What Have They Seen in Your House?

by Pastor Leslie and Irma Ackie

The ‘call’ to the gospel ministry is a great and solemn responsibility that God lays on the heart of an individual. Yet, pastors who are blessed with families also have another priority - the great privilege of leading them to the kingdom. Neither responsibility should be discharged to the detriment to the other. Isaiah 38 & 39 tells the story of Hezekiah’s failure to testify of God’s goodness to the Babylonian emissaries who had visited him to learn about his miracle-working God. The prophet Isaiah confronts him with the question, “What have they seen in your house?” (Isaiah 39:4). In light of the fact that the most natural first recipients of our gospel-sharing endeavours should be those in our families, this is a question we would do well to consider as church leaders within the context of our own families.

The prayer of affirmation known as The Shema is considered to be the most important prayer in Judaism. It states,

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength . . . 7 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

The Shema stresses the importance of parents passing on a spiritual heritage to their children. Ellen White reiterated this thought when she wrote, “Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home . . . There is no missionary field more important than this” (Adventist Home, 35). We cannot possibly meet the challenges of our calling in our own strength because pastoral families are specially targeted by the Enemy. It is no accident that Ephesians 6, which speaks of spiritual warfare, follows Ephesians 5 which emphasises the importance of family relationships.

The pastoral family is subjected to internal as well as external pressures. By definition, married pastors make two key vows, one to be faithful to their spouse and the ordination vow to be faithful to God through ministry. These vows often cause conflict in the minister’s experience. This tension is emphasised by the following passages. Jesus stated, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). Yet we are also counselled, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). Ministerial families will always wrestle with where to strike the balance between devotion to the ministry and responsibility to family. Unfortunately, the pastor’s spouse often gets the raw deal of the conflict. Ministry hours are not family friendly and many ministry spouses may be reluctant to express their legitimate needs for fear of being seen...
as an obstacle to ministry.

With all the legitimate calls on the minister’s time it is possible that ‘the good can become the enemy of the best’. In order for ministers to fulfill their responsibility to their ministry and their families, time must be budgeted just as we budget our limited finances. This may mean that many important activities may have to be left so that we may do that which is essential.

The very public nature of pastoral ministry often leads to ministry spouses experiencing the pressures of ‘living in a fishbowl’. Pastors need to protect their spouses from unrealistic expectations based on out-dated stereotypes of what a ministry spouse should be and the role they should play. Pastors’ spouses do not have a job description. Their role is simply to be the wife/husband of the pastor. Their ministry involvement should be based primarily on their individual spiritual giftedness, not on the position the pastor occupies.

God created three divine communities in order to safeguard our need for intimate relationships - marriage, the family and the church. We often make the mistake of prioritising the church over our families. The reality is that, ‘As goes the family so goes the church.’ The spiritual and emotional health of a pastor’s family and our families. The reality is that, ‘As goes the family so goes the church.’ The spiritual and emotional health of a pastor’s family and the well-being of the church are interrelated.

Pastoral couples can strengthen their families and their ministries, by cultivating their spiritual foundation and emotional connectedness. Christian families, including ministry homes, often neglect intimate couple prayer and meaningful family worship. The marriage covenant is dependent on the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Solomon illustrates this principle when he states, “‘Two are better than one . . . 17And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,12). Marriage can only fulfill God’s purpose when two genuinely spiritual people live by genuinely spiritual principles. The health of a ministry couple’s marriage empowers them to authentically gather their children at the family altar.

Our worship must be more than something we do just because it is expected.

How we relate to each other in our families will have a significant impact on how our children develop spiritually and emotionally and will be a strong predictor of their future relationships. We are counselled that, “If the parents would enter more fully into the feelings of their children and draw out what is on their hearts, it would have a beneficial influence upon them” (The Adventist Home, 19). Family worship can actually become a hindrance to spiritual growth unless parents are able to emotionally engage with their children and be “ministers of grace” (Child Guidance, 478) rather than ministers of religion.

When pastors do not achieve an equitable balance between home and ministry, children can often become resentful of the church. They may ask themselves, ‘What kind of God would force parents to serve Him so obsessively that they don’t have time and energy for their children?’ According to George Barna’s research, the optimum ages at which children make decisions for Christ are between 5-13 (www.barna.org). This is a confirmation of what Mrs White said many years ago that, “It is in these early years that the affections are the most ardent, the heart most susceptible of improvement” (Review and Herald, December 17, 1889). Barna also found that parents continue to be the major influence on the children’s spiritual choices, being two to three times more effective in leading children to faith than any church programme.

The sadness of Hezekiah’s story was that he failed to share his testimony and missed a gift-edged opportunity to be a living witness of God’s goodness. It is a sobering thought that our personal witness can change the course of history for our spouses and our children. The ‘call’ to be a pastor embraces the wonderful privilege to minister to their families as much, if not more, than to the communities in which we serve. While ministers may have a tendency to judge their standing with God based on the success of their ministry, we are counselled that, “Men and women, children and youth, are measured in the scales of heaven in accordance with that which is revealed in their home life. A Christian in the home is a Christian everywhere” (SDA Bible Commentary, Vol.5, 1085).

