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By Nelson Fernandez

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By Ronaldo Pacifico

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Preventing a Couple for Lifelong Marriage: It's Complicated
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Continuing Education to Launch at Convention

Nearly all professions, including plumbers, bankers, nurses, university professors, and attorneys have annual professional development requirements to ensure the delivery of high quality services to the public. Now the pastors of the North American Division will have access to continuing education beginning with the June 28-July 1 CALL convention for pastors and their families. NAD Ministerial and the Adventist Learning Community are partnering to create a delivery and recording system to enable every pastor to pursue his/her potential. Watch the introductory video.

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3 Childcare Options for Small Groups: Childcare is one of the challenging factors in effective small group ministries. What are your options?

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• Should Your Church Stop Having a Stand and Greet Time?
• General Conference Evangelism
• GenU.tv
• Five Trends Among the Unchurched
• "We Miss You" Greeting Cards
6 Ways to Guard Your Marriage in Ministry

By Nelson Fernandez

Today, I want to focus on one of the most important aspects that a successful marriage requires: marital fidelity. Now, I’m no relationship guru by any means. My wife and I have been married less than five years, but what makes a successful marriage is knowledge and follow-through combined – practical skills like we recently picked up from a weekend class with Dr. John Nixon.

Sexual sin is not morally worse than other sins, but because it has such a powerful effect on the whole person, it is more devastating. Sex is dangerous when it is misused; it can destroy us, body and soul. Recently, I have seen pastors inside and outside of Adventism resign from their churches because of moral falls. How can we prevent these kinds of tragedies from happening in our own churches and families? Here are a few tips to guard your marriage in ministry.

1. **Speak highly of your spouse to others.** Never share your marital problems with someone of the opposite sex, unless it is in a professional therapeutic setting. It is a trap of Satan to get us to complain about our spouses to “understanding” coworkers and friends so that through their sympathy we may be led to sin.

2. **Monitor your personal spiritual life.** Conduct an inventory of your habits of prayer, Bible study, meditation, etc. It is easy to neglect the spiritual disciplines, not intentionally, but simply through business.

3. **Make yourself accountable to someone trustworthy.** Here one pastor shares a personal story on this point. “Once I was undergoing a time of strong sexual temptation and finally I called a friend with whom I was having breakfast the next day. I said, ‘Please pray for me, and ask me tomorrow morning what I did last night.’ He agreed, and the moment I put down the phone, my temptation was gone. Why? I’d like to say it was because I’m so spiritual, but the truth is there was no way that I was going to face my friend the next morning and have to tell him I had sinned.”

4. **Regularly evaluate your marriage.** Watch for signs of boredom and routine, lack of affection, poor communication, poor sex life and discontentment. Read Christian marriage books together, perhaps a worship devotional. Remember, marriages go through stages of development and each new stage is an opportunity to grow in your relationship. Don’t take anything for granted. Remember Proverbs 5:15-19.

5. **Make no provision for sin.** Read Romans 13:14. Know the things that trigger impure thoughts and be intentional about rooting them out. Guard the avenues of the soul. Watch the things that you permit to enter your mind though the senses. In this way, you guard your mind. Impure thoughts have a cumulative effect on the soul when we permit them to have entry. They eat away at the integrity of our spirit like the ocean eroding the shoreline. Immoral acts come from gradual steps.

   “A relationship can be sexual long before it becomes erotic. Just because I’m not touching a woman, or just because I’m not envisioning specific erotic encounters, does not mean I’m not becoming sexually involved with her. The erotic is usually not the beginning but the culmination of sexual attraction.”

6. **Back off early.** As soon as you sense inappropriate feelings towards another person, face it and back away from it right away.

