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Ministry with Those with Special Needs

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05 March 2013 Tirana, Albania [Julian Kastrati, tedNEWS] The weekend of 1–3 March was indeed unique and had an immense impact on the Adventist Church in Albania. For three evenings, "Connect to Escape", a LIFEconnect Stream event featuring Dr Miroslav Pujic, Trans-European Division (TED) Internet Ministries Director, was launched very successfully in downtown Tirana.

This type of evangelistic outreach was notably the first of its kind in Albania but also in the TED territory. The format proved very impressive, innovative and engaging, both for the hall audience as well as for online viewers. The three evenings of broadcasts were themed "Connect to Escape" ("Is There Any Hope for Us?"). They focused on Trust ("Is God Doing His Job?"), Forgiveness ("Should I Forgive Someone Who Hurt Me?") and Hope ("End of the World. Really?") and have since been uploaded on YouTube.
The church in Tirana as well as the LIFEconnect Albania team had spent months preparing for the high-profile event which took place in the Hotel Tirana International. Over 100 non-Adventists attended the meetings excluding Tirana-based church members and local staff. Among the audience, there were representatives of Albania's Presidential Office, A Member of Parliament (who is a church member in Central Tirana), the Director of Culture for the City of Tirana, as well as TV personalities.

Throughout Albania, an additional twelve organised groups, met in churches or homes and interacted with the chat moderators. Around 100 people participated in chatting with our moderators regarding the topics and what was going on in the programme. Overall, about 1000 non-Adventists followed the programme online.
The event's live streaming enabled many others to watch the programme from the comfort of their own homes not only in Albania, but also throughout the whole world. With viewers from over 15 countries in Europe, Americas, and Asia. "Just to give an idea about the impact of the online streaming, I received a report that an organised group of 17 watched all three evenings from Offenbach, Germany" reported Gentian Thomollari, one of the chat moderators, who also added that "120 contacts viewed the programme from Elbasan alone (a city in Central Albania).

The Adventist Church in Albania and the Internet Ministries have a strong presence on the Internet, and particularly Facebook. The advert for the event produced by tedMEDIA Productions was shown over 3 million times on the LIFEconnect.al page and it was seen by 286,476 people and 3,210 people shared, liked or, made some other actions on the page.
"LIFEconnect reached the point of enjoying the fruits of the hard work of Julian [Kastrati], the [Albania] Web Pastor and the Mission team," said Dr Pujic. "I want to praise God for the success of this initiative, as well as the team in Tirana and tedMEDIA who did an excellent job."

Reflecting on this unique experience, Pr Leo Espana President of the Albanian Mission noted: "From Tirana city to the entire country and abroad, many persons were reached with a message of hope and salvation in the privacy of their homes. I am deeply grateful to God for this initiative. Certainly, God is preparing His church in Albania for greater things to happen: "Pr Espana continues quoting: "...so is My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

Needless to say, the feedback from in-hall and online viewers was tremendously positive. Lorena Idrizi, who has started baptismal studies with Pr Kastrati, brought her two cousins and two close friends. She could not hide her excitement online as she said: "I feel the blessing of God, as I reflect on the presentations of Professor Miroslav. I am challenged to be a better person and to trust God much more because He alone provides hope for us!" Also Qashif Imeri, an Albanian from Macedonia, commented online: "These were three of the most joyous evenings of my life. May God bless the organisers for providing such quality content and bringing us closer to God. It's particularly beautiful to watch and hear everything in the Albanian language".
"The Lord has blessed so abundantly!" said Pr Julian Kastrati, who was responsible for the event and who coordinates Internet Ministries in Albania. "I feel very privileged to be a part of the LIFEconnect family, and I want to wholeheartedly thank Dr Pujic, Mirjana Tesanovic Kicusic, the tedMEDIA team, as well as our local staff and group of digital missionaries. I am overwhelmed by the growing sense of ownership of the church in Tirana. So many brought their relatives and close friends to the programme, showing strong support for this initiative. We have received such positive feedback that we're keen to have Dr Pujic and the team return to Albania to feature similar programmes on a regular basis.

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05 March 2013 Dunstable, United Kingdom [Simon Martin, tedNEWS] Seven years ago a small group of members from the Luton North church decided to plant a community church in the nearby town of Dunstable. Its mission was (and still is) to plant an innovative, Jesus focused, spiritually alive, Bible based, grace oriented, culturally relevant Seventh-day Adventist church that will impact, transform and serve the immediate community for the Kingdom of God.

The plant has focused most of its ministry on the Downside estate, situated on the outskirts of Dunstable. It so was named to draw attention to the fact that the 1,100-home estate sits on the edge of an important nature resource: the Blow’s Downs. Over the years however the estate has suffered from periods of neglect and deprivation. At one point 8% of all recorded crime in Bedfordshire took place on this estate.

The Dunstable group has ministered to the local community over the years by providing the following services: free health checks and health seminars by qualified medical staff, after school clubs, a community football club, mother and toddler groups, fitness clubs, senior citizens clubs, and youth clubs. Every year the group provides a day outing for the local
residents. Its latest ministry to the estate has been in the form of a 'Heart café', a response to the lifestyle crisis of disconnection and isolation which is taking place in many of our communities today. Heart café tries to address this trend by creating safe and appealing environments where people can talk and connect in meaningful ways. At Heart café people enjoy good food, conversations and the presentation of the Gospel through live music and talks. Overall, the plant has adopted an incarnational ministry approach by meeting people where they are, providing a listening ear and practical support.

Every Saturday at 1pm after the morning worship service, the church provides lunch for the community, followed by 'Creative church'. This is an informal church service where families can come together to do arts and crafts, sing, play and learn. There is always a theme for the week, which focuses on a well-known Bible story that teaches important biblical values.

As a result of the good reputation of the Dunstable church plant within the community, some of the core group members have been invited to sit on numerous committees and resident associations to oversee and manage the estate. Members of the church plant were also included on the management team that set up Street Pastors for Dunstable. The plant now has five trained Street Pastors who patrol the town during the night at weekends. Two more group members are in the process of being trained.

Most recently, the Dunstable town council has allowed the church plant to take over the local community centre. The group now manages the centre and has some kind of activity running there every day of the week. [tedNEWS]
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The seven areas of special needs were identified as cognitive, visual, mobility, auditory, psychiatric, speech, and hidden. It was also identified that one-in-twenty of the population of any group will have a special need, worldwide. Yet this ministry has been largely ignored by the Christian church on the whole and by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular. This lack of attention to the spiritual and physical needs of these people discourages many from participating in the life of the church.

