BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

By Daniel Duda

Discipleship is one of those forgotten and neglected topics in Adventism. We used to preach about the end of the world, the Sabbath, diet, tithing… but discipleship? We never used to talk about that! The idea was, if you pay, pray and obey, that’s all that was expected of you. If you kept the Sabbath, paid your tithe (and offerings) and stayed away from pork and worldly music, you were almost ready for translation. (Of course, there were always some vigilant saints who reminded us that we also needed to be vegetarians, drink eight glasses of water daily, and more recently – eat five portions of fruits and vegetables per day).

If I asked in a typical local church: Why are we here? What’s the purpose of our existence? In most churches, I am sure I would hear something about evangelism: “We are here to do evangelism.” “Evangelism is the sole purpose of our existence.” And maybe some more knowledgeable people could even quote a Bible text to support it. The Great Commission wording from Matt 28:18-20 readily comes to mind. However, do you know any text where Jesus forbids evangelism?

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.” (Matt 23:15, NIV)

Jesus did not condemn the leaders because they were lazy. They travelled around the land and sea, covered oceans and continents to find names to add to their converts’ list. Imagine the travel expense reports, or their travel budget! Nevertheless, the outcome was outright destructive. I also want you to notice that the leaders did not get such a harsh rebuke from Jesus because they taught the wrong doctrines. They gave good Bible studies on Sabbath, tithing, healthful diet, they preached against idolatry, evil associates and religious indifference. Their converts joined the religion of true God and were twice likely to be lost than before! Ultimately their evangelism produced enemies of God.

That’s why evangelism cannot be the sole purpose of our existence. We need to ask: What kind of evangelism? And: What happens afterwards?

Discipleship is the process through which individuals who have received new life “from above” take on the character of Jesus Christ by a combination of grace and effort. It is “Growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

(Continues on page 2)
Think about people that go to your local church. Real people you know. If new people came to your church, found Christ and turned out to be just like people who are already in your church, would that change the world, hasten Jesus’ second coming?

If seekers became followers, what kind of people would they become? What kind of people are we reproducing? This is of utter significance. Do we expect people to change beyond changing the day of rest their keep, food they eat and percentage of their income that they contribute to charitable causes? Do we expect them to be more loving, gracious, tolerant, kind?

Do we expect them to love their family more, to love other people more, to serve more to those who are less privileged? Do we expect them to have more concern for people who speak a different language than they do, or for persons of a different colour, culture? Do we expect that they will now want around their church even people who are different from them? Do we expect they will not be easily irritated and not have a judgmental spirit in them?

Throughout the years, we have all learnt and now understand well that evangelism is not going to happen by default. Entropy will take care of that. Analogically we need to realize that discipleship, or spiritual formation is not going to happen, unless we are clearly intentional about it. If we as leaders do not create a discipleship-building culture, we fail in fulfilling the church’s mission. By neglecting to build a discipleship culture, we reveal that somehow covertly we believe in salvation by confessing the right doctrines. However, there is no Bible text that states salvation is a reward for believing the right set of fundamental beliefs.

The apostle Paul said: Do everything without complaining or grumbling so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God, without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of life. (Phil 2:14-16)

Take for example Paul’s first line: **Do everything without complaining or arguing.** Should we aim for that in our churches? Should we expect that to happen? If somebody has been a member of our local church for let’s say five years, should they have really made progress in this area of life? Do we take Paul’s inspired advice seriously or not?

Here is what is really troubling me: It is not just that so many of us are not changing for years. What is troubling me is the fact that often nobody is surprised by it! We don’t expect people to change once they have accepted the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Nobody says, we ought to call in a specialist from somewhere, or we ought to have an emergency Church Board meeting to consider this strange situation where there is somebody who has been coming into our church week after week, year after year, and kind of been doing church life the way that we say church life ought to be done, but he or she is not changing.

So what can you do?

1. **Assess.** Assess where people under your responsibility are. As a leader ask yourself: What kind of people are we producing? Nothing can change unless there is a clear perception that there is a problem, a sense of urgency. You could use some of the tools already out there, or develop your own. (Works of George Barna are especially helpful in this.)

