I’ve heard many people say that the greatest characteristic of the twenty-first century Adventist Church is not its size but its quality. If we divide our 16 million baptized members into the almost 140,000 Adventist churches and companies in the world today, each congregation would have 114 members. In the United States, the average ratio is 100 members per congregation. This means that, regardless of the great value media puts on large churches, we are still a denomination of small- and medium-sized churches.

Church leaders who serve small congregations may be tempted to downplay the importance of their ministry. They may look at larger churches and feel insignificant. But this is not true! No matter its size, each church is holy ground, a precious place, because Jesus gave His life for those people. Each church is important to God, and He expects His pastors to do their best for the members. All pastors should have a sense of dignity and value. In other words, there are no small tasks, and no one should feel insignificant and depreciated in leading a small church. There is a great work to be done, and God wants to use His pastors in a powerful way. Our major concern should not be the size of the church but the healthy characteristics within the church. Here are some pointers that can help you evaluate your church:

- Good doctrinal foundation. Do the members of your church have a clear understanding of the major Adventist doctrines? Do they receive helpful training which prepares them to defend or witness to their faith?
- A clear vision of mission. Is mission the central purpose of your church? Is this goal being successfully reached?
- Financially stable. Is the income appropriate for the number of members and their socio-economic status? Are members being instructed regarding the blessings of being faithful stewards?
- Warm and caring. Is the income appropriate for the number of members and their socio-economic status? Are members being instructed regarding the blessings of being faithful stewards?
- A positive image in the community. Has the church developed social and community projects suited to the needs of the community? Is it a friendly church? What do the neighbors think of the church?
- Good self-esteem. Are the members happy to be Christians? Are they proud of their church and their pastor?
- Warm and caring. Is there an environment of family and fellowship among the members? Are the members’ social, material, and spiritual needs being met?

This list is not comprehensive; you may add other characteristics that you consider important. But one thing is certain: your church — large or small — needs you. The difference in your ministry will be your motivation, ideas, spiritual credibility, and commitment. God has given you a unique opportunity to serve Him right where you are!
BRI stands for Biblical Research Institute. It was established in 1943 by the General Conference to study and answer publications against the church. It issued replies to attacks on the church and dealt with the teachings of offshoot groups. Then in 1952 the Committee on Biblical Study and Research was appointed to examine church manuscripts prior to publication. In 1969 the two committees were combined into one, the Biblical Research Institute Committee which today has about 40 members from around the world. It consists of theologians/Bible teachers and administrators.

The Biblical Research Institute is the office which oversees the work of the Biblical Research Institute Committee.

1. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE?
   - The institute provides theological resource books, articles, and seminars to the church.
   - Organizing and conducting conferences around the world as requested.
   - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities.
   - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.
   - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
   - Assisting the General Conference administration and the world field in matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends.

2. WHAT RESOURCES DOES BRI PROVIDE FOR OUR WORLDWIDE CHURCH?
   - Research, Apologetics, and Service to the church.
   - Theological Research:
     - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities.
     - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.
   - Apologetics:
     - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
   - Service:
     - Supporting the General Conference administration and the world field in matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends.

3. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GOVERN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH TODAY?
   - Establishing a strong commitment to Christ and His church;
   - Knowledge of the Spirit of prophecy, the remnant, and the nature of the truths of Scripture;
   - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities;
   - Resisting pressures from other religious communities;
   - Maintaining a clear understanding of the message and the mission of the church.

4. CONSIDERING THE TIMES WE LIVE IN, WHAT KIND OF THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IS OUR CHURCH FACING TODAY?
   - The large increase in membership in recent years, for which we praise the Lord, has also brought new challenges.
   - Theological issues in the church are well-known before the 1980s.
   - Theological issues in the church were well-known in the 1950s.

5. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE SOME IMPORTANT QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING EFFECTIVE CHURCH LEADERS?
   - Commitment to Christ and His church;
   - Knowledge of the Spirit of prophecy, the remnant, and the nature of the truths of Christianity – Is God omniscient? Is the Trinity one God or three persons?
   - Ability to plan other religious communities;
   - Ability to effectively deal with other religious communities;

6. WHAT KIND OF THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IS OUR CHURCH FACING TODAY?
   - The different functions of the Biblical Research Institute include theological research, Apologetics, and Service to the church.
   - Research:
     - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities.
     - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.
   - Apologetics:
     - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
   - Service:
     - Supporting the General Conference administration and the world field in matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends.

7. HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS HELP CHURCH MEMBERS TO COUNTER CHALLENGES TO THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE?
   - Educating church members about the truths of Scripture;
   - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
   - Encouraging church members to engage in dialogue with other religious communities.
   - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.

8. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST TEMPTATION IN PREACHING TODAY?
   - Preaching God's Word;
   - Entertaining the congregation;
   - Giving shallow messages, riding hobby horses, or addressing social and psychological concerns instead of preaching God's Word.

9. WHAT KIND OF MESSAGE SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED FROM THE PULPIT?
   - Messages anchored in Scripture;
   - Messages that are heard by the church and preaching God's Word;
   - Messages that are anchored in Scripture and preached to the church.

10. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAJOR CHALLENGES THAT CHURCH MEMBERS NEED TO BE INSTRUCTED ON?
    - God's will for their lives;
    - The different functions of the Biblical Research Institute include theological research, Apologetics, and Service to the church.
    - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.
    - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
    - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities.

11. WHAT RESOURCES DOES BRI PROVIDE FOR OUR WORLDWIDE CHURCH?
    - Research, Apologetics, and Service to the church.
    - Theological Research:
      - Engaging in dialogue with other religious communities.
      - Responding to challenges to biblical doctrines and the world's influence on the church.
    - Apologetics:
      - Providing Bible study materials and resources.
    - Service:
      - Supporting the General Conference administration and the world field in matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends.

The best time for Youth Meetings: Friday night or Saturday afternoon? What type of seats should we get for the sanctuary: chairs or pews?

To achieve good results as they consider these conflicting subjects, church elders must act constructively. Leading a church while avoiding crisis is essential for the success of the church's mission. In principle, doctrinal controversies (related to beliefs) have been the worst kind of controversies. During such crises, elders are wise to obtain advice from the church pastor or from conference leadership.

