### Hungary, Last Stop in Wilson's Tour of TED

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### Together in Hope and Compassion

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### One Year Later, Adventist Pastor Still in Togo Prison

15 March 2013, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [ANN] A year after Seventh-day Adventist Pastor Antonio Monteiro was imprisoned in Togo on unsupported charges, church lawyers and human rights activists are redoubling efforts to secure his release. Togolese government officials this week rejected the Adventist Church’s fifth request for Monteiro’s immediate release... Read more
Reflection on Christian Leadership

Jesus is and must always be our great example as a leader. The reasons for this have been beautifully summarized by Laurie Beth Jones. She calls attention to three simple premises:

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17 March 2013, Budapest, Hungary [Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, tedNEWS] The historical and beautiful city of Budapest, Hungary, showed its best side on a sunny, but crisp Sunday Morning, 17 March, when around 2000 members and friends gathered at a city hall for a full day of celebration and worship. The occasion was the 100th anniversary of the Duna Union, predecessor to the Hungarian Union conference, the visit of Pastor Ted Wilson, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and his wife Nancy, and the launching of the Great Hope project in Hungary.

“Bringing Hope to every Home“ was the theme for the celebration. The large choir and symphonic orchestra, composed of members of all ages from around the country, led the congregation forcefully in praise and thanksgiving.

At the opening of the program, the symphonic orchestra played a classical masterpiece after which Pastor Tamás Ocsai, President of the Hungarian Union Conference welcomed everyone. Mr Jenő Szigeti, Professor of Church History (HTS), gave a historical overview of the organisation of the Duna Union and of the Seventh–day Adventist Church in Hungary.

The varied program included spiritual messages, orchestral and choral music, as well as congregational singing of precious hymns, including: “We have this Hope that burns within our heart, Hope in the coming of the Lord".
In his message, Pastor Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, said, “Fearing God is described in the Bible as a special sign of God’s people, citizens of His Kingdom. It is an attitude of loyal honesty to God as Creator and God of the universe.” Reading several passages from the book of Revelation, Pastor Wiklander showed that, in a special way, fearing God characterises the faithful at the end of time, and thus it is included in the calling of Seventh-day Adventists in our ministry to the world on behalf of God.

During his sermon, Pastor Wilson emphasized, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's last remnant church. Another Church will not be established. God is preparing His people for something very unusual and we are to share with people the love of Jesus in a pleasant way.
May you leave this place full of Hope for the future!

During the lunch break, the Union leadership had organized a banquet for current and former leaders and employees of the Church, as well as special guests. During this time, Mrs Nancy Wilson gave a brief, but important talk about the important balance between work and family: “We need to have our priorities right, God first, then family (spouse and children) and then work”, Mrs Wilson said. “The husband is the head of the home, but the spouse sets the tone of the home. When I am happy and trusting God, no matter the circumstances, it affects the tone of the home”. Mrs Wilson concluded.

During the afternoon program, special guests, also from neighbouring countries from the time when the Duna Union included a larger territory, gave short talks. Between each talk, the orchestra and choir performed special music.

During this time a special meeting with Mr György Hölvényi, Minister of State for Religion, National Minority and Civil Society Affairs and his two associates took place. Present from the Seventh-day Adventist Church were Pastors Ocsai, Wilson, Wiklander, and Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, Treasurer of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Pastor Wilson expressed his appreciation on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for what the Hungarian Government does to guarantee religious freedom in Hungary. He also shared a glimpse of the worldwide activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its 17 million members currently present in 210 countries.

Mr Hölvényi said it was the Government’s obligation to provide religious liberty to all citizens. “In Hungary, the Church and State are separate and the intention of the Government is not to exclude any groups from religious activities in the country”, Mr Hölvényi said. He also stressed the importance of the work of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), which aims to protect the freedom of conscience in the world.

As a conclusion to this meeting, Pastor Wilson shared the thoughts from Mika 6:8: ‘He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God’ and Pastor Wilson and Mr Hölvényi prayed.

