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EPC Comment Board

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'Meet me on the Mountain'

22 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Victor Hulbert, tedNEWS] Rogaška Slatina is surrounded by mountains. It’s not surprising then that Laurence Turner used the theme on Wednesday morning, and Pastor Mark Finley continued it at the end of the day with a sermon focused on the Mount of Ascension, "Meet me on the mountain".

Ministers and their spouses may already have thought they were on the mountain top, but by 8:00 pm the thankfully air-conditioned marquee was full.

The warm up to Finley's sermon included Ronald Knott, Director of Andrews University Press, promoting some very practical assets for the Ministers professional library. Claire Sanches, TED Children and Family Ministry director, shared how to turn the tide in which 51 percent of our European youth leave the church before the age of 21. "KIDS in Discipleship", she emphasised, "is one of the solutions whereby parents and children worship, learn and develop faith together."

More focus on Mission came with Miroslav Pujic, Director of 'LIFEconnect' social media project. "If you are not on any social media you don't exist," Miroslav stated. LIFEconnect is trying to maximise on that phenomenon, and is now available in over 20 languages, with digital missionaries in every TED country.

The 3D project, an initiative in Iceland, allowed people from this very secularised nation to pass through an exhibition telling the story of the Bible in nine stages from Creation to Re-creation. It was the Gospel in Icelandic terms. "No religion is taught in schools – but we did things for children and we had a deluge of children," Manfred Lemke told an enthralled audience.

Edna and Heli presented “Jesus 7”, a Hungarian programme that shared seven sides of Jesus life in very public forums. This took seven stories and seven Holy Land presentations to 60 locations in seven weeks. Local pastors adapted the programme in creative ways, including exhibitions and books. This resulted in 2,500 visitors – more than the membership of the church in Hungry. Another 40,000 people followed online. Janos Kovacs-Biro, TED Evangelism director, emphasised that this was an excellent tool in countries where there are many nominal Christians.

Looking from the past to the future, Mission to the Cities, a World Church initiative is taking root in London, the largest city in the Trans-European Region. This is a joint project and, according to Pastor Ian Sweeney, it is linked to praying together. He noted that there are some 10,000 members in London who will have to reach out to 18 million people. Leaders from across Europe will join them in community witness and evangelism.

"Ancient Words, ever true, changing me, changing you," introduced us to the message of the evening, and a story of mountains, Mt Moriah, Mt Sinai, Mt Carmel, Mt of Beatitudes, Mt of transfiguration, Mt of Olives, Mt Calvary, each one sharing a part of the Gospel story. Most importantly, the Mount of Ascension. "Man steps off a mountain and goes down," Finley stated. "Christ steps off a mountain and goes up!"

Following through with the challenges and needs of the disciples in the ascension story, Finley skilfully wove their needs and desires into the reality of our need today. "Take some time while in Rogaška, to head out into the beauty of the mountains, to find a rock, or sit under a tree, and spend some time alone with God." He suggested getting together with friends in a hotel room and doing the same. Taking us to the Mount of Ascension he noted how Jesus empowered the disciples, even when some doubted. "When God puts a vision in your hearts, Jesus will dispel your doubts," he said, noting that "Jesus is the great doubt dissolver".
The quote for the evening that touched ministers' hearts was: “I'd rather try and do something great for God and fail, then do nothing for God and succeed.”

The concluding challenge, “What dream do you have for your church, your community?”

To see more photos of Wednesday programme, please click here.

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“Misplaced Devotion”

Presented by Derek Morris

22 August, 2012 Rogaljka Slatina, Slovenia [John Sunridge, tedNEWS] Pastor Derek Morris is known to virtually all Adventist pastors in the world, mainly through his television ministry. He currently works with the Ministerial Association of the GC but, as he pointed out to the assembled pastors, he is originally from Bristol, England, and has a special place in his heart for the Trans-European Division.

After bringing greetings from other pastors around the world Pastor Morris got to the heart of his message for the day: ministry is not easy, the Great Controversy is real, and Satan is ready to disrupt our work whenever he can. But God is greater than all our challenges. By adopting a few simple biblical principles we can avoid being distracted by “misplaced devotion” and be more effective in our ministry.

Working from the book of Acts, Pastor Morris focused on chapter 6 where the rapidly growing church ran into a problem. There was a complaint against the Jews from the Hellenists: their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. This problem threatened to derail the mission of the church. How the disciples dealt with it was key to the future of the Great Commission, and it is key to us today as we continue that work.

Three key points emerge from the text, the first of which is “delegation”. Those who are called to a specific ministry should not be diverted or distracted by other needs, however pressing, said Pastor Morris. He illustrated this truth from his own personal experience. When he was called to pastor a 2,600 member church in Florida he was physically unable to deal with the administrative overload that some wanted to burden him with. Miraculously he found someone who was willing to take on the task and through the efforts of this one key person all 600 volunteer positions identified by his church’s nominating committee were filled.

