European Youth Congress, less than 24 hours away!

29 July 2013 Novi Sad, Serbia [tedNEWS] Tomorrow, Tuesday, 30 July, at 20:30 CET - Central European Time, European Adventist Youth Congress (AYC) will begin with the opening programme. This type of event takes place every five years and is a gathering of young people from all around Europe.

We are expecting to have around 3,000 young people gathering at ‘Spens’ (Sport Center) and around 4,000 on Saturday, 03 August. The meetings will use the theme "The Power of ONE". This is going to be a remarkable congress having excellent speakers such as Gilbert Cangy, David Asscherick, Matthew Gamble, Patrick Johnson, Dejan Stojkovic, and many more. There is much planed in the five days to come: from morning prayer to evening worship and after glow, workshops, baptismal service, Impact Day and Book Crossing.

The morning and evening programmes will be streamed on our website as well as AYC website. For more information about the programme, please click here. In addition to the streaming, we will produce daily the tedNEWS bulletin, AYC video news, and upload photos. You can also follow us on Twitter and join us on Facebook. [tedNEWS]

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The development of a social media strategy for outreach in Europe is paying off for Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders trying to connect with those potentially interested in learning about God.

The online community LIFEconnect, launched in 2010, offers content and discussion groups for various lifestyle topics. This year, the online project began offering live meeting events and streaming presentations. Follow-up statistics from March and April meetings show the project is drawing tens of thousands of viewers and participants, and in some cases motivating them to visit an Adventist Church.

The initiative is operated by the Adventist Church’s Trans-European Division, based in England. The region includes 22 countries and is home to slightly less than 83,000 Adventist Church members.

Currently, 13 countries in the division are participating in the LIFEconnect project, with another half dozen expected to join this year.
“Jesus told us to go where people are, and today more than 2.5 billion people are on the Internet,” said Miroslav Pujic, Communication & Media director for the Trans-European Division. “Digital roads are quickly taking us to millions to share the story of Jesus Christ.”

While other church regions are finding success with major media outreach – such as television production and distribution in countries including Romania and Brazil – LIFEconnect is the denomination’s first major ongoing outreach initiative solely using social media. Though small for now, division leaders are finding some success in highly secular regions, where other methods of evangelism have yielded few results.

“I know of the challenges and sacrifices made to implement this project, and it’s thrilling to see this method of outreach delivering such great results, said Williams Costa Jr., Communication director of the Adventist world church. “Our church has been using other methods of outreach, and that’s fine, but we need to keep being innovative in finding new ways to share our message.”

In Albania, home to only 200 church members, more than 20 visitors came to an Adventist Church following a streamed LIFEconnect event. The nightly program had about 1,100 viewers.

In Serbia, organizers noted 10,500 viewers of a streamed program in one weekend. While some were church members, many community members participated in the program and at an auditorium event.

In Macedonia, a streamed program gained 3,300 viewers over a weekend. A national pop music recording artist came to a live event.

In Montenegro, 80 percent of registered users are not members of the Adventist Church. Some 3,000 people viewed a weekend program in March, with three people coming to visit and Adventist Church the following Saturday.

“This is becoming the major outreach method in Serbia,” said Dragan Grujicic, LIFEconnect leader for the Southeast-European Union Conference, based in Serbia.

Pujic launched LIFEconnect in June of 2010, following two years of planning and development. Church administrations in participating countries were required to designate a Web pastor for the project, a network developer and volunteers.

The initiative is operated at the division by a small team of developers, a marketing manager and a content manager.
Pujic said roughly 32,000 people followed streamed programs online or participated in corresponding events in auditoriums in March and April.

He said the division plans to add the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and several Nordic and Baltic countries to the LIFEconnect project by the end of this year. [tedNEWS]
"Connect to Escape" Comes to New York City

1 July 2013 New York, United States [E. Douglas Venn, ted/NEWS] One hundred and fifty people attended the "Connect to Escape" lunch seminar in Manhattan's Midtown area, most of them business people working in the surrounding offices, to enjoy delicious vegetarian food and talk about current situations in the society. The objective of the seminar was to share the wisdom from the Ancient Book (Holy Bible) on how to deal with the challenges in society and our lives. This event was one of 160 evangelistic programs and community service events taking place across Greater New York during June 2013 as part of the NY13 Comprehensive Urban Evangelism (www.ny13.org).

