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September 2000 issue

Will Eva’s editorial “Toronto’s Burning Issue” raises further questions on the thorny issue of divorce and remarriage in the Seventh-day Adventist Church—questions that Adventists tend to shy away from as a community.

Our church upholds the stand that God ordained the permanency of a one-man-one-woman marriage relationship for life, and rightly so. We also know that, with the best of intentions, the worthiest of marriages can be destroyed.

If there can be no dissolution of the marriage tie “except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow,” then what is the position of the Church towards those who divorce on grounds such as so-called “irreconcilable differences,” also known as a no-fault divorce? Ought not the spouse who initiated the divorce be counseled seriously when he or she files the divorce papers? If the person ignores the counsel anyway, should not the spouse who is dumped be free to remarry?

If the church washes its hands, looks the other way, and does nothing to help dissuade the petitioning spouse from finalizing the divorce, then surely the church must keep this in mind and always remember that in the judgments it is forced to make in any given case, the goal of these judgments is disciplining. This thought should be carefully read by all who must deal with these issues: “Give the erring one no occasion for discouragement. Suffer not a Pharisaical hardness to come in and hurt your brother. Let no bitter sneer rise in mind or heart. Let no tinge of scorn be manifest in the voice. If you speak a word of your own, if you take an attitude of indifference, or show suspicion or distrust, it may prove the ruin of a soul. He needs a brother with the heart of the Elder Brother’s heart of sympathy to touch his heart of humanity. . . .” (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, 275).

I believe the committee was seeking to accomplish this. I do, however, have a problem with an issue failing to be approved by the legitimate forum for its recognition because of some unspecified reason and then, in the absence of the objectors, and without their objections being addressed, the former action is rescinded and passed. This puts the action under a cloud and robs it of the clear-cut approval it deserves, thereby weakening its effectiveness.

The editorial lauded the role of the local church membership as the body responsible for handling the disciplining of its members. This is as it should be, but today’s modern society presents many factors that prevent or at least make this process more difficult. The mobility of today’s society, and especially our church gives each congregation a

Free Subscription  If you’re receiving Ministry bimonthly and haven’t paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can’t use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

January 2001  Ministry
New designs

New plans for Ministry are on the production line and beyond. The first and most obvious innovation is a new look for the magazine, inaugurated in this issue.

While we have attempted to retain a dignified and somewhat traditional look, we have also tried to create something fresh and contemporary. We see our new cover design and logo to be distinctive and inviting without being faddish. We are grateful to Bryan Gray of Boise, Idaho, for his fine design work—on the cover, the logo, and the interior redesign.

A major motive in this design has been to make Ministry more "reader friendly." We genuinely identify with the demanding life of the average pastor and realize that often enough significant portions of Ministry are not read because a given article looks too long, too "busy" or just plain too much. This design makes an effort to give the main body of the presented material a more open, less dense feel. The font, leading, and overall layout, we believe, creates a less threatening appearance that makes the physical act of reading a more pleasant experience.

We are retaining the First Glance feature on the masthead page. Every month, time and effort is spent succinctly summarizing each article. This gives a pastor the opportunity to glance through the contents of a given issue, article synopses included, and see which features he or she is likely to pass up, briefly peruse, carefully read, or file away.

One of the major issues discussed as we contemplated a redesign was the length of articles. All things considered, we are going to challenge both our writers and ourselves to produce shorter articles. Although we will not always reach our ideal, we would like each issue to contain a preponderance of 1,500 to 2,000 word articles, accompanied by one or two in each issue that are longer.

We are still committed to Ministry writers being drawn from the rank and file of our readers. Along with this we are increasingly dedicating ourselves to intentionally raising the quality of the content of Ministry. For this reason we will be commissioning more articles. That is, we will seek out particular writers, asking them to write in the areas of their expertise. This is challenging, especially when it remains important to include writers from all over the world. We are determined above all to improve the relevance and caliber of the magazine, always being true to our mission: Enriching the overall effectiveness and general professional context from which ministers communicate the gospel, while being faithful to the essentials of the three angels messages of Revelation 14.

Consistent with these things it is important to say again that we are always looking for good articles on outreach and evangelism—suggesting both innovative ways of evangelizing and ways of improving the tried and true. For the next year or two we would also like to emphasize the personal spiritual life of the pastor and the pastor's relationship or interaction with his or her members. Another issue that needs fresh material is the pastoral calling. It could be inspiring and encouraging to have well-written accounts of the journeys of some of us into ministry, which clarify and confirm for all of us the nature of the call to ministry.

Let me also briefly describe our definite plan to radically expand our Ministry Web site. Most significantly, this year we are aiming at making available on the Ministry Web site every article or significant piece of writing done in Ministry since its inception in 1928. This will be helpful to everyone as they do research, including sermon preparation. We hope the site will also be interactive; a place for submitting letters to the editor, and perhaps connecting to a chat room in which we can "meet" for scheduled chats over subjects of pastoral interest worldwide. Among other things such a "room" would simply give us opportunity to pool our thought, experience, and ideas. The continuing education possibilities for such a site are almost limitless.

We are heading into genuinely exciting times and we find ourselves deeply committed to making Ministry and all that associates with it, a broader and wider resource of bona fide value for each and all of us, to the glory of God.
How do we get them to listen?

Stephen Grunlan, D.Min., is pastor of the Balboa Community Church in San Diego, California.

In an introductory psychology class at a major university, the teacher randomly rang a bell during the lecture. At the sound, the students were to write down what they were thinking about at the moment they heard the bell. Twenty percent of the students were having erotic thoughts, 20 percent were thinking about family or work problems, and 12 percent were thinking about the lecture. The rest were thinking about a hodge podge of different things. As pastors, dare we believe our parishioners are much different?

All of which leads to a simple question: How can we help our people listen?

For years I have taught part-time at local universities and colleges, both Christian and secular. Currently, I teach a sociology course each term at a local community college. As part of my contract, I am required to attend a certain number of hours of in-service training.

At one recent in-service training seminar, a communications professor shared several strategies on “How to Get Students to Listen.” As I listened to his lecture, which he sprinkled with research findings and examples to illustrate his points, I realized everything he said applied to us ministers and the task of helping our parishioners listen as we speak. Here are his main points.

Give listeners a reason to listen

We need to give our listeners a reason to listen. The more immediate the reason, the greater their attention. Unfortunately, as pastors we often assume that people will want to listen because we are preaching God’s Word. The reality is that most people come to church with little or no motivation to listen. How do we give our people reasons to listen? By sharing with them the benefits that will come from what we are going to tell them.

For example, if we preach on Ephesians 5:21-33, we might say, “Do you know this passage contains four action principles that can change your marriage?” This gives our listeners an immediate reason to listen.

Tell them what to listen for

In the example above, not only are listeners given a reason to listen, but also something to listen for: the four action principles. People will listen more carefully if we let them know what they should be listening for. Research shows that when people are told what to listen for, listening increases 40 percent. That is why I have sermon notes in the bulletin for my congregation. The outline includes fill-in-the-blank statements and numbered lists for recording principles, views, insights, and so on. The outline helps my listeners to know for what to keep their ears open.

Illustrate each point with a story

Jesus used a lot of stories. People remembered His stories and then the point of the story. When I first came as pastor to one of my previous churches, I illustrated one of my sermons with a story about a battleship and a lighthouse. For the ten years I was at that church people would remind me about the story. When people came into the church office to order a sermon tape, often they would not ask for the tape by title or topic, but by a story in the message.

When I illustrate a sermon with a story, I can see an increase in attention. One of the reasons stories are so effective is that they are visual as well as verbal. Our listeners begin to see a picture in their minds, which is why we need descriptive words and action phrases in our stories to help our listeners paint the picture in their minds.

Use words that have meaning for your listeners

In my in-service training session, the communications professor warned us about the use
of technical jargon as we communicated with students. As pastors, we are steeped in theological language, those three-syllable words. However, most of our listeners, even the educated ones, use mostly one and two-syllable words of everyday speech. To communicate with them we need to speak their language. The fact is that if most of us held a gun to the heads of our parishioners and asked them to define *propitiation* or we would pull the trigger, we would become mass murderers! It is not the word that is important, but the meaning of the word that must be conveyed.

We also need to use local expressions and colloquialisms familiar to our listeners. I am a sports fan and have used a number of sports illustrations in my sermons. A few years ago, a female parishioner rightly pointed out that at least half my congregation were women and most of them did not relate to the sports stories. Now I use fewer sports illustrations, and when I do use one it usually refers to a widely known event such as the Olympic Games or the Super Bowl.

**Use immediacy behaviors**

"Hey, you just violated your last point. What is an immediacy behavior?" Immediacy may be defined as a feeling of closeness between individuals. It is a sense of approachability, availability, and warmth. Immediacy behaviors are actions that communicate closeness, warmth, and intimacy. Immediacy behaviors can be broken down into two categories, verbal and nonverbal.

Verbal immediacy behaviors include informal speech, humor, using people's names, and using personal illustrations. In using personal illustrations, we allow people to identify with us, to see the real us. Another verbal intimacy behavior is to use the first person plural rather than the third person plural in preaching. For example, rather than saying, "You need to take time to be with God each day" we might say, "We need to take time to be with God each day." When we use *you,* we are talking at people, when we use *we,* we are talking with people (by the way, notice the use of *we* and *us* in this article).

Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include good eye contact. I have been in congregations where the pastor looked over the heads of the people. We have all been in audiences where the speaker's eyes were glued to his or her notes. Good eye contact helps us connect with our listeners. While it may not be necessary to memorize our sermons, we should be so familiar with them that we need only glance at our notes occasionally. Most of the time we should be establishing eye contact.

**We need to give our listeners a reason to listen.**

Also, a stiff, formal posture holds people off while a relaxed posture invites them to come closer. Another behavior that invites closeness is coming out from behind the pulpit. The pulpit is a barrier between us and our listeners. In fact, I do not even use a pulpit. I have a small lectern, just large enough to hold my Bible and notes. I also use a cordless, lapel microphone. That way, I am free to move out from behind the lectern and move around the platform. At the end of a sermon, when I want to get even more personal with my listeners, I will sometimes come down from the platform and even walk partway up an aisle.

Tone of voice is also influential. Pastors tend to raise their voices when they want to emphasize a point. However, raising our voices tends to push people away. A more effective approach is to lower our voices. That has the effect of drawing people in. When I taught at the University of Wisconsin, I lectured in large "pit" classes with hundreds of students. When the students were talking, I tried to talk over them. However, the louder I spoke, the louder they got. Then I tried lowering my voice. Something incredible took place: they quieted down and started to listen. We should use those immediacy behaviors that will make our listeners feel closer to us.

**Teach them to take notes.**

Our speaker at the in-service training session pointed out the obvious: many students do not know how to take notes. That is true not only for students but for parishioners. We need to help them learn how to take notes. By the way, people who take notes pay better attention and retain more of what they hear. In our congregation at least 70 percent of the people take notes during the sermon. As I have already shared, in our bulletin we provide a sermon outline with a space for notes. We have points numbered and fill-in-the-blank spaces. I help my listeners with their note taking. Anything we can do to increase note taking will help our people listen better. When people write something down, they see it as well as hear it. We retain more of what we see and hear than what we just hear.

**People listen better in a more compact setting.**

Research clearly shows that people listen better, retain more, and are more easily persuaded when they are in a more compact setting. When we began offering two services, I knew that people would not fill the sanctuary in either service, so I roped off the side sections of the pews. That moved people into the center section in a more compact arrangement. If we have a sanctuary that is larger than our congregation, we need to rope off the sides and back, moving people forward and to the center.

Having pastored for years, I understand that people have their favorite...
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Growing a healthy church
(part 1)

John Grys and Greg Schaller

A small group abruptly stopped the Bible study when Mary said “My mother’s voice keeps playing in my conscience. I can hear her now questioning my every move. I am finding it hard to believe God can really accept me.” The group gathered around Mary. Our prayer for her focused on applying God’s freeing grace in Mary’s conscience.

How did our church body get to this moment? How did Mary find a group of supportive friends? It is part of a movement that has seen the number of small groups in our church grow from one to ten in less than a year.

But how did this growth occur? Two years ago a trusted friend introduced me to a new approach to church growth called Natural Church Development (NCD). I read the materials with mixed emotions. Could this work in our setting? Was this just another program? The materials promised authentic growth. I began to pray for guidance in determining whether this approach could integrate our piecemeal attempts to gain health and growth in our local church.

Eight elements that help churches grow

Christian Schwartz, the author of the materials, is a researcher who did extensive study on what makes churches grow. He attempted to measure the natural characteristics that cause church growth. After researching a thousand churches on six continents, he zeroed in on eight characteristics that emerged as significant to both spiritual and numerical growth: (1) empowering leadership; (2) gift-oriented ministry; (3) passionate spirituality; (4) functional structures; (5) inspiring worship services; (6) holistic small groups; (7) need-oriented evangelism; and (8) loving relationships. (See sidebar.)

Schwartz’s research further revealed that all eight characteristics are interconnected and each one is essential for church health and growth. The key is the harmonious interplay of all eight elements. Schwartz observed that when all eight characteristics reached a certain measurable strength, not one church could be found that was not growing!

Surprisingly, Natural Church Development is not a model to imitate. Nor is it a program. That is what struck a chord with me. NCD is a set of natural, God-given principles that can be tailored to a local church setting so God can grow the church. The apostle Paul reminds us, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6, NIV).

Four phases

How does Natural Church Development work in a church? There are four basic phases:

1. Pre-survey. This is an information sharing phase. In our setting, we started by passing out a little booklet, The ABCs of Natural Church Development. Church leaders and board members read this short booklet. This pre-survey step engages leadership’s understanding and commitment, and starts building momentum. We began with the church board as the core implementation team.

2. The survey. The pastor, along with thirty active members, completed an eighty-question survey. A NCD coach/consultant then scored and returned the results. The eight characteristics were plotted on an easy to read bar chart showing strengths and areas that needed work. (See sidebar for contact sources.)

3. Action plan. The summarized findings of the survey showed areas where we needed change. We moved from not knowing where to start, to agreeing to address our weakest characteristic. The first survey uncovered holistic small groups as our weak link. From
the urgency created, we formulated an action plan to grow small groups. Prayer, sermons, testimonies, coaching, promoting, and leadership mentoring created a focused approach. One night Mary found herself in a safe place, sharing her need and finding healing.

4. Repeat the process. Six to twelve months later the survey was taken again. Our results? Holistic small groups turned into a strength and need-oriented evangelism was identified as the area needing the most work. We discussed using small groups as places to evangelize friends. We held training events on “Becoming A Contagious Christian” and prototyped the new resource, “Friend 2 Friend.” For six months, we addressed need-based evangelism. The result? The church was overflowing and the parking lot was full. We have now started a second alternative service and are planting two cell churches. We are finding God growing our church. By repeating the survey every six to twelve months we objectively discern what characteristics to address.

**NCD’s simplicity**

What I find attractive about NCD is its simplicity. It’s easy for busy people to grasp and implement. It works. It’s like taking a blood test and getting an objective reading on what aspects need improvement. And it’s exhilarating being a part of a growing church. Current research has determined that 85 percent of the churches who identify and address their minimum characteristic are growing within one year. The remaining 15 percent either didn’t do anything with the assessment, or are in conflict.

How is NCD being implemented in other churches and regions? Our state conference holds regional conventions across our territory. In an afternoon session, a number of churches gather for an introduction to NCD and learn how to get started. Other states utilize consulting teams that go into a congregation to affirm and recommend action steps. The yearly Seeds church planting conference hosted at Andrews University introduces NCD as effective in forming new churches. The Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Seminary is designed around these principles of pastoral and congregational health. In the United States, this approach to church growth is spreading from coast to coast. Currently, materials are available in ten languages. 

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**Eight characteristics of a healthy church**

1. **Empowering leadership:** Leading via vision casting, mentoring, equipping, delegation, and change.
2. **Gift-oriented ministry:** Understanding and matching spiritual gifts to tasks for meaningful service.
3. **Passionate spirituality:** Faith lived out of a love relationship with Jesus Christ by practicing spiritual disciplines.
4. **Functional structures:** Combining the life in the church with systems, goals, and planning to move forward.
5. **Inspiring worship services:** God-centered worship with transforming preaching that leaves the congregation edified and uplifted.
6. **Holistic small groups:** A spiritual atmosphere of transparency, trust, and sharing with the application of biblical truths to daily living.
7. **Need-oriented evangelism:** Connecting to already existing friendships by listening, meeting needs, and connecting the gospel to personal situations.
8. **Loving relationships:** A relational environment of affirmation, encouragement, joy, and intentional conflict resolution.

**For more information, contact the following Resource Centers:**

* Center for Creative Ministry 800-272-4664: <www.creativeministry.org>
* ChurchSmart Resources 800-253-4276: <www.ChurchSmart.com>
* North American Division Evangelism Institute 616-471-9220: <www.nadei.org>

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**Forward to the beginning**

The catastrophic flood producing the geologic columns, demonstrates the causal connection between sin and death as a reality, preserves the atonement, and exalts Christ’s death as the wage of our sins, coupled with the surety of His coming as the culmination of our hope! So, forward to the beginning? Yes indeed! Forward to Jesus, the Beginning as our Creator, the Center as our Redeemer, the Culmination as our King. And that’s just the beginning! 

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Part 2 of this article will appear in the March 2001 issue of Ministry.
The church and volunteerism

Paul Cone, Ph.D., was head of business administration, graduate, and executive programs at the University of Southern California.

Lawrence Downing, D.Min., is pastor of the White Memorial Church in Los Angeles, California.

A ction depends on how we use our resources. All else is just talk. High performance and progress depend upon effective and efficient resource management. In a church setting, the most valuable resource is our members, particularly those who volunteer to extend the ministry of the church. Church managers who utilize these effective and performance-driven people will attract more like them with the result that church resources will multiply. Key components of church resource management include making projects attractive and relevant, establishing a sense of teamwork, and conducting quality training programs.

Making projects attractive

People are the only resources with the inherent ability to become more valuable with time and training. When given a sense of accomplishment, when working as a team with others, when appreciated and respected as peers, people will give significantly superior performance.

Professional businesspeople will be willing to serve on church boards and teams if they know how to fit in. The reverse is also true: Business and professional people who have volunteered their expertise have also come away frustrated, unappreciated, and cynical. Good leaders seek to reverse this.