This kind of thing doesn’t happen automatically, said Pastor Morris. One mistake that we often make is to delegate responsibility to the wrong people – and this actually creates more work for us. Acts 6:3 gives the characteristics that are essential in people to whom we delegate responsibility: they need to be of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom.

Although this might seem to be a tall order, Pastor Morris insisted that many of our members are not only willing to serve God they are actively looking for ways in which they can do it.

A second, and vitally important, principle found in the text is prayer. In Acts 6:3 the disciples said, “we will give ourselves continually to prayer.” Through a number of moving examples Pastor Morris told of how God had blessed his churches once they became actively engaged in prayer ministry. It’s not just personal prayer but it’s the way that we lead our churches into effective prayer that is important, he said.

A third principle from the text that can prevent us being led astray by misplaced devotion is study of God’s word – but not just study. “Total immersion” is a phrase we are familiar with in the context of baptism: Pastor Morris applied it to Bible study. Citing the example of H M S Richards who read through the Bible 160 times, Pastor Morris challenged the pastors: “Saturate your life with God’s word!”

When these three principles were applied by the disciples, the results were amazing: the word of God spread and the number of disciples multiplied greatly. Appealing as a pastor to other pastors, Pastor Morris admitted that these
consequences may not always be immediately visible. “We are not responsible for how many people respond,” he said. “But if we preach the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit then the word will spread and the number of disciples will be multiplied.”

In a final moving appeal Pastor Morris challenged his audience: “Don’t be too busy doing other things. Do you long for God to move you to the next level of effectiveness? Then don’t be distracted by misplaced devotion. Delegate, and saturate your life with prayer and the ministry of God’s word.” [tedNEWS]

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“One on One with the Woman of Samaria”

Presented by Sigve Tonstad
22 August, 2012 Rogaska Slatina, Slovenia [John Surridge, tedNEWS] In the first of six in depth presentations by Adventist specialists from around the world, Dr Sigve Tonstad from Loma Linda University, USA gave the one thousand assembled European pastors a unique insight into the story of the woman of Samaria as recorded in John chapter 4.

Dr Tonstad’s approach was disarmingly relaxed at first. Using careful exposition he went through the story, highlighting the known facts and introducing the pastors to a few ideas they may not have thought of. However it soon became clear that what was being presented was not simply exposition, it was an object lesson for all pastors who seek to make God known in the 21st century.

Dr Tonstad began by pointing out that the text begins from a position of tension. The Pharisees were keeping tabs on what Jesus was doing, and in return Jesus was keeping an apprehensive eye on them. As a result Jesus retreated from Judea to Galilee, and, the text says, “he had to go through Samaria”. But was this a geographic necessity? Probably not, said Dr Tonstad. In fact Jesus’ visit to Samaria was probably part of His plan – an intentional plan to reach lost people.

The next part of the story was illustrated by a literal “woman at the well” – on the stage, with a bucket! The story of Jesus’ conversation with this woman may be quick to read, said Dr Tonstad, but in “real time” it no doubt took a lot longer. After taking a leisurely real drink from a real glass, Dr Tonstad told the pastors that they needed to be careful not to rush through stories like this. In actuality, Jesus must have been engaged in a number of confidence building exercises where he skillfully used small talk, eye contact, and other important forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal to break down the barriers that existed between Him and the woman. Three of the barriers evident in the text: socio-ethnic, gender and moral, still challenge us today.

With the barriers broken down and a level of trust established, Jesus moved the conversation on from His need to her need. He spoke generally at first but then moved from the sublime (living water) to the specific (go and get your husband). This abrupt transition in the conversation must have been a shock to the woman, said Dr Tonstad, but not as much of a shock as when she found out that Jesus knew intimate details about her private life! John records the facts in precise detail – and perhaps there’s a lesson for pastors here. It’s possible that Jesus knew the facts by divine revelation but it’s also possible that He picked up the information from local sources – perhaps the Samarian “gossip columns”. Do we as pastors care enough about people to really find out about them?

In many cases Jesus’ direct approach could have been a conversation stopper, but it is the way that Jesus managed the transition that is key, said Dr Tonstad. Through tact, insight and an understanding of her situation, Jesus leads the woman along a progressive path of understanding: first she sees Him as an exceptional human being, then as someone who might possibly be greater than Jacob, then a prophet, but finally the Messiah.

The story ends with a powerful witness: “Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did?” From being ashamed of her past, coming out alone to the well so that she wouldn’t have to confront the painful parts of her life, the woman is transformed. Jesus has “detoxified” her relational history. “Now she knows,” said Dr Tonstad, “that something which was wrong can be made right.”

Dr Tonstad concluded his presentation with five points that specifically apply to ministers today:
1. The woman of Samaria was reached by a ministry that was local, personal and individual. You won’t reach this kind of person through TV evangelism.