Dr. Miroslav Pujic, Director of Ministry to Postmoderns at the Trans-European Division, presented a six-part seminar, entitled "Connect to Escape", on June 11 – 13 and 18 – 20, 2013. This seminar was designed to reach those with a postmodern mindset. The program was conducted at lunchtime on weekdays so that those working in the nearby area could attend. The setting for the meetings consisted of a café-style atmosphere with a vegetarian lunch, relaxing background music and a lecture presented in an interactive way inviting audience participation.

Pastor Bledi Leno, a founding pastor of the new church plant at Bryant Park, in Midtown Manhattan, NYC and the host pastor who coordinated this event, stated that this was the first community service being offered to the public. "This event was a great way to make our debut as the "Life Hope Center" in Manhattan's Midtown area (Life-Hope-Center-NYC). Connecting with the locals and seeing them take on interest in the message we were conveying was priceless. For many of them this may have been the only outreach opportunity we had."

Other partners who made this event possible included active local church members and pastors who attended NY13 as delegates. They
invited their friends who work in the Central business district to attend the meetings with them. Several pastors from the Southern-Asia Pacific Division invited people off the street and visited and prayed with them. (Read their experiences and get to know the team online at www.h4bc.com). In addition, the local Adventist Book Center provided sample vegetarian foods. As a result of his cooperative effort, the total attendance was 150 for the 6 sessions, with a total of 33 guests.

Participants were presented with the practical benefits of applying Biblical principles into their lives and given tips on how to do this. Dr. Pujic reframed Biblical topics with a relational perspective, addressing relevant issues such as, “Is God doing His job?”, “How to escape corruption?”, “Struggle for survival. Why?”, “Should I forgive someone who hurt me?”, “The Greatest social need” and “End of the world. Really?”.

One businessman shared his perspective: “One of the things that touched me the most was the forgiveness segment we had a couple days ago. That was something I needed in my own life. Originally, I'm from Rwanda – a country that has had very tough times. I spoke with Dr. Pujic afterwards – he's from Serbia and so he knows what it means to live in a country that has gone through war. I was really touched by it and I'm glad I came.”

"Connect to Escape" was held with the purpose of reaching young professionals who work in NYC. There are millions of people that live in the city and many of them commute for over an hour to get to work every day. “Offering an alternate outreach program during lunchtime gave us an opportunity to reach out to people that would be almost impossible to attract to evening meetings,” says Pastor Gerson Santos, Study Center Director for Urban Ministries at the General Conference, Adventist Mission Office and Executive Secretary for the GNYC. “The program proved to be very effective as New Yorkers returned on numerous occasions to attend 'Connect to Escape' during their lunch breaks. Our goal is to continue offering these programs on a monthly basis in order to increase our database of interests, expand our programs to the community, develop contacts for Bible studies and develop small group meetings in the area”, concludes Santos.
The "Life Hope Center" in Manhattan, NYC, is being established to connect with the community and to promote a holistic approach of personal, physical, emotional, social and spiritual development by offering seminars, resources and services. To connect to the "Life Hope Center" on Facebook, go to Life-Hope-Center-NYC.

To learn more about LIFEdevelopment discipleship pathways including resources, go to www.lifedevolution.info. [tedNEWS]

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Hundreds Baptized as First NY13 Phase Wraps up at Nassau Coliseum

Wearing a dark blue baptismal robe, Tomas Olivera of Peekskill, New York, stepped into the giant pool placed before the platform at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum on this afternoon and knew only one thing: he was finally about to be baptized.

It quickly developed that the Seventh-day Adventist pastor who placed Olivera under the water was the president of the Adventist world church, Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson, who had just completed a sermon about the role this religious movement would play at the end of time.

Olivera was all smiles, as was John MacKneil, a former resident of New York’s Greenwich Village, who returned to the Historic Seventh-day Adventist Church on West 11th Street to hear Wilson present a four-week “Revelation of Hope” seminar. MacKneil was also baptized by Wilson, and was a bit overcome at the experience.

“It’s an inspiration to be baptized by this man of God,” MacKneil said, standing next to Wilson, who briefly interned at that church when he first began his ministry. “I wanted to be baptized; I needed to be baptized. I feel good and I feel inspired.” Both MacKneil and Wilson said MacKneil’s brother would also soon join the church.

