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Creative Use of Media Makes the Difference in Croatia and Slovenia

23 March 2012 Zagreb, Croatia [Darko Kovacevic, tedNEWS] A hundred fifty participants gathered on 17-18 March 2012 in Zagreb, Croatia for the media conference organised by the Adriatic Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The main purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibilities in social media, photography, writings and video production. All the participants at the media conference agreed that media has a power and has already made an impact on the society which creates the values that people follow. Therefore we as a church need to be there and share the ancient values found in the Bible using this medium.

The main speaker of the conference was Dr Miroslav Pujic, Communication & Media Ministries Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Trans-European region, based in St. Albans, United Kingdom. He was talking about the power of social media and the paradigm shift that took place in our society, as the result of the internet influence. “Internet is the primary medium of the postmodern generation. There is a lot of information there and if we are no there, somebody else will be’, says Dr Pujic and concluded “therefore, our duty is to be there and share the story of what God has done for us, including the Biblical values which are very relevant in this time of confusion.”

Internet Ministry initiative, known as LIFEconnect, was explained to the audience by Dr Pujic and Mirjana Kicusic, experts in Social Media Development and Marketing. All delegates were invited to join the initiative and become digital missionaries (DMs) that is now available in seventeen languages (www.lifeconnect.info).

The participants also had the opportunity to listen to other presenters such as Mr Robert Zuber, a TV journalist from Croatia, who was explaining how to write news and articles for church publications; Toni Hnojcik, eminent photographer in Croatia who explored the topic of ‘The Power of Image’ (photography); the aspects of public and media relations that would help church to foster the positive image in the society done by Kristina Laco, the leading PR expert in Croatia. Dr Drago Cmuk, the expert in the area of new technology and social media, was talking about the mind-set of ‘digital aborigines’.

Dragana and Frederic Uvalic, tedMEDIA filmmakers taught the participants about producing short, attractive video clips for internet ministry. Their expertise and professionalism was highly appreciated by the participants.

“Today, more than ever, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Croatia and Slovenia wants to pursue the strong usage of media in the mission of the church” says Branko Bistrovic, President of the Adriatic Union, which Croatia and Slovenia are part of, and he continues: “Our purpose is to integrate photography, video, audio, music, graphic design and other creative forms of digital technology into the efforts of the Church and to live out our Vision and Mission.”

For more information about the work of the church in Croatia and Slovenia, please visit the website: www.adventisti.hr

Ralf Poehler, Theology Professor from Germany, answers...
"I Need You, God!" - Mission Conference in Skoplje

22 March 2012, Skoplje, Macedonia

Laszlo Gallusz, Adventist Mission Director at the SEEUC, sees an opportunity for Macedonian church to grow after this event: “The Macedonian Mission has a dedicated and visionary leadership, who faces numerous challenges in an Orthodox country with significant percentage of Muslims. However, to see hundreds of church members re-dedicating their life to Jesus and seeking to plant news small groups shifts the focus from these problems to new opportunities.”

To find out more about the work of church in Macedonian Mission, please click here. [tedNEWS]

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Moving Conversion Story

22 March 2012 Leknes, Norway [Tor Tjeransen, tedNEWS] During a weekend on contextualization March 16-18 the audience in the Leknes Seventh-day Church in North Norway heard the moving story of Richard Elofer’s conversion from the Jewish faith to Adventism.

Richard had his early years in Morocco but his family had to move to France. There Richard went to a rabbinic school to strengthen his Jewish convictions. Not long after Richard’s celebration of his Bar Mitzwa he visited a class mate from his class in the state school. The friend happened to be an Adventist. Richard was very impressed with these Christians who celebrated the seventh day Sabbath. Every time he visited the home of his Adventist friend, they read the Bible together. Richard saw that the Adventist understanding was correct according to the Bible he had received.

At nineteen Richard received Jesus. It was a shock to his family. “My dad mourned over me as if I was dead,” Richard told the audience in Leknes. His mother was not allowed to talk to him anymore. But the story did not end there. Richard Elofer told how he had been led to witness about the Messiah to his own people. For many, many years this has been his passion.

“For visitors and members of the Leknes church Richard’s story was a moving testimony of how much some people are willing to sacrifice in order to follow Jesus,” said Arne Kristian Andersen, the local pastor.