2. In the gospel of John the role of women in ministry is so conspicuous that you wonder why we are still having discussions about it today!

3. To the disciples Samaria was simply a “gas station” – a place where you could get essential provisions but then move on. They couldn’t understand why Jesus would be interested in a woman from such a place. Are we missing such places in our ministry today?

4. Jesus went to great lengths to win the woman’s confidence before He went on to spiritual matters. Are we keen observers and good listeners?

5. The story tells us about need and longing. The woman needed and longed for the living water that Jesus talked about. As we read the story however we come to realize that Jesus too had a great need and a great longing – not for water but for the woman’s salvation. As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus’ actions reveal something even deeper about the Father. Our need of God may be deep – as deep as a well, but His need, his longing, to save us, is bottomless.

[tedNEWS]

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EPC Comment Board

22 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Julian Hibbert, tedNEWS] The EPC Comment Board is up and ready for conference participants to have their say. Here are the first ones:

**Pastor Joachim Telfer of Norway:** “I was blessed and challenged by Bertil Wiklander's keynote address. It set the tone for the whole theme ‘Making God Known in Europe’.”

**Pastor Zoltan from Serbia:** “Wednesday’s worship and plenary sessions were both inspiring and challenging. The common theme was pastoral spirituality and the role of the pastor in the church. Each of the presenters (Laurence Turner, Sigve Tonstad and Derek Morris) drew thought-provoking conclusions from their chosen Bible texts. The main thought was that the perplexing context of evangelism in Europe demands new methods of ministry. However, the new methods are not supposed to replace the pillars of the pastor’s spiritual health: prayer, personal bible study and effective delegation. There cannot be effective ministry anywhere without unless these needs are met. First things first!”

**Pastor Tom Angelsen, Conference president of North Norway:** “I was empowered by Sigve Tonstad’s words: ‘Ministry is local, personal and individual. The missiological strategy of John is to win people’s confidence.’”

**Pastor Laszlo Gallusz, Global Mission and Education Director at the South-East European Union Conference:** “Pastors need their spiritual batteries recharged and their ministerial toolboxes updated. The conference’s first morning programme met this need. Laurence Turner’s sermon not only opened a new perspective on a well-known biblical text, but let it show a direction for the future of Adventism. Tonstad’s exegesis reminded us that even well known texts can speak with freshness. The inspiration talk by Dr. Morris contained very specific pastoral advice aimed at helping us identify the foundations of successful ministry . . . I am already very encouraged and refreshed after spending less then 24 hours in Rogaska Slatina.”

**Allan Falk from Denmark:** “A thought that stood out for me during the workshop was that ‘if we are not that into the people around us, we’re most likely not that much into God either.’” [tedNEWS]
A Herculean task, done well!

22 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Julian Hibbert, tedNEWS] Greek mythology has bequeathed the idea of the “Herculean task” to the English language, and the term is now used to describe a task that is unusually difficult to perform.

Dr Laurence Turner, of Newbold College, undertook such a task during this morning’s worship session at the European Pastors’ Conference: he preached to hundreds of preachers – and had our attention throughout!

I know that you will want to listen to it, so we won’t spoil you with too much prior information, just enough to whet your appetite.

Dr Turner started with an interesting comparison between two of God’s great “mountaineers” – both of whom joined Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. He then sketched Elijah’s spiritual journey from Carmel to Horeb (Mt. Sinai). A pilgrimage that took him into the same cave – “cleft in the rock” – that sheltered Moses when God passed by.

According to Turner, God spoke to Moses through the spectacular: earthquake, noise and fire. But although Elijah’s senses are also assaulted by such spectacular, awesome displays of light and sound, God speaks to him in a radically different way than He spoke to Moses – in a “gentle whisper”.

Well, that’s enough. Let’s not spoil your listening pleasure – just click here for the live recording and enjoy it. [tedNEWS]
“Peeping” on the pastor

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“Peeping” on the pastor | TED Adventist

http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/peeping-on-the-pastor
Stansted Bomb Hoax Affects EPC

21 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Julian Hibbert, tedNEWS] The irresponsible actions of UK man caused air traffic controllers to divert a Virgin Atlantic Airbus A340 from Heathrow to Stansted airport early this morning. This was caused by a telephonic bomb threat.

According to the MailOnline the plane “landed safely at 5.24am and the 214 passengers and 18 crew members were evacuated. Specialist teams carried out a detailed search of the plane but Essex Police confirmed the incident was a hoax.”*

Unfortunately, the threat caused flight delays that directly affected a large number of UK delegates to the European Pastors’ Conference who were due to fly out of Stansted today. It meant that they arrived in the late evening after the conference had opened. [tedNEWS]

*www.dailymail.co.uk/news

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Success Lies in the Details

21 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Julian Hibbert, tedNEWS] A key ingredient of every successful conference is the ability of the convening team to handle detail. They must think through and list the requirements for each component of the event, down to the finest detail.