The meetings started with seminars aimed at creating awareness among the attendees, of the importance of this ministry. Presentations were given by representatives of various special needs ministries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ray Dabrowski from Christian Record Services displayed resources that aid ministry to those who are blind, and outlined the urgency for this ministry in light of the soon return of Jesus Christ. Larry Evens spoke passionately about the need to build awareness for the ministry to the deaf and hearing impaired. Special guest and Director of Special Needs Ministries in North American Division, Charlotte Thoms, presented a comprehensive understanding of the definition for
special needs and how the church can be more proactive in this important ministry.

Within the TED at least four countries have already given attention to this ministry: Latvia, United Kingdom, Hungary and Poland. Within these countries special ministries have been developed to involve the blind, the deaf and others with special needs; however much more needs to be accomplished and more countries need to be involved.

The consultation meetings ended with resolutions to create further awareness in local churches for this ministry and to develop resources that will empower church members, with and without special needs, to effectively share their faith. [tedNEWS]
IRLA Joins Call for Pastor’s Release from Iranian Prison | TED Adventist

26 February 2013 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Ansel Oliver/ANN] The International Religious Liberty Association has joined more than a dozen religious groups and human rights advocates calling for the release of American pastor Saeed Abedini, who was imprisoned in Iran in September for his religious beliefs.

Abedini, who periodically traveled to his native Iran to establish and manage an orphanage, was arrested and convicted of endangering national security. The Christian Post last week reported that Abedini -- a member of a non-denominational Christian church -- was helping Christians in underground churches. He is now being tortured and forced to recant his Christian faith, the Post reported.

"It appears Abedini is being held and persecuted solely because of his faith, and we join others in calling for his immediate release," said IRLA Secretary-General John Graz, who also serves as director for the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the Seventh-day Adventist world church.

"Arresting someone because he changes his religion should not be accepted by those whose believe in human dignity," Graz said. "We hope the Iranian authorities will release Pastor Abedini as soon as possible."
In a February 13 letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, an informal group of NGOs and activists requested the secretary to “exhaust every possible option” to ensure Abedini’s release and call on Iran to meet its commitment of upholding human rights.

“Iran is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly recognizes the fundamental human right to choose one’s own religion and freedom from arbitrary detention,” the letter stated. Other signatory groups include the American Islamic Congress, Christian Solidarity International, and World Relief.

The group’s letter came a day following a similar letter to Secretary Kerry from 84 members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Reports indicate Abedini is subject to solitary confinement, beatings and aggressive interrogations at Evin Prison, known for holding many political prisoners. Abedini was sentenced to eight years in prison at a trial last month, which numerous human rights groups said was a sham.

On January 25, a State Department spokeswoman called for Abedini’s release, condemning Iran’s violation of human rights and freedom of religion. White House spokesman Jay Carney on January 28 issued a similar appeal.

Abedini, a 32-year-old father of two, converted from Islam to Christianity in 2000. He since traveled to Iran to manage an orphanage in the northern city of Rasht.

The American Center for Law and Justice has established a petition for Abedini’s release and will meet with UN Human Rights officials next month. [tedNEWS]

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21 February 2013 London, United Kingdom [Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist, BUC News]

Valentine's stretched out for an extra day at the Central London church. Last Friday evening it was sympathetically decorated adding a romantic feel fitting the theme of love for the monthly 'Dialogue café'.

An average of 125 people come to the café, an initiative of Pastor Geert Tap. He saw a need to create a space other than Sabbath morning for church people to bring their friends and colleagues to church.

"If we want to connect with the city we find ourselves in," explains Pastor Tap, "we need to open our doors in the evening when people stroll the streets of London in search of a great place to relax, have some good food, and meaningful conversations."

Gathering around decorated tables rather than pews, church members brought friends and colleagues to an evening of music, inspiration, and interaction – not forgetting the cupcakes and chocolate covered strawberries. With interactive puzzles to solve, each table got to know each other better both with tasks and later in the programme through dialogue.

"We have run it since October 2012, and every time we see new people, and half of the church is filled with non-members", enthuses Pastor Tap.

"I simply love it," said Amanda Van Der Schyff, "I come every time."

Tiago Torre visiting from Portugal found the evening different. "The music provided a more mixed atmosphere. Where I come from we only use a piano", he said.

Pastor Dejan Stojkovic, South England Conference Teens director, spoke about free refills, drawing from the story of the Samarian woman at the well, to whom Jesus offered eternal
water and eternal love.

"The evening was simply amazing", reflected Robert Coltheart. "I was inspired by the music and by Pastor Dejan, who really knows how to add humour, and still make a point."

To find out more about the activities in Central London Church, please click here. [tedNEWS]

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21 February 2013 Warsaw, Poland [Jan Kot, tedNEWS] The beginning of 2013 marks a breakthrough in the media ministry of the Polish Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (PUC). A dynamic growth of the Voice of Hope Adventist Media Centre (VoH AMC) resulted in launching the Hope Channel Poland, which extended the worldwide family of the Adventist television channels.

So far the programmes in Polish have been broadcast 24/7 online, but plans are being made to enter the cable and even satellite networks.

“We are grateful to our God who blessed us so much that evangelism through the professional online television in Polish became fact. Using this medium of communication we waste not a minute in continuous proclamation of the Word of God”, says Pastor Paweł Lazar, PUC president and Voice of Hope manager.

Online round–the–clock Adventist TV broadcast in Polish was started back in 2010 when during the General Conference Session in Atlanta the VoH AMC team in Warsaw decided to rebroadcast the most important parts of the session together with other previously prepared programmes.

‘Back then we responded to pastor Ted Wilson’s call to “Go Forward!”, which encouraged us
to take on seemingly impossible tasks. Also the Trans–European Division Strategic Plan for 2010–2015 gave us a boost for developing church media in Poland, offering still new mission programmes, recently under the Hope Channel logo,' says Jan Kot, VoH AMC editor-in-chief.

The Hope Channel Poland is preparing for the Mission to the Cities that is going to be carried out in Warsaw in 2014. At the moment, special billboards advertising this Adventist channel are being designed and will appear in a number of Polish cities. The first one was installed in Zakopane, the winter capital of Poland visited by 3 million tourists a year.

‘To a large extent the varied programming of the Hope Channel Poland is a result of a close cooperation with the tedMEDIA Productions of the Trans–European Division. The programmes are translated into Polish and distributed on DVDs and posted on YouTube, Facebook and LIFEconnect websites. They are an excellent ancillary tool aiding the process of personal ministry. In 2012 our media centre produced over 100,000 copies of individual films on DVDs, which also included many domestic productions that take into account the needs and expectations of various target groups and thus ever expand the offer,’ adds Jan Kot.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Poland consists of about 6000 members. Although being such a small community, Adventists do not cease to proclaim the truth of salvation and their presence in society is conspicuous, thanks to the dynamic activity of the Hope Channel Poland.

