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“I was particularly encouraged by the ‘Spiritual Care Dos’ and concur entirely, and it caused me to reflect on how I had been handling the situations with my parishioners.”

Jesus and the temple

I appreciate the article by Eliezer Gonzalez (“Jesus and the Temple: Understanding the Teaching of the New Testament,” January 2013). It’s interesting that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob only the sacrifice of the lamb to foreshadow Christ’s sacrifice for our sins, as He also demonstrated to Adam.

It wasn’t until the Israelites had spent 400 years in slavery, immersed in the idolatry and rituals of the Egyptians, that they seemed to need more visuals than the sacrifice of the lamb. It was after Moses came down from the mountain and found them dancing around a golden calf that God gave them the beautiful sanctuary representation of Christ’s work for them, expressed with feasts, celebrations, and visuals. I don’t know of any mention of a temple in heaven or on earth before this time.

In the New Testament, when Paul wrote to the Gentiles of Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica, he upheld Christ the Savior for our sins and didn’t mention the tabernacle that represents His work. But when he wrote to his Jewish brethren in the book of Hebrews, he frequently referred to the tabernacle to show them how Jesus fulfills the representations of the Messiah found therein.

As Gonzalez mentions, the New Testament refers to Jesus Himself as the temple (Rev. 21:22; John 2:19, 21). What a wonderful God to be willing to help us understand His great desire to save us!

Helen Fearing, email

Dealing with dementia

I am a pastor at a church where there are a significant number of elderly folk. The issue of dementia is a very real issue and a painful one which is not easy for anyone to deal with, be they pastors, spouses, or immediate families.

The issue, however, is not limited to those in the later stages of life; and I have had to deal with the crisis for those in very early midlife as well. I do thank you for the very insightful article in the January 2013 issue of Ministry by F. Donald Yost on this subject that I found most enlightening. I was particularly encouraged by the “Spiritual Care Dos” and concur entirely, and it caused me to reflect on how I had been handling the situations with my parishioners. Every situation and person is different and I would welcome reading any other pastors’ experiences in how they have been coping and dealing with the issues of dementia.

Grant Wright, pastor, Tauranga Central Baptist Church, Tauranga, New Zealand

The preacher’s thorn in the flesh

I am so thankful for the article by Charles Wesley Knight (“The Preacher’s Problem,” November 2012), the contents of which are like a balm of Gilead for me. I have been undergoing a physical ailment for several years and found myself disappointed and discouraged. But Knight’s article has given me a new strength and resilient power.

Most of all, through it all, I have realized who I really am. Humility leads to heaven. My thorn in the flesh gives power of humility.

Graceson Kamei, Chingmeirong, Imphal, India
Lifelong learners

Everywhere I go, I meet people who become my teachers. Recently, I ate lunch with a colleague who has been holding focus groups with Christian young adults in eight different countries. He shared with me the powerful lessons he learned from his research. He became my instructor.

Just a few weeks earlier, I attended a pastors’ conference during which I presented a workshop. I looked at the selection of presentations being offered during the same time slot and wished I could attend several of them as well.

Professional growth is vital, but I want to encourage you to press on as a lifelong learner in another area of your life. Peter expressed our need and privilege with these words: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NKJV). We are called to be lifelong learners in the school of Christ.

God desires each of His children, including pastors, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so that we can more fully reflect the beauty of His character to those around us. During a recent conversation with a pastor, as we spoke about the challenges of ministry, he shared a story with me that made me sad. Several individuals had joined the church where he serves as pastor. However, when he returned from a brief holiday, these new members were nowhere to be found. When he visited their homes and asked what happened, they responded, “There is no love in the church.” They sensed such a loveless atmosphere that they felt like they needed to leave in order to survive spiritually. What a tragedy, and what a painful reminder of the need to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you were to more intentionally enroll in the school of Christ for the next 30 days, what lessons would He teach you about Christlikeness? Would He call you to be like Him in His love, His patient endurance, His service, His mission? What chains would He ask permission to break? What wounds would He seek to heal? What burdens would He offer to lift?

We know deep in our hearts that Christlikeness is the will of God for each one of us, so what holds us back from continued growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Fear? A desire for control? Pride? What would it take to experience a breakthrough as a student in the school of Christ? I’m reminded of a powerful prayer embedded in a 3,000-year-old Scripture song: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23, 24, NKJV).

We all have much to learn regarding the theme of this special issue of Ministry: Mission to the Cities. More than 50 percent of the world’s population now lives in large urban centers. How can we reach these teeming masses with the good news about Jesus? Gary Krause and Gerson P. Santos help us to see the big picture as we consider the challenge of ministering the love of God to the large numbers of unreached people in the huge urban centers of the world. Miroslav Pujic encourages us to consider fresh new approaches in order to connect with postmoderns. Timothy P. Nixon challenges us to believe that we can take the big cities for God.

Johnny Wong isn’t just a promoter of mission to the cities, he serves on the front line, in downtown Melbourne, Australia, and his passion for urban ministry, especially to young adults, is contagious.

As you read this issue, we pray that you will be blessed and equipped for continued fruitful service in Jesus’ name. We would also like to hear from you. What important lessons have you learned about urban ministry that might be helpful to your pastoral colleagues around the world? Write to us at feedback@ministrymagazine.org. Let us learn from each other; and most of all, let us continue to be lifelong learners in the school of Christ.
nineteen hundred and one. The first year of the twentieth century. In New York City, the Tenement House Law of 1901 culminated years of effort by reformers to turn squalid and dangerous housing to be safer and healthier. The panic of 1901 started the first-ever crash on the New York Stock Exchange—and thousands of small investors limped away bankrupt. And in the summer of 1901, New York City withered under the deadliest heat wave in its history. In a one-week period, at least 989 people died in weather that Cole Thompson describes as “so hot it melted asphalt and drove scores of New Yorkers insane.”

He noted: “For a solid week New Yorkers cursed, collapsed, threw themselves into wells, leaped to their deaths from bridges, overwhelmed morgues, and stretched police and hospital workloads beyond their limit. . . . Hundreds of horses lay dead and bloated in the street, preventing ambulance service and removal of the dead.”

After four days of house hunting, they found an apartment. On the periphery of the city? In a rural outpost with an acre of green grass, docile cows, and a vegetable garden? No. In the heart of the city, a couple of blocks from the southeast corner of Central Park. “Do not let our brethren forget to pray for us,” wrote Haskell. “Do not forget the address: 400 West 57th St., New York City.”

Haskell marveled at the urban jungle his wife and he now called home. “In this city there are some buildings over thirty stories high,” he wrote. “In the building where we live there are fifty-three families. The building is seven stories high, and two elevators run night and day.”

The Haskells were following Ellen White’s counsel that, instead of just preaching to people, Christ’s followers should follow His incarnational ministry—living and ministering among the community. “It is through the social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world,” she wrote. And further: “Our experienced workers should strive to place themselves where they will come in direct contact with those needing help.”

So it was that in November 1901, Haskell wrote from the heart of New York City: “[We] work among all classes of people.”

Treading the ground

Some years ago, a young Global Mission pioneer taught me some valuable lessons about mission. Like the Haskells, Budiman Soreng and his family moved to live among the people to whom they would minister. Church planting at any time is tough work. But when Budiman arrived at his assigned location to plant a church, there was bloody tribal fighting in the streets—complete with beheadings and cannibalism.

When I visited that place, it was some time later. By this time, Budiman had established three groups of believers. I asked him how he did it. How did he go about contacting people, touching their lives, and leading them to Jesus?

He smiled and told me, through a translator, that he did not start by preaching at the people. First, he prayed. “At midnight I prayed, ‘Lord, first work in my heart,’ ” he said. “ ‘Then I can work with the people. Let me say what Jesus would say.’ ”

He also “studied the situation”—the place and the people. He wanted to understand the local culture. He then started making friends with Animists, Muslims, Chinese Buddhists, as well as other Christians. “I played football with the people, went jogging in the mornings, and worked with them in the rice fields,” he said.

Budiman soon began visiting in homes, opening the Bible, and sharing with people in their local dialect. At last report, several years ago, more than 200
people had been baptized and, with the help of four other pioneers, five new areas opened up to Adventist work.

The key for successful outreach, Budiman told me, is to be humble. And then he said something I have never forgotten: “We have an expression here—‘we tread the ground.’ That means ‘we come here, we become like the people here.’” That, I thought, is one of the best descriptions of the Incarnation I’ve heard.

The huge mission challenge of rapidly growing urban areas—where most of the world now lives—is daunting. We are like David facing a multitude of Goliaths. How do we best use our limited resources to reach these people? What methodologies should we try? How do we even begin to try to engage the different people groups, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, nonreligious beliefs?

Budiman reminds us of the fundamental mission principles. As followers of Jesus, we cannot be content with just remote-control, from-a-distance, drive-by, short-term mission. We must pray, be humble, and analyze the needs. And we must tread the ground.

**Christ’s method . . . alone**

Of course, Budiman was just following the example of Jesus, who was not content to stay in heaven and minister from a distance. He came down and “trod the ground” with us. He became one with us, pitched His tent among us, drank the same water, ate the same food, shed human tears. He broke down any social, cultural, or religious walls between Him and us (cf. Eph. 2).