I was interested in how the Trans-European Division (TED) team, tasked with organising the European Pastors’ Conference, would handle these details – and they impressed me from the start. Their communication of the programme, the registration procedure, the hotel reservation requirements, the destination options, the duties of those involved and the ‘pick-up’ arrangements at the airports – were all done well ahead of time.

Were they on time to fetch us? Yes! In fact, we were in our air-conditioned bus and on our way within ten minutes or so of collecting our luggage at the airport. Upon arrival at the hotel, the TED’s red-shirted welcoming group processed us smoothly with firm handshakes and warm smiles.

Then came my first personal test of their efficiency – had they remembered to reserve a single room for me? I would need that privacy for some late night editing on MESSENGER. Yes, they had!

These weren’t the only ‘little details’ TED had sorted out – we received conference bags filled with books, music DVDs . . . and even a water bottle to help survive Slovenia’s hot summer temperatures of 37C.

The arrangements in the main auditorium on the opening night were finished on time – another key feature of successful conference management. There was no “faffing about” with sound, lighting or decor. The pulpit party was in place and the worship team were ready.

So when Miroslav Pujic, TED Communication & Media director, said, “Start” – the conference did just that!

Bravo to the TED convenors – so far, too good! [tedNEWS]
European Pastors' Conference Begins

21 August 2012, Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia [Victor Hulbert, tedNEWS]

Some drove for sixteen hours. Others flew on convoluted routes around Europe. All had one purpose – to arrive at Rogaška Slatina, Slovenia in time for the opening service of the European Pastors' Conference (EPC).

With 30°C Slovenian sunshine outside, it was bliss to enter a large, air-conditioned marquee. An auditorium, a place of worship, and for 1,200 pastors, spouses and church workers from 22 countries, a place for fellowship for the next four days under the theme, 'Making God Known' in Europe.

Reflections in a 'Monty Python' like skit mixed humour, pathos and togetherness, and together with local folk traditions, inspiring music, a mime and short video segments, set a tone for the evening.

As normal at these events, greetings started to flow: from Pastor Daniel Duda, Trans-European Division (TED) Education Direction, who sees the purpose of EPC as an opportunity to join together once every five years as "a great time of encouragement, continuing education and fellowship." Jerry and Janet Page from the Ministerial Association at Adventist World Church Headquarters challenged ministers that "He who called you and began a good work in you will complete it."

Zmago Godina, President of the Adventist Church in Slovenia, remarked that "the whole membership of his conference would fit in half of this hall!" Such a meeting is a positive encouragement for his members. Encouraging too for Branko Kidrič, Mayor of this Spa Resort. He is especially delighted that ministers at this Conference have made a commitment to support a severely struggling family in his town by helping renovate their house.

The Director of the office for Religious affairs communities for Slovenia, Sylvester Garbishek was impressed by the numbers and the spirit of the event, "If we try and love each other in this manner the same Jesus is among us." The Regional Bishop of the Catholic Church in Celje, Monsenior Dr Stanislav Lipovšek noted that "this is an important theme, how to make God known in Europe." Quoting Augustine he emphasised, "Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in God."

The keynote address was given by Bertil Wiklander, President of the Adventist Church in the Trans-European Region. Looking back on the news coverage of the London 2012 Olympics, he recalled one persistent statement, "This is what these Olympic Games is all about". However, he noted that the words were used very many times in many different contexts. Yet for pastors at this Conference, there is only one context. "I put it to you," he said, "that it is 'making God known'."

Painting a picture from the Book of Revelation, Dr Wiklander noted the call of Revelation 21. "God wants to be known and to be with His people." He then reflected on the three angel's message, emphasising the call to worship Him who made heaven and earth, to proclaim the message, and to come away from false worship.

"To make God known in Europe is our great challenge and calling," Dr Wiklander emphasised, adding, "People here believe they can live without God, but this is a dysfunctional life." He then worked this theme through by noting that we need to know God ourselves first. "To know, implies an intimate relationship. Knowing God is to encounter him." Having an active, practical communion with God changes your life.

His theme then moved on to the fact that making God known will also involve sharing that experience with others. Where is the centre of sharing this experience? For the twenty-first century it is in exactly the same place as in the Gospels and the writings of...
Paul. Noting that all the four Gospels aim at and climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he added that the apostle Paul (in 1 Corinthians 15) also emphasised that the resurrection is of first importance. “We have a special message for these last days but let's be serious, let’s not fool ourselves, the 700 pages of the Great Controversy, the signs of the times we see all around us, our healthy lifestyle message, with all that, if we do not preach the truth of the resurrection then our preaching is in vain.”

