ELDER'S DIGEST

follow the BIBLE
EDITORIAL

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TO WRITERS:

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The fifth factor is worship. Liturgy is very important; growing churches tend to have an inspiring and vibrant liturgy. Their worship services are occasions when people are connected to God and feel His presence in a very intense way.

The sixth factor we discovered in growing churches is that the leadership is involved in training other people. The church cannot grow if the members are not trained in church ministries and evangelism. Our research has shown that growing churches spend at least 10 percent of their budget on training. They also spend about one third of their time training people. That means the pastor and other leaders invest one third of their time empowering others. On the other hand, non-growing churches spend little or no time on training.

 WHY DO SOME CHURCHES GROW WHILE OTHERS DON'T? There are several factors that contribute to a church's growth. The first factor is leadership. The church grows when leaders point the members' vision in the right direction. At the Seminary, we did a study to discover the differences between growing churches and non-growing churches. One of the things we discovered is the leader's influence. The growing church has leaders (pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders) who desire to see its growth and are willing to pay the price of growth. The second factor is the members' enthusiasm about God. They are enthusiastic about the idea of growth; they talk about it and have an attitude that says that God will make wonderful things happen among them.

The third factor we discovered is sharing. When members are enthusiastic about their experiences with God, they tend to share it with other people.

The fourth factor in church growth lies in the involvement of members, not only through their enthusiasm but through their involvement in church activities, especially in community activities. Members make a difference. They witness at work, in their neighborhoods, and at home.

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH? I believe that the number one reason people leave the church is because they don't feel that they belong. Church members usually belong to groups of family and friends. I call them "church structures." When a new member arrives, he or she needs to be helped to become part of a new circle of friends. But if new members find it hard to join one of these older structures, they may leave the church. Another reason people leave is the lack of a ministry for them. This was very clear in our study. Growing churches always involve new members in advancing God's cause, both inside and outside the church.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRONG CHURCH LEADER? First, the church leader needs to be wise, spiritual, and committed to God; when deacons were being chosen in the apostolic church, this was the criteria used. Today God wants strong spiritual leaders in His churches, people who are fully committed and connected to Him.

The second characteristic is being full of hope and enthusiasm. Leaders must believe that God can do the impossible. They need to believe that every church can have a better future. They must be able to envision what that future will look like for their church and be able to share this vision clearly with the members.

Fourth, strong leaders are always training, empowering, and preparing other people to become leaders.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THE WORD “VISION”? "Vision" is the ideal God has for us and for our churches.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR A LEADER TO HAVE VISION? If leaders do not know where they are going, how can they lead? The Bible says that "people perish without vision." Vision includes direction and a better future; it’s where we are going from here. Without vision, a church becomes stagnant and dies.

WHAT IS ONE CHALLENGE ELDERs FACE TODAY? One priority is the challenge of creating a place where people can grow spiritually in a receptive, lovin- g, and joyful environment. It is im- portant that each church becomes a place where people who visit the church feel welcome and say with confidence, "I intend to come back!" The church needs to be a loving community, and we need to be patient with visitors and new members. Let’s not judge them because they are not exactly the way we would like them to be. New members need time to become more like Jesus. In the meantime, they need our support, love, and pa- tient encouragement.
Touch a Heart, Tell the World

If I were to ask you as a church leader, “What are some of the issues and challenges that the women in your congregation face?” What would you say? At General Conference Women’s Ministries we have identified six main challenges that our sisters face in their daily lives. As I travel the globe I have found that these challenges exist in every country, in varying degrees, but they do exist.

Social status, education, financial status, culture, race, first world, developing world – neither of these hinder the existence of these challenges. They are real, they decimate the lives of their victims and their families, and they are unstoppable. These challenges are:

• Threats to Health
• Workloads
• Poverty
• Lack of training, mentoring and educational opportunities
• Abuse
• Illiteracy

Let me share a brief description about each of these challenges.

1. Threats to Health - Women’s health includes her emotional, social, and physical well-being and is directly affected by social, political and economic factors. The quality of a woman’s health directly impacts her life and well-being, her family and society.

2. A Woman’s Workload - Women around the world and in all cultures face the problem of work overload. Many women are faced with the challenge of doing 90% of the world’s agricultural work which includes long work days, small salaries and then the additional hours of housework and childcare with limited access to basic necessities. On the other hand are women who deal with the balancing act of societal expectations for maintaining an intact and healthy family while achieving in a highly competitive work environment resulting in long days, limited rest and recreation, and little time with God.

3. Poverty - The UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) report “Progress of the World’s Women 2005” notes that “despite parity in primary education, disparities are still wide in secondary and tertiary education—both increasingly key to new employment opportunities.”

4. Lack of Training, Mentoring, and Opportunities - Education for all is a basic human right. For women to achieve better health, nutrition, and quality of life for themselves and their families they need equal access to education. Lack of education results in women being trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited options for economic improvement which results in sentencing their children to chronic poverty and limited education.

5. Abuse - Domestic violence, incest, rape, and battering are all too common burdens that women carry. Physical, sexual, and psychological battering happens to small girls, adolescents, single, and married adult women, including elderly women. No stratum of society is immune from the epidemic of violence and as a church we believe that tolerance of abuse is a denial of Christ.

6. Illiteracy - There are nearly one billion people in the world who are illiterate, one-fifth of the world’s population. One out of every three women in the world cannot read and write. Statistics show that two-thirds of the world’s non-literate population and one-third of all heads of households are women, yet they carry out two-thirds of the world’s work.

