranked as the second most challenging aspect of being a pastor. Political challenges were also high on the list and pastors reported stress caused by the congregation or by the conference and union.

The reported side effects of stress included depression, anxiety and addictive practices (pornography, media addiction and overeating). “One of the most fascinating things was that in almost every situation, it was the pastors’ adult children who rated the specific problem more severely,” says Sedlacek. Seventy-one percent of the pastors’ kids and 45 percent of the pastors reported a concern about media addictions. Seventy-two percent of the kids reported struggling with unhealthy foods, compared to 61 percent of the spouses and 54 percent of the pastors.

The pastors’ adult children also reported some abuse. While the percentage was quite low, with verbal abuse being the highest percentage at 25 percent, this indicates yet another aspect of stress in the life of a pastor’s child. Typically, children do not feel that their parent’s job depends on their behavior. However, pastors’ children know that what they do may impact their parent’s career.

Children that experienced abuse indicated that it affected their spirituality, particularly the aspect of personal prayer. “One explanation is that the father, in some ways, represents God. If the father abuses the child, the child doesn’t want to have anything to do with a God who they consider to be like their abusive father,” says Sedlacek. The abuse that children experience is also related to the lack of privacy in a pastoral family. “Everything they do is in the fish bowl,” says McBride.

The qualitative studies, performed in focus groups, revealed other interesting aspects of pastoral family stress. There were three categories of focus groups with five or six groups in each category: pastoral focus groups, pastoral spouse focus groups, and pastors’ young adult kids (over 18 years). In addition, five different pastoral families (including children younger than 18) were interviewed as a group.

According to Sedlacek, pastors in the focus groups reported a “struggle to trust their local conference. There are expectations that the conference has of them, but they don’t feel that the conference has their back. Some pastors believe that conference administrators expect a lot, but do not give a lot.” However, the pastors’ children reported that it was the congregation they struggled with the most. “The congregations are demanding and demonstrate a lack of understanding,” says Alina Baltazar, “The parents tried to be understanding, but it was the congregation or the friends of the pastors’ kids who told them they shouldn’t act a certain way because they were pastors’ kids. The congregation has these high expectations for their behavior.” Pastors’ children also reported that the congregation disrupted family vacations or the pastor’s day off.

During the family interviews, participants raised the issues caused by frequent moves. Because pastors are often moved from district to district with only a few years in each place, they have difficulty maintaining friendships. The pastor’s spouse is particularly impacted because his/her job is typically not as mobile, and the children reported that it was hard for them to make new friends. In fact, Baltazar says, some of the children “held back from making new friends because they knew they would be moving in a couple of years.”

Both the quantitative and the qualitative studies attested to the loneliness of belonging to a pastoral family. Seventy-one percent of the spouses and 62 percent of the pastors said that it was difficult to maintain friendships in the congregation.
because of the pastor-member dynamic. “There is the sense that there is no one they can confide in,” says McBride. Some of the pastors in the focus groups noted that they are afraid to confide in their colleagues for political reasons. The only one they can confide in is their spouse. However, 71 percent of the spouses who took the survey reported that there is no one they can talk to.

Many pastors in the focus groups indicated that they did not even feel comfortable seeking counseling. “They feel like there is no culturally acceptable place for them to reach out and get help,” says Baltazar. Interestingly enough, the pastors’ children felt the same way and were comfortable talking only with other “pastor’s kids.”

Once the qualitative data is analyzed, the research group plans on synthesizing both the quantitative and qualitative data into a single report that includes specific recommendations to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The group hopes that their report will influence the church to actively educate congregations, pastors and those in leadership positions on how a pastor and his/her family can be supported.