Pastors can initiate volunteers into the inner circles of church administrative life. Every organization has developed its own protected vocabulary and methodology, which they do not readily share with those outside the circle. Business professionals have sometimes been made to feel, by some church leaders, that they do not understand that the business of the church is spiritual. However, developed skills and ethical practices used in business apply to spiritual entities. Here business professionals can be helpful to the church.

Experience indicates that religious organizations will become more effective as they thoughtfully utilize the skills available from business and management professionals. There are ways to find common ground and even a common language that will enable the church to benefit from the talents available through trained business and professional personnel. It remains true, however, that the church is much more than secular business and should be led with this in mind.

Establishing teamwork

In parish ministry, it is not uncommon for all church business matters, no matter how menial, to be left to the pastor. Typically, church officers make only token appearances at the weekly services to announce hymns, pray, or call for the offering. Elected officials usually represent 10-30 percent of the membership. In many churches, the majority of the members sit in the pews or do not come at all. The challenge is to increase participation among this majority group. Too often congregations look to the pastor to achieve this goal. The pastor’s personality and preaching may get some people into the church, but this is only the beginning. The more difficult and important task remains: to incorporate the efforts of the quiet majority as the congregation seeks to fulfill its mission.

If the local minister develops skills in leading the church to design quality strategic and operating plans, there will be sufficient guidance and control to empower volunteer teams to act and perform the business of the church in a superior manner. Skills may be developed in team formation and use. Committees only discuss and recommend but are limited when it comes to implementation. However, teams can execute programs and projects.

When members become participants in mission-centered congregations, they should
be invited to select a team they would like to join. New members receive training for that team responsibility. This gives new members immediate social ties and personal involvement. Conversations with church leaders who employ volunteer team-ministry models demonstrate that these congregations get significantly increased performance results, as compared to churches whose volunteers function independently one from the other. Other churches can learn from these congregational leaders. The leaders in these congregations may conduct seminars on how to incorporate volunteerism into the local parish.

**Successful use of volunteers**

The church, perhaps more than any other institution, is essentially a volunteer organization. In a consulting study we were involved in which we assessed the use of volunteers in a university system, it became clear that certain findings could be equally applicable to the parish. Here are some examples:

1. Involvement is the secret for initial and continued interest and support.

2. The volunteers’ performance and willingness to serve are enhanced when they: (a) are freed to serve on their own terms; (b) feel they are making a worthwhile contribution; (c) see development opportunities for themselves; (d) find that the project is attractive and relevant to real needs; and (3) can customize the task to their time, interests, and commitment length.

3. Volunteers identify with a small group when (a) they know and like the leader; (b) they can see that their personal skills are needed; (c) the group can set its own goals, priorities, and plans; and (d) they can see tangible results (not mere talk or reports).

4. Volunteers are motivated to become involved when they receive public, team, and individual recognition.

**Recommendations**

So what should church leaders do to obtain the maximum help from members who can be motivated to join volunteer groups? Here are three starting suggestions:

1. Establish denominational seminars to help all ministers make effective use of volunteers and to organize the local parish into empowered volunteer teams.

2. Define focused projects where volunteers can make meaningful contributions and place volunteers where they can have maximum impact.

3. Learn to listen! Volunteers base action on their agenda, not ours.

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Preaching as an instrument of transformation

My first premise: the church is more than a religious organization to which interested participants have attached themselves.

On the contrary, the church is the Body of Christ. That is more than a mere metaphor. Just as we affirm that Jesus is the Christ and therefore embodies the Word of God, so in faith we claim that the Word of God continues to be embodied in the continuing Body of Christ, the church.

My second premise, following from the first, is this: the task of the preacher is not only to bring the Word of God to the people but to articulate what God is saying to and through the congregation.

Discerning God’s Word in the congregation

The Word of God is already present. Sometimes it needs to be exposed to the consciousness of the people, and sometimes it needs to be celebrated as the miracle of God’s grace already expressed in the lives of God’s people. This reality, of course, does not eliminate the need for the prophet who challenges the people to respond to what God is doing among them, but it does shape the prophetic aspect of the sermon. Just as the disciples did not always understand the Word as embodied in Jesus, so the members of the congregation may have trouble discerning the Word as it is embodied among them.

If these things were clear in our minds and hearts as ministers, prophetic sermons would concentrate less upon placing guilt at the door of the congregation and more upon a proclamation, spoken in awe, exposing the hidden things that God seeks to call to birth among His people. Such preaching would more closely resemble the proclamations of the Hebrew prophets, revealing a higher consciousness in the preacher of the pain and experience of the people; the sermon coming, at least partly, from the experience of the people.

Preachers must develop attentive ears as they walk among the people. I have often had the shape of a sermon significantly affected by what I hear in a counseling session, a phone call, or a visit prior to the sermon.

The focus of our listening is shaped by the character of God. Since we know that God pays particular attention to the needy, it will often be in the crucible of human need that God’s Word becomes self-evident. Sometimes this will indeed be manifested in the agony of a member; or sometimes it will be apparent in the response of the church to the human need within the larger community. Because God is a God of justice, it will often be in the concern about injustice that God’s Word will be expressed. The same will be evident in acts of forgiveness, healing, generosity, to name a few of these acts. The challenge for the pastor is to discern the word that God is expressing through this particular congregation in this particular moment in time.

The Bible and the people

The canon by which the preacher seeks to measure the behavior of the church to discern the Word of God incarnate, is the Scriptures. In the Bible we have the testimony to the Word of God as it is expressed first among a people (the Old Testament) and then in the transcendent person of Christ (New Testament). While it may be clearest in Christ, we must not forget that to the great majority of the world, it is the life of the humanity of the church that is seen first of all. We should not expect that the Word of God will be automatically self-evident to the world. It needs to be proclaimed in a way that enables both the members of the church and the community that witnesses the church, to recognize what is being expressed in their midst.

Pastors need to accept that they are listen-
ers to the Word as well as proclaimers of the Word. They are to expect that it is God proclaiming the Word both through them as they lay the Scripture alongside the life of the congregation and as they seek to articulate what they have heard to the congregation. They also need to listen for the echo of the Word that is proclaimed as it ripples out over time among the people and rebounds back to the proclaimer. Preachers should never expect that a sermon is finished when it is initially spoken. It continues to work in the life of the congregation, sometimes in the most unexpected ways, and reshape itself to be reproclaimed long after the initial spoken word is delivered.

**How context shapes hearing**

The pastor must constantly pay attention to the way the congregation's context shapes the way the people hear the sermon. When the pastor does not stand outside the congregation seeking to bring the Word of God to bear on the people, but rather stands within the congregation seeking to listen for the Word of God, which is taking shape within the lives of the gathered people, it alters how the people listen. While the gospel may have an "over againstness" as it finds expression in our world, the pastor is allied with the congregation in seeking to discover the miracle of the incarnation as it finds expression in the lives of the people who have been gathered by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of hearing, receiving, and giving expression to God's Word.

The difference in the function of the pastor versus the average person is that pastors have been given the time and training to be theologians in residence among the people. In the midst of the divine and sociological realities connected to that role, the pastor is to be receptive to being addressed by God through both the Scripture and the congregation and the interplay between the two. It is from that experience that the words of the sermon will best be formed.

**Conclusion**

As any preacher knows, it is not the words spoken but the interaction between the words heard and the lives of those who hear them which creates the message received. All of this is so far beyond our control that we recognize that the Word that is proclaimed through the instrument of a sermon is truly a word from God. And the word that returns to the preacher can equally be a word from God that furthers the development of the expression of God's Word within the living Body of Christ. □
Feedback and evaluation
Key to relevant biblical preaching

Derek Morris: Lee, you serve as a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest Christian churches in the world. Some 15,000 members and seekers regularly attend the weekend services. One distinguishing characteristic of Willow Creek is the strong commitment to relevant biblical preaching, and I would like to discuss that. Let me start with a comment you made in a discussion with Bill Hybels, senior pastor of the Willow Creek Church. You mentioned that feedback and evaluation have been the key factors in your growth and development as a communicator of relevant biblical messages. What do you mean by that?

Lee Strobel: For me predelivery evaluation is really important. I don't think I have ever spoken without getting some presermon feedback. I finish a preliminary draft of my sermon manuscript by Thursday night. On Friday morning I'll give it to at least one person. He critiques it. I expect him to be honest. Sometimes he scrawls at the end, "This is tremendous! God is going to use this." Other times he recommends that I make this or that change. A lot of times he will make suggestions, such as "I think this passage of Scripture would really be meaningful at this juncture." After a written critique of the sermon is completed, we have lunch together and discuss it. I take his advice about 80 percent of the time. I feel free to say, "I disagree. Thanks for the input, but I don't agree with that."

DM: What then?

LS: I don't do much work on the sermon Friday afternoon, but then something happens that I call "the Friday night miracle." That is when the Holy Spirit helps me put the final touch on the message.

DM: Bill Hybels has mentioned that if he has a question or concern about something in his sermon, he might also solicit some presermon feedback before he preaches the sermon for the first time.

LS: Yes. If we are addressing a really sensitive issue on which the church doesn't have a clearly defined position, we might solicit presermon feedback from the elders. For instance, a couple years ago, when I preached a series on evolution and creation, I got some presermon feedback from one of the elders and from Bill.

