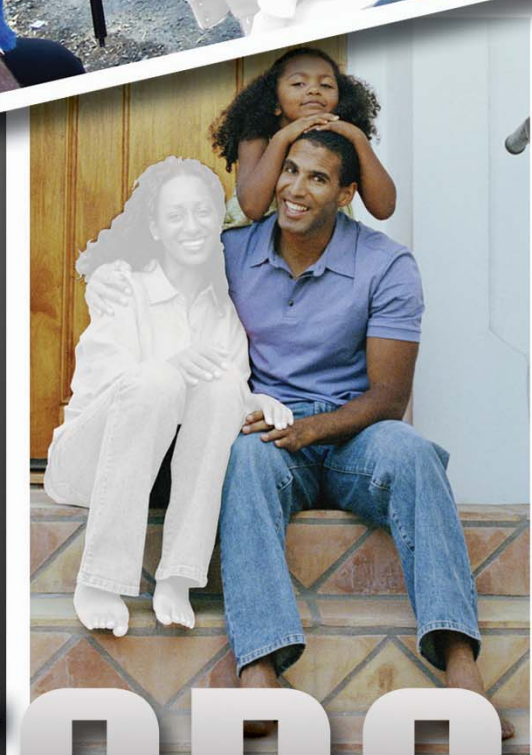


# MINISTRY

*International Journal for Pastors*

June 2006



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# MINISTRY

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**Cover Illustration** Harry Knox

**Layout** 316 Creative

**Subscriptions** 12 issues: United States US\$29.99; Canada and overseas US\$31.99; airmail US\$41.75; single copy US\$3.00. To order, send name, address, and payment to Ministry Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

**Web site** <[www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org)>

**Queries/renewals/address changes**

[ministrysubscriptions@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrysubscriptions@gc.adventist.org) (email); 301-680-6512 (phone); 301-680-6502 (fax)

**To Writers** We welcome unsolicited manuscripts.

Editorial preference is to receive manuscripts on diskette with name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and Social Security number (if U.S. citizen or possessing a U.S. Social Security number). Send editorial correspondence to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A. 301-680-6510 (phone); 301-680-6502 (fax); [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org) (editorial office email).

**Writer's Guidelines available on request and on Web site at** <[www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org)>.

**Ministry (ISSN 0026-5314)**, the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association © 2006, is published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. Member Associated Church Press. Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

**Vol. 78 Number 6**

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## OUR READERS RESPOND...

**Harmony in the church**

I so appreciate John Brunt's April article on harmony in the church (April 2006). I grieve when I hear ministers and theologians attack each other over different understandings of doctrinal points. We miss the bigger, richer picture when we focus on our own personal viewpoint. After all, God could have cloned Adam and Eve if He wanted us to all think exactly alike. God loves diversity. He created each of us with a unique body, mind, personality and relationship with Him. We are all enriched when we share with and listen to each other. I hold our special Adventist understandings very dear, but I have also learned much from other Christian thinkers. If that makes me a heretic, so be it!

Thanks also to Jon Paulien (February 2006, April 2006) for describing the worldview of many people today and showing how God can use these attitudes to reach hearts in a new way.

—Carrol Grady, *Snohomish, Washington, United States*

Dr. Brunt claims that Ellen G. White admits that there is diversity in the scripture, and that she celebrated it. If Dr. Brunt would give careful consideration to the context of that quotation, and what she says in other parts of her writings on the topic, he would come to a different conclusion.

Here is one of her statements on this topic "they will not be at variance, one believing one thing and another having faith and views entirely opposite, each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith." (*Testimonies to Ministries*, 29)

She does not endorse pluralism in doctrine and practice to any degree. The diversity that she mentions is in talents and temperaments. We don't find pluralistic and contradictory views in the Gospels, or in any other books of the Bible. One part of the Scripture complements another part, but that is not diversity. Here is another statement from Mrs. White. "Although

possessing different temperaments and dispositions, they will see eye to eye in all matters of religious belief. They will speak the same thing, they will have the same judgment, and they will be one in Christ." (*Historical Sketches*, 122-123)

The topics that Dr. Brunt mentions in his article, such as the way some interpret the first two chapters of Genesis, and the texts of Philippians 2, dealing with Christ's "emptying Himself"—those interpretations are not divisive or confusing for the church. Some scholars may be divided on such issues, but they are not of great concern to the majority of the world church. Issues that are dividing the Adventist church are, for example, methods of interpretation, the ordination of women as elders or pastors, Christian standards, and the Spirit of Prophecy.

Our church was fairly free from pluralistic ideas and divisions for over one hundred years. Problems of this nature began to appear after some of our teachers and scholars came out of liberal universities where they went to get their degrees. It is a miracle that we don't have more divisive problems.

During Mrs. White's lifetime, our church was saved from errors that some attempted to introduce, and the unity was preserved with inspired counsels. Today our church can be kept together if we study carefully and diligently her inspired writings, and with that help, we can understand correctly the essential teachings that we need in order to finish God's work and be ready for the second coming of Christ.

—Antonio Arteaga, *Th.D., Riverside, California, United States*

**The challenge of "Tell the World"**

Your cover picture and lead story (February 2006) immediately grabbed my attention despite my blurry cataract eyes. Those kids were cute! Mark Finley's clarion call to go and tell the world was exciting and challenging!

I say "challenging" because it is a call to every man, woman, and child on earth. It's exciting because every born-

again, Spirit-filled Seventh-day Adventist believer in North America hopefully will unite with our fellow believers throughout the world to fulfill the five-year gospel outreach—in an effort to present the whole Advent message via all the means at our disposal to the whole world!

However, I am concerned about believers who are university and college educated, and who are successful in their professions and prosperous in worldly accomplishments—financially blessed—who may be blinded, deaf, and mute spiritually to hearing the call and uniting with the poor in third world countries where evangelistic success and growth are exploding. I take courage and hope that Joel 2:28–32 will be fulfilled. I pray a spiritual revival, a deep-down repentance, and a faith-building obedience will result in all our churches.

—Keith R. Mundt, *Riverside, California, United States*

**Preaching with a translator**

I read with considerable interest Chantal Klingbeil's article "Preaching with a translator" (April 2006). After 15 years overseas, during which I preached in four languages, translated other preachers, and was often translated myself, I can relate to many of the factors and experiences the author mentions. I can verify that all the components she mentions are important, indeed essential! My congratulations to her for an article that is often (in my experience) sorely needed!

There is one other factor I would mention that appears to have been overlooked, perhaps because it is more culturally specific than most of the other points, and yet in some parts of the world it is an absolute necessity. That is style of preaching.

In most western countries, a common preaching style involves statement and repetition (usually the statement is rephrased), done for emphasis, or to reinforce the point. There are languages where this cannot be done without the translator having to repeat the same words as the previous statement due to a more limited

*continued on page 27*

# I'll give you my voice

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



**H**ardly hearing her mother's hoarse whisper because of a cold, the three-year-old girl asked what was wrong.

"I lost my voice," replied her mother.

Wanting to help, the little girl said, "I'll give you my voice."

Sometimes ministers of the gospel need to give their voice to others, for otherwise some people will never be heard—they will never have a voice.

Our world has problems with all kinds of pollution, including noise pollution. It's hard to get away from this kind of pollution—noise from cars, airplanes, crowded cities, and motorcycles, and noise from cities filled with millions. Sometimes we have to shout to be heard.

Some, however, are heard less than others, and some people are never heard. *Important* people can usually be heard, while the voices of many others are drowned out. Have we been trained to ignore certain people? As ministers (pastors, chaplains, teachers, church leaders), we need to give them our voice so that they can be heard and their needs, hopefully, met. But giving someone our voice has to do more with action than with actual words. It means recognizing their needs, acknowledging them, and doing what we can to assist them. All of this should be done in such a way to preserve the other person's dignity while enhancing it, as well.

Jesus did this when He gave His voice to others. For example, Jesus took special notice of little children, even though the disciples were not pleased. Mark writes that Jesus "took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16, NIV). His surprise action demonstrated His concern

for children—children ignored because, all too often, in the eyes of adults, they are not important.

## Jesus identifies Himself

Because healing remained one of Jesus' favorite activities, and a central part of His ministry, the Gospels record numerous healing stories. At the time John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus to find out if Jesus was the "one who was to come." The response may have surprised John's disciples—it certainly surprises me.

Jesus told John's disciples to "go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matt. 11:3–5, NIV).

Notice what Jesus said about His mission. His statement focused on the needs of individuals often forgotten—the blind, children, lepers, deaf, and others who also are too often ignored. He chose not to make a theological statement other than to refer to the preaching of the good news, but He even focused that on the poor—another forgotten and often ignored group.

## Identifying ourselves

How do we identify ourselves? How do our congregations identify them-

selves? Do we remember the people who are important to Jesus?

Several articles in this issue address the needs and the possibilities of people often overlooked. We focus on individuals with various challenges—those who are deaf, blind, crippled, or otherwise handicapped; those whom we may consider too young to be important; those too old to be useful; the divorced; and the oppressed. To this list we could have added the sick, the poor, and others, and we want to do so in a future issue. But what are we doing for people who face the challenges covered by our articles? Do we even know that they exist—often in our communities?

Are we again asking overworked pastors and congregations facing various challenges to take on additional ministries? Yes, we are—for most ministries are done in the context of the congregation with leadership consisting of lay leaders and pastors. In addition, coordinating and organizational bodies such as conferences provide support and structure. Perhaps your congregations cannot take on three or four new ministries. Well, how about considering two new ministries or perhaps one new ministry? How about praying that God will lead your congregation to determine which additional ministry it can include, and maybe that ministry could be to individuals who are often forgotten.

## Give a voice

Listen to the people often ignored. Share your voice with them. Your voice will help them to be heard so that, as the church, we will address their needs. After all, isn't that what Jesus did? ■

# Including all— omitting none

Charlotte L. V. Thoms



Charlotte L. V. Thoms, M.S., is an associate professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology in the College of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. She also is the coordinator of disabilities ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Her e-mail is disabilitiesministries@hotmail.com

Out of 35 miracles performed during the Savior's three-and-a-half-year ministry, 23 miracles directly touched people with disabilities. His mission was clear: "The Lord . . . hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18, KJV). Jesus' philosophy was revolutionary—both then and now.

Ellen White wrote this powerful, sobering message, "I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character."<sup>1</sup>

In 1995 the Seventh-day Adventist world church in general session at Utrecht, The Netherlands, recommended and voted the need for congregations to have a person selected for ministry to people with disabilities.

Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes its obligation to all—"every nation, kindred, tongue and people"—we will make inroads into this untapped human resource of millions of disabled individuals worldwide. Our motto, *Including All—Omitting None*, gives hope to any underrepresented people-group.