Ellen White beautifully summarizes Jesus’ approach, which she says is the only method that “will bring true success.” The Savior:

1. Mingled with people, desiring their good.
2. Showed sympathy.
3. Ministered to needs.
4. Won confidence.
5. Invited people to follow Him.

Ellen White envisioned wholistic ministry centers, which she called centers of influence, being established in every city around the world. These urban centers were to take church members out of the pews and into their communities. They were to be based 100 percent on Jesus’ method of ministry.

According to White, centers of influence could include such centers as vegetarian restaurants, treatment rooms, lifestyle education, small group meetings, literature, public meetings, and “reaping” ministries—anything to connect to the community.

She commended the work of the fledgling Adventist church in San Francisco, which she called a “beehive.” Church members visited “the sick and destitute,” found homes for orphans, and jobs for the unemployed. They visited from house to house, conducted classes on healthful living, and distributed literature. They started a school for children in inner-city Laguna Street, and maintained a medical mission and a “working men’s home.”

Right next to city hall, on Market Street, they operated treatment rooms as a branch of what is today St. Helena Hospital. At the same location they ran a health food store. Even closer to the heart of the city, a vegetarian café served healthful food six days a week. On the San Francisco Bay waterfront, Adventists ministered to sailors. And just in case they did not have enough to do already, they also held public meetings in city halls. They mingled, showed sympathy, ministered to needs, won confidence, and invited people to follow Jesus.

Adventist urban mission cannot focus exclusively on trying to attract people, like a spiritual magnet, from
the streets into church buildings. Of course, our churches should be attractive and friendly. Of course, we should have captivating preaching and music. Of course, we should run interesting programs and activities. But the major role of the church should be to inspire, train, and launch members out of the pew into the community.

But too often our focus, as Christians, has been inward rather than outward. And too often others have gone ahead of us. Michael Baer writes:

I once asked an Indonesian Christian why the country had become so predominantly Muslim. . . She said that when the Western Christians came . . . they built missionary compounds and missionary churches and expected the Indonesian people to come to them. The Muslims, on the other hand, came as traders, farmers, merchants, and businessepeople and simply lived among the natives. Today, Indonesia is the world’s most populous Muslim nation. I wonder how different it could have been?

Ah, by the way, we’re also a church. Each step in Jesus’ method is vital. Skip bidding people to follow Him, and we short-change and short-circuit our ministry. Overlook mingling, sympathy, ministering, winning confidence, and we neutral our effectiveness, undermine our credibility, and fail in making true disciples.

**Church or social agency?**

Over the past several decades, most Australians—religious and non-religious—have looked fondly on the Salvation Army. It is one of Australia’s best-known and most-loved institutions. As a kid, I would sometimes go door-to-door collecting money for the annual Salvation Army’s Red Shield appeal. This was easy work, and I do not remember a negative response or a closed door.

Referred to affectionately as “the Salvos,” or “the Sallies,” this church is widely recognized for their work to help the poor and needy. “The Salvation Army in Australia occupies an unprecedented position in terms of public acceptance and popularity for a Christian church, indeed for any organization,” writes Salvation Army Major Gregory Morgan. The challenge for this church, however, is to be recognized as a church—not just as a social agency—a church that eagerly wants to reverse its decline in membership.

“Public surveys reveal that 96 per cent of Australians are favourably inclined toward it,” says Morgan. “But alongside this is the stark reality that the church aspects of our Movement have been in decline for many years. Attendance and membership figures are dropping. Everyone loves us, but fewer and fewer want to join us.”

He adds: “Some fear that the evangelical side of the mission will be lost, that the Salvation Army will go the way of other venerable social agencies initially founded as spiritual missions, and lose its evangelical character.”

For some years the Salvation Army has been trying to address this challenge. I remember an advertising campaign they ran some years ago—complete with ads and billboards—reminding the Australian public that the Salvation Army is a church where they would be welcome.

Why has it been such a challenge for them to build the bridge from social care to church pew? Morgan suggests that one reason might be that “our social welfare expression has become large, professional, and program based. This is a far cry from the early Salvation Army, which passionately believed in, and practiced, incarnational mission.”

At times the Salvation Army may have seemed to work more “for” the community than “with” the community. It is difficult to get someone to come and sit next to you in the pew if they feel you only see them as a charity case.

Our urban mission must be long-term, on-the-ground, and incarnational. We must take care that we minister “with” people not “for” or “at” them. Where possible, we join existing community organizations, programs, and activities. We enlist believers and unbelievers to work with us on good causes. And we look for every opportunity to empower people to take ownership and more effectively deal with their own problems, challenges, and needs.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not called to become just another social welfare agency—as important as such agencies are. The spiritual framework and motivation of our ministry must underscore and inform everything we do—every bowl of soup we share, every coping-with-stress seminar we run, every vegetarian restaurant meal we serve. Certainly, it is wrong to even hint that someone must accept our message before we give him or her physical care. Our community work should show no-strings-attached compassion. But that does not mean we should separate humanitarian care and Christian witness.

We cannot be content to just mingle, show sympathy, minister to needs, and win confidence. We must pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the final and vital step—leading people to Jesus. This is not some sort of artificial construct that we place on top of everything else. It naturally flows from the other dimensions of Christ’s method.

For many postmoderns and believers from other world religions, the idea of walking through the doors of a Christian church building is a formidable obstacle. Many just cannot do it. That’s OK. We go where we are supposed to go—to meet them in their context. Small groups to study spiritual things will spring naturally from the centers of influence, and they can meet in homes, public places, even in the centers.

But what if someone does not accept Jesus? Do we dismiss them, and move on to more “fruitful fields”? Certainly not. We follow Christ’s method because this constitutes Christ’s method. We mingle with people because He mingled. We show sympathy because He did. We minister to needs because He did. This ministry cannot be conditional on people accepting Jesus. When people ignored...
Jesus’ bidding, He did not discard them. He kept loving them.

Dr. David Paulson who, along with Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, helped pioneer Adventist wholistic urban mission in the late 1800s, wrote:

The man who is interested in only those who he thinks can become church-members as a result of his ministrations, will find fewer and fewer openings for missionary work; for he gradually develops in others a spirit of distrust and suspicion, which closes more and more doors against him; while, on the other hand, the worker who has allowed the needs of humanity to touch his heart, will try to benefit the “nine lepers” even if he knows perfectly well that they will never join his church. 18

Are we content when people do not respond to the call of Jesus? No. Do we stop loving and caring when they do not respond? Of course not.

Who will go?

It has been more than a century since the Haskells moved to 400 West 57th Street to “tread the ground” in New York City. During all this time the challenge of urban mission has not disappeared and certainly has not diminished. Today there may be many new and creative methods to urban mission. But if they are to have any success, they must be firmly based on Christ’s method and Christ’s method alone.

There was complete silence, then Paul said, “You know, I’ve felt terrible. I’ve tried all kinds of approaches only to find myself slipping into deeper darkness and depression. I guess,” he said, trembling, “I guess I gave up on God because I thought, If He is God, He must know about my situation; and I’ve cried out to Him, but there has been no answer.” I said nothing. Then Paul made this comment: “You know, over the past few days, I’ve felt better than I have in years. I’ve begun to believe that God may be there after all.”

I gently said, “You know, Paul, I believe He is.” During the next several days, using God’s simple remedies, Paul came out of his depression. He was revived physically, but more importantly, he was also revived spiritually with the hope of eternal life.

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2 ibid.
4 Stephen Haskell, Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, July 5, 1901, 448.
5 Haskell, “The Bible Training School,” Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, November 12, 1901, 1, 739.
8 Haskell, November 12, 1901.
11 The Office of Adventist Mission is working to resurrect, for the twenty-first century, Ellen White’s concept of centers of influence. For more information about Life Hope Centers visit www.lifehopecenters.org or www.AdventistMission.org.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see Gary Krause, God’s Great Missionaries (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2005), 78.

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* A pseudonym.
We can take Jericho

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel had finally reached the borders of the Promised Land. But standing before them was what seemed an insurmountable obstacle: the fortified city of Jericho. The challenge seemed overwhelming, but God had promised Joshua, “I have given Jericho into your hand, with its kings and valiant warriors” (Josh. 6:2, NASB). The task appeared formidable. A walled city and inhabitants who seemed like giants immobilized the Israelites with apprehension. The 40-year-old “evil report” from the majority of spies sent by Moses still seemed to stand in Israel’s way. And after 40 years the giants had bred more giants. The city of Jericho seemed impenetrable; defeating its inhabitants, impossible. How would Israel overthrow this great city?

What is our Jericho?

God’s modern people, like Israel, stand at the borders of the heavenly Promised Land with a mandate from Jesus to make disciples of every nation. But, like Israel, insurmountable challenges stand before us as well.

Today, statistics tell us that the largest percentage of the human population lives in cities. Seventy-four percent of the population from developed nations and 44 percent of residents of developing countries live in urban areas. It is expected that 70 percent of the world population will be urban by 2050 and that the most urban growth will occur in developing countries. Thus, cities must be where the church focuses its attention on if we are to fulfill the Great Commission. But the challenge seems so immense and the inhabitants too great. So, what are the walls and giants we face in reaching the cities of the world and its inhabitants with the gospel?