The Bible describes a case of doctrinal controversy in the apostolic church that started when some Jewish masters began to impose circumcision among new converts; the story is found in Acts 15. The apostles and elders who heard this controversy (verses 1, 2) did not postpone searching for a solution, nor did they behave like ostriches who hide their heads in the sand. Because they believed that the local church should be in harmony with the church in Jerusalem, they met with their leaders (verse 6). After hearing several testimonies, they concluded that the controversy had been started by people “with no authority” to teach the church about this subject (verse 24). The leaders decided to “elect some men and send them” as speakers to announce the “agreement” that had been reached (verse 25), and they considered that the final verdict “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” and to themselves (verses 28, 29).

Regarding that council in Jerusalem, Ellen White says, “The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The ‘apostles and elders,’ men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches. Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and fault-finding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message” (The Acts of the Apostles, 196).

In general, when negative controversy occurs between church members, the elder always has two alternatives: to ignore the situation or intervene. The following statements are taken from the Spirit of Prophecy and may be helpful when you are faced with a controversial situation:

1. Listen, individually, to each person involved in the controversy. Be careful not to show bias or label people beforehand as being “problematic.” Be attentive to the conversation on a friendly note, as far as possible from emotional triggers. Try to keep the conversation on a spiritual level. The objective should be to reach a satisfactory outcome that is in harmony with church principles and Christian ethics. Fear and offense are hardly ever beneficial.

2. Don’t rush. Prioritize a list of possible solutions, considering the positive and negative aspects of each. Pray for wisdom to make the right decision.

3. “We should be guarded, that the spirit of controversy does not control our discussions of the Sabbath school lesson” (Counsels on Sabbath School Work, 27).

4. “Do not present subjects that will arouse controversy” (Evangelism, 142).

5. “Many dwell almost exclusively upon doctrinal subjects, while the nature of true piety, experimental godliness, receives little attention. Jesus, His love and grace, His self-denial and self-sacrifice, His meekness and forbearance, are not brought before the people as they should be” (Ibid, 163).

6. “In most of the religious controversies, the foundation of the trouble is that self is striving for the supremacy” (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 71).

7. “Let not controversy arise over trifles” (Mind, Character, and Personality, 2:488).

8. “None are to be forward or obtrusive, but we are quietly to live out our religion, with an eye single to the glory of God. . . . Then we shall shine as lights in the world, without noise or friction” (Sons and Daughters of God, 317).

If you lose control of a situation or cannot avoid or inhibit the propagation of negative controversy, do not behave like an ostrich or lose hope; rather, pray to God and ask Him for wisdom and serenity. Arguments are often caused by lack of communication regarding a specific matter. Therefore:

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3. Consult with each party again to discuss possible solutions. Share the positive and negative consequences of each option. Try to reach a consensus between both parties, always in a constructive, Christian atmosphere.

To achieve good results as they consider these conflicting subjects, church elders must act constructively. Leading a church while avoiding crisis is essential for the success of the church’s mission. In principle, doctrinal controversies (related to beliefs) have been the worst kind of controversies. During such crises, elders are wise to obtain advice from the church pastor or from conference leadership.

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On October 14, 1984, during the Annual Council, the General Conference Committee prepared the following statement about the election and ordination of women as local church elders.

WOMEN (LOCAL CHURCH) ELDERS - ELECTION AND ORDINATION

1. To reaffirm the Spring Meeting action of the General Conference Committee of 1975, Role of Women in the Church (GCC 75-153).

2. To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders.

3. To suggest that the following guidelines be used in the selection and ordination of women as local church elders:
   a. The concept should be carefully examined, discussed, and properly accepted at the local church level.
   b. If a church contemplates such an action, the entire matter should be discussed and approved by the conference administration after the conference administration has sought counsel from the union leadership. The negotiation between the church and the conference should occur in advance of the final decision and vote by the local church.
   c. The action to elect and ordain a woman as a local church elder must not be taken unless a clear consensus exists that the ministry of a woman elder is desirable and even essential to the spiritual well-being of the local church family. It should also be the consensus of the church that a woman elder will be respected as a spiritual leader and soul-winner. The church should also express its belief that there are dimensions of spiritual service and counsel which cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.
   d. A clear majority of the voting members of the local church must be in favor of the action. The matter should be considered at a specially-called church business meeting. Every church member should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue rather than only the few who might be present at a regular meeting where routine items of business are on the agenda. Although preliminary study could be given to this question by the church board, any final action should be taken by the church in a business meeting.
   e. Whatever the decision of the church, it should result in unifying the members and not be the source of divisiveness or alienation. The body of Christ, the Church, must not be tarnished in any way. In this important issue, as in all things, the name of our Lord and Savior must be exalted.

General Conference Ministerial Association
COWBOYS, STOCKMEN AND ELDERS: Some Common Pitfalls

**DON'T BE A "LONE RANGER."**

There's something quite poignant about a lone horseman set against a remote landscape. Many identify with the motion of such an image. Yet traveling alone in vast, untouched terrain can also be dangerous.

The reality and responsibility of decision-making make "lone ranger" taboo when it comes to congregational leadership. Whether your pastor has only one congregation or cares for multiple communities, you as an elder should communicate with him regularly. After all, the wilderness is a dangerous place. You don't want to be out there all alone.

Connect regularly with your pastor every week if possible. You both need to spend quality time together. "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

You need his support just as much as he needs yours. Schedule times for sharing, studying, praying, and planning. If a weekly face-to-face meeting is not possible, connect via e-mail or phone. The important thing is to stay in touch.

After his incredible transformation, Saul (Paul) tried to connect with the disciples, but we are told in Acts 9:26-30 that they were afraid of him. Saul understood that it was important to be connected to those the Lord had called before him. Eventually Barnabas convinced the disciples to accept Saul, and, fortunately for Saul, they did, because they later saved his life.

So don't be a lone ranger. Stay in touch with your superiors and maintain open lines of communication. It might just be a lifesaver!

