TOO MANY HATS?
Focusing Pastoral Roles
Free subscription to retired ministers
You were much faster than I gave you credit for being in implementing the free subscription of Ministry to the retired ministers. I figured it would take two or three months to get everything set up and moving, so I said nothing about having my own private subscription. You will see by the attached mailing sticker my subscription is paid through July 1996.

After retirement as soon as I learned my subscription was discontinued I immediately placed my own order and have continued it ever since. This lets you know that I do appreciate the Ministry journal.

Please accept my small contribution and keep up the good work. May God bless each one of you.—Jack Williams, Salisbury, PA

This letter is representative of many recently received from retired Adventist ministers. Our thanks for their words of appreciation.—Editors

Why plant apple trees?
In reviewing my article, Why Plant Apple Trees? in the February issue of Ministry, I detected errors that had crept in during the editing process. I realize the necessity of editing articles so that they conform to the allotted space, and I usually appreciate the work the editors do. However, in this instance the editing resulted in causing me to say the opposite of my position as stated in the original article.

In the published article, I was made to suggest that each newly planted church should attempt to reach all generations and that it would be wrong to target a specific generation in a church plant. The article said that we should plant cross-generationally. This is...the exact opposite of what I said and what current research suggests. Churches today must be planted generationally—to reach specific generations. It is necessary to plant churches generationally, especially for Boomers and Busters.—Russell Burrill, Director, North American Division Evangelism Institute, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Independent ministries
Recently an article and letters were printed regarding the dangers of negative independent ministries (October 1995); Letters (February 1996). Unfortunately, both fell prey to the recent habit of “lumping.” While it is true that warnings must be given against negative, separatist movements, it is all too easy to lump together with them all ministries which address current issues within the church. Not all groups which call for repentance and revival are anti-organization and opposed to church leadership. We need to remember that Jesus and His followers were classed as a negative independent ministry by some in the church of His time.

The publication by the North American Division, Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries, unfortunately fell prey to the same “lumping” practice... Much of the current tension could be reduced if we would more sophisticated and balanced in our attempts to analyze various groups. Each ministry must be evaluated on its own merits, resisting the temptation to label and make hasty judgments.—Dennis Priebe, Galt, California

Ministry
Thank you for the tremendous work you do to provide us with a resource each month.

Wholesome criticism if taken in the spirit it is given can also help. The paper used to print Ministry is just too good. I cannot use my crayon Bible highlighters as they will not stick to the paper. I have two windows in my office and two in my bedroom, both reading places for Ministry, but I cannot get an angle where the paper does not shine back at me and I can’t read the words.

Although an education qualification recognized in North America is M.Div., in my union I have only one field worker with a first degree and that was gained in 1995, and maybe 100 without any certificate-level education. They are getting lost in the length and scholarship of the articles. Ninety-five percent have never touched a computer.

Spare a moment and see if in practicality we can give them a share of Ministry. They are great ministers and great soul winners.—Ray W. Eaton, Ministerial Secretary, Western Pacific Union Mission, Solomon Islands

Appreciation
Amen! To your editorial on interpreting the Bible in the March issue. I agree that both of the main methods of interpreting Scriptures need to be merged together. It’s a both-and approach rather than either-or. Lee Gugliotto’s article on exegesis was excellent. I noted that he isn’t wearing a suit and tie in his picture. It’s refreshing to see people in ordinary clothing.

Amen! To the article on the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation. Robert McIver said, “a characteristic of early Seventh-day Adventists was their willingness to debate important issues freely and openly.” Thus the church today certainly should have the same attitude. He said “we should study the Bible to see what an inspired book is like, not bring a preconceived notion of what it should be like.”—Pauline W. Phillips, Centralia, Missouri

The truth as it is in Jesus
Thank you for this article. The Truth as it is in Jesus (February, ’96) has been my pursuit for years and never can a person be filled because we automatically overflow to others. What a blessing to keep searching this treasure. Whatever the circumstances, we cannot excuse ourselves from obeying the truth as it is in Jesus (this is forcefully brought out in pages 466-468 in The Acts of the Apostles). May the Lord continue to bless the Ministry magazine. It just keeps growing better!—Herbert E. Perrine, Dayton, Ohio
Living peacefully amid the multidimensional demands of pastoring... Martha was not the only human to be distracted from her full function as she was faced by the throng of demands made upon her (Luke 10:38-42). She was also not the only one to feel the resulting waves of frustration. So has many a pastor.

“The modern preacher has to make as many visits as a country doctor, shake as many hands as a politician, prepare as many briefs as a lawyer, and see as many people as a specialist. He has to be as good an executive as the president of a university [and] as good a financier as a bank president...” (Pierce Harris quoted by Marshall Shelly in “The Problems of Battered Pastors,” Christianity Today, May 17, 1985, p. 35).

Aside from these and many other demands, another kind of pastoral expectation was identified centuries ago by Chrysostom, who observed that the minister’s shortcomings cannot be concealed, and that, however small his offenses may be, they are great in the eyes of those who measure failure not by the actual proportions of a given misdeed, but by the standing of the transgressor. How does the pastor relate to the composite array of expectations placed upon him or her?

We pray that the articles by Eric Winter, Judson Lake, James Kilmer, and Ed James will be of real help to every pastor in answering that question and in easing the strain of pastoral ministry’s exacting array of functions.

The articles less dedicated to the specific theme of this month’s issue will also be enriching and helpful.

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Founders Day in my small Florida hometown was a major event. Each February we celebrated our local holiday with a grand parade. Since our home was on the main street of the parade route, all our relatives and friends lined up their lawn chairs across our front yard to view the passing parade, all the while enjoying lemonade and cookies my sisters and I served them while trying to catch candy from the passing floats.

The year I turned 13 the parade committee invited us to ride our horses in the procession. Although flattered, I was also scared. My new horse, a jet-black Tennessee walking mare named Midnight, was spirited and magnificent, and a little too much horse for a 90-pound adolescent.

My father had confidence that, with his guidance, I could handle the challenge. It wouldn’t be easy. Midnight sensed she had intimidated me, and the couple of times she had run away with me bruised both ego and body. Riding her around the lane down at our farm was one thing. Controlling her along a noisy parade route was quite another. Yet this was an opportunity I didn’t want to miss.

On the morning of the parade, the crisp February air only made Midnight more frisky. As we waited in the line-up, my father, sensing my apprehension, reassured me: “You’ll do fine. I will see you at the end of the parade.” And then we were off. At that moment the four-mile parade route seemed like 40.

I was afraid to take my eyes, even for a few seconds, away from the mare’s ears and head. I needed to know every second how she was coping with the pandemonium around us. Horns honked. People shouted. Children ran into the street. I needed to keep close control of the situation. Step by step, Midnight finally seemed to settle down a bit and enjoy the attention and admiration of the downtown crowd. The mass of people on each side of me was a blur.

Could it be? Was that my father behind the crowd? Several minutes later I dared to look up at the people again. It seemed as if I were hallucinating, because there he was again. My father seemed to be popping up everywhere. A few minutes later it looked like him again behind another cluster of people. Again and again, as I maneuvered down the street, I caught glimpses of him in the sunlight and in the shadows of the downtown buildings.

When we finally reached our own crowded yard near the end of the parade route, Daddy stood in the front yard. There he was to meet us as he had promised.

“I thought I saw you about 20 times along the parade route,” I said. “Were you there?”

“Yes,” he smiled. “I ran the whole parade route behind the crowds just to make sure you all were going to be OK. I never let you out of my sight for a second.” Then he joked, “It was the only way your mother would give permission for you to ride today.”

Our Father and our fears

Most of us who serve in ministry work hard in our assignments. It’s a difficult route, with lots of dangers and distractions along the way. We want to give our members every indication that we have all things “under control.” For most of us, it is the “opportunity of a lifetime” for service, and we want more than anything to do it well. But sometimes it feels as though we are on a parade route in front of all our world, trying to please, always smiling, dressed in our best, and giving the impression that all is well.

The truth is, we are frightened. Frightened of our own inabilities, and that we will lose control of some circumstance. We may be afraid that someone, perhaps even a family member, will be hurt. Or afraid because we are stretching our talents and gifts and strengths beyond what we believe we are able. As we go, we could carry the fear that in the confusion of a lost world, people might distract us from our mission, or that the end seems so far away and we might not endure.

Above all, often we are terrified because we wonder where our heavenly Father is. Is He really with us, or has He forsaken us? Will He really be there at the end when we get there? Then we remember how He called us to begin our ministry, and we believe He will be waiting there to welcome us, saying: “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21, NKJV).

Meanwhile, sometimes it seems that we are out there alone in the crowd. But then, in a still moment, when we dare look away from trying to control the situation ourselves, when we tune out the distractions, we get a glimpse of Him. He is actually right there, perhaps in the background, running along beside us, cheering us on, feeling every insecurity, ensuring our safety.

Continued on page 14
Preserve the vessel, share the treasure

Eric H. Winter

Dealing with the multifunctional roles of contemporary pastoral ministry

The role of a minister is a complex one. Pastors need to define and understand clearly their expectations from God, their parishioners, their organization, and themselves. How ministers understand their role will determine their attitude toward their work and their effectiveness as pastors. A failure to understand their role will result in low self-esteem, lack of job satisfaction, anxiety, and serious stress.

To comprehend the pastor’s role in relation to God and human beings is as necessary as it is complex and demanding. After an exhaustive study of the biblical concept of ministry, W. T. Purkiser has concluded: “In part the deteriorating image of the ministry both outside the church and among its laity may well be due to the fact that ministers themselves often betray a profound lack of understanding of their calling. The fuzziness of the image reflects the ministers’ own groping for an identity in modern society.”