The walls we face

The United States, like many other countries, has made significant strides toward racial equality. But the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. The Pew Research finds that the rich are living near the rich, while the poor are packed together in large sections of the nation’s metropolitan areas. Public schools are more segregated in urban areas today than during the 1960s. But America is not alone with these challenges. Income inequality worldwide has reached its highest levels ever. The top 1 percent control 40 percent of the world’s income, while the bottom half of the population share 1.1 percent of the world’s wealth. Cities exhibit these disparities worldwide.

Today’s cities are the most cosmopolitan areas of the world, with the greatest cross section of residence—culturally, socially, religiously, economically, and racially. Some cities are visibly divided into various cultural enclaves that are monolithic racially, culturally, or religiously. Some have higher unemployment and unskilled workers in their community, with weak educational systems and high illiteracy. Others are highly sophisticated with residents who are well to do, well educated, professional, and used to the finer things of life. The recent governmental shifts brought on by the “Arab Spring” have exposed many of these disparities. Social media has connected the world’s major cities with instant information and access to many views, ideologies, and philosophies that are opposed to Christianity. The neighborhoods, villages, and hovels where many Christians reside have seen a complete ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic change. How do we face these diverse and burgeoning challenges?

The giants we face

In the West, Christianity no longer has the universal appeal it once enjoyed. For many decades, the church had what one author called “a home-court advantage,” especially in America. “The average person held values that were marginally Judeo-Christian, had never met a Buddhist or a Muslim, and didn’t question whether truth existed or could be known.” In the twenty-first century, this is no longer true. Basic elementary biblical knowledge can no longer be assumed. Some years ago, two football fans saw a large sign with the inscription John 3:16 printed in bold colors. They did not recognize it as a biblical text but instead thought this sign was an advertisement for a new restaurant. The belief and understanding of God is conceptualized through many religious and philosophical lenses other than Christianity. The West is quickly becoming “post-Christian,” and the tenets of postmodern thinking which once were
fringe have trickled into our culture and become normal.”

As in the case of Israel, we, too, have some giants of our own creation. While our church is growing rapidly around the world, in the West, the church is atrophying. Of the more than 17 million members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only 8 percent come from North America and even less from other parts of the Western world.

We also are becoming culturally detached from the neighborhoods where our churches reside. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America and other parts of the Western world is rapidly becoming an immigrant church with an immigrant membership growing faster than the native-born membership in the cities where their churches reside. This creates a gulf between the members of the church and the native-born citizens of many major cities, and makes the church irrelevant to city dwellers.

**Breaking down walls while facing those giants**

How do we penetrate the walls of cultural, social, and economic separation while facing the giants of philosophical, educational, and religious incompatibility with Christianity? The following four suggestions may be a good start.

*Jesus Christ is the foundation.* First, our foundation rests in Jesus Christ. We must believe that Jesus Christ is able to draw all people unto Him (see John 12:32). This means believing that Jesus is able to break down any of the walls and all of the giants that we face in the cities of the world. The indispensable ingredient that Jesus Christ manifested to humanity was His love. John 3:16 remains at the heart of God’s appeal to all humanity and remains the greatest universal power in the entire world. Howard Belben writes, “The love of Jesus for men and women was so different from the love as men usually understand it. Most amazing of all is the love Jesus showed on the cross for those who put Him to death. There was nothing ‘put on’ about love like that. . . . He really loved people, even those who hated and killed Him.”

Reflecting Christ and showing genuine Christian love for all will break down any barriers that separate us from others.

*Be incarnational.* In order for Jesus to save us, He had to become like us (see Phil. 2:7; John 1:14). Through the Incarnation, He took upon Himself human flesh and experienced life as we do. He identified Himself with the people He came to save and understood their concerns. Ellen White says, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” Belben writes, “Jesus had a mission to lonely, unwanted people, and so must His Church.”

Too often Christians try to force non-Christians into their religious mold while remaining comfortable themselves. But, as Christ’s disciples, we are called to move beyond our comfort zone and reach the masses where they are. The apostle Paul understood that reaching unbelievers required him to “become all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22, NIV). This will mean thinking differently about how we present the gospel. Gibbs writes, “As Western churches increasingly engage . . . the pluralistic makeup of their societies, they are recognizing the need to gain fresh insights and learn new skills.”

The gospel must be contextualized to reach the communities and neighborhoods where city dwellers live. Christ’s method of reaching people will still work if Christians would try it themselves.

*Be socially engaged.* Poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and crime are still growing problems in many urban areas. Christians must involve themselves in the daily issues that many city dwellers face. During the first century, one of the most important activities that helped grow the Christian movement was the engagement of the churches in the social problems of the Roman population. Derrel Watkins writes, “Christian missionaries . . . demonstrated Christ’s
love by their concern for every person’s need as they encountered him or her. This compassion for suffering humanity . . . led to the rapid spread of the gospel throughout all the then-known world during the first three centuries.” Christians must become engaged in the social concerns that cities face. We should be actively involved in addressing the issues of poverty, distress, and justice that burden so many people. Ray Bakke observes that we do not need new technologies to reach the city for Christ; we only need to rediscover His vision, energy, and compassion.

In 1996, responding to a sermon series on God’s passion for our cities, a group of Andrews University students were inspired to minister in the city of Benton Harbor, Michigan. They began knocking on doors and praying for the residents every week. As the weeks passed, the students realized that there was a need for a children’s ministry. This idea became, The Benton Harbor Street Ministry, a weekly outreach program focused on children. The ministry served as the foundation for an evangelistic series eight years later in the fall of 2004. As a result of the consistent social involvement in the community, 41 people were baptized, and a new church began in the city. As it has been said: “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

Be technologically savvy. Technology has turned our world into a global neighborhood. The information superhighway made communication with distant parts of the world almost instantaneous. Facebook has become a worldwide tool of communication that everyday people use to make and develop “friends.” There are six billion active cell phone subscriptions in the world today and five billion come from developing countries. Last year alone, mobile users downloaded more than 30 billion apps. Social networks reach 82 percent of the world’s online population, representing 1.2 billion people worldwide. In October 2011, Social Networking ranked as the most popular content category in worldwide engagement, accounting for 19 percent of all the time spent online.

Christians must use this vital global means of communication to reach the people in cities around the world. All Christian churches and organizations should have Web pages, blogs, Facebook pages, podcasts, apps, and every other social networking tool available to reach city dwellers who spend their lives on the Internet in growing numbers. The Millennial generation was raised using social media and we must be engaged and active in using this means of communication to reach the next generation. At New Life Fellowship, where I pastor young adults, we have found that when we encourage our worshipers to text their friends during our services, they instantly advertise our services to their friends and then come to church. We also encourage worshipers to tweet portions of the music and sermons while we worship. Presently we average 70-80 tweets per Sabbath, and have seen those who follow others’ Twitter accounts join us for worship the next Sabbath. I encourage you to try it, if you think this type of ministry will work in your church also.

A heart for the city

Just prior to Israel’s Babylonian exile, God instructed Jeremiah to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer. 29:7, TNIV). As God’s followers, we must believe that this is not an accident but our destiny to live in a time when the population of cities is on the rise. Cities have the greatest resources with unlimited potential and opportunities if we are willing to meet the challenge.

Our greatest weapon

The greatest weapon Christians have in facing the seeming insurmountable challenges that cities present is our faith; faith in God’s commission, God’s power, and God’s promise. What God did with the twelve untrained, under-educated commoners at the beginning of the Christian era, He can do with us today. He is no respecter of persons. Jesus promised, “All who have faith in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these” (John 14:12, TNIV).

So, what are we waiting for? We can take Jericho! 

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Re-imagining evangelism in a postmodern culture

Scripture says that we “have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world” (Rom. 1:14).1 “Carrying the eternal Good News . . . to the people who belong to this world—to every nation, tribe, language, and people” (Rev. 14:6). This obligation includes postmoderns as well.

Who are postmoderns, what do they believe, and how can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, reach them?

Postmodernism defined

“Post” means “after,” and “modern” means “up to date” or “now.” So, we define postmodern as “beyond now”; that is, they are living on the edge of constant change. Perhaps the most concise literary definition of postmodernism comes from Jean-Francois Lyotard, calling it “incredulity towards metanarratives.”2 Meta-narratives are the overarching stories or truths, the concepts that are an umbrella for everything else in life—like the existence of Jesus Christ as God’s Son and His plan of salvation, as one example.

We find postmodernism often misunderstood. We mix the words secular, postmodern, pluralist, and contemporary, but they are not the same thing. A secular person does not believe in God, a pluralist believes in many gods or many truths, a contemporary person merely lives in the same time period as yourself; but a postmodern individual is far more complex. Postmoderns do not necessarily deny God; they just do not have a growing relationship with Him. They do not reject truth; they just are not sure where to find it or that the Bible has the truth.

Postmodernism reacts to modernism’s failures, rejecting universally applicable truth, and valuing tolerance as a paramount virtue.3 But this has contradictory boundaries, leading to a system of selective tolerance. Steven Connor says, “What is striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of consensus, the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable.”4 In other words, postmodernism seems to be certain that there is no way to be certain about absolutes.