**DON'T BE SWAYED TO ACCEPT THE SHERIFF'S BADGE.**

Disputes are common. Historically speaking, pioneers and first settlers often resolved disputes with bullets or nooses. In many pioneer communities, one person wore the official badge of authority and sometimes became a target by virtue of the badge. In truth, church life is not much different. Disputes arise. People take sides, appeal to authority, and call for justice. As a congregational leader, you are responsible for maintaining a neutral position during congregational disputes. Don't accept the sheriff's badge! You will be appealed to for decisive action. You will be called upon to deliver the bullet or administer the noose. Don't do it! Stay neutral. If action is required, incorporate others in the decision-making process. Above all, don't take sides. The moment you do, your ability to shepherd is lost. Jesus understood and practiced this principle of leadership. In response to someone calling for arbitration, the Lord replied, “Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

Listen, stay connected, and offer support. Seek counsel. Take the advice of Paul to Timothy: "Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Tim. 2:23). Practice the counsel of Paul to the Galatians: "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

**NEVER LOVE YOUR HORSE MORE THAN YOUR HOME.**

Cowboys love riding. Stockmen live for the thrill of the cattle drive. Horsemen dream of riding astride a galloping steed, the wind in their hair, chasing, capturing, and branding. The adrenaline rush during these moments is intoxicating, addictive, and entrapping. It is no secret that some horsemen love their horses more than they love their homes.

Elders are faced with a similar situation. Pastoral care can be a rush. Nothing compares to the thrill of gathering souls, sharing the gospel, and being used by God to win another soul for heaven. Jesus warned that doing God's work can become so all-consuming that our families are neglected (Mark 7:9-11). Make time for your family. Remember that God expects you to shepherd your family just as surely as He wants you to care for others. Neglecting your family for the work of God is sin in its most subtle form.

**TRAIN OTHER COWBOYS.**

The best stockmen share their skills and knowledge with young, inexperienced cowboys. They know the value of skilled fellow riders. Cowmen have to rely on each other, trust one another, and work together. Failure to do this may result in long days chasing beasts that slipped the line unnecessarily.

When you serve as an elder, you are responsible for sharing what you know. Give freely of the wisdom of your experience. Help your fellow elders become stronger in their own roles. Jesus was master at this, and we should also practice this task of leadership.

So you’re an elder! Your high calling to leadership invokes some words of advice. Whether your eldership is shiny-new or well-worn, your God-ordained role carries certain dangers. In many ways, the pitfalls you face are common to cowboys and stockmen. The commonality lies in the responsibility taken for and care given to herds of cattle and flocks of sheep.

The magnificent horsemen and women of the high country and plains know that if their horse throws a shoe, they are in trouble. They understand the need for regular food and water, and the dangers to both rider and beast if either is in short supply. They are well aware of the paths to avoid when leading their flocks and herds to safe pasture. So whether you’re saddling up for the first time or easing back into the saddle for another year of leading your congregation, avoid these dangers:

**DON'T PRETEND YOU'RE THE “MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER.”**

Be yourself and ride in your own saddle. Don’t imagine you’re someone you’re not. A common pitfall of leadership is to compare oneself to others. The danger lies in imagining that you possess someone else’s special talents and skills. You can easily fall off your horse if you pretend to be someone else. Stick with your own skill set. The preferred trail is the one on which your God-given gifts and passions guide your way. Don’t pretend to be someone you’re not.

“...But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... for to one is given... to another... to another” (1 Cor. 12:7-11). Paul is describing the principle of unity in diversity. God created you as a unique being, and the church needs your uniqueness! If you ride in your own saddle, the church will be blessed.

**AVOID RIDING FROM THE REAR OR WAY OUT FRONT.**

Balance! Stockmen understand that this is not just gravitational poise but also a sensitive balance between task completion and stock care. Good cowboys know the critical equilibrium between driving the stock forward and gently leading them to the next pasture.

Congregational leaders are often trapped when they attempt to drive their church from the rear, shouting and barking orders to get the job done. Equally dangerous are pastoral efforts to lead the congregation from way out front, urging members to follow while leaving them further and further behind.

Sometimes Jesus led the way and encouraged others to follow Him (Matt. 4:19, 20), and sometimes He instructed others to go before Him and promised to follow (Luke 10:1). Jesus accomplished these leadership tasks because He took time to connect with those whom He sought to lead and shepherd. Don’t be detached from your congregation. Maintain your balance and stay connected. People will follow as you lead and go before you as you direct.

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Nurture: Receiving and Holding Converts

There is a definite relationship between the reception of new converts and your remaining active in church fellowship. What can newcomers expect from the church? This is the question you will find yourself asking each time you receive a new member. New converts expect to find the same kind of care and concern for them as they would expect if they had been members of the church from birth. They look forward to finding a warm, loving fellowship in which they can grow spiritually. They expect that the church will give them the same kind of guidance and support that they found in their previous church. They want to feel that they are a part of the church family.

New Convert Expectations

1. A warm welcome. New converts expect to be welcomed into the church with open arms. They expect to be greeted with a warm handshake and a friendly smile. They expect to be offered a place to sit and a cup of coffee or tea. They expect to be introduced to other members of the church.

2. A sense of belonging. New converts expect to feel like they belong to the church. They expect to feel like they are a part of the church family. They expect to feel that they are welcome to participate in church activities and events.

3. A sense of purpose. New converts expect to find a sense of purpose in the church. They expect to feel like they are contributing to the work of the church. They expect to feel like their time and talents are being used for the glory of God.

4. A sense of accountability. New converts expect to feel accountable to the church. They expect to be held to high standards of behavior and conduct. They expect to be held accountable for their actions.

5. A sense of responsibility. New converts expect to feel responsible for the work of the church. They expect to feel like they have a duty to contribute to the work of the church. They expect to feel like they have a responsibility to help others.

6. A sense of community. New converts expect to feel like they are a part of a community. They expect to feel like they are part of a group of people who care about each other. They expect to feel like they are part of a group of people who support each other.

7. A sense of ownership. New converts expect to feel like they own a piece of the church. They expect to feel like they have a stake in the church. They expect to feel like they have a voice in the decisions of the church.

8. A sense of security. New converts expect to feel secure in the church. They expect to feel like they are safe in the church. They expect to feel like they are protected in the church.

9. A sense of hope. New converts expect to feel hope in the church. They expect to feel like they have a future in the church. They expect to feel like they have a chance to grow and mature in the church.

10. A sense of peace. New converts expect to feel peace in the church. They expect to feel like they are at peace in the church. They expect to feel like they are at home in the church.

What Can You Expect from New Converts?