## Four goals of disabilities ministries

**Accessibility.** Disabilities Ministries assists the church in making all structures, buildings, and programs easily available to *all* people. By eliminating existing architectural and structural barriers and by learning to design accessible programs and buildings, the church will become a place where everyone feels welcome. There should be no barriers to the cross of Christ!

**Accommodation.** Disabilities Ministries assists the church by including *all* people as members of the family of God. This may mean providing Braille or recorded information for people who are blind or creating meaningful Sabbath School experiences for people who have various learning challenges. The goal includes helping God's family to be inclusive in principle and practice.

**Encouragement and education.** Disabilities Ministries assists church members in developing a supportive environment in all aspects of church life for *all* people. This also includes working with educational institutions.

**Employment.** Disabilities Ministries assists the church in making full use of the talents and skills of *all* individuals throughout the work of the church.

DISABILITIES  
MINISTRIES  
ANTICIPATES A  
PERCEIVED NEED  
AND RESPONDS.

What would prevent a church or conference from embracing Disabilities Ministries? One pastor stated candidly, "I have a disability myself." His usual jovial voice became very deep with concern as he continued, "Honestly, I don't know what to do. If we open our doors to the disabled, are we ready?"

I was relieved because he did not say, "We can't afford another ministry." Disabilities Ministries anticipates a perceived need and responds. As a new father, he fully understood these words, "A nursery is usually completed before the baby comes home from the hospital. Disabilities Ministries should be started before you have disabled members in your church."

## Seven major disability groups

There are seven major disabilities groups a church can address.

**FIGURE 1**

Cognitive	Hearing	Hidden	Mobility	Psychiatric	Speech	Visual
Retarded	Deaf-mute	Afflicted with	Wheelchair bound	Crazy	Speechless	Blind as a bat
Dumb	Deaf and dumb	Birth defect	Shut in	Fruit cake	Retarded	Four eyes
Feeble-minded	Deafie	Stroke victim	Crippled	Mentally ill	Unfortunate	Sightless
Stupid	Handicapped	Normal	Deformed	Nuts	Defective	
Imbecile			Maimed		Mute	
Unfortunate			Withered			

*Cognitive disability.* Cognitive disability is an impairment of a person’s ability to comprehend what they see and hear and then to infer information from social subtleties and body language. A cognitive disability may include, but is not limited to, autism, mental challenges, learning disabilities, Down syndrome, and traumatic brain injuries.

*Hearing disability.* Hearing disability includes impairment of a person’s ability to hear sound and may include the inability to discriminate speech. Hearing disabilities may range from profound to severe to mild hearing losses.

*Hidden disability.* Some physical conditions are not easily recognized. Hidden disability may include, but is not limited to, lupus, arthritis, high blood pressure, epilepsy, heart disease, or diabetes.

*Mental or psychiatric disability.* Some disorders may affect daily living. These disabilities may include, but are not limited to, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, multiple personalities, and phobias.

*Mobility disability.* Mobility impairment limits the individual’s ability to perform the activities of daily living. This kind of disability may include, but is not limited

to, partial or complete paralysis, missing extremities, orthopedic impairments, and the use of wheelchairs or walkers.

*Speech disability.* Speech disability affects a person’s ability to communicate and can be characterized as language and voice disorders, articulation errors, and stuttering.

*Visual disability.* Visual disability affects a person’s ability to see.

Ellen Whites states that Jesus “showed His sympathy, . . . ministered to their needs, and won their confidence.”<sup>2</sup> By addressing these four goals within these seven major disability groups, church members can do the same by becoming sensitized to attitudinal barriers.

**Terms to be avoided**

Although some of the terms used are biblically based, in today’s vernacular many are quite negative and offensive (see figure 1).

The negative terms mentioned in figure 1 should be replaced by more appropriate terminology as described in figure 2.

Each church may begin a Disabilities Ministries program by developing Disabilities Awareness Sabbaths and interactive

learning sessions, evaluating structures and programs, seeking ways to improve accessibility, assisting with educational and informative resources, and producing tailor-made programs for the specific church and community needs.

Some of the following activities can be completed by skilled workers within the church or by contacting local agencies: install ramps, cut openings in curbs, lower telephones, add alarms with flashing lights, replace door knobs with handles, widen doorways and aisles, place grab bars in restroom stalls, remove high-pile carpeting, insulate lavatory pipes under sinks to prevent burns, and provide Braille signs and menus.

If your church requires additional information about ministry to individuals with disabilities, contact your conference office.

“If we have the true religion of the Bible we shall feel that debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren and who are less fortunate than ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

If Disabilities Ministries seems a bit overwhelming, remember, the will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you.

Disabilities Ministries is a ministry whose time has come. ■

**FIGURE 2**

Negative Term	Positive Term
Handicap	Disabled
Deaf and dumb	Deaf or hard of hearing
Mute	The person does not speak
Retarded or feeble-minded	Developmental disability
Diseased	Name the disability
Crazy	Mental or emotional disability
Birth defect	Congenital disability
Normal	A nondisabled person
Stroke victim	A person had a stroke
Afflicted with/suffering from	John has epilepsy. Not, John is an epileptic.
Wheelchair bound	Person uses a wheelchair
Shut in	Visit (list the names) Not, sick and shut-in members

1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 3 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1948), 511.  
 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1905), 143.  
 3 White, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, 511.

# The ministry to the oppressed

Jonathan Gallagher



Jonathan Gallagher, Ph.D., is the liaison of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the United Nations.

**H**alf the world—three billion people—live on less than two dollars a day. Almost a billion people entered the twenty-first century illiterate. One hundred twelve million children receive no education. Eleven million children die every year from malnutrition and disease, deaths that could have been prevented.

The statistics are harsh, and they're getting worse because besides these tragic economic and social indicators, one can add the impact of war, violence, and persecution. Over a billion people live under regimes that deny fundamental freedoms, especially religious freedom. About one hundred seventy thousand people, it has been estimated, are killed each year because of their faith (some would argue that the number is higher because much of the religion-inspired killing is done in secret).

One thing is sure: This world is descending into even greater violence and oppression against religious minorities. What, then, of our ministry to these oppressed people?

Given the immensity of the problem, how easy to ask, What can I do? But if we are to be true to our calling, to the mission Jesus has given us, especially as pastors, we cannot ignore the issues or try to remain unmoved by them.

## Jesus' mission statement—and ours

Read again Jesus' mission statement: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has

anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' " (Luke 4:18–21, NIV).

Jesus, quoting Isaiah, gives a five-point plan. The issues are poverty, freedom, healing, and oppression—all set in the context of the fifth point: the revelation of God's graciousness.

As He addressed—and we address—these issues, we must reflect on the fundamental aspects of God's kingdom. This is not merely some kind of "social gospel." Rather, it is placing the gospel in society, as Jesus did.

Addressing poverty and providing healing—whether through medical programs or lifestyle improvements—and of course the sharing of the gospel of God's grace, are, perhaps, more obvious aspects of the Christian life and are surely on the pastoral radar screen. Churches run soup kitchens and clinics and thrift stores and food banks—and rightly so. We wish to follow the mission program as stated by Jesus, helping the poor and underprivileged and the victims of prejudice, whoever they may be.

## Recognizing oppression—the missing factor

What seems to be more frequently missed is the pastor's role in identifying the major attacks on freedom and in helping those who are oppressed because of their faith. Perhaps it is the perception that politics needs to be kept out of the pulpit or that churches should not be seen as meddling in foreign affairs. Or maybe it is just that we are not aware of the scale of the problem and that once we begin to understand it, we feel so inadequate to deal with it. What difference does it make if I, a pastor of even a large church, speak about the problems faced by millions of Christians in one country? Or the total repression of all religions in another? Or yet in another country, the total ban on any worship other than the form of worship approved by the government? To this we could add interreligious warfare in other places.

Then pastors may wonder, Are we meant to go beyond our faith community in trying to defend faith? Are we supposed to defend other faiths, even non-Christian ones?

Here, concepts of possessing truth can lead to some warped perspectives. "I cannot defend X

believers because they are wrong in their beliefs.” Or “If I support the cause of Y faith, people will think I have apostatized and joined them.” Or even (mis-?) quoting Scripture regarding “what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

Here, the essential point is freedom, as Jesus articulated and demonstrated so clearly. Freedom to prisoners who are imprisoned because of their beliefs. To seek the release of the oppressed from their bondage of persecution, violence, and threat of death. Not just the ones we know and like, the ones we identify with, but everyone who suffers for their faith. Our support must be for the right of all human beings to choose their beliefs.

### Dealing with dictators

When the former dictator of an Asian country incarcerated the local Baptist pastor, closed the Hare Krishna temple, and bulldozed the only Adventist church in the country, we took up the challenge. Our delegation protested to the United Nations (UN). Our representative lobbied legislators on Capitol Hill. Our director wrote to the ambassador of that nation. All to no avail, or so it would seem.

We organized a letter-writing campaign—first to the president of that nation and to the country’s ambassadors in the various nations. We estimate at least ten thousand letters of protest were sent. We received no response. Not one. A hopeless task, perhaps? But still fulfilling the ministry to the oppressed. We saw the video of the church members as they watched their church being destroyed before their eyes, and we wept with them.

Others took up the cause—from diplomats to politicians to leaders of other faiths. We presented the case to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna, Austria; to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland; to numerous committees and hearings in Washington, D.C.

And, eventually, things happened. In fact, the pastor of the Adventist church was allowed to come to the United States as a guest of the United States State Department. Harassment of church

members decreased. And the Adventist church in the country gained official recognition by the government.

That’s not to say that persecution of believers is over in that nation, or that the government leaders have been converted! On the contrary, human rights

## EACH ONE OF US IS CALLED TO CARRY ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS

abuses and religious freedom violations continue. But confronted with the spectacle of massive oppression, we celebrate these small victories.

### Objecting to oppression

Through conversations with ambassadors and diplomats, we can bring change. A church closed in a certain nation by the authorities was reopened after an intervention at the UN. A government representative in another nation promised that churches will be reopened after our discussions with the ambassador. Responding to a statement made at the UN Commission on Human Rights, the representative of a third nation agreed that the death penalty for conversion is not part of Islamic *sharia* law and called on Muslim countries to abandon the practice.

All of these results transpired because of the direct action of those who object to oppression, who want to call governments to account, and who want to end violence in the name of religion.

Yet this can work only if those at the local level give their full support. Church pastors and members often ask what they can do. They often feel powerless—after all, they cannot go to the UN or meet with national leaders or organize a countrywide protest.

But they can help—and the help is multiplied by numbers. That is what gets attention. A senator told us that if he gets one hundred letters on a subject, that gets his attention. Imagine the impact of a few thousand letters. Or a petition carrying a million names.