The most common misunderstanding of postmodernism focuses on the fact that postmodernism completely denies truth, thus relativizing everything. Postmoderns do not deny truth and objective reality; instead they question our ability to distinguish truth from nontruth. Postmodernism is a reactionary movement, a backlash against the arrogant approach that modernism attributed to scientific authority and “proof.”

Opportunities for evangelism in postmodernity

With the demise of absolute human reason and science, the supernatural is once again open to consideration. Because postmodernists see spirituality as closely connected to supernatural experience, Christians who have experienced the Holy Spirit possess a great opportunity to make friends among postmoderns and share the story of a personal God who does miracles in their lives.

Intuition and emotions are another pathway where postmodernists can discover truth. As they experience various spiritual encounters, postmoderns will integrate into a new lifestyle when they find somewhere they belong. A personal invitation to “Try it”—i.e., the gospel—should be our message to them.

People long to belong. The postmodern western European traditions of pubbing (on Friday nights) and clubbing (on Saturday nights) suggest that people still need people. Christian community offers a supportive environment that can help them discover a deeper, more fulfilling meaning of life as a disciple of Jesus.
Given today’s research on the prevalence of postmodern culture, the church must adopt methods that will attract the postmodern mind. Richard Halverson said, “Dogmatism and faith are not identical! Dogmatism is like stone. Faith is like soil. Dogmatism refuses to admit doubts. Faith often struggles with doubt. . . . Dogmatism is a tunnel. Faith is a mountain peak . . . . Dogmatism insists on proposition. Faith knows Christ. Dogmatism generates bigotry. Faith stimulates understanding.” This does not mean we should dilute the message of Scripture in an attempt to entertain but that we should refocus our witnessing strategy, centering it on the example that Jesus Christ left us on how to live.

Because Christianity makes claims for absolute truth, it is bound to be unpopular in the postmodern setting. So while relational evangelism rates as the best approach, our “techniques” cannot be dishonest. The gospel applies to all ages in all countries and cultures. We face a danger: as we seek to “make the gospel relevant,” we may overlook the fact that it already is. The gospel will never become irrelevant as long as there are hurting people who need to find peace in the divine gift of salvation. Scripture must not be compromised or obscured by any evangelistic methodology preoccupied with church growth or obsessed with baptisms. Instead, we must remain focused on the individuals and their needs for relationship, support, and nurture.

To effectively reach the postmodern generation, we must return to the basics: living out biblical principles, developing authentic friendships, caring for practical needs, and giving new disciples an opportunity to believe through belonging. We must live out our faith because “[i]t is this kind of faith that postmoderns can accept—no, are attracted to—no, are dying for.”

Disicpleship model in reaching postmoderns
For a new culturally sensitive approach on how to reach postmoderns who are also post-Christians, we present a discipleship model used in LIFEdevelopment. What is LIFEdevelopment?

LIFEdevelopment is a discipleship process that includes strategic vision to involve Adventist Christians:

- In building authentic friendships with unchurched postmodern people in our communities
- In the process of leading them to Jesus Christ
- In providing hope through support and nurture

This vision is built on three biblical principles for evangelising the postmodern world.

1. Belonging Before Believing—The most widely adopted evangelistic strategy is to teach people about the gospel, see that they behave according to the doctrines, and then accept them to belong in the body of Christ. This method has proved inappropriate and ineffective in the Western postmodern world.

People today seek for honest and genuine relationships. Jesus is the model Example of how to build friendships. “The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” This requires planning and sacrifice because we are all busy. In such an environment, talking and sharing is crucial. We have to remember that talking includes listening as well. To help them understand the story of Christ requires much time and patience. We have to be understandable, honest, and not judgmental.

Food is very important. Shared meals construct and sustain human relationships and symbolize solidarity. Meals express the texture of human associations, a way of life even. Jesus
ate and drank with people, even with the worst sinners (Matt. 11:19; Mark 2:15–17; Luke 15:1, 2). Jesus knew that in being with people around the table, He could influence them through words and deeds.

If the main purpose of evangelism is “believing,” then we make people aware of the truth and things they need to know. If the main purpose of evangelism is “behaving,” then we make people focus on themselves and their personal habits. If the main personal decision to identify fully both with the Lord and with the body of Christ.”

Many people want to belong to a place that they can call home and identify with. The world travels now through the shift from modernism, where Enlightenment created self-autonomy, individualism, and isolation, to postmodernism, where people are searching for identity and community. We now have virtual reality, an experience real in effect but not in fact. As these people struggle in the misery of loneliness and search for identity, Christians should create a community that will embrace and help these people find their identity as they become disciples of Jesus Christ. God created community (Gen. 2:18), and Jesus Himself chose to live in a small community (Mark 3:14). This should be the framework for ministry in the postmodern world; an environment where people will become vulnerable enough to share their joy, suffering, and despair.

2. Process Evangelism—In the Gospels, we read that when Jesus started His mission, He entered into the world of twelve people, identified with them and their conditions, and committed Himself to begin the process of evangelizing them. The apostles spent more than three years growing up in understanding more about Jesus; first as a teacher, then prophet, then Messiah, and then Son of God. This clearly suggests a process rather than an event. Even though we are accustomed to instant food, instant drinks, instant cash, instant messages, we cannot do evangelism that way, at least not with this new generation. The postmodernists find it unacceptable to be approached with the truth in the form of a dogmatic grand scheme, proposed in a point of time. They will reject it.

Evangelizing is a process and takes a person on a spiritual journey that we Christians are on as well, with all its ups and downs. On that journey our job is to go one step at a time. The Holy Spirit’s job is to convince the person and bring them to conversion. Our responsibility is to make ourselves available as the tools that God uses to complete His work. We must follow Jesus’ example. It will help us experience the miracle of walking on the water, as Peter did (Matt. 14:29).

Jimmy Long identifies six steps in the postmodern conversion process, “these are: (1) discontentment with life, (2) confusion over meaning, (3) contact with Christians, (4) conversion to community, (5) commitment to Christ, and (6) a calling to God’s heavenly vision.” We have to know that this sometimes does not happen in these exact sequences. Time, place, and speed are applicable to the individual. It could be that one person goes through the process much more quickly than the other does or some skip a step or two. But this still remains a process, because the postmodern generation requires a lot of time to make any commitment. The process helps the seeker see the gospel in action in the setting of Christian community. The process shapes the seeker’s heart, not just the mind. The process leads the seeker into the holistic Christian maturity. The process converts the seeker to become a disciple. The process enables the new disciple to become a disciple-maker.

3. Narrative Evangelism—A story has the power to provoke our thoughts, emotions, laughter, and actions. A story has the power to create a vision, which, in turn, produces character. A story can change the person’s mind and affects his or her attitude, worldview, and soul. Jesus understood the power of a story and he “used many
similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables” (Mark 4:33, 34).

The new generation seeks to find a role model. When they see Christians who live their stories out in a faithful community, they will respond to an alive role model. It will provide hope to a generation without hope. It will support them in their everyday life and nurture them in their spiritual growth. “The Story that there is a God who cares about the individual human being is an old message—but it has been given a new attractiveness, a new plausibility in our time. Our postmodern generation is more ready than ever to hear this Story with new ears. Why? Because of emptiness and brokenness of postmodern life.”15 The very “storylessness” of this new generation is our golden opportunity.

Conclusion

When the young man, who was demon possessed, was healed, Jesus told him, “Go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been” (Mark 5:19; emphasis added). With this, Jesus taught us the principles of evangelism. He wants us to go back to our community and build holistic connections with people around us, where we live, work, and play, to be able to share the wonderful story of our healing experience.

The Christian community has unique resources that can be drawn from reaching this group. Postmodernists provide a more hospitable platform for spiritual and theological possibilities. It is not enough for us to understand our world from a distance. It is not enough to have a strategy on how to do a mission. We need to wade into it and rub shoulders with those whom we desire to reach for Christ. We need to be willing to live life with unchurched postmodernists on their terms, not ours. This will lay the ground for real communication to take place.

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Politicians trying to change marriage. Theologians trying to change the Bible. Influenced by popular culture and politics, some religious thinkers are claiming Biblical support for the practice of homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

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Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church
Edited by Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson

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The world is rapidly moving from a rural calm to an urban explosion. In 1800, only 3 percent of the world’s population lived in cities. One hundred years later, the urban population jumped to 14 percent, with 12 cities having over one million in population. More recently, the world has experienced unprecedented urban growth, and today over 300 cities have a population of one million and more. Today, the majority of the global population lives in urban areas. That majority is expected to rise to 70 percent of the world population by 2050.1

Currently, more than 20 megacities, each with more than 10 million people, make up the urban landscape.

Urban growth is staggering, and this poses a formidable challenge to the proclamation of God’s Word. Every minister, evangelist, and church member faces a mountain to climb as we expect the church to accomplish its global commission. Mission to cities can no longer be called an option but a commanding call.