2. **Cast a vision.** Hold a series of sermons on “A Biblical Call to Making Disciples”. One sermon is a splash that does not change much. Put discipleship as part of your yearly sermonic plan. Do not let the people argue with you. Present the Bible teaching in an inspirational way so that people see the great adventure they are missing in their lives. (Helpful tool: Greg Ogden: *Transforming Discipleship*, IVP, 2003)

3. **Organize your leadership team** in such a way that you model discipleship to your immediate circle. You can mentor only a small group of people. Choose the leaders that you can re-parent and they in turn will do the same for other leaders. (Helpful tool: Wayne Cordeiro: *Doing Church as a Team*, Regal books, 2009)

4. **Involve people on basis of their giftedness.** The traditional way of doing church is based on either duty or guilt (“You just got to put in the time” or “It’s your duty.”) In that model, church becomes one of the many responsibilities that people have to contend with every week. That kind of leadership does not work in today’s environment. Instead, find out how people are wired and then help them become what they want to be for the sake of the kingdom. Once you line up a person’s gift with his or her ministry role, then you get people who love doing what they’re doing. Your role as a shepherd-leader is to untangle the mess of people’s lives so that their dreams and gifts can be released for the sake of the kingdom. And when people are moving in their area of giftedness, there is maximum effectiveness and minimum weariness. (Useful tool: Bruce Bugbee: *What Do You Do Best in the Body of Christ*, Zondervan, 2005).

“The simple program of Christ for winning the whole world is to make each person He touches magnetic enough with love to draw others.” (Frank Laubach)

That’s why grace-based transformation must be on the top of our list of core values because our whole mission depends on this. That is the goal. We all need to know that if that does not happen, nothing else really matters. Though we can think we are really successful as a church, we can report great numbers of baptisms or interesting programmes, we can have terrific facilities and wonderful services and draw big crowds. Those are good things, but that’s not what the church is all about.

So is the discipleship building culture going to materialize in your sphere of influence?
As many of our readers know, this journal is issued by Andrews University, where our church operates a Christian Leadership Center. In this new issue the following may be noted:

In “Research for Action”, reference is made to E.J. Ellison & J.T. Kauffman’s *Developing Leaders for Urban Ministries* (1993). They define five levels of leadership in the church and argue that different kinds of leadership training is needed for these types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Functions &amp; Context</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1 leader</td>
<td>Small group or ministry</td>
<td>Intensive, face to face, not extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2 leader</td>
<td>Coordinator of ministries</td>
<td>Intensive, direct and indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3 leader</td>
<td>Pastor of church/district</td>
<td>Less intensive, direct and indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4 leader</td>
<td>Regional context</td>
<td>More extensive, mostly indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5 leader</td>
<td>International context</td>
<td>Very extensive, mostly indirect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a valuable distinction which applies to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a rule, the Division handles the training of type 4 and 5 leaders, and this is the emphasis in our TED Leadership Development Centre. Types 1-3 are being managed by the church departments and our educational institutions: The Personal Ministries Department handles training of types 1-2 leaders, and the Ministerial Association—in conjunction with Newbold College (and similar institutions)—care for type 3 leadership training.

In the same section, reference is made to L. Wiseman & G. McKeown’s article “Bringing out the best in your people”, *Harvard Business Review* 88(5), pp. 117-121 (2010). All leaders aspire to bring out the best in their people. In Adventist nominating committees, which I often have the privilege of chairing, we always look for leaders that are visionary, creative, passionate and articulate. However, this article gives leaders a warning. Some leaders with these talents may also undermine or diminish the healthy development of their teams. It all depends on your leadership style, where some leaders are “multipliers” while others are “diminishers”. Here are some red flags:

**Being a visionary.** “Some leaders are good at laying out a compelling vision and persuading others to buy into that vision. But they leave little space for people to think through the challenges themselves.”

**Having the gift of gab.** “Some leaders are passionate and articulate, taking up a lot of meeting time. But what they intend to be infectious is, unfortunately, stifling.”

**Being a creative person.** “Some leaders are a sparkplug of creative thinking, continually generating new ideas. But team members suffer from organisational whirlpool as they try to keep up with every new idea imposed by the ‘creativity’.”

Let us seek to avoid these pitfalls and be leaders who can unleash the ideas, skills, and interests of our people, leading to superior performance and long-term success. Let us be multipliers!

The “Feature Articles” include two significant contributions. In “Learning while Leading: The Andrews University Leadership Program”, Freed, Corvig & Baumgartner describe the new type of leadership needed in our fast-changing global society and how people can be trained for this task. They emphasise the need to foster know-how and know-why, abilities to perform and conceptual ways to create meaning. In “Learning to be calm in the storm”, Aufderhar & Flowers deal with pastors’ reactions in congregations where anxiety triggers inappropriate and inefficient reactions and outline a training path for handling this. They say that “Pastors must first focus on managing themselves rather than managing others and begin to think in a different way about how people in living systems affect each other.”

