Broadcast Live from First Congregational Church of Pasadena, United Church of Christ, 464 E. WALNUT STREET, PASADENA, CA 91101 (Adjacent to Fuller Theological Seminary Campus)
TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2010 1:00–4:30 P.M. U.S. Eastern Time [REPEAT BROADCAST APRIL 21, 2010]
The Adventist Church in the Pacific Rim: An interview
Three leaders of the Adventist Church in the Pacific region discuss the opportunities and challenges throughout the area.
Nikolaus Satelmajer & Willie E. Hucks II

Adventist World Radio beams the gospel to millions in the Pacific Rim
Asia has the largest population in the world with the least number of people who have heard of the gospel. Radio is an important way to reach them.
Benjamin D. Schoun

“Let it be so”: The meaning and significance of the baptism of Jesus
The one Person who seemingly never needed to be baptized volunteered to be immersed. Why?
Miguel Luna

Another look at the back door
Is it a realistic expectation that we should be aware of the direction traveled by every member of our congregations?
Joe A. Webb

Reclaiming church identity in a whatever society
Though this “whatever” attitude can be problematic enough within society, it’s now seen within churches.
Bruce Manners

Meeting the challenges of life
Ministry will have its ups and downs. The life of Daniel may just be the model that gives us hope when we face challenges.
Don Leo Garilva

Crisis or opportunity? Adventist pastors speak on Creation stewardship
Should the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocate on behalf of Creation? Should other more pressing matters relating to faith, belief, and theology take priority? Should pastors or congregations be involved practically in matters of unresolved science?
Brad Watson, Murray House, & D. Graham Stacey

The one Person who seemingly never needed to be baptized volunteered to be immersed. Why?
Miguel Luna

Another look at the back door
Is it a realistic expectation that we should be aware of the direction traveled by every member of our congregations?
Joe A. Webb

Reclaiming church identity in a whatever society
Though this “whatever” attitude can be problematic enough within society, it’s now seen within churches.
Bruce Manners

Meeting the challenges of life
Ministry will have its ups and downs. The life of Daniel may just be the model that gives us hope when we face challenges.
Don Leo Garilva

Crisis or opportunity? Adventist pastors speak on Creation stewardship
Should the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocate on behalf of Creation? Should other more pressing matters relating to faith, belief, and theology take priority? Should pastors or congregations be involved practically in matters of unresolved science?
Brad Watson, Murray House, & D. Graham Stacey
Our Readers Respond...

Keeping the Sabbath holy

The article by Shawn Brace, “Keeping the Sabbath Intensely Holy” (August 2009), really caught my attention. His emphasis on principles, rather than rules, is fully in harmony with how Jesus dealt with Sabbath observance. Brace was also on target in pointing out the ways we ever so gradually denigrate the Sabbath by giving less than focused attention to the true intent of the Sabbath.

It called to mind once again an astonishing article that appeared some years back in Inc. magazine, a journal for those active in corporate life. Somehow, I let my copy get away from me and have deeply regretted it ever since.

Remarkably, on the front cover of this executive business journal, right down in the lower middle, in typical front cover style, was a title something like, “The Sabbath—And How to Keep It.” Nothing of a religious nature had previously appeared in this journal during the years I subscribed. I was so astonished to see it, and even more so, as I read it. It was one of the best expositions on true Sabbath observance I have ever read.

—H. H. Hill, email

Personal spirituality

My enthusiastic thanks for Bobby Moore’s wonderfully inspiring and practical lead article, “Making Space for God: Contemplation as Praxis” (August 2009). I also want to express my admiration for the expert work of the cover design. That cover, which showed hands trying to brush away a mass of pastoral duties in order to discover God, was powerful. It reminded me of another Ministry cover from many years ago, when I was a new pastor. It bore the words “A Day’s Journey Away From God?”

It showed a lonely prairie highway, with a tiny black-suited pastor a long distance away. That cover’s message struck home to me and haunted me for weeks.

—Maylan Schurch, Bellevue, Washington, United States

I really enjoyed Bobby Moore’s article, “Making Space for God: Contemplation as Praxis.” Not only was it well written—with well-placed Bible verses, Ellen White references, and messages from other sources—it was also very practical. I am not a pastor, my dad is; but I am always looking through his magazines, particularly this one. Even from my nonpastoral perspective, I think it speaks to one of the main problems Christians, in general, have nowadays: developing and maintaining a deep, close, personal, and constant devotional life with God, which remains unbroken. As I start my graduate studies in two weeks—which I am sure will keep me very busy—I will keep these words in mind.

—Dana Daley, email

Responses to editorials

In response to the editorial by Willie E. Hucks II in the August 2009 issue (“Running on Empty”), I would observe that the minister may run on empty because he allow others to set priorities. It occurred to me, as I read the editorial, that when the pastor fails to set his priorities, the spouse and children also run on empty. The pastor’s first ministerial obligation is to the family. The pastor is the role model for the congregation when it comes to maintaining a healthy family. Perhaps an entire issue needs to be dedicated to how a pastor can minister to his own family, thus preventing his running on empty.

—Larry Yeagley, Gentry, Arkansas, United States

A big thank you to Pastor Cress for his article, “Smile-winning” (August 2009). Truth is important, but, unaccompanied by the true Christian graces, it may not be very winning. Those who are drawn to such an unhealthy presentation of truth may not be the balanced individuals that will continue to bear fruit for the gospel down the line. It seems like they must be of the “cup is half empty” mind-set, which obviously need filling from the Living Water until they realize all the many blessings we have in Christ Jesus.

—Rhonda Bolton, email

Pastoral search process

I read with interest Skip Bell’s article, “The Vacant Parish: Managing a Pastoral Search Process” (June 2009). He makes excellent points in his article. There is one area where I was surprised too. This can be a real problem as an excellent and effective pastor will receive a number of calls to come to other churches all during his career. At the same time, the ineffective pastor also becomes known, receives no calls, and the church and the conference are now responsible for [his] employment for a number of years.

This is not an isolated problem. Other institutions and businesses have the same problem. In this day, a formal, written recommendation is almost useless. Because of what is at stake, it would be cost effective for a person to travel to the actual location of the candidate and make discreet

Continued on page 29
This month marks the third October in a row that *Ministry* has featured a particular geographic region of the world field. In 2007, we published articles from writers on the African continent, and in 2008, our writers came from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. This year we will focus on the countries of the Pacific Rim, whose territories stretch from New Zealand and Papua New Guinea to Indonesia and Burma (Myanmar), to the Philippines, Korea, Mongolia, and so many more countries.

Although this issue focuses on specific countries, we know our readers from around the world will glean several universal truths. First, no matter where you live opportunities for spiritual and numerical growth exist. Second, there are also many challenges that threaten to undermine future growth. Third, in spite of great diversity—often within the same country—an amazing unity among believers exists that transcends even borders and political persuasions.

While recognizing the limitations of my personal exposure to life and ministry in Asia, I have seen the church there, alive and vibrant, powered by a burgeoning youth movement. Recently, while attending meetings in South Korea, I met several bright young theologians who have and will continue to make a difference through their teaching and writing. University life has always held a special place in my heart, and some of the finest schools can be found in the Pacific Rim. I have enjoyed visiting several of them within the last year; they are producing professionals who serve God wherever He calls them throughout the world. My colleague, Nikolaus Satelmajer, has traveled extensively throughout most regions of the Pacific Rim. He especially tells me of the dynamic work in China and its growth, both in large and small cities.

So much can be said about our pastors standing on the front lines of ministry. But so many others are also involved in faithfully fulfilling the work of the church.

Although this issue focuses on specific countries, we know our readers from around the world will glean several universal truths. First, no matter where you live opportunities for spiritual and numerical growth exist. Second, there are also many challenges that threaten to undermine future growth. Third, in spite of great diversity—often within the same country—an amazing unity among believers exists that transcends even borders and political persuasions.

While recognizing the limitations of my personal exposure to life and ministry in Asia, I have seen the church there, alive and vibrant, powered by a burgeoning youth movement. Recently, while attending meetings in South Korea, I met several bright young theologians who have and will continue to make a difference through their teaching and writing. University life has always held a special place in my heart, and some of the finest schools can be found in the Pacific Rim. I have enjoyed visiting several of them within the last year; they are producing professionals who serve God wherever He calls them throughout the world. My colleague, Nikolaus Satelmajer, has traveled extensively throughout most regions of the Pacific Rim. He especially tells me of the dynamic work in China and its growth, both in large and small cities.

So much can be said about our pastors standing on the front lines of ministry. But so many others are also involved in faithfully fulfilling the work of the church. Enough cannot be said about the tremendous work of Adventist World Radio (see Benjamin D. Schoun’s article in this issue), the relief efforts of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, and what you, the reader of *Ministry*, have done for this region.

Last summer, in the wake of the natural disasters that struck China and Burma (Myanmar), we asked you to give financial assistance. You opened your hearts, wallets, and purses with unparalleled generosity.

As was the case in 2007 and 2008, Dr. Satelmajer and I sat down with the presidents of the three divisions of the Adventist Church in the Pacific Rim: Alberto Gulfan, Jairyong Lee, and Barry Oliver. They shared with us a comprehensive overview of the work throughout their jurisdictions. In reading their interview, our lead article in this issue, you will discover the commonalities of both the successes and challenges they face. And, in seeing those successes and challenges, you can easily look at your churches, your districts, your conferences, and see that there is little difference between the pastors, members, and other leaders in Asia and you.

As a result of my travels and conversations—not only with leaders and pastors in Asia but elsewhere throughout the world—I am more and more impressed with the wonderful body that makes up the Seventh-day Adventist Church (both locally and globally). United by dedicated members and workers filled with the Holy Spirit, this church joyfully shares the good news of our Savior to a hungry world.

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
The Adventist Church in the Pacific Rim: An interview

Editor’s note: The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in order to care for its worldwide mission, has 13 world administrative regions. Three of these regions—the Northern Asia–Pacific Division, the Southern Asia–Pacific Division, and the South Pacific Division—encompass the territories of the Pacific Rim. The editors of Ministry interviewed the leaders of these three regions—Jairyong Lee, Alberto Gulfan, and Barry Oliver, respectively—who addressed a wide range of issues.

Nikolaus Satelmajer (NS): What are some of the exciting opportunities in your division?

Barry Oliver (BO): Our division’s diversity is very exciting. In countries like Australia or New Zealand, we have a lot of Asians who represent distinct people groups. And we are thrilled that, in the major cities, we’ve been planting churches among various groups—people from Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Even among our own indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginals, we have huge opportunities. We have established a college in Mamarapha in Western Australia that has been graduating people who can go back to their towns and villages and enter the ministry or become leaders, health workers, and teachers. This has been tremendously successful.

