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10 October 2013 London, United Kingdom [Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist / BUC News] London is the direct focus this month for the 'Mission to the Cities' initiative of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. After months of preparation, outreach programmes are running in Brixton church as well as Youth Missions in several venues across London.

The Brixton programme started with a full house on Sabbath, 5 October. The speaker, Pastor Kelby McCottry from the USA, is focusing his sermons on Hope.

By looking at different Bible characters, such as Samuel or Solomon, Pastor McCottry is enthusiastically guiding his audience to discover their need for hope. The congregation is mainly members and visitors from Brixton, Balham and Croydon churches.

Pastor Vili Costescu has been tasked by the Division to ensure media coverage, and has been working to set up the streaming service for Brixton so more people can watch the programmes. "It's good to make the programmes available for more people", Pastor Costescu stated. "We are averaging about 50 people who watch online, but I expect the numbers to rise over the weekend."

The programmes are streamed via the Brixton church website or direct from Streamkit TV. The programme runs daily (except Thursdays) at 7:00 pm until 19 October.

Simultaneously, around 200 youth under the leadership of Pastor Steve Thomas, started their restaurant style meetings in the Advent Centre. "It's been an amazing atmosphere", expressed Pastor Thomas, "I'm excited it's going so well." Following a three course meal, it's an evening of music by the London Youth Federation and a relevant sermon.
The speaker this week was Pastor Rebecca Davis from Atlanta, USA. Under the theme, 'What's love got to do with it,' she spoke about real love, great dating and a young person's future. Connecting well with the audience she said, "I'm impressed to see the youth here. They are very opinionated, engaged and talented. It's a group on fire for God."

There are challenges as Pastor Davis noted, principally "they are wondering if there is a place for them in the church."

SEC Teens director, Pastor Dejan Stojkovic, attended the opening and was impressed how Pastor Davis was able to speak straight to the youth in a language they understood. "I want to bring her over for the teens", he said. "It was a great evening with spiritual and physical food as well as outstanding fellowship" added Zinze Bishop. "We were excited to see people from the community coming in on Sunday."

The youth are bringing in different speakers, as well as visiting several different churches midweek and Sabbaths throughout October ending on 2 November. For more information and up-to-date schedule please visit the SEC Youth Facebook page.
Mission to the Cities – London, is more than a month of meetings. Two long-term church plant projects in Uxbridge and Potters Bar are building up work in their communities. At the moment they are conducting research and meeting the community to discover how best to make a difference in people's lives. Volunteers have been recruited to help with the project.

With so much activity you may feel in the need of rest. Providing that rest is another initiative born on the side of the other planned projects. Taking the organisers by surprise, it is the 'Sabbath sofa' project. Led by Pastor Costescu, a sofa is placed in a busy shopping area and people are invited to take a seat and engage in a conversation about rest. This leads to an introduction to the Sabbath principle of a 24-hour period of rest. For more information see the dedicated Sabbath website or Facebook page. [tedNEWS]

tedNEWS Staff: Miroslav Pujic, director; Deana Stojkovic, editor
119 St Peter's Street, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3EY, England
E-mail: tednews@ted-adventist.org
Website: www.ted-adventist.org

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11 October 2013 Tirana, Albania [Julian Kastrati & Dea Përtafi, tedNEWS] There was great anticipation in Albania leading up to the weekend of 4-6 October 2013 as many people looked forward to the follow-up of the ‘Connect to Escape’ series, featuring Dr. Miroslav Pujic, Trans-European Division Ministry to Postmoderns Director and the leader of LIFEconnect (LC) Social Media Evangelism. Following its hugely successful launch back in March 2013 the LC STREAM event had 130 people attend its reprise. Pastors and church members from Central Albania (Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan) invited their unchurched friends, who outnumbered church members in the packed auditorium at Hotel Tirana International.

Under the theme ‘Connect to Escape’, the three evenings covered the following topics: “When the world is collapsing, what to do?” (Faith), ‘How to escape corruption’ (Integrity) and ‘Being wrong isn’t that bad’ (Choices).

“I was very impressed by the practicality and usefulness of the topics,” said Denisa Sinanaj, a Psychology major from Elbasan. For the third evening’s presentation, she said, “I’ll always remember the five steps I have to take in order to recover from a wrong choice.”

Aldo Dervishi, a Sociology student from Elbasan was particularly appreciative of the exercises to exhibit integrity, thus discouraging
corruption. “If only all people practised these principles…the world we live in would drastically change.”