In light of this ambivalence and the importance of pastoral role definition, it has been suggested that any description of the minister’s function should be “negotiated” and “intentional.” “We believe effectiveness and faithfulness in ministry results from negotiating an intentional ministry. In this setting, negotiation refers to the quality of relationships and transactions by which ministry is carried out. Intentionality refers to the style of faith and proactive behavior that is at the heart of effective ministry.”

The emphasis here is on a ministry that establishes and clarifies intentions; has a clear concept of the mission of the church; sets priorities and thus creates the minister’s role, mobilizing the resources available to him or her. A pastor cannot “negotiate” the role and function of his or her particular ministry with the congregation until the minister’s own “intentions” are clearly defined. Yet it is just as important that the church clarify its role and mission in the world.

Biblical views of the pastoral role

In searching the Bible for a description of the minister’s role, it is not difficult to mistakenly exacerbate the already confusing multifunctional portrayal of the pastoral task. Some studies have identified as many as 30 distinct roles for the minister. When the Bible is invoked as the source of such descriptions, an even more overwhelming sense of strain may come into play with regard to the pastor.

One well-intentioned study of the role of the minister in Scripture perceives ministerial function to be based upon seven elements relating the minister to God Himself: The ministry is a calling, initiated by God (Heb. 5:4); a covenant of faith in God’s promises—an activity of assurance, not anxiety; a commitment to the purposes of God being the pastor’s choice; a commission given by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by the church; a consecration being God’s act of setting the minister apart for sacred ends; a challenge because it is the greatest task committed to humanity; and a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ through proclaiming the Word.

Growing out of this, the same study distinguishes 16 different ministerial images in the New Testament: “messenger” (Mark 1:2); “fisherman” (Mark
complexity of his ministry without the muddle and evaluate what he is doing.

leader in the congregation, a theory comprehensive theory of his role as role of being disciple-makers and allows ministers to take on the primary commission around the whole church. Such a role assignment would go far in relieving the burden of such an array of multifaceted expectations. 

Relieving the minister of multifaceted expectations

The key to relieving the minister from the burden of such an array of disparate expectations is clear: a renewed and more church-wide emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the ministry of the laity through the gifts of the Spirit. In this setting the pastor will be seen as a coordinating leader in the congregation. Such a role assignment would go far in relieving the confused role conflict experienced by so many clergy. Sharing of the gospel commission around the whole church allows ministers to take on the primary role of being disciple-makers and leaders.

Duane Litfin emphasizes what he calls the “leader and completer” role: “A pastor needs some way to consolidate all these diverse activities into a comprehensive theory of his role as leader in the congregation, a theory which will enable him to sort through the muddle and evaluate what he is doing. Only in this way can a pastor face the complexity of his ministry without losing himself and his sense of purpose. To attempt to function without such an overall theory is to court the disaster of directionlessness which seems to afflict so many ministers.”

The question arises, Has the church added to the complexity of the pastoral role by gathering too much authority and function around its pastors? The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its pastors need to reflect on this issue if they are to minister realistically to today’s needs.

The Adventist Church and the minister

The history and theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have

A pastor needs a theory which will enable him to sort through the muddle and evaluate what he is doing.

Adventist Church has the benefit of finding a sense of direction not only in Scripture but also in the work of Ellen White. She affirms the highest biblical view of the pastoral call: “Would that every minister of God realized the holiness of his work and the sacredness of his calling. As divinely appointed messengers, ministers are in a position of awful responsibility.”

The Index to Mrs. White’s books lists more than 1,700 references covering 31 categories of the ministerial role. In addition, many hundreds of references are listed under the categories of “preachers,” “shepherds,” “gospel workers,” and “evangelists.” The theme of the significance and sacredness of the ministry is dominant in what Ellen White says about ministry. Along with this, another theme emerges: the need for the entire church to be involved in the completion of the task of the church. Without proper role clarification Adventist ministers may be overwhelmed by the significance and sacredness of their calling. They may feel unfit or unqualified should they fail to reach the high and idealistic expectations presented in the counsel of Mrs. White. This attitude, if not correctly dealt with, will add significantly to the internal conflict of the pastor. An Adventist ordination service and the charge it contains reflect the high standards expected of the minister. Such expectations can be fulfilled only when the church continues to nurture and support its pastors and provide opportunities for them to practice the New Testament model of ministry that takes into account both the clergy and the laity in the fulfillment of the gospel commission.

Pastors as earthen vessels

It is true that without the very highest understanding and conviction of their calling from God, ministers will never aspire to, or achieve, what they have been called to do and to be. Likewise, to deny their human limitations and attempt to fulfill all the expectations directed their way will result in tension,
low self-esteem, and a feeling of not achieving.

Paul’s classic metaphor “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7) points to the superiority of the “treasure” (Jesus Christ), as compared with the inferiority of the “vessel” (the preacher). “However great his Christian privileges and glory, he [the minister] is still a mortal man; he is still a victim of circumstance; he is still involved in a human situation over which he has no control; he is still a mortal body with all the body’s weakness and pain. He is like a man with a precious treasure, but the treasure is contained in an earthen vessel, which itself is weak and worthless.” 8

The work of the gospel minister involves both God and people. In spite of their inequality, they are inseparably united in the proclamation of the saving power of Jesus Christ. “In God’s economy there is no such thing as the delivery of this glorious message of truth without a preacher. In the elective purpose of God His will and work are made known to us through a living personality,” 9 the minister. But “the minister . . . is only a man, and often a very ordinary man. He is not a superman. Neither is he an iron man. He has feelings and emotions, the same as other men; he grows weary, even as others do.” 10

To this end, both pastoral leaders and church administrators need to acknowledge the frailty of the “earthen vessel.” In addition, the parishioners must be aware of their ministers’ humanness. When expectations are tempered by such a conscious admission, then the stressfulness of the role conflict of the minister will be lessened.

Conflict is not necessarily bad. If controlled, it will both stimulate and motivate. If uncontrolled, it will be disastrous. G. Campbell Morgan provides the needed balance: “The pressure is in the earthen vessels, and they are subject to afflictions. There is a revelation of great principle of all successful work. It is through the breaking of the earthen vessels that light flashes out upon the pathway of others. . . . Yet the other truth is recognized that the power is such that all the pressure upon the earthen vessels is not sufficient to destroy them.” 11 Yet with a large proportion of ministers undergoing stress-related role conflicts, something is wrong. There is an urgency that the minister be ministered to.

“To promote the highest ends of the ministry the servant of God must begin with himself.” 12 The acknowledgment of this truth allows for a viable intentionality in encouraging ministers, parishioners, and employers to relate with supportive understanding. It acknowledges God’s true understanding of His “earthen vessels.” It lends itself to a healthier ministry with less role conflict.

Where genuine partnership exists, role conflict in ministry can be lessened.

“Role conflicts occur when two or more role expectations interfere with each other or contradict one another altogether. . . . In a serious conflict, the compliance with one expectation may make it completely impossible to comply with another.” 13 The minister himself or herself, the local congregation, and church administration must intentionally combine to negotiate a reduction in the contradictory interplay of such diverse role expectations.

It is encouraging to note that such role conflicts are not new to the people of God. Biblical patriarchs, prophets, priests, and preachers too have experienced such conflicts. Paul experienced conflict between his desire to be self-supporting when he was entitled to be supported by the church, acting thus “in places where his motives might have been misunderstood.” 14 He had to choose between receiving pay or remaining independent at the expense of his apostolic role. Peter and John (Acts 4:13-22) experienced role conflict between the command of Christ to preach and the command of the authorities not to preach. To decide either way was to create anxiety as they related to their obligations.

We can minimize these conflicts if we consciously admit that we are only earthen vessels, charged with sharing the divine treasure to all people through the help of our congregations. Pastors are not only leaders but trainers of others to be partners in the ministry. Even though this may seem to place yet another obligation on an already overcrowded pastoral role structure, it is an obligation that leads to long-term relief rather than ongoing frustration. This will be so especially if the whole church is engaged in the task of ushering in this shift in emphasis. Where genuine partnership exists, role conflict in ministry can be lessened and role fulfillment increased.

3 Purkiser, pp. 22-29.
4 Biersdorf, p. 51.
13 Smith, pp. 26, 27.
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The crisis of terminal illness

Penny Shell

No pastoral experience is more rewarding than an honest, intimate relationship with a person facing the end of life.

Pastor Jon,” Sheri began, “I’m calling from the hospital. Devin has just been diagnosed with leukemia. His doctor wants to begin chemotherapy, so he may be here a while. I didn’t tell Devin I was going to call you, but I thought you should know. I’m not sure you should visit. I don’t want to scare him. I...”

Jon interrupted Sheri to say he would be right there. Devin was not only his parishioner but his friend. Both were in their forties, and both had teenage children. Accustomed to being a calm pastoral authority, Jon was surprised at his own jumble of feelings. He actually felt a little light-headed as he sat down forcing himself to concentrate.

Sitting there, Jon noticed a growing sense of pride that he, not the senior pastor, had been called. Yes, it felt good that Sheri and Devin counted on him to take care of things. He started for the door. He would assure them that Devin would be all right. He would take his Bible and use it to build their faith... But would his approach be helpful? What do you say to someone who has just been told that he has leukemia?

The shock

A diagnosis of terminal illness almost always shocks us. We feel as though we are riding on a fast-moving train that suddenly slams into thickly drifted snow hidden in the fog. The impact is devastating for those most affected, but it creates disorientation and stress for pastors as well.

A burst of adrenaline might carry us through our initial contact with the family, but as the days, weeks, and months go by, we need support, skill, and spiritual strength to continue to pastor with strength, sensitivity, and care.

How, then, can we be prepared to minister to the terminally ill?