Richard Elofer has for many years led the Adventist church in Israel and has a long and varied experience in witnessing in a way that is sensitive to the Jewish context. For the members of the Leknes church there are many parallels to their efforts in reaching their local community for Jesus.

During worship service on Sabbath morning pastor Elofer led out in a service that was very different to the ordinary worship style in the Leknes church. Richard wore both a kippah, the small cap that is mandatory to wear for Orthodox Jews, and a tallit, the Jewish prayer shawl. The service exemplified how Adventist worship may be sensitive to the Jewish tradition.

For Elofer the event in North Norway was not about establishing a new Jewish Adventist congregation in the area. There are not enough Jews in North Norway for that. But it was important to raise awareness of the work the Adventist church is doing in relation to Jews. “It was a privilege for me to support the local pastor in his ministry in the community showing the openness of the Seventh-day Adventist church towards other faiths” said pastor Elofer. [tedNEWS]
Quality?

Moving Conversion Story

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Emotional Intelligence: The Most Important Leadership Quality?

Arriving in a new district or taking up a new position in an organisation is always fraught with anticipation, uncertainty and worry. This was particularly true when my husband took a pastoral position in an area with which he was not familiar. Shortly upon arrival, one well-meaning church member offered him very insightful advice. He said: ‘You cannot tell the people from our region what to do; you can only invite them to follow you’. What are the leaders’ characteristics that will inspire others to follow?

There is no shortage of literature identifying the most pertinent qualities that every good leader ought to have. We are told that amongst other traits leaders should possess cognitive strength, analytical reasoning, technical skills, inspirational motivation, vision, integrity, fairness, confidence and emotional intelligence. It is to be expected that a highly intelligent pastor or head of a department who oozes with confidence will generate respect from his congregation or his team. However, there are some indicators to suggest that it is in fact emotional intelligence, or as some termed it emotional literacy, that separates ordinary leaders from those capable of great things. What is more, it has been suggested that an ‘emotionally illiterate life’ that is often accompanied with emotional numbness and inability to respond to the emotional needs of others, is a significant shortcoming of those called to lead others.

Emotional intelligence, a concept that emerged in the 80s, has gradually entered into the vocabulary of psychologists, counsellors, life coaches and other professionals and it seems to be here to stay. However, what is emotional intelligence or emotional literacy? One of many available definitions suggests emotional intelligence to be ‘effective awareness, control and management of our own emotions and awareness and understanding of other people’. This human quality has captured the imagination of researchers resulting in what appears to be a convincing argument for the benefits of emotional sensitivity whilst pointing to the shortcomings in the case of its absence.

The far-reaching consequence of limited, or even non-existent emotional awareness is documented by an evaluation of the leadership qualities of past American presidents. Following the analysis of public communication, organisational capacity, political skill, vision, cognitive style and emotional intelligence of eleven presidents the authors acknowledge that ‘in the world of imagination it is possible to envisage a cognitively and emotionally intelligent chief executive, who happens also to be an inspiring public communicator, a capable White House organiser, and the possessor of exceptional political skill and vision. In the real world, human imperfection is inevitable, but some imperfections are more disabling than others.’ Having identified several presidents who despite some noteworthy historical achievements are responsible for ‘the most unhappy episodes of the twentieth century’ the authors reach a bold conclusion: ‘Beware the presidential contender who lacks emotional intelligence. In its absence all else may turn to ashes’.

This strong statement is not surprising given that an absence of emotional insight appears to have a profound effect not only on the leaders’ ability to understand his or her co-workers, but it is also responsible for the inaccurate appraisal of self. Daniel Goleman identified self-awareness as the first quality possessed by emotionally literate leaders. This includes ‘having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives.’ What is it that is making me happy, fulfilled and content? What, when and who brings the worst out in me? These are just some of the questions that need answering in an attempt to become an emotionally aware individual. Those people, the author continues ‘are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest with themselves and others.’

A good starting point in becoming in tune with self and others is a systematic appraisal of one’s strengths and weaknesses. This soul-searching exercise is not about naming what I should or ought to be good at; instead, it seeks to identify the areas in which I do particularly well, the skills I accomplish with ease, and the tasks that capture my imagination. It is about the input that generates positive feedbacks from those I know are honest with me. Having identified all of my strengths, my limitations need careful and sincere consideration. Which aspects of my job make me happy, fulfilled and content? What, when and who brings the worst out in me? These are just some of the questions that need answering in an attempt to become an emotionally aware individual. Those people, the author continues ‘are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest with themselves and others.’
Emotional Intelligence: The Most Important Leadership Quality? | TED...