The thought that the resurrection provides the Hope that this world needs, will be one that ministers will ponder on as they retire to their hotel rooms, dialogue with colleagues, and immerse themselves in the next four days of lectures, workshops and worship. [tedNEWS]

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Abide with Me

01 August 2012 Washington State, USA [Wayne Blakely/Record] In addressing the United Nations prayer breakfast, Ravi Zacharias, the Christian apologist, asked the question: “How do you reach a generation that listens with its eyes and thinks with its feelings?” It’s a profound question that should not simply be addressed to leaders outside the Church, but to each of us in the Church. As earth’s history is rapidly approaching its conclusion, many of us have come to accept “feelings” as our guide to “truth”. And in no area is this more true than in the field of human sexuality.

Since the sexual revolution broke out in the West, society has been pressured over and over again to abandon sexual standards based on Christian ideals. First we were told that sex outside of marriage was not only morally acceptable, but a healthy part of human development. Then we were told that the idea of a lifetime commitment in marriage was an oppressive anachronism. It was a short line from there to adopt the posture that human life so inconveniently created outside of stable relationships was expendable. And then came the gay rights movement with the message that homosexual sex is not only natural, but morally good.

I, like many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, believed the new message of sexual liberation. After 40 years living an active gay lifestyle, however, I have come to a very different conclusion. I’ve seen friends die, I’ve heard the heart cries of people caught in complete hopelessness that comes with a cold permisiveness, and I’ve heard over and over again the love of my Father calling me back to a life of obedience. Today I know that the opposite of “homosexuality” is not heterosexuality as many are inclined to believe—rather it is holiness. It is the holy and wholly encompassing love of God that can fill the gaping chasm in our lives and give us the healing we all so desperately need from the sin that plagues all of us.

The narrative formed by gay rights activists, however, is finding an echo among those in the Church who believe by ignoring or excusing sinful behaviour, they are extending love. They are not. It is true that God loves us just the way we are, regardless of our sin, and every person—homosexual, heterosexual or asexual—can be deeply thankful for that. But it is not true that God leaves us desperately mired in behaviour that destroys us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Jesus desires something more from all who have been born with a sinful nature. He wants us to develop an intimate relationship with Him and invite the Holy Spirit to bring about change in our lives. But the change He promises us is not about making a gay person straight, any more than it is about making heterosexuals who struggle with lust into asexual beings who have no desire at all. No, it is more complex than that, but no less remarkable.

When I immersed myself in getting to know Christ and submitted my will to Him, many amazing changes began to take place. He took over and revealed His perfect plan—a plan completely consistent with His revealed word, not a plan based on subjective feelings and emotive appeals that is at jarring odds with His revelation. He promises that as we trust and abide in Him, we become more like Him. The more we love Him, the more we are drawn to His holiness.

For decades many same-sex attracted people have experienced silence on the topic of homosexuality by the Church. In that silence, many have left the Church without knowing what God desires of them. Some have come to question whether or not God even loves them, accepts them, whether they are so broken they cannot be saved. Some have been treated like lepers—shunned, scorned and neglected as if their sexual temptations are somehow more sinful than everyone else’s. Others believe that God loves them, but begin to wrap God around self and live according to subjective truths rather than responding to God’s love with a desire to obey Him.

But praise God, there are those who have been reached through divine intervention and are claiming His victory and healing today. I am such an individual, “as were some of you”. Today, God has a ministry through me. He preserved me, and precious others, for such a time as this.

Often, it is not until we are cornered in the dark, that we are able to hear that still small voice. Humility, while frequently painful, can reveal light that seems to have been hidden by deception. When I was finally humbled before God, I recognised the voice of the Holy Spirit. My heart broke before God and I fell to my knees weeping and seeking His forgiveness. Where much is forgiven, there is much love, and today I love my Lord with my entire heart, soul and strength.

The clarity of what God revealed became awe-inspiring. Not just regarding homosexual behaviour, but with regard to all
sin and His request of us to lay it at His feet, seek and live in His righteousness. It’s a lot more difficult than it sounds. But it is rewarding beyond any earthly pleasure. Temptation remains my reminder of how much I need Jesus and how I immediately must call upon Him to be in charge of my mind and my decision-making. But temptation is not sin—sin occurs when we give in to temptation rather than trusting in our all-powerful Saviour.

We are living in a world in which evil often appears to triumph and in which accepting God’s standards often makes us a laughing stock, or worse, actively hated. I know that by writing this piece, I will be mocked, my character will be attacked, and I will receive yet another wave of hate mail. It is the least I can do for a Saviour who suffered much more on my account.

Today, gay rights supporters often label anyone standing for a life of obedience to God a “bigot” or “homophobe”. They are the kinds of pejorative labels designed to marginalise and silence God’s call for obedience. I don’t believe that homophobia is the support of biblical sexual principles, but rather it is the refusal to reach out and share the love and gospel with the LGBT community. What kind of cold indifference would result in people who know God’s truth, who know His last day call to a loving, holy relationship, remaining silent as millions of people reject God and continue in sin? That isn’t love; that is a fear of homosexuality that is so strong, you prefer to see men and women lose their souls for eternity rather than have the strength of character to give an honest witness of grace, love, repentance and salvation.