Probably the single fastest growing group in the church in Australia is the indigenous people. And that is exciting because that hasn’t always been the case. We established a fairly successful department at the division about twenty years ago when that aspect of the work just about died. But it has gradually grown until today when this ministry is progressing.

At the same time, you can go to some areas in the Solomon Islands where one in seven, one in eight—in some areas everyone—is a Seventh-day Adventist. You’ve got whole areas, political and geographic areas, where the population is Seventh-day Adventist. That has its unique challenges because there the emphasis is on nurture, and if people want to do evangelism, they’ve got to go somewhere else.

Jairyong Lee (JL): In our division we have many mission challenges and opportunities. We see the Lord opening doors wider, giving us tremendous opportunities. For example, Mongolia was under Communism for a number of years. They could not enjoy religious freedom, and we did not have any Adventists there. But the Lord opened the door in the early 1990s, and now the work has begun to grow.

And then there’s China. But we have tremendous opportunities in China. We now have about four thousand churches and meeting places there and nearly four hundred thousand Seventh-day Adventists. In many places, training centers, clinics, and health centers have been started. In Japan, Taiwan, and other places, we have many mission opportunities.

Alberto Gulfan (AG): We are excited about recently receiving a franchise for our television network in the Philippines. Now we can broadcast nationwide. We are also excited about the work in Myanmar. As a result of the work of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) responding to Typhoon Negress, the government of Myanmar is very much impressed with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The other area is the work in the small country of East Timor. East Timor has a population of about one million, and in January 2009, we organized East Timor into an attached mission of the division so that we can officially supervise it.

Willie Hucks (WH): What are some of the challenges you face and how are you addressing them?

AG: Our territory is so diverse. We have two Communist countries in this division. We have the largest country with the largest Muslim population, and we have Buddhist countries, so the challenges we are facing are how to reach out to these different major religions.

As far as Muslims are concerned, in many parts of our division, for example in South Philippines, we don’t have much of a problem because when they hear the word Adventist, they say, “You are our friends.” So we are very well accepted there.

But in the Buddhist countries, we struggle with helping Buddhists understand the need of a Savior. The Buddhist mind-set is so different. They don’t understand sin, so they don’t understand forgiveness. They don’t understand a God who was willing to come and die for their salvation.

The challenge in the postmodern city-state of Singapore is that, with almost four million people, it is highly secular. We have only seven churches, and during the past five years, our
membership there has been declining. We have challenged the leadership not to concentrate just on the Singaporeans but on the large Indian and Asian populations as well. We are trying all kinds of methods of outreach, including the health message. We have opened a store in downtown Singapore that sells vegetarian food, and we hope that the people in Singapore, who are very health conscious, will come in, and we can start making contacts with them.

JL: In our division, of course, the great challenge is the huge non-Christian population. We have one-and-a-half-billion people in our division, which is about twenty-five percent of the world’s population.

A special challenge is North Korea. There are twenty-two million people in North Korea; and for the last sixty years, we were not able to get into the country. The Adventist message arrived on the Korean peninsula more than one hundred years ago, but since the start of the Korean War, the North and South are under totally different systems. Yet, we are doing our best to approach the North Korean government to open doors for us.

We have a different kind of challenge in other places like Japan, which is a highly secularized postmodern country. Christians comprise less than one percent of the entire population. Thus, planting the gospel in the hearts of the people in Japan is a real challenge.

BO: In our division, we also have a number of different challenges, depending on what part of the division we’re thinking of. In the Pacific, for example, the challenge there is that of providing adequate resources. Our people are wonderful and very generous, but their resources are extremely limited in places. If we had both the human and financial resources, we would be able to do many things that we now find difficult. I know that we’re not solely dependent on resources—either human or financial—because the work is God’s and He will finish it. Having said that, the work still continues to be challenging.

In other areas of our division, we, too, face the challenges of postmodernism, secularism, and post-Christian thinking. If you were to ask many people on the street about God, they would say, “Yes, we believe in God. We even believe in the Christian concept of God.” Research says that at least sixty or seventy percent of people in Australia or New Zealand would say that they have a Christian ethos. But they don’t want to know about the church. They’ve been turned off against organized religion. And it’s a huge challenge for us to not only share Christ but then to integrate people into the family of faith and have them become part of the church.

We’re facing something similar with our own young people. We...
have a very active youth ministry throughout the division. One of our youth directors is targeting university students, and we've established university associations in all of our major universities through the Pacific in which we have young people coming together to support one another, to have social times together, share in Bible conferences together, and provide mentors. We have conferences, youth camps, and training events.

All these things are helping. But we've got to continue to rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit to make sure that we are creating the church of tomorrow, not just preserving the church of today, and giving our young people the opportunity to own the church, to see the church in their terms, in terms of the way they are and what their needs are.

JL: We also have the challenge of training workers, especially in China and Mongolia. In China we have about four thousand churches and meeting places, but we have less than one hundred pastors who have received pastoral training. That means that there are thousands of lay leaders who were never trained to become leaders. This is a serious challenge.

Meanwhile, the churches in Mongolia are comparatively young, yet we have close to fifteen hundred church members there now. The problem is, though, that we have only two national pastors. So we need more trained pastors there.

WH: Amid your busy schedules, how do you take or make the time to nourish yourselves spiritually?

BO: If you're not very careful, administration or ministry can totally absorb you. You have to be intentional; you have to make sure that you take time out. For me, I do a number of things. I like walking. As often as I can, I go walking and I'll take my Bible with me, or I'll simply walk and talk to the Lord and replenish my soul that way. Secondly, I have to drive an hour to work every day. On that drive I either talk to the Lord or I have a good supply of tapes and CDs that feed me intellectually as well as spiritually. I also have the Scripture on CD, which I listen to daily.

JL: I believe that leadership is spiritual leadership. The power, energy, knowledge, and wisdom that we need comes from the Lord. I'm consciously trying to take care of this in my everyday life. Of course, we come closer to the Lord in prayer. That is what I'm trying to do as much as possible in the morning when I first get up. My goal is to read the Bible at least two or three times a year. The first time I read it in English, the second time in Korean, the third in Japanese. It is my rule that I conduct an evangelistic meeting at least once a year. That's the way I renew my commitment to the Lord. That's the way I keep my spiritual life alive.

AG: I agree with my colleagues. If we are not intentional in our devotional life, it's going to be a catastrophe. So, I am grateful to the Lord for giving me a very supportive and spiritual wife who reminds me when I grow lax in my devotional life every now and then. I also conduct at least four—sometimes as many as seven—evangelistic meetings a year. The more I prepare for evangelistic meetings, the more time I have to study the Bible and other spiritual material. In the morning and just before bed in the evening, I will open the Bible and read several verses of scripture and meditate and pray, “Lord, what are You trying to tell me from the scripture? What is Your message for me in these texts?” These things strengthen me both personally and in my ministry.

WH: Thank you all so much. May God continue to bless your ministries.
With the inauguration of Adventist World Radio (AWR)–Guam in 1987, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s radio ministry truly went global. Even though Adventists have been broadcasting over the radio for quite some time in North America, eastern Europe, and some other parts of the world, Adventist World Radio–Guam was a bold venture to reach millions of people in Asia.

Why the need to reach out to Asia? Asia has the largest population in the world with the least number of people who have heard of the gospel. Of its staggering population of about 3.5 billion, only 8 percent are Christians. The Adventist population of 1.9 million represents .0005 percent, or 1 out of every 2,000 of the total population of Asia. If we compare the figures in Asia with those from Africa, we find that 46 percent of the 900 million people in Africa are Christian, and the Adventist population is 4.75 million. To reach Asia with the good news of the gospel requires creative strategies. The church chose radio as one of those methods.

After wide search and study, the church leadership chose Guam as the ideal site for the flagship shortwave radio station with call letters KSDA. No sooner was this settled than a groundswell of enthusiasm took hold of church members worldwide and many identified the project as their own. The 1985 General Conference Session received over $4 million for the station in a special offering. Preparation and construction began in 1985 and was completed in 1987. On March 6, 1987, just as the Sabbath was beginning, the first transmission took place. By the end of the month, more than 100 letters arrived from 20 countries. Today, KSDA Guam reaches out to about 15 of the 28 countries on the Asian side of the Pacific Rim. A network of studios feeds the station throughout the Asia-Pacific region where original programming in local languages is produced. AWR also leases airtime from other shortwave stations to reach certain places more effectively. A synopsis of AWR ministry in selective territories of the area is as follows:

**China**

The programs for China are produced in a studio in Hong Kong. The staff produces five hours of programming each day, which is broadcast in the morning and evening for a total of ten hours. Over the course of a year, the studio creates more than 3,600 programs. The studio also operates an active Bible correspondence school, from which lessons and other literature are sent out to listeners. The studio receives approximately 5,000 listener responses a year.

With postal mail not always reliable, the Hong Kong studio became the first to appoint an Internet evangelist. This person sends and receives email from China, sends electronic Bible lessons, and answers questions. The ministry has become increasingly successful, with hundreds of people requesting baptism without ever having personally met the individual with whom they are studying.

China has a significant Adventist membership, and radio has been an

**Countries reached by the Guam station**

- Bangladesh
- Cambodia
- China
- India
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Mongolia
- Myanmar
- North Korea
- Nepal
- Philippines
- Russia (east)
- South Korea
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- Vietnam
A hunger for the Bible is evident when a listener writes, “The most interesting part in the program is the Bible. I understand there is truth in the Bible. I did not read it and did not even know what a Bible was. But now I like the Bible very much.”

One individual had difficulty finding a Bible and sent this message to us: “To my disappointment, I only found some books that were based on the biblical accounts but reprocessed as common literature. I’m convinced that I can overcome all difficulties as long as I put my trust in the Lord. . . . Would you please send a Bible?”