DM: Having preached a sermon for the first time, as you usually do on a Saturday night, do you always receive postsermon feedback in preparation for again presenting the sermon during Sunday services?

LS: Yes. We all receive postsermon feedback, though it varies considerably. Sometimes it is written; other times it is verbal. On one occasion I received a six-minute voice mail message to which I responded from my car as I was driving home.

DM: One of the things that Bill Hybels emphasizes is that when soliciting feedback and evaluation for your sermons, you have got to ask the right people the right questions at the right time. It is unwise to invite people at random to provide feedback, because you get distortion. Some people are trying to impress you; some people have an ax to grind. How many individuals provide you with postsermon feedback?

LS: There are three individuals who provide me with postsermon feedback. I would be suspicious if someone enthusiastically volunteered to critique my messages. I would wonder why.
DM: How does postsermon feedback on Saturday evening impact your preaching at the Sunday services?

LS: It could be a word, a movement, a gesture. Once somebody noticed that when I made a point I stepped backward from the podium instead of stepping forward, which is more powerful. That was great feedback! Another person said, "You are scanning the people, but you are not focusing." I would say 80 percent of the time there is at least one suggestion for fine-tuning the sermon. The feedback, however, is not always a suggestion. Sometimes it is simply an affirmation. One of the elders likes to write "Waverly Avenue!" That means "home run!" because when a home run is hit at Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs, it goes out onto Waverly Avenue.

DM: Do you always implement the suggestions you receive?

LS: No. It's important for speakers to have the freedom to disagree and to do what they think is right in the end. I listen carefully to all the feedback, and I disagree with probably about 30 percent of it. And sometimes the suggestion is too radical. It is too late on Saturday evening to tell me to implement a totally different structure for the sermon. That's a suggestion that cannot be implemented by Sunday morning. Rather, I need to know how I can work with what I have to make it better.

DM: Do you receive any postsermon feedback after the Sunday services?

LS: The senior pastor, Bill Hybels, always gets a sermon tape and offers some feedback. If he is out of town, I may receive the feedback several days later, but it provides additional helpful advice and input that I can implement in the future.

DM: As you look back and consider how feedback and evaluation have helped you to preach relevant biblical sermons, could you imagine ceasing any feedback at this point and just going on without it?

LS: I wouldn't want to. That is why I solicit feedback before the message. I want the feedback because I know that this is the only way I am going to grow. If you are in an environment where for some reason the people feel the speaker's ego is too fragile, or he or she is too insecure, or there is something wrong with the community that people feel reluctant to provide feedback, it doesn't mean they don't still have opinions. I want to know what my listeners are thinking. I want them to feel free to be able to communicate with me so that I can improve.

DM: If evaluation and feedback are such valuable resources for preaching relevant biblical sermons, why do you think so few preachers solicit feedback and evaluation of their sermons?

LS: Some preachers may not enjoy a level of community where there is trust and love and a feeling of security. It is not always pleasant to receive feedback. I wouldn't like being involved in an atmosphere where there is a lot of feedback and evaluation without a sense of community. I can remember one time I did a message on a Saturday evening and blew it big-time. There was just something wrong with the message, and I didn't know what. Bill pulled me aside and talked with me for about two hours after that message. Now, this was very early in my preaching. It was probably about the fifth message that I had ever given in my life. I stayed up all night and worked on the message, then gave it two more reviews the next day, and it was much better. But if I had not been in community with Bill, if I had not known that Bill really loved me and valued me, that would have been a very devastating encounter. So I think evaluation and feedback have to be in the context of community.

Just recently I did a Scripture slide service and felt very good about it. However, the feedback that I immediately got after the Saturday evening meeting was that I needed to cut a section of it that I really liked. As I thought about it, I realized that I enjoyed this section because of the response that I received, but it didn't really contribute to what we were trying to accomplish in the service. At first receiving such feedback can be a blow to your self-esteem, and it can sting, but the sting goes away very quickly when the salve of the whole community is applied.

DM: I hear you saying that a loving, caring community is an essential context for feedback and evaluation. If that sense of community is missing, it's easy for a preacher to become defensive. Can you think of any other reasons preachers might resist feedback and evaluation of their sermons?

LS: I wonder if some preachers have the feeling that they are a cut above everyone else. They may be the dominant, autocratic type who believe no one should dare to question what they do or evaluate what they say. They might feel free to evaluate everybody else, but have great difficulty with anybody assessing them. To me, such an attitude is a community killer. Bill Hybels not
only accepts the evaluation and feedback of his sermons, he solicits it. Some pastors feel that if they allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to be critiqued, it somehow diminishes their leadership or impairs their status. They think such input somehow knocks them down a notch. But I don’t think so.

DM: I notice that at Willow Creek you also solicit feedback when planning the whole preaching year. How has that process worked?

LS: Bill pulls together a group of about eight laypeople and staff, women and men, mature and new Christians with different backgrounds. He says to them, “I want you to think about what we should include in the teaching diet of Willow Creek. What series do you think needs to be taught and what series would you want to hear personally? Go to the bookstore and get some ideas, see what is being written, talk to your friends, and come up with not just vague ideas like ‘something on the family,’ but a title for the series, and break it down into what you would cover in the individual weeks and give us specific titles for what you think should be covered.”

How much time would the group be given to do their research?

LS: I would give the group about six weeks in the spring, and then they would go on a retreat. The group could sit around a big table while people share their best ideas. Bill will take notes and elicit comments. The retreat phase might take about a day and a half for all the suggestions to be exhausted.

DM: So now the teaching pastor has a list of relevant suggestions for sermon series. What is the next step in the process?

LS: Bill comes back from that retreat with a list of maybe four pages of potential message series. Then there would be a second retreat in June for elders and some other key discerning staff. We would discuss each suggestion, pray about it, and then take the different suggestions for series and plot them into the calendar. We never actually implemented anything in totality that we had planned in June. After the second retreat Bill would go on a study break in July and August. He would take the calendar with him that we had developed in the second retreat, pray about it, and then make changes. He would come back to the team and say, “I think we need to start off with this series as opposed to that one, and I am going to add a new one here.” In the end, maybe half the original suggestions would be implemented. Things have changed somewhat now that we have a team of teaching pastors. But soliciting feedback regarding topics for preaching is still a very helpful mechanism for us.

DM: Would you recommend that process for others who want to keep on target and preach relevant biblical sermons?

LS: Absolutely! Even if you didn’t go away on a retreat, the brainstorming process is so valuable. I had a person come up to me and say, “We heard about this sermon series planning process and we tried it, and it didn’t work out perfectly with us either, but the process is important.”

DM: Lee, it’s been exciting to hear from someone who has a real passion for relevant biblical preaching. I want to thank you for the practical suggestions that you have shared with us that can help us connect effectively with our listeners and preach relevant biblical sermons. *“Preaching for Life Change,” part of an audiocassette series called Defining Moments

How to we get them to listen? continued from page 6

pew; the Joneses have sat in the left rear of the sanctuary for generations. So we may begin by roping off currently unused areas. Then, gradually, add a roped-off row or section until the desired configuration is reached. We had a pew that was against the back wall of the sanctuary and a few people had squatter’s rights on it and wouldn’t budge. We removed the pew and explained we wanted to have a wider aisle in the rear. If you have chairs in your worship area, the solution is simple: set up fewer chairs. The ushers can always add chairs.

Conclusion

The Word of God has the power to change lives. As pastors, we need to help our people listen effectively to that Word when it is preached. We want the Word of God to transform their lives. Through these techniques, we can help fulfill the words of the Lord, who said, “He who has an ear, let him hear...”
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Pitfalls of ministry

The three “Ps”

Thirty-eight years ago I presented a lecture to a group of pastors regarding the three “Ps,” or pitfalls, faced by ministers. Today, as I look around, I see that the same challenges remain. Perhaps they need to be addressed more urgently than ever.

What are these pitfalls, and how can they be handled?

Professionalism

When the young ministerial intern arrives at his or her first church, he normally exhibits considerable enthusiasm. He’s enthusiastic about his calling. He valiantly and fearlessly wields the sword of the Spirit in battle for His Lord.

However, after having faced disappointments and defeats, he often finds that his zeal has evaporated under the hot sun of pastoral engagement. The sword of battle hangs flaccid at his side. For some, this evolution takes longer than for others. But there are in fact very few who escape it entirely.

It is as though the “first love” of ministry is lost and is slowly replaced by an unemotional professionalism. Tasks are still being fulfilled, but in a routine, dutiful, mechanical way. Preaching, outreach, counseling, and visiting are no longer done under the inner constraint of the divine call. To a disturbing extent, ministry has simply become a career, or a mere job.

When this kind of professionalism dominates, heart-to-heart communication slowly degenerates into a computerlike technique. The pastor may go through the forms quite skillfully, but where is the spirit? The real minister ministers with the kindness of a saint showing personal interest and touch. He doesn’t think of his church as a work station and his parishioners as cases; rather, he thinks of his church as a hospital where wounded people can find loving and tender care.