Most of all, what Christian leaders who speak up against oppression are looking for is commitment at the local level. Contributions, maybe, but more importantly, the knowledge that the issue is on the local church agenda, and that Christians are praying, very specifically, for those who are persecuted.

National organizations such as the North American Religious Liberty Association (NARLA) are committed to protesting faith-based oppression, along with the global umbrella organization the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA). Other organizations and news

**If you wish to speak out on the issues of religious freedom, you may contact the organizations listed below for additional information.**

**North American Religious Liberty Association:**

[www.religiousliberty.info](http://www.religiousliberty.info)

**International Religious Liberty Association:**

[www.irla.org](http://www.irla.org)

**Voice of the Martyrs:**

[www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com)

**Freedom House:**

[www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

**Compass Direct:**

[www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org)



services such as Voice of the Martyrs and Compass Direct provide reports and analysis of reported persecution. These are very practical ways for individuals to get involved, and pastors can be informed and challenged by highly relevant cases and examples.

For how do you preach and demonstrate a ministry to the oppressed? Not by words alone but by transforming ideas into action and taking a stand against oppression and persecution. By being part of Jesus' mission on behalf of the oppressed—the poor and vulnerable, the beaten and the tortured, wherever we find them.

Each one of us is called to carry one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), to remember those who are imprisoned as our fellow prisoners, and to consider those who are mistreated as if we ourselves were suffering (Heb. 13:3). Most significantly, Paul, in Galatians, tells us, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10, NIV). The oppressed are our family!

### Facing oppression

In one Middle Eastern country, there is no religious freedom. There is only one state-sanctioned faith, and all other religions are expressly forbidden. No churches are permitted—not one. It is even a crime against the state to read a Bible in the privacy of your own home.

Persecution by religious police awaits anyone foolhardy enough to disobey the laws against Christian worship, which is even forbidden in the United States embassy there. Many thousands of Christians have been imprisoned and tortured, some losing limbs and lives, especially the "guest workers" from other countries.

In one Asian nation, the dictatorship has tried to destroy every Christian element there. Christians remain, but under difficult circumstances. The "religion" is worship of the country's leader, and variance is not permitted. Attacks on Christians in some countries comprise part of the strategy of containment—to prevent Christian growth and development and to enforce the dominant religion.

Even in such countries traditionally known for tolerance and liberty, chal-

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lenges have now surfaced. The "antiseptic" law proposed in France provoked much criticism because it can be used against any religious group, and the punishments are severe. Added to this is the prohibition of displaying religious symbols in the public arena, a clear denial of the freedom to practice religion. It is disturbing to see antireligious discrimination and hostility in the country known for "liberty, equality, and fraternity."

Persecution continues against religious minorities in another nation, and the new requirements for the registration of religious groups have provided an opportunity for regional leaders to intimidate and repress Christians who do not belong to the majority church. The media has also mounted a hostile campaign against what they describe as "foreign religions." For example, sensationalist media reports have described Seventh-day Adventist Christians as practicing child sacrifice and cannibalism.

The list of serious problems is long—prohibiting the construction of Christian churches, outright banning of Christianity, or jailing converts to another faith. It seems as if the oppressors of religious freedom continue to find new ways to limit or eliminate freedom of religion.

Persecution against protestant Christians in another country has included mob violence during which Christians have

been beaten and abused and thrown out of town, and their houses have been looted and burned. Excluded from town affairs, denied employment, refused permission to build churches, these Christians—including Adventists and other Protestants—hold to their faith.

In another location, a machete-wielding mob drove out all the Protestants from town—just another in a long series of violent acts repressing religious freedom. This is just another statistic to add to the more than thirty thousand people who have been made refugees in their own country in the past thirty years.

When they eventually thought it safe to return, these oppressed Christians found their houses burned and torn down in a rage of destruction.

Yet they continue. After being unable to worship together for two months, the Adventists in town held their service in the ruins of one of their homes—a witness to true faith and convictions, a proof of dedication to a higher authority, a declaration that demonstrates that religious freedom is no grant of government but a gift of God. A tribute to faith that values faithfulness to God above all.

What do you say? Will you ignore their plight? Or are you ready to commit, to *do* something and pledge to commit yourself to the ministry to the oppressed? ■

# Cycle of Life

“Sometimes you have to face harsh realities before you do what’s right.”

Pastor Minervino (Minner) and Evelyn Labrador  
Clearwater, Florida



The first question our financial advisor asked us about retirement was: Do you have a will and other estate planning documents? We didn't. Within weeks, two tragedies in our church showed us how important estate planning can be. A beloved deacon suffered a serious stroke. Machines kept him alive, but he could no longer communicate. Loving relatives found themselves in a painful conflict that could have been avoided, if only our church member had signed an advance medical directive. Then, a young couple related to a church member died in a car accident,

leaving two small children. With no will or guardianship directions, the children's future was left to the courts. The custody

dispute, together with probate costs, significantly reduced the children's inheritance. When we thought about our own family, we knew we couldn't live with uncertainty. We had to fulfill our obligations as parents, as pastors of the flock and as responsible

stewards of God's goods. Now that we have wills, we are so relieved. We know that if anything happens to us, our sons will be raised in an Adventist home.

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# Forgotten

Myrna Tetz



*Myrna Tetz is a retired managing editor of Adventist Review and currently the editorial consultant for Ministry magazine.*

One Sabbath morning, we waited in a room in the school adjacent to the church for the Sabbath School teacher to arrive. Three of us were in attendance: an older lady, Susan<sup>1</sup>; my husband, Bob; and I. When we realized no one was coming to teach the class and as the hope of more class participants dimmed, Bob, a retired pastor, took over.

As the three of us discussed the nature and function of the Holy Spirit, I noticed that Susan had written in her Bible study guide answers to each question. As Bob led in the discussion, she gave well-thought-out opinions with a pleasant smile radiating from her face.

Although we had attended this church only a few times over the past several years, we always greeted her but had not really become acquainted personally. I wondered how she became a Seventh-day Adventist, what her husband did for a living, how many children she had, what church offices she had held, and where she had lived during her lengthy lifetime.

Susan had a suitcase on wheels at her side, and I knew that extra oxygen was available. Before the study had begun, she told us that she had been hospitalized recently and just had been released from a period of time in a rehabilitation center. *Oh, I thought, and she still studies her lesson and still smiles.*

Questions came to my mind: Did she feel confident enough to join in the weekly discus-

sions in her Sabbath School class? Did the teacher encourage and include her in the discussions?

## She ministers in her own way

When we returned to the main building for the church service, I hugged another older lady who always braves a friendly greeting no matter what her physical pain level. As Mary<sup>2</sup> and I embraced, she shared a special experience in a weekly study group that meets near where she lives.

Mary sends church bulletins to all those who were not in attendance each Sabbath and writes to many individuals weekly—we know this because we receive evidence of her devotion when we are absent. That, she says, continues as her ministry.

Mary recently retired from her job stocking shelves in a drugstore. Because she was nearly eighty years of age, I had a hard time believing that she had been employed until just a few months ago. Not only that, she lives in a run-down house in an extremely dangerous section of the city. Does she complain or even mention her living situation? Never.

A few weeks previous, I had given her a list of questions that I hoped she would answer because I wanted to write her story: Tell me about your parents and siblings. Where did you live growing up? How much education did you receive? Tell about your husband. How many children do you have? When did you become an Adventist? Describe your life and your goals. What would you like to tell the young people today? Maybe an Adventist publication would publish her memoirs as a tribute to the individuals in our church who have served so faithfully but have become, sometimes, just pew decorations.

More questions came to mind: Does her congregation minister to her when she becomes so sick she cannot attend? When she can attend, do they greet her, talk to her, tell her of their love and gratitude for her loving, Christian witness? Do they (do I?) write to her as she writes to others?

## Mouth open in amazement

A couple years ago my husband and I visited a medium-sized church in a large city where he was scheduled to preach. The congregation included older folk, middle-aged people, baby boomers, young people, and small children. Nice mix, friendly members, well-cared-for worship center.

As the worship service got under way, I was so astonished that, looking back, I wonder if I sat there with my mouth open in amazement, unable to believe what I was observing. First, the elder greeted the congregation and the visitors, then

# Senior Citizen Programs

Ministries or community services designed specifically for senior citizens are half as likely to be found in Seventh-day Adventist churches as in congregations of all faiths across America. One in five Adventist churches report having some type of senior citizen program for their own members or people in the

community during the last year. Nearly twice as many (39%) of all religious groups give the same response.

The population over 65 years of age is the fastest-growing segment in many countries today. This growth is projected to continue for the rest of the century as more people live longer lives due to improvements in nutrition, wellness, and medicine.

Why aren't Adventist congregations more responsive to the needs of older members? The truth is that most

of them are; they just don't do it by having special programs labeled for senior citizens.

If congregations were to create community ministries specifically targeting the needs of senior citizens, there is evidence that church growth would also increase. Community services for seniors are one of the items that have a strong correlation with growth in Adventist churches. (See chapter 2 in *Adventist Congregations Today*.)

he reviewed the announcements in the bulletin. The visiting speaker entered, but the elder continued his duties. He gave the invocation, announced the opening hymn, led out in the singing, prayed the intercessory prayer, called for the offering, told the children's story, announced the special music (someone else *did* sing!), introduced the speaker, announced the closing song, and gave the benediction.

Another question: Do the members of this church feel needed, a part of the church functions, or do they sit there week after week with spoon feeding as the leadership style? Not only would the elderly feel unimportant and unnecessary, all age groups might question if they were there just to be fed without the privilege of also providing spiritual food.

## Once the lifeblood

With these three experiences as a focal point to this article, let's talk about our older members. Having been the lifeblood of their congregations, they now must sit back and watch others do what they had done so energetically.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the older folk in our churches financially built the church building, contributed to evangelistic campaigns, faithfully supplied money for the Sabbath School missions offering, returned their tithe, gave money to the church budget to keep the building attractive, donated to special projects, participated in the Ingathering campaigns—and still do. They deserve recognition and verbal expressions of appreciation.

## Seven ways we can value our elderly

Members and leaders can show value to the elderly in our congregations in the following ways:

*Empower them to serve.* Allow older people to announce the opening hymn, offer the opening prayer, call for the offering, give the children's story if they have that ability (however, that part of the worship service should have the best!), introduce the visiting speaker if they have a personal relationship with that person, and give the benediction. Why should one person do all that with competent individuals reposing as just observers week after week?

*Emphasize special dates.* Birthdays might be highlighted in the church bulletin and in the newsletter in advance of the date. Members might be willing to send cards with a personal note, bring the seniors a treat on their special day, pay them a visit, and be acknowledged by the person in charge of the church service. Of course, it goes without saying that the pastor will recognize these individuals on their special days.

*Employ their talents.* Older individuals could be asked to write a short, inspirational article for the church newsletter occasionally, or a brief story from their past.