Personal preparation

Giving attention to our own lives may seem a strange way to begin, but the quality of our ministry is in direct proportion to our responsible self-care. You may find it helpful to write out your personal answer to each of the following six questions.

What do I know about working with the terminally ill? Both theory and practice are necessary to help us learn. A good place to begin is taking classes in crisis intervention and death and dying. One of the most helpful ways for pastors to learn...
to minister in crisis is to take a unit of clinical pastoral education.1

How do I view severe illness? If we or anyone in our families have experienced serious or life-threatening illness, we can analyze how the illness affected the ailing person and our relationship with them. If we have not been a firsthand witness to the devastations of illness, we may be surprised at the profound changes illness can produce.

Unlike the tidy illnesses of television stories, people in real life may lose their hair, become skeletal, undergo a personality change, and acquire unpleasant odors. The devout church elder may use the lewd language of his youth after a stroke causes senility to set in. The “mother in Israel” may become a bald, anorexic, waxen doll. The strong, faith-filled young man may become a doubting, weeping complainer. In such circumstances we are called to be God’s visionaries who can still see the precious child of God, now assaulted by life’s crippling blows.

Another view that we may hold unconsciously is that severe illness represents God’s displeasure. The word “stroke,” for example, carries the implication that God has struck or is punishing the person. A few decades ago cancer was an almost unspeakable disease because of its association with God’s condemnation. Even today, as in biblical times, certain illnesses are considered to be a mark of divine retribution.

What are my emotional reactions? Another person’s health crisis often makes us think about our own health and eventual death. The closer the person is to our racial, gender, economic, and age category—or the more the person reminds us of someone with whom we have an intimate relationship (positive or negative)—the greater their situation impacts us emotionally. Acknowledging our feelings and expressing them appropriately frees us to support our parishioners.

What are my limits? While not “counting the cost” is often seen as noble, it may leave other parts of our lives neglected. Jesus Himself encouraged us to count the cost of our commitments. Counting the cost does not prevent us from acting, but recognizes our limits and helps us decide what action to take.

Perhaps we are in the middle of a major church program when the crisis occurs. Maybe we are in a personal crisis of our own. If so, we can ask for help. Others with more time and energy than we have may be better able to minister in this crisis.

What support do I have? Taking care of ourselves so we can better care for others is inherent in the biblical injunction “love your neighbor as yourself.” We find many reasons to neglect our own needs. In view of the ill person’s great need, we may be tempted to think that our needs don’t matter. Some of us may feel buoyed up by the thought that we are the “only ones who can really help.” Then we hug the situation to ourselves, not wanting to share it. Or we may fail to seek help because, like Elijah’s servant, we can’t see any support available to us. Yet, finding personal sustenance strengthens our ministry in the same way that putting on our oxygen mask first makes us ready to help others when the airplane pressure drops.

Moses succeeded in blessing Israel during their crisis because he accepted the support of Aaron and Hur (Ex. 17:8-16). We too need to ask “Who can hold up my hands?” Colleagues? Family members? Friends or counselors? Our request to them can be as simple as “During this crisis could we get together every Thursday for lunch so I can talk about it?” Or “Would you call me at 9:00 p.m. each Monday to see how I am doing?” Regular meetings with a peer group provide a ready-made place to vent our feelings, share our difficulties, exchange ideas, and gain perspective.

Then there is the ever-present support from God. We can renew that holy presence in a few moments of stillness before we enter house or hospital. We can breathe in assurance and breathe out our desire for wisdom.

How can my church enter into this ministry? Our congregations can become valuable partners in our ministry in several ways: (1) Church members who show special skills in relating to others can become competent ministers to the ill and dying. An effective training plan is the Stephen Ministry program. Stephen Ministries are a great blessing to many churches, and most Stephen ministers themselves feel blessed by engaging in this ministry. (2) A knowledgeable person or a small committee in your congregation may enjoy creating and updating a church resource book listing local support groups, crisis hot lines, and counselors for use in crises, including terminal illness. (3) Others may form networks such as prayer chains, food preparation teams, and transportation groups so that support can be quickly rallied as it is needed.

Guidelines for interaction

Personal preparation and support can improve our readiness to minister to those in crisis. But how do we put this into practice? The following principles have blessed my ministry to the terminally ill.

1. Be alert and sensitive. When visiting a person whose well-being depends on medical equipment, we can avoid problems by becoming aware of their territory. Sitting on the person’s bed may be a good idea, but check with the person first. A recent “accident” may have soiled part of the bed. Careless movements may pull apart IV lines or oxygen tubes or other equipment under the covers. An accidental bump could injure a tender body area.

How long should we stay? Occasionally a long visit is extremely important to the person we visit, but generally long visits tire the seriously ill. High-quality, short visits are usually best. We can create a quality visit by removing our wraps or other equipment under the covers. An accidental bump could injure a tender body area.

2. Recognize life. When we accept that we are all dying, we can be more aware that “terminal” people are living. They are still interested in sports and politics, family and religion. The point is to relate to the terminally ill in the same respect-
ful way we always have and not treat them as if they are someone who is already gone.

3. Empower others. We are sometimes called to visit the ill because we are authority figures, but we will serve the dying best as servant leaders. Because very ill people lose so much control over their lives, they easily become mired in a sense of helplessness. As servant leaders we increase their own personal authority by listening to their ideas of how to meet their needs. In a way, we exchange places. We become a “congregation of one” to our parishioners, listening intently while they find ways to be strengthened. Pontificating grabs power away from others: “You should take Tom to our healing service.” “You must be anointed.” “Read Psalm 91 every day.” Or “Deal with your denial.” It is much more effective to elicit responses in others. This creates power in them: “Tell me how you see the situation.” “What helps you the most?”

4. Connect with family. The ill don’t suffer alone; their whole family is affected. As we spend time with the family of someone who is dying, we begin to see how each member relates to the others. Discover the ones who seem to be the family spokespersons, the main decision-makers. They can be a valuable source of information and connection with the whole family.

Some family members may appear helpless, have trouble expressing their feelings, or get pushed to the side. We can support these less-visible members by listening to them and acknowledging their pain and efforts. Children are often in the latter group. We can encourage adults to trust children to choose their own degree of involvement and not to “protect” them automatically.

When a person is terminally ill, the family often begins grieving long before death comes. We can facilitate this process by accepting their pain. If the husband says to us, “I don’t think she is going to make it, Pastor,” it doesn’t help to say “Oh, come now, you need to have faith.” Consolation comes when we acknowledge the feelings expressed: “That must be very frightening.”

We can also help family members cope by asking them what other crises they have faced and what they did to cope then. Just remembering how they have coped before reengages gears of action and coping in the present. Since family members literally forget to care for themselves at times, we can encourage their ideas for their own support, such as planning a day out.

5. Communicate honestly and directly. What should we do if the family tells us that “Grandma doesn’t know she has cancer, and we aren’t telling her”? A possible response is to let the family know that while we will not announce Grandma’s diagnosis to her, we cannot tell her a made-up story if she asks a direct question.

Should a pastor talk about dying? It can be hard—that’s why Jon planned to assure Devin that he would be all right. True, we don’t need to bring up dying. But if the sick person expresses fears of dying, our listening can provide comfort and relief.

Should the pastor cry? To be happy always makes a contribution, but it may also short-circuit sadness that is natural and appropriate. Tears can bless. Excessive tears, on the other hand, can be a burden if we have become so emotional that others feel they must take care of us. We may avoid too many tears by doing our own grief work with peers and counselors.

What about talking to unconscious people? When the ill are nonresponsive, we may find ourselves talking to others about them in their presence. We need to remember that an ill person may hear us even when they can’t respond, so it is best to continue talking directly to them. Explain to the family, “I know Al doesn’t respond to us at this time, but I am uncomfortable just talking about him. Excuse me while I talk with him a moment.” Then say to Al, “Al, I know that you are very weak right now and that you cannot talk with me, but be patient while I do all the talking. Renee tells me you had been planning a retirement vacation when you were diagnosed. That must be a real disappointment. She said Al, Jr., is coming to town to visit with the two of you this weekend. I would imagine it is hard for you to have Al Jr., see you so still, but it will be good for him to be with his dad, no matter what the circumstances. Renee has asked me to pray for you. I wish you were able to let me know just what was most on your heart, but God knows what you feel and what you need, and even if I get it all wrong, God will get it all right.”

6. Deal with emotions. When we listen to expressions of emotion, we help the dying “take out the trash” before they die. Our nonjudgmental listening can help the ill express emotions such as anger, doubt, fear, sadness, or guilt. Unacknowledged or denied emotions bury themselves; they do not go away.

Feelings of guilt deserve special care. If we have a relationship of trust with the ill, we are often the ones with whom they share this guilt. Not all guilt is logical, but all guilt can be respected. Through patient, nonjudgmental listening we can offer the reassurance of God’s forgiveness and grace. Guilt is a persistent visitor. Though banished one day, it may reappear the next.

7. Bring religious resources gently. The way we use Scripture and prayer can honor or trample a person’s needs. We don’t need to force a text into the conversation by saying “What you really need to read is . . .” Rather, ask “Would you like me to read a scripture while I am here?” Then we can respect any negative or unclear answers (“Well, if you want to”) by saying “That’s OK. Let me know when you want to hear Scripture.” When, as most people do, they say yes, we can offer, “Do you have a favorite scripture you would like to hear?” If not, we can be ready to share a scripture that has blessed us in hard times.

Prayer also can be more effective when offered and not imposed. Sometimes the best prayer is the one we pray before we visit. The effective prayer that avails much is one that grows naturally out of the conversation, the one that reflects the concerns and even the words of the dying person.