Inspiration was certainly the theme for this day of celebration and commitment, which was held under the banner of a joint campmeeting of the Greater New York and Northeastern Conferences, something local officials said was a first for the two groups. Adventists came from all over the region – joined by officials of the Adventist Church world headquarters and the denomination’s North American Division, as well as from even farther afield – to mark the completion of an initial phase of urban evangelism and the welcoming of hundreds of new believers. At least 150 were baptized at the Nassau Coliseum venue, evangelist Mark Finley told Adventist Review, with many more in area churches the same morning. Estimates point to nearly 2,000 baptisms in the NY13 campaign before today's event.
Hundreds more had been baptized before the event, as the New York City area hosted more than 400 evangelistic outreach events held by Adventist congregations. As Wilson said of the NY13 effort during his sermon, "This is not a spectator sport," noting that several Adventist world church vice presidents and other world church leaders had conducted campaigns in the area as well.

At least one other division leader came to observe the results: Erton Köhler, president of the South American Division, and his wife Adriene were spotted among the worshippers Sabbath morning, no doubt happy that the "Arautos do Rei," the Brazilian "King’s Heralds" quartet, were part of the morning’s worship music.

Music wasn’t the only cause for happiness that morning: several public officials came to publicly acknowledge the positive impact the Seventh-day Adventist Church had on the community. Mayor Wayne J. Hall, Sr., of neighboring Hempstead, New York, welcomed the Adventists, and Una S. T. Clarke, a former member of the New York City Council and mother of U.S. Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-Brooklyn) was also recognized for her presence at the event.

But the greatest praise for Seventh-day Adventists came from Bill DeBlasio, who holds a citywide office as New York City Public Advocate, a job formerly known as president of the City Council.

"I represent all 8.4 million New Yorkers," DeBlasio said. "And I come to bring greetings and appreciation" for the work Adventists are doing in the community, he added.

"I was moved by the work of your young people after Hurricane Sandy struck. Every day, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is doing good works in the City of New York," De Blasio said. He lauded Adventist efforts in promoting healthy living and said the church’s schools comprise "one of the greatest educational systems on Earth.”

DeBlasio concluded saying, “Every day [Seventh-day Adventists] make us a better and a stronger city. I say, ‘God bless you.’”
Following the comments of these public officials, Adventist evangelist Mark Finley prayed for Hall, Clarke, and DeBlasio, each of whom was also greeted by Wilson.

Wilson, in his morning message, emphasized that the June 29 event, though historic, isn’t the end of outreach here: “NY13 continues until Jesus comes!” he declared.

Speaking about the “little scroll” that would be sweet to taste but “bitter in the belly” (Revelation 10:8-9), Wilson linked the disappointment of the early disciples, who thought Jesus would establish the Kingdom of God during His time on Earth but instead was crucified, buried, and resurrected, with that of the early Millerites. The 1840s Millerites, out of whom the Seventh-day Adventist Church eventually emerged, initially thought that the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8 pointed to the return of Christ to Earth in October of 1844.

Instead, the first-century disciples began preaching the gospel and, as Acts 17:6 records, “turned the world upside down.” So too, Wilson said, Seventh-day Adventists – the spiritual descendants of the disappointed Millerites – have reached out around the world bringing the three angels’ messages and the hope that Jesus is coming soon.

“This is not another church,” Wilson said. “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a movement of God.”

Noting the church’s presence in over 200 nations and territories around the globe, Wilson added praise for the church’s media outreach, noting “Adventist World Radio is making a major impact around the world,” and praising church-owned Hope Channel and supporting television ministry 3ABN for their part in the media outreach.

Wilson again emphasized that the day’s event was not the “end” of outreach in the region. He told the thousands gathered for worship and celebration, “We came to New York to highlight ‘Mission to the Cities.’ This is not a culmination today in New York City: the work is continuing.”

Speaking with Adventist Review while waiting to baptize Olivera, Wilson said his own campaign was “an amazing experience in Greenwich Village. The audience stayed with us the whole time.”

Members of the congregation were impressed. Duane Cady, interim president of Atlantic Union College, a church-owned institution in South Lancaster, Mass., was visiting from his home in Syracuse, New York.

Cady, also a former board chairman of the American Medical Association, choked back tears as he contemplated the number of new Adventists being baptized.