   “When meeting a woman for our third counseling appointment, I became aware that she was interested in me personally. What was more frightening to me was the fact that I realized I had subconsciously sensed this before but enjoyed her attraction too much to address the problem. Though I wasn’t yet emotionally involved or giving her inappropriate
Do you know what is the most erotic organ of the body? The brain. You can be alone and project yourself into arousal just by the thoughts of your mind. Our minds belong to God also. And when our thoughts are stayed on Jesus, we have the power of His Spirit to live for God’s glory no matter where we are.

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” – Philippians 4:8

Nelson Fernandez Jr. is the Lead Pastor for the Clemson Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Carolina
Lately I have been thinking about how pastoral ministry has changed through the years. One of those changes has to do with a pastoral spouse’s involvement in ministry. When I started my ministry, questions about my wife’s partnership in my ministry would have created a source of embarrassment for me. Her ministry, as far as I was concerned, was to take care of our two daughters in their Sabbath School classes, and to play the piano when needed. Since then I have come to value the talents, efficiency, and interest that she brings to our ministry.

Believing in the Call
Debra D. Benoit in her dissertation on the changing role of the pastor’s wife in today’s evangelical church says, “Many women don’t believe that God has ‘called’ them specifically into ministry – but they do feel called to the man.” They go into the marriage believing that because their husband has been called to the ministry, they will serve God in this way because of their relationship with their husband.”[1] Despite of many pastor’s wife start in ministry by only being a pastor’s wife, it is a growing feeling among them that they can play a role that goes beyond of just being the pastor’s wife.

Fitting in Ministry
Barna’s Research Group reports that there are 396,000 clergy families in the United States. One of the questions that many wives in ministry ask is, “Where do I fit in?” One thing that we know for certain – the wife of a pastor is in a very unique position, and in today’s church, the opportunities for her own ministry are endless.[2]

Motivating the Pastor’s Wife
The pastoral wife’s motivation is critical. According to Lisa Cullen, “Eight in 10 pastors’ wives say they feel unappreciated or unaccepted by their husband’s congregations.”[3] The same number wish that their husbands would choose another profession. I believe that the first step to help your wife become more active in ministry is to encourage her in the areas where she excels. It could be women’s ministries, family ministries, music ministries, or children’s ministries. And the list goes on and on. It is important to reaffirm the wife’s call to ministry. Many pastor’s wives may not felt the momentum of the call, but it does not means she has not been called to ministry.

Equipping, Preaching and Teaming
GPWN was founded by Vonette Bright, co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, and is led by Lois Evans, wife of well-known Dallas pastor Tony Evans. They tell us pastors’ wives are often thrust into the ministry spotlight with little training and support.[4] With encouragement, your wife can find her special place in ministry. You can even attend training events with her, or care for the kids while she attends training events. Training experiences are not only critical for the pastor, they are critical for the pastoral spouse as well. Another thing you may want to consider is inviting your wife to share the Sabbath sermon delivery with you, or to even speak by herself. I know many pastor wives who are excellent speakers. When I first began my ministry, my wife would not speak in public. Now, she is a confident preacher.

Ellen White encourages the pastoral wives to team up with their husbands. She also encourages the church to pay those wives in action. “There are ministers’ wives … who have been devoted, earnest, whole-souled workers, giving Bible readings and praying with families, helping along by personal efforts just as successfully as their husbands. These women give their whole time, and are told that they receive nothing for their labors because their husbands receive their wages.”[5]
Today, I cannot see myself in ministry without the partnership of my wife. Her ministry is essential to our success in ministry. I encourage you to nurture each other.

Nowadays, I cannot see my ministry without the help of my wife. As a matter of fact in some places my wife’s involvement in ministry can be the factor for success. Be sure you are moving and changing but do not neglect the one you have chosen to be in your side everywhere.

_Ronaldo Pacifico, originally from Brazil, has pastored churches in Boston, Massachusetts, and is currently a D.Min. student at Andrews University_

[2] Barna Research Group
[4] Bright and Evans
Preparing a Couple for Lifelong Marriage

It’s Complicated
By Shawn Brace

Of all the parts of ministry that a pastor gets to participate in, officiating at a wedding has to be one of the more special occasions. This is especially true if the pastor has a relationship with the couple that extends beyond a mere familiarity. But even if the pastor doesn’t, there will always be a unique connection with the couple that makes this sacred event a joy to be a part of.