Reminiscing on the weekend event, Linda Çepani Gjika, a professor at Tirana University’s Faculty of Economics, felt that “there was a blessing in the programme for everyone, irrespective of their age and walk of life. All felt free to share their experiences and all benefited from the Bible-based principles, so eloquently presented by Dr Pujic.”

Pastor Sergio N. Borges added, “Needless to say, Dr Pujic’s presentations and his didactic approach were greatly appreciated by the audience; moreover, we have been blessed through these series to extend our network of evangelistic contacts.”

“Once again we give praise to the Lord for the successful follow-up of the ‘Connect to Escape’ series,” shared a very enthusiastic Pastor Julian Kastrati, who was largely responsible for the event. “Seeing all of our churches benefit directly from the large number of visitors is indeed encouraging and overwhelming. This programme’s appeal has reached beyond Albania’s borders. Just to illustrate: it was
particularly moving to receive a message from Qashif Imeri, who reported that thirty-four Albanians in diaspora convened in one room in Offenbach, Germany, praying for the blessings of the Tirana event. “We have been doubly blessed this year with ‘Connect to Escape’ and the good news is: there’s yet more to come!” said Dea Përtafi, a committed LIFEconnect Albania activist, referring to the upcoming 6-8 December meetings in the same venue.

Asked for his comments, Pastor Leo N. España, President of the Albanian Mission, said, “We are very grateful to our God because once again the event proved to be successful! People who attended the ‘Connect to Escape’ series were welcomed in a friendly and cozy environment, where they had the opportunity to make new friends, share personal experiences and learn about God’s word and His plan of salvation. People of all ages had a delightful time in fellowship. The variety of formats included in the programme made it possible for pastors and church members to interact with their invitees through discussions and reflections.” In his appeal to the church and pastoral team, Pastor España concluded, “Let us continue to pray and work to follow up this evangelistic initiative that will lead more Albanians to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour!”

For more information about LIFEconnect as a Social Media evangelistic platform and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Albania, please visit www.lifeconnect.info and www.adventist.al. [tedNEWS]
Division.
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Canoe and ‘Escape’ – a holiday canoeing mission trip in Poland

5 October 2013 Warsaw, Poland Michał Rakowski and Zofia Włodarczyk] From 21-24 July 2013, a group of 30 people went on a canoeing mission trip on the Nida River in Poland. The group, which was comprised of adults, young people and children, stopped in small villages and towns to distribute Adventist books and magazines.

The Nida canoe trip in the Swietokrzyskie region was the sixth event of this kind. Each trip had a mission goal and this year’s goal was to distribute 2,500 copies of ‘ESCAPE’ magazine.
“Great respect and thanks to the youth! Their involvement was so inspiring,” said one of the organisers, Marek Kroczyk. In fact, about 15 young people went out and distributed material donated by the Polish Union Conference, which included about 60 copies of The Great Controversy as well as other books and DVDs.

The involvement of the youngest participants was particularly emphasized by Pastor Piotr Stachurski, the organiser of all six canoeing mission trips: “On the first day there was nobody who wanted to stay with the equipment – everybody wanted to 'do mission' from door to door. It is so wonderful that our children are showing so much interest in doing evangelism!” For the majority of these young people it was their first time experiencing these activities. One of the youngest participants said, “It’s cool! We are having a real, but safe, adventure. It’s cool we could hand in so many copies of ‘Escape’. It’s cool to realise, thanks to this canoeing trip, that we live for a purpose...”
Every morning, after a devotional and breakfast, the canoes would start their day’s journey of over a dozen kilometres. One has to say that the countryside along the Nida River is exceptionally beautiful. From time to time, the group stopped to visit nearby villages. Participants of the canoeing trip were impressed by the openness of the inhabitants in this area; people so often expressed a will to pray together!

One particular man kept crossing the path of the canoers. At first he came across the group at the most dangerous section of the river, where he was given some brochures. Then he rode on his bike to see the group again and wave to them from nearby bridge. The next day, one of the participants knocked on a door, and there he was, again. With enthusiasm, this gentleman said, “Sir, last night I read everything I got from you, and I want to stay in touch with you and discuss a few things.”

On another occasion, a group of young people were sitting at the entrance of a small village shop when the missionaries stopped by to sell the books. The young people found a book they desperately wanted to buy, but between them they only had 27 pennies. The missionaries decided to ‘sell’ the book anyway! A few moments later, the young people were completely engrossed in the book, one of them reading aloud and the other listening intently.