I know this information seems a bit overwhelming and as you read you are thinking about your country and if these problems really exist. Let me assure you, they exist. These are real challenges that our sisters deal with not only in the community but also within our church walls.

So how can we, the church help? Is there something that you as a church elder can do to help with these problems? Yes there is, and I’m so glad you asked.

The first thing you can do is to create an awareness of these problems in your church. Do an assessment of your church, talk with the pastor, church leaders and some of the women in your church. Ask them which of these problems they think are challenges to women in the church and in the community. Why the community? Because the problems of the community are also the problems of the church. Baptized members don’t leave their social challenges and issues behind when they get baptized. They bring them into the church and they need to be acknowledged and then helped.

But the greater challenge for us as leaders is not only to help those in our pews in need but reach out to “Tell the World” about Jesus.

What was Jesus’ mission to the world? These prophetic words about the Messiah found in Isaiah 61:1-3 reminds us,

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor, He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound…”

But what method should we use to touch the lives of those in need? Ellen White is very clear on the method.

“Christ’s method ALONE will give true success in reaching people. The Savior mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. THEN He bade them, ‘follow Me.’” Minis-

try of Healing, p. 143 (Emphasis mine). Did you see it? Don’t miss what Sister White is saying in this quotation – Jesus dealt with the needs of the people first, their challenges, their social issues, and THEN He told them to follow Him. First He met their needs, He touched them where it hurt the most, He dealt with their issues; then He gave them spiritual food.

Dear Elder, can we do less? God has called us to lead by His example. We, the women of your church and your community are waiting for a touch of love from God, and that means from you.
Remember those mission stories back when you were a kid in Sabbath School? You sat on the edge of your seat as each thrilling detail of the story unfolded. Would the witch doctor poison the little boy before help arrived? Would the villagers get the missionary doctor's Jeep out of the mud in time? Would the girls find their way through the jungle before the tiger discovered their trail? Would the teacher ever come back and teach them about Jesus? In those days, it seemed as though spreading the gospel to all the world was the most important thing we did as a church. Today, it still is.

Lately there has been a resurgence of interest among adults who remember those days with nostalgia. Of course, mission service and the opportunity to financially support the global work of the church has never gone away, but now parents and teachers want their kids to experience the same excitement about missions that we did.

The Office of Adventist Mission intends to bring back this excitement with a second edition of an interactive program called Mission Week. The new curriculum, based on the theme “Be Part of It,” contains mission-focused devotionals for the classroom for grades 3-8, or for children ages 8-13. It’s been designed so that children can fully participate by leading the programs and taking part in the activities.

The program is similar to a Week of Prayer or a Week of Spiritual Emphasis, only in this case, every devotional program is focused on missions. Complete programs contain video stories, print and PowerPoint stories, mission factoids, activities, and contests. Programs are easily adjustable according to grade or age level, and it is easily adaptable for Sabbath School programs. Primaries and Juniors can even choose their favorite stories and videos to present a mission-themed sermon for the adults. Most pastors and elders would be delighted to involve children in a special church service dedicated to missions.

The Mission Week program begins with a video welcome from Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission, challenging kids to find opportunities to get involved personally. “I hope you’ll catch a vision of what your mission is,” says Krause, “and help people just the way Jesus did when He was here. You can be part of it!”

Initially, the most attractive feature may be the price. It’s free, one per teacher. Sabbath School teachers, home school teachers, and other interested adults are welcome to use Mission Week in their classroom, children’s church, or other appropriate programs. Simply log onto www.AdventistMission.org and ask for your free copy, or call 1-800-648-5824.

Now kids can experience missions right in their own classroom or church and become a vital part of the mission team. Why not volunteer to join them? After all, we all want to be part of it!

Nancy Kyte is the marketing director for the Office of Adventist Mission. She says the best part of her job is getting people excited about mission. Through the years, she has been a leader in the Primary division of her local church, making mission come alive in her Sabbath School through the stories and activities in the Children’s Mission magazine.

**Uses for Mission Week:**
- Children’s Church
- Devotionals at church school
- Special programs
- Mission-themed sermons presented by kids to the congregation

**Mission Week’s Aim:**
- Teach the importance of mission work around the world
- Present mission service as a soul-winning adventure
- Inspire kids to support mission work through their prayers, offerings, and involvement
- Instill a sense that each of us can do something for Jesus

**How Elder’s Can Help**

For your free copy of Mission Week - log onto www.AdventistMission.org or call 1-800-648-5824

Contains complete programs for grades 3-8 or ages 8-13, including:
- Video Stories
- Print and PowerPoint Stories
- Mission Factoids
- Activities
- Essays
- Posters
- Extras

Mission-focused devotionals for the classroom. Let your students lead the programs!
A Sunday church that my family regularly drives past displays banners with pithy sayings. One day, my seven-year-old daughter, perching in the car’s back seat, sat up and noticed the newest sign recently erected.

Carefully pronouncing each word, Carissa read aloud, “Say… it… boldly.” As the church disappeared into our rearview mirror, she repeated it again, nulling the words over, tasting the meaning of their message. Then, with a flash of realization, Carissa declared, “If they are really going to ‘say it boldly’ they need to go to church on Sabbath and not Sunday!”

While my daughter is correct, boldness can be abused when we don’t “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). I’ve met a few recklessly bold church members through the years. At a church social where a number of people from other faiths were present, I overheard a sincere member lecturing our guests in stern tones on the right day for worship and damning them if they didn’t show up at church the next Sabbath. This is not the type of boldness that I aspire to.