For example, congregations can be educated to respect the pastor’s privacy and family time. The pastors can take family or financial seminars to learn how to better handle some of the challenges they face in their work. Some of these seminars have already been instituted in the Seminary curriculum. According to Sedlacek, “the North American Division also is looking into mandating continuing education for pastors.” Instead of pastors leaving college or seminary to head out on their own, the NAD is developing a program that lasts from the beginning of a pastor’s career as a college student all the way to retirement. Church leadership, at the level of the conference, union or division, can work towards understanding that issues such as the ordination of women, homosexuality or contemporary worship music can divide churches and deeply impact the lives of pastors and their families. “I think sometimes we forget that these seemingly academic policy decisions really play out in the pew every Sabbath,” he says.

Although this study only examined pastoral families within the North American Division, it is reasonable to assume that pastors around the world experience similar stresses. The researchers hope to expand this study in the future to include other divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*This article has been reprinted with permission from Research and Creative Scholarship at Andrews University, Volume 5 (Summer 2014)*
$120,000 to be Given Away at CALLED Convention

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“The total of $120,000 will be divided among churches that come up with creative ministry initiatives that have the potential of transforming their church and community,” states Ivan Williams, Director of the NAD Ministerial Department.

What specifically is a crazy revolutionary, risky idea? Oberg goes on to describe two elements that will be in the awarding winning proposals: “The first is a contagious and growing enthusiasm within a local congregation for more of Jesus. Experiencing ‘more’ of Jesus changes us as a community and moves us into a deeper discipleship—the church can see and feel a change.”

She goes on to say “The second manifestation of transformation happens when our friends and neighbors in the community come in contact with the mercy of Jesus. Meeting God outside the walls of our local church brings another aspect of growth—a growth specifically shaped for our community.”

The Scholarship Team is tasked with developing criteria for the proposal. Here is what they have come up with so far:

1. Your church can demonstrate how congregational life is enriched with this initiative. (Internal value)
2. Your church can demonstrate how the local community is enriched with this initiative. (External value)
3. Your church can demonstrate you have the vision, organization, budget assessment, and human resources for your initiative.
4. This project is something new for you and/or your congregation. Priority is given to new/innovative ideas that can be replicated in other congregations.”

How does a church apply? The Scholarship team is putting together an application packet that may include some of the following items:

“The name of project, vision or mission summary of the project, strategic steps of the project, responsible parties or leaders involved, budget projection, time frame of project, assessment/follow up to measure success, support of your local Church board voted- list date, they sign an application giving their word this project is not already ongoing and will be something new for their congregation.”

What kind of projects will not be funded? The funding team recommends excluding salaries and stipends, major equipment purchases, on-line platforms, web services, and other items that aren’t core to the mission.

Oberg lists these as suggestions because “my experience is that folks often create projects for the sake of getting some basic needs paid for- like building of a website, or radio transmitters, or CD duplicators. What they really want is a CD Duplicator for permanent use, or a live streaming service for permanent use, but they wrap it into a proposal for creative evangelism. Not trying to be punitive here, just an attempt to sort through rather quickly those requests that are semi-disguised as basic needs dressed up for the party, so to speak.”
More information on the funding giveaway will be released in future editions of Best Practices for Adventist Ministry.

Comment on Facebook

Stop Saying That

By Roger Hernandez

I have been going to church for 46 years. Almost 47, if you count the nine months in my mom’s belly. I have seen the good, the bad and the ugly. I understand that what I’m about to say is highly subjective, but it is still something that needs to be said. Whether anything changes or not is irrelevant. I love my church, even when it is less than perfect. But would you please stop saying these things?

(By the way, no deacons were harmed during the writing of this article)

Good Morning: It goes something like this: “Good morning everyone. (“Good morning,” says the congregation). “I can’t hear you, GOOD MORNING (louder and firmer.)” The congregation increases the volume. This is usually enough to placate the person with the microphone, except when it doesn’t, where the “Good mornings” are followed by “Didn’t you eat breakfast this morning?” or the always nice “Hasn’t God been good to you”. Here is a tip: Just say “good morning,” smile, say your part and sit back down. We love God. That is not measured by our volume.