Like Scripture, prayer is more welcome when it comes
with permission: “Would you like me to pray for you?” Respect unenthusiastic answers, such as “Well, I guess you can,” with “That’s OK; we can pray another time.” Most people, however, do welcome our prayers. When they do, one of the most meaningful things we can ask is “What would you like me to pray for?” Often people think quietly and deeply about this question. Then, sometimes with tears, come the heartfelt requests: “Pray that the kids will be OK after I am gone.” “Pray for my healing.” “Pray that I will not linger on and on.” “Pray that my coworkers will open their hearts to the Lord.” “Pray that we can find a way to pay for all of these medical expenses.” And when their cry is reflected in our prayer, showing how carefully we have heard them, they are reassured God hears them as well.

Additional religious resources we may offer include anointing, communion, and other concrete symbols of personal spiritual meaning.

8. **Hang on to God’s bottom line.** Sometimes merely sitting quietly with the ill person and the family is our best ministry. Implementing “correct methods of visitation” cannot substitute for a genuine caring presence. Just being there, or being with, is often simply all that is needed. That is the bottom line of our ministry to the terminally ill: to live out God’s promises “I will never leave you nor forsake you”; “Do not fear, for I am with you” (Joshua 1:5, NIV; Isaiah 41:10, NIV).

**Worth the price**

If we rush to the dying as heroes, to receive appreciation and praise, we may fall on our faces. But when we have made the proper arrangements to care for ourselves and to enter with sensitivity, wisdom, and commitment into the lives of those diagnosed with a terminal illness, we open ourselves for an effective ministry. Probably no experience is more rewarding than an honest, intimate relationship with a person facing the end of life.

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1. Clinical pastoral education is training for crisis ministry in which a supervisor and peers give support and feedback during actual ministry in a crisis setting. For more information about a program near you, call Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (404-320-1472). Adventist health systems or hospitals currently offering clinical pastoral education include Adventist HealthCare Mid-Atlantic, located at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital (301-279-6438); Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida (301-279-6438); Kettering Medical Center, Dayton, Ohio (513-298-4331, ext. 5000); and Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, California (909-824-4367).

2. Family here refers to those who are seen as intimate and meaningful, whether or not they are related by blood ties or marital bonds.

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**CONTINUING EDUCATION EXERCISE**

**The crisis of terminal illness**

1. You have just been diagnosed with advanced leukemia and have been given a 30 percent chance of surviving. You are told that you would have a 45 percent chance if you underwent at least six months of chemotherapy. What additional information would you need to make a decision? Summarize your feelings.

2. Interview someone who has experienced the terminal illness and death of a loved one. Seek answers to two questions: What are you glad you did? What do you wish you had done differently?

3. Survey your congregation to find three to six people who have lost a loved one from a protracted illness. Arrange to meet with them once or twice for 90-minute sessions in which they tell you how a minister can best support someone with a terminal illness.

4. Have a person or small group create a resource notebook for the church office. Be sure that it lists hot lines, support groups, grief classes, prayer chains, and so on. Develop a plan to update the book regularly.

5. Form a collegial support group to discuss the difficulties you face. Choose a time and place for meeting. Come together at least once a quarter.

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**Suggested reading**


Kavar, Louis F. *Pastoral Ministry in the AIDS Era: Focus on Families and Friends of Persons with AIDS*. Wayzata, Minn.: Woodland Pub. Co., 1988. Although this book is too old to include the latest medical information on AIDS, Kavar’s discussion on the myths of AIDS and principles for understanding the family in crisis are timeless.

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: Bantam Books, 1961. C. S. Lewis reflects on his experience as his wife struggled with cancer, and shares his faith struggles after her death following a happy marriage of only four years.


Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Wounded Healer*. Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979. The book emphasizes the need of the healer, the minister, to stay open to his or her own woundedness while caring for others.
Managing time well

Judson S. Lake, Jr.

The best of the best in time management systems

Time-management systems abound, and the busy pastor needs the best of the best. Three systems outclass all others: the Time Power System, the Franklin System, and The Seven Habits System. What makes these three systems superior is their value-based foundation. They teach that true time management occurs only when your daily activities harmonize with your highest values in life.

The Time Power System, developed by Charles R. Hobbs, is the best of the three. In the early seventies Hobbs pioneered the concept of managing time from values, and his original work continues unsurpassed. It is the perfect time-management system for pastoral ministry. The following is my own summary of the main ingredients of this system.

The guiding principles of the system

An articulated value structure is the foundation of effective time management. Personal values are best articulated in the form of guiding principles. A guiding principle is a highly regarded truth or value used as a guide for goal planning and making daily decisions. Examples a pastor might use are: “Love the Lord with all your heart,” “Put my family first in ministry,” “Lead the lost to Christ,” or “Be pure in heart.” Attached to each guiding principle is a clarifying statement consisting of at least one sentence or brief paragraph.

Here is an example:

Commit to Excellence: Do your very best in every undertaking. Prepare intensely for presentations and projects. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Col. 3:23, NIV).

A prioritized set of guiding principles written like this can become your personal mission statement, philosophy of life, or personal constitution. Thus, this document forms the framework for every decision you make, every goal you set, and every daily task you undertake. Imagine the direction and focus this can bring to your life and ministry.

Goals

A fully articulated goal, written in the framework of your guiding principles, is a powerful life-changing force. A goal may be defined as a written statement of a specific event you plan to bring systematically under your control in the future. Notice several important elements in this definition.

First, a goal should be written. This makes it tangible and concrete, something you can return to again and again for motivation and guidance.

Second, a goal should be specific, measurable, and dated or regulatory. Dated goals carry a target date, such as “Introduce small group ministry to the Jackson church on Sabbath, June 7, 1997.” Regulatory goals are daily, ongoing commitments, such as “Spend one hour alone with God every morning.”

Third, a goal should be accomplished systematically; that is, one step at a time.

Fourth, consciously realize that when you accomplish a goal, you bring it under control, and in turn, bring events in your life and ministry under control.

A true goal is actually an integrated unit of goals: a head goal with subgoals...
and daily goals generating from it. A written goal unit would look like this:

**Head goal:**


**Subgoals:**

- a-1 Schedule doctor's appointment for physical by September 5.
- a-2 Eat low-fat meals daily.
- a-3 Work out at fitness center 40 minutes Monday-Friday.
- a-4 Avoid rich desserts at meals.
- a-5 Drink six glasses of water every day.

**Daily goals:**

To do on September 3.

A-4 Schedule doctor’s appointment for physical before noon.
A-5 Eat salad bar meal at lunch appointment.

Take a look at this example again. The head goal is a single, concise, dated, action statement, descriptive of exactly what you want to accomplish. The subgoals are generated from the head goal, explaining exactly how to achieve them. The daily goals, generated from the subgoals, are the specific actions you take day by day to accomplish the head goal. Notice how this goal unit is prioritized using the letter-number system: uppercase for head goals, A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, etc., lowercase for subgoals, a-1, a-2, b-1, b-2, etc., and uppercase again for daily goals written in the daily to-do list. Writing every goal like this will bring focus, specificity, direction, and power into goal planning and thus into everyday life.

Two important issues surround goal planning.

**First**, test every goal unit to see that it harmonizes with your value structure.

**Second**, write your goal units for every major area of life. For personal life areas, such as spiritual, family, intellectual/cultural, physical, social, professional, and financial. And then for your pastoral work: preaching/teaching, worship, pastoral nurture/care, administration/management, leadership/vision, evangelism/church growth, and church finances.

When one or more goal units are written in each of these areas, you will have harmony, balance, and appropriateness in your personal life and ministry goal plan.

**Using an organizer**

A datebook organizer (electronic or otherwise), with its calendar, tabbed sections, address and phone directory, is a must for effective time management. I use the Day-Timer and find it meets all my needs as a busy pastor. Following Hobbs’s Time Power System, I print out my guiding principles and goal units with my computer and put them in my Day-Timer. Since I carry my Day-Timer with me almost everywhere, my life plan is accessible. Every time I open the Day-Timer my guiding principles and goals leap out at me, calling me to action. On a particular day’s page, I write out and prioritize my daily action list (to-do list) while checking my proposed actions for the day against my prioritized goal units. In doing this, I incorporate into my day activities that are responsive to my long-range head goals, as well as taking action on pressing items for that day.

**Keys for making the system work**

Three keys for successfully working this system are:

1. A daily planning time early in the morning.
2. Frequent reviewing and editing of your action list throughout the day.
3. Checking off daily goals and other items in your action list as they are accomplished.

This threefold practice induces a sense of urgency to the high-priority daily goals on your list and will motivate you to accomplish them. It really works!

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5. Hobbs’s system is fully explained in his book *Time Power* (see note 2). Please note I have changed some of his terminology, but not the concepts.
7. Hobbs gives the most complete discussion of goal planning ever written, pp. 41-66. In *First Things First*, pp. 136-153, Covey offers helpful ideas on goal planning that supplement those of Hobbs.
9. Datebook organizers have five major parts: a ring binder, monthly calendars, monthly filler books, an address and phone directory, and a tabbed section for data tailored to personal needs. Thus, you have a complete system to manage your life and its details.

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**Remembering our Father**

*Continued from page 4*

watching over us every moment.

In much of the world, June is when we remember our earthly fathers on a special day. We give them cards and gifts, or perhaps a gadget of some kind, and we let them know how much we love and appreciate them. It feels good to honor them.

While I will most certainly honor my earthly father, my heavenly Father also deserves special gifts. He isn’t waiting for gadgets. He is waiting for me to look up a little more often from my own agendas to find Him there in the shadows, or even out in the sunlight. Seeing Him will leave me less frightened in the crowd. The journey will not seem so long. And when we come to the end He will be there to tell each of us face-to-face, “I went the whole way with you.”
The pastor and the depressed parishioner

David Wesley Reid

Guidelines for competent ministry to the depressed

Pastor, I feel so miserable.” I was still in bed when the cry on the phone awakened me. The words were heavy with sadness. The tone reflected emptiness and inner loss.