Summarising the day: Pastor Ocsai said: “Being a part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist
Church family is a privilege and it is very good that we can participate in the Great Hope initiative. This is not about what the Church can do, but what the church members can do to bring “Hope to every Home” in Hungary.

The Hungarian Union Conference has 4,700 members in 107 churches.

This visit to Hungary marked the end of the ten–day tour of Pastor Wilson and his wife Nancy to five unions within the Trans–European Division.

Commenting on the General Conference President’s visit, Pastor Wiklander said, “God has blessed his church in five of our unions in the past ten days. The visit of Pastor Wilson and his wife Nancy has brought inspiration and great encouragement to thousands of members across the TED. It has been a joy and privilege for me to accompany and assist them. From magnificent, grand meetings with thousands of visitors in the Netherlands, Serbia and Hungary, to the late Saturday night meeting with a small but joyful congregation in Hajdukovo in Northern Serbia (they waited for us at nearly ten o’clock in the evening), we have felt truly part of God’s people. Visits to representatives of governments have also proved very fruitful, especially in Poland, Croatia and Hungary. I am deeply grateful to God and to the Wilson’s for their ministry and the way God has blessed all of us.”

Mrs Nancy Wilson shared the following: “I have been blessed beyond measure as I have seen the dedication and commitment of our members here in the TED, many of whom have endured very difficult circumstances in the past. It has also been encouraging so see so many young people playing an active role in their churches. These dear members certainly have the gift of hospitality. We will cherish the memories and our time together.”

Pastor Wilson summarised his impressions from his visit in these words: “What an enormous privilege it has been to visit five unions in the Trans–European Division. It has been exciting to see the vibrant church in so many places as God uses His Church and every member to proclaim the three angels’ messages. It was especially good to see the involvement of young people in the Church. I am grateful to the TED administration for their excellent cooperation and promotion of the great Biblical themes and programs of the worldwide church as we approach Christ’s soon coming. It is a privilege to work together in this great Advent movement.”

From Hungary, Pastor Wilson and his wife Nancy travelled on to the Middle–East Northern Africa Union with their first stop in Cairo, Egypt, where Pastor Wilson spent the early years of his childhood, and then on to Turkey and Lebanon.
To see more photos of Pastor and Mrs Wilson's visit to Hungary and the other countries on his tour through Trans-European Division, please [click here].

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16 March 2013, Belgrade, Serbia [Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, tedNEWS]

Two thousand participants gathered in a City Hall in the centre of Belgrade, Serbia, on 16 March 2013, for a Sabbath celebration and to hear encouraging words from Pastor Ted Wilson, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The varied program, organised by the South-East European Union Conference (SEEUC), with the theme ‘Together in Hope and Compassion’ included the sharing of God’s word through Bible study, spiritual encouragement, as well as congregational singing and musical performances. Many high quality musical groups and choirs performed, but the one-day program had made it hard for the organisers to choose from the many talented musicians in the Church in this Union who would have liked to perform. The South-East European Union is made off the following countries: Serbia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro.

In his message, Pastor Wilson stated, “We claim little where much should be claimed, but there is no limit to the promises of God. Your God has no limits and he wants you to claim these promises. Stay close to the Word of God and stay close to the Holy Spirit in quiet prayer. There is no limit to what God wants to provide in your endeavour to proclaim the Three Angles’ messages.”

From Revelation 1:7–8, Pastor Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, reminded the congregation of the second coming of Jesus. “It is the culmination of God’s mission to the world, expressing the Creator’s care for and faithfulness to His creation.”

During the afternoon, the programme also included focus on mission, where the Union leadership and departmental directors gave reports and presented their plans for the future. The South–East European Union presented well-prepared plans and materials for the Great Hope project and Pastor Wiklander offered a prayer for this special outreach launched on this day.

As a practical outreach of the day, 138 young people donated blood through the military
hospital in Belgrade.