There is a sanctified audacity, however, that we all can benefit from. It is the boldness that the fledgling Christian church besought God for while facing beatings, imprisonments, and death. “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Acts 4:29).

We too face real risks when witnessing. Rejection. Ridicule. Failure. Even death in some cultures. Human nature shrinks from these and less hazards. And more often than we like, this is where we may find ourselves. Benefit of boldness while opportunities to share Jesus pass us by.

Recently though, I’ve discovered apostolic boldness in the 21st century. On a visit to the church’s Hope Channel studios in Brazil, I was inspired with our members’ holy courage to claim their land for Christ. They have applied for more than 1,600 television broadcast licenses to put Hope Channel in millions of homes. The Brazil Central Union, in the São Paulo metro area, is in the process of purchasing a television station to reach 22 million residents in one of the five most populous cities in the world. Eager to help others find Jesus, South America is also broadcasting their Portuguese Hope Channel to the Portuguese-speaking nations of Africa.

During my visit I was also introduced to Vivacom Esperança—Live with Hope. This was the Division’s bold campaign to give the gospel to 100 million people in a single day. On September 6, members united together to distribute 50 million Live with Hope magazines filled with Christ-centered articles and Bible studies. Ten thousand billboards, commercials on Hope Channel’s network of more than 200 television stations, and radio spots provided an additional boost by inviting people to the Live with Hope website.

Such efforts are born of boldness and a keen appreciation of our mission. Eron Köhler, South American Division president, explains, “God is in a hurry and we should be too.”

Returning home, I encountered a similarly bold plan for North America—The Year of Evangelism. North America averages roughly 35,000 new members a year. But pastors and church leaders have asked themselves if this reflects enough boldness on their part.

Recognizing that Jesus yearns to reconnect with His lost children, the church in North America has designated 2009 as the year to win 100,000 persons to Christ. It has never been done before. And it can only happen as every member and pastor prays like the early church for a bold faith.

At the beginning of the year, every church is requested to dedicate a Sabbath to earnestly seek God for His Spirit. We need Him to do for us what He did in the first century. “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Bold goals include big plans and resources. So every pastor and church district is being asked to put our words into action and to live it boldly in The Year of Evangelism.

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10 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR CHURCH FROM GROWING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR THE CHURCH LEADER WHO ALREADY HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS.

Many churches today struggle with the burden of crowded pews, packed children’s classes, and filled parking lots. Unfortunately, pastors and local elders in these situations have few places where they can turn for help. Scores of books on how to increase church membership line the shelves of Christian bookstores everywhere. But no one, apparently, has authored a single book on how to avoid growing, how to keep unwanted people from the community out of a church that already has too many members.

Keeping people away from a church can prove difficult at times, especially when they seem determined to attend. However, if you adhere to the following guidelines, you can feel confident that your church has done everything possible to keep them away, or at least prevent their return should they accidentally wander into your service. These ten rules really aren’t too difficult to put into practice: many churches do so with apparent ease. By putting forth only a minimum effort, yours can too.

Check the box for each rule that you feel your church is following. Be as objective and honest as possible; if you aren’t measuring up, leave the box blank and go to the next one. At the end, add the number of boxes you have checked and find where your church stands by using the handy scoring device.

1. MAKE YOUR CHURCH DIFFICULT FOR VISITORS TO FIND.

This is one of the best ways to discourage visitors. When you build a church, get the cheapest piece of land you can buy—preferably well out of town and on a seldom-used road. (Better yet, have some members donate a piece of property that the new church. That way your chances of having the right kind of property for discouraging visitors is almost guaranteed.)

Above all, don’t put up any direction signs that will help strangers or out-of-town visitors locate your building. Don’t provide brochures that reveal the location or time of your service. Be careful not to list your church in the yellow pages or online. These are some of the first places a person will look when trying to locate a church. Besides, think of the money you will save by not listing your church along with the others.

2. DON’T LET YOUR MEMBERS INVITE PEOPLE TO ATTEND YOUR CHURCH.

If you’re serious about keeping strangers away, you naturally don’t want to invite anyone to attend. One survey revealed that 40 percent of the people who started coming to church did so because someone invited them to attend. Many people simply won’t attend a new or different church without an invitation. They fear they won’t be welcome, or not want to sit by themselves among total strangers. A personal invitation only makes it easier for them to decide to visit.

3. GIVE ALL VISITORS A COLD SHOULDER.

If a stranger is persistent in despite of the barriers you have erected, you will communicate a lack of welcome better than to ignore him or her. Giving visitors a cold shoulder is easy; you don’t have to say a word. If perchance the stranger looks your way, simply turn your head. They will quickly understand from your excellent body language that you don’t need them in your church. Few who have experienced such treatment will insist on returning.

4. BE ON YOUR GUARD FOR STRANGERS IN YOUR CHURCH.

When someone walks in the door for the first time, be sure they find no one posted there to greet them or give them a church bulletin. Let them discover for themselves where the cradle roll or youth department is located. Also, be sure to change classes around frequently. Better yet, don’t place the correct class name of age levels on the doors of the different classrooms. Maybe they will feel so embarrassed walking into the wrong class that they’ll never return.

5. DON’T ENCOURAGE YOUR MEMBERS TO INVITE VISITORS HOME.

If a visitor insists on returning a second or third time—in spite of all your precautions—make sure no one invites that individual home for dinner. Dinner invitations are as dangerous as giving someone might never stop coming to your church.