“It’s amazing. We’re going forward, and I’m very happy, even thrilled,” he said.

As the baptisms continued, and an afternoon of music and testimony loomed, the joyfulness promised to remain for quite some time.

[tedNEWS]

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27 June 2013 Zagreb, Croatia [Darko Kovačević, tedNEWS] On 9 June 2013 the Adriatic Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (AUC) held its sessions at the campus of the Union College in Maruševec, Croatia. Zlatko Musija, former President of the Croatia Conference, was elected Union President replacing Pastor Branko Bistrić. Pastor Neven Klačmer replaced Pastor Srećko Kuburić as Union Secretary, and Nebojša Milovanović was re-elected as the Union Treasurer for the next four years.

For the first time ever, the Croatia and Slovenia Conference sessions were held on the same day following the Union session. Pastor Drago Mojzeš was elected as the President of the Croatian Conference, replacing Zlatko Musija, and Pastor Zmago Godina was re-elected as President of the Slovenian Conference. At the same time, it was decided that Pastor Alban Matohiti, will replace Pastor Leo Nils Espana in 2015 as Albania Mission President.

The atmosphere at the session was positive and the leadership of Dr Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, helped all the meetings to run smoothly and concluded within one day. The Adventist Church in the AUC has 3,500 members and has experienced an increase of about 250 believers during the past five years.
‘It is my desire that the Church in the Adriatic Union will grow in love towards our Lord Jesus Christ and towards people in crisis and that we will carefully nurture Christian unity among the members of our Church. I would like to see a more practical spirituality among us that reaches the world in need, according to the gifts God has entrusted to us individually,’ commented Zlatko Musija, newly elected Union President. ‘It is my special desire to see our children and youth be more involved in the positive changes in the Church supported by more experienced members. This will be the best investment into the future of our Church,’ Pastor Musija concluded.

The consecration services for the Union Conference and Croatian Conference were held on June 15, 2013 in Maruševec, and for the Slovenian Conference on June 22, in Maribor. These were blessed opportunities to thank God for leading us safely so far to express our deep trust in His leadership for the future. All the programmes were enriched by good quality spiritual music claiming the promises of the Word of God. All proceedings were recorded by national radio and TV and communicated to the public in the programme ‘Duhovni izazovi’ (Spiritual Challenges) on June 22, 2013.

For more information about the Adventist church in Croatia, Slovenia or Albania, please click here. [tedNEWS]

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The question used as title above is used in the Introduction to Leadership Next by Eddie Gibbs. He is Professor of Church Growth at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

The reason for his book was an interview on the web-site of Christianity Today regarding the topic of the emerging church – a concept of church which changes and adapts to the ever changing culture around us. He was asked a question that torments (or should torment) Seventh-day Adventist leaders today: ‘What are the reasons that so many young people under thirty-five leave the church?’ His answer was: ‘One factor is that they are reacting against a culture of control’. The editorial director of InterVarsity Press thought that this answer contained the seed for a book and prodded Gibbs to write. Leadership Next is the result.

‘The youth are reacting against a culture of control’. The statement kept me thinking. I had just presented a paper to the General Conference Global Mission Issues Committee on ‘Mission Challenges in a Post-Christian World’. In my research I had found numerous indications to support Gibb’s answer.

It is an uncomfortable truth that Adventist youth are being born, growing up and living in a post-Christian society (and where this is not yet the case in Europe, the signs indicate that it is on its way). People in this society erroneously think that Christianity is something of the past and a looser. Although we know they are mistaken, their beliefs form a powerful context which exposes young people to the mixed values of ever-changing ‘secular’ (‘there is evidence that God does not exist’) or ‘post-modern’ (‘we don’t know and can never know’) kinds of reasoning about the world and our place in it.

The changing culture today has certain constancies: a growing individualism and longing for freedom from authorities, be they parents, teachers, police, government, church, Bible, or God. Our youth are not immune to this. They, too, ‘react against a culture of control’. Church leaders today need to understand this and learn to communicate the invitation to leadership in a different way. Thus, young people will not respond to invitations to assume leadership if the church organisation simply tells them ‘we need more leaders’, or ‘this is what we have to be and do’, or ‘this is what the GC has decided’, or ‘this is what you need to learn at the Theological Seminary’.