Mission to the cities

How do we reach the teeming masses of our cities? How can evangelism keep up with the exploding population? How can people of every language, tribe, and nation hear the good news of salvation and soon return of Jesus? Perhaps we should begin by recognizing that the mission does not belong to us, but to God. This mission encompasses His activity of grace and love toward the world. “He is a sending God, a going God, a God who incarnates Himself in a specific time and context, so that every person may come to know and love Him. If that was what Jesus did, then we, His followers are to do likewise. Going in mission is not an optional extra—an upgrade for the mature disciple. Going in mission is fundamental to the journey of discipleship.”2

Because mission has become so important, it cannot be just a sporadic, haphazard activity, for mission encompasses the very reason for the existence of the church. Without that crucial focus of mission, rooted in the great commission of the risen Lord to preach, teach, baptize, and make disciples of all nations, the church could well be an association of the like-minded or a social club with ethical stints. Being a disciple and making disciples for Christ describes the mission of the church. R. McNeal describes it this way: “We must change our ideas of what it means to develop a disciple, shifting the emphasis from studying Jesus and all things spiritual in an environment protected from the world, to following Jesus into the world to join him in his redemptive mission.”3 Thus the mission of church does not live of its own; even the proper existence of the Christian church is founded in its engagement of fulfilling God’s purpose for herself. “There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.”4 Christopher Wright goes as far as to say, “Mission is what the Bible is all about; we could as meaningfully talk of the missional basis of the Bible as of the biblical basis of mission.”5

How does mission occur?

Even before we become involved in mission, we need to know the condition of the people who are objects of our mission. Jesus described that condition through picturesque words: lost son in the distant land, sheep without shepherd, sick unto death, and more. Ellen White says, “Multitudes are so sunken in sin that they have lost the sense of eternal realities... Many of these can be reached only through acts of disinterested kindness.”6 Jesus gave us a twofold strategy to accomplish His mission: witness and service. “Deeds as well as words of sympathy are needed. Christ prefaced the giving of His message by deeds of love and benevolence. Let these workers go from house to house, helping where help is needed, and, as opportunity offers, telling the story of the cross. Christ is to be their text. They need not dwell upon doctrinal subjects; let them speak of the work and sacrifice of Christ. Let them hold up His righteous— righteousness, in their lives revealing His purity.”7

Restoring relationships among people, and between people and God, is another essential part of mission. Human history began with a perfect, loving relationship between God and humans. Adam and Eve shared a loving and positive bond with God. But with the intrusion of sin, this perfect relationship was ruptured and in its place a marred, sinful, selfish relationship reigned between human and human.
and between humans and God. Against this background, God set in operation His redemptive mission. He sent His Son, Jesus, to become the first missionary—not only to carry the good news of salvation but also to be the embodiment of that good news.

At the foundation of God’s mission is the motive of love—“ ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’ “ (John 3:16, NKJV)—and the movement toward reconciliation—“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10, NKJV). At the end of history with the second coming of Jesus, a restoration of perfect relationship will mark the triumphal close of God’s mission. “The mission of God is a redemptive mission. Everything that sin broke is being addressed and restored through God’s mission. This includes not just the ruptured relationship between God and humanity, but also the relationship of humans with themselves, with one another, and with the rest of creation.”

Thus, mission joins with God in the work of healing all the areas of brokenness. “If we follow the example of Christ in doing goodness, our hearts will open up as well as His.” We need to learn from Christ how to apply a healing touch to broken people.

God’s plan to reach the cities

About 100 years ago, Ellen White challenged the Advent movement to reach the cities with the gospel, using innovative methods: “There is means now tied up that should be in use for the unworked cities. . . These cities have been neglected for years.”

She urged church leaders to establish centers of influence in urban areas to develop a variety of activities such as lifestyle education, bookstores/reading rooms, restaurants, literature ministry, lectures, small groups, health and culinary seminars, and more. Her burden for city work is without compromise: “Workers with clear minds are needed to devise methods for reaching the people. Something must be done to break down the prejudice existing in the world against the truth.”

The ecclesiology that was behind such forceful commitment to reaching the cities is one that considered the church not as a building or social club, but an ecclesia—a body of those called by the redemptive mission of Jesus in order to be participants of that mission both personally and among the people in which they live. The church shows itself, not as an architectural showpiece but a redemptive witness: it is God’s community of redeemed sons and daughters, called to make the ecclesia and extend the invitation for others to join and experience the divine wonder of salvation. Jesus spoke of His church, “ ‘This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out’ “ (Matt. 16:18, The Message).

Perhaps we have spent too much time trying to protect the church from the world in fear that the world would come inside the church. In the process, maybe we have forgotten the need to go out to reach the world. I believe that Jesus was saying that the world should be afraid of the church and not the other way around. Consider the city of Chennai in South India. In this teeming megacity of some 12 million people, 30 years ago there were some five churches. Great evangelistic series were held by great preachers, but the development was slow. Evangelism, wonderful as evangelistic campaigns are, expected people to come to a central place to hear the good news. The churches did not grow to be many, although the existing five were vibrant, financially strong, and carried an Adventist ethos for all to see. But a large megapolis cannot remain content with limited centers of influence.

Then came a young man, Johnson, full of passion, vision, and mission. Instead of expecting people to come to hear him preach in a great hall, he decided he would go where the people are: to their homes. With much prayer and little cash, he turned his church office into a recording studio, used blankets to make it sound proof, borrowed some cameras and recording machines, recorded a series of TV Bible studies in the local language, and went around the city looking for a TV station that would broadcast the messages. Rejection followed rejection and after weeks of painful visits to numerous TV centers, God answered in a mysterious way. One TV station offered a slot at 6:00 a.m. on Saturday morning—hardly the time to get a large audience. But Johnson took it, and his message was a simple one—what Jesus can do to you. The gospel has a way of penetrating rock-hard souls, and soon letters from the hearers flooded the little Adventist church, many of the letters with a little gift to enlarge the ministry. This single pastor, with his highly motivated members, kept the TV show going, conducted group meetings in homes where neighbors can gather, and soon there were baptisms. Cottage meetings, block sessions, home visitations, and prayer marathons over the phone followed, and today in the megapolis the Adventist churches have multiplied to some 80 congregations, fully self-supporting, and organized into a conference. Johnson did not wait for people to come and hear him. He went where people were—hurting, searching, sick, and looking for a blessed hope. With Johnson, mission is go where people are with the One who loves them all. That’s Jesus’ way.

What makes a successful church? A church that meets our needs? A church that has great preachers who make us feel good or challenges us just a little, but not too much? A church that has music pleasing to us? A church that has a program or two that makes us feel as if we have a place to serve? There is nothing wrong with good preaching, good music, and well-run programs; but these things do not define a successful church.

A great church, a healthy church, is one in which we find Jesus Christ in word and deed. A God-honoring, gospel-loving church is one where
we find the Word of God as the primary motivator for doing the work of  
God—a church seeking the shalom of the city. “Shalom is much richer than  
the absence of conflict or a trendy way to say good-bye. Biblical shalom con-  
notes universal human flourishing. By seeking the shalom of the city, God was  
asking those in Babylonian captivity to live and invest in the midst of the social  
and cultural world of their enemies, encouraging and supporting the good-  
ness and enjoyment of life by creating shalom in every niche of society.”

The God of Shalom has not changed His method or purpose. He seeks after  
the lost. He wants the wanderer to come home. He wants the slave to be set free. Every one of the billions living in the concrete jungles today, in  
nameless communities, is precious to Him. God searches for them. He wants  
to bring them into the fellowship of the redeemed.

Four ways to relate to the city

There are typically four ways a church relates to the city. The first: the “church in the city.” Their heart beats to get people in the doors to hear the gospel. They are geographically in the city, but they are not effectively engaged with the people and culture of the city. The second: the “church against the city.” The church adopts a defensive posture toward the city. They are located in urban areas, but everything about the surrounding culture is seen as not just bad, but irredeemable. The third: the “church of the city.” Here the church embraces the culture of the city so much so that they lose the flavor in their salt and the brightness of their light. Then, there is the “church for the city” that speaks the truth of the gospel and does not fear upholding a biblical worldview and moral standards. Such a church proclaims the truth of Scripture with passion, clarity, and boldness, while seeking to commit itself for social, spiritual, and moral well-being of the city.13

How does a “church for the city” become a reality? How can your church  
boldly and faithfully proclaim the gospel and engage your community with acts of service and mercy? Cities are at the epicenter of God’s earth-shaking movements today, and it is important that any model for starting new churches takes into account the unique nuances of ministry in an urban context. Many of these principles are applicable and transferable, from an urban church in New York City to a  
meeting the needs of the community. I saw Jesus’ face on each of those in line to receive assistance.

God’s purpose for His church includes being an agency for the salvation of all of His children. “It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”14 The main goal of the church is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20), connecting people to Jesus. To be His church is a

Even before we become involved in mission, we need to know the condition of the people who are objects of our mission.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we preach and serve as Jesus intended.15 We need to fulfill God’s will, and catch a vision of biblical ministry by churches that are organized for service, and its mission includes being an agency for the salvation of all of His children. “It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”16 The main goal of the church is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20), connecting people to Jesus. To be His church is a

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The Gateway Experience

Mission to the cities describes a call to proclaim the everlasting gospel to more than 650 cities worldwide. Along with this call, though, is the question, “How do we do this?” Many of us have heard this beautiful quote: “The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good . . . then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” However, how can we take these wonderful words and turn them into practical instructions for urban evangelism that will yield fruit for the harvest?

