Dear Lexie,

Called

The "Called - NAD Pastoral Family Convention" was held in Austin Texas, July 5-8, 2015. Over 5,000 pastors, pastor's spouses and children gathered for what was an inspiring, encouraging, edifying, and uplifting event. For several months leading up to this Convention, the idea of being "called" had been on my mind. What does it mean to be "called"? Who is "called"? What are we "called" to?

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July 18, 2015

Speaker:
Pastor Gerry Lopez
"Birds and the Bread"

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Sligo VBS Praise Team

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Remember the Alamo!

General Conference 2015 in some ways reminded me of Christmas. Its anticipation was greater than its reality, though unlike Christmas the after effects are longer lasting. The circles in which I move hardly do two or more people come together without the subject of the women's ordination vote at the General Conference session coming up.

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The “Called – NAD Pastoral Family Convention” was held in Austin, Texas, July 5-8, 2015. Over 5,000 pastors, pastor’s spouses and children gathered for what was an inspiring, encouraging, edifying, and uplifting event. For several months leading up to this Convention, the idea of being “called” had been on my mind. What does it mean to be “called”? Who is “called”? What are we “called” to?

Usually when we speak of the “call” we are referring to pastors. We seem to liken the pastor’s “call” to that of a prophet in the Old Testament. The interesting fact is that in the New Testament the Greek word we translate “pastor” appears only once.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12).

What I have always found interesting and compelling in the above text is both the work of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher and the work of the people (in other versions, saints). For our purposes I will focus on the pastor and the people (members of the church). The pastor is “called” to equip people for the works of service. The people (members) are “called” to do the works for service which will build up the body of Christ.

One “call” is not above or more important than the other “call”. The “call” is for the edifying of the body of Christ, which is done through various gifts in various ways.

1 Corinthians clarifies this idea further. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each member of God’s body. Through these gifts, each member of the body is “called” to work for the edification of the church, the loving of our community, and the dissemination of the Gospel throughout the world. This “call” is not to the pastor alone, but to every person who bears the name of Christ – to every “Christian”.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines…..Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:4-28 NIV)

Some have erroneously come to believe that only the pastor is “called” to ministry, in fact, each member of Christ’s family is “called” to ministry. It is the same “call”, by the same Spirit, for the same purpose, it only manifests itself in various ways. The “call” is to expand the kingdom of Christ on earth. How we do it varies from person to person; its
manifestation varies based on giftings, temperament, talents, and personality. The Pastor, in our context, is “called” to church ministry, to expand Christ's kingdom through training and equipping members of the church; the doctor, the teacher, the janitor, the bus driver, the lawyer, the stay at home mom… are all “called” to the same degree in their own context, using the God-given gifts and talents for the united purpose of expanding Christ's Kingdom.

I pray that each of us recognize the “call” in our lives. We are, after all, the priesthood of all believers, here for one purpose – the expansion of Christ's Kingdom.

Pranitha Fielder

Tagged with → Christian • church • spiritual gifts
REMEMBER THE ALAMO!

dmcfarlane

General Conference 2015 in some ways reminded me of Christmas. Its anticipation was greater than its reality, though unlike Christmas the after effects are longer lasting. In the circles that I move hardly do two or more people come together without the subject of the women’s ordination vote at the General Conference session coming up. Thirty-five years ago I most likely would have been among the 1,381 who voted no to women’s ordination by Division. I would have considered it part of my duty to uphold ‘truth’ and put the ‘liberal and worldly North Americans, Europeans and Australians’ in their place. Some might have described me as a “Crusading Seventh-day Adventist.” My church was the only religious organization on earth on which divine favor was bestowed. I was under orders to go out and compel non-members to become part of my church. Those who didn’t were condemned to eternal death. Not only was my church right and everyone else wrong, the version of Adventism that I was taught was the only legitimate and acceptable expression of “the faith.”

My narrow vision of the church changed rapidly when I was invited to work in the United Kingdom. On arrival from Jamaica, I saw practices that were alien to this enforcer of Adventist orthodoxy. For example, I was amazed to see male church officers wearing wedding bands and in no uncertain terms I requested, as pastor, that those ‘symbols of the world’ be discarded.