An additional benefit of being aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses might result in increased confidence as well as in the readiness to acknowledge one's own limitations. I have recently been asked to teach and work closely with a young, sharp and very intelligent scholar who is leading some 'cutting edge' work in his area of expertise. It would be dishonest of me to omit the fact that I was concerned about being intimidated by him, but quite the opposite happened. In addition to his enthusiasm and his superior handling of knowledge, his readiness to freely identify areas which he apparently 'knew little about', and his modesty about his expertise made him not only approachable but also stimulated learning. This is not surprising because genuine humility, not unlike empathy, to be discussed next, is a quality that has enabling properties.

Empathy has been acknowledged as an important dimension of emotional intelligence that, whilst most easily recognisable, is frequently absent from the repertoire of essential leadership skills. And yet, an empathetic leader might be able to prevent the team and individuals from becoming overwhelmed, disillusioned, and even depressed in the course of duty. He or she will not remain silent about the professional challenges or personal hardships his co-workers are going through. Showing genuine interest in his or her workforce will be an integral aspect of the leadership style employed by an emotionally literate leader. Empathy discussed here however is not an 'un-businesslike' sentimental style of leadership, but a leadership capable of taking notice of employees circumstances, feelings and ability 'in the process of making intelligent decisions'. These leaders are in tune with 'the messages beneath the words being spoken'. This will also include unequivocal respect for others as well as commitment to understanding the way culture impacts upon human interactions.

As a social work academic I am frequently involved in attempting to teach students to be both aware of their own feelings as well as being sensitive to the needs of those they will be working with. Positive regard for every individual alongside a related set of traditional values that, amongst others, includes acceptance, a non-judgmental attitude and a respect for people are deeply embedded in the knowledge base and skills passed on to social work students. Despite the noble intentions and genuine motivation of most students, this approach to training often feels as though one is trying to teach budding social workers to create a beautiful master-piece by 'painting by numbers'. As a Christian who teaches at a State University I often question whether it is indeed possible to develop those qualities through education and training alone? Could it be that identified leadership techniques, including the emotional intelligence, might remain just a mechanical exercise without drawing on the power available to those who have a meaningful spiritual life?

There is no doubt that many Adventist leaders are known for their excellent leadership that includes the vast repertoire of skills expected of an effective Christian leader. Equally, as most leaders know, in the 'hustle and bustle' of pursuing the common goal, it is very easy to overlook one's own emotional needs alongside the needs of co-workers. I have attempted to argue that a leadership that is committed to developing the emotional intelligence that includes keen knowledge of self and dedication to the understanding of others has the potential to overcome this omission. I would like to conclude by acknowledging that emotional intelligence that draws from Christ's example and uses his power in like to conclude by acknowledging that emotional intelligence that draws from Christ's example and uses his power in achieving this goal will give real meaning to this important leadership skill. After all, He was the ultimate leader who only needed to say: 'Follow me', and the rest is history. [tedNEWS]

7 Ibid.

Dr Lidija Godina, Senior Lecturer, Applied Social Sciences at University of Bedfordshire

Leadership Development Journal - March 2012

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Internet Ministry Impacts Church Growth in Albania

08 March 2012 Tirana, Albania [teoNEWS] There were many reasons to give praises and thanks to God as churches and groups throughout Albania convened in Tirana for the “Festival of Faith” and Internet Ministry (IM) training on 25 and 26 February 2012. Pr Julian Kastrati, Web Pastor for Albania, could not hide his enthusiasm as he gave the IM report in front of two hundred people present for the event.

Just five years ago there was virtually no online Adventist presence in the Albanian language. However, the year 2012 finds the Albanian Mission and ADRA Albania online and actively involved, networking, and building friendships and bridges with the online Albanian-speaking community. Each local church now has its own webpage or blog as well as a strong Facebook presence. Moreover, just a few months after its launch in Albania, LIFEconnect website now features over 4100 members in its Facebook group! This large online presence is catered for and networked by over 50 digital missionaries who provide quality content via the newly launched website www.lifeconnect.al.