New converts are a blessing to the church. They bring new life and energy to the church. They bring new perspectives and new insights. They bring new insights and new ideas. They bring new talents and new skills. They bring new strengths and new weaknesses. They bring new experiences and new stories. They bring new histories and new backgrounds. They bring new hopes and new dreams. They bring new joys and new sorrows. They bring new challenges and new opportunities. They bring new responsibilities and new privileges. They bring new gifts and new talents. They bring new needs and new desires. They bring new wants and new needs. They bring new expectations and new hopes. They bring new dreams and new aspirations. They bring new joys and new sorrows. They bring new blessings and new troubles. They bring new needs and new resources. They bring new burdens and new strengths. They bring new weaknesses and new resources. They bring new needs and new abilities. They bring new strengths and new weakness.
adequate instruction in the meaning of church affiliation. The emphasis here is on instruction, not criticism.

New believers are learners. They are entitled to the right kind of instruction. Too often the saints have become set, formal, and inactive in church service and are therefore left by the earnestness and zeal of new converts. They want to stifle and crush that first love, and in so doing, they deeply wound the newcomers. The attitude of such stereotyped, complacent saints brings to mind a certain incident.

A preacher once asked a farmer why oxen always walked so slowly. The farmer replied, “I don’t know, except that they always break in the young oxen with the old ones. The old ones slow down, and they teach the young ones to walk slow.” Let’s leave this method with the oxen and keep it out of the church.

New converts can also expect a program of Christian education adjusted to their special needs. This education pertains to doctrine, church organization, missionary (home and overseas) information, the essential qualities of Christian character, the successes of Christianity, lives of noble church leaders, and many other areas touching the work and experience of men and women of the church. Often new converts are bombarded with criticism of church leaders and with policies by which the work of the church is accomplished. Instead of seeing that the church is following a consistent program of positive education of its members, newcomers in the faith too often confused and left to struggle by themselves. This usually results in discouragement and separation from the church.

New converts can expect the church to provide an atmosphere of heartening goodwill and pulpit, heart-warming fellowship. New members should discover that they are among friends. They should be made to feel at home. Close friends, respected superiors, trusted consultants, and dear companions should be found in the church.

Finally, new converts can expect early integration and enlistment into the life and service of the church. It is a great honor to be a part of and participate in the activities of the church. The part may be small, yet it means much to a new believer to be called upon to serve. In this way, new members become an integral part of the body and feel wanted and needed.

The subject of receiving and holding converts requires serious and constant attention. It is hoped that the few thoughts presented here will serve to stimulate greater concern for those who seek fellowship with God’s people. If followed sincerely and prayerfully, the simple steps described above will result in holding more of our dear people in active, happy fellowship.

H. L. Rudy was the president of the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists when he wrote this article.

Let us allow Christ to anoint our eyes with the heavenly eyesalve that we may see. We do not want to be blind; we want to see everything. Day by day we are to march toward Canaan, and the next day toward Canaan, and then back to Egypt again. Day by day we are to march steadily forward.


| SERMON 1 |

YOUR EYES ARE ON CANAAN, BUT YOUR MIND IS IN EGYPT! | Exodus 16:1-3 |
**SHOW ME YOUR GLORY**

Exodus 33:18-33

Exodus 33 describes a conversation between God and Moses. Moses boldly asked God to reveal His glory. Can you imagine such a request? Our first reaction may be shock and awe. Imagine what it was like for Moses to speak face to face with God. Yet, God was willing to reveal His glory to Moses. God told Moses that His name is Jehovah Nissi, which means the Lord is my banner. God promised to build an altar and call it “the Lord is my banner.”

**V. IN THE LIVES OF GOD’S PEOPLE**

We can also see God in the lives of people who have lived faithfully for Him. Looking into their faces, you can see the power of God’s radiance. You know God has been part of their lives and that He is near. Our scripture tells us that God is close yet distant. It’s a paradox, isn’t it? You will never understand everything about God, but this is an assurance that we can experience.

God so rear that we can’t help but hear and see Him. It is stepping into the sea and feeling the refreshing sensation of water rushing over your toes. It is like the sea saying, “Come on in, there is more. Take another step and see how good it feels.” That is the way it is with God. He says to us, “There is part of me that is close to you, but there is more. Step out and experience more and more of my presence.”

Jesus stood before a lonely world. The people of His day looked at Him and asked the same thing that Moses asked: “We want to see the Father.” In response, Jesus said, “When you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.” As we study the gospel, we see God. We read about God becoming flesh, breathing air, eating our food, experiencing our temptations; we learn of His concern for the lost, ill, hungry, and poor. And as you see more of Jesus, you see more of God.

When Moses made his bold request of God, the Lord replied (Read Exodus 33:19, 20). These tests suggest the ways God reveals Himself even today. At times God passes so near one can feel His presence. We feel sure He is there. Although there is a dimension to God that we will never be able to see or comprehend with our puny, finite minds, there are times when God reaches us in special, unique ways where I think we can sense the nearness of God.

1. **IN NATURE**

We can see God’s handiwork in the nature that surrounds us (Ps. 83). The psalmist, standing up at the sky on a moon-lit night, expressed his reverence of the evening and realized that it was God who made the heavens and put the moon and stars in their places.

Psalm 19:1, 2 presents a similar thought. The psalmist reminds us that the heavens iterate, “Day after day, at night after night, He Reveals His glory to us.” (Read also Job 12:17, 18.)

The book of Romans suggests that we all have reason to know God. Even if we have never heard a sermon about God, we are not excused because nature shows us what God is like and what God has done. The psalmist declared that God’s handiwork reveals His glory to us. (Rom. 1:19-20.)

Sometimes God comes so close in moments of worship that we reach out and touch Him. You may not see His face, but you know He is there. At night after night, you can feel the wind of His presence as He passes by.

2. **AS YOU SEE THE CHURCH**

Sometimes we experience the presence of God when we see the church operating as the body of Christ, when it functions as it was designed to function. You feel the presence of the Lord as the body of Christ functions. The people of the church are the body of Christ. They are to be the hands and feet of Christ. They are to reach out and touch Him. Right now we listen and watch and wait. We hear and sense and know that God is there. When voices lifted in praise to Him, He is in the harvest field. He is in the church as it works toward the future for Christ. He is in the people who have lived faithfully for Him. Look and see. Listen and hear.