*Listen to them.* Why not, once in a while, interview one of the elderly for Sabbath School or one of the other programs of the church? This would introduce these special individuals to the entire congregation so they would know them

# Discussion Questions

1. Does our congregation provide senior citizen programs for our own members or for people in the community?
2. What percentage of our members are over 65 years of age? How does that compare to the percentage in our community?
3. Is this a type of ministry we should explore for the future?
4. Should we appoint an individual or a small planning group to generate a plan and report back to us?

To order the *Adventist Congregations Today* book and CD-R and to learn more about the Faith Communities Today (FACT) research, visit the Center for Creative Ministry Web site at <[www.creativeministry.org/transaction\\_detail.php?id=14](http://www.creativeministry.org/transaction_detail.php?id=14)>. You also may call 800-272-4664.

Paul Richardson, director  
Center for Creative Ministry

HAVING BEEN THE LIFEBLOOD OF THEIR CONGREGATIONS, THEY MUST NOW SIT BACK AND WATCH OTHERS DO WHAT THEY HAD DONE SO ENERGETICALLY.

beyond just a Sabbath greeting. With an interview format, no person could just take over the time with a lengthy, perhaps boring, speech.

*Serve them.* Members could be encouraged to minister to those who have physical problems. Maybe they are hunched over, maybe they limp and walk with a cane, maybe they come with oxygen, maybe they are in wheelchairs. And it's very possible that some need transportation.

*Visit them.* Church leadership could provide to worship participants a list of seniors for regular visitation. Assigning members to specific individuals would distribute responsibility evenly. One of the saddest stories of all involves those who cannot get to church because of inhibiting health challenges. Unless members refuse to let these individuals be forgotten, they sit alone all day Sabbath and dream of days gone by. In one church, two daughters visit their mother every week; but keep in mind that both daughters live 300 miles away, and one comes one weekend and one the other. They have pleaded with those who know their mother and others in her church to please visit her, but that hasn't happened very often.

*Write short notes to them.* One of my very good friends writes short notes often to many people, both young and old. He celebrates with the young their accomplishments in school, in sports, and in extracurricular activities. And he reaches the elderly celebrating their birthdays, their recovery from illnesses, or their specific witnessing activities. Not only that, once a week he takes his guitar to a seniors' residence during his noon hour and sings for his friends there. As he ministers by correspondence, those who receive his written and mailed messages

must anticipate receiving mail as an important time of their day.

### Our internal bucket

Of course, the elderly would not be the only ones blessed by these kinds of recognition. A magazine columnist described a psychologist's theory of the dipper and the bucket. We all have an internal bucket, he

claims, that represents our contentedness. This internal bucket becomes depleted or filled depending on how others treat us. The dipper represents what we use to fill the buckets of others. Amazingly, every time we minister to someone, we fill both their bucket and ours.

Ministry to the elderly cannot be considered a one-way street. And the rewards are eternal. ❏

1 A pseudonym.

2 A pseudonym.

3 Of course, if the elderly continued to play a lot of the up-front leadership roles, many members, particularly our young people, would not appreciate their involvement; for as we get older, our outward expressions of enthusiasm diminish. And in order to keep our young people in the church, they also have to be involved.

## Additional Resources

- As a result of a survey that included 419 elderly individuals, David Skelton discovered several issues that were not adequately met by their preferred formal religious institutions. "The issues identified included poor transportation to church; a need for large print books; a need for improved outreach by telephone, mailings or visiting; a need was perceived for improved acoustics within the church; better access, not only to church buildings, but also to the altar; inadequate or difficult access to washrooms; and there was an (unsolicited) dissatisfaction with more modern forms of worship! On one occasion an individual identified the need for improved temperature control within the church building itself." For the entire presentation by Skelton, go to <[www.zeuter.com/~accs/sermons/min-elder.htm](http://www.zeuter.com/~accs/sermons/min-elder.htm)>.

- J. Earl Thompson, Jr., lists the three following books and articles on the topic of ministry to the elderly on his Ministry to the Elderly course syllabus at <[www.ants.edu/academics/syllabi/spring/sp06\\_psyh743s.pdf](http://www.ants.edu/academics/syllabi/spring/sp06_psyh743s.pdf)>:

Melvin A. Kimble et al., *Ageing, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook* vol. 1 (Fortress Press, 1995)

Melvin A. Kimble and Susan H McFadden, eds., *Ageing, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook* vol. 2 (Fortress Press, 2003).

Eugene Bianchi, *Ageing as a Spiritual Journey*. (This book is no longer in print but can sometimes be purchased through Amazon.com or in a used bookstore.)

- Bobby Joe Saucer and Jean Alicia Elster *Our Help in Ages Past: The Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly*, <[Ecampus.com/book/0817014837](http://Ecampus.com/book/0817014837)>.

# A dream deferred

**Skip Bell**

**I**n my youth, God inspired a dream that created my pastoral vocation. As with many of you, my dream developed from an intense desire to see people come to salvation in Jesus. It fashioned a compelling image as I imagined a church plant in Manhattan, New York, that demonstrated the ideal nature of God's community on earth—that is, a church formed by members engaged in ministry who experienced meaningful dynamic worship in a diverse congregation, and who created a Christian community in small groups.

Dreams are essential to our ministry. They also change, or at least evolve. So has it been with mine. Not that the dream of my youth died; rather, it simply responded to the seeming contradictions of pastoral ministry. Much of life evolves that way. Stunning realities challenge our dreams.

But who would we become without our dreams? And why, if our purpose grows dim, do we persist in the inspired quest of church ministry? Troubled as we may be, we have not abandoned our dreams for God's church. We must not. Like threads of gold uniting our hopes around the earth, we treasure the following four elements of our dream for Adventism.

## **Dynamic, growing Seventh-day Adventist congregations**

Dynamic growing Seventh-day Adventist congregations are the first element of our dream. This dream affirms the local church. It affirms that the

people of God, formed in fellowship for mission in their community, are the Lord's most important agency on earth. Joined to a congregation of other believers who have committed their lives to Christ, these people form spiritual disciplines and lead others to Christ. The essential nature of the church is a Spirit-empowered ministering body. Stated simply, the local church is God's primary evangelistic entity.

## **Empowered equipping pastors**

Empowered equipping pastors who develop leadership for God's harvest are the second element of our dream. This dream affirms the church pastor. It affirms that God carries out His work in the community, gifting people to provide leadership to the congregation. Paul expresses the calling of the pastor: "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11, 12, NIV).

Pastors are the most important leaders in our world movement. Wherever the gospel is taught or preached, people form into a ministering Christian community, which becomes the frontier of mission. In the formation of the local church, the world movement fulfills its God-given calling. Pastors (and I will add teachers in the ministry of education) develop leadership for mission in that context. They build Christian community, lead the church in the formation of shared vision, challenge people to discover and employ spiritual gifts in ministry, and envision new churches.

## **Excellent mission-driven Christian schools**

Excellent mission-driven Christian schools, redemptive in their effect on young people, are the third element of our dream. This dream affirms the importance of Christian education and also affirms children and youth. The substance of the dream is not institutional; it is children and youth who are able to learn about God, to know His character in Jesus Christ, to see His character reflected in teachers, and develop faith in Christian schools.

Teachers in these schools are prepared for their professional task and valued for their contribution. They devote their best energy to the ministry of learning, knowledge, and character formation. They enthusiastically engage in their ministry with a sense of evangelistic purpose, both in its broadest sense and with specific interest in each student.



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With loyalty, enthusiasm, and finances, church and community members support these schools. Churches embrace support of a Christian school as central to their mission without reference to numbers of children from their congregation in attendance.

### Efficient mission-driven denominational organizations

Efficient and service-oriented denominational organizations driven by the shared mission priorities of Adventist members form the fourth element of our dream. This dream affirms the world church. It affirms the Adventist movement as a worldwide gathering of Christians who have a prophetic message of hope. We seek a network that shares inspiration for mission, promotes essential beliefs, and distributes resources to accomplish our purpose.

These organizations are changeable, provide for the association of local churches, effectively sound the calling formed from the shared vision of church membership, and serve as guided by members and front-line pastors and teachers. They are streamlined to absorb as little as possible of the resources preserved for front-line mission. In developed regions of the world, communication technology provides for a matrix of these organizations without hierarchal layering.

These church associations make it possible for members with front-line pastors and teachers to form policies empowering to their ministry while assisting churches in distributing resources to other front-line missions. They also enable gathering for Bible study and theological inquiry, and they facilitate accountability.

### Realities

Our longing may be seen by some as an impossible dream, an illusion. Granted, the reality of the situations may not always be encouraging. I have seen a thousand small rural churches lifelessly clinging to habits drained of the Spirit's power. People longing to find a sense of Jesus' presence often find little to embrace in Sabbath worship or weekly fellowship in such congregations. I have

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also seen the superficial sophistication of large churches satisfied with their own institutional strength. Comfort pushes aside raw mission. I have seen village churches multiplying in countries where the idea of "empowering the individual" has eclipsed spirituality.

Developing empowered pastors seems an impossible dream. Some pastors serve churches for a few years and then move on as if the congregations were mere stepping stones with commitment to a mission-driven congregation often replaced by longing for position. In reality, leadership on the front line is hard, often accompanied by isolation and lack of appreciation; meanwhile, in the background, the perks of position beckon. After all, traveling church consultation or analyzing ministry around a committee table seems more inviting than living the challenge on the frontier of mission.

Christian schools? We have a difficult time confessing the realities in our schools. With a few exceptions in large institution-driven Adventist communities, local elementary schools are underfunded and understaffed. An often overlooked fact, the health of the Christian high school or college is in proportion to the growth of the church-operated elementary school. The value we assign to Adventist Christian education may

be questioned as these schools compete for meager resources. And when they are shut down, it's often with little note from denominational organizations. Many churches do not contribute to a local school anywhere.

Streamlined mission-driven church organizations also seem an impossible dream. As a world mission movement, we must provide a mission network. So, early in our denominational history we formed fellowships of congregations (conferences) fellowships of conferences (unions), and fellowships of unions (divisions). While information and communication technology have dramatically changed the way human society forms organization and community in recent decades, the look of our denominational structure has remained basically the same for over a century.

The challenge of servant leadership has proven difficult in church organization. We drift toward substituting power for love, control for collaboration. Policies of pay or perks often reflect hierarchal thinking and copy, although with moderation, secular organizations. This creates a climate of "promotion" in the local church. In reality denominational organizations complain of disconnect from the local church while members and front-line professionals in ministry complain of disconnect from the processes

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and policies that affect them. Feeling “the organization is too big,” members explore new ways to distribute resources for mission. At the same time, ownership of denominational policies decreases, and local churches start thinking how they might strengthen vision and belief through their own initiatives.