Below you will find a few comments from our website which show that the Adventist media activity in Poland is also appreciated abroad by the members of a multi–million Polish emigrant community who can partake in the blessed Word of God in their native language through the Internet.

‘Praise the Lord Almighty for the mass media through which the Gospel can reach the ends of the earth. May our gracious God bless you abundantly. MARANA THA!’ (Iwona, Italy)

‘I have just come across your programs. They enrich me spiritually. I am very grateful for them. May the Lord bless you in this undertaking in a special way.’ (Piotr, Germany)

‘Always wishing you God’s abundant blessing. I have found here interesting Bible studies and beautiful songs. I praise the Lord that I found this wonderful website.’ (Arkadia, Cyprus)

‘We are praising the Lord for this website. We especially enjoy the worship services.’ (Emilia and Robert, Turkey)
‘I deem it an act of Grace that I found you on the Net. I believe that God led me to find you. I am a Catholic, but I believe all Christians belong to one community. What counts is the love for God and you teach it in a very clear and encouraging manner. CONGRATULATIONS! May you grow in strength.’ (Krystyna, USA)

The Hope Channel Poland can be viewed at www.hopetv.org under „Poland” and also at www.hopechannel.pl. [tedNEWS]

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In the Guinness Book of Records the fastest talker in the world is Steve Woodmore, at 595 words per minute. Depending on which research you look at people normally talk at 100 to 175 words per minute. By contrast, their listening capacity or ability to comprehend is 600 to 800 words per minute. This, disparity researchers say, means that someone hears and comprehends between 25–50% of what you say.

George Bernard Shaw’s expressed the problem slightly differently: “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place”. If you read, listen or watch the news the truth of that statement is all too obvious. Conflicts in the Middle East, Iran and in Africa are all examples of apparently successful negotiations or agreements breaking down. The illusion of communication is shattered by the practical application of what the parties thought they had “agreed”. The same situation can arise within the church between: members; pastors and members; administration and employees. The potential for misunderstanding between people is ever present.

There are various aids to communication, presentation methods and structures which can aid communication and assimilation. There is one aspect of communication which is often overlooked and all too seldom practiced – silence.

**Active listening**
Listening can be regarded as passive, said in the right way it is a tool to improve our efficiency, effectiveness and enhance our ability in interpersonal relationships.

There are key components to active listening. These components help us understand what a person is trying to say, while at the same time giving positive feedback to the person who is speaking and facilitating a true exchange of ideas.

**Pay attention**
At the risk of stating the obvious – pay attention to the person who is speaking!

When on the telephone or in a meeting with your computer resist the temptation to play games on your computer, scan incoming e-mails or surf the internet. There is nothing as irritating as hearing the click, click of a mouse at the other end of the telephone. It communicates disrespect for others.

Look at the speaker. Observe their body language. Avoid preparing your response after you
have heard the first sentence. Wait until they have finished speaking or presenting their point before responding.

It is all too easy to be distracted. External noises, mobile phones, bright lights, or decorations all can interpose between us and the speaker. A late night, a heavy workload can easily result in mind drift. Suddenly you realize that you have lost half of the conversation and now you are expected to make a response. A helpful approach is to take notes, a discipline that keeps us focused on the speaker.

**Show that you are paying attention**
Just as the speaker’s body language enhances their verbal communication, so your body language enhances your listening. Sit in an open positive position. Nod, smile, and reflect the emotions of the speaker. In a small group or on a one to one basis give verbal endorsements where appropriate, such as yes, ok, hmm etc.

**Positive response**
Our preconceptions, cultural conditioning, emotions or assumptions may distort or enhance our ability to hear and understand what it being said.

Reflect back to the speaker what you have heard using phrases such as:
If I understand you correctly…
What you are saying is …
and then paraphrase what you have heard.

If it is unclear about what the person is saying – ask clarifying questions. Confucian wisdom ‘say’: “When you know something say what you know. When you don’t know something say that you don’t know. That is knowledge.” At appropriate points in the conversation summarize what you have heard and understood. This way misunderstandings can be cleared up at the meeting and not come as a nasty surprise afterwards.

**Suspend judgment**
There is nothing more frustrating than someone who constantly interrupts. It disrupts the speaker’s flow of ideas. It inhibits the listeners’ ability to understand what is being said. Always allow the speaker to finish so that you have the complete picture. It may make your counter arguments more effective!

**Respond**
Active listening is based on mutual respect. This should also be basis of our response. Apply the Golden Rule: respond to others in the manner that you would like them to respond to you.
There may be times when a person makes a personal attack on you. Your natural reaction may be to react and express anger, frustration or indignation. Well thought out strategies in advance can help defuse the situation and help avoid a conflict situation. By applying “reflect” and responding: I feel that you are XXX, have I understood you correctly? This can help the speaker listen to themselves and constructively confront and diffuse a difficult situation.

**Active listening checklist**
Use the following list will help evaluate your active listening skills and identify where there is room for improvement.

- What proportion of time do you spend talking and listening?
- How often do you finish other’s sentences?
- How aware are you of your personal filters in a given situation? We are products of our environment and have natural biases. How do these effect our ability to listen to others with different opinions?
- Do you experience mind drift or daydream during meetings?
- Do you play games on the computer or surf the internet while talking to someone on the telephone?
- Do you dominate conversations or do you allow others to express their opinions?
- When do you formulate your response? Do you wait until the person has finished what they are saying or are you formulating it as they speak?
- Do you give feedback by reacting or reflecting?

Active listening requires as much if not more energy than speaking, but it will pay rich dividends. Those who think with their mouth have little use for their grey cells. ♦

By Audrey Andersson, Executive Secretary, Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Used with permission from Leadership Development Journal – June 2009
Leadership and sexual self-control | TED Adventist

The general assumption is – you can’t be a good leader, teacher, pastor, or elder and have sexual self-control problems. In reality most people are good at hiding their sexual self-control problems.¹

Looking for something to read while waiting for a colleague, a pastor opened the glove compartment of his colleague’s car to find a collection of pornographic magazines, not the religious literature he was expecting. Confronting his friend, he pointed out that not only was he setting a bad example, he was also putting his ministry in jeopardy.