The summer of 1981 had a telling effect on my ministry and changed forever how I view people, my ministry and some of the traditions in my church. It was the first year of my MA program at Newbold College. A diverse group of students from various European countries and elsewhere made up the cohort. Chatting with fellow student, Terry Jacobsen, a charming Norwegian, over supper one evening, he declared that he frequently went skiing on a Sabbath afternoon. I could hardly control myself. Righteous indignation boiled up in me and I shouted, “You do what?”

Terry remained calm and asked, “Don, do you go walking on a Sabbath afternoon with your family?” “Yes,” I said, “but that’s different from skiing.” “You see, Don, for a large portion of the year in Norway, if I must go walking with my family on a Sabbath afternoon, I have no alternative but to go on skis.” He needn’t say another word. I got it!

Although we belong to one church and have certain shared beliefs and hopes, the expression of Adventism in different parts of the world cannot be the same. To do so would be to create an artificially constructed edifice which by nature has a number of fault lines that naturally will lead to the collapse of the building. Members in different parts of the world must be trusted to relate to God in ways that are relevant to their particular situation.

San Antonio’s decision on women’s ordination was an attempt to have the church march to the same drumbeat. While a common understanding of our core doctrines, such as the nature of man, the Sabbath, salvation and the second coming is essential for global cohesion, a shared identity and a joint purpose in mission, the imposition of the cultural nuances found in some parts of the world on other parts of the world can only lead to fragmentation eventually and the disenfranchisement of large sections of the global church community.
“My church has left me but I am not leaving it,” is a statement that I have heard with increasing frequency since San Antonio. These are people who love the church, some have even served abroad as missionaries. Increasingly, they are feeling marginalized in their church and sense that they are being asked to go walking on a Sabbath afternoon in Norway in the depth of winter without skis.

“The gospel is above culture,” is a phrase that is glibly thrown around by some but to try and separate culture from the experience of the gospel is analogous to taking a fish out of water and expect it to survive and be as active as when it was in the water. It is going to die unless re-immersed. Sherwood G Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers in their book, “Ministering Cross-Culturally,” say “Culture is the … label for the sum of the distinctive characteristics of a people’s way of life. All human behavior occurs within particular cultures, within socially defined contexts.” Worship is meaningful only within the context of one’s own culture. Another way of saying this is, there is no worship without culture. No amount of preaching, exhortation and voted action can change this reality.

I was privileged to serve the church in the British Isles for thirty-three years, twenty-seven of which were as an administrator, ranging from conference secretary to Union president. The United Kingdom is one of the few places where the composition of the membership of the church is in reverse proportion to the composition of the population. In the ethnically-diverse British church, I quickly learned that if the church was to survive on all fronts and not become a mono-cultural institution that bore little relevance to the wider public, the majority (immigrants from various parts of the world) in the church had to protect the interests of the minority (native British and European).

The political power of the Seventh-day Adventist Church now lies with members in the Southern hemisphere, who account for more than ninety percent of global membership. It is clear that no major change can take place within the church unless leaders and members in the Southern hemisphere desire such a change. At the same time, unless the majority in our global church recognize, appreciate, celebrate and defend the expressions of faith as found in places like Europe and North America, it is conceivable that Adventism could become an irrelevancy in these countries. The church would appear to be more interested in conducting a dialogue with itself and preserving certain traditions than it is in engaging in a meaningful and constructive manner with a society drowning in hopelessness.

While some will no doubt remember the Alamo…Dome with fondness and as the place where the church was kept united, others will recall it with tears and resignation as the place where unity in diversity was put aside for uniformity. In the long run this will prove inimical to genuine unity and mission advancement. It is possible that the unity which church leaders were trying to preserve in San Antonio is the very thing that has been damaged. Leaders need to decide how that which has been broken will be mended and how those who now feel disenfranchised can regain their sense of identity and purpose.

Tagged with → adventism and culture