**V. CONCLUSION**

God is always there. For example, God says, “There is part of me that is close to you, but there is more. Step out and experience more and more of my presence.”

We stand in the presence of God and we pray. We must pray. We must not only pray, but we must be present and alert. An intercessor is not a watchman; an intercessor pleads for or intercedes on behalf of someone else. Intercession is God’s gift to us so that we might be one in prayer and prayer helps win battles.
II. WE MUST PRACTICE OBEDIENCE TO GOD (Ex. 14:15).

When seemingly impossible situations arise, we must maintain our confidence in God. Let’s consider three aspects of this principle.

A. Our confidence in God must be firmly expressed. Our confidence in God is personal, it must be freely given; it cannot be coerced. I learned a long time ago that you cannot make people trust you. You may convince them to say they trust you, but actually trusting you may be another story. You may say you trust and have confidence in God, but only God knows your heart.

In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul tells Timothy that their trust in God has prepared them for their work and their suffering. Their laboring and suffering for Christ have not forced them to trust Him—but just the opposite. We learn to freely rely on God.

B. Our confidence in God must be firmly expressed. Do not trust or reliance is not a loosely-applied principle. Any deviation is “not trusting.” We may allow many things to weaken our trust. It is easy to attend church and give testimonies about trusting God for all your needs. It becomes more difficult to trust when you are diagnosed with a terminal illness, have a prodigal in your family or lose all your material possessions. We need to remember the words of Jesus found in John 16:33. We must trust firmly in the One who gives us victory. We learn to proclaim with Paul (1 Cor. 15:57).

C. Our confidence in God must be fully experienced. When we rely fully on God, we are proving in my life, I have experienced and seen in the lives of others that human efforts will not bring success; in fact, they will make our situations more difficult. Our anesthetics and readiness hinder the work that God is trying to do through us. We can have full confidence in God because He is able to help us. Remember Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:20. In Exodus, Moses told the people, “If ye will not listen to me and not do all these commandments, I will break the staff of your bread from before your eyes. I will give you bread just as you were hungry and water just as you were thirsty. I will send more wild beasts in your midst, such as the nations are cursed by; they will eat up your land and cover it with stones. I will scatter you among the nations, and I will forget you among peoples. You will ask in great numbers, ‘Where is God, who brought us up out of Egypt? Who brought us up out of the house of slavery? Our fathers are dead and we do not know who brought us up out of Egypt. Our fathers are dead and we do not know who brought us up out of Egypt. Our fathers are dead and we do not know who brought us up out of Egypt. Our fathers are dead and we do not know who brought us up out of Egypt.’”

III. WE MUST HAVE A PURPOSEFUL EXPERIENCE OF GOD (Ex. 15:1).

The Israelites’ experience with God was real and dynamic. It did not happen by chance. It was God’s purpose for God’s people in this situation.

A. Their experience happened at God’s place (Ex. 15:4).

The place the Israelites found themselves was a real place. This place or-
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE - PART 2
UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN CHRIST

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global community that embraces a diverse population of believers from different countries, cultures, races, and ethnicities. Our mission is to take the everlasting gospel of Jesus to every nation, kindred, tongue, and tribe. As a body of Christ, we must authentically experience and demonstrate unity in diversity in Christ.
DIVERSITY OF FORM IS ACCEPTABLE AND SHOULD BE RESPECTED.

THE DEGREE OF DIVERSITY REQUIRED TO FULFILL OUR MISSION WILL VARY FROM PLACE TO PLACE, FROM SITUATION TO SITUATION.

TAKES ALL FACTS, INCLUDING SOCIOLOGICAL AND CULTURE ONES, INTO ACCOUNT.

The crucial question is whether the Church in a particular place and time is willing and bold enough to follow God’s leading. Within the biblical and theological framework of unity in diversity in Christ, the Church must be responsibly open to experimentation and variety or it may fail to follow the promptings of the Spirit Himself.

Historically, within the context of Adventist mission, we have sometimes allowed the church to determine when a particular element in a culture is capable of becoming a suitable expression of the good news and a vehicle for telling the Adventist story. What yesterday was considered objectionable in our missionary endeavor in a given country may today be considered a culturally-appropriate opportunity for the evangelization of the people.

When I started out in the ministry as a young pastor in the Caribbean, the use of steel drums as musical instruments was prohibited in the churches. They were deemed inappropriate for the praiseful worship of God. Today, some Adventist churches have steel orchestras, and the drums are now legitimate musical instruments for worship. From time to time, they have even been used at our General Conference sessions. For many Adventists, such diversity in musical instruments may not feel safe, but theologically and biblically it is right on the path of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. What is required today of both leaders and laity is to act faithfully and responsibly in seeking to discover how God is at work in a particular culture, time, and place.

Let’s consider another issue that has created barriers to the successful implementation of the Great Commission in certain cultures: women’s ordination. Against such issues as cross-cultural, multicultural, and demographic changes, the danger lies in a structural fundamentalism in which unity is derived through polity, as though polity is almost to be equated with absolute truth. My plea is that we not allow structure to distract us or to sabotage our essential oneness in Christ and His mission.

Unity in diversity in Christ will allow that if the Church in North America is ready to ordain women to the gospel ministry, such action should not be perceived as divisive, insubordinate, or threatening to the essential unity of the global Church. North America should not be held back by other regions of the world where it might be perceived as premature and culturally inappropriate to do the same. If the North American Church—with all its racial, cultural, ethnic, and demographic diversity—has found a way to work out some of the issues that confront it in our time, the rest of the Church should not only respect and celebrate the advance and be open to change. We believe that the Spirit leads where it wills. And as Gamaliel succinctly put it, “If this plan or this understanding of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it; then you might even be found opposing God” (Acts 5:38, 39).