6. HAVE A LIMITED CHURCH PROGRAM.

A church with a lot of different programs related to people’s needs draws visitors like a winter feeder draws birds. Need-oriented programs can totally wreck your game plan for keeping people out of your church. Don’t conduct Vacation Bible Schools—not only do they encourage children to attend your church, but they often inspire the parents to show up, too! Don’t offer classes such as Family Enrichment, Pre-marital or Health Seminars. Too many people might be attracted to such topics.

7. MAKE YOUR CHURCH AS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR VISITORS AS POSSIBLE.

Anything goes in this category. Don’t print weekly church bulletins—all they do is help visitors understand your service and make them feel comfortable. Be sure your church has hard wooden pews. They keep people from enjoying the service. In addition, make sure someone talks about church finances from the pulpit every week. Nothing will turn people away from a church faster than a secular service that focuses on money fundraising, and charts. Even Jesus, visiting the temple, got pretty upset over the money-changers of His day, didn’t He?

Other tricks of the trade that will discourage most people include lack of heat in the winter, slippery sidewalks when it snows, and of course a hot, stuffy service in the summer.

8. NEVER CONDUCT ANY COMMUNITY-OUTREACH PROGRAMS.

Studies show that rapidly growing churches always employ a variety of outreach programs—letters from the pastor to newlyweds, letters to new residents of the community, cooking classes, sermon tapes for shut-ins, etc. Don’t publish a monthly pastoral letter. Nonmembers might get hold of it and become interested in the announced topics and upcoming programs. They might even assume that your church has a progressive program and want to attend. Many people avoid churches because they don’t realize how much the fellowship could benefit them personally; you don’t want anyone deciding your church has something to offer!

9. KEEP YOUR CHURCH OUT OF THE PAPER.

If you’re serious about keeping visitors away from your services, be sure to elect an ineffective, unconcerned individual to the office of public relations. Stories in the local papers about the activities of the church and its members will only create a lot of goodwill in the community and encourage the unchurched to attend. A lot of lonely people and those searching for help in their lives are just looking for a church to belong to.
HOW TO FIND SUCCESS IN 2009

Joshua 1 and Deuteronomy 34:9

The words of the Lord to His people are that we lift our standard higher and seek His help. If we obey His word, He will work with us and our efforts will be crowned with success.

1. I HAVE FAITH IN GOD’S PROMISES

Joshua 1:2-4

In 1 John, we are reminded that if we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with Jesus and our sins will be cleansed. Remember the words to the old hymn: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

To be happy, we must walk with the Lord. When we give Him that, He will fill us with His Spirit (see Deut. 33:9), and we will have joy as He gives us success and prosperity. I want God’s best in 2009. Do you?

2. I UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF

Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1

Many other techniques to keep your community to your church, you’ll want to develop your own rules. You may have already outlined here should never only to help your church grow, but also to maintain the separate but single-church principle behind the idea of a church taking care of its own people. However, if for some reason you should want people from the community to visit your church, you should want people from the community to visit your church.

If the number of boxes you score your church, you can be a success. The more boxes you score, the more successful you will be. The minimum score is 0, and the maximum score is 10.

SCORE YOURSELF!

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AUSTIN C. ARCHER, PH.D.

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AUSTIN C. ARCHER, PH.D.

Austen Archer was born and raised on the West Coast. He was the only male in his age group to attend artifact, and he was a basketball star in high school and college. He is married and has four children, two boys and two girls. He is the pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Arizona.

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I. THE BATTLE OF JERICHO (CHAPTER 6)

The city of Jericho symbolizes the world. God told the children of Israel that they were not to take anything out of Jericho as they went in to fight. But one man did not listen to God and sinned by taking what God said was to be destroyed or was to be saved for Him.

II. THE BATTLE OF AI (CHAPTER 7)

One lesson from the battle of Ai is the danger of self-sufficiency. As you study Chapter 7, you will find that the children of Israel underestimated their enemy (read Joshua 7:3-5). The lesson we can learn is this: We must never underestimate our personal strength. God is always stronger than our strength.

III. THE BATTLE AGAINST THE GIBEONITES (CHAPTER 9)

The battle against the Gibeonites was not a flesh-and-blood battle; it was a spiritual battle of deception. God told Joshua to wipe out all the inhabitants in the land. God was not unreasoning. He knew the people in Gibeon were pagan and would soon have the whole nation of Israel worshiping the same false gods they did. But the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites and caused them to sin.

If we allow sin to rule our lives, many of our prayers will go unanswered, and the work of the church will not move forward. Two types of sin special mention are:

A. Sins of the flesh. When I speak of "the flesh," I am referring to activities such as: drinking, infidelity, sexual misconduct, pornography, and so on.

B. Sins of the spirit. These sins include pride, anger, lust, greed, unbelief, rebellion, etc. When we do not confess and repent of these sins, God will withdraw His Spirit, and nothing will happen in our church.

If sin remains in our lives, three things can happen:

1. The religion of Christ means much more than the forgiveness of sin. It means taking away our sins and filling the vacuum with the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God.

2. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ.

III. WE’RE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO TEMPTATION IN MOMENTS OF APPARENT SUCCESS.

The next city on the Israelites’ agenda was Ai. Joshua sent spies to spy out Ai, and they sent back the message (7:3): Ai was a weak city. This would be an easy battle. But look what happened. About 3,000 men went up, but they were routed by the army of Ai, who killed about 36 of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and even beyond.