This challenge drove our small church planting core group in Melbourne, Australia, to its knees. Through the process of prayer and seeking God’s wisdom, we created our first vision statement. Our initial focus was to “create a focal point in the city” to proclaim the three angels’ messages and train young people to witness for Jesus Christ. At that point, the specifics on how to achieve this vision started to become apparent. We felt directed to a blueprint that consisted of 16 ingredients for urban evangelism.

In this article, we will look at the 16 ingredients for urban evangelism at Gateway, an urban-based outreach center that started in 2003. Since applying these ingredients, Gateway has seen a total of three urban churches planted, more than 130 baptisms (with most of them from non-Adventist backgrounds), and close to 90 percent retention rate of its baptized members.

The blueprint

In Testimonies for the Church, volume 9, Ellen White provided a blueprint for this outreach. In Section 3, “The Work in the Cities,” 16 ingredients for establishing a successful urban ministry are outlined. They are summarized below:

- United in prayer
- Proclaim message in public evangelism
- Clear and distinct message
- Not entertainment-focused
- Reaching churched and unchurched people
- More consecrated members’ lives
- Pre-evangelism house-to-house work/personal work
- Bible work/1-to-1 studies
- Health message linked to the third angel’s message—run professionally
- Reach people in authority, with wealth and responsibilities
- Create a center of influence for Bible truth
- Involvement of “the army”—use gifts, talents, and provide training
- Leadership—plan, plan, plan
- Train and up-build other churches—“transplant trees”
- Call youth to be pastors

It would be daunting to apply all 16 ingredients in a local church immediately. At Gateway, we focused on four or five in a given year. In the initial years of urban outreach, we focused on (1) united in prayer; (2) center of influence for Bible truth; (3) pre-evangelism house-to-house work; (4) preaching clear and distinct messages; and (5) non-entertainment outreach. In subsequent years, as led by the Spirit, we applied other ingredients, such as the health message.

United in prayer

We can learn from the book of Acts that the entire early church ministry was bathed in prayer. Thus, for 8–12 months before our work in Melbourne started, we prayed as a core group each Sabbath morning from 8:30–9:30 A.M. There were also regular monthly prayer meetings as well as a yearly Week of Prayer.

In the first chapter of Acts, 120 people were united in prayer in the upper room. We knew that we would not want to plant a church without having at least as many prayer partners. We actively looked for 120 prayer partners to pray for the ministry. The overflowing response of encouraging emails and phone calls were a blessing.

We also adopted the 777 prayer, and members came to any one of the three church plant sites around the city to pray Sunday mornings at 7:00 A.M.

Because Gateway is a church-based CARE group, we also held our regular weekly CARE group core members Skype prayer meetings.

Centers of influence for Bible truth

CARE groups are at the heart of Gateway. Our research found that the churches experiencing the fastest growth were those that founded their ministry on small groups. Every other
method of interfacing with the community through felt-need areas—health and wellness, personal relationships, and finance based on the Bible—simply feed back into our network of evangelistically focused CARE groups. CARE groups are a place where we can open up our houses to create an environment of belonging for seekers (nonmembers) such that, by witnessing the changed lives of church members who have a living experience with Jesus, they can become open to Jesus Christ.

For example, a young atheist-working-professional from China was depressed after breaking up with his girlfriend. In a time of despair, a church friend invited him to a CARE group. He could not help but notice on this particular Friday night the environment was far different from the clubbing and drinking lifestyle that he knew. What he observed was a group of people who enjoyed life: they were having a healthy fellowship meal, singing songs of praise, studying the Word, and sharing time in prayer. That experience of finding acceptance and belonging led to spiritual questions, Bible studies, and then baptism. Today, this young man has left a promising career in order to become a pastor.

Pre-evangelism house-to-house work

An important element of pre-evangelism house-to-house work, linked closely with CARE groups, involves visitations to the homes of seekers. When the desire for truth is aroused, we find it important to have Bible workers on hand as well as trained church members to make visitations to the homes of seekers. At cafés or on university campuses, we have employed young people as campus missionaries in three secular universities in the city. These people spend quality time with seekers at their homes and develop friendships with them.

Public evangelism

Too often we are afraid to stand out in the crowd. We want to blend in with the way the world speaks, dresses, worships, and behaves. However, in a busy city where there is much noise and confusion, if no clear and distinct voice can be heard, our unique message will be lost in the myriad of secular attractions vying for our attention.

In addition to secular attractions, a myriad of churches in the city seek to reach the urban masses just as we do. To reach the urban youth, some offer entertainment-based worship programs; others offer “felt needs” classes.

While we value the ministry of these other groups, we are clear that what we as Seventh-day Adventists offer differs from other denominations. We offer the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages, and we do it in ways that cover the whole person: physical, social, mental, and spiritual. In our public evangelism, often held in neutral venues, we share Jesus’ teachings in the context of the third angel’s message. We have to make that central or else we can wind up teaching nothing different than anyone else.

Not entertainment-based

In some church planting/growth literature, a strong focus is placed on entertaining worship services as the means to attract individuals to God. Such models assume a well-choreographed worship program with a fully functional music and worship team. This would likely mean a team of 10 to 15 people often rehearsing for hours each week. In our experience, we would rather have two people planning worship and sending the others to go visiting house-to-house during the week. The hours spent at rehearsing seem better spent at visitation and personal work.

As we are a church-based CARE group, we often have seekers coming first to CARE groups and then to church on Sabbath morning. In Gateway’s model, worship is seen as merely a combined gathering of all CARE groups. For seekers who come for the first time, we have a special visitors’ class. In this introductory Bible study group, an opportunity exists for friendship, learning, and interaction.

On any given Sabbath morning, 30 percent of our attendees are seekers. Everything we do must be geared for them. Even our announcements and church bulletin must be reviewed to make sure that all we do is seeker friendly.

Our annual Bible lectures (public evangelistic series) are not merely to entertain but to present life-transforming truth. Nothing at the program should be frivolous or flippant but done professionally and respectfully. City dwellers who are young professionals expect high standards; thus, we must meet that standard.

Health message

Urban populations are increasingly health conscious. What makes an Adventist vegetarian restaurant any different from other vegan/vegetarian restaurants in the city? Any health seminars, such as cooking demonstrations or nutrition talks, must be linked to the third angel’s message—calling for a people to be prepared physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually for the soon return of Jesus.

Recently Gateway ran a two-weekend public lecture seminar entitled “Better Life, Better Future.” In the first weekend, a medical doctor shared the secrets of longevity from a health and wellness perspective. However, a pertinent question was asked at the end: If the world was heading down the pathway to destruction, what purpose did living a long life really serve? That is where the second part of the message becomes important, for here we talk about the Bible and the soon return of Jesus.

We have discovered that health ministry in an urban context cannot be a sporadic event but needs to be consistent and comprehensive. Our recent innovation includes having a Better Life Café where members can invite their friends on a weekend to our center to enjoy a healthy meal and...
meet others interested in health and wellness. An Adventist health professional shares a 15-minute health talk in a casual and relaxed environment. We also encourage seekers to join our CARE groups, especially those that focus on health. We call one of our health CARE groups, “The Daniel Challenge,” where, in applying the NEWSTART principles, they would see their lives transformed physically, mentally, and spiritually over time. A young Buddhist student who has an interest in weight loss joined the group and today she is a baptized Christian actively promoting the health message.

**Conclusion**

When our small core group was to commence soul winning in the city, we did not know where to begin. We were pointed to books, DVDs, and Web sites on church planting and church growth. We could have fumbled along and gone with a “trial and error” approach recommended in the many books, DVDs, or Web sites.

However, we chose to adopt the blueprint that Ellen White gave us, and we rejoice because it is working. We praise God for what He is doing with our community at Gateway. Over the years, we have been able to share our practical training with hundreds of churches worldwide, as well as via our online training school, www.rightlytrained.com.

“We are standing on the very borders of the eternal world. We have no time to lose. There should be a well-organized plan for the employment of workers to go into all our churches, large and small, to instruct the members how to labor for the upbuilding of the church and also for unbelievers. Those who labor in visiting the churches should give the brethren and sisters instruction in practical methods of doing missionary work.”

We need “instruction in practical methods” of doing missionary work. By turning the inspired blueprint to proven practical methods, we have seen the Lord’s blessings. Our humble desire focuses on the gospel to be carried to the world and especially to the large urban cities around the world.

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1  www.adventistmission.org.  
4  www.revivalandreformation.org.  
5  CARE = Christ’s Attitude Reflected in Everyone; it is an evangelistic small group ministry.  
7  White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, 117.
People or projects: *Lessons on connecting with missing members*

I am not a project!” the woman glowered at Samantha, a member of our missing members ministry team. “Don’t bother me anymore!” With that, she shut the door. Samantha stood for a moment on the cold, concrete steps and then slowly walked away with tears in her eyes. Those same tears sprang up as she shared her experience with our group the next Sabbath after church.

Samantha replayed her encounter. “She asked me why people from the church were coming by each week. I explained that we formed a new ministry called Project Love to reach out to members we haven’t seen in church and—” Then the lights came on. “Maybe the name of our ministry made her feel like a project. How could I have better handled this situation?”

Reaching missing members is a challenging prospect in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some estimates indicate that there are well over one million former members in the North American Division alone. Like Samantha, many pastors and members wonder how to better handle the hurdles of connecting with those who were once part of the church family. Not all doors are closed, some open up.

