As church leaders, we would do well to study Paul’s prayer for the church leaders in Philippians. “This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9, 10).

The ability to discern good and evil is a gift from God. Ellen G. White says, “The power of discerning good and evil is an attribute from God, and unless the human agents are in vital connection with God, they cannot discern spiritual things” (Manuscript Releases, No. 926:26:2). It is good to know that each one of us can have good discernment as a result of a close communion with God.

Discerning church leaders see what is happening beneath the surface. Such leaders see behind the facade of a member’s smile to understand how that person is really feeling. Discerning leaders see fine details in the church that others may not:

Discerning church leaders notice details. Such leaders see fine details in the church that can make a huge difference. For example, they are able to ascertain what worship services are attractive and meaningful, while others are boring and weak.

Discerning church leaders know how to differentiate. For instance, such leaders see the difference between positive and negative, important and trivial, spiritual and secular, urgent and patient.

Discerning church leaders see connec-
tions. Such leaders notice the links between how the church is doing today and how it was doing last year. These leaders help church mem-
bers retain their hope in the Second Coming of Jesus, remembering that the world is not our eternal home. Their feet are on this earth, but their minds are in heaven.

Discerning church leaders see what is happen-
ing beneath the surface. Such leaders see behind the facade of a member’s smile to understand how that person is really feeling. Discerning leaders feel the pain that may lie behind such external indicators as a snide remark. These leaders know that behind an unloving action is a heart in need of spiritual support.

Discerning leaders see what many people in the same circumstance cannot see. This spiritual ability provides a deep perception to promote excellence in the church. Church leaders with this gift have a good sense of what is really happening. Such leaders see little things that can make a big difference. They sense what people around them are feeling. They perceive how one thing is related to, different from, or important than another.
do those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth” (Ellen G. White.

**Evangelism**

We must continually promote faith through various methods. But there is always a need for printed books and materials. It is important to acknowledge that the Internet is one of the most recent ways to spread knowledge, but people still prefer to read printed books.

**DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT: “IF YOU CAN’T READ, YOU CAN’T LEAD?”**

I wouldn’t overstate this. There may be times and places where a person who hasn’t learned to read can become a leader. I believe God calls people to leadership who are willing to listen to His voice and follow Him. Having said that, I believe effective leadership requires the ability to read and analyze information.

**Historically, Church Growth Coincides with Publishing House Property. How Do You Feel These Two Entities Support Each Other?**

PACIFIC PRESS HAS AN INCREDIBLE STORY OF ITS MORE THAN 130 YEARS OF EXISTENCE. COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT HOW GOD HAS HELPED PACIFIC PRESS OVERCOME THE MANY OBSTACLES IN ITS WAY?

When James and Ellen White established Pacific Press in the early 1870s, the church’s “mission field” was the west coast of the United States. The church was young and small, but the Whites had a vision to establish a publishing house where the gospel could be shared throughout the world. In the early years, the church faced many challenges, including financial struggles and the need for new materials to share the gospel. However, the Whites persevered and established a publishing house that continues to produce soul-winning materials today.

**WHAT IS PACIFIC PRESS’ MISSION STATEMENT?**

Pacific Press has a mission statement that reflects its role as a publisher of materials for evangelistic outreach and spiritual nurture of church members. The statement reads:

“Pacific Press® Publishing Association, established in 1874, is a mission statement that reflects the reach and spiritual nurture of the church. Pacific Press is the voice of the church, and its mission is to reach and nurture the church through its publications.”

**WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH'S PUBLISHING HOUSES?**

The church's publishing houses also produce materials that provide spiritual nurturing and training for members. The church's mission is to reach and nurture the church through its publications, and the publishing houses play a crucial role in this mission. They produce a variety of materials, including books, magazines, tracts, and recordings of Christian music, to help members grow in their faith.

**INTERVIEW**

**INTERVIEW**

Elder Dale Galusha, who once worshiped and prayed with us, has left the church. Much has been said about member retention. Ellen White counseled that the printed page was one of the most important tools in human and material investment in human and material resources to carry out our world mission.”

**Where Have You Seen the Importance of Printed Books in Ministry?**

For many years, literature evangelists (formerly called colporteurs) have been the front-line workers of the church—the ones knocking on doors in communities. Many members trace their conversion, or the conversion of parents or grandparents, to the publishing house. When the publishing house is producing and distributing soul-winning material, the church is growing and vibrant.

**Barna Research, a Ventura, California-based polling firm, reported in 2007 that 97% of people who have been at one particular church for more than five years tend to read less.” Although the data does not indicate that reading is necessary for leadership, it does suggest that reading may be associated with leadership.**

**WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PERSONNEL AND MATERIALS IN THE CHURCH’S MISSION?**

The role of personnel and materials in the church’s mission is crucial. The church’s mission is to reach and nurture the church through its publications, and the publishing houses play a crucial role in this mission. They produce a variety of materials, including books, magazines, tracts, and recordings of Christian music, to help members grow in their faith.

**What are some of the challenges that Pacific Press has faced over the years?**

Over the years, there have been many challenges, including financial challenges and the need for new materials to share the gospel. However, the Whites persevered and established a publishing house that continues to produce soul-winning materials today.