“Marie, what’s wrong?” I asked.

“He’s gone, pastor. My husband’s gone. Not that he’s run away or anything. It’s just that he has this new job and he’s never home! How does he expect me to keep things going by myself? I just can’t do it! And my brother . . . he’s so sick. You know, he had back surgery, and the doctors are worried about him. And my mom, she’s calling me and crying all the time. Oh pastor, I’m just so unhappy!”

Marie had struggled with her problems. Finally they had become too much. For two days prior to calling me she had shut herself in, refused to answer the telephone or doorbell, relinquished all the household chores to her two daughters, and stayed in bed weeping.

Do Marie’s complaints appear somewhat inconsequential? The truth is, she was suffering from depression. Depression is a common malady of our times. Every pastor encounters it in the parish. Though treatment and recovery are promising, depression can be a protracted problem, one that diminishes the overall health of the sufferer, along with the well-being of their family.

Twenty-four years of pastoral ministry has led me to the conviction that the local church can play a dynamic role in ministering to the depressed. The church lives to care and to impart to people the sense that they matter. At the core of our proclamation is the reality of forgiveness, faith in an omnipotent God, and the true worth of every human being.

This being so, it is important that pastors learn how to offer this kind of care with competence. More than one study has shown that often the pastor is the first point of professional contact for depressed persons seeking help. Therefore, the kind of help pastors offer is a matter of critical significance. Skilled care may help to diminish the scope and duration of a parishioner’s pain, while inept care may prove disastrous, even life threatening.

What makes up competent pastoral care? From my experience two skill areas constitute pastoral competence when dealing with depressed persons: identification and intervention.

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Recognizing symptoms

The common symptoms of depression fall under five categories.

1. Feeling. Depressed persons feel sad or dejected and may be prone to frequent bouts of weeping.

2. Cognitive process. Depressed individuals think negatively about almost everything. They ruminate a great deal
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- over past mistakes.¹ As a result, they have low self-esteem. Trivial problems seem monumental. Guilt is a constant plague, not only in the light of things done or undone, but simply in the light of being.

3. Motivation. Depressed persons suffer from a paraplegia of the will. They are indecisive. Projects go untouched. Tasks undertaken frequently go unfinished.

4. Physical health. Depressed persons generally exhibit one or more symptoms of waning physical health. These may be real or imagined.

5. Behavior. Depressed persons display a general slowdown in physical activity. A few days prior to calling me, Marie had retreated to bed, refusing to get up despite the pleas of her daughters and friends.

Viewed together, all five categories of symptoms serve as a conceptual tool for recognizing depression. However, research shows that symptoms of depression are not always clearly manifested. Often they are masked by “depressive or affective equivalents,”² that is, changes in physical health, behavior, or temperament that do not obviously attach themselves to a depressive event. When this happens, identifying depression may be difficult.

These masked symptoms may include hyperactivity, anxiousness, agitation, overachievement, underachievement, chronic tardiness, overwork or laziness, insomnia, excessive sleeping, bowel irregularities, overpoliteness, inappropriate laughter, flightiness, excessive pleasure seeking, forgetfulness, overeating, undereating, neglect of appearance, excessive generosity, inability to concentrate, compulsive TV watching or radio listening, reckless driving, overindulgence in alcohol or drugs, daydreaming, obsessive-compulsive activity, apathy, supersensitivity, lack of humor, angry outbursts, mood swings, sarcasm, or cynicism.

Evaluating the severity

Recognizing the symptoms of depression represents half the identification task. Evaluating the severity represents the other half. Estimating the severity of a depressive condition is vitally important in that underestimation could prove fatal.

David, 21, a recent college graduate, asked to see me for a few minutes. The visit became an extended one during which David described his struggles with depression. His distress was obvious, but I underestimated its intensity. Smiling as he left, he said he looked forward to meeting me the next day. He never made it. At 5:00 the next morning his brother called to convey the news that David had jumped off a nearby bridge, plummeting 300 feet to his death.

One way of weighing the degree of seriousness in a depressive situation is to find out how much the depression has upset the person’s usual daily routine. Generally, the more significantly the daily routine is disrupted, the more serious the depression is.

Mild depression is usually characterized by: (1) a cause that is likely to be recent and overt; (2) a mood of sadness; (3) a slight lack of ambition; (4) occasional daydreaming (particularly about activities of pleasurable escape); (5) a low-grade pessimism; and (6) a general sense of lethargy.

Moderate depression is characterized by: (1) occasional thoughts of suicide; (2) a diminished sense of efficiency in daily responsibilities; (3) a lowered sense of self-esteem; (4) numerous aches and pains; (5) a desire to withdraw; (6) a feeling of melancholy; (7) fatigue; (8) frequent fantasizing; (9) an active resistance to taking on new responsibilities; and (10) a sense of being immobilized.

Severe depression is characterized by: (1) hallucinations (in some cases); (2) strong suicidal wishes; (3) an inability to carry out the daily routine; (4) thoughts of total worthlessness; (5) radical social withdrawal; (6) despair; (7) severe physical lethargy; and (8) an almost complete loss of motivation.

Intervention

Once depression is identified and
assessed, intervention follows. Ten guidelines for intervention have proved to be helpful.

1. **Be caring, not just concerned.** Depressed persons generally feel unloved and unlovable. When pastors express “concern” and do not follow up with “caring,” their support may be viewed as coming from a sense of obligation rather than love. This reinforces an already overdeveloped self-perception of worthlessness, only exacerbating the depression.

2. **Take the initiative.** Depressed persons will often deny their need for help and resist it. Pastors need to find discreet ways to make contact—perhaps a telephone call, an invitation to lunch, a personal note, or a quiet conversation in the hallway after church.

3. **Empathize rather than sympathize.** Sympathy is not necessarily negative, but it may reinforce self-pity, which is not helpful to the recovery process. Something like the following could be said: “I have never been exactly where you are, but I have been depressed enough to know how very unpleasant it is. I also know that there are certain things that can be done to ease your pain and help you regain your peace of mind. If you’d like, I’d be glad to help you work things out.”

4. **Hold out hope.** A depressed person often gets such pithy counsel as “Cheer up,” “Hang in there,” or “It’ll work out.” These put-off comments are not hope-infusing; in fact, they are hope-diffusing. Of far greater benefit is a comment such as this: “I want you to know the time will come, perhaps soon, when you’ll be beyond this depression. Although now it is a limiting distress and the process out of it may not be easy or painless, the depression will pass.” When I look a depressed person in the eye and articulate these words with conviction, almost without exception the result is an audible sigh of relief. The person may not grasp the hope straightaway, but hope finds root, to be owned at a later date.

5. **Actions speak louder than words.** For a depressed person, words may seem empty, powerless, and futile. Action is more likely to communicate. In ministry the action that talks the loudest is the pastor’s willingness to spend time with the depressed parishioner. Because depression hurts, avoidance is instinctive. But a pastor’s willingness to share the hurt through voluntarily personal association speaks volumes about the authenticity—and thus the healing properties—of the pastor’s caring.

6. **Remember that recovery is a process.** In dealing with pain, one is greatly tempted to seek a quick closure. Depression is no exception. Marie left my office after our first conversation, having gained an understanding of why she had become depressed. Mistakenly she thought the depression was over. She was astonished and disappointed the next morning to discover that she felt bad again. Moving from a depres-
sion to recovery always involves a process. This process takes time.

7. Beware of manipulation. Depression breeds dependence, accompanied by a demand for attention. This in turn frequently causes a depressed person to latch onto the pastor to get the kind and degree of attention desired. Flattery becomes common: “Pastor, you’re the only one who understands”; or “Pastor, you’re so in touch with what I feel. I’d like to continue seeing you until I feel better.” At face value, there is nothing wrong with such attitudes, but they should be viewed as a red flag. It may be advisable to connect the depressed person with other support persons or groups, or to refer them to professional counseling.

8. Utilize faith resources. Pastors have an advantage over secular caregivers in that they are expected to draw upon spiritual resources. Prayer, Bible reading, preaching, and the sacraments, if appropriately presented, connect the depressed parishioner with the healing grace of God. It is at the heart of the pastor’s calling to propose the “good news” themes of the Christian faith, such as God’s rescuing nature, the constancy of His love even in times of doubt and despair, the promise of forgiveness in Christ, the personal availability of the Holy Spirit, the assurance of God’s unremitting purpose at work in individual lives, and the confident hope that one day we will all be victorious over pain and death.

9. Be ready to refer. If a pastor has serious questions about the profile of a given state of depression, he or she may refer the parishioner to a specialist in counseling. It is important to be gentle in doing this, so that it is not misconstrued as rejection. Reassure the parishioner of your continued support and encouragement as a pastor.

10. Don’t hesitate to take emergency action. In some cases of depression the risk of suicide is high. Stanley Lesse lists a number of signs of suicidal tendency: a sudden shift in feeling; an increase in psychomotor activity; a sudden drop from agitated behavior into lethargy; increased defiance; acting out; giving away of important possessions; an expression of hopelessness or helplessness.

If suicide seems possible, the pastor needs to intervene immediately and enlist emergency assistance from appropriate authorities or family members. It is helpful to create a select file of competent (and preferably Christian) professionals to refer to in the variety of situations a pastor is likely to face.

Eventually Marie returned to normalcy. I’m glad she came to see me.

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3 Lesse, pp. 130, 131.
Stop the burnout, enjoy the ministry

James R. Kilmer

Pastoral burnout: positive strategies for living above it

First the bad news: burnout threatens up to 65 percent of North American Adventist ministers. This is revealed by a 1994 survey conducted by the Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It can strike the best of pastors without warning. Under its influence, more than one member of the clergy has succumbed to despair, an extramarital affair, or some other reactive behavior.