After Samantha shared with our group, we knelt and prayed for this missing family member and the local people on our church records who we had not seen in a long time. We also spent time discussing how to connect with those who quit coming to church. Since that time, I have learned a few lessons on why people leave the church and how to reach out to this extended part of our church family. Here are three factors to especially remember.

**People are not projects**

Samantha did not intend to communicate to the woman at the door that she was a project. Yet we sometimes can unknowingly reach out in ways that are less relational and more objective. I love to be organized, and our ministry of touching missing members over a ten-week period was well planned. Flowcharts and handouts have their places, but these are no substitutes for having caring hearts for those who have chosen to stop coming to church. Ellen G. White encourages, “All who engage in this personal labor should be just as careful not to become mechanical in their manner of working.”

Nobody wants to be a project. You cannot efficiently love others. Caring about people must spring from within and supersedes all the proficient, educated, and strategic plans. There is a place for systems, but methods sometimes get in the way of simply looking into the eyes of another and saying, “I care about you.”

Pastors and members with gifts of organization are reticent to set aside formulas for getting the job done, but I have discovered too often that people who no longer attend church can be wary of structured visits and are skeptical about ministries to “pull them back” into the fold. Relationships take time. As Don Gray, a minister and teacher on reaching missing members, used to say, the longer they have been gone, the more contacts you will probably need to make to reconnect.

If we are going to reach missing members, we must pray for hearts that genuinely care. We must guide our members to show sympathy in a way that does not attempt to “fix” members who are gone. We would do better to think deeply about how to effectively love others and not try to be efficient or successful. The latter focuses more on us. Self-sacrificing love focuses on the needs of others.

**Whose problem is it?**

I cringed as one of the members of my church spoke about reaching missing members. “Pastor, it’s a free...”
country. If they want to leave, then that’s their choice. I think we should just leave them alone.” Negligence is one of the key problems in reaching backsliders. Christ certainly did not take this approach with those who left the fold (Luke 15:4). Paul wrote, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10, NKJV).

A simple exercise I have conducted during seminars on reaching missing members is to have people raise their hands if they know of a member who does not attend church. Almost everyone responds. Then I ask, “How many of you have family members who are patterns as to why people leave. Even though some missing members will tell you upfront that the reason they left was over some teaching of the church, there is often a hurt underneath.

These pains often come from typical life events that just happen. People graduate from school, they move, they have children, or lose their jobs. The most common event connected to people quitting church is divorce. A broken marriage is messy and people do not always want to have to explain things to church members who ask, especially to members who want to probe. It becomes easier just to not show up at church.

To effectively reach the postmodern generation, we must return to the basics: living out biblical principles, developing authentic friendships, caring for practical needs, and giving new disciples an opportunity to believe through belonging.

not attending church?” It is common for more than 75 percent to raise their hands. Plenty of pain and concern exist in the household of faith. This is not just about theory—it is about family.

People in the church can sometimes look for tidy ways to explain why members leave. Many say it is for doctrinal or spiritual reasons, but this can be a form of reinforcing their own status. In other words, “I’m OK because I’m still in the church. They have a problem because they left.” But this self-serving explanation takes all responsibility off the member who stays and puts it on the one who leaves. It really makes us blind to what we may have contributed to the other’s leaving.

Though you cannot put every former member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church into the same box, there are The relational reasons people leave church are most often not the fault of anybody at church, in an active sense. Occasionally, someone will blame the pastor or another member, often as a way to justify his or her reason for quitting church. The biggest way the church fails is in how people handle the person’s leaving. Some try to determine who they can blame for the person’s leaving; but that is typically a waste of time and energy. Others query returning members, which can come across (not intentionally) as judging them. But most who quietly slip out are simply ignored.

I once accidentally visited a young couple who had missed church for more than a month. I was the associate pastor of a large church and had not really noticed their absence. I happened to drop by and they warmly welcomed me into their home and “knew” the reason for my visit—to see why they were not at church. Actually, I did not know this until we sat down and started talking. They were frustrated that the nominating committee did not ask them to help out anywhere. They wanted to be involved but were overlooked. We immediately plugged them into a ministry that fit their gifts and passions, and they quickly became involved in the church.

We need to carefully assess our own motives for reaching out as well. We may not be aware of what is prompting us to try to connect with them. In the Arbinger Institute’s book The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict, the authors explain how a self-justifying spirit can make us unaware of how hurtful we can be toward others. “The deepest way in which we are right or wrong . . . is in our way of being toward others. I can be right on the surface—in my behavior or positions—while being entirely mistaken beneath, in my way of being.”

Teach people to withhold statements and not bring up why they left. If people want to bring up the reason they left, let them on their own terms. Otherwise, simply show compassion for whatever they might be going through in life. People commonly drop out because of the loss of a job. This can be an embarrassing situation to most members, and a person can feel like a complete failure. Let us be sensitive to how we handle these life events when talking with former members.
The greatest skill

All the research on reaching missing members could be boiled down to one skill that trumps them all, and that is empathetic listening. While there are many other qualities we can learn about when connecting with members who have slipped away (how to find them, your first contact, when to invite them back to church, providing safe environments for them to grow), nothing is as important as listening with care. Try to put yourself in their shoes.

“He was not treated fairly!” a father of a teen once told me. The father was a nonattending member of our church who was angry and hurt when his son was kicked out of church school. “The principal just didn’t like him.” His wife had not been attending much either. The incident happened a couple years before I came.

Though I knew the basic story from reputable sources, I simply listened. There were moments when I wanted to interrupt and “edit” his take on the situation. But I said, “That would be difficult. I’m sorry for how it all turned out.” I did not totally agree with him but showed understanding. I let him know my desire to help in any way I could, though his son was now too old to attend our school. In the end, it helped create an avenue for them to reconnect with the church, including the son. At the time, I felt my listening had not done any good. I underestimated the power of showing interest.

Because most people who are no longer in church have a painful story to tell, we would create more pathways back to church for people if we acknowledge their hurts, even if we question the facts of some difficult church event. Better to simply say, “I am so sorry. That obviously would not represent God or the church.” There are times it would be appropriate to add, “On behalf of the church, I want to apologize.” Such care can help heal a wound that may be decades old.

Hopelessness is a key marker that former members cross on their pathway out of the church. When life events happen and members feel discouraged, we find it not uncommon to question the value of spiritual things. Christians can start to think, The church seems pointless. Nobody really cares. When this mind-set begins to take hold, they are on track for dropping out. If loving members intercede by recognizing difficult events in members’ lives and show compassion, they demonstrate that the church is not useless. They show that God’s family really does care. Listening communicates love.

Here is one more thing pastors might keep in mind when listening to missing members. As representatives of the church, we may find people’s anger boiling out and spilling all over us. It is easy to take these expressions of hatred personally. I recall one elderly man shaking his finger at me in anger. He had not been to church for many years because, he said, “God allowed my daughter to die in a car accident a week before she was to be married. How can I worship a God like that?” How tempting it is, in these circumstances, to theologize. I simply sat there with tears in my eyes and said, “I am so sorry.” Pastors represent God and sometimes people unload their pain on clergy who personify the Lord (albeit imperfectly!).

Not for the fainthearted

Our ministry project to reach missing members focused on touching the lives of ten families. Though we certainly made mistakes (we did not use the name project anymore) and needed to spend more time learning to listen to the hearts of missing members, we did have some success. We started our contacts in a very low-key way and shared loaves of bread, gifts made by the children at the church school, and other simple items. As the ten weeks progressed, we began to share appropriate literature. Then we invited these people out for a meal or to a church social. After ten weeks of contact, we invited them back to church. Three families responded positively.

One of these families had fallen out with another family in the church over a rental property. The two parties never worked the issue out until one of the volunteers from our ministry offered to meet with them. In this case, the presence of a third party brought healing. After talking for a couple of hours, the two couples prayed together and then hugged each other. There were tears. The following Sabbath they actually sat together in church. I realize some situations are far more complex, but one thing occurred to me as I look back on this story: this couple actually wanted to come back to church. They just needed to resolve this conflict.

Conclusion

I have discovered over the years basic patterns among churches that effectively reach missing members. First, there is usually a core group who are dedicated to this ministry. These members have often gone through training on reaching former Adventists. They especially learn and practice how to listen empathically to others with nonjudgmental attitudes. These caring groups are intentional in not only finding missing members but also in their awareness of who has quit coming to church.

In our Project Love ministry, I really hoped all ten families would return. After years of seeking to connect with former members, I now realize that to have one-third of them reconnect with the church should be considered an excellent response. We rejoiced at seeing these members back in church and learned that people are forgiving of our fumbling efforts to show we care. It was less important to have the structure of our program nailed down and more critical to demonstrate genuine Christlike love to those who were once active in the church family. We learned that people are more important than projects.}

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

1 A pseudonym.
2 Monte Sahlin, North American Division Office of Information and Research, Silver, MD, 1994. Current estimates continue to affirm these numbers. An updated research project is currently underway.
NY13: A comprehensive evangelistic initiative

NY13, which stands for “New York 2013,” consists of a comprehensive evangelistic initiative designed to involve each church administrator, departmental director, pastor, and church member in the greater New York metropolitan area. This initiative involves much more than a single event, envisioning an ongoing process. The Atlantic Union, Columbia Union, and five conferences (Greater New York, Northeastern, New Jersey, Allegheny East, and Southern New England), comprising the Greater New York and New Jersey area, have united their efforts to reach the 20 million people living in the this huge metropolitan area. NY13 involves varied outreach approaches including personal Bible studies, small groups, health, family life, youth ministries, literature ministry, community services, lay evangelistic meetings, and much more. NY13 envisions each church as a dynamic soul-winning center in which pastors have a passionate commitment to reaching lost people and church members are equipped and trained for service.