"This day of Fellowship was a unique and blessed experience for me. What I really appreciated from the entire team's visit was warm-heartedness, sincerity and passion for God that was felt in presenting His Word. I was greatly encouraged by the messages I heard today. My heart is still smiling." said Jelena Popovic, South-Conference Treasurer.

“The visit of Pastor Ted Wilson and his wife Nancy, with their humble approach, in some specific way lifted our eyes to look to Jesus Christ again and at the same time refreshed our identity and mission in this very important time”, said Pastor Bozidar Lazic Chief Editor at the Euro Dream Publishing House.

“Today was just a great day! It was great worshipping God! It was great hearing again the ‘Righteousness by faith’ message! It was great meeting old and making new friends. It was just great! It was a taste of heaven. You had to be there!", said Pastor Lidija Runic, Secretary for Hope and Mission in the West Conference, covering Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pastor Djordje Trajkovski, President of the SEEUC summarised Pastor Wilson’s and his party’s visit well: “The members and the pastors of our Union were looking forward to this visit. His call to the true personal relationship with God, Church unity, and active participation in the Great Hope Project, emphasised once again during the Sabbath service, reminded us that we are a part of God’s large family, united in fulfilling his mission on earth and preparing for the soon coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We are to humble ourselves before God, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit and decide to have less of ourselves and more of Jesus living in us.”

On Saturday night, Pastor Wilson and his party travelled by car to Budapest, Hungary. Midway, at 22:00, about 60 members of the Hungarian speaking local church in Hajdauko, in northern Serbia, waited patiently for the party that arrived two hours behind schedule. The warm hospitality was a reminder that it is in the local church where true church work takes place. Pastors Wilson and Wiklander shared encouraging words and prayed for the group. Refreshments followed before the party continued to Hungary.

The last stop on Pastor and Mrs Wilson’s tour of the Trans-European Division is Budapest,
Hungary. To see more photos from their visits to the countries in the TED, please click here.
[tedNEWS]
15 March 2013, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [ANN] A year after Seventh-day Adventist Pastor Antonio Monteiro was imprisoned in Togo on unsupported charges, church lawyers and human rights activists are redoubling efforts to secure his release.

Togolese government officials this week rejected the Adventist Church’s fifth request for Monteiro’s immediate release, according to a lawyer from the church’s Sahel Union Mission working closely on the case.

“Tomorrow is the sad anniversary of the unjust arrest of Pastor Monteiro. We are disappointed that our request has once again been refused, despite our ongoing efforts,” said Guy Roger, president of the Sahel Union Mission.

Roger, who met with Monteiro in prison on March 13, said the pastor is well and “by God’s grace, expecting a miracle.”

Monteiro was detained in March for conspiracy to commit murder after a Togolese man implicated him and two other Christians, one an Adventist, as conspirators in an alleged criminal ring that trafficked human blood. The witness had earlier confessed to the murder of some 20 young girls, claiming he was only carrying out orders.

However, the witness has a documented history of mental instability and his statement is widely considered unreliable, a representative from the National Commission of Human Rights in Togo said.
Evidence and testimony additionally suggest that the statement implicating Monteiro was obtained under duress.

Church leaders said the witness met Monteiro when the pastor previously ministered to him. A native of Cape Verde, Monteiro had since 2009 served as the church’s Sabbath School and Personal Ministries director for the Sahel Union Mission, headquartered in Lomé. A police search of Monteiro’s home and local church headquarters shortly after his arrest failed to produce any evidence of his connection to the case.

Public pressure to solve the string of murders last year likely thwarted his release and exoneration, church officials said. Prior to Monteiro’s arrest, human rights groups and a
local women’s coalition accused Togolese police of not doing enough to solve the crimes.

Adventist Church leaders said they are planning a major campaign for April focusing on collecting signatures for a petition and sending letters to officials in Togo demanding an end to Monteiro’s arbitrary detention and calling for the arrest of those guilty of the crimes.