We have to trust that what is true and good in Christ will succeed. Like Peter and Paul, we must trust God to ensure the continuity of unity in diversity even when men and women are unsure of it. We honor God as the originator of unity by expressing unity through diversity as an organism paradigm than the institutional one. The New Testament truly advocates unity in diversity, in love, and in diversity of forms expressing the variety within the community. This diversity does not threaten the essential unity of the church, nor does it compromise the proclamation of the gospel. For example, valuing diversity with inclusion as a mission strategy need not lead to disruption of the church’s unity in places in which it is appropriate. Rather, it may provide the church an opportunity to correlate possible diversity with necessary unity. It will enrich and strengthen fellowship, deepen spirituality, create new possibilities for mission, and multiply the church’s effort to accomplish its task in the world. Embracing the differences inherent in the diverse races, cultures, and ethnic makeup of the world church will enhance the unity of the church if national, cultural, and racial identities are not made to be definitive over and above the makeup of the whole body as it receives its collective identity in Christ. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV).

We must acknowledge that, unlike method, mission does not have a single universal pattern. We need to remind ourselves that diversity of form does not threaten the essential unity of the body. The biblical understanding of diversity allows us to engage every legitimate gift God has placed in His church when it comes to gender, race, language, culture, ethnicity, tribe, and nationality. What really holds us together is not unity through polity but our common confession of “one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” This oneness is articulated and set forth in what we consider to be the core beliefs of Adventism. The face of Adventism will change with growth, but our essential core teachings must remain constant. Diversity of form is acceptable and should be respected. The degree of diversity required to fulfill our mission will vary from place to place, from situation to situation. The Holy Spirit has not yet exhausted the structural possibilities and forms of ministries possible in the church. The New Testament does not encourage us to think that something should not be done just because it is being done for the first time. The apostolic church and the Adventist Church have done things that Jesus did not do. And this thinking by no means applies only to cultural and ethnic diversity, it also applies to age, gender, and race.

As I review our global diversities, I am led to conclude that the danger lies not in the decision for or against such issues as cross-cultural, multicultural, and demographic changes; the danger lies in a structural fundamentalism in which unity is derived through polity, as though polity is almost to be equated with absolute truth. My plea is that we not allow structure to distract us or to sabotage our essential oneness in Christ and His mission.

The beauty of the biblical view of unity in diversity in Christ versus unity through polity is the freedom of God to work through His church in fulfilling His mission in the world. He may add a new step in one place while practice continues unchanged elsewhere, for He
Almost every week a church member or pastor calls my office asking the same question: Is the General Conference a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC)? My answer is always the same: No! It is not “No, but . . .” It is a “No, period!” However, most callers seem to feel they know the answer better than I. They believe we are secretly members or in a sub-category similar to membership, but this is not true. Visit the WCC Web site and read the list of members. You will not find our name. We are not a member of the WCC, and we are not planning to become a member. Period!

Others may ask, Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church have a relationship with the WCC? Yes, we do. From time to time we attend the WCC Central Committee and their General Assembly as observers. This fact is not a secret, and articles about it are published in the Adventist Review.

Others say they have heard that a delegation from the General Conference attends the Conference of Christian World Communions (CS/CWC) meeting every year. Is this true? Yes, it is! But the WCC is not the CS/CWC. The confusion may arise from the names of these two groups.

Let me explain the difference. The World Council of Churches is the official organization of the ecumenical movement. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. Approximately 340 denominations are members of the WCC, representing 592 million Christians, a little more than 25 percent of the Christian world. The purpose of the WCC is to promote Christian unity. “To promote” would have been too weak for the founders, who wanted to build a visible unity of Christians. The dream was conceived after two World Wars between so-called Christian countries turned the world upside down. Christian unity would have been the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer and a major factor for peace in the world.

Today, unity—even among the members of the WCC—is a real challenge. Orthodox and Protestant members cannot share the Eucharist together after a half century of meetings, statements, and studies. The majority of Christians are not members of the WCC, and the most dynamic wing of the Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals has not expressed an interest in becoming members. The Roman Catholic Church is very influential within the WCC but is not a member.

When we think about the WCC, we must remember its purpose: the visible unity of Christianity. This concept may have different interpretations, and attaining this goal may seem a long process, but the WCC is the only religious organization totally committed to this goal.

What is the Conference of Christian World Communions? The Adventist Church is not a member of the WCC but is a member of the CS/CWC. The difference is that the CS/CWC is not an organization but rather a conference of Christian leaders. It is made up of Secretaries General or other top officials representing world church organizations. Its purpose is not to build the visible unity of the Christian family but to share information, concerns, and reports, and to become better acquainted with one another. No one is encouraged to change beliefs or create new Christian churches. Doctrinal issues are not on the agenda. Leaders represent their denominations and their beliefs. They are accepted as they are.

This group of Secretaries represents about 2 billion Christians and covers more churches than any other organization, including the WCC. The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church are represented, as are the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Mennonite Convention, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Baptist World Alliance, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and many others. Adventists have played an important role in this conference in opening it to Evangelicals. Dr. Bert B. Beach was the Secretary of the conference for 32 years. I have held this position since 2002. Our presence in such an elite group, which represents the Christian world, has been extremely helpful for our church around the world. It has shown that we are a Christian church recognized by the Christian family of leaders, that we are not a cult or a dangerous group of fanatics but a Christian denomination.

How are the relations between the WCC and the CS/CWC? The relations between the WCC and the CS/CWC were difficult in the beginning but have since improved. The CS/CWC accepted churches as they were and respected their differences; the WCC believed that this did not build unity. Today the WCC has a representative within the CS/CWC. Will the CS/CWC join the WCC? Some people on both sides think a close cooperation would be good for all, and a consultative commission was set up last year. But other members of the CS/CWC don’t want the conference to change its main purpose, which is to be a unique fellowship of Christian leaders who spend time together, pray together, read the Bible together, and try to better understand each member of the larger Christian family.

Adventists have always been open to developing good relationships with other churches and religious groups while staying faithful to our mission and beliefs. We are not an isolated church, but we believe God has called us to fulfill a specific mission and to proclaim a specific message for the last days. Meeting other Christian leaders gives us a great opportunity to be better known and to share our mission, as we are able to respect others without compromising our identity and our faith.

Building one Christian church is the dream of many sincere Christians. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also prays for Christian unity based on the Word of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But our church is not a member of the WCC even though we respect this institution and recognize its positive initiatives. We believe we can build good relations and show respect for everyone without being a member of the WCC!
**REFOCUSING OUR PRIORITIES**

God’s priority is reaching lost people with the gospel; nothing is more important to our heavenly Father. He has poured out all of heaven's resources into the plan of salvation. Jesus—heaven’s most priceless gift—came to earth on a redemptive mission. The gospel of Luke states it in clear, unmistakable words: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Ellen G. White adds this clarion call: “Evangelistic work, opening the scriptures to others, warning men and women what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God’s servants” (Evangelism, page 17).