Sometimes we can be victorious over some of the strongest battles. The same is true when it comes to the Christian walk. Many of our mistakes could be avoided if we immersed ourselves in God’s Word.

Illustration: When I first bought a new gadget and didn’t read the instruction manual, I was vulnerable to temptation. I was not prepared for the consequences of my actions.

When I spend time with God, He will strengthen my resolve.

Our prayers will be hindered if we do not learn from the mistakes of others. When we don’t learn from the mistakes of others, we are like the children of Israel. As a result, the whole nation of Israel suffered defeat, and Achan and his family lost their lives.

You may have heard the saying, “One bad apple spoils the whole lot.” We must understand that if one individual in the church is living in sin, the rest of the church will suffer as a result.

GOD’S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Every person wants to be successful. We often measure our worth by how successful we are in our jobs, or by the number of promotions we receive. But success is rarely measured by these criteria.

God’s formula for success is much simpler. It is the will of God to make us strong, and courageous. Our prayers will be hindered if we are not willing to do both.

When we have the will to do good and the faith to do it, God will help us to succeed.

Illustration: When I was a child, I was fearful of the dark. I would cover my head and ears, and not go to sleep. But one night, I decided to face my fear. I counted to ten, and then I closed my eyes and went to sleep.

I am writing this book to encourage you to face your fears. God will help you to succeed if you have the will and the faith to do it.

Our prayers will be hindered if we do not learn from the mistakes of others. When we don’t learn from the mistakes of others, we are like the children of Israel. As a result, the whole nation of Israel suffered defeat, and Achan and his family lost their lives.

You may have heard the saying, “One bad apple spoils the whole lot.” We must understand that if one individual in the church is living in sin, the rest of the church will suffer as a result.
LIVING WITH A BAD DECISION

Joshua 9:1-27

According to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual and the Minister's Handbook, ordained pastors—usually with ministerial credentials—can perform baptisms. According to the Church Manual, church elders may also perform the rite on certain occasions with the authorization of the conference/mission president. It is also possible that a retired minister may perform a baptism in coordination with the conference/mission and the local church pastor.

According to the Bible, who is entitled to baptize new church members? The Gospel of John and the Pauline epistles give us insights as to who should perform the rite. The earliest reference to baptism is found in the Gospel of John when it is mentioned that John "was baptizing" (John 1:28). By what authority was he baptizing? The Gospel of Luke mentions that John the Baptist was appointed and called by God to do this work (Luke 1:5-25). The angel presented John's mission to his parents: "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17, NIV). This mission was clearly acknowledged by Jesus. "But what did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26). John the Baptist fulfilled his mission as a prophet and baptized people with the authority given to him by the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John also tells us that Jesus' disciples baptized. "After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized" (John 3:22). "The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples" (John 4:1, 2). It is important to note that the disciples baptized because of the mission and authority entrusted to them by Jesus; they were called and appointed by Jesus for this ministry (Matt. 10:1-4). After Jesus' resurrection, He again entrusted them to continue this ministry. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus gave specific instructions regarding who may baptize. In this particular event, the disciples (also called the apostles) were supposed to perform the rite. They continued making disciples, and as the numbers of believers grew, they took steps toward church organization. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples continued in their ministry (Acts 1:12-17). Interestingly, it is Peter who mentioned that they were entrusted with this ministry of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching the gospel of Jesus. And when they were gathered together, they elected Matthias to continue in the "apostolic ministry" (Acts 1:25). Clearly, those appointed as leaders were also authorized to baptize new candidates by the authority of the early church and the apostles.

As the church grew, a more elaborate form of church service and ministry was needed. The disciples and the church gathered again to appoint seven additional leaders who could minister to the church in their need for the daily distribution (Acts 6:1-4). Once more the early...
chance. They believed that the whole group needed a change in their lifestyle. They consequently stood up, dispersed the group, and started to follow and share the Good News with others.

Now, let’s focus on the church. The church is the gathering of people who have decided to follow Jesus and His teachings. It is a community that seeks to live according to the principles of the Gospel. The church is led by pastors, elders, and deacons, who are chosen by the congregation. These leaders have the responsibility to guide the church, to preach the Gospel, and to care for the needs of the members.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

16. Luke recorded that after Ana-nias’ prayer, “he got up and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Again it was under the Lord’s direction that this particular disciple received the au-thority to baptize the apostle Paul.

The apostle Peter worked for the Jewish community; however, he also had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Again, in his case, it was under the Lord’s instructions that he went to visit Cornelius’ home, family, and friends. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). After Peter’s speech and testimony about Jesus Christ, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44). There-fore, the apostle Peter, with the au-thority entrusted him by Jesus, the apostles, and the church, “ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48).

So far we have observed that when baptism occurred in the early church, they were performed in fulfillment of the Great Com-mission (Matt. 28:18-20). Those who performed the baptisms were guided by the Lord and the Holy Spirit as well as by the early church and the apostles after more than three years of ministerial training from Jesus Himself. As disciples of Jesus, the apostles had watched His ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching. As the church grew, they passed the Great Commission on to the next generation.

In the epistle to the Galatians, we see that it was the decision of the Jerusalem apostles under the leadership of James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:8) to appoint Paul for the mission to the Gentiles. “They agreed that we [Paul and Barnabas] go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jew[s]” (Gal. 2:9).