The students are eager to “borrow our faith” to help them start their Christian journey, as this young man expresses, “One time I failed an exam and was really depressed. I turned on the radio and voilà . . . there it was! The Voice of Hope! I’m very thankful to you, because you helped me up to face the challenges of life. Faith is important to a poor student like me. Even though I’m not a Christian yet, I’ll borrow your noble faith as my spiritual support and motivating power.”

languages AWR uses in the Pacific Rim

- Bahasa Malay
- Bangla
- Burmese
- Cebuano
- Chin
- English
- Fijian
- French
- Hmong
- Ilocano
- Ilonggo
- Indonesian
- Japanese
- Javanese
- Karen
- Khmer
- Korean
- Lao
- Mandarin
- Russian
- Sinhalese
- Sundanese
- Tagalog
- Tahitian
- Thai
- Vietnamese

Japan

The church in Japan began broadcasting the Voice of Prophecy in 1952. Only about 1 percent of the Japanese population professes to be Christian. While the radio ministry receives good listener responses, relatively few people actually make a decision to be baptized. No wonder there is so much rejoicing when one person takes that step. “I would like to tell you some GOOD NEWS!” says one letter. “Mr. M. Y., who is one of our listeners, will be baptized on November 2 (Hallelujah!).”

Korea

One of the purposes for the Korean broadcasts is to reach the people of North Korea. Because of the prevailing conditions, we do not receive any letters from there, but occasionally, we hear reports that make our investment in broadcasting worth the effort.

Some time ago, we received a report that a regular female listener accepted the gospel and was baptized.

Vietnam

Perhaps the largest response to AWR broadcasts comes from Vietnam. AWR has been broadcasting there for more than ten years, and thousands of people have responded. It is difficult to measure exactly how many believers there are, but the response to the gospel message is amazing. Testimonies of dramatic miracles and the working of God’s power are often received from many listeners. In one recent year, we received 18,000 listener responses, nearly 16,000 requests for Bible courses, 8,000 email contacts, and more than 2,000 phone calls. During the same period, 110,000 magazines and pieces of literature were sent or given to listeners. Believers make wide use of DVDs, and now they are beginning to distribute the digital audio players with Vietnamese material on them.

Philippines

Recently, the Philippine Adventist Church obtained a national license for radio and television. AWR will be assisting in establishing at least four new stations around the country.
This will add to the purchased airtime already being used and the short-wave broadcasts that are ongoing in this part of the world. A couple of years ago, we discovered a Catholic priest who was a regular listener. He used many of our presentations as a basis for preaching in his church.

**Indonesia and Malaysia**

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, and AWR has been broadcasting in the Indonesian language for 22 years with a steady stream of listener responses, Bible students, and baptisms from these broadcasts. Recently, a new studio was built in Bandung, and staff members have begun preparing programs in Javanese and Sundanese, two new languages for AWR.

In Malaysia, a new studio has been established this year in Sarawak, which will enable AWR to broadcast in the Bahasa Malay that is spoken by more than 25 million people.

**South Pacific**

AWR works with an excellent media center in Sydney, Australia, which serves the entire region. Staff members prepare radio programs for use throughout Australia and other regions. In addition, AWR has assisted with affiliate stations in Fiji and Tahiti. This year AWR funded a significant portion of the cost for a new station at Pacific Adventist University in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

**Internet and podcasting**

A major advance for AWR is currently unfolding—the repurposing of our radio program material into a format that can be used for distribution through the Internet and podcasting. Podcasting is a technology whereby individuals can subscribe for certain programming on the Internet, with the material automatically downloaded to their computers, portable MP3 players, or smart phones. This represents a sudden jump from broadcasting a program in a particular language for a specifically targeted territory through the airwaves, to making all of our programs available to anyone with access to the Internet. Users will be able to listen to programs whenever they wish. AWR has procured a Media Asset Management system that will automate these processes.

In central Vietnam, a listener of the AWR program for the past four years writes everything he hears into notebooks and shares these discoveries with his friends. Recently, he contacted our leaders and said, “My friends and I would like to be baptized into the church.” We immediately sent one of our leaders to see him. As a result of this one man’s notebook ministry, we have so far contacted more than 12 groups of people who are worshiping on the Sabbath and wanting Bible studies. Several more groups are waiting for us to contact them.

**Letter from Japan**

“I am a Buddhist, but I listen to a few Christian broadcasts once in a while. However, among all the Christian broadcasts, your program is very special and friendly. . . . Often I have received wisdom or encouragement from your program. Tonight, I was especially impressed with the music.” (Tokyo)

“Your ‘Sabbath Hour’ program is very comforting to listen to. The talk is well organized and [the] points are clear. Also hymns come in at [the] right tim[e]. I appreciate [it] because I can pray along with the programs on Saturday morning.” (Kanagawa Prefecture)

**Thailand and Cambodia**

The church in Thailand has three locally owned stations. In June 2008, AWR built a new studio at Mission College so that programs could be prepared in Thai, Lao (or Northern Thai), and Hmong languages. Thai and Lao are on the air using short-wave, and Hmong will be added soon. In addition, there are plans to purchase airtime on some stations near the Mekong River so that the people of Laos along the border will also be able to hear the programs. This historic development enables Adventist broadcasts to reach Laos for the first time.

AWR has been broadcasting to Cambodia for several years with programs produced in the United States by Khmer-speaking pastors. We have a goal of establishing a studio and possibly a station in Phnom Penh.

Podcasting will have a big impact in the Pacific Rim since the largest users of the Internet are now the Chinese, with the people of Japan and South Korea not too far behind.

**Looking to the future**

Needs and opportunities arise all the time with countries, languages, and people groups still needing their own broadcasts and programming. New stations need to be built and new technologies are beckoning our attention. AWR will continue to pursue these objectives until Jesus comes. Certainly radio (or audio) communication is still the most ubiquitous and economical means of sharing the gospel. A listener from Nepal recently wrote, “As you talked about the Bible and all the things that are happening according to the Bible, I believe it totally. In our ancestors’ religion there are no such things mentioned about the future; there is only the cycle of reincarnation. But it is so nice to believe that Jesus loves us personally and gives us the assurance of eternal life.” This listener was led to believe just by hearing the radio presentations. He asked for a Bible since he had never seen one.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
“Let it be so”: The meaning and significance of the baptism of Jesus

Have you ever pondered why Jesus was baptized by John? What does His baptism mean? What significance does it have for Christian believers today?

John burst on the wilderness with a clear message leading to “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” People from all walks of life—Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors, soldiers, and the common people—flocked to hear him. They came “from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River” (Matt. 3:5, 6).1 Certainly John was ushering in spiritual renewal and reformation in preparation for the Messiah.

John’s message of revival reached all the towns of Judea and Galilee, including Nazareth. Ellen White states, “Tidings of the wilderness prophet and his wonderful announcement spread throughout Galilee. The message reached the peasants in the remotest hill towns, and the fisher folk by the sea and in these simple, earnest hearts found its truest response. In Nazareth, it was told in the carpenter shop that had been Joseph’s, and One recognized the call. His time had come. Turning from His daily toil, He bade farewell to His mother and followed in the steps of His countrymen who were flocking to the Jordan.”2

And Jesus came to John to be baptized. But “John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness’ “ (verses 13–15).

Matthew records heaven’s approval of Jesus’ baptism with a series of divine acts. “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’ “ (Matthew 3:17). Matthew records the presence of the Trinity in the baptismal scene: Jesus comes out of the water, the voice of God declares that Jesus is God’s Son, and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove, empowering Him for His mission. And the mission of Jesus, as announced by the Baptist, is to be the Lamb of God in fulfillment of God’s plan for the salvation of humankind.

But why was Jesus, the Sinless One, needing to be baptized? Here was a crowd of sinners who indeed needed to seek for the forgiveness of sins and be baptized as a sign of new life. But Jesus? John himself was puzzled and declared, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

“How could he, a sinner, baptize the Sinless One? And why should He, who needed no repentance, submit to a rite that was a confession of guilt to be washed away?”3 Answering these questions is essential to understand fully the meaning of Jesus’ baptism.

The meaning of Jesus’ baptism

When John hesitated to baptize Jesus, the latter urged the Baptist to go ahead with the baptism for “it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). What does “to fulfill all righteousness” mean?

First, “fulfilling all righteousness” suggests a covenant relationship to follow God’s will and, in this case, a relationship between the Father and the Son to implement the salvation plan for humanity (John 3:15–17). The gospel of John refers to Jesus’ commitment to follow God’s mission. Jesus declared, “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent” (John 5:36–38). The Son had a mission given by the Father to fulfill for the redemption of humanity, and in that sense, He was fulfilling all righteousness.

From the outset of His ministry, Jesus conducted Himself as a Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42:1) who surrendered His will to the will of His Father, first in the works He did (John 4:34), then in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–45), and finally on the cross (Luke 23:46). When John announced the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” he was proclaiming the universal mission of Jesus—that His death would result in redemption from sin. The baptism of Jesus is, in a way, the introduction of the Lamb of God—and hence His mission of

M I G U E L L U N A
Miguel Luna, PhD, is the ministerial secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the Northern-Asia Pacific Division, headquartered in Goyang City, Republic of Korea.
salvation—that will deal with the problem of sin and provide a redemptive way to the sinners He came to save.5

Thus, Jesus’ baptism clearly lays out Christ’s intention to follow the Father’s plan and way of salvation even when that plan would eventually lead to the slaughter of the Lamb of God. He had no other option except to follow God’s will. He made this clear in His dialogue with the Pharisees. Although He is the pre-existent and Eternal God, He followed the will of His Father. The Pharisees “did not understand that He was telling them about His Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me’ ” (John 8:27, 28).

Second, to fulfill all righteousness relates to the fulfillment of the symbolism of the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). John’s proclamation that Jesus is “‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (John 1:29) says, prophetically, that the paschal lamb of the Passover that signified the liberation from Egypt has now entered into history in the Person of Jesus whose death on the cross would deal with the problem of sin in a sense of finality. Jesus is the ultimate Passover Lamb. The historical connection and conclusion that John draws between the Passover of Exodus and the Passover sacrifice of the cross cannot be missed.

Third, to fulfill all righteousness must also be understood as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophetic declaration that the Messiah would indeed be a Suffering Servant whose life would bear humanity’s sin, as foretold in Isaiah 53.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearsers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa. 53:4–7).

From these three-pronged meanings of “fulfill[ing] all righteousness” —that is, to fulfill the covenantal relationship in the Trinity that through the Son will be the plan of redemption, to assume the role of the Lamb of God in the Son’s incarnate state, and to be the Suffering Servant, bearing the sins of the world— we can begin to understand the depth of the meaning of the baptism of Jesus. He did not need to be baptized like the rest of the crowd that flocked to Jordan, but He chose to be baptized to inaugurate God’s salvation scheme and the kingdom principle—that is, without the Cross, there can be no salvation and kingdom. Thus in His baptism, Jesus anticipated His suffering and death to secure “righteousness for all” in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. “After the suffering of his soul, / he will see the light of life and be satisfied; / by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, / and he will bear their iniquities” (verse 11). Jesus came to fulfill His mission as the innocent Servant of the Lord. That mission involved His vicarious sacrifice and the full involvement of the Father and the Holy Spirit in the process. Thus, by undergoing baptism, Jesus anticipated His own baptism of death by which He secured “righteousness for all.”