Now the good news: burnout is preventable.

Consider the common symptoms of pastoral burnout. Ministry's old joys are no longer there. Spiritual ardor takes on a cooling mode. Depression, insomnia, anxiety, hostility, relational conflict, low self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness become common. The pastor may continue to perform well but may have no sense of eagerness, no real concern for mission or outreach, and may find it difficult to discern God’s direction when making decisions.

The Washington Conference survey of 76 pastors revealed that burnout prevention must be a part of a pastor’s personal strategy as he or she seeks to flourish in today’s ministry settings. Pastors who have a more proactive orientation in their ministry, who attend to prayer and ministry of the Word, train members in a discipling relationship, and depend upon the Holy Spirit, report less tendency toward burnout. In contrast, pastors who have a more reactive orientation in their life and ministry, and who focus on troubleshooting and dealing with problems and do not disciple or train members, are more likely to experience burnout.

Look at figure 1. Sixty-seven percent of pastors surveyed expressed that they have experienced some burnout. All of them also reported that they did not train church members, nor did they consider their ministry to be basically that of discipling members. These pastors reported that they did not enjoy the ministry. Most of their time was spent dealing with problems and troubleshooting. The lines indicate a statistical correlation between pastoral burnout and pastoral attitudes and approaches to ministry.

Do we know anything more about these pastors who were problem-oriented and spent most of their time troubleshooting? Figure 2 shows that they are also the ones who indicated that they (a) deal with an overabundance of relational problems; (b) spend more time dealing with symptoms rather than cures; (c) spend more time than they would like in keeping the organization.
running; (d) do not work with a consciousness of the presence of Jesus with them in ministry; and (e) tend not to depend on the Holy Spirit in their lives. These patterns are statistically related to a style of ministry that is oriented to a troubleshooting, problem-preoccupied approach to life and ministry.

By the very nature of their work, pastors rub shoulders with difficulties. Within a single week, a minister may have to deal with a divorce, a suicide, and a fatal accident. Pastors must referee church fights, oversee financial matters for church and school, visit that elderly person who lives alone, or rush to the hospital to pray for a member who has just undergone surgery. As these kinds of things become routine to pastors, many tend to focus their ministry on solving these difficulties. This focus can head a pastor for burnout.

However, these pastoral dilemmas need not rule their lives and drain their emotional energy. Aside from being a reactor to problems, reeling from blow to blow, it is possible for pastors to control their environments and to meet the daily emergencies from a reservoir of inner strength.

Jesus was never pressurized by circumstances. The sisters of Lazarus were concerned that He was not as “pastorally available” for them and their brother as He should have been, and that therefore Lazarus died. But Jesus still took His time getting to them, and when He arrived He fulfilled His ministry. When pastors run from one crisis to another without taking time for the reflection and restoration that comes from their relationship with God, they are not fulfilling their ministry; instead, they have opened themselves to burning out.

Some view ministry as they do a business. The job is to keep the machinery in motion: attend board and business meetings; keep the agenda going; raise funds for projects and programs; and support the church school. In this kind of pastoring there is little that is genuinely spiritual, and much that is fundamentally at odds with the real call of God to any kind of prophetic ministry. One of the fundamental flaws in many burnout-prone ministers is that they are sidetracked from the gospel commission to serving tables (Acts 6).

This kind of pastoring can be demanding and disheartening, while for the discouraged pastor the cause for such feelings is difficult to recognize.

People may become dependent upon a strong nurturing pastor and multiply their burdens by making selfish demands. Our egos sometimes lead us as pastors to become codependent; viewing ourselves as great problem solvers. Dedication and love for people are essential in ministry, but they must not be allowed to deprive pastors of time for their personal devotion and spiritual recharging. Pastors need their spiritual strength to meet the crises that come their way.

Another characteristic of pastoral burnout is the tendency of pastors not to develop and rely upon adequate lay assistants. There is nothing new about pastors doing all the work. The hazard goes back to Moses and Jethro. Jethro observed the people coming continually to Moses and he asked, “Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?” Moses was quick to point out that the people came to him so that he might be a link between themselves and the Lord. Jethro, however, said: “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Ex. 18:14, 17, 18). Jethro’s suggestion of sharing responsibility with others saved Moses from ministerial burnout.

**Burnout prevention**

Figure 3 describes pastors who tend not to experience burnout in their ministry. They spend time training members. They view ministry as one of discipling members. And they enjoy ministry. All these positive characteristics are statistically related to burnout prevention. These characteristics are also statistically linked to each other: that is, those who enjoy ministry spend time discipling and training members.

Figure 4 shows additional patterns and attitudes of ministry that are statistically linked to the main characteristics...
Pastors who tend not to experience burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe their ministry as one of discipling members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend time training members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy the ministry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lines represent correlations.

in figure 3. When thus diagrammed, this cluster of statistically related characteristics shows a pastoral profile that resists burnout.

Such pastors begin the day with significant quality devotional time. They focus attention on the presence of Christ in them and in their ministry. They spend time in prayer and the ministry of the Word. As Leroy Eimes writes: “Burnout doesn’t result from overwork but from getting too busy to have time with the Lord. Pretty soon you’re functioning out of the energy of the flesh rather than the power of the Spirit.”1 Pastors must carry the burdens alone or let Jesus do it. The first leads to burnout; the second to ministerial fulfillment.

From personal devotion comes a conscious presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit that helps the pastor to meet every crisis with calm assurance. Such pastors become instruments in God’s hands. This also releases the pastor from a sense of guilt or failure as well as from a sense of pressure to achieve.

Pastors who depend on the real presence of the Holy Spirit also enjoy the ministry. They give first attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They spend time training members, describe their ministry as discipling, and find active spiritual gifts manifested in members under their leadership.

When pastors drink deeply at the fountain of God’s grace and love, genuine love flows out from them. It is the nature of love to multiply itself. It is much more rewarding to extend a ministry based on grace and love than it is to attempt to coerce people into service. A love-based ministry makes disciples out of members.

But what is a discipling ministry and how does one do it?

**Discipling Ministry**

According to Ephesians 4:11-13, the pastor’s role is that of a trainer. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were “to prepare [“equipping,” NKJV] God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Pastors should not be preoccupied with requests for keys to buildings, custodial service, balancing accounts, doing the bulletin, filling the baptistry, caring for the building, raising money for worthy students, or any other of a multitude of things that some members expect of them. One pastor made a list of whom to contact for each detail. At the bottom of the list were these words: “For prayer, ministry of the Word, and training, contact the pastor.”

The first essential step to church growth, according to Elmer Towns, is for the pastor to lose contact with the congregation. This would sound heretical if it were not followed by another essential element. The pastor must establish contact with lay leaders who serve as shepherds to smaller flocks. The pastor’s efforts then are directed toward equipping these undershepherds to minister to their respective flocks.2

For example, one pastor in Upper Columbia Conference established local elders as care coordinators of Sabbath school classes. He met with these elders weekly for prayer and sharing concerning the state of the flock. He emphasized that these men and women had more access to the people than he did. This approach, coupled with personal and public evangelism, resulted in 300 baptisms during a five-year period.

**Those who tend not to experience burnout follow these patterns of ministry:**

- Spiritual gifts active
- Depend on the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit
- Members active
- Ministry described as discipling
- Spend time training members
- Enjoy the ministry

Look at any circle. Follow lines from that circle to others to observe correlations. For example, those who depend on a conscious presence of the Holy Spirit also describe their ministry as discipling, spend time training members, give primary attention to prayer and ministry of the Word, see spiritual gifts active in their congregations, and enjoy the ministry.
A discipling ministry does not necessarily mean outreach ministry. It could be as simple as stopping by the office of a professional member and asking for five minutes of time, then asking the member to pray with the pastor over some concern and in return asking if there is anything he or she would like to pray about.

Several pastors in Upper Columbia Conference are training members how to find and give Bible studies. Using a simple door-to-door contact tied to *Positive Life Radio*, members are able to start numerous Bible studies. Members learn quickly and in turn teach others. When this approach is followed, it is not difficult to have hundreds of Bible study contacts going prior to scheduled evangelistic meetings. The most dramatic blessing is that the dynamics are totally different during the meetings. Members are supportive and the church is alive with activity. The Holy Spirit blesses. When members are active, they tend to focus less on their own problems.

Last year a group of us went to Russia to train Russian members how to lead others to Christ through personal Bible study. Our translator told how her mother and others in the local congregation were excited about their studies. One woman had been suffering from depression, but since she had become involved with people who needed her and depended on her, she found she had a purpose in life and was coming out of her depression. When members have something significant to do, they tend to get into fewer church fights. When fishers do not fish, they fight.

**Mobilizing for service**

Perhaps the best way to mobilize the church is through spiritual gifts inventories. One church I pastored brought spiritual gifts and job descriptions together in the nominating committee. The church was organized with five major leaders (figure 5) under the pastor and five areas of responsibility under each of those five. When the nominating committee contacted members, they read each job description. The major leaders were the head elder, head deacon, personal ministries leader, social committee chair, and educational leader. Under the head elder were elders in charge of visitation, worship, youth, Sabbath school, and stewardship. A financial administrator under the head deacon held the financial responsibility of the church. The head deacon also took care of building construction, maintenance, and custodial details.

The head deaconess worked with the chair of the social committee, who planned the recreational and social events. She also supervised the chair of the committees dealing with flowers, weddings, funerals, worship service, greeting, and fellowship meals.

The personal ministries leader ministered directly to the Community Services leader, the outreach coordinator, and the persons in charge of Ingathering, Signs, and religious liberty. The educational leader worked with the school, fund-raising, sponsoring worthy students, and parenting education.