This article focuses on the underlying dynamic involved in all forms of addiction, including sexual addiction. A simple definition of addiction is: “any thinking, or behaviour that is habitual, repetitious, and very difficult or almost impossible to control regardless of negative consequences”.² The long term negative consequences of an addiction are detrimental to a person’s relationships, health, psychological well-being and spiritual health. Addictions come in many guises. The most common are alcohol, drugs, television, Internet games, shopping, gambling, eating, sports, work, nicotine or even chocolate. Others are addicted to exercise, work, politics, or religion. When the addiction is perceived as negative, most try to hide it; however, when the addiction is something positive, such as care giving or church activities, some project it as being good and wear it like a badge of honour. According to another definition of addiction, providing no harm comes to the individual or others, technically there is no addiction.³

People may accomplish a lot in other areas of their lives while still having a real and potentially dangerous problem with sex. Problems with sexual self-control can be like a monster, constantly needing more and more to keep it quiet. Some risk their security, including job, money, relationships and health to meet the ever-increasing demand of their sex life.

These problems are not new. King David, a “man after God’s heart”, could not resist temptation when he started to focus on Bathsheba’s physical beauty. His lust resulted in him arranging to have her husband killed. In turn David suffered the consequences when confronted by the prophet Nathan.

Sex addiction problems are prevalent among people from all walks of life. Today sexual images are readily available and not everyone is strong enough to resist and refocus the
mind on something else.

Today there are many sources of sexual gratification. Pornography is readily available 24x7 via the Internet. More than 200 new pornographic websites are launched daily. More people than ever before are struggling with sexual compulsivity due to the Internet. About 40% of sex addicts are women.4 Like other addictions, a sex addiction is a pathological relationship with a mood-altering experience, which in the end becomes central to the person’s life. The relationship is with sex not with people. The secretive and double life becomes more real than the public life.

The addictive experience generally follows a four-phase addictive cycle. Phase one moves from a pre-occupation with sexual fantasies to an obsessive search for sexual stimulation. The mood is altered as the person enters an obsessive trance. In the second phase the person progresses from this mental state to preparation activities (rituals) which intensify the obsession. In the third phase the natural outcome is compulsive sexual behaviour which is almost impossible to control. The fourth and final phase is a feeling of hopelessness and of being powerless.5 Within this cycle there are three levels of addiction. Some people have episodic sexual compulsion problems and engage in activities such as excessive masturbation, watching pornography, Cybersex or illicit sexual behaviour. At a more destructive level behaviours such as victimisation, harassment and exhibitionism call for legal sanctions. The third level consists of behaviours like incest, rape and child molestation, with grave consequences for both victim and perpetrator.6

Sexual excitement is centred in the brain, and the impact of sexual addiction on the neural pathways of the brain is one reason why it is so hard to break. Our brain is composed of multiple neurons which are connected by synapses that can be created and grown, or deteriorate based on our thoughts and actions. Therefore, our choices and behaviours change the structure of the brain. Dopamine (a neurotransmitter) floods our brain and rewards us for exciting or risky behaviour. In addition, Oxytocin is released in the female brain and Vasopressin in the male brain stimulating attachment during sexual activity,7 creating organic changes in the brain. In the end addictive neural pathways based on sexual stimuli are established which are extremely hard to change. These neural pathways function like a map indicating what is arousing in a specific situation8 and form the physiological basis of our thought processes. The preoccupation and obsession with sexual activity functions as a filter distorting reality so that sexual activity is considered to be the most important need9, because the brain is now addicted.

Many case studies also seem to indicate that sexual addiction is transferred from one
generation to the next. According to specialists, the underlying dynamic in any addiction is a deep ingrained fear of abandonment. Generally there might have been a lack of nurturing. In the search for something or someone to depend on, alternatives are sought, which always promise to be a source of comfort and feeling good. In this situation any addiction becomes a real danger. In the case of sex addiction e.g. pornography, the fusion between sex and nurturing is cemented together.\textsuperscript{10}

Especially during times of stress, conflict or fatigue, individuals are more vulnerable and likely to lose control. PET scans show that at any given time, more blood flows to areas of the brain which are active.\textsuperscript{11}

During times of prolonged stress the part of the brain involved in so-called, instinctual drives (hunger, sleep etc.) and emotional experiences, is more active. At the other end of the spectrum, parts of the brain controlling the ability to inhibit unacceptable behaviours, controlling impulses and exhibiting moral behaviour, become less active. They are bombarded by impulses from the emotional brain and are overwhelmed. As a consequence, a person becomes less rational and more emotional, and extremely vulnerable to any issue with which they may struggle. The thinking process gets distorted and that is why it is important to take time to recuperate and balance work with rest. Triggered by this mental state, sexual self-control problems are intensified by distorted thinking, intense emotions, specific situations and the strength of one’s physical sexual drive. Additional risks include factors such as: being in a place where loss of control happened previously; being in conflict with other people (spouse, family, work); having unwanted feelings such as hostility, depression, anxiety and not knowing what to do with them; acting on unfounded thoughts and sexual arousal.\textsuperscript{12}

When individuals learn how to cope with their negative emotions, thoughts, situations and sexual arousal in more healthy ways, they are less likely to engage in addictive behaviour. How does one give leadership and guidance to those who struggle with sexual self-control issues? Or for that matter how does one cope on a personal level with issues in this area? Here are some strategies to guide others. These guidelines can also be used as a self-help method:

1. Acknowledge and accept that the problem is beyond the person’s control and stop denying or neglecting this fact (ownership).
2. Help the person admit that he /she cannot control the addiction without dependence on God, self-examination, prayer and help from at least one trustworthy individual. Establish a relationship based on unconditional acceptance and trust with at least one other person.
3. Support the individual to commit to the help they have sought.
4. Challenge old (obsessive) thoughts, and understand and change sexual planning and decision making; refocus sexual fantasies. Thoughts are not true in themselves. Consider them to be nothing more than hypotheses which ought to be challenged.

5. Practise tolerating negative emotions such as anger and depressed feelings without using sex to relieve them. Develop the ability to experience strong negative emotions without bringing sex into the picture.

6. Identify situations and strategies to avoid high-risk situations. A changed environment changes behaviour.

7. Balance life so that sex is not more important than any other part. Find a hobby and plan other activities. There are great joys in life that have nothing to do with sex.

8. Take a break in time.

9. Cope with the problem of wanting immediate gratification.

10. Be aware of the “abstinence violation effect”. Old behaviour pathways never completely disappear. They are overrun by new pathways. When trying to change (stopping old behaviour and practising new skills), relapse into old behaviour is simply part of growth, and there is nothing wrong with that. The risk is to think that all is lost. This is catastrophic thinking. Take a step back; refocus as soon as possible on the new behaviour and start again.

11. Be patient with the person and help him/her to be patient with themselves! It takes at least nine months of practice to establish a new neural pathway that is strong enough for the behaviour to become more or less automatic. In fact this might be a life-long process.