Previous appeals coordinated by the church have included the mailing of hundreds of Christmas cards to Monteiro, a worldwide day of prayer and a press conference in Lomé. A second press conference is expected shortly, Roger said.

Adventist religious liberty leaders said they plan to actively involve young people in efforts to release Monteiro. At several recent petition-signing events in the U.S. state of California, college students stood in line to show their support for Monteiro.

John Graz, director of the Adventist world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, said public appeals will intensify in the coming months, a strategy to parallel behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts to secure Monteiro’s release.

“We are asking all Adventists, all Christians and all people who believe in justice to join in this campaign,” Graz said. [tedNEWS]

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Jesus is and must always be our great example as a leader. The reasons for this have been beautifully summarized by Laurie Beth Jones.¹ She calls attention to three simple premises:

1. One person trained twelve human beings who went on to so influence the world that time itself is now recorded as being before (BC) or after (AD.) his existence.

2. This person worked with a staff that was totally human and not divine ... a staff that in spite of illiteracy, questionable backgrounds, fractious feelings, and momentary cowardice went on to accomplish the tasks he trained them to do. They did this for one main reason—to be with him again.

3. His leadership style was intended to be put to use by any of us.

Other authors challenge our Christian leadership in broader terms. What key principles actually characterise a Christian leader? Let me draw on Charles Sibthorpe, A Man Under Authority: Qualities of Christian Leadership (1984). Your answers to his nine questions will describe your leadership:

1. **Are you a servant?**

   Sibthorpe’s home was sometimes used as a centre for young people. He says: “I was always interested in who would volunteer to clear up the bar or give the place a coat of paint. It is interesting that those who were the most ready to serve took up positions of leadership later.”

   One of the key principles of leadership is the willingness to be a servant. Jesus said: “whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26–27).

2. **Are you humble?**

   A Christian leader knows he is incapable of doing his work in his own strength. Paul described his mission to Corinth like this:

   “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.” (1 Cor. 2:1–3)

   Moses, when he received God’s call to leadership, said: “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.” (Exodus 4:13)
Gideon’s response to his call was similar: “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” (Judges 6:15) This attitude of humility is the condition for spiritual power. As a leader, Paul recognised that “When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)

3. Do you speak the word of God?
“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you” (Heb. 13:7). There are a lot of words in the church today. But are they effective? Jesus only spoke the words God gave him: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). Human reason and eloquence, good as they may be, have a limited effect and only last until someone produces a better and more convincing argument. But God’s word is spiritual power that transforms human lives.
Paul said: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.” (1 Cor. 2:4–5)
A leader must be a man or woman of God’s word.

4. Do you live your message and values?
“Remember your leaders...Consider the outcome of their way of life” (Heb. 13:7). Life speaks more powerfully than words. All we say or preach cannot be fulfilled perfectly in our lives, but a man will apply the word of God to himself first, and only then will he be at liberty to share it with others.
Paul said: “For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.” (1 Cor. 4:17)
This is all a result of faith in God’s grace. Paul said: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Cor. 15:10)
A leader is a man of God's grace.

5. Do you operate by faith?
“Remember your leaders...and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). A Christian leader has a faith that others want to imitate. Faith points to God who controls our lives and invites his power to lead.

6. Are you followed?
Jesus said: “Come, follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men”. Then, we are told: “At once they left their nets and followed him” (Mk. 1:17–18).
Leaders in business have followers, because they pay them. Leaders in the church are
different. The people are not always being paid, and are not under any compulsion to submit. If they are paid employees, they will not get more pay if they do what you want them to do. The whole dynamic is based on the relationship between God and man, not on reward.

A leader’s leadership will be tested by the way people respond to it. A leader who leads by the power and authority of God will be followed. If no one is following, the leader is not a leader.

This does not mean that a leader should seek to please the people. If you are a man-pleaser, you will be moved out from under God’s authority. A true leader does the will of God, which may not always please.