### A dream made real?

How shall we relate to these realities? Some deny them, others flee them. A better alternative does exist. To observe the way things are and to suggest that those realities define the church is to be unfaithful to the power of God. We must treasure a God-given dream for the church. A God-honoring vision for the future is neither present reality nor an illusion but a gift by which we may see the church for what it really is and not for what it seems to be. A dream has creative power.

Don Quixote, the central character in Cervante’s masterpiece, pursues a foolish quest fighting imagined metaphorical foes, righting abstract wrongs, and seeking righteousness where evil dwells. In his journey he meets a girl, Aldonza, a street urchin living a shameful life and filled with disgust for herself. Quixote, ever the dreamer, sees her differently. Envisioning beauty in her soul and bearing, he names her “Dulcinea”—his sweet little one. He honors the regal bearing he alone sees by calling her “my lady.”

Aldonza can bear the absurdity no longer. She angrily confronts him with the truth about her birth to unknown parents, about her life of servitude, and about her prostitution. She derides Quixote’s efforts to better her: “What good are dreams, after all, to someone with no hope of achieving them?”

What of our dreams for our church? Will they remain only dreams—dreams deferred, perhaps indefinitely, or is there hope? I believe there is hope, because I’ve seen examples that cause me to hope, such as the Kelso-Longview Seventh-day Adventist church near Vancouver, Washington. This church, like hundreds of others, has taken leadership responsibility for mission, has creatively designed worship and ministry to reach the community, and has grown dramatically.

Their “Journey to Bethlehem” Christmas pageant attracts nearly seven thousand visitors from the community. They also cherish Adventist world mission, finding ways to engage in front-line service outside their boundaries.

And then there is Randy Davis, a pastor who affirms our hope. He, like hundreds of other pastors, stays committed to the leadership of the church he serves. Recently declining an invitation to a large institutional church (a “positive career step,” he was told), he chose to continue with University City and Gastonia churches in North Carolina. After serving six and a half years in the community, he has seen University City move from an attendance of around thirty-five to nearly two hundred. He finds joy in the grace and ministry of his churches; they are his home, and he has committed himself to the community.

Brighton Adventist School in Colorado thrives with 153 students, excels in academics, emphasizes appreciation in music and art, and has a varied curriculum of physical development while centering on biblical curriculum. Visionary local church members underwrite the school’s solid financial operation while nonmember parents from the community, who choose the school for their children, make decisions for baptism.

What of denominational structures? We must concede that streamlining where financial crisis demands it remains as simply a management necessity. We find more hope, however, in the occasional conversation among committees that explore new mission-driven organizational paradigms that would move more resources to front-line leadership.

We take encouragement from these examples, with our hope remaining in a promise. It has always been that way. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1, NIV). We are a spiritual movement, in faith living in His reality but looking for a new and better age. Faith carries us through this age. Commissioning His church, Jesus said, “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NIV). Our hope and our dreams rest on God’s vision for us. ■



# Our ministry to the divorced among us

Ron Edmondson



Ron Edmondson, M.A., is the head of Mustard Seed Ministry, Nashville, Tennessee, United States.

**N**ot one person from church has ever called me in three years.”

Those were the painful words from a former church member I encountered at a store recently. I had heard of the man’s divorce and knew that I had not seen him in a while. But the size of the church would have made it very easy for me to have missed him even if he were there, so much more so with him gone. After berating me and the church for our lack of attention to him following his divorce, he said, “I’ll never set foot in that church again!” He has, I believe, kept his word. In fact, I’m not sure that he’s setting foot in any church these days.

Divorce, we all know, is a problem. If the statistics are correct, the rate of divorce inside the church is about the same as outside. There are now more people in families who have experienced divorce than there are in families never touched by it. All this tells me one thing: If the church today wants to reach families for Christ, it must learn how to deal with the divorced among us.

There are no easy answers. It is imperative that we continue to teach biblical truths and never allow culture to dictate our teachings. On the other hand, we must live within our culture and reach the people within the context of that culture. In my counseling of those who have experienced divorce, I have learned a few important points that I believe we need to grasp if we want to minister to the needs of the divorced.

## Do not stigmatize

Most divorced people feel that they are no longer welcome. Many times this feeling is self-induced; but often it results from attitudes within the church. When churches single out divorced people as a specific category, these people are often left to feel that they are considered strange. Even worse, rather than being ministered to with God’s grace as any other person would be, divorced people tell me they are often made to feel dirty, or unclean. Certainly, as a church, we can, and must, do better.

## Minister to both spouses

When a couple divorces, often the church will reach out to one spouse but not the other, based on who was the most active member, on who is the presumed “guilty” party, or who continues to attend church. If a church wants to reach divorced people, it must display love to both parties. Both spouses may not be equally receptive to that love and support, but the intent and offer should be clear. The goal should be to reach people for Christ, not to label them.

Many treat the “guilty” party as the enemy of the church. Redemptive actions may need to be taken because of sin, but that process is far better and more biblical than ignoring the person altogether, which is what many churches tend to do. Every divorce has two sides; unfortunately, however, usually only one side of the story is repeated.

## Know what you believe and practice it

The doctrines of the church should be clearly known and carried out *consistently*. I know one church that allowed deacons to be divorced, for example, but didn’t want them to serve in any “visible” role. Most divorced people realize that a church must interpret Scripture in a certain way, and they can accept that. What people can’t understand is when the interpretations are contradictory and inconsistent.

## Teach biblical truth in love

Jesus came, full of grace and truth (see John 1:14). Both grace and truth are necessary for a healthy church that will reach the divorced. The church can’t pretend divorce is acceptable, but it shouldn’t condemn people because of it, either. Most people can accept truth far better if they know that they are still loved and accepted in spite of their mistakes. I know many churches that excommunicate themselves from divorced people, either consciously and purposefully, or unconsciously and by tradition. A person who is

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“dumped” by a church after a divorce is very unlikely to reunite with another church for several years, if ever. I can’t imagine Jesus ever failing to show love to a divorced person.

### Do not ignore the problem

Many churches do not address the issue of divorce. They don’t reach divorced people, nor do they do anything to stop the trend. At some point the church needs to become an agent for cultural change. Churches need to address the issue of divorce, because the church has the answers to the problem. If churches don’t address the problem of divorce, who will?

MOST PEOPLE CAN ACCEPT TRUTH  
FAR BETTER IF THEY KNOW THEY  
ARE STILL LOVED AND ACCEPTED IN  
SPITE OF THEIR MISTAKES

### Help build strong marriages

Churches should provide ample opportunities for couples to grow in marriage. Fellowship, Bible studies, and even sermons should reinforce the healthy home environment. I have never met a divorced person who didn’t want a marriage that worked or who wished divorce on other people. Most people simply don’t know how to have a successful marriage—they should be able to learn in the church. Many divorced people are looking for a church that reveres the institution of marriage, while helping them recover from divorce.

### Provide and expect premarital training

When my son turned 16 years old, he had spent about 40 hours in driver’s training. In most churches today he will be blessed if he gets 10 percent of that time in counseling before marriage. Churches need to provide premarital counseling. If the church doesn’t have

qualified staff, or staff with time to provide the training, it should offer to pay for couples to receive counseling. Some churches are now offering premarital counseling through mentoring couples who commit to work with the engaged couple and walk through the first year of marriage with the newlyweds, providing an inexpensive but effective way to train couples for marriage.


### Build healthy Christians

The best defense against divorce in the church is to build healthy Christians. It is also the best method to minister to those impacted by divorce. Divorce is hard on everyone involved, but recov-

ery is much faster if the person is growing spiritually. Healthy Christians are a strong shield of protection against divorce.

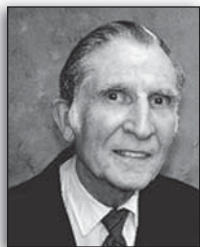
Most churches have a significant number of divorced people. As someone who watches statistics, I have wondered if one reason church attendance is declining is that we aren’t reaching the divorced among us—one of the fastest growing segments of the population in many countries. The church doesn’t have to embrace divorce, but should certainly love those hurt by divorce and should offer solutions to help move the culture away from it. But this will never happen if the subject of divorce is taboo in our churches or if there is no plan on how to address the problem.

Certainly Jesus did not favor divorce. Yet I have no doubt that if Jesus lived in our culture, He would have contacted the man who had been missing from church these past three years.

Shouldn’t we do likewise? 

# A hidden mission field

Arthur W. Griffith



Arthur W. Griffith is a retired deaf pastor to the deaf in Centralia, Washington, United States.

**P**ioneers often volunteer to go to a foreign mission field, where they endure great hardship and face many dangers in order to bring the gospel to an unreached people. It may take years for them to learn the language and become accepted in and acclimated to a radically new culture. But in order to fulfill the Great Commission, they gladly make such sacrifices.

Yet worldwide there is a hidden group of people that our church has hardly reached. Passing one of them on the street, or in a store, you would not see a difference. They may have your skin color and look like everyone else; and if you smile to them, they will smile back. But if you stop and speak, you may see a perplexed look come across his or her face. Or you may get a smile and a nod, nothing else. Who are they?

## Our deaf

Worldwide there are an estimated 70 million hearing-impaired individuals.<sup>1</sup> They have varying degrees of hearing loss, and many can be helped with a hearing aid if it's fine-tuned to their kind of loss. Some churches provide earphones in front seats for the hearing-impaired, but this "one-kind-fits-all" approach may not be satisfactory. Some instruments work for those whose hearing loss occurred late in life and is not severe, but they will not do for those who were born deaf, or those whose loss is profound and happened later through an illness. These deaf people form distinct subcultures in any country, and they need the gospel too.

## Facts about the deaf

Because they may have been snubbed, insulted, taken advantage of, or just plain ignored, most profoundly deaf people have a deep distrust of the hearing population in general and have tended to withdraw into a circle of friends who share their handicap and frustrations. When you bring one deaf person to Christ, you may have opened a door of access to many others, for that person will surely tell friends about his or her newfound faith.

Most churches are eager to use an interpreter for the deaf who might visit their church, but interpreted meetings are a distant second best. For one thing, the pastor usually talks too fast for the interpreter and uses many words that the interpreter cannot translate quickly. It is a rare interpreter who, in the best American Sign Language (ASL), can by facial expressions and body language transmit to the deaf all the feeling and tones of a dynamic preacher. Yet for many of the deaf in our churches, an interpreter is the only answer.

Therefore, the best method for the deaf is a Bible study by someone who knows the language; or even better yet, a church for the deaf, led by a pastor who signs. Because the deaf are visually oriented, they need pictures, displayed texts, and other visual aids. While accepting any signing teacher, they are excited to find one who is deaf as they are. Deaf members who are able and knowledgeable should be encouraged by the church to start Bible studies of their own.