Cold professionalism may look “cool” in the pulpit, especially when accompanied by high-sounding titles. However, that coldness draws few to Christ for the simple reason that it doesn’t actually lift up Christ. It cannot actually solve problems. Biblical theoreticians may succeed in unraveling theological knots, but when they are not reaching into the Scriptures to meet human need, little solid, long term benefit comes to the people. A minister can avoid the pitfall of professionalism only if he loves the Lord of the church, the people, and the work he has been called to do. Like Jesus, the true pastor suffers with and even for his sheep.

It is a penetrating question: What do our members most need from us? Theory? Technique? Authoritarianism? Scholarship? These things have their place and can be helpful, but they need first of all inspiration, hope, kindness and comfort, gentle understanding, a heart beating with true interest in people, constrained not by mere professional duty, but by the love of Christ. The letter of perfunctory professionalism killeth, but the spirit of passionate proclamation in partnership with the Spirit maketh alive.

Petrification

While on a recent trip to Brazil, I bought several fossils. They make nice displays. But they are cold, hard, and dead. It is a law of ministerial life that one either grows or decays and petrifies. I have never met a minister, no matter how seasoned and experienced, who didn’t need to keep growing spiritually and intellectually.

Few things keep a pastor growing more than public evangelism. Preachers can wither up and petrify from the sheer lack of working with people on the soul level. Vigorous evangelism keeps a minister both “fighting trim” and methodologically up to date.

In-service training and progress in knowl-
These pitfalls do not pounce upon their ministerial prey at once, they develop slowly. It is doubtful that God calls people to the ministry who do not enjoy (at least to some extent) study. Life-long study and earnest mental application is par for the ministerial course. Frequent exercise is as necessary for the ministerial mind as it is for the body. If the mind is being starved, ministers become anemic and superficial, petty preachers who simply mouth the obvious.

While in prison, waiting for the executioner’s axe, Paul still wanted to grow through study. Some snicker at and depreciate book knowledge, but Paul loved his books and asked Timothy to bring his “books” and “parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13).

The time in which we live offers unprecedented opportunity for this type of growth. The minister with his computer and the Internet has immediate access to almost unlimited resources of information and knowledge. There is no reason and certainly no excuse for us to stagnate.

**Pessimism**

The older minister is probably more subject to the pitfall of pessimism than the young minister. The older man is more likely to have experienced disappointments and failures, even a series of them. Thus, he faces the danger of becoming pessimistic, which can, by the way, spread to others, even the congregation. Ministers, though human, must avoid this at all costs.

If anyone ever had a reason to be pessimistic, it was Paul in prison. Yet Paul from his prison wrote that most joyous of his epistles, Philippians. Without doubt, Paul knew times of inner gloom and possibly even some despair and depression, but in his epistles there is no evidence of his communicating it to others.

Criticism is often the maidservant of pessimism. No minister can truly be an ambassador of God and speak critically and disparagingly of God’s church and its leadership. No ambassador can speak in a derogatory way of his own country and government and continue in office. Speaking negatively of colleagues and leadership is a sure way to close the door to any advancement. It is also a sure way of opening the door to negativism and depression. A minister may well become weary in body and faint at heart, as at times everyone does. But the truth is that people have enough troubles and burdens of their own without having to endure a pessimistic, critical pastor.

**Antidotes**

These are some of the pitfalls that ministers face. There are others of course, but these are especially insidious, because they do not pounce upon their ministerial prey at once. Instead, they develop slowly, like a malignant cancer.

The three “Ps” of prayer, purposefulness, and passion represent helpful antidotes. The spiritual autobiography of the apostle Paul gives the ultimate answer. He tells of how God Himself pointed out to him the source of power that makes the minister strong, productive, and successful: “His answer was ‘My grace is all you need, for my power is strongest when you are weak.’”

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Conviction and truth in Adventist education

When Tony Campolo, the well-known preacher-professor, flies home after speaking appointments, his response to questioning seatmates depends on whether he feels like talking or not.

He explains that “when someone asks what I do, and I want to talk, I say I’m a sociologist.” The person perks up—“Oh, that’s interesting!” and wants to know more. “But if I really want to shut someone up,” he goes on, “I say I’m a Baptist evangelist. That generally does it.”

Our society, in large measure, is afraid of conviction, especially religious conviction. And the well-educated (who often ride airplanes) tend to dismiss “Baptist evangelists” as pushy and closed-minded. So Campolo’s self-deprecating story rings true. It’s funny because people really have those attitudes.

One reason for our society’s fear of conviction is that conventional educators think schools should be non-committal about religion and morality. As for the stereotype about “Baptist evangelists,” that reflects a weakness for closed-mindedness that really does exist among believers.

I have led Adventist colleges, and I think the best education is partisan education, education that builds religious conviction. I also think the best education opens minds to growth. If the first point goes against the grain of worldly wisdom, the second, I’m afraid, goes against the grain of some churchly piety. But those who have taught us best in the church agree with both these points, and so should we.

It’s clear that the Bible writers believed the education of the young should build religious conviction. According to Deuteronomy 6, for example, God expected Israel to teach the divine commands and stories to every generation; these things, after all, had to be “upon your heart.” Ellen White declared that the education of the young should be “consistent with our faith.” The “work of true education,” she says further, is training students to “possess . . . the courage of their convictions.”

Opposition to teaching particular truth and conviction

The heirs of the Enlightenment, who shaped the worldly wisdom of today, disagree with this view of education. At his inauguration to the presidency of Harvard in 1869, Charles Eliot mocked teaching that instills in students some particular set of beliefs about what is good and true. That may be “logical and appropriate in a convent, or a seminary for priests,” he said in his speech that day, but it is “intolerable” in universities. A Harvard student under Eliot, DeWitt Hyde, who became president of Bowdoin College, thought the “narrowness” of church colleges “utterly incompatible” with responsible higher education. “A church university,” he declaimed, “is a contradiction in terms.”

Similar attitudes—we may call them “liberal” attitudes—are still commonplace. The famous Columbia University professor, Jacque Barzun, wrote in 1991 that trying to inculcate “any set of personal, social, or political virtues” in the classroom is “either indoctrination or foolery.” John Mearscheimer, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, told colleagues in his 1997 address on “The Aims of Education” that the university’s job is to produce thinkers who are skilled, knowledgeable, and independent. It has no business defending a particular truth or implanting a particular morality. He says, proudly indeed, that his university is “a fundamentally amoral institution.”

It’s not just people connected with biblical religion, however, who disagree with these attitudes. Some five centuries before Christ, the Greek writer Aristophanes wrote a play...
called *Clouds*. He meant it as a criticism of Socrates, the philosopher of that same period whose thinking did much to form the ideals of “liberal education.”

The play is about a young man, a spendthrift and idler who has hardly any conscience at all. His desperate father, having heard about the school in Athens where Socrates is teaching, decides to enroll his son there. He hopes education under renowned teachers will transform him. But the school, it turns out, puts all the focus on raising questions. Although the son hears defenders of traditional values, the overall emphasis is criticism of traditional thinking and morality. As Aristophanes tells the story, even Socrates has nothing positive to teach about how to live. He ridicules inherited wisdom, yet offers no substitute for it. He says nothing about what a person *should* aim for in life, nothing about the standards and convictions that *should* prevail.

**Develop convictions or drift**

How does Aristophanes voice his disagreement with all this? In the play he has the son finish school—*and leave as selfish as when he came*. He has *not* been transformed. He still lacks a conscience; he is still a spendthrift and idler.7

The point is the very one I am making: unless education *builds conviction*, students (and in the end, societies) drift to the path of least resistance. You stay with what you think and feel already, or move toward what the dominant surrounding culture thinks and feels. In the early twentieth century, the poet William Butler Yeats noted that the exceptions to the rule—the persons who steer a course, not just drift with the wind—are, all too often, perpetrators of evil. “The best lack all conviction,” he complained, “while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” The effect, as our violent century shows, is the loosening of “the blood-dimmed tide.”8

And people educated in the Enlightenment tradition played a key role in loosening the blood-dimmed tide. On January 20, 1942, fourteen men, all officials in the Nazi government, gathered for what history remembers as the Wannsee Conference. These men completed a Holocaust strategy, a plan for elimination of the Jews from Europe. Not only did they agree on the murder of Jews. They agreed that their mouths would be mines for gold, their hair a textile for clothing, their fat a source of soap, their bones raw material for fertilizer! *And of these fourteen monsters, eight had doctoral degrees.*9

It’s no wonder that a Holocaust survivor who became a school principal in Massachusetts remarked one day to his teachers that he was “suspicious of education.” In a note he left in their mailboxes at the start of school one year, he said he had seen “what no one should witness”: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children killed by highly educated physicians and nurses. So he could not trust learning for its own sake, and he appealed to his teachers to help their students become better people. “Your efforts,” he said, “must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.”10

**Growth, honesty, and authentic spirit**

True education builds conviction, including religious conviction; by making us *more* authentic in spirit, it makes us more humane in our dealings with others.

But true education also imparts a readiness to test inherited understanding: to analyze it and improve upon it. It gives learners both the ability and the eagerness to advance in knowledge and insight, making them, as Ellen White said, into “thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts.” They become persons who have both “breadth of
UNLESS
EDUCATION
BUILD CONVICTION.
STUDENTS DRIFT TO
THE PATH OF LEAST
RESISTANCE.

mind" and "clearness of thought." 11

In a word, true education opens minds to growth. But this point really does go, all too often, against the grain of churchly piety. When I was a boy, a family came to my congregation convinced that, from duty to God, all women and girls had to wear long pants under their dresses. I was familiar with nonconformity; against convention, my family kept the Sabbath. But to me this new family's nonconformity was just weird: I saw no good "reasons" for it, nor any readiness, on their part, to entertain change.