More than ever before, leaders, pastors and teachers need to be educated by those who have experienced and chosen to live a redeemed life in Jesus. As He directs our hearts under His influence, we can all become the “new creation” as described in 2 Corinthians 5:17. By recognising His glory and authority we can choose to be called out of darkness and live in His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The Church cannot afford to be afraid of LGBT people—we are, after all, just people. You can’t afford to be indifferent—we need the love and healing of the gospel as much as anyone. You can’t afford to be so prudish you fail to discuss openly the issue of sexual behaviour. Everyone, everywhere is talking about it, and when the Church is silent, when you are silent, it isn’t neutrality or prudence, it’s cowardice and indifference.

That said, this issue does require thought and care. Calling LGBT people horrible names or expecting people to somehow magically transpose their sexual orientation is not the right approach. Shunning or shaming is also very damaging. Accepting, loving, caring, while always honestly representing God’s call to an obedient life for all of us—that is the way Christ treated all sinners, and it is the path we must follow. God is on the move. He is holding back the four winds. He is revealing His truth. He is calling His beloved sinners to come home. I frequently teach in my presentations that we cannot share what we do not have. By engaging in an intimate relationship with Jesus, amazing changes occur. When we are living in a continual walk with Him, those we encounter will see Jesus in us and have a desire for the life He offers all.

Let those who you come in contact with see Jesus in your eyes and through your demonstration of His love. Live the love that draws the sin-sick soul into a relationship with Jesus. Christianity is not about “listening with our eyes, and thinking with our feelings”. But it is also not simply a prayer in the morning, evening and studying the Sabbath School lesson either. Victory and healing of all sin is in the continual, constant abiding in Him that results in a lifetime promise of true freedom, true acceptance and true love.

By Wayne Blakely

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Never Give Up

Practical insights regarding reclaiming inactive youth

Stop your crying and wipe away your tears. All that you have done for your children will not go unrewarded; they will return from the enemies land. There is hope for your future; your children will come home, I, the Lord, have spoken. Jeremiah 31: 16-17 (Good News)

The loss of young people through the back door is a real issue for the church today. It is imperative that we take steps to make sure that as many as possible of those growing up in the church will remain to become active members. I also believe there is an overwhelming need to reach out to those who may, for whatever reason, have already become inactive over the years and reclaim them for the church.

In undertaking a doctoral level dissertation I undertook a pilot project at a local church. Although the numbers were limited, the findings were significant. The headline news is that over 90% of inactive youth responding to an initial contact, together with a short questionnaire, clearly still saw themselves as being Christian, and fifty per cent felt that they would one day return to the church of their youth.

So how do we help make this a reality? I think we would all resonate with the following assertion that the effective care of young people today must be seen as a) an immediate priority, b) a strategic priority, and c) a critical issue for all Christian leaders. I believe that the church – our church – has a limited window of opportunity which demands that the time for action is now.

Summary of Research Findings

A summary of the survey findings, that I personally conducted, revealed a number of interesting practical insights that can be summarized in the following ten points.

1. It is imperative that those who are inactive are followed up and not left to drift away unnoticed. From my limited sample, females seemed more responsive than males to cold contact, but males will respond once a real and warm link can be established.
2. In their early years, friends remain the top reason why young people enjoy attending church.
3. The early, mid and late teenage years are the focal point when youth make decisions for or against continuing church fellowship. The peak age bracket for becoming inactive, in this study, was between ages fifteen and twenty.
4. There exists a continuing contact system through the family. This usually remains intact even when a young person has left church fellowship.
5. The church is not seen as warm and caring and youth often see church members as being critical and narrow minded. The attitude of older members was expressed as the top area of dislike felt about the church.
6. There exists a disconnect between dedicating young children and baptism. Only a third of the group were baptized. We are clearly not discipling enough of our own young people while they are actively with us in the church.
7. Some young people may be very sporadic in their church attendance but do not consider that they have cut all ties with the church. Church attendance does not seem to be a major priority for some during their early twenties or period of tertiary education.
8. Virtually half of the group felt they would return to church one day. This provides hope in so many cases that all is certainly not lost.
9. Overwhelmingly the young people surveyed showed that they still felt that Christianity was relevant in their lives.
10. Each young person is unique and has their own story to tell. We must never treat them as merely statistics.2

Key Points

There are a number of key points that can be seen from this and other studies. Here I will highlight just three.

The church needs a clear and effective discipling process for young people. This is as referenced in point 6 above. This year, being the Year of Discipleship, gives a window of opportunity to address this need for the Ambassador age group (16-21) through some pilot programmes in the TED territory. Additionally we will hold the first Youth Matters Symposium with the title “Discipleship that Lasts”, aiming towards establishing good discipleship models for Student-age Ministry.