Therefore, the baptism of Jesus is the fundamental demonstration of Jesus’ anticipation of His suffering and, at the same time, the assurance of substitutionary sacrifice for sin. As Ralph Earle suggested, “[T]he incarnation is the greatest of all miracles. Christ’s baptism was a prelude of the Cross.”

The meaning for Christian believers

If baptism had a profound meaning and anticipation for Christ’s redemptive mission, what is the meaning of baptism for the believer? First, a good place to begin is Paul’s teaching on baptism: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:3, 4).

Paul gives a clear message. Through baptism, we are being baptized into the death of Jesus—not in the sense that we have anything to do for our redemption from sin. That is a task accomplished by Jesus and Him alone. What Paul means is that we renounce and give up the ways of sin, and rise again to live a life of righteousness by the resurrection power of the new life in Christ Jesus.

Second, another important meaning of baptism for the Christian is found in the book of Acts where Philip confronts the Ethiopian ruler with the meaning of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant portrayal (Isa. 53:7, 8). Philip interprets Isaiah to the Ethiopian and shows how Isaiah’s prophecy was recently fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus as an atonement and victory over sin—events with which the Ethiopian ruler was no doubt made familiar during his recent sojourn in Jerusalem but could not see the divine import behind those events. When Philip made the connection and presented the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35), the Ethiopian was moved by the divine intervention in human history, and he asked a most personal and profound question: “Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). The question indicates that the Ethiopian was familiar with the meaning of baptism, that it is a symbolic entry into the Messianic kingdom and constitutes an open acceptance of God’s remedy for sins. While the ruler was familiar with the meaning of baptism, that familiarity made its profound link and identification with
the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus after Philip’s Spirit-filled Bible study. Hence the Ethiopian’s seeking baptism and Philip performing the act. Both the ruler’s seeking and Philip’s bestowing clearly show that baptism to the Christian means, first and foremost, the unreserved acceptance of the substitutionary death of Jesus for one’s sins.

Third, the apostle Paul further adds to the richness of baptism when he declares, “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with; that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom. 6:5–7). Because Jesus Christ is the substitutionary Sacrifice on the cross, the believer has new life in Jesus Christ. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11).

This reference to a new life was already mentioned by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus. “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit’ ” (John 3:5). Here is a declaration pointing to baptism as a symbol of a regenerated life, with such a regeneration possible only through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, as Jesus Himself testified, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’ ” (verses 14, 15).

Fourth, baptism also provides for the believer a public opportunity to affirm the new covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. “In him,” says Paul, “you were also circumcised, in putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11, 12). Note the argument of parallelism the apostle makes between the circumcision of the flesh, the old sign of the covenant, and the circumcision of the heart. The old was made by human hands, the new was “done by Christ.” For the Israelites, circumcision was indeed a sacred sign of the covenant inherited through Abraham (Gen. 17:9–14); but now for spiritual Israel, the church, introduced as “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29), baptism is presented as taking the place of circumcision. Thus, baptism inherits all the richness of the symbolism of circumcision, and indeed is not circumcision of the flesh but circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28, 29).

Finally, baptism is also a symbol of entrance into the church, the body of Christ. The Great Commission of Jesus is for the disciples to “‘go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Matt. 28:19). The phrase “make disciples” points to the mission of the church as a continuation of Jesus’ mission. As a result, the apostles will include in that mission, baptizing and teaching that reflects the characteristic of those who become disciples.7 The “baptizing” (Matt. 28:19) characterization marks that the believer follows the example of Jesus’ baptism and accepts His death and resurrection as the remedy for the forgiveness of sin and the assurance of new life in Jesus.

It became clear not long after the giving of the Great Commission that baptism became an imperative to enter into the life of the church. Witness the Pentecostal outpouring when, under the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter proclaimed to the masses in Jerusalem what they should do to experience the forgiveness of sins and enjoy the joy of new life in Christ: “‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 2:38; cf. Acts 16:31–33). One must not fail to note how Peter links in the Pentecostal sermon the death and resurrection of Christ, the need for repentance and baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and the baptism of three thousand people. The inauguration of the church—the community of the redeemed—began with the baptism of those who believed in the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ and repented of their sins.

Conclusion
The historical event of the baptism of Jesus is not simply a routine event, but has tremendous import for the understanding of God’s plan of salvation. It reveals the covenantal relationship within the Trinity for the fulfillment of the plan of salvation, and affirms that Jesus, as the true Paschal Lamb, set on His journey to the cross to deal with the problem of sin. The baptism of Jesus was in anticipation of His sacrifice and portrays the symbolism of His death and resurrection through which a new life in Jesus becomes available to those who believe in Him. The baptism is a new sign of the circumcision of the heart, a sign of the covenant of reconciliation between God and His people, and is a continual reminder of the way new disciples are added to the church daily when they are baptized following the formula given by Jesus, “‘baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Matt. 28:19).

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
ADULT
SNAPSHOTS OF GOD
Richard W. Coffen
Catch a glimpse of God’s character by examining details found in Scripture. Collectively these “snapshots” provide a true picture of our Creator—and help us know Him for who He really is. Hardcover. 978-0-8280-2460-0. US$15.99

EVENING
REFLECTING CHRIST
Ellen G. White
As you connect with God you reflect His love to others. Ellen White experienced the transforming effect of beholding Christ and through these daily readings you can experience it too! Hardcover. 978-0-8280-2494-5. US$15.99

WOMEN
SANCTUARY
Ardis Stenbakken, editor
Slip away to a place where you can abandon your burdens and sense the comfort and reassurance of God’s presence. Find solace in His promises, as have a multitude of His cherished daughters. Hardcover. 978-0-8280-2472-3. US$18.99

YOUNG ADULT
I DON’T SEE IT THAT WAY
Ken McFarland
An exploration of some curious, and sometimes unconventional, thoughts on God, life, the world around us, and the world to come—and a glimpse of humanity through God’s unique point of view. 978-0-8280-2468-6. US$13.99

TEEN
TIME WARP
Bradley Booth
In this daily devotional teens will trek back through time to explore events that can impact their lives today. These historical readings help them grow spiritually, preparing them for the future—something they won’t want to miss! 978-0-8280-2495-2. US$15.99

JUNIOR
SKYSCRAPERS
Eric B. Hare
Eric B. Hare, legendary storyteller and missionary, crammed this daily devotional full of exciting stories. Kids have a happier life as they learn more about their best Friend and want to spend eternity with Him. 978-0-8280-2466-2. US$15.99

PRIMARY
GOD’S AMAZING CREATION
Vicki Redden, Dee Litten Reed, Joelle Reed Yamada
Monkeys and chickens, flowers and rainbows—all reveal something about the Creator. Delight and intrigue children with true stories and facts about nature while teaching them lessons about God. Hardcover. 0-8280-1871-5. US$14.99

PRESCHOOL
HUGS FROM JESUS
Sally Pierson Dillon
Make spiritual lessons exciting for your child with these devotionals that include simple object lessons and hands-on activities certain to awaken your child’s imagination and love for Jesus. Hardcover. 0-8280-1567-8. US$14.99

M any churches have a larger membership on the books than the actual number of worshipers. The church may not even know where some of these missing members are, for they may have slipped quietly out the “back door.” But how can they walk out unnoticed? Who was supposed to be watching that door? And, why was it left open anyway?

The truth? While too many people exit by the back door, most people don’t have a clue as to where, or what, this back door is. Members agree, however, that it should be closed. The idea of closing the back door can be described as a loving attempt to encourage and convince people to stay in the fellowship. That’s why it is important to help your church identify and close the back door.

What is the back door?

Literally speaking, the back door means a rear exit. It turns out to be the easiest way out; you don’t get questioned or judged, and usually no one is aware you are leaving. The church’s back door, though, is not a literal door at the rear of the church, but a metaphor referring to the process of quietly leaving. That’s why it is important to help your church identify and close the back door.

Where is your back door?

Those in the congregation, focused on other things, do not easily see a church’s back door. The answer to the problem is not to shift your total focus and energies to this issue but broaden your attention to include the back-door problem. Where is your back door? This is an easy question to ask, but adequate answers will take time and patience to ascertain. When we discover why some people leave and others consider leaving, we have identified some boards that, in different combinations, have the potential to make up a door with “Rear Exit” written on it.

In attempting to discover a back door, no detail must be overlooked no matter how insignificant. Remember, you are trying to complete a picture and each piece of the puzzle has value. Don’t waste time discovering why people want to leave if you are not willing to act upon what you find. This strategy should not be just a public relations exercise.

Don’t assume anything. If you suspect that some elderly people stay home in winter because the church temperature seems too cold, then ask the relevant questions, and do something about the problem. All conclusions must be based on information received, so make sure you have the maximum amount of information possible. If you can remove someone’s temptation to pull out of the church by meeting his or her needs, then God requires just that of your church. Remember, your church’s back door will probably be wherever you leave boards lying around and you don’t notice people picking them up.

Identifying those heading for the back door

How often have I heard the words, “I never would have guessed that they were going to leave”? If we don’t know when people are going to leave, it may also be true that we are not aware of the problems, issues, or circumstances causing them to make this decision. This raises an important question: Is it a realistic expectation that we should be aware of the direction traveled by every member of our congregations? The
answer comes as both No and Yes. No, the pastor keeping a close eye on everyone results in an unrealistic expectation of one person nurturing, encouraging, and counseling an entire congregation. At the same time, the answer is Yes: the expectation becomes realistic with the whole church involved in this work.

Those heading for the back door may have already concluded that they are not important to the church, and no one cares about them. So, how can we know they are on the dropout track? Here are some areas on which to focus. The following points do not comprise an exhaustive list, neither are they in any order of importance, but are simply an illustration of the type of things to consider.

- Some people in your church may not have become involved in any type of ministry, as they have probably never discovered their spiritual gifts. They may not contribute to worship or study programs to any great degree. These people are not often asked to do anything as we assume they don’t want to be involved. Be careful with these people. Rather than asking them to be involved with a specific task, ask them where they would like to be involved.

- Some people leave church because of things we do. Others leave because of things we don’t do. Many times their leaving has nothing to do with us; it could be some tragedy or issue in the family. Even minor problems can cause people to begin their exit journey if no one cares or shows any interest.

- Another area in which we should be sensitive is criticism. When someone who has been generally supportive begins to criticize, even in small ways, there will be issues that need to be resolved.