Now as We Begin: This usually happens after the initial song service, which begs the question: What were you doing for the past 15 minutes? The truth is, many times song service happens with no rhyme or reason, is a filler, or something we do while people get there. I don’t believe that practice honors God or inspires people. By the way, song leader, if you’re going to ask for member’s favorite songs, make sure you know more than 10 hymns!

Wherever Two or Three are Gathered: This usually happens when few are in attendance (Think Sabbath School, Prayer Meeting or the beginning of AY). What this communicates is pity, rather than power. It’s a disastrous message to send to guests. Think about it. Who would like to join a group of people that feel so bad about themselves? God is present where there are two or three, but the most common application this text is given is not really what the Bible writer intended to convey. We are not victims, and the “Poor little ol’ me” has no place in the house of the living God.

We Will Sing This Song Twice: Why? That’s all. Why?

Pray for Me, I’ve Lost My Voice: Again?

The Inspired Pen: First of all, God inspires people not writing utensils. That is “insider” language that we understand but visitors do not. These and other popular “Adventese” expressions are not limited to the one listed here. We use phrases like GC, AYS, ABC, GCC, Conference, Union, Division, and a host of others that if not explained can create a puzzled look in guests’ faces at the worship service. Speak English, Spanish, Korean, etc. Not Adventese.

Lord, Please Hurry the Steps of Those Who Are on Their Way: What does that even mean? Are we down with teleportation now? One important fact we sometimes forget is that just because a person is late does not mean they are less spiritual or don’t care about their relationship with God. There could be a host of reasons why people are late. I am an early arrival. That makes me prompt, not perfect. By the way, a smile and a hug for late arrivals.

Without Wasting Any More Time: This one is used a lot in Spanish churches. The person who is introducing the speaker, after taking all the time in the world, says “Now, without wasting any more of your time, we will have our guest speaker preach.” The question I have is, how about all the other parts of the service? Was that a waste of time or just your part, the long drawn out introduction?
Can I Get an Amen?: No you may not. Jesus will. You won’t.

May the Lord Add His blessing to the Reading of His Word: This sure sounds great. The only problem is that it is said so much it loses meaning. At the same time, there is an intrinsically determined blessing that comes along with the reading of God’s word already. This phrase, along with several others we use, takes a simple concept and complicates it. Here is a thought: How about just reading the Scripture for that day, and sitting down or praying. Don’t add anything just for the gratuitous amen.

Spanish is the Language of Heaven: No it’s not. It’s Farsi. Please stop saying this. I want to jump off the third floor of the GC when I hear that.

These are small details, I know. But if our goal is excellence in everything we do, we must get better. Let’s work together to make the worship service a memorable experience for everyone.

Roger Hernandez is ministerial director for the Southern Union Conference. You can follow his blog at Lead Southern Union Ministerial
House Dedications

By Kingsley O. Palmer

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Psalms 23:6

Shortly after relocating back to the U.S. from Canada I was blessed to pastor a multinational church of some 25 ethnic groups. One day I was approached by one of the members requesting that I come and conduct a blessing at his new home.

In his culture a house blessing required more than just the minister stopping by giving some brief words of counsel, saying a prayer, and after wishing the family well and then leave.

For him a house blessing required that both family and friends which included churched and unchurched guests be present followed by a huge celebration.

I asked the Lord to give me some creative direction on how to proceed. This was an opportunity not only to affirm the family in question but a chance to witness and show their guests what plans and blessings the Lord had in mind for every home represented in this world and the world to come.

The Holy Spirit impressed upon my mind two scenes. The first took me back to London England, where growing up as a child, I recall visiting a number of homes. Upon entering these homes I would see a little plaque mounted on a wall that read: “Christ is the Head of this House, the Unseen Guest at every meal. The Silent Listener to every conversation.”

Every time I would read these words I seemed to sense their import and feel something of a peaceful presence. After some time my mother, brought a plaque for our home and like the others she hung it in a strategic place for all to see.

As time went by, I began to realize that no matter what transpired in our much troubled home, these words served as reminder to me and perhaps others present that in this place, the presence of the Lord was still welcomed.