The Church Warmth and Thinking Climates are very important. This is as referenced in point 5 above and is powerfully backed up by the European Valuegenesis Survey. (see graph) It is quite clear that both on the Thinking Climate and the Church Warmth measures decrease with age and that we are currently not meeting the needs of our older youth. The “thinking climate” measures to what extent a church stimulates its members to think, learn and ask questions. The “church warmth” measures how much a church is felt to be friendly, caring and an accepting environment. Both areas are of crucial importance in determining young peoples’ commitment to the church.

These areas can, and must, be readily addressed through a concerted relational ministry for young adults at the local church level.

![Graph showing Church Climate by age (Q61) (high agreement)](image)

Most definitely there are inactive members (please don’t use the term backsliders!) who will look to return at some point. Point 8 highlights this and the reasons, I believe, are centered in a number of issues involving the positive legacy of past church teaching, warm memories and a search for past identity. As one of the respondents to the pilot survey stated “I still carry and remember a lot of what I was taught every day.” Another reflected about a return one day and stated, “My departure from the church was a gradual one, if there is going to be a return, it’ll also be a gradual one.”

This was also found to be true in another study of returning Adventists who definitely expressed that they still had warm memories from their childhood. “Eight out of ten persons interviewed expressed memories of early Adventism that reminded them of happy times in the church.” 3

Roots and identity are a very powerful combination. The search for identity is not static and just as it is part of finding one’s own identity that pushes young people to challenge their value systems, and sometimes push them away, so too the reverse search for identity may well bring them back one day to their roots. Many young people who question their parents, values and beliefs ultimately accept them as their own.

Conclusion

The desired outcome is that returning “prodigals” will have a chance to return to a church that is ready and waiting to meet them. Such churches may vary in appearance from country to country but it is clear that any church that wishes to effectively nurture returning young people must make this a priority. In so doing they will need to have a well thought-out discipleship process in place, a warm climate that encourages spiritual growth and also an understanding of the need of many young adults to re-connect with their spiritual roots.

The good news is that no matter how long someone has been away returning always remains an option. Never give up, there is hope for the future.

Research carried out as part of DMin dissertation "Bringing Home Our Adventist Prodigals: A Strategic Plan To Reclaim Youth In The Trans-European Division." (Andrews University 2009)


The TED Church of Refuge (CORe) initiative is dedicated to helping our churches to retain and reclaim young adults.

For further information see www.churchofrefuge.eu

By Paul Tompkins, Youth Ministry Director, Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists

Leadership Development Journal - May 2012
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 ones own 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 very anxious or do not result in a positive response from others? What would those closest to me identify as my weakest point as a leader? Do I need help with any aspect of my life? Conducting an accurate evaluation of one’s weaknesses has the potential to contribute to a realistic approach to the challenges that any job brings. This is expected to include utilising strengths appropriately whilst being careful when engaging in the areas recognised as weaknesses. Furthermore, identifying appropriate strategies that will address the weaker aspects of my own performance is also an important aspect of this self-discovery.
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 humbleness, 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 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.

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Improving and Growing Yourself to Improve, Grow and Serve Your Church Organisation

28 June 2012 Bracknell, UK [Philip R Brown] In The Twelve Absolutes of Leadership Gary Burnison recounts the story of a farmer whose donkey fell into a well. The farmer frantically thought about what he could do as the stricken animal cried out to be rescued. With no obvious solution, the farmer regretfully concluded that because the donkey was old and the well needed to be filled in anyway, he should give up the idea of rescuing the beast. Instead, he should simply fill in the well and hope the poor animal would not suffer too much.

The farmer asked his neighbours for help and they all began to shovel earth into the well. When the donkey realised what was happening, he brayed and struggled. Then, the noise stopped.

The farmer looked down into the well and was astonished at what he saw. The donkey was still alive and was progressing towards the top of the well. By shaking off the dirt instead of letting it cover him, he could step on the accumulating soil as the level rose. When the donkey reached the top, he stepped over the edge and gave the farmer one last look. “Now who’s the jackass?” the donkey remarked, and trotted happily away.

This story offers a key insight for those seeking to be effective Church leaders, who must have and demonstrate learning agility. The latter can be defined as the ability to learn from experience and to apply that learning to new situations. Learning agility is not the same thing as having a high IQ or EQ (emotional intelligence). Rather, a Church leader with learning agility can excel at absorbing information from his or her experiences and applying it to the present – thereby creating an agile Church organisation that also learns, grows and adapts.

Yes, learning as a Church leader is often about adapting, being open-minded, and being willing to find solutions that are not always obvious. As a Church leader you cannot expect to learn from things you are NOT doing! Consequently, there can be times when you should expect to fail. Such situations demand that you choose not to blame yourself but rather to learn. In fact, it has been said that the only real failure is failing to fail. A Church leader who fails to fail from time to time could either be unaware of what is going on or simply be acting too cautiously.