**When did Pacific Press start?**

Pacific Press was established in 1874.
WHERE IN THE WORLD CAN HAVE ACCESS TO THE PRODUCTS WE PRODUCE?

HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCH ELDER PURCHASE THESE RESOURCES?

Spend time at your local Adventist Book Center—most conferences around the world have a book center and provide a selection of valuable resources. And by visiting www.AdventistBookCenter.com on the Internet, church elders can see the entire selection of products available from the two official Adventist publishing houses in North America.

WHAT GRATIFICATION DO YOU PERSONALLY RECEIVE IN KNOWING THAT THROUGH YOUR WORK AT PACIFIC PRESS, MANY ARE HEARING THE MESSAGE OF JESUS AND SALVATION?

We receive many letters each week from individuals who tell us what the books and magazines have done in their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. These letters come from prisoners who have found a Pacific Press book. They come from individuals who have picked up a copy of Signs of the Times from a newsbox in their town or who have purchased a book from a literature evangelist. They come from individuals across North America and from countries around the world.

WHAT MESSAGE CAN YOU LEAVE US WITH TO ENCOURAGE WORLDWIDE LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS?

Take time to do two things. First, read a book. Let its words touch your heart. Second, share a book or a magazine. Let the printed page do its work in soul-winning! When you share a piece of literature, you may not see immediate results, but God promises that the day will come when we will see wonderful results! Keep reading. Keep sharing.

Dale Galusha
President of Pacific Press

The art of speech: OVERTCOME THE FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Now go! I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say!

Exodus 4:12

There are many Christians who are afraid of preaching. Fear of public speaking is so ancient that even the Bible makes reference to it.

Moses is a good example of a leader who was afraid of public speaking. In his argument against the Lord’s order to free His people through speech, he avoided it by giving some excuses. But God assured him with a voice that inspired conviction and trust:

“Now go; I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say!”

But still Moses pleaded fearfully:

“O Lord, please send someone else to do it!” (Exodus 4:12, 13 NW)

I believe this story was registered in the Bible to show us how challenging it is to deliver some messages. Moses only stopped arguing when God suggested his brother, Aaron, could speak for him.

How about you? Have you let other people speak for you because you were afraid? The following suggestions can help you overcome the fear of public speaking:

1. Choose in advance the subject you plan to present to the church.
2. Organize your thoughts and break them into parts or divisions within the sermon.
3. When you start talking, go straight to the subject, first, captivate the public by telling a story, a testimony, a reflection, or showing the benefits the church will gain from studying the subject.
4. Avoid starting your message by giving a personal opinion about the subject, which might oppose the listener’s opinion. Show the common ground first and then, in a very pleasant way present opinions that might cause an impact.

5. When presenting a subject, clearly state the theme you want to develop, the problem you wish to solve, and the topics you are going to deal with. Thus, the listeners will be able to better follow your thoughts.
6. Follow through within the stages you outlined. Apply the theme to their current reality, give examples, but do not exaggerate so that it doesn’t become unbelievable.
7. Make your conclusions and leave the best part, the greatest emotion, for the end. End with a reflection or something that makes them think or act according to the message.

Think about this: Those who are able to overcome the fear of the unknown and the fear of someone else’s evaluation are the ones who truly have surrendered themselves to Divine guidance; they are the ones who allow the Holy Spirit to use them. Therefore, stop criticizing yourself, stop thinking about yourself and think about the good your message will bring to others.

May you be able to reach this goal, by God’s grace!

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil
TAKING THE GOSPEL TO PEOPLE one-by-one

Global Mission is the frontline mission arm of Adventist Mission, an office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s world headquarters. Since 1990 Global Mission has established some 11,000 congregations in previously unreached areas of the world. This can vary from a North American suburb with no Adventist presence to an entire country in the 10/40 Window—a region stretching from West Africa to the Far East, which is home to many of the world’s major religions, relatively few Christians, and fastest growing cities.

Global Mission’s frontline pioneers share the gospel through a holistic ministry that many include caring for the sick, running literacy programs, holding evangelistic meetings, and giving Bible studies. In a previously unreached North Asian city that can’t be named, a group of Global Mission pioneers started a health evangelism program to help the community with chronic health problems. The result is six house churches and some 30 new church members. Law student Jacob is grateful that an Adventist English language school in Bangkok, Thailand, showed him the purpose and meaning in life for which he was seeking. In Lesotho—a country in Southern Africa—Futho went door-to-door asking people if they’d like to take Bible studies until he found enough people for an evangelism seminar. Now he has a congregation of 12 people.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

• Go to www.Global-Mission.org/annual-offering/ to download this year’s Annual Sacrifice Offering program.
• This quarter’s Adventist Mission DVD has a specific video to show during the offering call.
• For questions and to learn more visit www.Global-Mission.org or call 1-800-648-5824.
THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

What is the relationship between religion and politics? Can a church member or the church itself be involved in politics? How should we relate to the state and to the political authorities who are in charge?

Dr. Bert Beach began his article “The Christian and Politics” with the above three questions. Many Seventeenth Adventists think that the church has no political role to play and that individual members should not be involved in politics. Many Christians have the opposite point of view and believe that it is the responsibility of every Christian to influence politicians to build a better world. Many Christians also think that to do nothing is to support the wrongs and allow injustice to rule the world, while a minority of Christians think that the church’s mission is only to build the city of God here on earth.