Of course, a lot goes into a wedding—though the event itself is merely the culmination of a lot of planning. The most important aspect of planning from a pastoral perspective, however, does not revolve around the wedding itself, but the marriage the pastor is solemnizing.

But there is an interesting—and largely discouraging—trend that I have noticed in the near-decade that I have been counseling couples who are preparing for marriage. This trend complicates the preparation and presents challenges that may not have been as prevalent for Seventh-day Adventist ministers a few decades ago.

Simply put, I have noticed that there are more and more couples who approach a potential marriage with complicating factors. In fact, in my nearly-decade long ministry, I have yet to marry a couple who might be considered a “traditional” fit—that is, the joining together of two individuals that are both believers, or who have never been married before or lived together. Instead, it seems that every couple that has approached me about marrying them has either been living together prior to marriage, is the potential union of a believer with a non-believer, or pursuing their second or third marriage. I don’t mention this for the purpose of trying to shame the couple; it’s just recognition of the dynamics that a pastor might face with greater frequency. A recent wedding I performed serves as a good illustration of this reality, and might provide insight in how to navigate the sometimes-muddy waters of wedding dynamics.

Not long ago, this young couple approached me about performing their wedding. The young man had grown up in the church I had been pastoring for a couple years, and I had known the young lady since she was a girl. Over the course of my time at the church, my wife and I had developed a very good relationship with them and had them over our house on many occasions. But there were two factors at play that mutually complicated the scenario: on the one hand, the young man was a baptized member of the church, while the young lady—who had attended Adventist churches her whole life—had never been baptized. On the other hand, what complicated the situation even more is that they had been living together for some time.

So I felt that I was between a rock and a hard place, to some extent. I had the choice of either marrying a young man who was baptized to a young lady who wasn’t, or baptizing a young woman who was—as it used to be called—“living in sin.”

Granted, there are many who, no doubt, feel that such an attitude is narrow-minded and rigidly legalistic. And I concur to some extent. We want to exude grace and love. Yet as ministers, we also want to set people up for success. In this case, studies show that a cohabiting couple has a lower chance of staying married,[1] and the more a couple has in common as it relates to their faith, the better off they will also be.

In this situation, I decided to consult with various ministers to see what their experience has been, as well as any general advice they might have. Without exception, the three or four that I talked with thought that I should invite the young lady to get baptized, while asking the young man to get re-baptized—since he had betrayed his original baptismal vows—and then ask them to live apart between the baptism and the wedding. Again, this may seem legalistic to some, yet I thought it was appropriate to try to establish some semblance of protocol—and when I approached the couple about it, they willingly agreed to the arrangement.
At that point, I started meeting with them—both for baptism and for pre-marriage counseling. Utilizing a series of Bible study guides that were heavy on the gospel, I felt that encountering Christ would be a great foundation for their marriage anyway, and could lay the groundwork effectively for more direct pre-marriage counseling. This is because unless the persons going into a marriage have a heart-experience with Christ, no amount of marriage counseling can join two hearts together.

The process moved along fine until another complicating factor popped up. When I approached the church about the arrangement, inviting the Board to recommend the young lady’s name for membership to the church family contingent upon her baptism, a number of the Board members—who generally tend to be loving, non-judgmental people—balked at the arrangement. They questioned the girl’s sincerity and thought it was somewhat arbitrary that the two would not live apart until after their baptism. They felt that if the two were sincerely converted, they would immediately separate.