## World stories

Shortly after Latvia became independent, Kenneth Mittleider held meetings in Riga, Latvia. Among those baptized were about forty deaf people who got the message through an interpreter. Later the interpreter was also baptized. From that beginning, the message has grown among the deaf there, which shows what could happen if more attention were given to deaf people in evangelistic efforts. For these, trained sign language interpreters are needed.

In other countries, deaf groups have sprung up where God guided someone into this ministry. *Mission*<sup>2</sup> carried a story of a deaf young man, Pavel, who turned his disability into an opportunity to preach the gospel to hundreds of hearing-impaired people in Tula, Russia.

Another time, in 1983, I went to Japan to assist in a camp meeting for the deaf that arose through the efforts of a hearing Adventist young attorney, who one day saw deaf people talking in signs. Fascinated, he persuaded me to teach him the language and won that deaf woman to

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Christ. With true missionary sacrifice, he sold his property and dedicated the proceeds to his new mission field, the deaf of Japan.

Years earlier, in the 1960s, we received in the mail a letter from a deaf Adventist layman in Thanjavur, South India, who was educated in England to be a tailor, and during his life he brought many Indian deaf to Christ. Just before his death, he had the honor of cutting the ribbon to open a church built especially for the deaf in South India. John Blake from the Alberta Conference of Seventh-day Adventists worked with Dorothy Watts in India and lay members in Canada to raise funds for this first Adventist church building for the deaf in Asia, and to our knowledge, in the world. Recently Blake stated that 100 deaf people were baptized when Pastor Jeff Jordan, deaf himself, held a series of evangelistic meetings in South India. Rose Caloroso, a lay worker from the United States, held revival meetings earlier with additional baptisms. This made a total of 150 for the year.

### Reaching the deaf

In what ways can our church become the head and not the tail in ministering to deaf people? The young people are a great potential resource. They learn sign language quickly and remember it better than adults. If our own schools

would encourage students to learn sign language, there might be many more potential workers for the deaf today, and deaf people would not feel so shut out from the hearing society.

It is not too late. The youth are also

## AS A CHURCH, WE CAN DO MUCH MORE TO REACH THIS IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION.

needed in a role in which they would excel, such as captioning Adventist videos so that deaf and hard-of-hearing people can profit from them. We have hardly any in our church libraries today.

The point is simple. As a church, we can do much more to reach this important segment of our population. It's great that we send missionaries all over the world to reach various groups. But we mustn't forget those groups who are right here among us, and that includes the deaf.

### Resources for deaf ministries

For anyone who wants to understand deaf people, there's *The Mask of Benevolence*<sup>3</sup> by Harlan Lane, a distinguished university professor at Northeastern University. This book will give deep insight

into the situation deaf people still find them-selves in. The book in paperback can be purchased from <[www.dawnsign.com](http://www.dawnsign.com)>.

Very few of our ministers have ever investigated this mission field; yet other churches and organizations offer a very large amount of help to the deaf population. See <[www.ohsoez.com](http://www.ohsoez.com)>. This is just one area.

Moreover, various countries have a nationwide phone relay system that enables anyone to contact a deaf person who is equipped with a TTY (a device like a small typewriter). In this system, the deaf person reads on the screen the message the relay operator types in rapidly as you talk to her. These vary from country to country.

For pastors who are interested in doing something for deaf people, I recommend Edgar D. Lawrence's book *Ministering to the Silent Minority: How to Develop a Church Ministry for the Deaf*.<sup>4</sup> Though only 92 pages, it has a wealth of information. It may be obtained from: Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, Michigan <[www.gospelpublishing.com](http://www.gospelpublishing.com)>.

This book exposes the hidden pitfalls to avoid and offers proven methods of building a deaf congregation.

In the United States, the deaf work is centered in Adventist Deaf Ministries (ADM) <[www.deafadventist.org](http://www.deafadventist.org)> and is directed by a deaf leader, Jim Hovey. ADM is a supporting ministry recognized by the Adventist Church in North America. ❏

- 1 <<http://hab.hrsa.gov/publications/hrsa401.htm>>.
- 2 Charlotte Ishkhanian, ed., *Mission* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001).
- 3 Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992; DawnSignPress, 1999).
- 4 Edgar D. Lawrence, *Ministering to the Silent Minority: How to Develop a Church Ministry for the Deaf* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1978).



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# What does she know?

Patricia A. Habada



Patricia A. Habada, Ph.D., is assistant director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

In the first six months of operation, with no advertisement except by word of mouth, email, and a limited mailing to friends, we have 267 newly sponsored Adventist children in Seventh-day Adventist schools in India.<sup>1</sup> Thus begins the latest email message from my friend Dorothy. What is she thinking?

She continued, "These children will be the future leaders of our expanding work in India. We are trying to think of the future. . . . We need to somehow get 10,000 of our new member's children into Seventh-day Adventist schools."

So, maybe it's retention of new members. If she can get their children into Adventist schools and give them an education, more adults will stay. Is that it? Does she know something that we don't know?

George Barna also knows. He writes, "In my mind, children had always been part of a package deal. We want to reach adults with the gospel and then help them mature in their faith in Christ, so we have accepted the kids as a 'throw-in.' . . . Seeing children as the primary focus of ministry never occurred to me."<sup>2</sup>

## The 4/14 window

Just what did Barna discover in his study of ministry to children and adolescents? In a nutshell: To win and keep people for Christ, you must reach them and teach them while they are yet children. People who take Jesus as their Savior before they reach their teens are more likely to remain in the same Christian faith for the rest of their life.

Let's look at some of the data uncovered by Barna's recent research.<sup>3</sup>

Among the findings, (1) nine out of ten young people consider themselves to be Christians by age 13. (2) One's spiritual condition by age 13 is a strong predictor of spiritual life as an adult. (3) The probability of people taking Jesus as their Savior is 32 percent for those between the ages of 5 and 12; 4 percent for those in the 13 to 17 year range; and 6 percent for those 19 or older. Therefore, chances are that if people do not accept Jesus before their teens, they are not likely to do so later. (4) The spiritual condition of adolescents and teenagers changes very little as they age. (5) More than 65 percent of 13-year-olds say they will not alter their core beliefs in the future.

Furthermore, (6) by age 9, most children have their spiritual moorings in place. A child's moral development is determined and set by age 9. (7) Lifelong habits, values, beliefs, and attitudes are formed between the ages of 5 and 12 years. (8) Moral and spiritual development starts as early as age 2.

In summary, the important point to be made is this: If a church wishes to reach and keep people; if a church wants to impact lives; that church must invest in people while they are young, very young. The key time is between the ages of 4 and 14, a time some call "the 4/14 window."

Ellen White sums it up in one sentence: "The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years."<sup>4</sup> She particularly stresses the importance of the first three years of life.<sup>5</sup>

## What shall we do?

Begin at the beginning with beginners. Take a long, hard look at your Beginners (formerly Cradle Roll) Sabbath School. Is it active or passive? Are children really involved? Is learning taking place? Is the major emphasis on God's love for children and Jesus as their Savior? Does the entire program teach concepts of grace, worship, community, and service?

The best teachers should be working with these children, and they should exhibit pleasure in doing so. Leaders and teachers of tiny tots should clearly love and enjoy children.

Then apply those same questions to all other children's Sabbath School groups and other activities your church sponsors for children. What is my church doing to reach children? Are all the children in Sabbath School every week? What goes on beyond that one hour a week? How long has it been since those who care for children in

my church have attended a children's ministry or Sabbath School workshop? Are Adventurer and Pathfinder Clubs alive and well? Have those leaders been trained? How often do we have Children's Church? How many of our children attend an Adventist school? What percentage of our budget is specifically for these needs?

In her book *Shouting in the Temple*, Lorna Jenkins says, "There are no second-class citizens in the Kingdom. Children will not become citizens only when they grow up. They are citizens now, with rights and responsibilities. As parents and members of their spiritual family, our task is to help them learn the Kingdom lifestyle while they are children."<sup>6</sup>

Jenkins expresses her goal as building strong intergenerational congregations where children take an active part in

every aspect of church life. In part, the vision statement of her church says, "All the children of the church family should be integrated into the total life of the church, in outreach, discipleship, and service."<sup>7</sup>

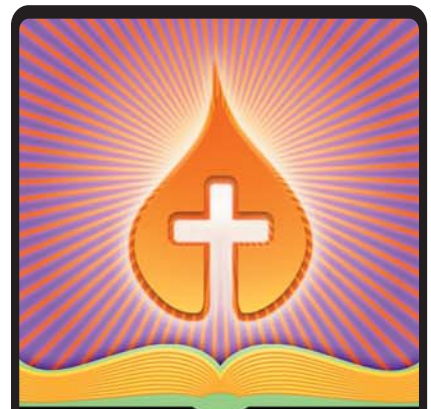
While traveling with Janet Rieger, former children's ministries director for the Adventist church in the South Pacific, I was impressed with Janet's vision. She frequently said to workers, "Children are not the future of the church—they are the 'now.' If you lead adults to Christ, you have them for half or maybe three-fourths of their life, but if you lead a young child to Jesus, you have that child's whole life."<sup>8</sup>

### Who's responsible?

Jenkins says the senior pastor is the key leader in the church.<sup>9</sup> He or she should not be caught up in the day-to-day

## Resources

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—Lawrence Kimbrough, *Words to Die For*, 168.

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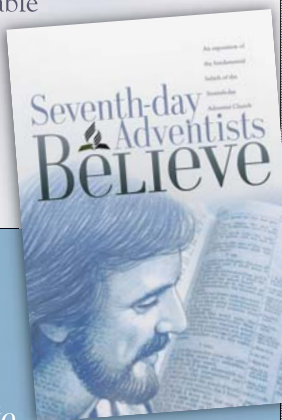
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operation of ministry to children but should ultimately be responsible for establishing and guarding the vision of his or her church for children, for providing the financial resources, for guiding those leaders chosen to guide the children of the church. The pastor's role involves much more than preaching a once-a-year sermon about Christian education.

That sounds good, but how can a busy pastor stay on top of all that goes on for children in his or her church? In a situation where a senior pastor has an associate for children's ministry, major responsibilities can be delegated to that person, who will report to the pastor. This does not remove responsibility from the senior pastor but offers assistance in specific functions. The senior pastor still needs to be involved with the children of the church.

Some pastors do not have the luxury of a pastoral staff and often find themselves spread too thinly. In such settings, the pastor may choose to designate an elder to monitor and work with those who lead children's church-sponsored activities. That elder reports to the pastor and is an advocate for children's ministry with the church board.

An important addition to the church-officer group is a children's ministry coordinator. Elected by the church during the officer-election process each year, that individual becomes a member of the church board. Among other things, duties involve chairing the children's ministry committee, a group that includes all leaders of children's activities.