12. Help the individual to focus on Jesus who offers unconditional acceptance. Guide them to tap into His love and power as a spiritual resource, which enables change and gradual growth into Christlikeness! It is very important to have an external model to focus on.

13. Help them to memorise by heart, empowering scriptural texts that strengthen neural pathways (e.g. Philippians 4:13 is helpful: “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.” (NKJV) Ephesians 3:20 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (NIV)

14. Seek professional help!

Notes:


(3) Ibid., 682.
(6) Ibid., 37.
(9) Ibid., 102.
(10) Ibid., 97–103.

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Used with permission from Leadership Development Journal – January/February 2013
I have never particularly liked reading books on the subject of leadership. You know the sort of thing: Ten steps to maximising your leadership potential. They are often very generalised and full of lists pointing the way to success. They may have their place of course. Stephen Covey’s book Seven Habits of Highly Successful People would not have sold in such huge numbers had it not had something important to say.

But these books often make a crucial mistake: they make leadership into a science when actually it is an art. They offer some sort of mechanical performance, techniques, and systems as the keystone of success. I believe that at the heart of good leadership inevitably and always you find strong, respectful, and creative relationships. If this generalisation holds good anywhere surely it must be in the Church.

The best book I have read on Christian leadership is very short and contains no lists, no steps. It was written by a man who, by his own admission, was entirely lacking in the ability to manage any large venture. But leading is not at all the same as managing. And he remains a great leader of minds worldwide. Henri Nouwen has important things to say to us in the Church today in his book In the Name of Jesus: reflections on Christian leadership.

In a few short pages he confronts us with some uncomfortable truths about the ways we exercise leadership. He says: “We have been tempted to replace love with power...Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy and intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead” (p60). He adds that “it seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people” (p59). Such tensions mean that we are often engaged in “political battles for power [rather] than spiritual searches for the truth” (p31).

We all, if we are honest, want to make our mark, to draw attention to our own contribution. But no, says Nouwen. We must resist the “temptation to do something spectacular”, after all “Jesus refused to be a stunt man” (p38). Nouwen says we must “overcome the temptation to individual heroism” (p25). And the temptation to heroism is strong among us. The mark of true Christian leaders is that they are “always willing to confess their own brokenness” (p46). That is not easy to do in the midst of the pressure to impress which is as present in the life of the Church as anywhere else.

Well at least we can stand for justice and be the model of a moral human being. But no: “it is not enough for the priests... of the future...to be moral people”. They will have above all
“an ardent desire to dwell in God’s presence” (p29). Many things in the institutional life of the Church stifle this desire but

“when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft and true witnesses without being manipulative” (p32).

If only...

Nouwen identifies my weaknesses as a leader with disturbing accuracy. It is a rather painful read. He raises the bar higher: “The Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self” (p17). But I desperately do not want to be irrelevant! I want all my activism to count for something!

He reassures us: “Through contemplative prayer we can keep ourselves from being pulled from one urgent issue to another and from becoming strangers to our own and God’s heart” (pp28–29). All of this means that we have to be wide open to the opinions of others, open to critique without being destroyed. God’s correction will often come through the critique of others.

‘Critique’ is somehow a gentler word than ‘criticism’. Whichever word you choose it is hard to accept. The reason often is fear. Many of us are insecure in ourselves, in our own judgements and leadership ability. And so we become entrenched in our own views, fearing critique as an attack on us. It takes a depth of spirit to accept criticism from others.

Many of us are servants of the system which promoted us. So we are wary of giving or receiving criticism. He who critiques will himself be critiqued. And so we maintain polite silences. We lack the courage or the skills necessary to offer life-giving criticism. Yet we have not only to accept criticism but to embrace it. This is the mark of a mature leader who turns critique into momentum for future action. Ultimately criticism only really becomes valuable when we transform it into self-criticism.

You might think that is only negative critique which is difficult to take. But no. Many Christian leaders find it impossible to accept affirmations. They deflect them. This has always puzzled me. It masquerades as humility but is often false. It is a serious spiritual problem because it shows that we find it difficult to accept grace when it is extended, and for a Christian that is serious.
Nouwen calls for “a whole new type of leadership...not modelled on the power games of the world, but on the servant leader, Jesus”. And then he announces the final unpalatable truth – that “the mystery [is] that leadership for a large part means to be led” (p57).

Maybe Nouwen is right. Maybe we have sometimes mistaken managerialism for leadership. Maybe we have thereby invited secular styles into Church structures. If Nouwen is right we have a lot of rethinking to do about our approaches to leadership in our own places of work.

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Written by Michael Pearson, DPhil, Principal Lecturer in Philosophy, Newbold College, UK

Conflicts are normal in a church setting, and all churches have to deal with them. Unlike leaders of the business world who have the authority to insist and make changes, church leaders must rely upon their God–given gifts to reconcile conflicting parties voluntarily — they must mediate.

When dealing with colleagues, church members or anyone else who may be coming from a different perspective to us, there is always potential for conflict. Contrasting personality styles, competing visions and difference in spiritual maturity – just to mention a few – can lead to anything from innocent misunderstandings to inappropriate behaviour and open hostility. There are also some people who have the “self–anointed gift of conflict.” Facing the challenge of working in unity with these gifted members and colleagues is one of life’s greatest frustrations.

At the same time, we need to recognise that conflict in a church environment is unique – it mixes organisational dynamics with personality, family history, theology and of course, faith. This combination creates both challenges and opportunities. James, the brother of our Lord, tells us that conflict is generated in the heart of a person and that outer conflict has its origin in the inner turmoil of the individual. He says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (James 4:1, NIV).

One of the earlier incidents of conflict in the New Testament Church is in Acts 6:1–7, where some members were hurt because the widows from the other group seemed to be getting more attention from the leaders. This kind of spirit where members feel neglected resulting in feelings of hurt is still with us today.

The intent of this article is to identify some of the ways in which conflict is currently being handled in a church setting, by drawing on available literature, and propose a need to change the culture within the church in order for conflict to be handled creatively and transformatively. The reason to consider such a change is so that the church can provide a more authentic and dynamic witness for in–reach and outreach purposes. This article is not intended to address interpersonal conflict and reconciliation with a brother (or sister) “who sins against you” as outlined by Christ in Matthew 18.
Misconceptions of the Word “Conflict”
It is vital to remember that all conflicts are not bad, although unmanaged or unresolved conflicts can turn toxic. One of the difficulties in talking about conflict in the church has to do with our understanding of the word “conflict”. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk in her book “Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation” suggests four common misperceptions of conflict in a church setting:

1. We often restrict the use of the term “conflict” to tensions where there are negative elements, and fail to include situations where there is a positive or constructive outcome.