I did my best to assure them that the couple seemed to have a genuine interest in going about things the right way, and that I was trying to make the best out of a complicated situation. I also emphasized the fact that every one of the three or four other pastors I counseled with—all of whom are fairly “conservative” on the theological spectrum—gave it almost no thought that this was the obvious approach to take. In fact, one pastor said that he had both baptized and married a cohabiting couple on the same day.

Finally, after a week or two of in-depth discussion—continued via e-mail—all the Board members relented and voted to recommend the young lady for church membership. A month or two later, I had the privilege of baptizing the young couple in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean in September, off the coast of Maine, and a few weeks later I had the honor of marrying them. Though they have since moved, I still keep in contact with them as much as I can and maintain the special connection that performing a wedding brings.

Of course, because of the multiple complicating factors, this scenario may be somewhat unique. And yet every minister will encounter issues when it comes to performing weddings that may not be anticipated ahead of time. That’s why it’s critical to be prepared and proactive, as far as possible. Thus, in light of this experience, as well as others I’ve encountered, these are some of the practical bits of advice that I would offer.

1. Get to know the couple as well as you can.

Ideally, this can happen before they even ask you to perform their wedding so that issues that may come up that might be uncomfortable can be addressed with greater sensitivity. It isn’t always possible, of course, because we are sometimes asked to perform weddings for couples we don’t really know at all; but even if this is the case, we should still make every effort to get to know them as much as we can, as quickly as we can.

This is because when we, as ministers, are asked to perform a wedding, we are not merely performing a legal, civic ceremony that’s a momentary event, but declaring God’s blessing upon the union for the entirety of the couple’s lives. This is a serious and solemn thought! If the couple wants the former, they can simply go to a Justice of the Peace.

2. Set out clear parameters and boundaries—especially ahead of time.

This is not a time to go on a power-trip, but when a couple approaches you about performing their wedding, sharing with them your expectations and practices at the very beginning is always helpful. This is not a time to totally undermine the plans the bride has likely been thinking about since her childhood, but if there are clear guidelines that your conscience dictates you follow—whether that is about the wedding itself, or the relational dynamics of the couple—then clarify those as quickly as possible.

As an example: it may not seem like a big deal to many, but I learned the hard way that I cannot, in good conscience,
perform a wedding on Sabbath. I did it once and decided to never do it again. To be clear: I think that, theoretically, Sabbath could be a wonderful time to celebrate the union of husband and wife—and I don’t see any scriptural evidence to indicate it shouldn’t be done—but there is a lot more that goes into a wedding than just the “I dos.” There is a lot of last-minute planning and running around that makes it easy to forget it’s Sabbath—not to mention the environment that especially seems to be present at receptions (music, etc.). Again, it may not seem like a huge issue, but I’ve decided that I am going to tell couples, right from the get-go, that I simply won’t perform a wedding on Sabbath.

3. Be very deliberate about pre-marriage counseling.

This is a non-negotiable. It may be tempting to let counseling slide, especially if you have been asked to perform a wedding last-minute, or the couple lives far away, but to reiterate: you are being asked to provide spiritual guidance and blessing on the union. You need to thus do all that you can to provide the couple with as solid a spiritual foundation as you can.

Find a good counseling approach. One suggestion would be to utilize the Prepare/Enrich Assessment (www.prepare-enrich.com), which provides couples with an objective picture of how healthy their relationship is. If distance is an issue, try to find a trusted pastor in their area to do the counseling—or, better yet, meet with them via Skype.

4. Don’t be afraid to deal with touchy issues that come up.

One of the lessons I learned in my dealing with the cohabiting couple was that I should have dealt with their cohabiting long before they decided to get engaged. This would have made everything that followed a lot less complicated—and ultimately would have been for their good. Unfortunately, cohabiting is becoming a lot more prevalent in the church, and more and more churches and pastors are winking at it—at best—or condoning it altogether.[2] Admittedly, like a lot of other pastors, I don’t like to step on people’s toes, and I haven’t quite perfected the art of counseling couples out of cohabitation; but we still owe it to them—despite what they might think—to do all we can to graciously walk them through the process of realigning with God’s model for relationships.