How can you, the pastor, know that all is well with the children of your church? Ask yourself the following: How often do I meet with the Sabbath School Council? Have I visited the children's Sabbath School divisions lately? Have I ever participated in teaching the lesson? How often do I tell a children's story during the church service? Do I reach the children in my sermons? What message do I send them? When was the last time I attended a Pathfinder or Adventurer meeting to observe and to encourage the children and their leaders? Do I visit their staff meetings now and then? Do I regularly visit with the church-school staff to offer guidance and encouragement? What is my responsibility beyond

school-board meetings? How often do I worship with the church school children? Have I listened to their concerns and prayed with any of them recently? Do I play with them during recess or eat lunch with them at noon? Does every child in my congregation have an opportunity for a Christian education? Can I call the children in my congregation by name? Do I talk with them, pray with them, laugh with them? When I visit their homes, are they included in the conversation and prayers? How do I involve children in the church service? Do they read the scripture, help with the offering, greet people at the door, or provide special music?

In short, are the children of my church a priority in my ministry?

## So, what does Dorothy know?

Dorothy knows the worth of a child. She knows that she has a responsibility to lead children to Christ. She knows that children are the future of the church and that the future of the church is now. She knows that the strength of the church in India depends largely on what is done for, and with, its children today. She has the courage and determination to reach out to children of new members, to reach them and teach them to know and love Jesus as their friend and Savior. And she has the conviction that will carry her work for children forward today and tomorrow and in years to come.

What about you? What do you know? ■

- 1 Dorothy Watts, personal communication, December 6, 2005.
- 2 George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light Publishing, 2003), 11.
- 3 For a detailed discussion of the data, see Barna, 33-47.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Review and Herald® Publishing Association., Hagerstown, Md.: 1982), 193.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 194.
- 6 Lorna Jenkins, *Shouting in the Temple: A Radical Look at Children's Ministry* (Singapore: Touch Ministries International, 1999), 83.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 8 Janet Rieger, personal communication, December 2005.
- 9 Jenkins, 101.



# Expectations for a pastor: seven principles from a church administrator

Reinder Bruinsma



Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands, Huis ter Heide, Netherlands.

I am the president of a small union conference. A few decades ago the General Conference gave its approval to disband the two existing conferences and create a simplified organization with only one administrative unit. This has worked well. As a result, the union conference, in many ways, also functions like a conference, and I have the kind of direct interaction with the pastors in the local churches that most union conference presidents would not have. It is a part of my duties that I thoroughly enjoy.

I tend to be demanding of other people. But at the same time I also try to help create an atmosphere in which people experience ample freedom to be themselves—fostering warm collegiality, allowing them to feel encouraged to develop and pursue their own initiatives. Yet, I do have definite expectations that I believe are reasonable. In fact, I am convinced that they form a platform for highly effective cooperation and collegiality in our collective ministry.

The following seven principles are of paramount importance to me. While I hope that the pastors in my field will see this article and concur that this is indeed how we, in fact, work together, I trust it also may be of some use to others.

## The pastor must be a leader

Often, we talk about church leaders and local pastors as if these are two main classes of church workers that are totally separate. Indeed, the people who operate out of a conference or union

conference office have a specific leadership assignment. But the pastors in the churches are leaders in their own right. I want the pastors to assume a leadership role in their churches. They must lead by example. They must lead through planning and casting a vision for their members. Today, one hardly can talk about leadership without defining it as *servant* leadership. I wholeheartedly agree—not because it is the politically correct thing to say but because any involvement in working for our Lord must be inspired by the example of the great Servant of all. But at the same time I believe this does not militate against the idea that a leader must have a certain degree of ambition. Successful leaders must want to be leaders and enjoy the fact that they are leaders. If not, they will soon cease to inspire the people they are called to lead.

## The pastor must grow

You may have heard the story about two people who applied for a job. When the one with twenty years of experience complained that the employer had chosen the other applicant who had only three years of experience, the employer told the man who boasted of twenty years of experience, “You do not have twenty years of experience, but only one year—twenty times over.” This is the unfortunate truth about many people—some pastors included. They may have a considerable number of years of service behind them, but this has not necessarily made them mature, experienced people.

I expect pastors to grow both personally and spiritually. That kind of growth does not just happen automatically. Pastors must intentionally feed their own souls. They also must be able to regularly take a critical look at themselves and determine where they need to improve and grow. I also expect pastors to grow professionally. Of course, that expectation presupposes that the pastors are stimulated to avail themselves of opportunities for professional growth and that their employing organization provides learning opportunities.

## The pastor must be a change agent

A church that does not change with the times and with the ever-changing culture in which it bears witness will soon be no more than a museum, visited occasionally by some people with some historical or nostalgic interest. The church must speak to people of the twenty-first century. It must remain loyal to the message it proclaims but also must constantly pursue better and more persuasive ways of proclaiming

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has adopted a long-term strategy for growth—in numbers and in spirituality. All layers of the church have been able to provide input. I expect the pastors to keep this overall strategy in mind as they seek to lead their churches to greater relevancy for the members and, in particular, for those who are at the fringe of the church or those who are still looking for a satisfying spiritual roof over their heads.

**The pastor must be loyal**

The need for loyalty seems obvious. Yet, it is so important that it must be underlined as a separate point. The loyalty I am speaking of is not a blind, uncritical obedience or the gullible subservience of a past age. There always must be room for dialogue, differences of opinion, or even a degree of independence. However, the church loses its credibility if its leaders pursue their own private agendas rather than a common one.

Pastors must be loyal to the charge they received and accepted at their ordination. They must be loyal to the teachings of the Bible as understood by the church that employs them. They may

that message in a progressively secular and postmodern context. A local church cannot fulfill its mission and will cease to attract and captivate today's younger generation if it is not willing to continually update its efforts to provide a true spiritual home for the people to whom it seeks to

minister. To many, change does not come easily, and even the slightest modification is seen as a threat. Pastors must be change agents par excellence. They must be committed to change but also must learn how, and in what tempo, to effectuate change. Our union conference

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argue, dialogue, criticize, and, at times, even be angry with their church and those who happen to be in positions of leadership at a “higher” level, but they nonetheless must have a fundamental loyalty to the organization that has called them, trained them, and pays them. I expect that kind of basic loyalty from the pastors—a definite loyalty not only to the organization they serve but also to their pastoral colleagues and conference administrators.

### **The pastor must be real**

Pastors who do not enjoy what they do, and do not enjoy life in general, may not last in their jobs. I realize that people differ and that not all of us have the same sense of humor or deal with our emotions, our joys and frustrations, in the same way. Some find it easier to relativize things than others. That’s fair enough. But all of us must function with transparency and integrity, and people around us must be able to understand us as we present ourselves. Members no longer expect their pastors to be perfect—if they ever did. Pastors should not be afraid to show their vulnerability from time to time. Showing vulnerability shows the pastor to be both human and credible. I expect pastors to be who they are and not go through life wearing a mask. I hope the pastors in my union conference feel they can be open with me and do not need to play a role or pretend they are someone or something they are not.

### **The pastor must be balanced**

Theological diversity (also among pastors) is a reality of Seventh-day

Adventist life. Whether we like it or not, not all of us, pastors included, hold the same position on every biblical and theological topic. Some veer a bit to one direction and others to another direction. That does not mean that “everything goes.” Pastors who do not feel comfortable with the central tenets of the Adventist vision of the Christian faith have a problem that cannot be overlooked. But within these parameters there should be considerable freedom. However, pastors must be the leaders and shepherds of *all* members and be careful not to position themselves as the defender of one particular current of thought. They don’t have to hide their opinions or remain silent about what they believe, but they always will be understanding and respectful to those who differ in their views.

I expect balance not only in the ways pastors deal with theology but also in their general attitude to life and work. I expect pastors to work more than 40 hours in a work week. They will have to work irregular hours and may at times have to go beyond the call of duty. But they should not feel guilty if they take off ample time for study, hobbies, and family life or when there is the occasional week when they are less than productive. It would be good if we could reduce the number of workaholics in our midst.

### **The pastor must be a person of faith**

I am not too impressed with persons who are overly pious and feel they have to show their godliness in every sentence

they speak. But somehow our deepest motivation must be visible. Somehow people must see that the pastor is a person of faith. If that does not show, there is a problem.

Doubt, however, is part of the life of faith. I recognize that many pastors struggle with periodic bouts of uncertainty, or even with regular serious doubts. That is acceptable, as long as they attempt to deal with their doubts in a responsible way. I recognize that pastors need to be able to talk about their doubts—without fear of losing job or status. But the pastor must know when to speak, in what circumstances, and to whom. Being open about one’s doubts may actually, in some instances, encourage some who are likewise plagued by doubt. But it may also confuse others if a pastor shares doubts with members who are not able to handle this.

With or without doubt, I expect pastors to live their Adventist Christian faith in such a way that it attracts others and makes the church members feel that their pastor is a spiritual leader who deserves trust and will lead the church to higher levels of Christian experience.

Of course, I still expect other things. I expect some administrative skills. I expect the pastor to preach decent sermons. And I could add more. But the seven expectations listed above are in a class of their own. Am I expecting too much from my pastors? I don’t think so. I may have these expectations as long as I realize that they may expect all of the above also from me. ❏

*Letters continued*

vocabulary than English has. In fact, in parts of Papua New Guinea (for example in Tok Pisin), the restatement might result in the translator saying, “Sem gen tasol!” each time—“Same again, that’s all!”

Preachers using translators would do well to avoid repetition, reinforcement, and rephrasing when preaching if being translated into a language with a limited vocabulary, or to people with strong oral

traditions, unless it is indicated that the culture finds the style acceptable. Keep it simple; and of course, the elimination of the rephrasing will help greatly in cutting down the duration to allow for the interpreter to fit into the preaching timeframe!

—Colin T. Richardson, pastor, Parkes and Orange districts, South New South Wales Conference, Australia

### **Kudos**

Let me say how much I enjoy Ministry Magazine. I am a pastor in the Washington Conference. I love the new look and feel!