This was my first awareness that religion could unite with folly, or what I thought was folly. Later I became aware of the endless stream of bad typing (it's hardly writing) that zealots with similarly narrow preoccupations send to whomever they feel should receive it. Usually, it's marked by silly, dangerous certitude: all answers and no questions.

When I first heard about the incident in Waco involving Branch Davidians and their leader, David Koresh, I was in my church with someone whose brother was inside the compound. Later, after the madness concluded in a fatal fire, I sat in the same church one day not far from two children who were now fatherless from that fire. Clearly, what had happened was "close to home." And now my heart, not just my head, was confronting what had happened. It was confronting the fact that the main characters inside the compound had been schooled in Adventism, even if they had drawn away from it in their devotion to Koresh and his wild, apocalyptic speculations. Their backgrounds somehow made them vulnerable to his intoxicating certitude, his many answers, his few questions. But in this case the damage was far graver than the embarrassment of young girls forbidden by their family to wear dresses without long pants.

Having an eagerness to learn and grow

These stories show that religious people—Adventist people—face, and sometimes acquiesce to the temptation of self-satisfaction and closed-mindedness. It's just not automatic that we love the Lord, as we are commanded, with our minds. The stories show, too, the hazards of giving in to this temptation. And stories from mainstream Adventism underscore the point. During World War II the leadership of the church in Germany again and again expressed its support, even its praise, for Hitler. The church kept proclaiming its message, insensible to the Holocaust's unfolding evil. 12

Had I been in Germany then, I might have been as numb to the "blood-dimmed tide" as anyone else. It's not easy, after all, to acquire the "breadth of mind" and "clearness of thought" that is called for if we are to live properly in this world. But the fact that it's not easy by no means excuses us from trying.

When the Bible pictures Jesus as a child, He is an eager learner, "sitting among his teachers, listening to them and asking questions." When it pictures Him as a teacher in His own right, He is pushing boundaries. Against the conventions of His age, He rescues the Sabbath from legalism. Against these same conventions, He opens the learning circle to Mary, whom others would have excluded because she was a woman. Then, in the atmosphere of danger and uncertainty just before His arrest in Jerusalem, Jesus told His disciples that the coming Spirit would deepen their understanding even after He was gone. 13

The ideal for us, Christ's followers, is obvious: we should grow in wisdom all our lives. As the poet says in the famous hymn: "They must upward still and onward, Who would keep abreast of truth." 14

Embracing the difficulty

Perhaps, then, the mature religious community will not only expect and learn to live with the difficulty that goes along with learning; it will actually embrace that difficulty. Ellen White embraces it. She challenges the Church to foreswear the conservatism that seeks to "avoid discussion." Without "new questions" or "difference of opinion," she says, we veer toward the ignorant "self-confidence" that feels "no necessity for more truth and greater light." 15

Against those who think any acknowledgment of "error" will lead others to doubt, or cause "dissension and disunion," she declares: "We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished. Those who allow prejudice to bar the mind against the reception of truth cannot receive the divine enlightenment." 16

Striving for harmony

But if mature believers embrace the difficulty that goes along with learning, they at the same time strive for harmony. Our passion to learn must be driven always by love for one another and by concern for the Church and the Church's mission. When Paul dealt with a quarreling community in Corinth, he reminded the members that if differences of outlook decline into petulance and pride, they cannot be constructive. "Knowledge puffs up," he said, "but love builds up." 17
The idea of discipleship also puts learning in perspective, by connecting it with shared mission. The case of Bartimaeus, the blind man Jesus healed outside of Jericho, illuminates the matter perfectly. As the context in Mark's Gospel suggests, the man wanted not only to see, but also to follow. He immediately "followed him" on the road to Jerusalem. He became a learner, engaged in his master's mission. That mission, of course, was just the love, the radical generosity, that Paul upheld in his letter to the Corinthians. But the point now is that Bartimaeus wedded learning in the school of Christ with enlistment in the cause of Christ, and thus became, according to James William McClendon, "the paradigmatic Christian scholar." The story of Bartimaeus puts the church's vision of learning in the context of conviction. True education builds religious conviction—puts learners into the alliance with Christ that Bartimaeus joined so eagerly. True education also opens minds to growth—what Bartimaeus also wanted—so this magnificent alliance can grow stronger and more effective through deeper understanding.

Conviction? Yes! It must be central in education.

Minds open to growth? Yes! This, too, must be central.

If the marriage of conviction and learning isn't easy, it's still worth preserving. For when conviction and openness to growth join hands, the partnership helps the whole body of Christ reach toward the greater faithfulness, and the greater abundance of life, that is, after all, the essence of being a Christian. 

1. This phrase is from verse 6. But see the entire chapter Scripture quotes in this article are from the New Revised Standard Version.
2. Testimonies, 3:559, and Education, 17, 18.
4. Quoted in Janis Vogl Pelikan, The Idea of the University: A

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January 2001
Reflections on a pastoral visit

Chor-Kiat Sim

Slipping out of the sanctuary alone after the worship service, Jane's* steps showed discouragement, rejection, and a lack of spiritual ardor. Only a few days before she had told me that her husband had left her for a younger woman. As her pastor, I made an appointment to visit her.

In her living room, she poured out her anguish and bitterness. After an hour had dragged by, she began to repeat her stories of frustration and grief. My patience was gone. I longed for a way out. Forgetting her needs I thought, "She's wasting my precious time."

A feeling of helplessness overwhelmed me. In desperation I prayed, "God, help me." Suddenly her expression changed. With light in her eyes, her complaints stopped and she whispered, "Pastor, I know what's wrong with me. I have placed my husband between myself and God."

Amazed, I affirmed her for her conviction. The spiritual insight Jane had was remarkable. I know that such experiences are not always as dramatic as this one, but as I drove off to my next visit, I marveled at how the Spirit worked in Jane when I prayed for help. I almost missed the experience, as did Jane, by terminating my visit prematurely in frustration. Indeed, God's gift of spiritual discernment is vital in every phase of a pastor's ministry. The words of Paul took on a new meaning to me:

"I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9-10, NKJV). Without the Spirit of Christ, all our doings are in essence, vain. When it comes to real ministry, we are only the channels through which His power flows.

God opens our spiritual eyesight in every pastoral encounter. These emerging insights, developed through visitation, can be classified into four areas of consciousness: the sense of pastoral calling, the sense of commission, the sense of commitment, and the sense of competence.

The sense of calling

Most important, a deep sense of calling has to do with the inner conviction that the pastor is a representative of Christ. Besides their priestly, prophetic, and evangelistic functions, pastors, like shepherds, are primarily responsible for the care of their flock. Not only are personal visits the best way of doing so, but they promote harmony within the congregation and support educational and evangelistic programs as well. God sends pastors as the message incarnated. Divine messages are always sent by messengers. When pastors make visits, they help their members to a better understanding of a pastor's role and function and thus enhance the spiritual health of the congregation. Christ's call to His disciples to feed the flock recorded in John 21:15-17, is definitely relevant today.

Diligent visitation in homes, combined with spirit-filled preaching in the pulpit, results in members filled with power and enthusiasm for their Lord. A positive response to Christ's commission to nurture motivates them to love. People need love, care, and renewal. Both sensitivity and communication identify a caring pastor who represents a comforting and redeeming God.

Pastoral service is incomplete without visitation because pastoral presence reminds both the visitor and the visited that God is love. God's divine presence when communica ted through a pastor inspires the members to be active in fellowship and worship. Such dynamic pastoral ministry is evidence that the pastoral call plays a part in the fulfillment of Christ's promise of sending another Comforter (John 14:16).
The sense of commission

The sense of commission mandated by Christ in John 21:15-19 challenges pastors to provide nurture to their congregations through pastoral presence. God uses the presence of His willing agents to enrich relationships and to remind the world about the plan of salvation. Christ came to this world 2,000 years ago clothed in human flesh in order to save human beings. He came to live, to minister, and to die on the cross for our sin. Salvation cannot be assured apart from Christ. An active response to Christ’s commission, both in nurture and outreach, helps parishioners to understand the way God works for every person.

Christ Himself visited those He ministered to. He went to them in their homes, by the wayside, or one-on-one in the temple (Luke 4:6). Some of the most touching narratives in the Gospels describe Christ’s visits. For example, Christ visited with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, Lazarus, and later, His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias and on the Emmaus Road (Luke 13:32; John 3:1-8; 4:7-24; 11:1-7; 21:1-6). Christ demonstrated compassion, insight, and understanding in His visits. Similarly, pastors who provide pastoral care for their congregations become role-models who inspire others to action.

Pastoral visitation reflects a deep awareness of a pastor’s own faith. Particularly at this point in history, every pastor should portray comfort and care since the day of redemption is near. A pastor should live so that the Holy Spirit can be manifested in the confusion of these last days. Following the example of Jesus, who comforted His followers personally, is just as important as preaching or witnessing. Christ’s teaching about the Good Shepherd attempts to inspire His disciples to be leaders of the flock and to seek the lost sheep (John 10:14-17).