The pastor was able to give attention to training those in key positions, helping them to minister to those under their care. The pastor visited with visitation elders, trained those gifted in evangelism, and worked through the five main leaders. The result was a joy to behold and be a part of.

One event illustrates the beautiful manner in which this plan worked. One person with the gift of healing came to the pastor and said she wanted to sponsor a health seminar involving people from Loma Linda University. The pastor at first thought it would be too expensive. Then he remembered that the church now had a financial manager. He told her to talk to him, thinking that the manager would say no. She came back and said he had said yes. The event was planned, executed, and wonderfully supported. The pastor did little to move this activity forward and thus was free to train members in other arenas. One member minister was instrumental in winning 13 persons in one year. More than 90 people joined this congregation in a little more than two and one-half years. The most beautiful thing was that the church experienced the joy of working together.

**Tips to try**

In conclusion, if you want to prevent pastoral burnout, try the following:

- Build a ministry around meaningful devotional life.
- Depend on a conscious presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
- Develop a discipling approach to ministry.
- Train members.
- Heal the sickness of sin rather than help people manage sins.
- Organize the church for action according to their assessed spiritual gifts.
- Share the work of the ministry with trained member leaders.
- Enjoy the ministry.

Figure 5

![Diagram of church leadership roles]

*All scriptural quotes are from the New International Version, unless otherwise specified. 1 Leroy Eimes, *Time With God,* Summer 1993, pp. 76-79. 2 See Elmer Towns’ video, 154 Steps to Revitalize Your Sunday School and Keep Your Church Growing.*

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When your church wants you out

Ed James

Moving the pastor is not the answer to pastor-church conflict.

The worst nightmare in my life came without warning. My church wanted me out. Not just the usual grumblers. I could have handled them. But a broad cross section of members, including some of my friends, wanted me to leave. I waded through a whole gamut of emotions: disbelief, shock, anger, hurt, pain, betrayal, a sense of failure, and rising bitterness. I wanted to lash out, defend myself, make people understand it was all a mistake.

Questions flooded my mind. What was I to do? Run for cover? Call the conference? Quit? Fight it out? What about my family? How would this affect them? How deep was my commitment to ministry? How much was I willing to endure or let my family endure? Maybe I would just wrap myself up in righteous indignation, stamp the dust off my shoes, and seek another assignment. When the initial shock was over and reality set in, I began to think more rationally. Conventional wisdom had it that I was finished—at least there. My effectiveness was gone. It was time, such “wisdom” said, to ask for a new assignment and start packing. Yet I’ve never been one to cave in to conventional wisdom. I knew that such conflicts were not impossible to resolve, that there was hope even though slim. So, bathed in much prayer and soul searching, I took the following steps.

Prayerful steps to take

1. Although I had significant experience in conflict resolution, I immediately sought out carefully chosen people with a background in resolving conflicts in a church context. Those whom I consulted stayed close to me during the whole process.

2. After receiving counsel, I made up my mind not to have any conversations with anyone about moving until we had attempted to work out our differences. Once reconciliation had occurred, I would then sit down with the church and together we would decide whether it would be in everyone’s best interest for me to move.

3. I tried to keep the conflict from escalating even further by doing the following:
   - I requested the conference not to intervene, and they honored my request. This allowed time to work through our problem without added complexity.
   - I approached members immediately involved in the conflict through a third party, who encouraged them to speak with me.
   - I continued preaching. I resisted the temptation to use the pulpit to address the issues at hand or defend myself. I also avoided topics that

Ed James is a pseudonym.
would alienate or escalate offenses.

- I attempted to treat everyone with honor and respect, especially at church.
- I avoided no one and spoke to everyone.
- The way I offended people.
- The decline in the quality of sermons.
- Lack of leadership.
- A number of other pastoral expectations that some felt were not being met.

4. Complaints and issues started to be aired. The issues were varied:
- The length of my stay; some thought I had been there long enough and it was time for a change.
- My personal style, how I do things.
- The way I offended people.
- The decline in the quality of sermons.
- Lack of leadership.
- A number of other pastoral expectations that some felt were not being met.

As I sorted through these complaints and issues I did a lot of praying, counseling, and soul searching. As a result I took ownership of those issues that were clearly mine.

5. I worked with my head elder, who handled all the details and was cautiously supportive.

6. I followed the formal but unofficial process that was put in place, which meant I never met with the opposition group until the meeting described below.

7. After a number of meetings between members, which I did not attend, as well as a series of “facilitated conversations” between myself and offended individuals, there was a final meeting. After I made a brief statement, we had a question-and-answer session. The group then decided that I should stay and use the opportunity to see how changes could be brought about in the months ahead.

It took two years for healing to take place and for reconciliation to become a reality. After two years another informal meeting resulted in closure for myself and those most directly involved. This allowed me to move on without fear or concern that somehow the residual effects of the original conflict were still hanging over my head.

I believe the experience has strengthened me, the concerned group, and the congregation. We now resort to biblical conflict management principles to resolve differences rather than let them fester and poison us.

Some thoughts about pastor-congregation conflict

It is no secret that time and again pastors are moved because of unresolved conflict. This is the bane of church administrators these days and an unnecessary burden for pastors and church members. Some of the conflicts we experience are the result of our human condition and will continue until the Lord comes. And painful as it is to say, we have brought upon ourselves so much of the conflict that results in moving pastors. We have trained our people to believe that when a conflict arises between pastor and congregation, the best solution is to move the pastor.

When a pastor is moved because of unresolved conflict, it damages both the pastor and the congregation, and it does...
not help those in the conference office. Often the pastor's reputation is damaged because members talk to relatives and friends in other places about how bad the pastor is, and pastors will talk about how troublesome the congregations are. When conflict is unresolved, both pastors and congregations often separate with a sense of failure, betrayal, anger, hurt, and occasionally a quality of bitterness that boasts about the joy being delivered from a “den of lions.” Without a clear process of reconciliation and an attempt to implement it, both pastor and congregation easily become major conflict centers waiting to happen again.

The greatest disservice we do pastors and churches is not resolving conflict when it arises. Any conflict crisis is an open invitation to healthy growth all the way around. We would best serve pastors and churches by helping them to work through conflict in healthy, productive, and positive ways by carefully entering the conflict with them, providing models and tools to do so.

Managing conflict

Here is what a proactive pastor can do to manage conflict.

1. Be sure of your calling, and remind yourself always that you are there to serve.

2. Treat those who disagree with you with respect. Honor them by trying to understand their position. Many conflicts are started and escalated by ignoring or writing people off.

3. Practice the principles of peacemaking found in Matthew 18:15. I no longer hesitate to go to a person right away when I know that person has a problem with me. This alone has stalled a number of potentially large conflicts. It is often as simple as taking him or her to lunch (never the church office) and just saying, “I understand we have a problem. Can we talk about it?”

4. Learn as much as you can in conflict resolution and mediation. Learning these skills, techniques, and processes is an invaluable addition to any pastor’s toolbox. If I had not had a clear understanding of the process of conflict resolution and had I not observed other conflicts being resolved I would have moved or been forced out, and reconciliation would not have taken place.

5. Be willing to own your own stuff. If you have a problem, if you’re doing something that isn’t right, if your pastoral practices are poor, admit to it and change it. Sometimes all that people want is acknowledgment of the problem and some hope that it can change. Too many of us pastors become defensive. All defensiveness does is escalate the conflict.

6. Since some conflict is inevitable, decide beforehand, perhaps in consultation with two or three elders, how significant enough conflict might be handled if or when it does arise. Share some resources, decide ahead of time what you want to do and how you will go about it if a major conflict arises. Preach a series of sermons on reconciliation and God’s methods of resolving disagreements. Don’t wait for a conflict to happen and then start throwing around sermons, Bible texts, and processes. Do it up front. Prevention is always better than cure.

7. Make yourself easy to approach if someone has a problem with you. It takes a lot of courage for most people to confront a pastor face-to-face. Make it easy for them.

A final word. Since I was the pastor involved in this conflict, what you are reading is subject to my memory, biases, and perspective. If you were to talk to others involved, you would get a different perspective. But this one thing I know. Our church has changed for the better. I am a better pastor for this, and the congregation is better also. Our past year together has been the most productive in a long time. We are excited about outreach and evangelism. God is working among us. We are not perfect. We still have squabbles. There are still those who don’t always view me in the best light. But overall, our health is much better.

My experience is not yours. Every situation is different. But God’s principles are consistent. When we go through the pain of conflict, work through the dysfunction, and love one another, we grow and we honor God and declare His power of reconciliation to those around us.
Time test: how well do you manage time?

Richard G. Ensman, Jr.

Wise sages and time management experts have reminded us for years that we can never really “save” time, only spend it.

How effectively do we spend time? Is our time carefully planned, treating minutes and hours as precious resources? Even more importantly, do we spend our hours achieving the personal and professional goals most important to us?

To answer these questions—and to brush up on the key principles of time management—grab a pencil and take the brief “time test” on page 27.

Determine your quotient

To determine your “time management quotient,” total the number of points you received on the time test. If your score ranges between 65 and 75, congratulations! You’re a fine time manager, and you’re probably using your time to get top results in your personal and professional life. If your score ranges between 45 and 64, not bad. With some modest improvements you can become more productive each day. If your score ranges between 25 and 44, you’ve got the right idea, but you’ll have to work to begin using key time management principles in your life. If your score is below 25, you’ve got a lot of work to do. With some intensive reading—or even a time management course—you can dramatically improve your work habits and achieve far more than you ever thought possible.

It is critical to fervently guard against time-wasting habits, and deploy precious minutes and hours so that they will bring the greatest return. Following the principles suggested in the test on the opposite page will lead us to achieve far more than swift efficiency; we’ll actually achieve our goals.
TIME TEST

Give yourself 0, 1, 2, or 3 points according to the following scoring key.