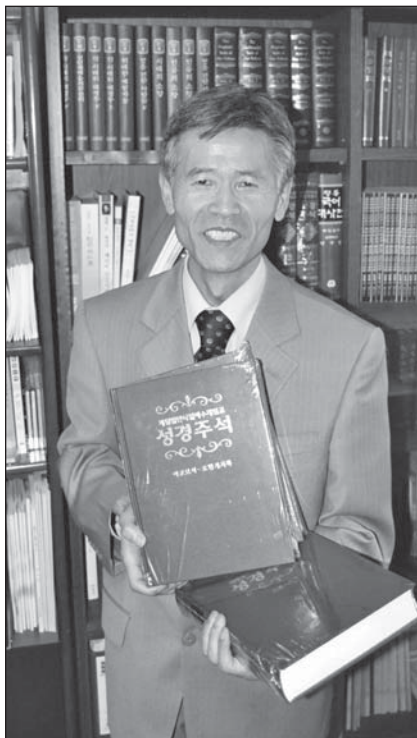
Thanks and God bless. ❏

—Mike Maldonado, pastor, Sultan, Washington, United States

# Dateline

## Bible commentary in Korea

**Seoul, Republic of Korea:** Seventy translators, fifteen editors, and other staff members recently completed the monumental project of translating the 14 volumes of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Various church leaders attended the dedication service, as well as representatives from the Korean Bible Society. Young-Jin Min, general secretary of the Korean Bible Society, stated, "I wish the Korean Christians will read this commentary to study and understand God's Word." The president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Korea, Hong, Myung Kwan, told the gathered group that he hoped this commentary will strengthen the church family.



*Sung Sun Hong, ministerial secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Korea, holds one of the newly published Bible commentaries.*

## All-Africa Congress on religious freedom Accra, Ghana

The All-Africa Religious Liberty Congress convened April 25, 2006, with a message from Ghana's president, **His Excellency John A. Kofuor**. Commending the participants for their commitment to religious freedom, **Honorable Gladys Asmah, MP, minister of state**, read the president's message and added that she believed "all should live in peace whatever religious inclinations we may have." With a practical emphasis on mutual respect between religions, this would be "a wonderful world to live in," she added.

The Congress brought together dignitaries, experts, and religious leaders to highlight the urgent cause of religious freedom, according to **Dr. John Graz**, secretary general of the **International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA)**, the organizing body. "Under the theme 'Religious Liberty: Co-existence in Peace and Freedom in Diversity,' we will be seeking ways to combat religious intolerance and to develop mutual understanding as a way of peace. Too many conflicts in our world today have a religious component, and we need to make sure that religion is not used as a weapon of violence," Graz stated.



*Minister of state for Ghana, Honorable Gladys Asmah, addresses the All-Africa Religious Liberty Congress.*

Congress speakers came from a wide range of high-level representatives, government officials, and scholars representing more than sixty countries across Africa and beyond. "Religious freedom is under threat in different areas around the world, and certainly this is a hot issue," according to **Dr. Japheth Agboka**, regional IRLA representative and primary event organizer. "We hope to make a contribution to the fundamental rights of religious liberty and freedom of conscience through this event and through the use of materials developed here in Accra. We will be working to address the challenge of discrimination and intolerance, especially as it relates to the principles of religious freedom." Agboka was responsible, together with the other IRLA regional secretaries for the African continent, **Prof. Mutuku Mutinga** (East-Central Africa) and **Dr. Hensley Mooroven** (Southern Africa-Indian Ocean), for the essential planning work of the Congress.

The last All-Africa Congress was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1991. More information on the work of the IRLA can be found at <[www.irla.org](http://www.irla.org)>.

## Two conferences hold joint evangelism symposium

**Riverside, California, United States:** For the first time, nearly four hundred Seventh-day Adventist pastors from southern and southeastern California met jointly to explore how to share the gospel more effectively. Adding to the occasion's historic import, pastors encouraged three or more lay persons from their congregations to attend a portion of the two-day event, March 5 and 6, 2006. Attendance on Sunday swelled to more than eight hundred.



Larry L. Caviness (L), president, Southern California Conference, and Gerald D. Penick, Sr., president, Southeastern California Conference, welcome the participants to the combined meeting sponsored by the two conferences.

## BOOK REVIEW

**The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence** by Richard Lischer, William B. Eerdmans, 2005, 192 pages, US\$18.00.

Not a predictable preaching primer, *The End of Words*, by Richard Lischer, a professor of preaching at Duke Divinity School, will challenge your thinking and confront your preaching, and may even change the way that you live.

Lischer asserts that preachers, called to speak words of peace in the midst of a violent culture, have the dangerous challenge of sharing the Word of God in a world filled with lies. And to what end? Not to win an argument or to defend a theological position. According to Lischer, faithful proclamation ends in reconciliation that comes threefold: The world is reconciled to God; persons are reconciled to one another; and human beings are reconciled within themselves.

Lischer suggests that the development of a reconciling sermon has three basic moves. It begins with pastoral discernment of our present painful reality. Then, the second move involves telling the truth—not only the truth about Jesus and about God’s grace, but the truth about the hate, suffering, pride, and idolatry that surrounds us in a culture of violence. Finally, the third move in a reconciling sermon involves sharing the good news about Jesus Christ, thus providing an opportunity for listeners to celebrate God’s reconciling activity in the church and in the world.

Lischer concludes by asserting that “preaching toward reconciliation continues as one of the most dangerous of all pastoral activities, dangerous not to the preacher but those who take his or her words seriously” (149). I would

respectfully disagree. Preaching toward reconciliation in a culture of violence remains not only dangerous for the listener who takes these words seriously, but also dangerous for the preacher. Who among us cannot remember the names of martyrs, past and present, who had the courage to utter reconciling speech in the midst of a violent culture?

Perhaps it would be safer to leave *The End of Words* on the shelf. Avoid reconciling speech. Maintain the status quo. But who among us lives as truly content and preaches passively in a world gone mad? ❏

—Reviewed by Derek J. Morris, senior pastor of the Forest Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church, Apopka, Florida, United States

## RESOURCES

### Resources to answer *The Da Vinci Code*

In May 2006 we published “*The Da Vinci Code* and The Nag Hammadi Gospels,” by Robert McIver. Since that article was published, additional resources have become available. We recommend to our readers that they check the following:

- To educate your church or youth group or to run an outreach seminar, you could download presenter scripts, PowerPoint presentations, audience notes, and advertising from <[www.thedavincidecode.net](http://www.thedavincidecode.net)>.
- The book *The Da Vinci Decode* by Grenville Kent and Philip Rodionoff is available from that Web site in PDF form or in print from Signs Publishing <[www.abc.org.au/orders/davincidecode.htm](http://www.abc.org.au/orders/davincidecode.htm)>. ❏

Plenary speakers included **Leslie Pollard**, vice president for diversity at Loma Linda University; **Laurence Burn** of Adventist Frontier Missions; and **Richard Peace**, professor of evangelism and church renewal at Fuller Theological Seminary. Breakout sessions provided more than twenty workshops on topics such as guiding the church through change, youth evangelism, and how technology can enhance worship and public outreach.

Postmodernism was the most lively topic in the workshops, panel discussions, and plenary sessions. While some prefer a religion based on information, logic, and proof, others emphasized relationships, participatory worship, and an expressive religious experience.

“The ‘wine’ of the gospel is the same. But old or new ‘wineskins’ react to it differently,” commented workshop presenters **Rudy Torres** and **Andy McRae**. “We need to understand the diversity in our churches and communities.” ❏

# Quit Now!

JAMES A. CRESS



**D**uring my first year of ministry, I became known as the Stop-Smoking Bishop of Tampa Bay, Florida, thanks to our overwhelming success as we helped people quit.

When an elder in my congregation insisted that I partner with him in presenting a 5-Day Plan to Stop Smoking, I reluctantly agreed and offered to contact the local hospital to sponsor the event. "No," he replied. "Let's present it right here in our own church facility."

I thought we were doomed to failure, but "Dr. Dave" and the Holy Spirit knew better than I. We registered about a dozen attendees, one of whom was the public relations director for WFLA, the NBC radio affiliate. Not only was he successful, he became an enthusiastic promoter of cigarette cancellation and recorded several dozen spot announcements that aired three times per hour every day for a month. Overnight, both Dr. Dave and I, along with all the area churches, became famous for helping Tampa kick the habit. Newspapers and other media reported the story, and within days we were registering up to 200 people at any location where we offered the famous 5-Day Plan—and at \$15.00 per registration, we were making money while doing good!

*Ministry* magazine editor, Nikolaus Satelmajer, used the same program in metro New York and even taught the plan on the commuter trains in specially designated "stop smoking cars." Again, the enormous publicity put the church "on the map."

After years of success, coupled with dozens of other commercial and public service programs by various organizations, some good progress has been achieved in reducing the percentage of smokers in North America. However, the global use of tobacco continues to be one of the most serious health and moral problems confronting humanity. I can think of no more gracious service

than for a congregation to offer its community such real, practical assistance. Our Ministerial Association has launched a fresh update of the 5-day plan titled *Quit Now!* (see advertisement in this issue). You can utilize this fresh resource to provide more effective ministry to those encumbered with the tobacco habit.

**Disinterested benevolence.** Your community will be impressed to see your church offering practical help with a real social, health, and moral challenge. Civic, medical, and educational entities will partner with you in this venture.

**Fresh, updated materials.** *Quit Now!* materials are international in scope, creative in design, yet still very personalized to assist presenters in helping participants achieve success. Leadership of a *Quit Now!* program does not require a medical background. Pastors, teachers, and others in helping or leadership positions can easily adapt the instruction materials for their own use.

**Simple tools.** The program still relies on very basic, easy-to-follow principles for success. PowerPoint presentations and redesigned formats emphasize the value of choice, as well as the importance of water, exercise, nutrition, replacement alternatives, group support, and individualized "buddy" attention.

**Financially feasible.** Materials—both for group facilitators and individual attendees—are affordable. In fact, with a modest registration fee (remember that people value something for which they must invest some payment), you will likely cover all your expenses for supplies

and advertising. Today, Medicare even allows reimbursement for tobacco cessation programs.

**Follow-through fundraising.** Even more important than any financial "break even" is the reward of raising friends for your congregation. Through the years I have helped dozens of individuals who call me "their pastor" because I assisted them in achieving their goals. I have also discovered the value of offering ongoing small group activities for fellowship, study, and encouragement to "stay quit."

**Utilize public awareness.** The world's No-Tobacco Day each May and The Great American Smokeout each November offer opportunities to enhance awareness. Television and print advertising, as well as cancer and health societies, will enlist local sponsors to enhance your effectiveness.

**Seize initiative.** Churches should remain at the forefront in offering help to curb this plague. Amazingly, the very purveyors of tobacco products now attempt to position themselves as helping parents prevent their children from smoking even as they seek to enslave youngsters in addiction.

**13th World Conference on Tobacco.** This conference comes to Washington, D.C. this summer to be followed immediately by the Adventist Tobacco Conference, July 14–17. DeWitt S. Williams, director of Health Ministries for the Adventist Church in North America, states, "We invite those interested in providing stop-smoking programs to attend this conference that deals with one of the most serious health problems facing the public." For more information or to register, see <[www.nadhealthministries.org](http://www.nadhealthministries.org)>.

**Try it!** Your success will surprise you. God's power will accompany you. Your community will praise you. Your Lord will reward you. You can make a real difference for your community. **M**

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