“God has blessed the Church in Albania with highly-talented, innovative and high-profile and media savvy members and friends, so it is a privilege as well as fun for me to work together with them.” said Pr Kastrati ‘Both the Adventist Church and ADRA Albania enjoy a fine reputation and a growing audience among the Albanian public, online as well as offline. In Albania, 1 in 3 citizens have a Facebook account, and if we are to make an impact, we need to be where the people are, so we can establish contacts and friendships to be followed by a discipleship path.’ Pr Kastrati explained.

Already results are seen in Tirana Central Church, as during the morning programme two new members of Pr Kastrati’s Bible study group shared their touching story of how they got in contact with church through the Internet.

Pr Gentian Thomollari, a dynamic and prolific networker and radio-presenter in Elbasan, referring to the above mentioned story, showed clearly that internet ministry brings real and tangible results and has a direct impact on church growth and popularity.

The main speaker of the programme was Pr Miroslav Pujic, Internet Ministry Director at the Trans-European Division, who encouraged and urged all present to be spiritually fit themselves in order to point others to Jesus. He also conducted further training on relevant topics on post-modernism and social media and its impact. Mr Pujic concluded the meetings by challenging the DMs to continue to grow and interact with people, make connections with them and most importantly invite them to get to know and follow Jesus.

LIFEconnect is part of Trans-European Division (TED) Internet Ministry initiative. For more information, please visit www.lifeconnect.info and choose your language. [teoNEWS]
Facelift of Student Facilities at Newbold College Begins

07 March 2012 Bracknell, United Kingdom [tedNEWS]

Since commencing as Principal at Newbold College late last year Dr Philip Brown has initiated a much-needed refurbishment schedule for the halls of residence, cafeteria and gymnasium. "Improving the standard of existing facilities is vital to the student experience on campus and will prove critical to boosting enrolment in 2012-13 and beyond" Dr brown said this week.

Dr Brown comes to Newbold College with extensive experience in the Education sector in senior management and leadership roles. Brown previously served as Vice-President (Learning & Teaching) at Avondale College, the main higher education institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific Division. Brown has also been Director of Education for a US-based online learning company; General Manager for an educational publisher; and Executive Principal for a university pathways college to one of Australia’s largest urban universities.

Dr Brown’s strong academic background includes a Master of Tertiary Education Management from the University of Melbourne; Master of Commerce and Master of Educational Administration degrees from the University of New South Wales and a Doctor of Education, undertaken at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist liberal arts institution in California, USA.

One project that Dr Brown has initiated in recent weeks is a facelift for Keough House, the 50 year old men’s Hall of Residence on campus. At 50 years, Keough House is showing its age and no longer offers the kind of accommodation that will contribute to a positive student experience at Newbold.

The Newbold College Board, with the support of the Union Conferences within the Trans-European Division are committed to refurbishing and upgrading Keough House by the beginning of the new college year in September 2012.

Later this month Dr Brown will be writing to church boards and members within the Trans-European Division asking whether your church could contribute to the refurbishment of just one room (or more if your church feels able) over the immediate period ahead.

As a guide, each of the 40+ rooms requires up to £2,500 (€3,000) worth of new furniture including beds, bedside tables, cupboards, study desks, chairs, flooring, curtains and related accessories. This means, for example, the refurbishment of one room could be funded if 25 members from your church were each prepared to contribute just £30 per month for the next five months. The good news is that for every £1 or €1 donated – up to a total of €120,000 – that sum will be matched by an anonymous donor.

'We have taken a step in faith and have signed a contract and the work is underway. As the first installment is due to the construction company by the middle of April we would urge church members, alumni and friends of Newbold College to make this request a matter of prayer and priority.” Brown said.

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If you are interested or require further information about any aspect of the project to refurbish Keough House over the coming months, please contact Dr Brown directly on +44 1344 407 400 or at pbrown@newbold.ac.uk

"We thank church members in anticipation of any contribution that they and their church feels able to make at this time” Dr Brown added. [tedNEWS]

Ralf Poehler, Theology Professor from Germany, answers...

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Testimony on Substance Abuse Brings Harlow South to Tears

02 March 2012 Harlow, United Kingdom [Calvin Mazengwe/SEC] A young man from Reading spoke of a life spent battling addictions to the group assembled at Harlow South Church Plant in Essex for their Youth Day, on February 4th. Michael Oxley told the youths assembled for a program on substance abuse how he changed from an addict to a powerful speaker and finally accepted Jesus Christ.