2. We tend to view pain and struggle as negative and as experiences to be avoided, rather than as inescapable and intrinsic elements in growth and creativity – and, for the Christian, in discipleship.

3. As Christians, we often hold a theology (whether implicit or explicit) that conflict is wrong or sinful, instead of understanding that conflict can be neutral and that it is our responses to conflict that determine right or wrong behaviours and outcomes.

4. We like to think that it should be easy to “love one another”, but in reality, dealing creatively with our differences in a Christian setting is often profoundly challenging and demanding.

While there are times when it is appropriate to avoid conflict, adopting a generic church/personal position on conflict avoidance and “niceness” will likely lead to a build up of tensions that can explode destructively at a later stage. Conflict avoidance also misses out on more creative options for dealing with the tensions and differences within a Christian congregation.

Transformational Approach to Conflict
So, a central issue to addressing this topic as leaders is the question of how we think about conflict. John Paul Lederach in his book “Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures” offers us to think about conflict in terms of conflict transformation (rather than the more common “conflict resolution” or “conflict management”). Lederach argues:

“A transformational approach recognises that conflict is a normal and continuous dynamic within human relationships. Moreover, conflict brings with it the potential for constructive change. Positive change does not always happen, of course. As we all know too well, many times conflict results in long-standing cycles of hurt and destruction. But the key to transformation is a proactive bias toward seeing conflict as a potential catalyst for growth.”
Lederach adds that conflict transformation can be a deeply spiritual process that demands prayer, discipleship, commitment, discipline, new skills, much practice, and constant vigilance from each of us – it can be a good thing for our personal spiritual development.

**Conflict Requires our Attention and Intention**

When dealing with transformational conflict situations in a church context, focused attention and serious listening are key to achieving positive outcomes. This entails engaging in listening to God’s voice, going through a deep process of listening to those that will be impacted, reading the “signs of the times”, and wrestling together with what it means to be the church in this rapidly changing environment.

I came across a brilliant article by C Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer in leadership at MIT, entitled “Uncovering the Blind Spot of Leadership”. I also took the time to read portions of Scharmer’s book, “Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges”. Scharmer argues that successful leadership depends on the quality of attention (listening) and intention that a leader brings in any conflict and change situation. Furthermore, Scharmer underscores four levels of listening that are needed when facing a conflict and addressing change:

1. **Downloading** – where everything you hear confirms what you already know.

2. **Factual** – where the listener (problem-solver) pays attention to facts or discomforting information. This is the phase where the leader needs to switch off his inner voice of judgement and focuses on what differs from what he/she already knows – you let the responses and information talk to you. In other words, you disconfirm what you already know and notice what “is new out there”.

3. **Empathic** – this is a deeper level of listening where the leader becomes engaged in real dialogue. It is the phase where you move away from the cold facts to listening to the story of a living person. This requires an openness of heart to really feel how another feels. You forget about your own agenda and begin to see how the world appears through someone else’s eyes – in other words, your perspective as a problem solver/change facilitator is redirected to seeing the situation through the eyes of another. People’s perceptions – and by implication their misperceptions – are central to the experience of conflict.

4. **Generative** – this is the level where the listener feels quieter and is connected to the BIG picture. This kind of listening is futuristic in nature focusing on the opportunities to apply change in a constructive manner. It goes beyond listening to facts and empathising with someone. It is a phase where you enter a deeper level of knowing, including the knowledge of your best future opportunities.
Scharmer adds that one of the ultimate purposes of listening in a conflict transformational process is not only for the leader/listener to get ‘the facts’ or get his/her ideas across but to support the speaker in understanding their own thoughts and feelings about the conflict they are involved in and helping them connect with future opportunities. Only when you reach the Generative level, without the bias you began with, will you be able to agree on a way forward and avoid a potential conflict.

**Assessing Conflict Intensity**

Conflicts that are not managed become more vicious as it increases in intensity. Speed Leas (who is a recognised authority on conflict in church congregations) in his book, “Discover your Conflict Management Style”, has provided a framework for naming and identifying the different levels of intensity of conflict. Leas proposes five broad levels of conflict intensity as follows:

1. **Problems to Solve** – at this level there are real differences between people, but the people are problem-focused not person-focused. Communication is clear and specific and the people involved want to sort out the problem. This is a normal and entirely healthy level of conflict which is experienced by all churches.

2. **Disagreement** – at this level people are more concerned with self-protection than problem-solving. Communication is more generalised and people withhold information they think may be used by those with whom they disagree. Again, it is normal for most churches to experience this level of conflict.

3. **Contest** – at this level people’s attitudes shift to winning arguments. There is a win-lose dynamic and communication becomes more confused with personal attacks. It is not unusual for churches to experience this level of conflict.

4. **Fight or Flight** – at this level the parties’ objectives are to hurt or get rid of others, or to leave if they cannot achieve this. Divisions are cemented, with identified leaders, and the good of the subgroup, rather than the whole congregation or wider Christian body, becomes their focus. Communication is characterised by blaming, negative stereotyping, and self-righteousness. It is less common for churches to reach this level of conflict, and if they do, they would require external assistance if the group is to stay together.

5. **Intractable** – the goal of opposing parties at this level is to destroy one another. In such situations, members see themselves as fighting for universal principles with any means justifying the all-important ends. Communication is characterised by outright condemnation of others, extreme emotional volatility, compulsiveness, an inability to
disengage, and with the issues lost from sight. This is conflict at its most destructive, and requires separation of the warring parties, some kind of peacekeeping rather than a peacemaking initiative.

By being aware of these levels of conflict, Leas helps us to understand some of the difficulty that can be involved in working with conflict situations in the church. An accurate assessment of the level of intensity is crucial to solving a conflict. “If you do not recognise the conflict level then it is likely that what you do will at best be ineffective and at worst be counter-productive. Misjudging the conflict level can do more harm than good.”

**Final Remarks**

Without doubt, there is a need to encourage a “culture of peace” in the church. Part of developing a “culture of peace” is the way we think about ourselves as leaders and others in a conflict situation (both individuals and groups) to achieve a transformational approach to conflict. Our goal should not be elimination of all disagreement but to manage unchristian practices which are not consistent with Christ’s command to “love one another” – such as “corridor talk”, name calling, finger-pointing and spiritual spearing of one another.

Managing expectations regarding conflicts and embarking on an exercise to encourage the development of an authentic conflict culture within our church is also part of Christian discipleship. Perhaps we need to learn to disagree – even on matters of truth – in ways that represent the “Gospel of Truth”.