How do we choose the right position? First of all, we have to look at Jesus. What did He do? What was His position toward politics? Jesus was not a political leader. His temptation in the wilderness had a political dimension. His feeding of the multitude could have been the first step in His assuming kingly power. What about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem? But He resisted the temptation to become a political figure. His mission was primarily spiritual, yet it had strong political implications. He taught justice and honesty. He condemned the rich and the poor who oppressed the poor. He spent time with the poor and the oppressed.

The boundary between social and political issues is not always easy to determine. Adventist pioneers were involved in some social issues. At the beginning, Adventists were concerned about alcoholism, slavery, the oppression of women, and the educational needs of children and youth.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Col. 3:23

The values of our faith and the law of God identify the border between these two sometimes-conflicting realities.

For the Christian, rulers are God’s servants, whether they acknowledge this responsibility or not. Ellen G. White wrote: “Rulers are God’s servants, and they are to serve their time as His apprentices. . . . They are not to connive at one act of dishonesty or injustice. They are not to do a base, unjust action themselves, nor to sustain others in acts of oppression. Wise rulers will not permit the people to be oppressed because of the envy and jealousy of those who disregard the law of God.”

A CHRISTIAN CAN HOLD A HIGH POSITION

Great opportunities exist for Christians who are employed by the government in positions of leadership or public service. They must use their God-given gifts and talents for the good of the community and the country. They must continue to work for the good of all and “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31), rather than for selfish purposes or their own promotion and interest. During Bible times, God’s men and women who held prominent positions of power and authority were committed to their work, to their people, and to God. Think of Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah. All of them faithfully fulfilled an important role in God’s plan.

A CHRISTIAN CAN HAVE A GOOD INFLUENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT

When church members are elected to significant positions of public office and responsibility, they must use their God-given gifts and talents for the good of the community and the nation. They must continue to provide leadership and guidance, and to work for the good of all and “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31), rather than for selfish purposes or their own promotion and interest. During Bible times, God’s men and women who held prominent positions of power and authority were committed to their work, to their people, and to God. Think of Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah. All of them faithfully fulfilled an important role in God’s plan.

The Christian’s motivation for service must be far more than monetary reward or social prestige. It has to reveal the kind of God he or she believes in—a God who loves people. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus became a servant because He loves us.

Ellen G. White wrote: “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government. He desires only the service of love, and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.” This is fundamental.

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A CHRISTIAN HOLDING A HIGH POSITION CAN HELP PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Through political influence, a person in a high position can help to ensure the protection of the people from government policies that are harmful. It is important for Christians to be involved in the political process in order to make a positive impact on society. By using their platform, they can be a positive influence for good or evil. They have opportunities to be important witnesses to the truth, just like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon. Should not that influence for good or evil be used as a platform for political campaigning?

For too many Adventists, Sabbath mornings consist of little more than going to church. But the Sabbath is a day of rest and worship, a time for holy rest and reflection. The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not dictate how to vote, but as members of the church, we are responsible for making informed decisions. It is important to remember that voting is an individual decision. However, because of the rivalry that often exists between political parties, it is better, when possible, to campaign as independents.

At Sunnyvale Adventist Church in California, Ellen White wrote: "Would we know how we may please the Savior? It is not engaging in political speeches, either in or out of the pulpit." For Adventists who are serving their country during times of crises, God says, "And who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Sabbath School lessons often address political issues, but these lessons are not intended to be a platform for political campaigning. The church should not be involved in political campaigning. A CHRISTIAN HOLDING A HIGH POSITION CAN HELP PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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II. THE CHURCH GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OUR LOVE TO GOD.

A little old man was seen walking to church every Sabbath morning. He was deaf, so he could not hear the sermon, the music of the choir, or the hymns sung by the congregation. A scoffer asked, “Why do you spend your Sabbath in that church when you can’t hear a word?” He replied, “I want my neighbors to know which side I’m on!”

We demonstrate our love through our giving. In the book of Malachi, God asks a penetrating question (read Mal. 4:8-10). In this passage, the people are charged with robbing God. Why? Because they are not giving God ten per cent of their income as He instructed them to do.

CONCLUSION

These five points remind us of the importance of being united as a church family. If we want to grow and maintain our spiritual health, the church can help us. If we need support in difficult times, we also call it in the church.

How can we strengthen our personal relationship with God? By our commitment to weekly worship. We give our time to activities that are most important to us. When we make our weekly meeting with God a priority in our lives.

III. THE CHURCH IS WHERE WE FIND STRENGTH DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.

In Hebrews 10:24, 25, Paul talks about the difficulty of our spiritual walk and the necessity of persevering in our faith, and he gives us practical help. He tells us not to stop meeting together.

Together let us consider five reasons why it is important to be a committed part of a church family.

1. WE MEET CHRIST IN A SPECIAL WAY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP.

In Matthew 18:20, we read these familiar words: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Jesus is present when believers are gathered together. Kent Hughes writes, “It is true that one does not have to go to church to be a Christian. He does not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases, if he does not, he will have a very poor relationship” (commentary on Hebrews).

2. THE CHURCH IS THE LABORATORY FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING.

The church is a framework for living the Christian life. Each church member has a unique spiritual gift, and his/her role of responsibility in the church should be matched up with that gift. In this way, each elder can address the specific areas of ministry.