Youth Day organiser Del Baxter said, “The best and most powerful way to impact young people is to show them how God has already changed the complex lives of their peers. Michael’s story, however, truly touched not only the youth but the whole church”.

Young people from neighbouring churches, as well as from the community, joined Harlow South’s youth for a program focused on the effects of substance abuse. During the morning programme they had looked at the example of the prodigal son and the consequences of his decisions. This parable set the stage for Michael’s honest, eye-opening personal testimony.

Michael’s story brought home how the power of God can take you through even the darkest of hours; it certainly set the pace for the rest of the year! An older church member admitted, “I cried throughout the presentation, I thought I was the only one crying but, when I looked around, I discovered that several people were in tears.”

Following the programme, Elder Calvin Mazengwe remarked how impressed he was with the numbers of young people and their feedback. “Evangelism can be done by youth”, said Calvin, “We are encouraging our youth to brighten their corner and I am pleased that so many young people came.

Harlow South is a new church plant that already has more than ten candidates for baptism; among these, four are young people. [tedNEWS]

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Building Beneath the Surface - The Leader's Inner Life

Brooklyn Bridge is a famous landmark spanning the East River in New York City. At the time it opened (1883), it was the longest suspension bridge in the world — 50% longer than any previously built. For several years the towers were the tallest structures in the Western Hemisphere.

When the bridge opened there were many skeptics who claimed that such a large structure could not long remain suspended by cables. It could not bear the strain of traffic or wind and weather. Before long it would collapse into the river. Yet for well over a century it has served as a major transportation artery connecting the boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan.

During the early stages of constructing the New York tower progress was not apparent. Local citizens complained about the passage of time and the absence of any visible development. In response, the Chief Engineer wrote: “To such of the general public as might imagine that no work had been done on the New York tower, because they see no evidence of it above the water, I should simply remark that the amount of the masonry and concrete laid on that foundation during the past winter, under water, is equal in quantity to the entire masonry of the Brooklyn tower visible today above the water line.”

The Chief Engineer’s statement illustrates a vital truth about leadership: It is the work that is done inside the heart and mind, where people cannot see, that determines whether a leader will stand the tests of time and circumstance. It is the inner life, where only God sees, that informs, stabilizes, sustains or weakens and corrodes the visible aspects of leadership. This inner work is accomplished by worship, devotion, prayer and reflection about ethics, morals, and values.

Today one hears a lot about leadership strategy, leadership vision, the marketing and communication of leadership ideas. The risk is that a person may spend all his/her time on these leadership concepts and forget that character-building is the first priority for leadership.

Jesus spoke in graphic terms about the contrasts between the outer and the inner life. (See Matthew 23:13-28) The outside of cup and platter may be so clean as to glisten in the sun but the inside is full of corruption and excess. Religious leaders might be as attractive as newly-painted tombstones in a well-manicured cemetery but the inviting exterior only hides inner decay. This is the tragedy of leaders failing to recognize the importance of the inner life.

On another occasion Jesus spoke about the influence of one’s life. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” —John 7:37,38 NKJV

What Jesus is saying is that if you want your life to be influential the first thing is to make sure it is connected to the right source. Perhaps the leadership principle that is most important for spiritual leaders is that “when you guard your secret life with God, your public life will take care of itself.” Jesus assures us that if we are connected to Him, the visible effect of our lives, however small, will be a blessing to the world.

Far too often news headlines these days describe the moral downfall of persons who have hitherto carried enormous responsibility and enjoyed public trust. And then to everyone’s amazement the corroded inner life of such a leader is exposed—perhaps an act of financial fraud, failure to tell the truth in a moment of crisis, unfaithfulness to a spouse, or the cancerous effects of a private habit such as pornography. Leaders of religious organisations are not immune to public failure. The environment of power and the accolades of colleagues can easily blind a person to the risks that accompany position and prestige. It requires the inner life to anchor the public life.

How then do we attend to the inner life, the character-building work that is so essential to survival in public leadership? It happens primarily in what we do with our quiet time—those moments of the day that are reserved for feeding and focusing the mind. Those periods in private when we wrestle with huge questions: what kind of person do I want to be? for what purpose am I living? to whom do I turn for mentoring? what are the values by which I live?