How we handle conflict has also relevance to our outreach mission as a church. This is equally important for our interaction with our communities. A Church exhibiting healthy relationships and successful conflict transformational methods is a living testimony of our genuine faith in Jesus Christ. We have an incredible opportunity to share the good news of Christ to communities that hunger for genuine relationships and the authentic demonstration of a Christ-loving care for one another. Handling conflict by “sweeping it under the carpet” because of our “niceness” and “conflict avoidance” culture and/or personality will not be the best tool for our church’s mission. On the other hand, a church and church leadership that has found a relevant way of handling conflict creatively can be “good news” to the community at large. As one stated, “Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but this is part of the real work”.

Real authentic relationships have a potential to be a huge witness to friends and neighbours.

**Sources:**

By Raafat Kamal, Field Secretary, Trans-European Division

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The Trans-European Division is a division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It means that TED follows General Conference policy, except in cases where we request and are given permission to apply a variance to the common world-church policy. The 11 unions within the TED are all members of the General Conference (and the TED) and in their constitutions and bylaws they state that their faith, church order, and working policies shall be in harmony with the GC/TED.

These regulations in our church law explain the position taken by the TED Executive Committee on women’s ordination to the pastoral ministry.

The matter of women’s ordination for ministry has been under discussion in the TED at least since 1968. In the 1970s and 1980s, the issues were usually about concerned women being ordained as elders and deaconesses. The General Conference Executive Committee had approved both ordinations, but with some restrictions, in the spring of 1975, and this was reaffirmed by the General Conference Annual Council in 1984. The former ordination, with right to perform weddings and baptisms, was endorsed by the General Conference Session in 1990 and the latter in 2010.

In May, 1989, a survey of our unions’ positions on the ordination of women was undertaken and a clear majority was then not in favour of actually ordaining women as pastors although they may not have considered it biblically wrong to do so.

The policies of the General Conference from 1990 and onwards allowed for ordination of women as church elders, employment of women as associates in pastoral care (if they were ordained as local elders), and also commissioning of women in ministry for pastoral type of work in a union. This gradually led to a greater openness and even a sense of strong need for ordaining women to the gospel ministry in the TED. This was the case in some unions more than in others, possibly depending on the cultural context in which we live and work.

In response to this development in the 1990’s and 2000’s, TED has for several years organised regular councils for female pastoral workers. We have seriously looked at recommendations from this group. Thus, salaries, employment conditions, titles, and job
descriptions for male and female pastoral workers have been made more and more equal in many unions. On 18 November, 2009, the TED Executive Committee voted unanimously to provide ‘Revised Guidelines for Commissioning’ where all that was possible to do within policy to create equality between the genders in pastoral kinds of ministry was established for the TED.

In January–March, 2010, the General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, initiated a survey among the 13 world divisions regarding their position on women’s ordination. The TED invited all its unions to take part. The outcome was that all our unions unanimously accept that there are no biblical reasons for not ordaining women and that it would not be a problem if the General Conference granted the TED authority to let unions, who so request, the right to ordain women as pastors. Of all the 11 unions today in the TED, only one union president stated that his union would not at present ordain women as pastors, even if it was permitted, but he had no objection to this being done in other unions. However, a majority of world divisions did not share our view and the GC leadership decided therefore not bring the matter forward to the GC Session a few months later.

The issue was however raised on the floor at the GC Session in Atlanta in June/July, 2010, in connection with the discussion and acceptance of the ordination of deaconesses. It was voted that the church would study the theology of ordination and seek a better biblical understanding of what ordination really means: If the church can ordain women as church elders and deaconesses, then why not also as pastors? We now have a detailed time table for this study, and it is clear that it is going to be a very comprehensive work that includes women’s ordination and all aspects of ordination in the church. Each division has been asked to provide a research report through their biblical research committee, getting input from the unions, voting it in their executive committee, and sending it to the GC Biblical Research Institute. The TED is now fully engaged in this work and our executive committee will be asked to authorise our research report in November, 2013. A co-ordinating body at the GC will then study the research from all 13 divisions and provide a report which will go to the GC leadership in the summer of 2014. If recommended by the GC Annual Council in October, 2014, a motion will go to the floor of the GC Session in San Antonio in 2015. We take the view in the TED that we actively participate in the study of ordination and then we wait and see what will be the outcome, believing that the Spirit of God will lead this matter to a good solution for his church.

In November 2010, the TED Executive Committee voted a document called ‘The Leadership and Ordination of Women’. Its purpose was to address the tension between the extraordinary mission challenges facing the church within our territories and the need to mobilize all our members, male and female, on the one hand, and church policy on the
ordination of women, on the other. Four requests were made to the General Conference. Those requests and the responses were as follows:

1. To request that the study of the theology of ordination as voted at the General Conference Session in Atlanta is prioritized. The General Conference has granted this.

2. To request the General Conference to review and amend General Conference policies, so that the wording is gender neutral and that all leadership pathways are open to male and female. No formal response has been received and we will continue to work with the GC Secretariat on this point.

3. To request the General Conference to grant a variance to the model constitutions and bylaws to accommodate the unique needs of the Trans-European Division with the insertion of “conference and union presidents should be ordained/commissioned ministers” in its policy language. We feel that this is a matter of some urgency and respectfully request that this be dealt with as soon as possible but no later than General Conference Annual Council 2011. This was brought to the floor in October 2011, but it was not voted on formally, since a similar variance only relating to conference presidents was requested by the NAD. Their request was voted down and by common consent the TED motion therefore also failed.

4. To request the General Conference for permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the Trans-European Division thereby creating parity between female and male ministers and follow the same process and procedure as currently applies to ordained men and credentialed ministers. This point is in abeyance awaiting the outcome of the study on the theology of ordination.

In November, 2011, following the vote at Annual Council, the TED prayerfully considered how to respond to it. We consulted widely and received input from the unions. We recognise and understand that we are part of a global church and need to listen to and be in harmony with the decision of the church at large. The Committee voted:

1. To affirm again the role of its women leaders, pastors and lay members.

2. To pro-actively work to support the development of women in leadership within the TED and to present a road map to the TED Spring Meetings 2012 as to how this could be done. This work is on-going.

The big question is of course what the Bible says about women’s ordination. We will provide an answer from our perspective in November, 2013, based on a very comprehensive research. In the meantime, I would ask you all to pray for this study. Without the Spirit of
God and of Jesus Christ we can do nothing. But I would add that you can do more than praying. You can also study the matter for yourself, so that you understand what the word of God teaches on this point.