- Obvious candidates for the back door are those who do not attend services regularly. If members do not have a valid reason to be absent from time to time, don’t just assume reasons for absences. If they are getting into the habit of staying home, find out why. The bottom line? Anyone in your church can pull out if they do not feel loved and valued.

Closing the back door
Only the local church membership can close the back door. While it would be unrealistic to think we can meet all of the needs in our congregation, we can attempt to meet those needs we discover. The more needs being met, the less likely people will look for a quiet exit. The likelihood of leaving increases in proportion to the quantity of unmet needs. In reality, any individual’s back door is hard to see because it is not a complete door until just before the person steps through it.

Needs are met by a caring church, and a caring church means more than having your hand shaken four times between the parking lot and the pew. Christian caring cannot be programmed. If you attempt to
GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING ALL YEAR LONG!

Spirits of Prophecy Study Bibles
These King James Version study Bibles give you instant access to the added light of the Spirit of Prophecy. Prominent comments are printed at the bottom of each page. It also includes a Scripture index, chronological tables, concordance, and subject index to the Scripture comments, and much more.

**The Study Bible**

**Study Bible**
Large print makes it easier to read. Black Large Print, US$69.99

**Deluxe Study Bible with The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal**
Black with zippered cover, US$89.99

Mid-size Bible/Hymnal Set
This series of fine leather Bibles and matching leather editions of *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* make wonderful gifts! Red-letter edition King James Version Bible with center-column references, eight pages of color maps, 126-page concordance, and revised H.M.S. Richards study helps. Available as a set, Bible only, or hymnal only.

**Set**—Black Genuine Cowhide, US$119.99
Black or Burgundy Bonded Leather, US$79.99

**Bible only**—Black Genuine Cowhide, US$79.99
Black or Burgundy Bonded Leather, US$49.99

**Hymnal only**—Black Genuine Cowhide, US$54.99
Black or Burgundy Bonded Leather, US$39.99

Pocket-size Bible/Hymnal Set
Black-letter edition King James Version Bible with center-column references, concordance, and color maps with gazetteer. Available in either black or burgundy bonded leather.

**Set**—US$49.99
**Bible only**—US$29.99
**Hymnal only**—US$27.99

The Clear Word
This popular paraphrase by Jack Blanco has renewed the devotional lives of thousands of people. Let it renew the life of someone you love. The smaller pocket edition is a great gift idea for students or those who travel—it is the perfect size to tuck in suitcase, purse, or backpack.

**Full-size Editions**
Hardcover, US$34.99
Paperback, US$24.99
Black or Burgundy Bonded Leather, US$59.99
Black Genuine Leather, US$79.99

**The Easy English Clear Word**
Hardcover, US$29.99

**The Clear Word for Kids**
Hardcover, US$29.99

**The Clear Word Giant Print**

**Psalms and Proverbs**
Hardcover, US$24.99
Black or Burgundy Bonded Leather, US$39.99

**The Clear Word New Testament Audio Book**

**New King James Version Bible**
Includes presentation page, words of Christ in red, revised H.M.S. Richards Study Helps, harmony of the gospels, and yearly Bible reading plan. Children’s, Black or Burgundy Hardcover, US$8.99 each.

WAYS TO SHOP
Quick order at AdventistBookCenter.com
Call toll-free 1-800-765-6955
Visit your local Adventist Book Center®

Price and availability subject to change. Canadian prices higher.
train your church members to be caring, you will most likely focus on the handshakes, hellos, hot drinks, and hugs. While nothing, of course, can be considered wrong with any of these, they will tend to diminish when those involved get tired or move on to another time-consuming ministry.

A caring church equates with a church where individuals focus upon their personal relationship with Jesus and His claims upon their lives. They have a clear conception of the value Jesus places upon each individual. When caring for one another becomes an outpouring of love received, Christian caring becomes a way of life rather than a church ministry.

Closing the back door, then, involves getting close to people, learning their needs as they are willing to share them, and meeting those needs where appropriate. People who have meaningful relationships with fellow Christians are less likely to leave.

When considering how to close the back door, a need exists for each church to do some serious evaluation in regards to the connection each member has with Jesus Christ. While it is true that you certainly cannot program spirituality into people, you can promote spirituality through the focus and emphasis in everything you do as a church.

Perhaps we need to stop trying to close the back door and concentrate on eliminating it through dealing with possible board-producing situations.

**Educating the church about the back door**

Members must realize that people will only remain in the church when they are encouraged and allowed to feel a part of the family. The process through which a person becomes a part of the family is known as incorporation. This incorporation does not come through baptism, profession of faith, a pastoral decree, or a warm “Welcome to the family” from the pulpit. Incorporation takes place when new people develop meaningful relationships in the church family and are involved in running the church and its activities. Such involvement gives people a sense of ownership and belonging and the satisfaction of contributing something to their new family.

The principle of incorporation places a responsibility upon everyone. While new members sometimes find it difficult to merge with established relationships, new relationships must be allowed to form. If new people are not allowed to contribute because proven, long-term members do everything, and if no sense of ownership develops, new members may begin to form an exit strategy. It is often safe to put people to work sooner rather than later, especially when their spiritual gifts become evident.

By way of a challenge, let me point to an instance that happened not long after Jesus’ resurrection. In John 21:15–17, Jesus asked Peter the same question three times: “ ‘Do you love Me?’ “ In verse 16, in response to Peter’s affirmation of love, Jesus told him to, “ ‘Tend My sheep’” (NKJV).

Can we accept this task given to Peter as a part of the modern church’s commission? If so, tending sheep is much more than supplying food, it also includes everything involved in watching over and caring for them. The idea that caring just means feeding has led to the belief that only the pastor is identified as the shepherd. Only as the church members realize and accept this commission and rise to the challenge, will new members, and some not so new, be incorporated.

**How not to close the back door**

Some church leaders promote their church as a place where people are cared for. On their church sign are the words, “A caring church.” However, despite all of the advertising, some members don’t feel cared for. You will never convince them to stay in the fellowship by preaching and advertising that the church consists of something it does not. Fear or guilt should not motivate people to stay. If someone is walking toward the back door, I doubt if such tactics would turn them around and might even make them feel farther away from God without the desired encouragement to return to Him.

Trying to instill a sense of responsibility, such as encouraging parents to stay with the church because of their children, will not necessarily establish people in the faith. While parents have a responsibility to bring up their children in the way of the Lord, if this remains as the only motivation for attending, what will happen when the children leave home or begin to make their own decisions?

Adding new programs with the hope that they may meet some people’s needs and cause them to stay is a hit-and-miss tactic. You may be lucky and provide just what some people need. On the other hand, you may be providing what others don’t need or want. New or different programs and strategies should be added only after discovering the felt needs of a congregation. Some needs are more easily discovered than others, and no substitute exists for good research.

Don’t have an unhealthy emphasis on future rewards (good or bad) as a motivation for attendance. Eternity with Jesus cannot be attained by church attendance, but God makes eternal life possible by His grace and received by faith. Of course, the church where the members spontaneously exhibit the character of Jesus toward one another, meeting each other’s needs under the guidance and equipping of the Holy Spirit, describes a church where people will want to attend and stay.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
Whatever.”
Said with attitude, that word is the ultimate statement of apathy, and a very good descriptor for post-postmodern society in which truth or values are really only personal choices depending upon how each person sees the world. In this society, differences, including the most basic beliefs, are treated casually; a society where tolerance of another’s views and practices is considered a virtue (except where extreme positions are taken); a society with a confusing array of religious and spiritual beliefs readily available.

Though this “whatever” attitude can be problematic enough within society, it’s now seen within churches. Individuals now tend to choose their church, or swap among churches, with little regard for denominational labels or doctrinal teaching but, rather, on the basis of things like appeal to young people, worship style, or social networks. Some parts of the “emerging church” movement¹ in Western Christianity want to forego labels entirely. “Aren’t labels simply artificial divisions that make us feel safe or help us exert control? Why not mine the riches of many traditions?”²

The concept of a separate and distinct denominational identity can be seen as arrogant, even exclusivist, especially in a “whatever” world.

Yet identity makes a distinct church distinct. Identity is nothing if not about boundaries and differences. An individual’s, or group’s identity is defined by what makes them different from others. “We are not consciously aware of a particular identity unless we come up against another group who are different. . . . Identity is defined by the other.”³ For a religious group, the idea of identity “generally includes both ideological (or cognitive) features and the more concrete materiality of religion, such as distinct rituals and artifacts.”⁴ It is what “makes a congregation unique, distinct from all others.”⁵

Identity is strengthened when differences are highlighted. If an organization comes under attack, the differences become obvious as the attack from without and the defense from within are played out. Identity becomes very clear. In a “whatever” world, little tension exists from outside, thus making identity maintenance difficult.

**The uniting church: A case study**

In 1977, after several years of negotiating, Australia’s Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations formed “Australia’s first home-grown church,”⁶ the Uniting Church. This was intended as a beginning, the first step toward the “desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other churches.”⁷ It was an attempt to build an ecumenical denomination that would not be “rigidified by rules and regulations nor hidebound by ritual and tradition.”

However, the difficulty of uniting these three denominations—the Congregationalists with their independent congregations, the Methodists with their concerns for social justice, and the Presbyterians with their strong Calvinism—should not be understated.⁸ The quest for unity was often a “source of division within negotiating congregations.”⁹ The fallout from revising denominational structures was greatly miscalculated and people were “often hurt when the well-beloved disappeared.”¹⁰ Many local congregations reevaluated who they were, with many, at least in the early years, simply changing the name on their notice boards but carrying on as before.

In those early years, though, an external force did draw them together. When the Queensland, Australia, premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, challenged their support of Aboriginal claims against mining bauxite at Aurukun (1978), it helped to reinforce the new denomination’s “emerging self-image being a community of faith.”¹¹ This strengthened the church’s resolve and provided an external “enemy” that helped unite them. For churches in a “whatever” world, this rarely happens.

Early debates over baptism, and later over abortion and homosexuality, have made a common identity difficult to find. Questions about the relationship between unity and diversity were raised early and many are wondering if much diversity is adequate? Are there limits? The difficulty is that “our church now appears more as a group of individuals. It has moved from accountability and responsibility to a theologically diverse individualism.”¹² Finally, “the
same long search for consensus that produced the Uniting Church now works to avert “church disintegration in recent years.”