So how do you improve and grow yourself in order to improve and grow your Church organisation? One key requirement is your own preparedness to maintain an open and curious mind. In their book Great Leaders Grow Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller suggest that for a leader growing is like oxygen to a deep-sea diver - without it you die. Unlike the diver, you may not physically die – but if you stop growing, your influence may well erode, and over time, you may even lose the opportunity to lead at all.¹

The failure to grow has sabotaged the career of more Church leaders than just about anything else. Hence, your capacity to grow is crucial in determining your capacity to lead. If you wish to improve or grow your Church organisation, then you too must continue to improve and grow. Blanchard and Miller have utilised the acronym GROW to remind leaders of the key ingredients for fostering their personal and professional growth:
G = Gaining Knowledge – this ingredient includes knowing one’s own strengths and weaknesses; knowing the people one leads on a deep level (personally and professionally); knowing one’s industry extremely well; having a high level of mastery of the principles and practices of leadership; and having a detailed, written personal development plan.

R = Reaching Out to Others – this ingredient includes always looking for ways to invest in the growth of others; having ongoing mentoring relationships with emerging leaders; frequently seeing and seizing teachable moments; frequently sharing with others what one has learned; and developing a high level of mastery in communicating one’s point of view on leadership.

O = Opening Your World – this ingredient includes constantly looking for opportunities to grow at work; seeking new experiences outside the workplace; having a mentor(s) who helps you grow; always looking for additional opportunities to lead; and seeing every day as an opportunity to learn and grow.

W = Walking toward Wisdom – this ingredient includes consistently telling oneself the truth regarding one’s leadership; actively seeking feedback from those you know to be truth tellers; having a group of people you trust to give you counsel on important issues; having mastered the art and discipline of asking profound questions; and being fully committed to a lifelong pursuit of wisdom.

Blanchard and Miller maintain that a leader’s capacity to GROW determines their capacity to lead! Further, improving yourself as a leader is crucial in seeking to improve and serve your organisation. Interestingly, it appears that in most organisations the best leaders choose to serve others. Servant leaders are normally those whose goals are focused on the greater good. In The Secret: What Great Leaders Know and Do, Blanchard and Miller offer a helpful description of the ways in which a leader can SERVE. They utilise the acronym SERVE to highlight key leader behaviours:

S = Seeing the Future – Servant leaders envision and communicate a compelling picture of the future. Leading always begins with a picture of a preferred future.

E = Engaging and Developing Others – Servant leaders recruit and select the right people for the right job while creating an environment where people wholeheartedly invest themselves in achieving the vision.

R = Reinventing Continuously – Servant leaders possess a never-ending focus on improvement. Progress is impossible without change.

V = Valuing Results and Relationships – Servant leaders generate positive, measurable results, and cultivate great relationships with those they lead. Ultimate success always includes people and performance.

E = Embodying the Values – Servant leaders live in a fashion consistent with their stated values. People learn more from what a leader does than from what a leader says.

By Dr Philip R Brown, Principal, Newbold College

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3 Great Leaders Grow, p. 119.
The Art of Leadership – Some Reflections

28 June 2012 St Albans, UK [Bertil Wiklander] A colleague recently reminded me of Peter Drucker’s distinction between management and leadership:

‘Management is doing things right – Leadership is doing the right things.’

It made me think again of the real nature of leadership. What helps us know how to do the right things? See here the fruit of some of my reflections:

Art and Wisdom

Leadership is the practice of an art. It is not an exact science and it is not accomplished simply by implementing rules.

Leadership is based on wisdom acquired by making mistakes and learning the right lessons from them.

Character

Leadership is best learnt and exercised by persons with certain personality traits.

Leadership comes from feeling good about yourself – avoiding self-destruction and not being over-sensitive to criticism, being humble and yet fearless and bold.

Leadership requires being energetic, persistent and self-disciplined and yet constantly encouraging others.

Abilities

Leadership comes from being able to listen to, having empathy with, and reading the minds of other people.

Leadership comes from being able to see the big picture while understanding how its elements relate to the whole.

Leadership is not lost in the detail of things and never micromanages.

Leadership comes from being able to focus on the essence in every given situation – a leader knows the difference between what is important and what is trivial.

Leadership comes from being able to bring a group together that acts toward a common goal.

Leadership comes from being able to communicate well – articulating your thoughts clearly while adapting to different kinds of situations and audiences.

Attitude to My Leadership Role

Leaders understand their central role in the process of inducing others to act toward a common goal – and know how to master this role.

Leadership is about relating so well to others that you are being followed.

Leaders lead by their actions, not their positions.

Leaders influence others by inspiring their trust, acting consistently, and motivating them by words and deeds.

Leaders lead by legitimate authority, setting an example, setting goals, rewarding success and dealing with failure, organisational restructuring, team-building, and communicating a vision.

Leaders act so that the organisation achieves its mission while all feel they were part of it.

By Dr Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division