The sense of commitment

The sense of commitment to pastoral visitation requires preparation of the whole being. The world renowned Seventh-day Adventist preacher, H. M. S. Richards raised three questions about ministry calculated to help pastors commit themselves to a caring ministry. The questions could well be asked before each pastoral visit to provide the pastor with focus and spiritual direction: (1) What am I? (2) What have I done? Why am I here? (3) From what principles do I undertake this work?

Pondering these questions has guided me in my visitation. Answering them honestly can be helpful. For example, these questions prompted me to examine my personal and professional identity when I visited Jane. I was a young pastor then. I had just been assigned to my church. Still in my thirties, my energy was strong and ambitious. But lurking beneath the surface of my progressive pastoral aspirations were the quicksands of self-centeredness and self-consciousness, waiting to jeopardize the effectiveness of my true vocational journey. But thank God for His effective guidance and that of a few spiritual mentors whose humility and wisdom taught me the steps to take in my practice of ministry, and who helped me in effect to apply the Richards questions to my situation. My visit with Jane could have been disastrous if my pastoral value systems had been in a state of erosion. However, with my wife’s encouragement, we helped Jane persevere in her faith and cope with her crisis. A few years have elapsed since that experience, and I find that what I learned then is perhaps even more important now.

The sense of competence

Besides being called, commissioned, and committed, pastors should enhance their ministry with a sense of competence that should accompany them as they visit. In order to be competent, a pastor should acquire certain basic skills. Here are six suggestions:

1. Administer wisely and plan intelligently. Keeping good records and setting realistic goals to meet the spiritual needs and faith development of a congregation ensures an effective visitation program. Our God is a God of order. Systematic and organized efforts are required in doing God’s work.

2. Team up with others. All churches usually have at least a few church members with whom it is difficult to relate. Additional support is needed in such cases. Making pastoral visits two by two is advisable because the gifts of one complement those of the other. Christ sent His disciples out in twos (Mark 6:7). A spouse, colleague, or elder who can fulfill such a role can be invaluable.

3. Create a supportive staff. A well-organized administrative secretary makes some of the telephone calls to ensure that parishioners are home and helps to organize visitation and other pastoral functions. In this busy world, it often takes an average of ten telephone calls in order to set up one appointment for the pastor. Often, having such a person (perhaps on a voluntary basis) is not as impossible as it seems in some situations.

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sibilities are not complete without an ongoing training of others in the skills of visitation. Pastors should respect church members’ time and privacy. I love to use holidays or Sabbath afternoons to visit members in addition to evening visits during the week. Many of my appointments have been made by asking certain church members after worship service whether they could be available in the afternoon. Pastors should not drop into members’ homes unexpectedly.

6. Make referrals. Pastors should admit their limitations and make referrals when specialists are required. The contemporary world has ushered in extremely complicated spiritual, social, economic, and political issues. Pastors are being prudent when they refer some of their perplexed parishioners to those who specialize in relevant areas of expertise.

Conclusion

In this age of email, telecommunication, and the Internet, pastoral visits are by no means obsolete. Though pastors should employ these devices, they should not be allowed to take the place of fulfilling Christ’s basic commission to tend to the flock. There is no substitute for personal visitation. Christ could have sent His angels to appear on the wide screen of the universe but He came to visit us. He visited once and promised to come again.

Shouldn’t pastors make pastoral visiting a top priority?*

Letters continued from page 3

larger percentage of strange faces in their midst and the issue of divorce and remarriage finds relocation an answer to some of its problems. . . .

—Robert H. Allen, Ontario, New York

Outrageous grace

The force and beauty of the rhetoric in James Cress’s Outrageous Grace (September 2000) not only transcended the page, but lifted us far above conventional theologies that have clouded Christianity for centuries.

Jesus used the condemned woman as an opportunity to reveal God as the universe’s Father, not primarily as the universe’s Cosmic Cop or Vengeful Judge. Why is it so hard for us to see in our Lord’s mercy to this condemned woman, the marvelous model of how God relates to this rebel world?

Wherever I look in the New Testament I see God’s “outrageous grace” at work. No tickets or prepayment were required before the 5,000 plus were fed (Matt. 14:19-21). In fact, nowhere do I find Jesus asking for a prerequisite condition before He healed the sick or raised the dead. . . .

Paul never forgot the blazing light of the Damascus road in that God had forgiven him before his heart had been changed. . . .

But “outrageous grace” does not encourage antinomianism any more than Jesus gave Mary Magdalene a free pass to keep on sinning. The good news of the Cross is that guilt-stricken sinners have already been forgiven and their best response is to believe it, to live under the liberating joy that our Father in heaven has reminded us that we are His sons and daughters and that we should live, not only “as if” but truly as His children. . . .

—Herbert E. Douglass (retired president), Weimar College, Weimar, California

In your very fine September issue, Calvin Rock argues that preaching cannot be Black unless it addresses the “justice concerns” that help to define Black preaching. He then intimates that preaching cannot be truly prophetic unless it addresses these concerns: justice, he says, is the “defining core” of prophetic “righteousness,” or at least of the righteousness set forth in Isaiah.

It follows, I believe, that for Anglo (or any other) preaching to be truly prophetic, it must embrace the example of Black preaching with respect to justice concerns. But how likely is this when Adventist orthodoxy, as inscribed in the “Twenty-Seven Points” document, makes virtually no mention at all of these concerns?

Rock’s article invites reflection on our most basic convictions as a church. Fortunately, the “Twenty-Seven Points” document, with its preamble on the role of the Holy Spirit, encourages us to do precisely this.

—Charles Scriven, interim president, Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio

I just read “How Many Really Great Preachers Are There?” (September 2000) and say to Snyder, “That is the best article I have ever read!” but I am another “old brother Elmer” and say that to all writers. So don’t get the big-head. But seriously, Ministry could use a few more streamlined articles with simple words.

—Edward W. Graves, Lake Elsinore, California

January 2001

MINISTRY 27
Turning scars into stars
How a small Chinese church discovered its purpose

Early last year, our little church in Chi-Ba in the Yunnan province, conducted a sale. A piano, minivan, computer, desks and benches, and other sundries were sold to raise funds to meet a human emergency. Some 4,000 other Adventists in the province joined the fund-raising with their special donations. When the Good Samaritan ministry was over a few weeks later, our church was the richer, as it extended God’s love and grace to members of another church that had been caught in a severe tragedy.

Last February, some fifty young people of the Miao Christian Church from Wu Ding in Yunnan province, China, set out by truck to travel to a nearby village to share their faith. The road was mountainous, the terrain rough and slippery, and the weather was snowy. During their journey, the truck skidded and plunged into the deep ravine of a river. Two died instantly, and the rest were injured, 17 of them seriously. The news of the tragedy spread through the country.

With the funds we raised, we rushed to the scene of the accident, with medical supplies, food, blankets, and other emergency needs. We also took with us a team of lay ministers who provided spiritual and emotional support to the injured and the suffering relatives. Upon arrival on the scene, we found the injured laid out on the floor of two nearby houses; they had no means to go a hospital. In the midst of their suffering, they were singing Psalm 46:1, 2: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear.”

Fear was certainly not their lot, but pain was. We decided to transfer the injured to the main provincial hospital. But first we had to return to our church, provide a report to the members, and raise some more funds. When we got back to the site of the accident, we were surprised that not a single injured person was there. We were told that they had been moved back to their villages, to do whatever they could for themselves in their homes. Over the next few days, we tried to locate each injured person. The task was challenging, as the villages were far apart in mountainous areas.

Finally most of the injured persons and their family members were able to assemble in the church at Da Ping Di. The injured still needed medical attention, but now in the circle of Christian concern and love, they burst forth in praise and singing. Adversity was forgotten in those moments of praise, and those of us who were well could only marvel at the strength of the faith of the injured. The praise fellowship and preaching of the Word lasted well past midnight. The following day we moved them to the central hospital where good care was provided.

One day we traveled more than thirty miles to visit a chorister who was so seriously injured that he could not be taken to the hospital. When we got to him, we found him all bandaged from head to foot. His skull and lower jaw had been broken, and he had fractured his arms and legs. For days he could hardly eat or move. When we reached his place, we sang and praised. A faint smile crossed his face, and we were able to move him to the hospital.

The tragedy united the people in the villages around as nothing else would have. Even though people were poor, there was a spirit of sharing and willingness to help. The churches, regardless of denomination, united to bring help, healing, and hope. Our little Adventist churchshouldered much of the responsibility of locating the injured, comforting the bereaved, counseling the families involved, and providing every possible help. For days our church turned itself into a make-shift camp.

Now, almost a year later, the injured are back to some normalcy. Other churches that joined this ministry of Christian concern and care marvel at how a tragedy turned itself into a triumph of God’s grace. Our own church at Chi Ba discovered an identity that it exists not for some theoretical purpose, but to be of service to those who suffer spiritually and physically. Turning every scar into a star of hope is after all the central part of Christian ministry.—Robert Wong, Ministerial Secretary, Chinese Union Mission, Hong Kong
A t the opening of a new millen-ium, it seems particularly significa-cant to return to the beginning.

Perhaps no portion of Scripture has been more challenged or derided than the simple declaration of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” and the Bible’s subsequent description of seven 24-hour creation days.