When the church fails to place priority on reaching the lost, it fails in accomplishing its God-appointed mission. Any church not passionate about soul-winning has missed its calling. Soul-winning churches are alive. Evangelistic churches are vibrant, growing, living churches. Whenever a church turns inward, focusing predominately upon its own needs, it will begin a downward spiral toward spiritual death. In the spiritual as well as in the natural world, activity is the law of life.

In 2008, Seventh-day Adventist churches throughout North America and around the world will have the unique opportunity via the Hope Channel to participate in Discoveries ‘08. Each meeting will be sent via satellite live from Orlando, Florida. The series will begin on October 24 and continue through November 29.

Discoveries ‘08 will take you on an incredible journey through the ancient past to unlock millennia-old mysteries which speak to us in the twenty-first century. Eternal truths will leap off the pages of Scripture with a new freshness and relevance to a generation seeking answers to the deepest questions of life. Each presentation will be fully illustrated with all-new graphics, presenting Bible truth with clarity and power.

During Discoveries ‘08, you will hear the best in Adventist music. Soloists and musical groups from across North America will inspire you with uplifting music. Throughout Discoveries ‘08, we will feature YouTube-type questions so your church can be actively involved. Your members and guests will be able to videotape a question locally, post it on a Web page, and listen for the answer during Discoveries ‘08. Questions will be selected for the following evening. Lecture outlines will be posted on the Internet so every church can download materials free of charge to be passed out locally.

Satellite evangelism has been a highly successful form of soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The first satellite series, “Discoveries in Prophecy,” was launched in 1995, live from Chattanooga, Tennessee, with 676 churches participating. Since that time, more than 200 satellite events worldwide in more than 50 languages have resulted in over 1 million baptisms. But satellite evangelism is not a substitute for member involvement in witness; rather, it is a focal point for involvement. Some satellite series in local churches have not been successful at all. Why? The answer usually lies in a failure to prepare adequately. Someone has said it well: “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.”

Here is what you can do to be absolutely sure Discoveries ‘08 will be successful for Christ in your church:

- With your church board, develop a master plan for evangelism.
- Set aside times to pray earnestly for specific people who need to know God’s end-time message.
- Launch an active visitation program to former members and others who have expressed interest in your church.
- Organize social events, concerts, picnics, and other church activities for your guests.
- Prepare for Discoveries ‘08 just as you would if the pastor or a conference evangelist were coming to town.
- Order handbills, put up posters, place an ad in the newspaper, invite your friends, and watch the Holy Spirit work.
- Get involved. Plan something big for God. Don’t sit on the sidelines discussing why evangelism won’t work. Roll up your sleeves and go to work for God. He will do “exceedingly, abundantly, all that we ask or think” for the glory of His name.

To register for Discoveries ‘08, log on to www.acn.info or call 1-800-ACN-1119 (226-1119).

Mark Finley is a vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

**DISCOVERIES ‘08**

Live via satellite on the Hope Channel from Greater Orlando as a series of all new Christ-centered biblical presentations exploring the past, present & future.

Join thousands of churches from October 24 - November 29

For an incredible journey through the great teachings of the Bible

Discoveries ‘08 will feature...
- Live Call-in Questions
- Interactive Chat Room
- Specially Designed Response Sheets
- The Best In Adventist Music
- Powerful Biblical Preaching With All New Graphics

Register before June 1 and receive Empowered by the Spirit—a 2-DVD set of five sermons that will revive your church.
MISSION SPOTLIGHT:
A TRIBUTE

Every quarter for 37 years, Mission Spotlight whisked Sabbath school members off to faraway places to experience the intriguing world of Adventist mission.

It all started with a handful of slides and stories created by Oscar Heinrich, who, as communication director of the Southern Union Conference, agreed to accompany a youth group to Guatemala and prepare a presentation of the trip for his local Sabbath school. It was a hit. Other Sabbath schools requested similar programs, and the concept of Mission Spotlight was born.

From its inception, Mission Spotlight was a family ministry. Oscar’s wife, Judy, traveled with him and wrote the scripts. Through the years, each of their three children contributed to Mission Spotlight until its last issue in 2007. Jerry Heinrich handled the photography, audio recording, and program editing. Judy (Heinrich) Carter managed the finances, promotion, and circulation. And Ginger (Heinrich) O’Neil wrote and narrated the scripts.

“To make these reports, we have gone to more than 160 countries,” Heinrich said. “We traveled in everything from ox carts to jumbo jets, climbed through mountain jungles from early morning to dusk, waded streams and forded rivers, and spent nights in thatch shelters.”

When he was a boy, Heinrich listened in wide-eyed wonder to stories about “wild men from Borneo, cannibals in the South Seas, and man-eating tigers in India.” He would never forget these riveting tales or the unselfish spirit of the missionaries who told them. From 1970 until his death in 2002, Heinrich dedicated his life to telling the stories of those who had given their all to reach an unreached world with God’s love.

“Mission Spotlight is not about the problems of the world, crime, AIDS, famines, terrorists, wars, or natural disasters,” said Heinrich. “It is about faith, hope, love, and promises fulfilled. It is about people.”

The Office of Adventist Mission would like to pay special tribute to and thank the Heinrich family for their commitment to keeping the story of Adventist mission alive. Only in heaven will the results of their service be fully realized.
The art of speech:

**WHEN YOUR THROAT IS SORE AND IT’S DIFFICULT TO SPEAK**

What could cause someone to feel constant pain in the throat, even when the throat is not infected?

A person who constantly feels pain in the throat is probably abusing his/her throat and not realizing it. Talking too loud, screaming, talking nonstop for a long time, and breathing inadequately are factors that may cause such pain.

When we are tired and tense, we have a tendency to bend forward. This posture makes the diaphragm (one of the muscles that supports proper breathing) move with difficulty.

Observe your posture and try to relax the muscles around your neck and shoulders. If needed, apply a warm towel or heating pad to these areas. This will help the muscles relax.

Practice a light sport such as walking or gymnastics and avoid activities such as body-building and martial arts that may overload the shoulders and neck.