Back then I had no idea years later just how much of an impact that piece of framed memorabilia was going to have on my mind and ministry.

The second scene took me to two passages of scripture, Genesis chapters 12:8 and 18:19 which tell of the story of God’s call upon Abraham to leave his ancestral domicile and set up new a home in a far-away community he had heard of but had never been to.

The passages go on to describe that wherever Abraham and his family settled He did two things. 1. Set up their tents 2. Built an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord. He wanted his neighbors to know that he, His God and his family had just moved into town.

It is little wonder that in spite of the mistakes he made en route to Canaan the Lord could say of Abraham “I know that he will command his children and his household after me and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him”. Genesis 18:19

Why did Abraham set up his tents and established altars to the Lord wherever he went?

Once Abraham accepted the call from God, uprooted everything he had and in faith left Haran to follow wherever the
Lord was took him, he sensed his need to be fully dependent upon God. As He moved from one place to another and settled there He would bless the Lord by setting up an altar in praise and worship to the one true God.

And so it is with us as we travel from place to another under God’s leading, we are to set up our homes like altars of blessing, pointing others to worship ‘The One’ true God.

After that I began to frame a picture in my mind on how I should proceed to perform a house blessing on that home and every subsequent one after it.

As a pastor, I began to realize that among the many rites and services one is expected to perform, the blessing and establishment of a Christian home is an awesome, sacred and solemn responsibility.

Laying the groundwork for a house blessing:

(1). Counsel with the family beforehand on what you plan to do and how it was going to be done. (2). Find out what sort of visitors are going to attend whether they go to church or not. This helps you to know what kind of verbiage to use. (3). Prepare a custom printed program for them to follow and have as a keepsake. (4). Request a recent photo of the family. (5). Let them know you are going to purchase two scented-candles one white and the other red. (6). Then provide two additional candles one for each spouse to use as light bearers of the home and to the community. (7). Be prepared to get to the home early to meet and connect with the guests and make them feel comfortable.

Simple steps on how to perform a meaningful House Blessing

(8). Designate a point in time where you will ask both husband and the wife to either stand or sit in the center of the room. As a means to get the dedication service started invite all present to be involved, write into the program the words to that famous poem “Bless This House O Lord I Pray” (See Sidebar) written by Englishwoman Helen Taylor and put to music by her friend May Brahe in 1927.

Invite everyone to read the poem in the form of a prayer request to the Lord, asking Him to bless this home and its family as well as their own.

(9) In your homily offer the family some counsel reminding them of why God had called them to that location and remind them that no matter how wonderful their home is at best it is a temporary earthly dwelling for God had prepared for them something infinitely better.

Concerning the use of the candles, share with all present:

(1).The red candle represents the blood of Christ as a symbol of His sacrifice and promised protection. (2).The white candle represents Christ’s sinless life and purity. (3).The flames from each candle symbolize the light and presence of the Holy Spirit. (4).The scent from each candle would symbolize the daily prayers offered up to God from the home as a sweet smelling savor.

End the service with a final charge and then invite the family to light the candles, after which you offer a special prayer for the family and the home making sure to include and mention all the other families present.

Now you may be wondering why I asked for photographs? After I gave the charge and offered the dedicatory prayer it was at this point we would come to the most touching and intimate part of the presentation. I believe everyone present, especially the family, really connected with this.

(10) As a final act present the family with a gift wrapped box. From it the family should pull out a large framed plaque which includes their photo, the house dedication date and their home address along with a Biblical exhortation. Most
importantly included was the reference to Christ being the Head of that new House.

Just to see the looks on the faces of each family member as they show off their plaque, as they passed it around for their guests to see. The reaction pure and simply Priceless!

Almost immediately the family will tend to search for a prominent space in the home where the plaque could attract the immediate attention of those who came by.

Months and even years later while seeing me out and about one or more of the guests who happened to attend one of the house blessings would see me and stop me. Although I did not always remember their names or their faces they would express how much they appreciated what they saw at that home and would ask me to continue praying for them.