At times, a true leader is surrounded by people who have lost their faith in God and who do not wish to do God’s will. God will then call him to lead others.

7. Are you fruitful?

God plants leaders with the anticipation of reaping a rich harvest of fruit in the lives of his people. Paul referred to certain followers as his “dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

Fruitfulness in God’s people is the reflection of Christ in their lives. God does it by His Holy Spirit, in order to glorify him and to be a blessing to others.

8. Are you ahead of the people?

If you are to be followed, you need to be ahead of your people. Paul was bold enough to say: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Leaders live under the responsibility of continually pressing on with God. It is often a lonely path, because you are breaking new ground for others to walk through later, but you yourself will only be following the path that Jesus has already walked. Through discouragement and fatigue, leaders often find they have not remained out in front and so their people have come to a standstill. When the church stands still, the leaders are standing still. You need to be ahead of the people. That is leadership. Being ahead also means to listen to your people, understanding their needs and ensuring that you bring God’s saving word to them which will fill them with hope, inspiration, and a will to go where God through your leadership wants them to go.

What is the fundamental, real key to all these questions? I have taken great strength from a passage in Henri Nouwen’s precious little book In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership (1989). He says as he comments on Jesus’ last conversation with Simon Peter:

Before Jesus appointed Peter as a shepherd, he asked him: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than the others do?” He asked him again: “Do you love me?” And a third time: “Do
you love me?” We must see this question as the crucial question for our entire Christian leadership, for it is that question which both saves us from opportunism and gives us a true self-esteem. The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much will you accomplish? Can you demonstrate any results? But the question is: Do you love Jesus?

1 For example, Laurie Beth Jones, Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership, Hyperion, New York, 1995.

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

Used with permission from Leadership Development Journal – July 2011
16 March 2013, Belgrade, Serbia [Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, tedNEWS] On Thursday, 15 March 2013, Pastor Ted Wilson, the President of the World Seventh-day Adventist Church, and his wife, Nancy, arrived to Serbia where members and pastors, met them excited to hear a message of encouragement, learn about the mission of the church for the future and to participate in leadership training.

Early mornings and late nights seem to be the norm for Pastor Ted Wilson, to visit the world fields, and Thursday 14 March was no different. Pastor Wilson and his party started their journey from Zagreb, Croatia to Belgrade, Serbia early that morning. The spring that had arrived a week ago, had disappeared, and the party travelled several hundred kilometres in winds, rain, sleet and snow.

The first stop in Serbia was a visit to the Union Publishing House and future Media Centre, Euro Dream, in its new facilities donated by a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was the first assignment of the day. Currently Euro Dream’s printing facilities are operating 24 hours a day printing magazines and books for the ‘Great Hope Project’ in most of the languages spoken in the Trans-European Division.

The Novi Sad Church in Northern Serbia had planned an evening meeting with Pastor Wilson, which opened with the congregation singing, “It is well, it is well, with my soul.” In his sermon, Pastor Wilson focused on the Reformation and how, no matter the costs, the early church reformers stood up for truth. “We, too, are called to be reformers for God”, Pastor Wilson said and added, “It is unsafe for a Christian to act against his/her conscience. Are you willing to stand by Jesus and be true to His Word, also in difficult times?”
Friday morning, 15 March was set aside for a pastors’ meeting. Pastor Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, opened the meeting with a leadership-training seminar. “You as pastors are leaders in the Church”, Wiklander said, and focused on seven important characteristics of a good leader: 1) Christ likeness in relationships; 2) Mission Focus; 3) Integrity; 4) Loyalty (to God and to the Church); 5) Professional Competence, 6) Ability to foster unity in diversity; 7) Responsibility and Accountability. “The most important part of leadership is to follow Jesus Christ in every aspect of your lives”, Pastor Wiklander concluded.