Exacerbated by falling numbers and declining financial resources, the Uniting Church remains unsettled. Questions were raised more than a decade ago at the 1997 Uniting Church Assembly in Perth, about why the Assembly had failed to find its identity, though some claimed that identity cannot be found in the Assembly anyway or in “councils of the church beyond the congregations,” but in local communities.

The Uniting Church demonstrates the difficulty of creating a congregational or denominational identity. In attempting to make three denominations into one, their experience may be an extreme case, but the task of renewing identity for any church in a “whatever” age is a difficult one.

**Suggestions for renewing church identity**

Following are three suggestions for renewing Adventist identity in our “whatever” society, something that proves easier at the congregational level than at the denominational.

The denominational or corporate level can be helpful in creating an overall image and in supporting and promoting doctrinal, ritual, and lifestyle practices, but the outworking of these will be found at the congregational level.

1. **A solid theological and philosophical base aids identity.** Imagine a congregation or denomination as a castle. In the center of the classic castle is kind of a special-guarded room, called the keep. The keep is the safest place in the castle. Here are the most precious objects are kept, and it’s the place of final defense when the castle comes under attack. For Castle Church, the keep represents the theological and philosophical base on which it is built, forming the basis of what “makes a congregation unique, distinct from all others,” and also directs its mission. Here you find Castle Church’s purpose for being.

2. **Identity is more than the core.** Just as a castle is more than its keep, so a church is more than its theological base and philosophy. The castle also has outer walls with gates and, perhaps, a drawbridge. Within the castle walls are such things as stables, a storehouse, and an armory. There are a variety of rooms ranging from the banquet hall to the kitchen and the dungeon. They all have their various uses, and all form a part of the castle. Castle Church is much more than its keep. Some teachings will be distinctive or have a stronger emphasis, which will make them important for congregational and denominational identity.

Alden Thompson, in writing about the Adventist Church as a castle, used the imagery in this way: The keep is the inner fortress, the safest and most secure place of the castle where the core doctrines accepted by all are found. The courtyard is not as safe as the keep, but it enjoys the security of the castle and allows more freedom. Here Adventists discuss the meaning of what is in the keep and ponder whether something new should be added or old taken out. The outer wall functions as the boundary that separates the church from the world. Those who go beyond the outer wall are no longer part of the community.

“Example? The Sabbath is in the keep; but what it means and how one celebrates its sacred hours are matters for the Courtyard. If, however, someone no longer believes that the day is blessed by God, that person has moved beyond the Outer Wall.”

The keep of Castle Church will contain more than the core doctrines, but they are an essential part of what forms the base of the congregation or denomination. In a “whatever” society, unless the adherents understand and know this base, they will find it difficult to maintain a strong sense of identity within their congregation or denomination.

A further complication is that the “whatever” society, by its very nature, is a changing society. This causes tension within any congregation or denomination that wants to remain in touch with society and yet remain true to its mission.

Religious bodies are tempted to claim that what is in the keep are unchangeable eternal truths only. However, as Thompson has noted, there will be discussion about what belongs in the keep and what should be moved out. For instance, as seen, indigenous rights became a core and identifying issue for the Uniting Church soon after its inception. The environment, once not rated highly, has taken a central place in many congregations. Within the Adventist Church, the teaching on a core doctrine, the sanctuary, has evolved over time: “It has been deeply impacted by a better understanding of linguistic, contextual and other studies of Leviticus, Daniel, the Epistle to the Hebrews and Revelation, as well as by a more mature grasp of Righteousness by Faith.”

Having conceded change within the keep, the church will face a slow and sometimes painful process unless the situation demands immediate attention. This emphasizes both the importance and significance of what is in the keep.

**The denominational or corporate level can be helpful in creating an overall image and in supporting and promoting doctrinal, ritual, and lifestyle practices, but the outworking of these will be found at the congregational level.**
However, other influences help create identity. These include the church’s history. A church begun in the Reformation era will still have elements from its beginnings. The perceived purpose of the church (which, again, may change or be adjusted) has an obvious impact. At the congregational level, geographic positioning will also impact identity (compare a congregation in a retirement village with one on a school campus). Significant people have their impact. Martin Luther, John Wesley, and William Booth still have impact in the denominations they founded, while today, some living personages can greatly impact a church’s identity.

A difficulty faced by Castle Church is the complexity brought about by time. Within an active, lived-in castle, you find relics from former ages alongside modern technology. Banquet halls become restaurants, the armory may have flat-screen televisions showing how technology. Banquet halls become fl at-screen televisions showing how things like the church signify and mean to a secondary to the theological and which is outside the doctrinal and philosophical base and which is outside the foundational for a strong theological creation of a castle that wants to avoid this kind of fundamentalism, it will be a castle with the gates always open and the drawbridge always down. Fundamentalism can never take root with an organization open to outside influences. With a secure keep and a healthy understanding of its identity, free access by any to the rest of Castle Church may bring change but will not damage its identity in significant ways. On the contrary, this openness could become part of its identity.

This approach to church sees the center or core of the church (the keep) as clearly understood, with the boundaries outside the center recognized but permeable. In this model, questions of identity are less about who is inside and who is outside and more about direction—who is moving away from or toward the center. The role of the congregation is then less to police its boundaries and more to “define and articulate its center.” This “centered-set understanding of a congregation allows for both identity and openness.”

Conclusion

Together these three suggestions provide the following: First, a foundation for a strong theological and philosophical base. Second, a recognition and celebration of other identity markers that can lead to a full and healthy sense of mission and purpose. Finally, a realization that the safeguard against the risk of fundamentalist attitudes in strengthening identity is openness.

In a “whatever” world, without a sense of identity, a congregation or denomination will have difficulty in sorting out its priorities. On the flipside, a strong sense of identity brings liberation for those within the group because they know who they are as they face the future.

---

1. The “emerging church” movement began toward the end of the 1980s as a response to postmodernism and in an attempt to impact secular society. In their research, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger suggest that “Emerging churches” (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) do not create arts, but (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.” Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, What is the Emerging Church? Creating Christian Cultures in Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 45.
2. Ibid., 37–39.
8. It also needs to be noted that not all within these denominations were convinced that they should unite, and each of them continues in some form or another.
11. Ibid.
15. William W. Emkens, ibid., xi....
16. A castle, though useful to illustrate a point here, is not the clear center, but no boundaries or permeable boundaries always down. Fundamentalism can never take root with an organization open to outside influences.
21. Anthony B. Robinson, What’s the Theology Got To Do With It? (Hermosa, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 31–35. Robinson describes three types of churches: the open-set church where everyone is welcome, you believe what you want, and there are no boundaries between those who are in and those who are out. This type of church will have difficulty in working out its identity. The bounded-set church, which is more exclusive, does not have easy entry, but will have a clear and, usually, confining identity. It has little openness to differences or questions. The centered-set church has a clear center, but no boundaries or permeable boundaries defining inside and outside.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
Meeting the challenges of life

Growing lions, fiery furnaces, flying goats, and talking horns. When we think of Daniel, these images usually come to mind. He is seen as either a children’s superstar, a mainstay on the picture roll top-five favorites list because of his capacity to tame lions, or as a sage—a mystically gifted master reveling in end-time visions and dreams.

In spite of all the vision-viewing and wonder-working glitter associated with his name, Daniel should also be an example of how a Christian can successfully meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges of life.

Background
Daniel was born into an upper-class Jewish family in Palestine, probably around 622 B.C.1 He was about 18 years old2 when Jerusalem fell, and he was taken captive—marching 900 miles in two months to Babylon.3 As far as the record shows, none of those first exiles, Daniel included, ever saw their homeland again.4 He spent the rest of his life as a statesman in the courts of the world’s greatest monarchy at that time.

The Babylon of Daniel’s time
Isaiah spoke of Babylon during Daniel’s time as “the glory of kingdoms, / the splendor and pride of the Chaldeans” (Isa. 13:19, NRSV). Jeremiah described her as a city “who [lived] by mighty waters, / rich in treasures” (Jer. 51:13, NRSV). He adds that Babylon was “the pride of the whole earth” (verse 41, NRSV). This was especially true during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign for he was considered the greatest ruler of the world at that time. Even Ezekiel spoke of Nebuchadnezzar as “king of kings” (Ezek. 26:7). Thus, Daniel and his three friends found themselves in the center of the world’s greatest monarchy, and how they would handle that situation became central to the story.

During Daniel’s time, Judah was ripe for retribution. After showing great patience, God gave up His people to their own choices, though not before they were given repeated and redemptive warnings. In the midst of this hopeless situation, there were individuals in Judah who still stood firm. Ellen White calls them “patriots, men who were as true as steel to principles.”5 One of these few faithful men was Daniel, who left behind a model of Christian ministry to follow in times of crisis and calamity. And, even in the midst of prosperity, Daniel did not falter from pleasing God. From this minister par excellence, we can learn three main principles that will enable us to deal with the daunting challenges that we, especially as ministers, can and will face.

A person of prayer
Daniel is pictured as a person who made prayer the breath of his soul. Daniel is depicted on his knees the first time in Daniel 2:20–23, when his life and the lives of his friends—including the lives of the wise men of Babylon—were at stake. In chapter 6:10, Daniel is again seen in another life-threatening situation, not from an angry king but from hungry lions. Then, finally, in chapter 9:4–19, Daniel prays, not just for his personal safety, but for his people.

In chapter 2, Daniel was about 18; in chapter 9, he was more than 80. In the intervening years, his practice of seeking God in prayer apparently stayed with him, becoming the main secret of his life. It gave him an instant and constant source of unlimited Omnipotent power. Ellen White emphasizes that great results will be seen in the labors of praying ministers despite the combined efforts of earth and hell.6 What a comforting assurance for ministers to know that, when they kneel in prayer, they become invincible and unconquerable even by the strongest world powers. This concept can be illustrated this way.

A person of the Word
Daniel was both a person of prayer and of the Word; these two go hand in hand. Daniel 9 opens with Daniel studying the writings of the prophets, especially those of Jeremiah. Chronologically, the event in chapter 9 follows chapter 5, so that 9:1 follows 5:31. The year this event happened was about 538–537 B.C. and was a critical time in an era of so much confusion. The fateful night of Belshazzar’s death and Babylon’s fall left a haunting memory in people’s minds.7 At this time of upheaval and uncertainty, instead of pouting over the present, Daniel occupied himself with the study of the Scriptures, which gave him security about the.
future. Lehman Strauss challenged Christian leaders when he said, “If your prayer life is lacking, take up the Word of God. . . . Daniel was reading his Bible and it was this which prompted him to pray.”

Daniel’s life was rooted and grounded in God’s Word. The Word gave him comfort and the confidence that God’s “biddings are enablings.” When he was tempted to doubt, God’s Word anchored his faith on God’s promises.