During the weekend of January 18–20, 2013, Ted Wilson, the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, along with his wife, Nancy, and an accompanying team, met with pastors, leading laypeople, and other church administrators to develop comprehensive plans to reach the city. In addition to a major convocation, the team conducted lay training events throughout the metropolitan area. More than 500 people packed the Linden Seventh-day Adventist Church in Queens to attend Ernestine Finley’s “Light Your World for God” seminar on how to become an effective lay Bible instructor. Each participant received a witnessing workbook and a set of “Search for Certainty” Bible lessons. Attendees actively participated in the seminar as they practiced giving Bible studies to one another. Mrs. Finley challenged each participant to allow God to use them to study the Bible with at least one person and lead that person to Jesus.

Denzil McNeilus, a banker and active lay leader from Dodge Center, Minnesota, along with Robert Costa, associate ministerial secretary for evangelism for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, led out in a “New Beginnings” seminar to train lay preachers. The church was packed to overflowing with eager participants desirous of learning how to use their homes and small auditoriums to conduct lay-led evangelistic meetings. Commenting on the enthusiasm of the attendees, McNeilus said, “I am convinced that there are thousands of laypeople waiting to be challenged to do something significant for the Lord. They just need to be trained and equipped.”

Mark Finley, the assistant to the president of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists, taught a class on how to organize home Bible study groups based on the book of Daniel. More than 130 people attended the small-group training seminar and committed to organize 70 small groups. In addition to the lay training events, more than 1,400 youth were challenged to be part of something great for God and use their influence to touch their friends with the gospel during NY13.

During NY13, approximately 400 evangelistic meetings will be conducted in the metropolitan New York area, involving hundreds of churches and thousands of church members. Pastors are leading their congregations in prayer vigils, earnestly petitioning heaven for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The following gives a summary of plans and events thus far: laypeople giving Bible studies, small groups organized, health and family life ministries launched, literature distributed, young people actively involved, lay evangelistic meetings planned, evangelists and pastors from every division of the world attend an international school of evangelism in New York in June. The Holy Spirit is moving. Pastor Don King, the Atlantic Union Conference president, challenged administrators, pastors, and members to be actively involved in this massive outreach for Christ, stating, “NY13 is a united approach bringing us all together to focus on reaching people in this great metropolitan area for Jesus.” Pastors Daniel Honore and Earl Knight, presidents of the Northeastern and Greater New York Conferences, respectively, electrified the audience as they announced that each of their conferences had committed US$1,000,000 to the NY13 evangelistic initiative. Honore shared the story of a lady, whom he did not know, who walked into his office the week before and told him she was impressed to do something significant for NY13 and handed him a check for $20,000.

This evangelistic outreach in New York City is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Mission to the Cities initiative. Church leaders at every level of church organization have identified 630 major cities worldwide upon which to focus their evangelistic energies and resources in the next three years. [Mark A. Finley] ☁
End Child Abuse campaign releases multilanguage digital kit

Launched by Adventist Risk Management and a group of Seventh-day Adventist denominational partners, the Seven Campaign to end child abuse has prepared a digital kit that is available at the campaign Web site (www.theseven-campaign.com). The digital kit includes information and message points about the campaign, a petition form, logos, and posters, all of which are free to download. The digital kit is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

Use this kit to raise awareness about the issue of child abuse at your local church and school and to reach out to your community. Encourage your members to become educated about this issue and to take active steps to make a difference. One of the banners on the campaign Web site reads, “The best things in life are free! Use your voice, your life, your influence to make a positive difference.”

Visitors to the campaign Web site are encouraged to (digitally) sign a promise to take action. The promise says the following:

- Tell seven people how to stop abuse now, by sharing the resources.
- Speak out against abuse—don’t remain indifferent.
- Advocate for change with my voice and vote.
- Mobilize my peers.
- Lead by example.
- Express my support creatively through the virtual gallery.
- Share the Seven Campaign with seven people.

The Seven Campaign is a grassroots campaign that aims to raise awareness and mobilize church members and supporters to take a stand on the issue of child abuse. [Adventist Risk Management]

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The 7 Campaign is a global campaign to raise awareness and advocate for an end to the abuse of children around the world

How can you help stop child abuse?

Use your voice
your influence
your life
Make a promise to be the difference

End Child Abuse

Visit www.thesevencampaign.com
American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists

Francis Asbury was the dominant force in shaping the fledgling Methodist movement into America’s largest Protestant denomination. As such, he is one of the most significant figures in the history of American religion and, by extension, American culture.

Scorned by society, Asbury found a new spiritual family in the Methodist movement. Although never considered much of a preacher, he was apparently gifted while, at the same time, dispensable enough to be sent at the age of 26 to America as one of the movement’s first missionaries to America (44).

The genius of Asbury was his ability to recognize American Methodism as a separate movement with its own democratic pulses (72). This, in itself, was fraught with challenges. When he first arrived, the movement was largely stagnant, with two preachers focused on climbing the proverbial social ladder. Asbury pushed to implement John Wesley’s itinerant model of circuits. As he did so, the movement flourished among the common people in America (in fact, Methodism became known as “a poor person’s religion”). Ultimately, American Methodism would cut its own umbilical cord with the main movement in England due to the American Revolution. Although Asbury was suspected as a Tory, by the time the conflict was over, he emerged as the de facto head of American Methodism.

Perhaps Asbury’s greatest contribution, while he was alive, was in establishing and maintaining a system of itinerant preachers. He did not ask others to commit to what he was not willing to do himself. Asbury believed that spirituality was proportionate to spiritual discipline (79, 80). He maintained a grueling travel schedule to the end of his life. He never owned more than a horse and what he could carry on his person. He gave all of his money away. In fact, he never settled or married—one of the greatest fears he had for aspiring ministers. Yet his greatest talent was in his ability to connect with the ordinary person in his or her home. Through personal interaction and adherence to Methodist discipline, he earned the trust of the people, and they loved him for it (280).

The “class meeting”—based on the earlier Moravian bands—became the basic building block of American Methodism and, in its later form, set the precedent for Adventist worship. Later, Asbury established conferences and even a general conference that provided a polity for American Methodism, and the parallel continues, albeit somewhat nuanced, in Adventism. By the time Ellen White was born in 1827, the American Methodist movement had become the largest denomination in America, along with a common language and set of experiences that testified to Methodism’s transforming power.

Asbury could easily be passed over in the annals of church history, yet my fellow pastors will be all the richer for taking the time to make his acquaintance through this biography. As a pastor, when I read this book, I was inspired by his life. His struggles with health, church conflict, and even depression give me hope. The issues he grappled with are very much real today. I was struck with how God was able to use a very ordinary person in an extraordinary way.

Reviewed by Michael W. Campbell, PhD, assistant professor of historical and theological studies at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.
Some years ago, while I was working at a lifestyle center, a guest arrived with prostate cancer that had already spread to his bone. Medically, there was nothing more that could be done for him. In the preceding weeks, his medical records were reviewed by our staff. We could not promise him any miracle cures. Yet, he still came.

An anointing was scheduled for the next day. Jim confessed his mistakes, asked the Lord for forgiveness, and requested healing according to the Lord’s will. The service was short, sweet, and very meaningful.

Several days later, Jim went back to his home, having finished his program. About two weeks later, he died. Shortly after the funeral, we received a phone call from Jim’s wife. She wanted to thank us for all we had done for him. Although they had just buried Jim, she ended her call with these words: “He was healed during his stay with you!”

How could that be? Just a few days after Jim’s death his wife was saying he had been healed during his stay at our facility. Through this experience, I learned a valuable lesson in healing.

We so often think that if people just eradicate the bad habits of life such as smoking, drinking, sedentary living, or poor diet that they will get better. Yet changing all those habits and more may not bring true healing, for we are more than physical beings. One of the greatest robbers of joy and peace can be the unwillingness to forgive or be forgiven. Harboring bitterness, anger, or resentment can be a deadly habit to our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Only Christ can treat those maladies.

David I. Levy, a neurosurgeon, in his book Gray Matter eloquently described the impact that prayer and forgiveness can have on the process of healing the body and mind. This captivating book is a must read for all pastors, physicians, and health care workers.

When people come to health education programs, do we focus only on the harmful habits in their lives, telling them to start exercising, eat better, and quit smoking? Or do we offer to pray with them, listening carefully to their responses, and encouraging them to forgive those who have hurt them, and seek the forgiveness of those they have hurt?

Doing this may be more important to their healing—and much harder—than teaching them to exercise more, make better food choices, and quit health-destroying habits.

1 A pseudonym.
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