Bruce Fenner has been an elder in the Caldwell, Idaho, church for the past five years and has served as first elder for the past year. He and his wife, Leticia, who were our main speakers in this series, have a rich heritage and passion for the church. 

Bruce Fenner believes that service starts with an intimate relationship with God. “When we are working for the church or doing God’s work, it is very easy to get caught up in the work of the ‘Work’ and lose sight of what we are doing and why we are doing it. If we are going to serve God well and present Him to others, we must stay committed to growing in our own personal spiritual walk with God.”

In his free time, Fenner enjoys snow skiing with his boys or camping with his family in the beautiful mountains and forests of Idaho. He does with this thoughtful wonderful thought: “It is truly amusing when you stop and think about the fact that God, the Creator of the universe, the Savor of all mankind, the One who has the power to simply speak things into existence, actually loves us so much that He wants to have a real and personal relationship with each of us. It is so humbling and such an incredible honor when we come to fully understand this. It is a real privilege to serve a God like that.”

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If we study Luke 17:11-19 carefully, we will find a powerful object lesson that will stay with us for life. Let’s look at the account. “As he [Jesus] was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’”

1. IT IS A SHARED JOY

Let’s read Philippians 1:3-5, 8. In the words following the salutation, Paul tells the Thessalonians that he has been praying for them. But he doesn’t just pray—he prays with joy, and his joy comes “because of your partnership in the gospel.” Paul’s joy is a shared joy. This partnership is more than just spending time together. There is a unity, a purpose that is held in common.

Think about a great experience you’ve had. Perhaps it was the birth of a child. Maybe it was a great war paid to you or a life-changing insight. What brought you joy was not just the people you were with; it was the fact that you were sharing a joy that was deeper than yourself.

II. IT IS A CONFIDENT JOY

Now let’s read Philippians 3:1-6. Here Paul shares one of the greatest reasons for joy. He never said this was easy. He never said this was painless. But he knew what it was and he was confident in it. And so was Paul. Paul is not just saying that he was happy; he is saying that his joy was made complete as you shared it with others. A shared joy is a deeper joy.

III. IT IS AN INCREASING JOY

In Philippians 1:3-11, Paul says that the believers will continue to grow. They are sure of their destiny, but they should also be progressing in the faith. The Christian Life is not static; it is growing. We experience joy as we see ourselves becoming more and more like Christ. But is the experience of joy unique? Perhaps it is not the experience of most Christians.

Many of us begin our Christian life in a rainbow of joy, which gradually dissipates. By the time we have been believers for a few years, we are often just “going through the motions.” Our faith has become lifeless. That’s why Paul’s prayer is so significant for us. He prays that God may love you and love you more. But he is not just asking that we feel more strongly about each other; he wants us to grow in our love for the Father. This is a love that is not more intense but based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

The Christian Life is lifeless. That’s why Paul’s prayer is significant for us. He wants us to grow in our love for the Father. This is a love that is more intense but based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

IV. IT IS A DEEPLY ROOTED JOY

In Philippians 1:6, Paul tells us of the fact that God is with us. There is a truth of the Christian life that cannot be coincidental. It is a love that is not mere emotion. It is based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

The Christian Life is lifeless. That’s why Paul’s prayer is significant for us. He wants us to grow in our love for the Father. This is a love that is more intense but based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

V. IT IS A REWARDING JOY

In Philippians 1:8, Paul tells us of the fact that our reward is not yet known. There is a truth of the Christian life that cannot be coincidental. It is a love that is not mere emotion. It is based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

The Christian Life is lifeless. That’s why Paul’s prayer is significant for us. He wants us to grow in our love for the Father. This is a love that is more intense but based on our knowledge and depth of insight.

VI. IT IS A JOYOUS CHRISTIAN

In Philippians 1:10, Paul tells us of the fact that our reward is not yet known. There is a truth of the Christian life that cannot be coincidental. It is a love that is not mere emotion. It is based on our knowledge and depth of insight.
CHRISTMAS

How easy it is to miss the magnificence of the story of Christmas. We know the facts. We've heard about the shepherds, the Magi, and Mary and Joseph. And because we're familiar with the story, it's easy to miss its incredible power. In difficult times as well as in good times, this is precisely the message we need to hear. It bears in it our hope, our source of strength, and our reason for joy.

Let's look at this with fresh eyes and address the basic questions once more. If you were hearing the Christmas story for the very first time, you might ask several questions. Who was this man Jesus, and what makes His birth so significant? What was the purpose of His coming? What difference does this make in my life?

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT JESUS?

Was Jesus just another man or was He someone special? Was Jesus, as some say, the Son of God or not?

At the beginning of his biography of Jesus, the apostle John writes: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Through the Word all things were made, and without the Word nothing was made that has been made.” In the Word was life, and that life has been the light of men. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (John 1:1-5).