“The Spiritual Life of a Pastor or Administrator” was the title of Pastor Wilson’s seminar. “A connection with Christ in all you do will have a powerful effect on your influence”, Pastor Wilson said and shared twenty points on the theme. Pastor Wilson encouraged the pastors to commit themselves to the Lord and to His Service and shared Proverbs 3:5, 6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight”. “If you do this, God will make you powerful, spiritual people”, Wilson concluded.

Following the presentations, the floor was open for questions, and Pastor Wilson gave answers on issues about recent articles in some of our official Church papers about Creation and Mysticism, which contradict the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A question about the Creation’s “gap theory” presented in the 1st quarter Sabbath School lesson 2013 was also raised, Pastor Wilson said that the General Conference was working with the editors regarding the content of the two articles mentioned. “I do not subscribe to Creation’s ‘gap theory’ and it is not something that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is promoting” Wilson said. “I believe that God created this earth and its surroundings (not the whole universe) in six literal days, in resent time”, Wilson said.

Serbia is a part of South-East European Union Conferences (SEEUC) along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. For more information of the work of the Church in these countries, please
visit www.jieu-adventisti.org. To see more photos from Pastor and Mrs Wilson's visit to Serbia, please click here.[tedNEWS]

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13 March 2013 Zagreb, Croatia [Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, tedNEWS] Four hundred people gathered to worship together with Pastor Ted Wilson, the President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, and his wife, Nancy, at The First Adventist Church in Zagreb, Croatia, on Wednesday evening, 13 March 2013. This was their last assignment on their short but sweet visit to the Adventist Church in Croatia. Streaming of the program through the Internet made it possible for other members of the Church, both in the country and abroad, to watch the program and join in worship.

“Give thanks with a grateful heart” performed by the AGAPE choir was a fitting introduction to Pastor Wilson’s message where he encouraged the audience to thank God every day for the religious freedom they enjoy. The church’s male choir also sang a beautiful hymn.

Pastor Wilson focused on 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land”. A short prayer session followed where two and two prayed together in recommitment to the spreading of the “Three Angels’ Messages” to the people of Croatia, Slovenia and Albania and beyond.

Earlier in the day, a courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Croatia, Dr Ivo Josipovic and Dr Anrica Marinovic, Presidential Advisor for Religious Affairs, was paid by Pastor Wilson, Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, Trans-European Division Treasurer, Pastor Branko Bistrovic, President of the Adriatic Union Conference (AUC), and Pastor Sretko Kuburic, AUC Executive Secretary.

Dr. Josipovic welcomed the representatives from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and there was a relaxed and good atmosphere during the visit.

Pastor Wilson expressed his appreciation for the good relations between the President’s office and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Croatia and shared with Dr. Josipovic a
glimpse of the worldwide activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its 17 million baptized members and representation in about 210 countries of the world. Pastor Wilson used the opportunity to share leadership advice from the Bible and prayed for the President, the Government and the nation.

“The Seventh-Adventist Church in Croatia has regular meetings and a positive relationship with the President and his Office, as well as with Government and State Institutions. Pastor Wilson’s visit has deepened this relationship with the President, and has given him a broader picture of the worldwide work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church”, said Pastor Bistrovic.

The President, Dr Josipovic and his advisor, Dr Marinovic, have accepted an invitation from the Adriatic Union Conference to visit Marusevec, the Union school and Seminary, in April this year.

In the afternoon, a one-hour sightseeing walk in the beautiful historic city of Zagreb came as a nice surprise to the Wilson party.

Before the evening meeting, the Union administration had invited all union staff and conference and mission leaders to a fellowship banquet with the visitors. The Adriatic Union Conference is made up of Croatia (86% Roman Catholic), Slovenia (58% Roman Catholic) and Albania (70% Muslim).

The Union is participating in the Great Hope Project by distributing The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White, and other special materials produced by the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists as a part of this project. The Union employees, as well as members around the whole Union are also reading a chapter of The Great Controversy weekly in small groups. A special illustrated version of the book will be released next month.