It is a myth that a crisis develops character. It does not. Crisis only reveals character. The urgent lesson for leaders is that in changing times, in moments of crisis, strength comes from one’s spiritual disciplines. These habits are not
developed on the spur of the moment. They yield their fruit only when carefully cultivated with consistency and honesty.

And there is a marvelous assurance that the inner life of dependence upon God will have its beneficial effect in one's public life. Jesus affirmed that in His statement about a person, who believes in Him, becoming a river of living water.

Ellen G White cautioned and encouraged leaders that, "It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you."1

Building beneath the surface is the most important work that any leader can do.

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1 Ellen G White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 146

By Lowell C Cooper, General Vice President, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Leadership Development Journal - January 2012
A World of Possibilities

It is canny how ideas converge to capture our attention. Among Heathrow’s advertising graffiti last week was the strap: HSBC - the Bank that sees a world of possibilities.

During a training event this month, school governors were introduced to the idea of ‘possibility thinking’ - what happens when a student believes that they are an A-grade student? What happens when teachers perceive their students worthy of the A-grade? It would appear that the students cease to operate from a basis of fear, or in a spirit of competition, they become adventurous and creative, they begin to live into their possibilities. They live into the person they want to be. Teachers find new respect and passion for those they teach and find common purpose with their students.

Coincidently one of the themes in our Trans-European Division meetings was ‘thinking possibilities’. We were challenged to think of 82,000 members all inspired to speak of God’s grace, people in twenty nations speaking to needs and conflicts of their communities, we spoke at length of the coming Christ who will overcome in the face of the saga of controversy during the last six thousand years of human history. We spoke with passion about recognising possibilities, gifts for service and leadership, in every person both male and female.

Ben and Roz Zander, in their inspiring ‘The Art of Possibility’ write as follows:

"The action in the universe of possibility may be described as generative, or giving, in all senses of the word - producing new life, creating new ideas, consciously endowing with meaning, contributing, yielding to the power of contexts. The relationship between people and environments is highlighted, not the people and things themselves. Emotions that are relegated to the special category of spirituality are abundant here: joy, grace, awe, wholeness, passion and compassion."

"You are more likely to be successful overall, if you participate joyfully with projects and goals and do not think your life depends upon them...resources are likely to come to you in greater abundance when you are generous and inclusive and engage people in your passion for life... In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold."

"The leader of possibility invigorates lines of affiliation and compassion from person to person in the face of a tyranny of fear"... we can exercise this kind of leadership whoever or wherever we are.

Clearly, when we think possibility with respect to our neighbours, we see them not as enemies to be conquered, or heathens to be converted, incorrigible secularists, but people created in the image of God who could grow into disciples of Christ. People like James and John, common fishermen, to whom Jesus simply said: follow me. The same people who years later described the vision of their experience: for we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.

Thank you for seeing possibility in the people you serve by offering them hope in these times of despair. Improbable, but with possibility!

By Victor Pilmoor - Treasurer, British Union of Conferences of the Seventh-day Adventists
Leadership Development Journal - January 2012
As a leader in God's church, you will probably be asked on some occasions to deliver a sermon to a different audience and/or congregation. Wanting to do your task well, you will inevitably ask: How do I do this well? What is a good sermon? As a member of a local church and listener to sermons Sabbath after Sabbath, you ask that question too.

Is a good sermon a matter of taste, similarly to a good meal or music? Is it that our personal upbringing, culture, taste, how we are psychologically wired and other things, determine which sermons we consider to be good and which perhaps bad and boring? Any preacher who ever preached a sermon is aware of the enormous variety of different people's perceptions in his/her audience.

A lot could be said about what is a good sermon, good preaching. For this article, let me just highlight two.

Good news not good advice

In my last church, one of my members came to me and said: "Pastor Duda, I am so disappointed with you. You have been our pastor for two years now and you have not preached against women wearing trousers yet!" Obviously, her idea of a good sermon was that it should tell people what to do (and not to do).

However, from my experience as a pastor and administrator, most people know what to do; they are just not very good at that. My problem is that I already know that I am not what I ought to be; I know I am doing things that I ought not to do and that I am leaving undone things I ought to do. Like most people, I do not live my life crippled by moral indecision, paralyzed for lack of good advice. Our problem is not moral indecision, but moral impotence (Rom 7:21-25).