God didn't declare His love because He was the light of men. He declared His love for us. He came to us in order to tell us in person that God loves us. Read 1 John 4:10: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

But Jesus came to earth to tell us in person that God does love us. Read 1 John 4:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Therefore, John tells us that Jesus came to earth to make it possible for you and me to love forever in God's presence. When Jesus became human, He replied several things:

1. He declared His love for us. God became man so that He could communicate His love to us. Most of us feel that we have disappointed God. We say, “I sure hope God grades on a curve.” We know we have made mistakes. Consequently, we feel that God could not really love us. But Jesus came to earth to tell us in person that God does love us. Read John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

2. He demonstrated His love for us. God became man not only to declare His love, but also to demonstrate it. In each of the verses we looked at earlier, there is an additional idea. John 3:3 tells us that God “giving” His Son. In 1 John we read about Christ making “an atoning sacrifice for sin.”

3. John 3:16 tells us that God became a man so that He could communicate His love to us. We see the cross and the empty tomb as the key to our salvation. But Jesus demonstrated His love for us in other ways, too.

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CONCLUSION

Christmas reminds us that the world is not alone. God sees us. He loves us. Christmas reminds us that there is a wonderful reason for hope. Christmas is not about gifts, programs, or family gatherings. Those are not the reason for the season; Jesus is the reason. God became man because of His great love for us.

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Let visitors go through line first during fellow-
ship meals, but assign friendly members to sit with
your visitors, making the entire Sabbath experience
a memorable one in our church, we even had a friend
on Sabbath when there wasn’t a fellowship meal.
A visitor comes to your church and lives in the
area within 48 hours? Some cookies and deliver
them.

Recently two families from my church came back
from their vacations over spring break. They told me
that at one church they visited, they didn’t feel as
welcome as they did at our church, which made them
consider coming to our church. If you’ve ever stayed
in a nice hotel, you know that it not only costs more,
it also has more amenities: chocolates on the pillows,
fresh flowers on the table, bottles of water in the fridge,
and the like. But you know what else makes a hotel
come alive? When the bell rings, and a bellhop in a
cummerbund and top hat comes out and says, “What can
I do for you?”

“Staff,” is what I wrote down in my church leadership
meeting a few months ago. And suddenly, we’re doing
it. The reason? It’s that old adage: “You catch more
fishes with a net.”

All of my church members know that they’re
ministers, which means we’re all in this together.
More importantly, we’re all servants, and part of be-
ing a servant is being a greeter. (Every member’s a
greeter).

I’m certain that everyone reading this will agree
with me: When Sabbath School ended, none of the other
class members introduced themselves to him; it was as if he
wasn’t even there, other than his taking their place.

The first part of the worship service, invite
visitors to stand up and say “Hello.” If I were to go into
certain churches, I’d say, “Hi.”

If you’ve ever stayed in a nice hotel, you know that
that’s why we want to make our churches as friendly
as possible.

During the first part of the worship service, invite
everyone to break out and shake a few hands. It’s a
memorable experience for both you and the visitor.

A few years ago, I was at a conference in Atlanta,
Georgia. Pastor David Hughes in South Florida posted a
card. Pastor David Hughes in South Florida posted a
message about how to be more evangelistic during our time

Gary Ketelsen

The Visitor-friendly Church

A certain visitor showed up early at an Adventist
church, not knowing I’d receive a parking space
behind him. He realized that he’d be parked behind
a young man and said, “You’re sitting in our place.
You moved over to let them have ‘their’ place.” He
looked over to let them have “their” place. As the visitor

As the visitor

Jesus represents Himself as one of the least
Adventists; however, I wonder if we can learn a few
things about how to be more evangelistic during our time

people in the parking lot seem in a hurry, they
are going somewhere, they are not looking for a
point of contact, and they are not interested in talking
or being identified as church members until they
actually come in. People in the parking lot seem in a hurry,
thinking about their business and where they are going.

And by the way, what do you think of your church
when it comes to friendly churches? A recent poll
from the Atlanta Journal Constitution found that
Atlanta is the friendliest city in America. This said
nothing about church and Christianity. Is it safe to say
that “the only difference between our church and theirs is
the way we treat our members and our visitors.”

Is it safe to say that “the only difference between
our church and theirs is the way we treat our members
and our visitors.”

When Sabbath School ended, none of the other class
members introduced themselves to him; it was as if he
wasn’t even there, other than his taking their place.

In one church I pastored, we even formed a hospitality
commitee to invite visitors home on Sabbath when there
wasn’t a fellowship meal.

If a visitor comes to your church and lives in the
area within 48 hours, bake some cookies and deliver
them.
When I look at the youth and teenagers in our church, I notice many are doing very little to advance the gospel. Organizing youth into small groups to do outreach could produce fantastic results to an extent rarely seen in the history of Adventism.

Ellen G. White counsels us, “There are many lines in which the youth can find opportunity for helpful effort. Let them organize into bands for Christian service, and the cooperation will prove an assistance and an encouragement” (Education, 269).

After reading widely on church growth and serving the church in several countries and in various regions of Brazil, I decided that the creation of small groups was not merely a church-growth fad; rather, it is God’s plan for His church today.

The concept of small groups is an interdenominational trend. There is a constant effort among evangelical churches to organize themselves into cells. Dr. Christian A. Schwarz, an expert in church growth, conducted a 10-year study of more than 1,000 congregations from 32 countries. He studied eight basic characteristics of healthy, growing churches and identified them as follows:

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship service
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships

Referring to small groups in relation to these eight characteristics, he says, “If we were to identify any one principle as the most important, then without doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups” (Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches, 32).