The Union has recently launched evangelism projects streamed through the Internet. This small beginning has been well received by the members and the wider public.

The next stop on Wilson’s tour of the TED is Serbia. To see more photos of Pastor Wilson’s tour of the TED, please click here. [tedNEWS]

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14 March 2013 Bracknell, United Kingdom [John Baildam / Bjorn Ottesen, BUC News] Fifty participants at an all-day Bible Conference travelled from as far as Wales, Scotland, the Midlands, London and the North of England to enjoy five thought-provoking presentations by lecturers in the Department of Theological Studies at Newbold College of Higher Education.

Dr Philip Brown, Principal, opened the conference on Sabbath, 9 March. It was a follow-up to last year's successful inaugural venture.

The first speaker was Dr Aulikki Nahkola, Principal Lecturer in Old Testament and Biblical Languages, who presented the topic 'What is Prophecy?'. She explored who the prophets were, what their task was, and why they were needed. She noted that prophets do not necessarily foretell the future, but rather pronounce truth for their own time through visionary preaching.

With attendees wondering how Dr Nahkola's thinking might relate to the Church and Ellen White, Dr Michael Pearson, Principal Lecturer in Philosophy and Ethics, then spoke on that very topic, namely 'Disturbing the Peace: Ellen White, the Prophecies and the People'. His doctoral research examined the Church's attitudes to aspects of Ellen White's writings. Of particular interest was his exploration of historical context and our response in 2013.

Dr Radiša Antić, Principal Lecturer in Systematic Theology, spoke for an hour without notes on the subject 'Transformed through His Promise of the Second Coming', empathising with those who describe and experience 'spiritual pain' as they await the second coming of Jesus. His paper was underpinned by references to philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Hume, Voltaire, Leibniz, Hegel, Goethe and Sartre.
Pastor Gifford Rhamie, Lecturer in Pastoral and New Testament Studies, presented 'The Prophetic Voice: A Lived Reality'. This enabled participants through group discussion and formal lecture to think through a balance between giving appropriate pastoral responses and providing prophetic leadership to the challenging demands of our Church community and beyond.

The final paper was given by Pastor Bjørn Ottesen, Lecturer in Pastoral Studies. He examined in practical and often humorous terms our attitudes to Ellen White through his contextualising presentation 'Rediscovering Prophetic Roots'.

Participants noted a clear thread running throughout the day with regard to our reception of the writings of Ellen White. Bisser Stykov and John Baildam took advantage of the coffee breaks to interview a number of attendees, some of whom had also attended last year's conference.

All those interviewed expressed delight with the organisation of the day and the presentations and had clearly benefited from what they had heard. Edited clips of these interviews will be available on the College website at http://www.newbold.ac.uk/bible-conferencethis week.

Several participants had not been back to Newbold for almost 50 years and were excited to find an expanded campus boasting a vibrant academic community – they even commented on the delicious lunch which far surpassed anything served up in their day!

As is often the case, the closing question and answer session, hosted by Dr John Baildam, Deputy Principal, provoked unpredictable questions and provocative responses from each of the five panel members.

A number of visitors are keen to attend Newbold College of Higher Education either as regular students from this coming September or as participants in the published summer programme – and many are already looking forward to the 2014 conference. [tedNEWS]

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God has always had His appointed representatives to show His character and love in the community. It was for this purpose that He raised the Seventh-day Adventist church and it is His purpose in calling you and I to be leaders.

How can we as leaders **CONNECT** with our church members and assist them as they interact with the community to uplift Christ in very practical ways?

Perhaps the following acrostic will offer helpful suggestions:

**C** = COMMITMENT to God and His Service -
Connect with God through His Word, prayer and meditation in finding what He would have you and I do in our respective communities. This relationship, essential for a Christian leader, is the basis of any positive association in the community. Jesus knew this – we see examples in the gospel where Jesus got up early in the morning and went to a solitary place to commune with His Father. Jesus had to have His quiet time with His Father. He recognized the importance of prayer to keep him in touch with His Father’s mission. We will not be able to help others without first being connected to the Life giver. Engaging in anything which we feel is important takes time, effort and commitment.