It was the Holy Spirit and the church of Antioch, as well as apostolic endorsement, which appoint-ed both Paul and Barnabas for the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3). They would continue making disciples and appointing elders among the Jewish synagogues and proselytes. Were they also responsi-ble for performing baptisms? Certainly they followed the church appointment and authority to per-form the rite. Paul and Silas, delegated authority to their associates and local church elders who were the shepherds of the local church.

In the Gospel, Philip was instructed by the Holy Spirit to perform the baptism of the Ethiopian. In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul made a connection between baptism and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: “Don’t you know that all of us who were bap-tized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). Actually, baptism points to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is the means for the church’s delegated authority to their associates and local church elders who were the shepherds of the local church.

As the early church faced perse-cution, it is worth noting that Philippi was an extraordinary case. Paul and Silas were imprisoned, beaten, and left with internal bleeding. However, they did not lose faith or hope. In Philippi, they were able to spread the Gospel to the whole city. The jailer, who had been there since the beginning of the church, was impressed by the power of the Gospel. He was convinced that the Gospel was the answer to the problems of his life. He converted to Christianity and was baptized by Paul and Silas.

It is interesting to note that in his epistle to the Romans, Paul made a connection between baptism and the sacrifice of Christ: “Don’t you know that all of us who were bap-tized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). Actually, baptism points to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is the means for the church’s delegated authority to their associates and local church elders who were the shepherds of the local church.

In the church, the baptism of the Ethiopian was an extraordinary case under the explicit instruction of the Holy Spirit.
Seventh-day Adventists regard themselves as “people of the Book.” For Adventists the Word of God is central. It is the foundation of our faith. Every doctrine and teaching of the church is rooted in God’s Word.

From the early days of the movement, Seventh-day Adventists have begun their day reading the Bible. It has provided inspiration and guidelines for Adventists facing life’s challenges. It has been the guiding voice in a world of religious confusion. An honest analysis of Bible study in some sectors of the Adventist Church today reveals a disturbing trend. A world-wide survey (3,646 surveys returned) by the Institute of Church Ministry at the theological seminary at Andrews University reveals that only 51% of the Seventh-day Adventist population are reading the Bible daily. This downward trend in Bible reading and witnessing among Seventh-day Adventists will not be reversed quickly, and will not change by simply initiating a new Bible-reading program. It will take concentrated effort with continued emphasis on the importance of re-igniting the believer’s on-going relationship with the Word of God over an extended period of time.

“Follow the Bible” is part of a coordinated initiative by church leadership to lift the vision of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide in renewing their commitment to read, study, and share the Word of God.

Church leadership envisions an international “Bible Route” with a copy of the Bible traveling the world between October 2008 and June 2010. It is envisioned that the entire Adventist community will be involved in promoting the initiative and covering the journey. The communication plan also includes media relations and activities that are featuring the Bible’s journey.

An array of technological options lends itself to assist in “Follow the Bible” journey. The Bible will be preached from and read in more languages than any other book in the history of mankind. The purpose of this initiative is to create a significant world event and capture the imagination of Adventists worldwide, fostering Bible reading and sharing God’s Word.

Once in a lifetime an experience moves the world. The traveling Bible brings together 66 languages and believers from around the globe. See it in person or visit online to join a spiritual journey connecting Christians and continents through Scripture.
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

MARK FINLEY ANSWERS
SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT “FOLLOW THE BIBLE.”

ARE THESE CONVOCATIONS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS ONLY?
Certainly not! We encourage every member in each area the Bible travels to tell their friends about “Follow the Bible” and invite them to attend. This is an outstanding time for the community to know that Seventh-day Adventists are a people of the Book.

WHAT MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE FOR CHURCH LEADERS IN CONDUCTING THESE CONVOCATIONS?
There are three sample sermons prepared on the importance and inspiration of Bible Study, a daily Bible Reading Guide, Bible Bookmarks and an introductory lesson on the Bible.

ARE THERE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS AVAILABLE?
Yes, there are. There is a poster design, a news story and a short DVD on “Follow the Bible.”

WHAT IS THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE ADMINISTRATION FOR “FOLLOW THE BIBLE”?
The major objective of the General Conference Administration is to inspire millions of Seventh-day Adventists to further Bible Study. Recent surveys indicate that less than 50% of the church membership is regularly studying the Bible. “Follow the Bible” has the possibility of re-igniting the desire to study God’s Word. It has the possibility of lifting the average church member to new heights of spirituality through God’s Word. What if all 16 million Seventh-day Adventists were faithfully studying God’s Word each day? What if they were had a new vital experience with our Lord? God would pour out His Spirit in abundance and we would see an explosion of witnessing and evangelism like the church has never seen.

WHAT IS THE SCHEDULE FOR THE BIBLE TO TRAVEL TO VARYING DIVISIONS?
Please see the schedule dates on page 23.

WHAT HAPPENS AS THE BIBLE ARRIVES IN A PARTICULAR COUNTRY OR CITY?
There will be large convocations or rallies conducted at each place the Bible travels. Sermons will be preached on the importance of God’s Word. Attendees will be invited to participate in a daily Bible Study plan. They will also be offered an opportunity to enroll in the Discover Bible Course.

HOW MANY LANGUAGES WILL THIS SINGLE BIBLE CONTAIN?
This one Bible contains 66 languages. Every book a different language. It represents God’s message to all people.