I believe that organizing youth into small groups will accentuate the idea of church as family and community. A family ought to be the best small group. A colleague of mine once told me that “the church of the future will learn to live like the church of the past,” which means that the ideal model of worship and fellowship has been and always will be based on the family—from the lost paradise to the restored Eden.

Doug Fields, youth pastor at the Saddleback Church, has written more than 20 books for youth, among them Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry. He says, “The most effective way to produce ‘biblical’ fellowship in the lives of our youth is through their participation in small groups. . . . in the church, small groups are essential, especially to adolescent spiritual maturity” (138).

There are at least three reasons why youth should be involved in and committed to small group ministry:

1. Small groups for youth will provide a suitable environment to get acquainted. Young people often choose their friends because of proximity (school, work, etc.). Providing a comfortable setting for them to meet other young people from their church will nurture friendships. It will also provide an opportunity for them to become involved in church activities and to feel they are a valued and integral part of their church.

2. Feeling rejected can be traumatic for youth. Everyone wants to be part of a group. Young people want to belong, and they want to be part of a community with similar interests. Developing small groups in the church makes this possible.

During the prophet Samuel’s time, the principle of working with young people in groups was very important. “In the accomplishment of this object, Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. The instructors were men not only versed in divine truth, but those who had themselves enjoyed communion with God, and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and piety” (Ellen G. White, Fundamentals of Christian Education, 96).

2. Small groups for youth will provide an environment that encourages Christian friendships and caring for one another. Christianity is a religion of relationships. First and foremost is one’s relationship with Jesus, through private prayer, Bible reading, and witnessing about Him. Second is our relationship with our neighbors, especially the people in “my” youth group.

The Bible is full of Christian exhortations whose purpose is to stimulate fellowship in communities and caring for one another. “But through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). “Therefore receive one another” (Rom. 15:7). “Bearing one another, and forgiving one another” (Col. 3:13). “Seek one another” (Rom. 16:16). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10). “Able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). “Submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21). “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11).

The biblical expression “one another” occurs 53 times in the New Testament, most of the time challenging us to a healthy relationship with our neighbors. God created us to live in communities. It is in the fellowship of a group that we discover the reason for our being and the true value each person has before God. “The principle inculcated in the injunction ‘Be kindly affectionate to one another’ is the cornerstone of the Christian character. . . . Christian courtesy is the golden clasp which unites the members of the family in bonds of love, becoming closer and stronger every day” (Ellen G. White, Reflecting Christ, 189).

3. Small groups for youth will provide an environment for faith development. One of the
major challenges in youth ministry is to get young people to make a commitment to the church mission, using the gifts each one has received as God’s good stewards. Our young people have many gifts and abilities; however, most are not using them because they either don’t know how, are afraid of witnessing, or are not given the opportunity to participate.

What is the solution? The answer may be in the creation of small groups for youth, where young people are given the opportunity to develop their gifts. By learning to use their gifts gradually and in a supportive environment, they will lose their fear of witnessing.

It is time to help our youth organize into small groups to study the Bible, to sing praises to God, and to pray and witness to schoolmates or colleagues. This is the challenge today: “Young men and young women, cannot you form companies, and, as soldiers of Christ, enlist in the work, putting all your tact and skill and talent into the Master’s service, that you may save souls from ruin? Let there be companies organized in every church to do this work” (Ellen G. White, Christian Service, 96).

According to sociologists, human beings want to be part of a small group, not a multitude. They want to be noted, loved, and protected; they want to be part of a winning team. This being true, there may be no more effective method of working with our youth than in small groups.

GIOVANNI NEGRO

“I thank the Lord for the blessings and joy He has given me!” exclaims Giovanni Negro, a local church elder at the Bracciano Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has been an elder at this little country church near Rome, Italy, for two years and has been an Adventist since 1987. He is married to his beautiful wife Lucia, and they have two precious daughters, Elisa and Gloria. He is a very active church member, not only as an elder but also as the director of the Pathfinder Club and evangelism program.

Giovanni believes that every ministry he is a part of is solely for the Lord and that each duty is important and gratifying. He does not care if these functions require a lot of his time and energy. Instead, he focuses on the reason he serves and ministers patiently in the Lord. “In the past, I have often thought of what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:16 (NLT) when he writes, ‘And who is adequate for such a task as this?’ I realize that working as an elder is a great responsibility because of my accountability to the church and to God; however, God has always given me the strength during my ministry to serve my church with love and humility.”

His pastor describes him as a spiritual person, a committed member, and a great helper in the ministry. He says that working with a local church leader like Giovanni is a blessing each pastor desires to have.

THE LOCAL CHURCH.

The Levites and even the priests from Aaron’s family dedicated much less time to the Tabernacle or Temple than a pastor dedicates to the church today, and that did not take away their right to tithe income. If tithe income is based on the time dedicated to the service of the church, the pastor’s dedication is much greater than the Levites’ was. On the other hand, the pastor ministers to several churches, and he does not get a salary from each one; a single salary takes care of all. As for the working time of the Levites, even when they were still a small tribe, they totaled thousands of members (Num. 4:47-49; 1 Chron. 23:1-4), who lived in their “cities of refuge” (Num. 35) and only went to work in the service of the temple following a schedule system which did not include working every day or every week. Not all of them had priestly duties. Thousands served as judges, administrators, and other officials. Some served throughout their entire lives as gatekeepers, wood providers, musicians, keepers of part of the sanctuary, etc. (Read 1 Chron. 23:4 up to chapter 25.) They worked for 25 years but received wages from tithe all their lives, before and after they reached 50 years of age, when they became counselors of the younger generation (Num. 8:24, 25). In fact, their pay was not based on what they did in the temple, but on their total and exclusive dedication as ministers for life. They taught, administered, and represented their God before the people—they were doctrine-keepers. This is the type of ministry God expects as described in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy. Despite its imperfections, that is how the Adventist ministry is. It cannot be measured using the same criteria as other common duties.