In “Leadership Lived”, the issue features John R. Mott (1865-1955), Albert Reyes (autobiographical), and Rick Stiffney (autobiographical).

In “Global Lead”, we find two articles: Ann Gibson writes on “I don’t lend money; It causes amnesia!” and Pat Gustin on “How not to get lost in translation”. Gibson deals with the challenges of intercultural leadership that involve financial transactions and offers suggestions for addressing the resulting cultural and ethical questions. Gustin addresses the issue of working with and through a translator in a foreign country, sharing experiences that are most helpful. This is a must-read for type 5 leaders working in an international context.

The issue ends with five book reviews and a list of dissertations, six of which are at Andrews University in 2009 and 2010.

---

**Reach Up, Reach Out, reach Across: Tell the WORLD!**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has adopted a strategic plan for 2010-2015. We invite all our readers to obtain the booklet outlining this plan, which includes a DVD. It proceeds from the Mission Statement of the Church, the three Strategic Values of Quality of Life, Unity, and Growth, the Global Mission priorities, to outlining the tasks of Reaching Up (spirituality), Reaching Out (evangelism), and Reaching Across (Nurture). Specific goals are being set and initiatives for mission are suggested in an integrated church approach to mission. The Trans-European Division will vote its contribution to this plan in November, 2010, based on plans developed in its sixteen unions and attached fields. The booklet from the General Conference can be obtained in an electronic version at TellTheWorld.AdventistMission.org
TO THINK ABOUT... DESIRE FOR GOD

What are you looking for? John 1:38 NRSV
One day John the Baptist pointed to Jesus Christ and said, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." Two of John's disciples left him that day and immediately began to follow Jesus. When Jesus realized they were walking behind him, he turned and asked them, "What are you looking for?"

That is such a good question. I can envision these two new disciples with their heads down, each nudging the other to answer Jesus' question. Finally, one of them says, "Teacher, where are you staying?"
The other guy must have put his face in his hands. What a dumb answer! Why didn't he say that they were looking for truth, or maybe the kingdom of God?

To be honest, most of the questions I ask God really aren't very profound either. I would love to impress God with my speculations about the inner dynamics of the Trinity, but I'm not up all night thinking about that. The things that keep me up at night are much more trivial. Most of us don't really yearn for world peace. We think world peace is a good idea, but what we are deeply concerned about and think about continually are issues like losing weight or getting our teenagers to talk to us.
The disciple's question, "Teacher, where are you staying?" was not a serious or deep question. But what's fascinating is that Jesus took the question seriously and invited the two men to follow him home. There they stayed with him, probably talking about a lot of ordinary things. Apparently the conversation was so ordinary that John didn't bother recording it in his Gospel. I'm sure Jesus eventually talked about salvation, but he must have spent a lot of time fulfilling the disciples' ordinary yearnings before he could expose their longings for God.

The important thing is not what they discussed but with whom they were talking. There are no dumb questions with Jesus. There aren't any smart ones either. Frankly, it doesn't matter what we are looking for in life. If we turn the search into a prayer, Jesus will use it to reveal more of himself to us. And once we come to see who he is, the other questions will become less important. That means about halfway through our prayers, if we are paying attention, it should not be uncommon for us to say, "Now, what was I asking? I really can't remember."

—M. Craig Barnes

Reflection
Do your prayers focus on the things for which you are asking or on the one to whom you are speaking?

Prayer
Keep me praying without ceasing, God, until I come to see that it is for you alone that I really yearn. ♦

ISSUES OBSERVED IN THE FIELD:
From the TED President

If developing discipleship is our great goal in the church, then how does that impact your leadership style? Surely, you have often thought of this and may have found your answers to this question. Here are a few that come to my mind:

My leadership should imitate the attitude and actions of Christ – by daily reading about him I foster and strengthen this development in my work
My team is the first group I seek to teach discipleship – I must make room for discipleship among the many things that impact our teamwork
It is ok if an administrative task is not perfectly performed – as long as a lesson of discipleship has been learnt
Trust and loyalty are vital in my relationships – even if these are valuable for me to receive, I need to first to ensure that I give them to others
Discipleship makes mission the central task for the church organisation – I need to keep it central in all my work ♦

— Bertil Wiklander