**O** = OBSERVE opportunities for service within our communities – social events, business meetings, school programmes, community initiatives. Sometimes we are so busy looking after ourselves that we forget about others and the real reason we are on this earth. Take time to reach out, to see what is happening in your community, listen to the hidden cries of someone in emotional pain, understand where someone is coming from, interact socially with our communities. Allow God to speak to you as you observe and follow His leading.

Remember God has given us two eyes, two ears and one mouth. When we use our mouths, it is hard to observe. Let us use our eyes and ears at least twice as much as we use our mouths.

**N** = NON-JUDGEMENTAL – Connect without judging or condemnation while not giving up our values or principles. God has blessed us and provides us with understanding and insights into His Word. Unfortunately, at times this blessing has caused us to feel we are superior to other groups or individuals. This is not the case – we should not consider ourselves any better than the addict or drunkard. We are both loved by God equally. In actuality, being ‘keepers of the flame’ we have a solemn responsibility to uphold the standards and principles which have been given to us by God. To disregard them is to actually put ourselves in a worse position. It is important for us to leave the judging to God.
but to share with the community the love God showed us. No one likes someone who is always critical or judgemental. As a church supporting the community, let us show much love and less critical judging.

**N** = NURTURE church members and community. Principles for this are found in Christ's servant-leadership. "The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" MH 144 This was no hurried process but that of leading the people along at a pace with which they could identify and respond appropriately. Allow the Holy Spirit to convince and convict others. Our responsibility is to humbly share what God has done for us.

**E** = EXEMPLIFY the character of Christ to our church members. Following the principles of Christ's ministry includes not only the way in which one works but also who one is in Christ. The Holy Spirit will develop the needed fruits for us to be like Jesus -- "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Galatians 5:22,23 NKJV The familiar saying, ‘Actions speak louder than words’ is true and this influence of the leader encourages the church members to exemplify the fruits in their lives and to their community.

**C** = CARE for the marginalized and oppressed, the addicts and depressed, the rejected and the broken-hearted, the searching. Also step out of your COMFORT ZONE in associating with those of wealth, power, great learning and influence. We have received riches, blessings and knowledge, which are far above any earthly wisdom. If we will humbly share the goodness of the Lord, we will bring comfort and encouragement, leading to a desire in many to know the wonderful God we serve. We live in a secular society. We are not to copy their lifestyle and methods but seek to address the community needs in a real and lasting way. We are to uplift Jesus so that He will draw all men unto Him. John 12:32 refers to Christ's crucifixion but also has an application to our invitation to have people look to Jesus, accept Him as Lord and Saviour and be saved.

**T** = TENDER TEAMWORK on social issues and needs in the community – Connect and support each other in different social ministries. The needs in our communities are many and each of us has a role in community work. It is sometimes difficult for people enthusiastic in their service for others and filled with good ideas to accept different ideas and work as a team but teamwork is crucial in exploring needs, methods and cohesive progress, ownership and loyalty in the church and community. Micah 6:8 counsels us, "He has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Together in Christ our communities will
be transformed.

"Make Christ's work your example. Constantly He went about doing good—feeding the hungry and healing the sick. No one who came to Him for sympathy was disappointed. The commander of the heavenly courts, He was made flesh and dwelt among us, and His lifework is an example of the work we are to do.—Manuscript 55, 1901. {WM 53.1}

By Stephen Cooper, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) TE Director

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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
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. 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 preoccupation 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. 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.

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, 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 situation 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 need, 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.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.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.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!

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Notes:
(3) Ibid., 682.


(6) Ibid., 37.


(9) Ibid., 102.

(10) Ibid., 97–103.


Written by John Sanches, MDiv., MSc. (Ph.D candidate, Netherlands)

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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 ItEmerges”. 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:

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