One way for you to get acquainted with the matter is by reading pastor John Lorencin’s booklet on women’s ordination—it is available in English with the title Priestly Ministry in the Old and the New Testament: Should Women be Ordained? (2012) Pastor Lorencin was the Yugoslavian Union President until 1994 and used to be very much opposed to women’s ordination. He admits that he took a traditional view and under the influence of his cultural context where there were three main religions: Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic Christian, and Islam. He had not formed his opinion on the basis of the Bible, so when he retired he decided to study ordination in the Bible. In his book, as a pastoral Bible reader, in simple language, he goes through the whole Bible. He finds that in the New Testament, Christ has taken over the sacrificial priestly office from the Old Testament, so it is no more. Instead, Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system and become our high priest in heaven where he now offers his benefits for us to God. As our high priest, he is also the head of the body of Christ, the church, which consists of the priesthood of all believers, which makes no distinction between male and female. He also points out that there is no word for ‘ordination’ in the Bible. It is used in the King James Version from 1611, but it is there based on old Roman Catholic translations from the 14th and 15th centuries. In fact, pastor Lorencin warns against letting the pastoral ordination be influenced by the Roman Catholic, unbiblical practice, which is rooted in the pagan Roman system of being promoted (Latin ordinatio) to a higher ‘order’ (Latin ordo) in the state offices. Any sense of the rite of ordination conveying a special status or character that is not already there through the gift of the Holy Spirit is unbiblical. Ordination is therefore a work of the Spirit and only recognised and confirmed by the church. Many of the points raised here have also been pointed out in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, in the article on 'ordination' (1996).

And there is of course other literature on the topic. The teachers at Andrews University collected a number of papers on the topic in a volume called Women in Ministry (edited by Nancy Vyhmeister, Berrien springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998) and this valuable book is still available. I can add mention that Dr Jan Barna, one of our esteemed teachers at Newbold College, has written his doctoral thesis in 2009 on this topic and he is in negotiations to have it printed. His emphasis is the view of the Bible and the hermeneutics being applied in dealing with the matter of women’s ordination.

I want to say to you that I have never made a secret of my own personal conviction. I accept women’s ordination as being biblical and appropriate. But I am also very concerned that we manage this important matter in harmony and cooperation with the world church. I know
that the Lord will bless our joint efforts to explore his word and to share it with our brothers and sisters world-wide. And I think the best thing we can do is to pray for the Spirit of God to lead his church to understand this matter in harmony with his will. As keepers of the heritage of the Protestant reformation, let us see this matter from a spiritual perspective and ask God to lead us to an understanding of his truth. And let us do it in a spirit of respect for each other, knowing that we all seek the truth and that Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit will ‘guide us into all truth’. [tedNEWS]

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People are like dynamite, the power is on the inside, nothing happens until the fuse gets lit. So it is with leaders. A leader can give inspiration, motivation and encouragement to move mountains; or leave a trail of destruction and despair producing inertia and stagnation.

Positive and negative, good and bad are words used to classify people and also leaders. What is the essential ingredient that makes the difference? Can it be summed up in the word “character”?

Having worked in senior management in a secular business environment for sixteen years before starting to work for the church it is possible to draw some comparisons between the two working environments and from the perspective of leadership character traits. The resulting ambivalence calls for a careful assessment of character on the part of those who would lead.

**Ethical excellence**
The secular business world strives for expertise, efficiency and excellence. At times this is combined with an economic application of ethics or moral behaviour, which at best can be described as dysfunctional, at worst criminal. (The banking mismanagement is just the one recent example.)

In contrast church structures sustain a high level of morality, and ethical behaviour. However a cynical comment expressed at a session “People keep getting elected until they reach their level of incompetence”, has uncomfortable overtones.

Performance criteria and an expectation of excellence may generate accusations of secularisation, but is striving for excellence within a functional ethical framework a non-negotiable leadership characteristic? Jesus himself guided and educated his disciples to grow, develop and improve. Should we require less today?

**No sentiment in business**
There is no room for sentiment: is a business mantra within the secular world of economics. Yet law, unions and personal policies are designed to protect employees from injustice seeking to ensure that they are treated with dignity, fairness and often kindness. These are correctives to unjust leadership behaviour which can be discriminatory and hurtful.

Could there be a perception of the church as an uncaring employer seen in a widening
trend of members resorting to litigation in Employment Tribunals to resolve difficulties? Bitter members or ex-employees may pour out bile, which creates situations that are negative and cause extreme difficulty for leaders attempting to resolve issues. This is an area where a gram of leadership prevention is better than tones of cure.

A generous application of the golden rule goes a long way in preventing problems. It respects people at all times and in all situations.

**Have you heard the one about …?**

A leader was once overheard commenting about one of his pastors “She confirms my worst opinion about her.” and in a few negative statements delivered an effective character demolition.

Few consciously set out to gossip. At all times it is vital to distinguish between the necessary and appropriate sharing of that “special insight” or confidential information and gossip which can be malicious.

Closely allied to gossip is criticism. Cutting words can discourage instead of encourage, destroy instead of develop. James (James 3) points to the dangers of thinking with our tongues instead of our brains. Reflective speech is a non-negotiable priority.

Avoidance of gossip and negative criticisms are essential. They are out; transparency, openness and honesty are in. “Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots.” (Frank A Clark)

**Running away from issues**

Honesty framed by kindness and firmness would avoid many problems. Persons entering a training program for ministry may not be suitable for the profession. Hints are given, but the issue is not faced. Some are never employed and years later fail to understand why. Others enter ministry and struggle, finding life difficult and discouraging in the churches they serve. An honest facing of these matters could save a lot of hurt and anguish. It is a rule: situations which are not confronted openly and fairly will never be resolved. Honesty and openness combined with kindness are character qualities leadership should embrace.

**Ambition**

Secular ambition is regarded as positive, with little consideration of whom you trample on the way up! The wise would have reflected on possible negative encounters on the way down.

Is ambition within the church taboo? Would it generate envy resulting in subversive
attitudes and actions? Is it not possible sanctified ambition can be positive? Could it generate a desire to improve, develop and hone abilities to better serve God? Would a healthy dose of “sanctified” ambition improve performance challenging growth at all levels?

Is it really character?
Our character is not a heavenly passport but it helps. It is a positive or negative power here and now. It is not only when we reach the end of our life that character is important. Our Lord when describing those entering the kingdom did not set an unobtainable character goal for them. He spoke of simple things, which have far reaching influence and consequences. Giving a cup of water. Visiting the lonely. Showing hospitality. Inviting someone home for a meal. Giving away an article of clothing. These activities are well within the capabilities of anyone. They do not require great riches, a high degree of education or special talents. What they do require is character: a character like our Saviours, which treats people with respect, grace, dignity and appreciation in all situations, not least in the daily life and work of the church.

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