Conclusion

We have uncovered Daniel’s three practices in overcoming life’s ups and downs. These life-changing, yet common principles are interwoven with each other (See Figure 5.). They reverberate through time and speak eloquently to God’s ministers today. God conveys an important message to His end-time ministers to emulate the character of His end-time prophet contained in this end-time book. The first half of Daniel’s book contains the record of his spotless character for end-time pastors to emulate, while the other half contains the prophetic messages God’s ministers have to proclaim in these last days.

What could have been the factors that shaped and sharpened these principles in Daniel? First, the revival set off by King Josiah must have left an indelible mark on Daniel’s life. The king’s influence, plus those of the godly prophets like Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum, were not lost on Daniel. Second, there was his home training. Daniel’s parents had trained him to be what he became later in life. Third, and most important, was Daniel’s own decisions. The time had to come when he had to act on his own. His life hung on his choices. Daniel made the right choices by prioritizing constant communion with the Creator through prayer, diligent study of the Scriptures, and witness.

Our challenges of ministry will also have ups and downs. The life of Daniel may just be the model that gives us hope when we face challenges.

Daniel must have witnessed to King Darius also. We are told that Daniel constantly recognized the God of heaven “before kings, princes, and statesmen.” This implies that King Darius must have been one of them. This resulted in the king’s confession that Daniel’s only hope of surviving the lions’ den was a miraculous deliverance by the God whom he served “continually” (Dan. 6:20). Witnessing to people around him lent Daniel the practicum he so much needed to exercise his growing faith in the One who is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8, KJV). This can be diagrammed as shown below:

A person who witnessed

The Bible implies that Nebuchadnezzar recognized the Son of God. Daniel 3:25 states, “And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (NKJV). This implies that Daniel must have faithfully witnessed in the king’s palace. In life and character, Daniel told the king about the coming of the world’s Redeemer. Ellen White states, "How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives filling positions of trust in Babylon had in life and character represented before him the truth. . . . Plainly and simply they had presented the principles of righteousness, thus teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God.”

Daniel must have witnessed to King Darius also. We are told that Daniel constantly recognized the God of heaven “before kings, princes, and statesmen.” This implies that King Darius must have been one of them. This resulted in the king’s confession that Daniel’s only hope of surviving the lions’ den was a miraculous deliverance by the God whom he served “continually” (Dan. 6:20). Witnessing to people around him lent Daniel the practicum he so much needed to exercise his growing faith in the One who is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8, KJV). This can be diagrammed as shown below:
OBJECTIVE:
Each church member in the North American Division gives away at least two copies of the 2010 sharing books.

IMPACT:
More than 4 million households are reached with a life-changing message of hope.

YOUR CHURCH CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

2010 SHARING BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Kid’s (Ages 10+)

NOT ALONE
Battling the Devil in the City of Angels

Kellie’s family never had time for her, so she tried to find friends who did. But when she turned to the spiritual realm and acquired her own “ghost,” the attention soon turned ugly. Cheryl Porter based this story on her own escape from the tantalizing dangers of the occult. 978-0-8280-2471-6. Regularly US$2.49 each, sale US$1.99 each. 100+: US$1.59 each.

Adults

SIGNS OF HOPE

In a world in which chaos and catastrophe are business as usual, people find themselves hoping against hope that things will get better. Alejandro Bullón suggests that the crises we face are actually signs of hope pointing to the grand finale—the second coming of Jesus. 978-0-8280-2392-4. Regularly US$2.49 each, special price US$1.25 each.*

*Regularly US$2.49 each, SPECIAL PRICE US$1.25 each

Visit your local Adventist Book Center®
Call toll-free 1-800-765-6955
Order online at AdventistBookCenter.com

Price and availability subject to change. Canadian prices higher.
Most would agree that there is something gut-wrenching about a polar bear perched forlornly on a melting ice floe hardly bigger than the bear itself, while surrounded by an area of sea that was recently covered with thick Arctic ice. Influential media and scientific sources in Western countries bombard us with poignant images of an environmental crisis, gloomy accounts of extinction, examples of pollution, forecasts of global warming, and evidence of accelerating environmental damage inflicted by humanity.

As a result, Seventh-day Adventist ministers and church leaders are grappling with issues relating to the environment. As theists who believe in a literal six-day Creation, Adventist ministers find themselves vexed by questions about their role in preserving creation. As one minister complained, “My main concern with getting involved in environmental issues is the problem with the supposed ‘facts.’ One day it all sounds absolute, but the next it is debunked . . . as a church we have a biblical mandate to be good stewards, but it would be sad if [we] become radical and premature.”

Should the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocate on behalf of creation? Should other more pressing matters relating to faith, belief, and theology take priority? Should pastors or congregations be practically involved in matters of unresolved science?

The basic tension
The beliefs and attitudes of Seventh-day Adventist ministers towards creation stewardship have largely been unknown. In response to this situation, a 2008 survey of Australian Adventist ministers was conducted. The 278 responses provided unique insights into the thinking of these pastors. How aware were ministers of the big environmental issues and what did they think about them?

In the survey, the statement, “One of the most important tasks given to Adam and Eve was to tend to God’s creation,” attracted an overwhelming level of support: 89.4 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it. At the same time, we found that Australian Adventist ministers find themselves struggling to reconcile an expectation of inevitable environmental decay associated with end-time events and the need to be proactive in protecting the environment. Most agreed or strongly agreed (94.4 percent) that the Bible forecasts widespread environmental destruction at the end of time; a similarly high number (92.3 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the Bible does require humankind to protect what God created.

How this tension between apocalyptic expectation and contemporary commitment becomes resolved remains unclear. Is this tension inhibiting pastors from leading their churches into practical demonstrations of their theological views of creation stewardship? Given the specific mission of Jesus Christ in atoning for human sin, His enabling ministry with people, and virtually no references in the Gospels to environment, we were surprised that 89 percent indicated they thought Jesus would be interested in modern environmental problems.

Clearly, Adventists have been passionate about matters not explicitly part of Christ’s ministry. Adventists have played leading roles in advocacy for education, health care, religious liberty, community development, and vegetarianism—all of which were hardly priorities of Christ—at least according to the Gospels. Should the environment be added to this list?

To conquer or to care for?
Perplexingly, people commonly criticize the Judeo-Christian tradition as a belief system that places humankind above nature with the remainder of creation in a position of subservience. Genesis 1:28 reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man...”
in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule [have dominion] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (NIV). Strong’s Concordance indicates that the word used for dominion (interpreted above as “rule”) is the Hebrew radah, which means “tread down, subjugate, prevail against, rule over.” However, rulership in the Judeo-Christian tradition clearly requires justice, wisdom, compassion, and benevolence (as seen in Psalm 72:1–3). Indeed, 55.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Bible gives believers in God the right to conquer nature, though what respondents mean by “conquer” remains unclear. More so, whether “conquering” precludes “care” is also not stated.

There is no question, however, that a large group of respondents (83.8 percent) feel that the environment (creation) is “in bad shape.” Nearly two-thirds (61.4 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the most significant current environmental problem is man-made climate change; 85.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Western way of life is harmful to the natural environment. Therefore, it may be inferred that ministers know the actions of humankind are harmful to creation.

In terms of social justice, expert consensus says global warming will impact most on the world’s poor. In early 2008, the United Nations (UN) secretary-general reiterated the UN position that “it is the poor, in Africa and developing small island states and elsewhere, who will suffer the most, even though they are the least responsible for global warming.”

However a significant third, 32.6 percent of Australian Adventist ministers surveyed, expressed uncertainty or disagreed that this would be the case.

**View from the pew**

Part three of our survey dealt with ministers’ perceptions of their own congregations and was designed to complement forthcoming surveys on youth and congregations. Close to 50 percent thought their congregations were interested in environmental matters; 22.6 percent, in contrast, anticipated a lack of interest from them.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) thought their congregations would not oppose a sermon on environmental stewardship; 77.2 percent felt their congregations could “do a lot more to help the environment.” If ministers are correct, a significant portion of Adventists are interested in environmental matters, though a large majority are doing relatively little to advocate for or protect creation. Moving this inertia to activities based upon religious beliefs stands as an enormous challenge for the church at large. There may be some fear of a backlash, as revealed in the comment, “I believe environmental stewardship is important; however, I have seen a congregation turn on its leader who promoted such an idea. Therefore I am wary of broaching the topic with a conservative church.”

A little more than one-third of ministers (38.8 percent) objected to the statement, “The main thing that stops the congregation I lead (or attend) from helping the environment is the belief that we can’t really make a difference.” We speculate that apathy, habit, ignorance, and lack of awareness about viable ways of making a real difference stand in the way of congregations doing something. Of concern is the fact that more than 75 percent of respondents did not indicate that their church congregation had taken steps to reduce its impact on the environment.

Given the statistics above, we might speculate that about three-quarters of ministers are reasonably sure their congregations would support a sermon on environmental stewardship. A prevailing sense of powerlessness exists, however, that churches can reduce their environmental footprint. The question begs asking, Why do Adventists, who believe God made earth, not work together as a congregation to caretake creation? Why does financial stewardship remain high on the official list of priorities while creation stewardship languishes? Why do we put so much energy into encouraging members to donate more money without emphasizing our other responsibilities?

**The Adventist Church as a whole**

The last part of our survey explored the ministers’ personal commitments to creation stewardship and their perceptions of the denomination at large. In terms of who is best positioned to advocate for creation, there was little opposition to formal church engagement. Just 20.2 percent of ministers were neutral or negative about the idea of the Seventh-day Adventist Church including environmental stewardship as an important part of the denominational message. Interestingly, 22.9 percent expressed concerns about becoming sidetracked from the church’s mission. However, 79.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that environmental stewardship should be an important part of the denomination’s message. At the same time, 84.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Christian respect for God’s creation is an important part of church mission. Ministers overwhelmingly reject the idea that trying to make a difference is pointless; 85 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am personally committed to environmental stewardship.”