WHAT LARGE IS THE BIBLE?
Very large. The Bible is approximately 18 inches long and 12 inches wide. It consists of over 1,100 pages and is bound with a padded leather cover. It is very similar in size to the large Bible Ellen White held above her head in vision and repeatedly quoted Bible texts by memory.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WORLD DIVISIONS IN “FOLLOW THE BIBLE”?
Each Division President has been consulted regarding the best time for the Bible to arrive in their Division. The Division “Follow the Bible” Coordinator is responsible for working with their Union and Conference counterparts to organize the Bible’s itinerary within the Division territory. The Divisions are responsible for planning all activities for the Bible in their Division including the Convocations and all Division-wide media coverage. They are also responsible for receiving the Bible and passing it on to the next Division.

WILL THE DENOMINATIONAL JOURNALS CARRY ARTICLES ON “FOLLOW THE BIBLE”?
There will be regular articles written in the Adventist Review, Elder’s Digest and Ministry magazine as well as the Union Papers.

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WHAT IF THE BIBLE IS LOST IN ITS TRAVELS OR BADLY DAMAGED?
We are praying that this will not happen and will take all the necessary precautions, but we are prepared for this eventuality by sending three Bibles which are exactly the same to travel together. One will always be kept at the Division Office.

WHAT ABOUT THE HOPE CHANNEL? HOW WILL IT COVER THE STORY?
There is a Video team producing short reports for the Hope Channel and chronicling the “Follow the Bible” story. There are regular features on the Hope Channel.

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HOW CAN I HEAR AWR PROGRAMS?
Adventist World Radio is the mission radio arm of the Adventist church. Our mandate is to enter the hardest-to-reach countries and, wherever possible, to broadcast to people groups that are difficult to reach in other ways. There are countries where mission workers cannot be sent because of political, religious, or geographic barriers. North America does not have those restrictions, and many Adventist media ministries are already active here, so we concentrate on broadcasting to other areas.

HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU BROADCAST IN, AND HOW MANY COUNTRIES DO YOU REACH?
We currently produce programs in 75 languages, such as Amharic for people in Ethiopia, Kirgiz for residents of Kyrgyzstan, and Malayalam for listeners in India. Our non-Internet broadcasts cover more than two thirds of the world, through shortwave, AM and FM stations, and satellite. It is a challenge to calculate the exact number of countries we reach, since signals fluctuate and radio stations access our broadcasts in a different way.

HOW ARE GIFTS TO AWR USED?
All gifts made directly to AWR go to advance our broadcast ministry. For example, AWR uses direct gifts to cover the cost of air time and add new languages in areas such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Operating expenses are covered by appropriations from the General Conference and other sources of income, such as investments, endowments, and estate gifts.
DEFINITION OF PROCEDURES

To avoid conflicts between departments and leaders, elders need to understand the rules that govern procedures for both the world church and the local church. It is important that each church department leader knows the procedures that are expected from him or her area. That is why leaders need to be familiar with the Church Manual and with the guidelines for each area (Elder’s Guide, Deacons’ Guide, Sabbath School Guide, etc.). Ellen G. White warns church leadership of the danger of paying too much attention to small matters that might draw them away from the church’s mission focus (Church Leadership, p. 102).

DEFINITION AND APPLICATION OF THE CHURCH PROGRAM

Every church program needs to be clearly defined and repeated as many times as possible for the leaders and the congregation. Having an ecclesiastical calendar helps to establish programs in advance, giving each church department time to plan and organize, thus avoiding conflicts with programs that come up at the last minute. It is important to follow certain steps during the process of developing the calendar:

1. Before the ecclesiastical year starts or at its beginning, the pastor and head elder should meet to prepare the calendar’s frame, considering first the pastor’s preaching schedule and the denominational program brought from the last pastoral council.
2. The head elder and other elders should meet to evaluate the calendar and to make suggestions.
3. The head elder and the pastor should then have another meeting to finalize the program.
4. The pastor should take the calendar’s frame to the church committee for final consideration (eventual changes and approval). Following that, a final copy of the calendar’s distributed to each department leader and posted on the church’s bulletin board.
5. Once the church calendar is ready, church leadership may prepare the budget and vote it in the church committee meeting, and eventually with the entire church during an administrative meeting.
6. The next step is to act, delivering the training, motivation, execution, supervision, and evaluation promised in the church calendar.

CONCLUSION

Good Christian leaders are conscientious about the church’s mission, executing projects with objectivity and prayer. The leader and team inform the church regarding the content of the church program to evangelize their community. Leaders pray with the team, asking God to help them work efficiently. “The cause of God demands [leaders] who can see quickly and act instantaneously at the right time and with power” (Gospel Workers, p. 133).

Even while conducting the church within the biblical patterns, Christian leaders should be satisfied with mere technical and leadership abilities; they need to be completely dependent upon God and empty of self and from feelings of superiority, independence, and presumption. In all circumstances, our leadership role model is the Lord Jesus Christ.