Over the years, I have been privileged to perform numerous house blessings in my district and other places. Every time I would visit these homes I would notice where the plaques that were placed in the home were.

These mementoes found in the home may serve as a reminder of who is supposed to be in charge. Yes, it is true you can pitch your tent and set up your altar anywhere you choose. However, neither has the power to keep the home or family together unless all are willing to accept the fact that “Unless the Lord builds ‘the house’ they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city the watchman stays awake in vain”. Psalms 127:1

Sadly until Christ is truly the head of everyone under that roof, He will never be allowed to enter the home much less be the head of that house.

Conversely when Jesus reigns in the heart of anyone, in any home, regardless of its location or what condition it is in, that home is a most blessed place indeed.

Yes, I have seen the happiness on the faces of families who received their customized house blessing plaques to hang in their homes right here on earth, but when Christ returns soon, to give all those who have made him the Head of their house, the keys to eternal life and heavenly property what that will be like?

Try to imagine if you can, what inexplicable, ecstatic and unspeakable joy it will be to have eternal goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life so you can dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

My prayer and desire is to make the Lord the Supreme ruler of my life, my house and everything else. I do hope that this is your prayer too.

Kingsley O. Palmer serves as assistant to the president and director for African-American ministries, Arizona Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists.

Sidebar

Bless this house, O Lord we pray,
Make it safe by night and day . . .

Bless these walls so firm and stout,
Keeping want and trouble out . . .

Bless the roof and chimneys tall,
Let thy peace lie overall . . .
Bless this door that it may prove,
Ever open,
To joy and love . . .

Bless these windows shining bright,
Letting in God's Heavenly light,
Bless the hearth, ablazing there,
With smoke ascending like a prayer!

Bless the people here within,
Keep them pure and free from sin . . .

Bless us all that we may be,
Fit O Lord to dwell with thee . . .

Bless us all that one day we may dwell,
O Lord! With Thee!

Words and Music by Helen Taylor
and May H. Morgan ( a.k.a. Brahe ), 1927
The Seventh-day Adventist Retirement Plan is Changing

By Del Johnson

I have great news to share on an upcoming change with Adventist Retirement. Adventist Retirement has selected Great-West Financial® as the new provider of administration, recordkeeping, communication and education services for Adventist Retirement. Our new contract begins on January 1, 2015.

As a part of our commitment to provide high-quality retirement savings, Adventist Retirement conducted an extensive selection process during 2014, as we did in 1999, 2004 and 2009. After evaluating several service providers, Great-West Financial was selected based upon the extensive scope and outstanding quality of services they give to plan participants. We believe this change will bring many new features while allowing many benefits you've come to depend on, to remain in place.

New benefits include:

• A strong focus on advancing Retirement Readiness
• Improved education resources, services and communication materials
• An enhanced and intuitive website with many tools and calculators

Some of the key features remaining in place include:

• The ability to invest in our proprietary socially screened SDA funds
• The use of Managed Accounts for help in retirement planning
• The Schwab Self-Directed Brokerage option

Your investment options will remain essentially the same, including the SDA Funds. The plan seeks to ensure a wide range of investment options to allow you the opportunity to develop the best individual investment strategy. This focus does not change.

The Transition Period

To ensure accurate processing and verification of participant accounts, a transition period will occur, beginning in late December through early January. Your money will remain invested in financial markets and regular contributions will be processed as soon as it is administratively feasible. Detailed information on the transition process and any necessary action on your part will be clearly communicated in a comprehensive Transition Bulletin, scheduled to be mailed to your home in late November.

What do you need to do?

Look for the Transition Bulletin to arrive at your home in November for more details.

Adventist Retirement is an important benefit provided to church employees. We encourage you to seek out more information through a meeting, webinar or online as these become available. Ask questions and make sure that you understand the plan and transition.

We look forward to providing you with more information about these important changes as we make the transition to our new service provider.

Del Johnson is the administrator for Adventist Retirement