BECAUSE HE DIVIDES HIS TIME BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CHURCHES IN HIS DISTRICT, THE PASTOR SPENDS VERY LITTLE TIME AT THE LOCAL CHURCH. SINCE LOCAL WORK IS PERFORMED BY VOLUNTEER MEMBERS, SHOULD THE PASTOR RECEIVE INCOME FROM TITHE?
Welcome, Pastor!

You may not fully understand the joy and anticipation with which we welcome you to our church. We know that we will love you and look forward to getting acquainted with you and your family.

We have had many pastors through the years. Our congregation is small (less than 200 members), and for various reasons, the pastors have left one by one. They have gone on to retirement or have been drawn to a warmer climate; others need to be closer to family members. The mission field has called, as have larger churches and the work of full-time evangelism. We understand why our pastors have chosen to move on to new and different challenges, for this is how we all grow. Saying farewell to each pastor has brought sadness to our hearts.

Again we have been searching for just the right person to be our pastor. We are so glad you and your family are the ones who will capture a warm spot in our hearts and memories forever.

Our congregation is diverse. The occupations the people have chosen are varied: some are laborers, some are in businesses, some are professionals, and some have retired. Most are successful in whatever career they have chosen. In spite of difficulties, they try to maintain a cheerful attitude.

Our needs are many and varied. Some have just lost a loved one. Others are coming to terms with a doctor’s diagnosis of a terminal illness or of a disease that will disable them for the remaining years of their lives. Our senior members face the prospect of entering nursing homes. Businesses have financial struggles. Farmers cope with weather conditions and low prices for their crops. Parents have many concerns for their children.

We need you to feed our souls. We want you to give us sermons that will uplift us and guide us through the week. Visit us in our homes. Be sensitive when we are hurting and rejoice with us through the good times. Let your pastoral heart touch us personally.

We are aware that some find it easy to divide the congregation into the young and the old, the wealthy and the poor, or the well-educated and the uneducated. We prefer to be known as a family that works, plays, and prays together.

Some church leaders have held their positions of leadership for several years. Some members may think these people want to be leaders because of the prestige and “power” of their positions, whereas the leaders believe it has been their duty to serve when asked by nominating committees through the years. Our pastors have taught us that we each have talents, and that it is our responsibility as followers of Jesus to use these talents. Whether our leaders are young or old, male or female, we appreciate their talents and welcome their willingness to serve.

Many of us have lived in our community for our entire lives, and we have worked to keep our church a thriving church. Without the ministry of our strong leaders, this church might not have survived long enough for you to be our pastor.

Perhaps you may think one of us is the Patriarch or the Matriarch of the church. Thank you for the compliment, for that puts us in a class with Abraham and Sarah and others whom God considers it well for us to study and emulate. We would rather think of ourselves as God’s children whose lives and hearts and souls are involved in living for Christ. Part of that life is being a faithful church member.

We want you to develop a relationship with us, to move on to new and different experiences in your former pastorates, leave it there and come to us with an open heart and mind. Anticipate that you will find acceptance and love.

Welcome to our hearts! May there be mutual understanding and love. May your ministry be fruitful and productive. May we be that “perfect” congregation of which you have always dreamed.

Evelyn Glass is the former director of Women’s Ministries in the Mid-America Union.

We love through all our faults and mistakes. Help us to grow in the grace of Christ. May we never leave God’s house, when you have spoken, without feeling Christ’s love projected through you.

Help us know your needs. Allow us to be your comforters when you need comfort. We want to be understanding when your children are (like ours) less than perfect. To see you tired and weary does not make us happy, so take time to relax and enjoy your family. Uphold and support your spouse. If you have children, reserve time in your busy schedule for them. By placing your family first, you will set the right example for us.

We need you to feed our souls. We are aware that some find it easy to divide the congregation into the rich and the poor, or the well-educated and the uneducated. We prefer to be known as a family that works, plays, and prays together.

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Resolving conflicts

Conflict is just one of the many issues facing church elders. Sometimes conflicts are motivated by diverging ideas; other times, conflict is caused by differences in methods or in differing interpretations of certain church situations or programs.

Conflicts may be productive if they motivate a deeper reflection about the decisions to be made or if they promote a fusion of ideas, a consensus. For that to happen, people need to be willing to accept differing viewpoints and be open to compromise. The results will almost always be positive. Leaders who deal effectively with conflict show their parishioners that they can be trusted.

However, it is not always easy for leaders to resolve conflicts. Pride and vanity may turn differences over concepts or methods into personal attacks. That is when emotions erupt. At that point, opposing parties, personal dissension, offense, intrigue, and dispute begin. You probably know what happens next: the church notices that its leaders are not united, the parties and disputes corrupt the members, and the leadership loses its credibility. Those who should act as spiritual guides have jeopardized their influence. Preaching loses its power, and the spirituality of the entire body deteriorates.