If your answer is: always ...................... 3 points
usually ................................. 2 points
sometimes ......................... 1 point
never or rarely ................... 0 points

☑ Do you regularly review long-range goals for your personal and professional life?

☑ Do you spend a few minutes thinking about and planning your day before you start it?

☑ Do you outline each day’s appointments and key tasks in your calendar?

☑ Do you list your tasks and activities in priority order and concentrate on the top priorities?

☑ Do you keep, and use, an ongoing “to do” list, consisting of things you’d like to do in the future?

☑ Do you handle the most important tasks of the day when you feel most alert?

☑ Do you group similar tasks together and do them all at the same time?

☑ Do you maintain a simple but well-defined filing system, into which you place all loose papers and materials?

☑ In completing paperwork, do you handle each piece of paper only once?

☑ Do you use a dictating machine to handle memos, messages, and correspondence?

☑ Do you skim magazines, journals, and reports to learn key information?

☑ Do you use waiting time and travel time to handle small tasks or catch up on reading?

☑ Do you make decisions and embark on courses of action quickly?

☑ When you start a project or task, do you have “backup” plans that can be quickly and easily implemented if your original plans don’t work out?

☑ Do you keep your secretary, assistant, or colleagues informed about your work so they can handle minor tasks without interrupting you?

☑ Do you provide clear instructions to subordinates and colleagues—clear enough so they don’t have to come back to you with ongoing questions?

☑ Do you set clear agendas for meetings—and stick to them?

☑ Do you stop working on a task when you begin to feel stress or a loss of energy?

☑ Do you keep a simple time log to assess systematically where and how you spend your time?

☑ Do you take time each week to appraise your productivity and determine whether you’ve completed the goals you set out to accomplish?
Seminary is more than a training institution for ministry. It is a resource center filled with ideas, research, and creative work. Pastors and church leaders struggling with administrative, theological, or practical problems can find answers in the continuous research done at the seminary. One such resource is the dissertations and theses done by graduating seminarians.

Take, for example, the question of interpreting the seals of Revelation 5 and 6, a problem that has challenged the church through the centuries. With current increasing interest in apocalyptic prophecy, these two chapters are of great significance to Bible students and pastors alike. Ranko M. V. Stefanovic’s recent Ph.D. dissertation, “The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5,” provides some interesting new insights.

After a 100-page comprehensive survey of the interpretation of the seals from the second to the twentieth centuries, Stefanovic gives a detailed exegesis of the critical words and phrases that are decisive to the understanding of Revelation 5 and its context. His conclusion is that the scene is the throne room of the heavenly temple. But rather than being a setting of judgment, as is so often understood, it is the occasion of the enthronement of Christ. It is the moment when, in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, “the resurrected Christ approached the throne, took the sealed scroll from the throne at the right side of God as the insignia of the transference of all authority and sovereignty, sat upon the throne of the universe at the right hand of the Father, and received the adoration and cries of acclamation that belong only to royalty.”

Stefanovic refers to the Old Testament tradition in which the Israelite kings, as Yahweh’s representatives, received the covenant book at the time of their enthronement (Deut. 17:18-20; 2 Kings 11:12), signifying their right to rule as “sons” under God, and their sacerdotal function of instructing the people in His law. However, with the downfall of the monarchy and the breaking of the covenant, the Davidic kingship ceased, and the covenant book became “sealed” (cf. Isa. 8:16; 29:11), waiting for the promised Davidic descendant to unseal it. Revelation 5 says that the scroll has now been handed to the promised ideal king of the Davidic lineage, the Lion of the tribe of Judah who is actually the Sprout of David, the eschatological “Son” (cf. Dan. 7:13, 14). Following the enthronement of Christ, the covenant is carried out.

With this understanding, chapters 4 and 5 can be seen as a high point in the book of Revelation. The theme of Revelation becomes God’s covenant relationship with His people, and the focus is thus the gospel rather than political events, disasters, and woes. Christ’s taking hold of the covenant is seen as the foundation for the three angels’ messages.

Stefanovic’s work provides a scholarly framework for pastors who want to understand the seals of Revelation better. This is just one example of the rich collection of dissertations and theses available through the seminary for use by Bible students and ministers.

Benjamin D. Schoun, D.Min., is associate dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
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Let’s abolish the laity

James A. Cress

That’s right! When the goals of Global Mission are fully understood, the only possible hope that we have for accomplishing this great challenge is to abolish the laity altogether. Before you dismiss this idea as radical ramblings or an attempt to grasp attention, consider the fact that in the New Testament the concept of dichotomy between “clergy and laity” is foreign. Instead, the Scriptures call for the working body of Christians—all Christians, whether so-called laity or so-called clergy—together to spread the good news of salvation.

For far too long we have stumbled along under a vague yet definitely mistaken impression that somehow God’s work would be completed by professional clergy and that the role of the laypersons lies somewhere between a sanctified cheering section and a beneficent banker whose financial backing demonstrates a nebulous commitment to the overall objectives of reaching people with the message of Jesus’ soon return without requiring too much individual participation. On the basis of the sheer force of what is happening about us, we cannot afford this illusion any longer.

Everyone a minister

The real goal of abolishing the laity is clear: to elevate all the people of God—both clergy and laity alike—to their true dignity as ministers of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther noted, “All believers are ministers, some ministers are clergy.” The so-called minister or pastor is not called primarily to do the work of the ministry but to equip the saints for ministry. In other words, the liberty of the laity into the full role of ministry is not a side issue. Thus it is the primary task of church leadership as well as the concern of every member that all the saints be equipped for their ministry. There is no more important work to be accomplished.

The work of the pastor is to devise a ministry that lives to express itself through helping others to find and express theirs. “That which is needed now for the upbuilding of the churches is...to discern and develop talent in the church—talent that can be educated for the Master’s use.” The pastor cannot wait around until someone volunteers. The pastor must seek out and recruit members to become involved with ministry. Laity need to understand that if their pastor is designing and implementing ways to train members and put them to work in ministry for others, this is the most important pastoral work. If conference officers are holding pastors accountable for training the laity and for fulfilling the ministry of all believers, then they are doing their most important work.

Needed: explosion of ministry

You regularly read thrilling stories of lay ministry in this place or that, and I am thankful for these outstanding reports. But what we need now is an explosion of these ministries. As Charles Bradford says: “We have prayed for the latter rain; we at least need a cloudburst!”

This is not a call for one more program in lay training. It is a call for a radical transformation of the whole people of God into a ministering people. Nothing short of this will restore the church to its divinely appointed role as a movement of destiny to “prepare a people ready to meet the Lord.” Furthermore, nothing short of this will prepare us as individual church members to be ready personally to meet our soon-coming Saviour.

In his book Liberating the Laity, Paul Stevens says that in his study of Ephesians 4 he discovered the primary purpose of church leadership—pastors and teachers—to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” He says, “In certain older translations of Ephesians 4:12 a fatal comma had been introduced which made it seem that the work of the pastor-teacher was to do the work of the ministry rather than to equip all the saints to do this work. According to this translation, God gave ‘some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, [there’s the fatal comma] for the work of ministry.’ Thus it is not the saints but the leading equippers who do the ministry. However, there should be no comma between the last two phrases.”

Newer translations correctly state the goal—“God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry.” That is the New Testament idea of the church. God’s people—the whole church—are a priestly people. The grace of God in a life empowered by the Holy Spirit makes the weakest, most inadequate person competent to minister for the King of the universe!

3 Ibid.
Family Life conference

The twenty-second annual Family Life International Conference takes place August 5-12 at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. A second conference is set for August 19-26 at Caribbean Union College in Trinidad. Many of the same seminar topics will be offered at both conferences under the umbrella theme Seasons of Family. There will be three modules instead of the usual two: Family Law and Public Policy, Family Ethics, and Family Resource Management. Another exciting and professionally stimulating FLI program is being arranged for pastors, teachers, counselors, students, and others working toward qualification as a certified Family Life educator, for those who are already CFLE certified, or for parents and couples to enrich their own family relationships. For further information, contact Family Life International at Andrews by phone (616/471-6366), fax (616/471-6374), E-mail (millie@andrews.edu), or regular mail (room 214, Bell Hall, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104).

Meaningful communion

The celebration of our last Communion service took an unusual turn that proved meaningful to our members. After a sermon on the gift of Christ that emphasized His substitutionary atonement and our responsibility in nailing Jesus to the cross, we invited the entire congregation to the churchyard, where a cross had been erected. There we handed each participant a red ribbon, a nail, and a hammer with an explanation of the symbology. After we nailed our ribbons to the cross, we separated for the ordinance of humility and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. At the conclusion of the service, we gathered once again at the cross, where the red ribbons had been replaced with white ones. Rejoicing in the cleansing gift of Christ, we sang “Amazing Grace” and invited the people to take their white ribbon with them as a memento of this special Communion celebration.—Dan Martella, Provo, Utah

Compliment Club

At our church we keep a Compliment Club Record Book. Members send greeting cards and write notes of affirmation, accompanied with a suitable Bible text. This ministry is especially appreciated by the depressed and others in crisis.—Rizpah Bobb-Semle, Antigua, West Indies

Share your wealth

Most new ministers begin their ministry with a fairly scanty library, while veteran clergy often find adequate shelf space a problem. Often we find among our collection duplicate copies of the same book. Next time you attend an ordination, why not take along one of your duplicate volumes, inscribe it appropriately, and give it to the ordinate after the service? You will free up some shelf space for yourself, help the new minister establish his or her library, and create a warm bond of friendship that will not soon be forgotten.—A. Alan Redfern, Bassett, Wisconsin

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