What is it, then, that may bring good leaders in the future? Maybe it is their experience of being called by God. Maybe it is their experience of being called by Christ to be his disciples and followers. Maybe it is their experience of being grasped by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If so, how are we as leaders to encourage and empower them to seek these experiences, to acknowledge them, and to act on them? Modern youth respond to authentic people. Thus, a fundamental condition for being heard and trusted is that we – ourselves – have these daily and ongoing spiritual experiences and that we – ourselves – embody and demonstrate – with profound humility – a Christian leadership based on such foundations? Part of the new generation’s mind-set is a ‘reaction against a culture of control’. It means, among other things, that you will not be trusted as a leader because of your position or title (control), but because of your life and genuine personal experiences of God.

I take comfort from thinking that God owns the church and he has the power to make it into what he wants it to be. So, the plan of redemption or the mission of God will not fail. The key issue is a different one. It is personal: Will you and I fail as leaders, because we fail to know the mind-set of our youth and thus talk past them?

Recently, I was privileged to take part in the GC celebration of 150 years of the organised Seventh-day Adventist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan (1863-2013). It was stated repeatedly that this is a ‘sad’ occasion – because we are still here and Christ has not yet come. I tend to leave this with God, however. If my Saviour has not yet come, God will have his reasons for allowing that to happen. Another way to look at our 150th anniversary is to ask ourselves this important question:

What is it in the structures we have built up in our church over the past 150 years that is now an obstruction for the gospel to be received by our youth and the world around us? Many Adventists of all ages are now asking this question. I noticed how strong such sentiments were at the meeting of The One Project in Chicago (11-12 February, 2013), both from the pulpit and in the group discussions. Some answers to this vital question came to me as I read Gibbs’ thoughts on leaders being ‘called by God’ (pp. 131-134). This theme is what pastor Lowell Cooper is sharing with us this month and I believe that the following reflections will connect well with what says to us.

Gibbs brings seven areas of concern:
1. Discipleship: The essential deficit of the church today: its failure to adequately disciple the church members. Thus, he opens the brief section ‘Called by God’ by linking church leadership with the biblical concept of discipleship: ‘The concept of calling is essential to the life of discipleship’.

2. Christ’s Call is On-Going and Life-Changing: Gibbs says that ‘the call of Christ is not a once in a lifetime experience, but rather represents the ongoing response of the disciple’ and it is therefore the key to the ongoing growth as a disciple which generates new enthusiasm for continuing. ‘A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others – the Audience of One’. This principle applies to all followers of Christ, but especially to leaders ‘for God’s calling is the key to igniting a passion for the deepest growth and highest heroism in life’.

3. The Individual Calling Is Part of a Communal Calling. Gibbs then looks at how we abuse our calling: ‘Some leaders are so obsessed with their own sense of calling that they marginalize those around them or simply use them to serve their own ends’. This is of course contrary to the Bible, where disciples are called, not in isolation, but as part of ‘a community of the called’. Every leader must address the reverse side of being called by God, namely conceit, envy and greed.

4. The Unfortunate Distinction between Clergy and Laity Must Be Reformed from the Teaching of the Bible. God’s calling applies to the totality of God’s people. It is not restricted to the leaders. The myth of the ‘restricted call’ has crippled the church’s mission in the world. Traditionally, Gibbs says, ordained ministry or the mission field (more broadly labelled ‘full-time service’) has been regarded as ‘the highest calling’. Over time this has led to two distinct classes of Christians (Adventists): the clergy, those ordained to the pastorate, and the laity, the majority from which the few were selected.

Thus, we must change our view of ordination and clergy, coming more into harmony with the Bible, if we want to mobilise the whole church for mission. We must change it for another reason, too: The young people of today, especially those who are leaving us, ‘react against a culture of control’. If they live and work in a church where all are called and sent on the mission of God – being ordained by their faith and baptism – they will see that the ordained pastor is one of them, that he leads them to seriously impact the world out there, not to benefit his own programs.

Gibbs says that ‘as we come to appreciate the comprehensive nature of God’s call, we must recognise that lay people are not amateur contributors within the structures of the institutional church. They must not be regarded as volunteers who support and run clergy-controlled programs. The term laity (laos) has to be restored to its original meaning – the people of God called to a priestly and apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 6:16; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). We are all members of the laity, including those who are ordained as pastors. We have all been sent by our ascended Lord into the world to represent his present reign, herald his anticipated coming and invite people to join us in following him. In this view of the church, the people of God become culture-creating teams dispersed throughout society as salt, yeast and light.’