For Seventh-day Adventists, the literal days of creation, culminating with the seventh-day Sabbath, holds particular significance for our worship of Jesus Christ both as Creator and Redeemer.

Sabbath rest is rooted in creation and grounded in love.

Coming directly from the Lord’s example at the conclusion of His creative work, as Christ rested and sanctified the seventh day, the Sabbath rest is rooted in His fiat creation. Sabbath becomes the perpetual memorial of His rule over that which He made.

Coming directly from the Lord’s experience at the conclusion of His redemptive work, as Christ rested in the tomb from redeeming His creation, the Lord’s Day is grounded in His love. Sabbath becomes the energizing seal of His rule over that which He made.

No wonder the last book of the Bible calls people to “worship Him who made the heavens, and the earth, and the fountains of water.” We are called to celebrate Jesus’ creative initiative, to commemorate His redemptive love, and to anticipate His ultimate restoration.

Likewise, believers should not be surprised that Satan would do whatever possible to obscure the magnificence of God’s creative power or the abundance of His redemptive grace. From a cosmic view, when Jesus’ reputation as either Creator or Redeemer is diminished, Satan’s self-inflated pride is exalted.

Over the past 150 years, the biblical account of creation has received repeated body-blows from skeptics, scientists, and some spiritual leaders who have vainly attempted to reconcile geological columns and epochs of time with the simple Genesis story.

Even self-declared and perhaps well-intentioned religious people express opinions ranging from outright acceptance of evolutionary speculation to cautious questioning of the age of nature’s basic building materials to refusal of dialogue with anyone holding alternative views.

Some believers have attempted to remain faithful to the biblical view by developing elaborate explanations of imponderables. Others have been so certain of their answers, they have ignored basic questions that must be answered. So what is the best current evidence to support creationism or to refute evolution?

I have found that the new book, Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary, edited by John T. Baldwin of Andrews University, presents credible fresh evidence and deep spiritual insights into the debate.

After perusing this book, I telephoned my long-time friend and colleague to say, “John, this is the book you were born to write!”

For years I have both admired and teased John for his ability to plumb the depths of theological thought while lesser minds are just catching up to the point from which he began to dig. For example, ponder the title of his University of Chicago doctoral dissertation: The Argument to Design in British Religious Thought: An Investigation of the Status and Cogency of Post-Humean Forms of Teleological Argumentation With Reference Principally to Hume and Paley. I once told him such an impressive title should be acknowledged in Ministry.

And now, John, it has!

I admitted to John, who is a scholar of such note that he won the 1994 John Templeton Foundation prize, that I did not understand every word in the book. This is not light reading. But the depth of spirituality linking creation, the catastrophic Genesis flood, and the cross of Calvary, coupled with the strength of evidence and logical reasoning on behalf of creationism, makes this book a most significant landmark and worth the effort necessary to study its chapters.

Every pastoral and seminary library should include this book (see advertisement on page 19), not for easy-reading, but for its evidentiary record of the strength of creationism’s case.

Baldwin brings scholars—scientists, archeologists, theologians, and geologists—together to demonstrate why a six-day creation non-evolutionary worldview is supported by the best biblical scholarship; why and how the first two chapters of Genesis are complementary creation stories rather than conflicting accounts; how and why the biblical text clearly demands a universal flood; and how the Bible’s final pages use the very terminology of Genesis and Exodus to call people back to faithfulness in following God’s plans and God’s commands.

Focusing on a worldview that includes the great controversy between Christ and Satan, Baldwin challenges continued on page 9
Hi-tech church ideas

George Barna, president of Barna Research group predicts that by 2010 we will have 10 to 20 percent of the American population relying primarily or exclusively upon the Internet for its religious material. Many of these will be people who would never set foot in a church.

A church Web site can provide many unforeseen options, with its 24-hour day access to church ministries. Churches with a Web site can help people in many ways: Newcomers to a community can use the Web to connect with someone who will accept them in spite of their pain and past. They can also find a church near them to minister to the needs of their family. Searchers will use the Web to help them find God.

Daily devotions can be offered to anyone who gives their email address. Audio messages on inspirational topics and Christian music can be downloaded for listening. Online chatrooms and staff can provide pastoral care, which includes women’s ministry, youth ministry, and spiritual counseling.

—Douglas Raymond Rose, Texas.

Transporting flowers

Knowing that the pastor would be visiting the sick in the hospital, I have had people say, “Pastor, since you are going to visit Mrs. Jones in the hospital, would you mind taking the flowers on the communion table?” Of course, I usually would take the flowers, but, I have never found a good way of transporting flowers until I hit upon the idea of putting a seat belt around the flowers in the passenger side of my car. It works fine!

—Willis H. Switzer, pastor, Franklin, Virginia.

Caring for one another

In many of our churches our attendance is a poor representation of our book membership, often new members slip through the cracks and sometimes even those who are less visible and involved of the older members can be “unnoticed” at church.

Elders and pastors are stretched to stay ahead of things, especially when you consider that sometimes our non-attenders represent 50 percent or more of the church.

To help the “body to care one for another,” we initiated a system to empower and encourage those who attend to contact, pray for, and encourage those who do not.

Each Sabbath we place a large board in the foyer. Using a “Post-It” removable glue stick and business-card-size cards, we attach the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all the church members—regular attenders and children (children under the age of five are listed on their mother’s card). Couples have individual cards.

As people arrive, they or our greeters simply take their name off the board and place it in a box under the board. Visitors also fill out a card, and it too is placed in the box.

At the end of the service the board is turned so that it faces the people as they come out. The names left on it are those who were not there. As attending members leave, they take as many cards as they feel they can contact and encourage these non-attenders through a card or a call and prayer.

With a computer it is easy to print the cards and organize a simple database to manage the information gathered.

Our goal is to have the board cleared every week. We are planning to do this for two months with a weekend “revival” series planned for two-thirds of the way through. This does several things.

1. We have a visual, weekly reminder of those who were away.
2. The church collectively owns the problem and the solution, and all have the opportunity to do something to help.
3. The weekly attendance is tracked accurately and logged into a database.
4. The sense of community grows as people begin to pray, call, write, and encourage each other.
5. Every week we see, pray for, and contact those whom we have not seen—in some cases for years.

Is it working? The question is more accurately asked, “Is God working in response to our prayers and contacts?” The answer is overwhelmingly Yes. People who have not been to church for years are coming back. It is not possible to forget anyone who at some time made a commitment to Christ and needs our prayers and support.

We have just decided to take a month’s break from the “Body Board” so as to not wear out the saints. We will resume it as we come into the festive season.

—Peter Smaela, pastor, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Book Review

A Path Straight to the Hedges


This is a manual “written for individuals who want to be involved in cross-cultural evangelism in the ever-expanding Seventh-day Adventist world field.” The book is not merely
Theoretical, but deals with how to serve.

The author is clear, direct, and relevant. He takes a biblical and practical approach and provides the reader with a significant background of experience in varied cultures.

In his introduction to the book, Jan Paulsen, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, notes the four areas of the book's concentration: (1) reaching new areas, (2) strengthening existing churches, (3) providing evangelistic models, and (4) demonstrating that evangelism is not just a question of resources. The book usefully expands on each of these categories.

Who should read this book? Anyone anywhere in the world who has a burden for the salvation of men and women, boys and girls. No cheap solutions are offered the reader, no unbiblical triumphalism, and no vaunted proclamation of great successes. What we find is a call to engage, consider, and reflect on the unfinished task, the countless millions into whose ears no gospel message has come, into whose hearts and minds the blessings of a saving Christ have never entered. Here is the challenge. Everyone who reads and studies this book is encouraged to reconsider their relationship to the uncompleted task of witnessing to the unsaved with emphasis upon the poor, the marginalized, or as the author puts it “the hedge people.”

Schantz writes honestly and directly; he is practical and encouraging. He not only invites and encourages, he motivates. The principles Schantz sets out are applicable in all cultures. Here is no narrow, sectarian view of the gospel commission. The author has written a refreshingly frank book that will have appeal for all who are serious about communicating the gospel in an age of change, challenge, and opportunity.

Waiting in the Presence of the Holy

Waiting is an essential part of spiritual life in which we discover new and healing rhythms of grace and gratitude. Marguerite Shuster, an associate professor of preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary, embraces the task of waiting in God's presence from experience as a woman, a pastor, and a teacher.

Proclaiming in the Presence of the Holy

As the pastor of large African-American congregations in Los Angeles and New York City, Ron Smith learned that God is both the subject and the audience of the sermon. Sermons communicate what God has said and what the proclaimer and congregation have to say to Him. He now serves as editor of Message magazine.

Playing in the Presence of the Holy

Only those who are secure can play, for only they believe that good will triumph over evil. Calvin Miller, professor of preaching and pastoral studies at Beeson Divinity School is uniquely equipped to help ministry professionals experience personal and corporate spontaneity in the presence of God.

Rejoicing in the Presence of the Holy

Grace is only given to sinners, and only they can know the height and breadth of holy joy. Morris Venden's four decades of preaching about grace have helped tens of thousands rediscover the gladness of being children of God. He now is associate speaker for the Voice of Prophecy, the international radio broadcast of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This seminar is ideal for ministerial/clergy association meetings, seminary or college classes, and chaplain groups.

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