Our denomination has an opportunity to equip pastors to be relevant and responsive. Just 36 percent of ministers reported feeling equipped to promote creation or environmental stewardship. This is partly because of the narrow focus involved in most theological training programs and the complex nature of environmental science. For example, few ministers would be familiar with climate modeling, the Gaia hypothesis, solar variability, continental drift, and a range of
It is the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that humankind was created in the image of God, and is thus to represent God as His steward and to manage the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way. Nature is a gift from God. Unfortunately, men and women have been increasingly involved in an irresponsible destruction of the earth’s resources, resulting in widespread suffering, environmental degradation, and the threat of climate change. While scientific research needs to continue, it is clear from the accumulated evidence that the increasing emission of destructive gasses, the massive destruction of the American rain forests, and the depletion of the protective mantle of ozone (the so-called greenhouse effect), are all threatening the earth’s eco-system. There are dire predictions of global warming, rising sea levels, increasing frequency of storms and destructive floods, and devastating desertification and droughts. These problems are largely due to human selfishness and greed which result in ever-increasing production, unlimited consumption, and depletion of non-renewable resources. Solidarity with future generations is discussed, but the pressure of immediate interests is given priority. The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind’s greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship.

The government and people of Costa Rica are to be commended for their support of a comprehensive policy of sustainable development in harmony with nature. Seventh-day Adventism advocates a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled over-consumption, accumulation of goods, and production of waste. A reformation of lifestyle is called for, based on respect for nature, restraint in the use of the world’s resources, re-evaluation of one’s needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.2

The church statement is clear (despite the mistaken statement that ozone loss is the greenhouse effect).

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Our survey reveals that Seventh-day Adventist ministers are concerned about the apparent plight of creation and do think it an issue requiring “some” advocacy. The majority of ministers also think their congregations are interested in the environment and overwhelmingly conclude that the denomination needs a strong position on environmental stewardship (almost 80 percent).

At the same time, the question is always asked, Should other more pressing matters relating to faith, belief, and theology take priority? It would be interesting in further research to investigate the concerns ministers have about potential divisiveness. As one minister commented, “While my congregation is generally committed to environmental stewardship, methods and opinions vary greatly. We have nature lovers and SUV owners who are concerned about the environment but use very different methods. Any policy would have to be non-political and inclusive of all methods. The potential for division could be as big as music has been.”

The wider church, we would argue, needs education about the consequences of inaction and its forecasted impact upon the world’s needy. Continued theological tension between apocalyptic expectation and working until Christ returns requires a continuing conversation among us. Balancing these two polarities challenges our choices and practices. The environmental crisis presents many opportunities for Adventists to react with practical godliness and relevance in increasingly secular societies that view religion as irrelevant and outdated.

**A COMMENT ON METHOD:**

Two hundred seventy-eight ministers and church leaders completed a 40-question survey by circling a number on a sliding scale of 1–10 according to how much they agreed or disagreed with a statement. The software package SPSS was used to disaggregate and analyze results.

**BIODATA FACTS**

- 278 valid survey responses.
- 97.7 percent of respondents were male.
- 78.2 percent of respondents held an undergraduate degree or higher.
- 72.3 percent of respondents reported being of Caucasian ethnicity.
- 72.3 percent of respondents reported their form of ministry as pastoral.
- 25 percent of respondents reported less than 5 years in ministry.

**ENDNOTES**


First festival of religious freedom in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, Israel—The International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) in Israel held its first festival of religious freedom in Jerusalem, July 25–26, 2009.

On Saturday, July 25, approximately 1,000 people gathered to listen to Dr. John Graz (general secretary from the world office of the IRLA, based in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States), Dr. Eugene Hsu, (vice president of the IRLA), Pastor Harald Wollan (Trans-European director of the IRLA), and local director, Pastor Richard Elofer.

Two hundred seventy people were present for the official day of the festival on Sunday, July 26. They heard speeches from the special guests mentioned above, as well as Rabbi Ya’acov Lebeau, director of the Fushberg Center for Conservative Judaism in Israel. He drew people’s attention to what he saw as an anomaly—that Christians (including Seventh-day Adventists) have the right to baptize and marry people—while this right is not extended to non-Orthodox Jewish rabbis.

These meetings were held to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in Israel. [Richard Elofer/Harald Wollan/TED News]

Conference on ministerial and theological education

Seoul, South Korea—The Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church sponsored a conference on ministerial and theological education on the campus of Sahmyook University, August 9–13, 2009.

The conference was attended by more than 70 university professors, administrators, and others interested in discussing theological issues that affect the church throughout Asia. Attendees came from China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Papers read during the conference addressed topics such as hermeneutics, revelation and inspiration, the role of the Adventist theologian, and the integration of faith and learning.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, director of the Biblical Research Institute, and Miguel Luna, ministerial secretary of NSD, led out in the planning and implementation of this event. Reflecting upon the event, Luna said, “The quality of presentations and participation of our church theologians, internationally and locally, made this event relevant. I think NSD is moving in the right direction integrating professors of theology from all regions of its territories.”

Many of the participants hope that another such conference will transpire in the near future. [Willie E. Hucks II]

Year of Evangelism update

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The increase in baptisms and professions of faith for the 2009 Year of Evangelism has seen a 16 percent increase over the same period last year. While this reported increase is in North America, other world divisions are also experiencing increases in baptisms. This records the largest increase in accessions of any year in recent memory.

Conferences, churches, pastors, and laypeople are making evangelism an increased priority during this time of special outreach emphasis, with focal points of ministry featuring lifestyle training as well as traditional forms of evangelism. [Bernadine Delafield]

LETTERS • Continued from page 4

inquiring on the spot. Such inquiries might need to be done very privately, meeting at a restaurant rather than some location where [his or her] presence would become known. The person making this assessment would probably not be an official but might . . . be a trusted, but unknown, layperson.

In making this suggestion, I do not intend to make it hard for a struggling pastor; rather, that we might need to make decisions that would be helpful all around. A pastor who is having problems might need education or mentoring. And we must face it—there are some who will never be effective, and it would be merciful for that person to find other employment that might involve further education.

—Name withheld
Pastors in conversation

During October in many areas of the world, churches of all denominations honor their pastors for faithful ministry. Typically, this involves a public acknowledgment of gratitude during the worship service or even the presentation of an appropriate gift of appreciation.

Since pastors labor diligently—often with few tangible rewards or, sometimes, not even a kind word—when church organizations plan a coordinated time of the year to express thankfulness for pastors, the importance of these “frontline” servants to the church is highlighted.

I encourage ministerial secretaries everywhere to alert the elders throughout their territories about the appropriateness of giving honor to whom honor is due (see Rom. 13:7). Leadership could provide a certificate of appreciation, a practical resource or book for each pastor, and encourage their local congregations to consider a gift as well.

Other ideas

Include pastors in decision-making processes for objectives in their districts rather than imposing goals that may or may not be relevant. Asking your pastors to strategize which areas of emphasis would be most successful for their particular jurisdiction would be beneficial.

Involve pastors in strategizing where relocation assignments might best suit their talents as well as their family’s needs. I remember Pastor Wallace Coe coming to my parents many years ago, and thoughtfully inviting them to relocate near the academy for the benefit of my younger brother.

Invite the spouses and families of pastors to participate in pastoral meetings at the organization’s expenses. Remember, these dedicated ministry partners often have provided food and accommodation in their own homes for traveling leaders and most spouses labor earnestly for no remuneration.

Develop pastors in skill areas where they personally sense a need, not on the basis of achieving goals but upon the reality that those whose performance is less than optimum may be the ones most in need of continuing education opportunities.

Affirm the role of pastors in the eyes of the laity, especially the elders and other officers. Before listening to members complain about their pastor, determine if they have followed the Bible principle of going first to the individual to attempt reconciliation. When difficulties mount, make certain the minister senses that administrative leadership serves as a pastoral advocate who will act with equity and benevolence.

Converse with the pastors. Friendly, informal interaction can build far more goodwill than formal instruction. While both teaching and preaching are essential components, listening actively rewards both the listener, who learns from the discussion, as well as those who are grateful they are being heard.

An excellent example occurred a few months ago when I was privileged to travel with Adventist world leader, Jan Paulsen, to Belize for the dual celebration of that country forming a new union of churches and a special taping of Dr. Paulsen’s recurring broadcast, Pastors in Conversation.

Six pastors from various Caribbean nations engaged in open dialogue with the General Conference president, and their open, unscripted questions brought candid answers. Although many ministers may not have viewed the live satellite broadcast, the program was duplicated and distributed widely so that anyone can benefit.

In addition to that broadcast taping, Israel Leito, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Inter-American Division, brought all the pastors from that region together for a much longer dialogue in which he and his fellow division administrators carefully listened and noted questions, observations, points of concern, and ideas. Those of us who are ministers but not currently serving as church pastors, including Dr. Paulsen and myself, experienced personal growth and experiential learning as we listened to the interchange.

Beyond such one-time events, next year’s General Conference session in Atlanta, Georgia, will feature church pastors from around the world preaching every devotional message, as well as presenting a five-part seminar series emphasizing the important role and function of pastoral ministry in the church.

These special topics include (1) pastoral leadership—the function of ministry to oversee God’s church; (2) pastoral nurture—the function of ministry to nurture and shepherd God’s church; (3) pastoral formation—the function of ministry to recruit, call, educate, and resource others for the best service to our Lord; (4) pastoral evangelism—the function of ministry to seek the lost, evangelize the world, and disciple new believers to maturity; and (5) pastoral fulfillment—the necessity of an integral, holistic ministry that impacts first the minister’s own life and family.

So, in seeking to engage each other to stimulate creativity, excellence, and our ultimate goal of saving souls for God’s kingdom, let’s keep the conversation going!
Finally, a simple, Bible-based resource for children that will teach them about faith while they are having fun and learning more about God!

The HOPE Kids’ Fun Pack has everything you need to hold a successful children’s program in connection with an evangelistic series or by itself.

Replenish your HOPE Kids’ Fun Pack, 10 sets of 24 lessons - $130.00,
10 Kids Lesson Booklets - $42.50, Invitation Cards, set of 10 - $6.00

www.hopesource.com
West Point of Evangelism

3 Days of Inspiration & Learning

Fanning the Flame in These Last Hours

December 6-9, 2009

GRAND VISTA HOTEL
999 Enchanted Way, Simi Valley, California 93065

Hotel Accommodations: (800) 455-SIMI (7464)
Group Name: WestPoint • Cutoff date: November 19, 2009

Registration for WestPoint: PlusLine.org

More Seminars

• God’s Law Based on His Character
• Creation and the Ideal Marriage
• When Personal Crisis Comes
• Ellen White and Last-day Events
• Is God a Punitive God?
• Faith and Presumption

Sponsoring organizations:
Voice of Prophecy and Pacific Union Conference
in association with Amazing Facts, Faith For Today, It Is Written,
The Quiet Hour, and North Pacific Union Conference.

For Further Information: Pacific Union Conference Ministerial Department: (805) 413-7350
E-mail: julie@puconline.org • Website: www.puconline.org