In this view of the church, there is no place for struggling with ‘how to activate the church members’. This is an issue created by the clergy-laity distinction! Neither would we see so many young people leave us, because they would be acknowledged as called by Christ already and their engagement in ministry to change the world would be their life!

Leaders in the church are formed among disciples of Christ, among a mobilised community of Christ, where young people, men and women are expected, encouraged and equipped to be ministers, with our without imposition of hands. And therefore, the attitude, life and leadership that you and I display as leaders will have an impact on where the new leaders will come from.

5. Replace Self-Fulfilment with God’s On-Going Call to Service. Gibbs calls attention to a serious consequence of an absence of a personal sense of call from God by church members: their focus on the need for personal fulfilment in order to find some sense of purpose for their lives.

Facts indicate a strong trend among secular and postmodern people towards self, and you have a keen interest in self-growth, self-development, self-realisation, and self-fulfilment. Even young Adventists being asked to serve often ask these days: ‘What’s in it for me?’ This is the fruit of not being part of a community of disciples of Christ where service is the focus of everything. They don’t understand what ‘service’ means because it has not been embodied by their church and it is virtually non-existent in the mass-media
version of life. The deep and consistent teaching on ‘service’ in the Bible has not reached them.

Gibbs warns against looking within one-self and self-realisation and gives a quotation from J. E. White: ‘When personal fulfilment is allowed to take the place of calling, our lives become little more than exercises in self-indulgence. Ironically, we were created such that our deepest fulfilment is found as we submit to God’s calling on our life. The reason is simple: we are first and foremost to Someone, not to something or to somewhere.’

6. **Leaders Must Embody that the Entire Church is Called by God and Show it in their Leadership Style.** In order for the entire church to be motivated by a sense of divine call, Gibbs says, ‘it is imperative for its leaders to share this deep conviction, demonstrating their own personal call and God’s call to the whole congregation. In fact, church leaders cannot merely share it; they must embody it to an extraordinary degree. For some, this will require a gigantic shift away from a controlling style of leadership to one of affirmation and empowerment.’

7. **Demonstrate the Joy of Service.** All leaders know that leadership seldom consists of moving from one exhausting test and exhilarating triumph to the next. Most days consist of dealing with an ‘unending succession of mundane matters’. But the calling of God transforms life so that even the simple, everyday duties become invested with kingdom significance. For Adventist leaders, therefore, an essential ingredient in leadership should therefore be the joy of doing our work, because we are called by God.

In conclusion, as we step out in obedience to Christ’s leading of our leadership, let us bear in mind the positive approach that God’s call inspires in us by the Spirit:

- Look at the kingdom, not just your corner.
- See beyond our circumstances to the presence of Christ with us.
- Focus on successes, not problems.
- Beware of exaggerating problems and empowering failures.
- Keep a list of blessings and successes.
- Look at reality with all its imperfections, not just exceptions.
- Reconfirm your call rather than be swayed by complaints.

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3 Ibid., p. 78.

By

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

*Used with permission from Leadership Development Journal - April 2013*
Hearing the Call

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’”

The ancient prophet is caught up in a dazzling display of light and sound. Riveting in its intensity. Frightening in its majesty. He feels awful and awe-filled at the same time. His call, though couched in generality, is unmistakable, his response unequivocal.

Most people experience the call of God in less dramatic ways. In whatever way it comes a call from God can be a fearful thing. If it strikes us as strange, unusual or difficult the response might be, “Here am I. Send my sister.” On the other hand, a person can rush ahead of God, conjure up a call based on imagination and then perform a self-appointment.

Mark Buchanan identifies several questions for thoughtful reflection about hearing and heeding God’s call. These include: Am I running from something? Is it a genuine call or simply a desire? Does this fit who I am and how God shaped me? Is it for now or later? Do others independently perceive it? Is it rooted in the deeper call of God?

The reality is that all are called. Called first to a life that glorifies God, a life that proceeds out of committed discipleship to Jesus Christ. Within that calling there may come something more specific dealing with a career, a ministry, a temporary role or simply a once-in-a-lifetime act. But all of these are cradled in God’s call to holiness and service. So, whoever you are, wherever you are, you have been called by God.