I can’t sing because my throat itches and I start coughing.

Lack of water or insufficient water damages the voice. Drink eight glasses of water each day and check to see if your urine is light-colored and your saliva is not too thick. Eat more fruit, especially citrus. Try to control your cough by drinking water every time you want to cough (always carry a water bottle).

I have been teaching for five years. It is hard not to talk loudly, and sometimes I even scream.

Teachers should take care of their voices. It would be best to use a microphone in the classroom; if that is not possible, use new strategies such as asking students to present their work or dividing the class into small groups and explaining the subject separately for each group. Students often talk during class, so the teacher has to compete for their attention. Unfortunately, the voice does not tolerate so much effort and gets irritated. Don’t talk at the same time your students do.

Pray and ask God to give you creativity to plan classes attractively without having to scream.

My voice is getting worse every day. It’s gotten to the point where, for a few minutes, my voice disappears completely because I talked too loud or screamed.

It is not normal to lose your voice, even for a short period of time. When you lose your voice, are you anxious or nervous? Our voices reveal a lot about us. Evaluating the connection between our voices and our emotions can be very helpful.

I’m allergic to perfume; it irritates my throat. Allergy is another factor that can damage the voice. Discover the cause of the allergy and try to eliminate it. The air we breathe goes through our vocal cords, and if that air is not pure and healthy, it may irritate the nose and walls of the larynx, damaging the voice. A good alternative is to wash the nose with saline nasal spray, use a vaporizer, and gargle with warm salt water (one teaspoon of salt for each cup of water).

My dental arch is crooked, and my teeth press against my tongue, which makes speech difficult. I’ve had braces, but they didn’t help. The problem could be corrected with surgery, but it is costly and I can’t afford it.

Look for a speech therapist to treat your case; he or she could tell you more specifically what to do. You could also go to a school of dentistry that treats cases such as yours at no cost.

I hope these suggestions help you, but don’t forget to seek an ear, nose, and throat specialist. These physicians are qualified to perform exams that may aid in getting a more precise diagnosis.

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

We often neglect the sobering work of disciplining in favor of the much more exciting process of gathering new converts. The dazzle of public preaching, coupled with the joy of witnessing thousands being baptized, makes disciple-building seem mundane and, thus, too easy to neglect.

We neglect follow-up at our own peril and at risk to the kingdom we hope to advance. Jesus’ great commission intends that new-born believers will be continuously preserved, nurtured, and built into His body as strong disciples. All of this is evangelism—the whole process. As Peter Wagner so eloquently reminded his church growth classes, “Any scheme which separates evangelism and follow-up into distinct functions has already built into the system its own defeat.”

So what do new members need? In a word, everything! Just as newborns depend totally upon their parents for survival, so newborn believers depend completely upon their church. Evangelism must always be understood as a process, not an event. Jesus intentionally chose the familiar imagery of love, family, conception, gestation, birth, development, and maturity to describe the process by which individuals are brought to belief and matured into disciples. If we wonder what new believers need, we can simply apply what newborns need to the spiritual development of new believers.

TOTAL CARE. Loving nurture, tender care, acceptance, affirmation, companionship, conversation, administration, high-touch bonding, appreciation, security, simple food, cleaning, capacious companionship, and consistent attention are vital for the survival of babies and believers. Disciple. Long before reasoning allows an infant to comprehend dangerous situations, a firmly-worded “No!” command is essential to protect the baby from placing its hand in a fire. Such protection is essential to learning the authority of both God’s Word and the responsible parent. Discipline is not harshly punitive; it is protective. Abandoning a baby to its own conclusions would be destructive abuse.

INSTRUCTION. The milk of the Word is repetitive assurance of God’s love, acceptance, and forgiveness, freighted not so much with information as with reassurance and taught by mentoring example, not reasoned logic. Infants learn to walk not by a discourse on the dynamics of locomotion but by a patterning of “walking with them” until they eventually take their first steps.

EDUCATION. Believers must next be taught to think for themselves. Education is not just an assimilating of information. Education is learning to reason for oneself rather than merely reflecting the thoughts of others. “Why?” questions are essential in the educational steps.

DISCERNMENT. Youngsters must learn to distinguish between the genuine and clever counterfeit. When my brother John was a toddler, he drank a glass of gasoline thinking it was ginger ale. Deadly consequences were averted only by immediate intervention. Believers must be taught to test the “winds of doctrine” that are swept their way by all manner of well-meaning and ill-intentioned individuals.

DEPLOYMENT. Believers must receive ministry assignments; otherwise, they cannot grow and will remain immature and dependent. The work of the pastor is to “work” the members.

PARTNERSHIP. Those being deployed must also be partnered with experienced leaders who teach by associative example what they have experienced themselves. From the very beginning, Jesus designed a partnership role for the most effective pursuit of any good venture. It is dangerous to work alone.

SUPERVISION. The deployed must also be closely supervised to assure their success and to prevent mistakes from becoming habits. When Jesus sent His disciples two-by-two, He also brought them back together after a short time to evaluate their performance, rejoice in their successes, and instruct them for even greater achievements.

ACCOUNTABILITY. Maturing disciples must embrace accountability both to leadership and to their fellow members. Independence in belief or action indicates immaturity. Unwillingness to accept the counsel of the wider body disqualifies anyone.

RESPONSIBILITY. As disciples mature, they will value the things their Savior values. His priorities will be their priorities. His mission will become their mission. They will earn the praise and diligently work to build up His church and to hasten His coming.

REDUPLICATION. Maturity exists only when disciples are winning other new believers and helping them to become disciples. When these disciples are effectively engaged in birthing new believers, the church’s evangelistic process is complete.

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary
It is easy to build a wall.
More difficult to destroy it.
Even more difficult to build a bridge.
Yet easy to destroy it.
Make your online connection for eternity.

Become involved. Participate.

NEXT EVENTS:

Denver, CO (USA)
July 9 to 13, 2008

Nairobi, Kenya
(regional to East Africa)
August 14 to 17, 2008

Montego Bay, Jamaica
May 13 to 17, 2009

More information: www.gien.adventist.org

The Global Internet Evangelism Network is a community of evangelists and technologists who are committed to using the Internet to share the good news of the gospel. In addition to sharing, it is committed to discipling and preparing people for Christ's return.