TIMOTHY ATOLAGBE

Timothy Alloba is the Head Elder/Lay Pastor at the New Hope SDA Church in Fulton, Maryland, USA. His church has 630 members. He and his wife Lida have been members for over 20 years, and they have a son and daughter. As a Lay Pastor, some of Timothy’s roles are to assist the pastors in nurturing the members and attendants. This includes teaching classes, baptismal preparation, counseling and prayer. He especially enjoys teaching on the subjects of Marriage, Family and Parenting. At New Hope, ten elders/Lay pastors serve the congregation visibly during services and also behind the scenes during the week. During the service, there are lay pastors assigned to pray with the worship teams, pastors and the various ministry groups, as well as assist in welcoming members, organizing communion celebrations, as well as helping with baby dedications. For the past four years, the lay pastors have ministered to the church family members in subgroups called “parishes.” Birthdays, anniversaries, births, sicknesses and all other life’s events are ministry opportunities for the lay pastor. Timothy’s vision for the church is “… that our church family members and attendees will radiate warmly with the radical love and passionate commitment to Jesus Christ like the New Testament church at Pentecost.” When Timothy is not busy with church, he is a scientist at a Pharmaceutical company. In his spare time he enjoys volleyball, table tennis, and soccer.

By Paulo Pinheiro

Paulo Pinheiro is the editor for Elder’s Digest in Brazil.
The art of speech: STUTTERING WHILE SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

Many times one can observe that stuttering, while speaking in public, is a problem, even for people who do not usually stutter. Is this normal?

According to the Houaiss Dictionary “Stuttering is the repetition of syllables and involuntary stops at the beginning of words.” However, it is much more serious than that for about 1% of the world’s population victimized by this disorder, in a proportion of four men to one woman. In Brazil, the Specialty Center for Speech Therapy (Cefac) estimates a number of 1.8 million Brazilians who suffer from this problem, usually beginning between the ages of 2 and 4.

Lack of rhythm fluency, atypical interruption in the speech, with repetitions, hesitations, stoppages, body and facial tensions and prolongations are symptoms that may victimize anyone from any race or culture. According to specialists, the disorder is treatable; however, it may also be cured naturally.

Many parents of those who live with the person who stutters are greater than that of the “disfluent,” as they are called. Many children stutter when they are acquiring and developing their speech. But, if treated naturally, the stuttering goes away, receiving the name of “normal speech disfluency.” However, parents should not criticize or complete the phrase of the child. He or she is only learning to elaborate their speech and should be listened to attentively and naturally.

Anyone, under pressure, has difficulty controlling their speech. At these moments, the individual isn’t usually asked to slow down, be patient or take a breath. We need to respect everyone’s timing when pronouncing the words and wait with calmness, trying not to hasten the person or increase the stutter’s stress focus.

Disfluency is normal. Everyone has certain hesitations when speaking. When we speak, we elaborate thoughts and think more, which causes a delay in the pronunciation of words.

It is possible to imagine the word coming out naturally, without thinking. No one thinks to speak. When you notice, you already have said it. It is an autonomous and independent act and this needs to be clear to those who stutter.

Once I was invited to preach, and I was really concerned about what people would think of me if I stuttered. My uncle, a natural public speaker, told me, with a smile: “It’s easy to speak in public. All you have to do is think that you are talking to a bunch of cabbage heads.”

Of course, as time goes on, you forget about the cabbage heads and are better able to face the public without stuttering.

Alexandra Sampaio
Speech therapist in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Jesus was always “hanging out” with the wrong crowd.

In fact, Jesus generally offended people because His behavior did not match their expectations of how ministry “ought” to proceed. They thought the Messiah would associate with the high and mighty and lead a vast army to deliver Israel from the Romans. Instead, Jesus associated with the low and powerless and led a ragamuffin bunch of sinners and outcasts to deliver souls from Satan.

Not that He hadn’t clearly announced His intentions. Quoting Isaiah and applying the prophecy to Himself, Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

And when they comprehended that His ministry actually would follow this pattern, they sought to kill Him. Just as they were offended that Jesus hung out with the wrong crowd, so today many reject the reality that Jesus wants His church to recruit from, care for, and minister with the same bunch.

Jesus targeted the disabled. Moved with compassion by the needs of the multitudes, Jesus intentionally focused on those who were distressed, diseased, disabled, despised, and disenfranchised. He returned sight to the blind who themselves would extend light. He restored lame limbs and the newly-abled built belief in others. He resurrected dead bodies and created new born believers who, themselves, shared everlasting life. In loosing their physical pain and suffering, Jesus bound people with mighty cords of love to His own loving heart.

Jesus did not heal every person. Not every prayer was answered. Not every cripple walked. Even though Scripture describes Jesus healing one lame man at the pool of Bethesda, there is no record of every sick person leaving that place restored. Jesus must have passed by the crippled beggar at the temple’s Gate Beautiful on numerous occasions without stopping. Only weeks after Christ’s ascension was the beggar contacted by the church.

And His selection process follows no logical pattern. For example, if I were designing heaven’s system for answering prayer requests, I would surely respect the desires of the Apostle Paul who was informed not only that his thorn would not be removed, but that he should stop praying for deliverance and depend solely upon God’s all-sufficient grace.

Jesus judges our treatment of the disabled. In the lost ask Jesus the same question. “When did we see You hungry, thirsty, naked, or in prison.” Neither group recognized that their ministry to or rejection of “the least of Jesus’ brethren” was ministry to or rejection of Jesus, Himself.

Imagine that! In heaven’s eyes, the wrong crowd just might be the right crowd!

Disfluency is normal. Everyone has certain hesitations when speaking. When we speak, we elaborate thoughts and think more, which causes a delay in the pronunciation of words.
Traveling where missionaries cannot go. No walls. No borders. No limits.

AN AWR LISTENER IN THE MIDDLE EAST WRITES:

"Your station has been a first window for me to be introduced to Christianity in the right way. Please send me an Arabic Bible so that I can understand more."

With your help, many more eager listeners will be able to turn on their radios and hear of God's love for the first time.