God’s general call is for everyone. God’s specific calls cover a vast array of roles and persons. Consider for a moment a short list to illustrate the variety of God’s calls:

Abraham—a man with no possessions and no progeny called to be the father of the faithful Moses—an 80-year old shepherd called to lead a band of slaves to nationhood Samuel—a little child commissioned to bear the message of God to the one in highest spiritual office of the day Daniel and his friends—captives in a heathen empire called to bear unflinching witness to the King of the universe Lydia—a businesswoman provides housing for the evangelistic team in Philippi Paul and Silas—whose suffering as prisoners in Philippi leads to the jailor’s conversion

And then there is a nameless slave girl, kidnapped from her home, forced into domestic service for the wife of a military commander, caught in circumstances she did not choose and could not change. Then one day she learns that the master of the house is himself caught in circumstances he did not choose and could not change—Naaman has leprosy! And instead of rejoicing at his misfortune this little maid merely voices a wish that her master might find healing at the house of the prophet. Naaman goes, is healed and becomes a worshipper of God.

A witness to God and His kingdom can arise from any occupation. There is no hierarchy of spiritual professions. The preacher or Bible worker is not more important than the taxi driver, housewife, or parking lot attendant when it comes to being light. It is not your place in the wage scale, nor your place in the organization; it is not your brains nor your beauty; it is not your degrees nor your seniority that qualifies you to be light. It is your connection with Jesus Christ.

Remember the challenge of Jesus: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

Perhaps what is urgently needed in the Church today is the realization that every kind of work done for the sake of human community and the mission of God is a consecrated calling. We must reject the idea that ministerial work is more holy than teaching math or fixing machinery. We reject this idea because it masks the assumption that if I am unable, unfit or uncalled to ministerial work my role is basically that of a bystander in the mission of God.

Martin Luther strongly opposed the view of vocation prevalent during his time—the idea that only work in and for the church could qualify as God's calling.

“It is pure invention [fiction] that Pope, bishops, priests and monks are called to the ‘spiritual estate’ while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called to the ‘temporal estate.’ This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and that for the reason: *all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate*, and there is no difference among them except that of office….We are all
consecrated priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: ‘You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm’ (1 Pet. 2:9). The Apocalypse says: ‘Thou hast made us to be kings and priests by thy blood’ (Rev 5:9-10).5

We must take care lest we fall victim to the idea that we serve God best when we are in church, when we are praying or reading the Bible, or giving Bible studies or handing out tracts and that our work is merely a necessity to provide resources to serve Him when we have completed our allotted task or shift of duty. Our daily work is ultimately an act of worship to the God who called us and who equipped us to do it.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”6

These three ideas form the context for a Christian’s sense of calling: 1) We are called first to be children of God, 2) The means by which we earn a living is the platform from which we honour God and advance His mission, 3) Doing our work faithfully and well, whatever it be, is our way of transforming a career into a calling.

Eugene Peterson recounts the story of the fourth century church father Gregory of Nyssa whose brother Basil had arranged for him to be made bishop of Cappadocia. “Gregory objected,” Peterson writes. “He didn’t want to be stuck in such an out-of-the-way place. His brother told him he didn’t want Gregory to obtain distinction from his church but to confer distinction upon it.” Is this not what Christ wants for us as well? To seek the good of the small places in which he has placed us and to confer distinction upon them by serving him with humility there? The path of glory is often an obscure one. It is the way of the cross.7

1 Isaiah 6:8, NKJV
2 Leadership Journal (ISSN 0199-7661), Winter 2013, p. 96
3 2 Kings 5, NKJV
4 John 7:37, 38, NKJV
5 Martin Luther, Three Treatises (Fortress, 1970), p.12.
6 1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV

By

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In a church and a world calling for effective leaders, it is appropriate to ask once again, where do good leaders come from? Do we find them through some thorough screening process? Do we forge them through a variety of experiences? Can we train them by carefully designed coursework or degrees? And how long do we wait for their performance to show whether they are the real deal – someone with discernment and wisdom whom others will follow.

As part of my responsibilities at Loma Linda University, I chair many search committees. These are small groups of peers and colleagues who come together to select a new Dean, Vice President, or other significant leader for our institution. I am always fascinated by the discussions that occur. First, the committee spends time talking about the characteristics they would want to see in this person. When the discussion is complete, we have created an ideal candidate that we all realize can never be found. Then we start putting forward names. The list often starts with obvious choices - those second in command, associates, or recognized leaders on campus. There always a few who nominate themselves, though my experience has been they are usually not the best candidates.