Dear elder, do not allow this devilish process to occur in your church, or, if dissent is already present, respond quickly to correct the situation. Here are several suggestions, taken from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, for dealing with conflict in the church.

Gather with the elders and, with much prayer, study this article together. If possible, do the same with all the other leaders in a church committee meeting.

POINTER FOR RESOLVING OR AVOIDING CONFLICT

Be one with Jesus. "In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these disciples, differing so widely in natural characteristics, in training, and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself" (Ellen G. White, Education, 86).

Be humble. Be humble enough to accept different opinions. Accept that the best ideas are not always yours. "We each need the help we can receive from others. God will work in other minds than ours. The various gifts given to different ones are to blend for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12) (Ellen G. White, The Upward Look, 127).

It is not easy, but instead of spending your energy tirelessly trying to promote your own ideas, try adopting some ideas from your leadership colleagues. Try modifying your ideas. Eventually you will see that others will be more open to your ideas as well.

For current conflicts, follow Jesus' guidance. "Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matt. 18:15).

This principle doesn't apply only when the brother is guilty. The text shows us that a personal and direct approach, coupled with love and humility, is the key to resolving conflicts. This is not the time to expose mistakes or point fingers. It is a time to seek reconciliation and freedom from the power of the devil, for there is no greater effort in which the devil strives in the church than in promoting division and intrigue.

The elder mentioned at the beginning of this article, who called to thank me, had called a few days earlier, distressed and wishing to abandon his responsibilities in the church. He was facing a terrible personal conflict with another influential church leader. With prayer and humility, he took the initiative to seek out the brother, admitted his own fault, and expressed with a lot of prudence the points that offended him as well. The result was tears, hugs, and reconciliation. The name of the Lord was honored, the church benefited, and the devil left ashamed.

In the following statement, Ellen White encourages us to adopt the same attitude: "All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong, the Spirit of God binds heart to heart, and there is music in heaven over the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error" (Ellen G. White, The Upward Look, 127).
Sexual misconduct by clergy has dominated the headlines in recent months. Predatory violation of children is particularly reprehensible, and calls for punishment and reform have come from laity as well as fellow clergy who realize their own reputations are besmirched by the sinful behavior of a few miscreants.

As the media reports on individual clergy criminals, another level of wickedness—organizational misconduct—should be carefully evaluated by every denomination. When an individual clergy is transferred from one location to another with sexual misconduct by the transferred pastor, then the wider group contributes to the sin of the minister and should be accountable to the victims.

And this is not just a challenge for one religious organization. Evils of pedophilia and every type of sexual misconduct cross denominational boundaries. Sexual misconduct by clergy must inform organizational conduct by the transferred pastor. Then the wider group should be accountable to the victims. Sexual misconduct by clergy must inform organizational conduct by the transferred pastor. Then the wider group should be accountable to the victims.

Various factors motivate administrators who avoid dealing with guilty clergy and, subsequently, transfer them to new locations. Perhaps the greatest contributing factor is the misconception that the church's reputation must be protected at all costs, even by keeping secrets. Rushing to forgive errant clergy and to professionally absolve them of their sins is wrong even if it's done with the best of intentions. There are severe consequences that deal with issues of moral fall. When organizational behavior does not match organizational policy, pastors conclude they will be disciplined on the basis of "who they know" more than on the basis of the basis of the basis of policy. And, in many organizations, even the policy is often ignored to protect the church's image and prevent hurting "good" clergy who are willing to do ministry.

Likewise, for those denominations (my own included) whose official policies offer no rehabilitation process and anticipate that every moral fall means dismissal from the church's service, organizational culture contributes to the sin of the minister and should be accountable to the victims. When an organizational culture refuses to deal with reality, training in sexual ethics and professional responsibility may be woefully lacking.

Too often organizations appear to express greater concern for their employee than for the person(s) victimized. Misguided empathy for the needs of a clergy often takes precedence over the victim's need to see justice. Rushing to forgive errant clergy and to professionally absolve them of their sins often ignores the severe trauma experienced by the victims. The victims feel violated and mistreated by leaders who refuse to hear their cries. In fact, victims are often blamed for seducing the clergy. One victim said, "I was made to feel that a man's job was more important than my virtue." Because the church must not only "do right" but also "appear right," laity should serve on all committees that deal with issues of misconduct and violation.

Another group of victims are often blamed for clergy sexual misconduct. Pastoral wives are viewed as contributing to their husband's sin (sexual misconduct is almost exclusively a problem of male clergy) by the assumption that they did not "meet their spouse's needs." Do not underestimate the victimization of pastoral wives and families when justice does not consider their situation. Absolute integrity in disclosure of misconduct and even unproven accusations should inform every transfer of employees. Otherwise, the organization participates in and perpetuates the very misconduct it purports to abhor.
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.

BIBLE

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. Since 2004 GIEN expanded internationally with several regional events in Asia, Africa and Europe.

NEXT EVENT:
Montego Bay, Jamaica
May 13 - 17, 2009

Become involved.
PARTICIPATE.

More information:
http://gien.adventist.org