When the journey between engagement and the wedding day ends, take time to enjoy the day. Most couples either have a wedding planner, or the bride has everything planned out herself. Very few couples will solicit your help when it comes to the service itself. In many ways, after you have gone through the pre-wedding journey with the couple, your job is to simply show up, smile, and rejoice with the couple and their family.

But one more practical piece of advice: don’t drag out a long homily. Anything the couple really needs to know should have been brought to their attention long before the wedding day. And besides, no one is really there to hear us anyway (nor will they likely remember what we’ve said).

Shawn Brace pastors a multi-church district in Northern New England Conference.

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A church with a mission faces challenges and projects where the financial factor is the key. All of us without exception need resources. If you offer a free gift of one million dollars, even a multimillionaire wouldn’t reject it. Then, whom are we going to ask if every one potentially lacks resources, and those who have it, won’t share it?

Our theological curriculum doesn’t include a course related to planning or fundraising strategies except through additional seminar. But aren’t we dealing with planning on a daily basis? Even if it is not our major skills and specialty, these are some steps to consider:

I. ADOPT NEHEMIAH’S STRATEGIC PLAN

1. To humbly recognize our limitations in order to receive and accept training on this matter.

2. To define yourself being loyal to the spiritual vision and mission with earnest prayer. We are mentors and coaches, not spectators. Fundraising is still within our perimeter.

3. To solicit our Conference leaders to train us with a professional orientation to work in harmony and alignment. We are the link between the church and administration.

Our major role is to train the saints, promoting actively “Go and make disciples.” But we can be like Nehemiah who was not a prophet, priest, and didn’t depend on an ecclesiastical position to launch the reconstruction of Jerusalem. He was a fundraiser and planner. Preaching and praying are not our only duties.

“There is a need of Nehemiahs in the church today – not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced by firm and eager purpose. The course pursued by the Hebrew patriot in the accomplishment of his plans is one that should be adopted by ministers and leading men.” (SW March 29, 1904 Ellen White)

II. FACILITATE AND COACH THE TEAM WORK

1. To commit elders first because they are the key on decision-making. Before Moses went to Pharaoh, he first spoke to the elders of Israel. “So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.” (Ex. 4:29-30)

Some people may think that if only Moses understood, it was enough for the whole of Israel. Why did they need to spend time consulting the elders if it was God’s mandate? It was not a waste of time. God likes teamwork because unity is His essence. If the Israelites were not convinced to come out of Egypt, God would have never forced them. It was a mutual agreement. Likewise, our churches should determine shared goals to raise funds. As leaders, it is our duty to promote the urgency of working together but never pressuring members if elders and churches are not ready to move forward.

2. To establish with all our members the vision, mission and church values. This is ownership.

3. To resist the temptation of elaborating a plan on our own. It would be like giving a sermon to a layman to preach it exactly like you do it. Promote creativeness.

4. To teach, inform and communicate in giving instructions about policy and rules. This is democracy. This is an
5. To promote participative leadership. The church board nominates a planning committee and subcommittees to involve the church body.

6. To train every committee giving authority and power to perform the fundraising plan. This is discipleship.

7. Fundraising does not happen by accident. Earnest prayer and faith work together in unity. Nehemiah presented the vision so clearly to Israel, creating confidence. The human mind is opposed to any idea that is misunderstood. How can a plan prosper? Which plan are we using to involve our members? Is it enough democratically clear? In regards of Nehemiah’s attitude Ellen White says:

*When they have laid their plans, they should present them to the church in such a manner as to win interest and cooperation. Let the people understand the plans and share in the work, and they will have personal interest in its prosperity.* (SW March 29, 1904 Ellen White)

**Gardner Bermudez is pastor of the Calgary Spanish and Calgary Maranatha Spanish Churches in Alberta, Canada**