And the discussion begins. What is the balance of characteristics that make the best leaders? Do you want charisma over character, energy over tolerance and reflection? How important is knowledge in their particular discipline? And what about wisdom? Where does it come from? Gradually, over a number of meetings, the issues are carefully and prayerfully discussed and a consensus starts to emerge. Opinions change when listening to others. The preferred candidate of one meeting may move down the list after reflection at the next meeting. Finally a “short list” is selected and interviews scheduled. And even then, after hours of discussion of each person’s history and references, opinions change based on how they present themselves, how they respond to key questions, and their general demeanour and attitude.

It is very clear that the intangibles of who we want in a leadership position are more than a set of good credentials or knowledge in their field. It includes their disposition, their attitude to life and those they will work with, and the approach they demonstrate to issues. I have come to call the best candidates the “reluctant leaders.” They are the ones who are not overly confident, but quietly competent. They show a reflective attitude, not easy answers. They are not seeking the job, but are willing if asked.

Jim Collins, in his bestselling book “Good to Great”, talks about this kind of corporate leader.

“We were surprised, shocked really, to discover the type of leadership required for turning a good company into a great one...Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”

Those are the Level 5 leaders that Collins found could truly make a difference in his or her organization. Reserved... Shy... Personal humility... - not exactly what one usually thinks of as a leader. Yet they are the ones who were able to gather ideas and people around them to move their organization forward.

So where does that place our church in this process of developing leaders? How do we grow, identify and appoint leaders with those characteristics? Does our current system of selecting leaders really do that?

I was attending a division level meeting recently in which the president was very clear on why he wanted each union and mission to become conferences. “Because then you will be responsible to the people. You will have to defend your actions and decisions to those who elected you”. Yet, does even the democratic process of selecting leaders guarantee results? When is a person’s popularity a barrier to making the tough decisions that are often necessary? Can a church, an institution, an organization, prepare leaders effectively? Or is this a matter of finding the right genetic material and polishing to what we want?

My impression is that the most effective leaders come with the basic ingredients already on board, a result of genetics and their early training as a child. They are then moulded by experience to have the characteristics we want them to have. It is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge comes from many sources and is absolutely essential. But wisdom only comes when that knowledge is refined in the context of life’s experiences. It starts making reactions more intuitive, guided by forgotten experiences that left their imprint on that person’s character.

One strategy that we are trying to institute at Loma Linda is for each leader on campus to identify potential successors to their position. Each year they are expected to confidentially submit to their leader the names of 2-3 people they feel could take their place, either now or in the future. This is tough work and sobering for all of us. Yet it forces a mindset that is crucial to recognize that organizations will move on after us, and though things may be done differently, they will continue.
A key part of this strategy is to then seek to grow these potential successors to prepare them for future responsibility. Usually this must be done without their knowledge, as it often destroys a person’s relationships with peers if others think they have an inside track or have already been selected for an advanced position. So quietly and without most being aware of the strategy, these people are placed on committees, given assignments, and appointed to responsibilities that will expose them to the kinds of ideas and thinking that are important to the organization. If the initial supposition was correct, they perform well and can be given other responsibilities. But occasionally, characteristics of that person emerge that raise questions about their skill or even character. Both kinds of information are critical in identifying future leaders. And I often see the list of potential successors change as more exposure is provided.

Finally, I want to comment on the art of mentoring. I have benefited enormously through the years by having someone whom I respect be brave enough to comment on my behaviour or decisions in various situations. This is an incredible gift to another to have that kind of discussion. Too often we shrug our shoulders and hide our thoughts, thinking we don’t want to hurt our relationship or discourage a friend.

But the courage to confront, to have a crucial conversation with another, is one of the most valuable steps in developing leaders. It is the best kind of education, usually creating memories that stick in your mind for years. It doesn’t need to always be a comment about a problem, but can be equally effective as an affirmation of something positive that was observed. This is a responsibility we all can share.

Our church needs and deserves the best leaders we can find. Intentional strategies to develop individuals with the character and insights to truly be authentic leaders are essential. May God give us the courage and commitment to do this patiently, deliberately, and with precision.

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