That's why the remedy cannot be just good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done – "What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own Son..." (Rom 8:30). Thus remedy and good preaching is not good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done. Ultimately preaching is about God, and what he has done, not just about us and about what we ought to do. Surely, our understanding of who God is and what he has done has implications for our lives. Our problem is not moral indecision, but moral impotence (Rom 7:21-25).

If preaching is to be proclamation and not mere moralizing, the ethics of our preaching must be rooted in the theology of our preaching. We cannot make sense of who we are and what we ought to do, unless we first know who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ. Theology empowers the ethics; it does not just accompany it with an encouraging, heavenly-Father pat on the back.

There is a temptation for leaders (and not only for them!) to use preaching to tell people what to do and not to do and thus straighten them out and "force" them to follow what we consider good and useful. But this can easily border on spiritual abuse. A good sermon will inspire people and help them to do what is right and not just tell them what to do.

Seeing yourself as part of God's story

Preaching is kerygma, the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Preaching therefore must be biblical, or it is not preaching at all. The talk may be interesting or edifying, but it is not preaching. The sole source of our knowledge, of what God has done, comes to us through the text of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

However, the fact that a sermon is rooted in a particular text or passage is no guarantee that what we are saying is authentically biblical. It is not the frequency of quoting the Bible (or EGW) that makes it biblical. For a sermon to be biblical, it must be rooted not only in a specific Bible text or passage, but also the immediate and wider context of the passage and in the cosmic sweep of God's story as a whole.
I have been teaching Homiletics for over 20 years. In my enquiries with pastors, theology students and members about the sermons which they remembered after a year, 5 or 10 years, or even more after the first time they heard them, I found one common denominator – a memorable sermon was one that somehow “clicked” the Bible material with the current experience of the listener.

The Bible did not come to us as a collection of proof texts, system of fundamental beliefs, a recipe on how to know God’s will, or seven rules for successful leadership. It came to us as a story that has its beginning and its climax. Thus good preaching must recognize not just what God has revealed to us, but how he has revealed it. The gospel that we preach has come to us through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments telling God’s story. This needs to be connected to our story, which is part of the bigger story.

The stories of the Bible are not merely illustrations of the revelation of God, they are the revelation. Biblical truth is the Event (not just cerebral doctrine) and the Event is what God has done in our creation and recreation (salvation), in what He is doing now and in what he is yet to do before the story ends.

Good preaching is telling and retelling God’s story and our stories from creation to the Second coming (not in one sermon hopefully!). The Bible speaks about this special type of remembering (OT zakar, NT anamnesis), a remembrance which does not merely call to mind the things past, but makes them real, present, potent and demanding here and now.

The gospel is no longer the story of something that God did once for all, far away then and there. It is now also the story of our world, our society, our culture, our individual lives in all the complexity and strange mixture of glory and shame.

That's why we need to do not only the exegesis of the Bible text, we need to do the exegesis of life. If we have no idea where people are today, the complexities of their lives, the demands of their environment and allurements of culture in which they live, then even the most brilliant exposition of historical details of Ezekiel is not going to connect with them. However theologically sound, however exegetically accurate, however historically informative, however interesting and inspiring it may be, until the saving acts of God which He accomplished once for all and there have become embedded in our experience, our culture, our history, our individual lives, we have not preached. We might have delivered a religious talk, but not a sermon, and certainly not a good sermon.

A good sermon is not just remembering His story, it is also the remembering of ours. And when our story becomes part of His story, His bigger story, we have a good and a memorable sermon. The two stories are not two anymore, they have become one as we begin to live, however imperfectly “in Christ”. As the apostle Paul put it: “the life that I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

We preach the good news that in Christ God’s kingdom has come, a new kind of life has been made possible here and now, a new kind of humanity has been born, a new kind of community has been established. The critical and decisive battle with the power of darkness has been fought and won, not by us, by what we do, but by Christ and what he accomplished on the cross of Calvary 2000 years ago. The war is not yet over, but the outcome is no longer in doubt.

Our personal future may be uncertain, but the outcome is not unknown for those who know the story of God. We know for sure how His story will end. Paradise lost has been regained and will be restored by Him. And we all can be a part of it. That’s what good preaching is all about!

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