Choosing the Best Medium of Communication
By Bertil Wiklander

Successful communication depends on the medium you decide to use. Your choice depends on what you want to achieve with your message. Consider five basic forms of medium when you communicate:

**Written Word:** This is the basis for organisational communication because it is relatively permanent and accessible. When you want to say something that you need to remember, which may be misunderstood or misinterpreted later, or something that leaves a paper trail as evidence or record, then you write. Writing may also be better when you deal with a complicated matter that calls for thought and attention to details. E-mail means a revolution for the written word. Use it less than you do and selectively.

**Spoken Word:** Talking person to person, or by phone, is advantageous because of the immediacy and because of the personal contact. It gives you speed, informality and convenience. It is also used when you talk about something sensitive or complicated and where you don’t need a paper trail that keeps a record of what you say.

**Symbolic Gestures:** Action and body language profoundly but unconsciously affect people. Be conscious of your body language and ensure that it supports the message you want to give. Make it natural, not artificial or manipulative. Note that body language may be culturally conditioned.

**Visual Images:** A visual image is seen and is therefore easier to remember. It has the potential of making abstract matters concrete and more easily understandable. It appeals to the emotions and can be used in propaganda, because its content is ambiguous. The importance of images in communication is growing due to the IT environment.

**Multimedia:** A combination of different media may give opportunity for participative communication, i.e. the give-and-take between sender and receiver. It may also appeal to a person’s senses. But it requires professionalism and good preparation. Using two or more communication methods together increases interest (motivation), comprehension, and retention.

As you consider your options, match your medium to your message with great care. The following examples illustrate why:
Example 1: You want to share the content of a sensitive personal conversation with a pastor in the church. What medium do you use?

Example 2: You want to let a local church board know what the Conference Executive Committee voted on a particular matter. What medium do you use?

Example 3: You need to convince the Committee that the visions and plans you have will work and have a very positive impact. What medium do you use?

Example 4: The son of a pastor has been taken to hospital for drug abuse and is facing criminal charges. What medium do you use, if (a) nobody else knows about the matter in the church, or (b) a limited circle already know about it, or (c) it has become public knowledge and church members are concerned about the example set by the pastor’s family and the image of the church.

E-mail has become one of the most common mediums of communication. It does no harm to consider the advice circulated fifteen years ago in ‘The Ten Commandments of E-Mail’ by Tom Spring (PC World):

1. Delete that e-mail: ‘You have several choices,’ reads the first commandment. ‘Scan headers, and delete everything you don’t need to know or act upon materially.’ It’s okay to ignore an e-mail the way you might a letter or a phone message. When you are sending messages, make them short and informal, and remember that they cannot replace a phone call.

2. Break free from attachments: The second commandment chides those who send attachments. ‘An enormous amount of time and energy is wasted in the corporate world by people struggling with incompatible formats, files that never arrived, and attachments that got garbled or stripped off the message.’ Instead, find a good spot on a company intranet for posting and downloading. And on the receiving end, of course, exercise extreme care in opening up files from strangers to avoid virus problems.

3. Count to ten, then send: Don’t send e-mail when you’re tired or furious. ‘E-mail can easily be angry, hurtful, or critical.’ It takes a lot of time to undo the damage.’ Treat e-mail like letters and phone calls; wait for a calmer moment to respond.

4. There’s nothing like the real thing: Never substitute e-mail for a necessary face-to-face meeting – especially when it comes to reprimanding, rewarding, or firing someone. Also remember that misdirected messages can get messy, especially when they are of a personal nature.

5. A STITCH IN TIME: Take advantage of the timesaving bells and whistles your e-mail programme offers. Keep an up-to-date address book, and never delete names and addresses. You never know when someone will come back into your digital life.

6. Break the chain: Chain e-mails is not only tacky, it’s banned from many corporate networks.

7. Rumour, gossip, and hearsay: Don’t pass on rumour or innuendo about real people. This could come back to haunt you. E-mail can be easily forwarded to the wrong person. Not only does e-mail have an uncanny ability of being resurrected, it can also be used against you in a court of law.

Example 1: You want to send the content of a sensitive personal conversation with a pastor in the church. What medium do you use?

Dear Readers,

It has been my pleasure to be part of communicating with you through this Leadership Development Journal over several years. Leadership is and will remain a key concern of our church. It is more than simply letting people do what they want. It means to know God and his will and go before the people and show the way. It is my prayer that the trend in our modern times to undermine leadership and criticise it will not intimidate you or lead you to doubt your vital role in God’s work: to lead your people to accomplishing God’s purpose and mission.

This journal has sought to be a constant reminder of how important it is to be a life-long learner in leadership and it has attempted to give food for thought about how we can grow in our leadership. It has been a real team work with many writers from all over the world, and I want to express my gratitude on behalf of the editing team to all who have contributed to the journal over the years.

As I move into retirement in about one month, I want to thank all readers for your support and many encouraging words. I thank Esti Pujic and Raafat Kamal, who have been my partners – both of them have been a delight to work with. And I thank God, who has given us the grace of seeing in Jesus Christ the greatest leader of all times. May his humility and commitment to serve be our continuing aim and example in our leadership.

May God bless you all and, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, continue the good work he has begun in your life as a leader.

Warm personal greetings,

Bertil Wiklander