“Such a canoeing trip is a great time for both recreation and mission. We really experienced God’s guidance,” admitted Stachurski. As there has been such a great interest in this kind of holiday this year, two canoeing mission trips are being for 2014. [tedNEWS]
It's time to re-catch an old vision!

14 October 2013 St Albans, United Kingdom [Miroslav Pujic, tedNEWS] Have you ever felt discouraged at the immense challenge of sharing the gospel to a postmodern world? Frustrated that so many people just don’t seem to be interested in Christianity anymore? Disappointed with the ‘fresh techniques’ for witnessing that seem to water down the gospel truth? Doubtful that you have what it takes to be a successful witness?

It’s time to re-catch an old vision! We would like to invite you to participate at the Conference ‘Go Beyond Normal: Making God Known in Europe’ which will be held from 12 – 14 November 2014 in the Hotel ‘Splendid’, Bečići, Montenegro.

The purpose of this conference is to DEEPEN our UNDERSTANDING about the mindset of people in Europe, TALK about EXPERIENCE in the COMMUNITY and plan to be part of the NEXT movement to MAKE GOD KNOWN. We want to help you discover ways to connect with people in this postmodern generation; bridge gaps between church and the public and provide you with the models and practical resources to strengthen your witnessing ability.

For more information about the conference, please click here. [tedNEWS]

tedNEWS Staff: Miroslav Pujic, director; Deana Stojkovic, editor
119 St Peter's Street, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3EY, England
E-mail: tednews@ted-adventist.org
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In Egypt, mob burns Adventist Church in Assiut

15 August 2013 Cairo, Egypt [ANN] The burning of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in the city of Assiut during rioting last night was not part of a wider, organized political movement, local church officials said.

The Assiut Adventist Church, located approximately 220 miles south of Cairo, was attacked by a mob and heavily damaged after it was set on fire. The pastor and his wife hid in their upstairs apartment and were not found by the attackers, who set the building on fire. The pastor and his wife were rescued from the burning building by Muslim neighbors.
“This was a small group of people bent on doing harm. This event was not representative of Egypt or the people of Egypt,” said Llewellyn R. Edwards, president the Adventist Church’s Egypt-Sudan Field, based in Heliopolis.

“As Adventists we want our relationships to be strong with Egyptians of all faiths in the country,” Edwards said.
Muslim neighbors rescuing the Adventist couple shows “the true picture of most people in Egypt,” Edwards said.

Edwards said the government has announced it will pay for the rebuilding of all churches destroyed last night during rioting in several cities.

Several other Christian churches were also attacked in Assuit, as well as the shop of the Egypt Bible Society, Edwards said.

The Adventist Church operates two schools in Egypt – Nile Union Academy northeast of Cairo, and Zeitoun Adventist School. Both institutions have positive relationships with their communities, Edwards said. [tedNEWS]

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David Asscherick: 'The best thing to keep the youth focused...'

5 August 2013 Novi Sad, Serbia [Agnieszka Kluska, tedNEWS] David Asscherick is co-director of Light Bearers and co-founder of ARISE. A former extreme sports enthusiast and punk rocker, David turned his life over to the God of the Bible at the age of 23. He has spent the last 15 years travelling the globe preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the author of God In Pain: Another Look at Evil, Suffering, and the Cross, his first book. He and Violeta, his wife of 13 years, are the happy parents of two boys, Landon and Jabel. They enjoy backpacking, climbing, running, fly fishing, and reading.

ted/MEDIA: How are you enjoying the Congress and what were your expectations before you came?
David Asscherick: To be honest my expectations were that I would have a lot more free time because when I looked at the schedule I was thinking, oh you know I’m only teaching on Wednesday and Thursday so I’ll have all day Friday and Sabbath. But there have been so many wonderful young people here that I’ve just been literally uninterruptedly non-stop talking to people and I love that.

I had high expectations before I came and those expectations have almost entirely been met.

ted/MEDIA: Have you met many new people or are these old friends that you’re meeting?

David Asscherick: I have met a tone of new friends here and I’ve connected with some old friends as well. There’s several ARISE students here. One of my favourite things in life is to meet new people, just to get to know them, sit down, hang out, and I’ve met just a lot of new people.

ted/MEDIA: Your message on Thursday was powerful. And the energy was just infectious. Where do you get it from? Everyone is asking about that!

David Asscherick: A lot of people are asking me about that! I think it’s from striving to live a healthy life. I just turned 40 this year and I feel great. I feel as good as I’ve ever felt. I love to run, in fact I just went for a run a couple of days ago here in Novi Sad. I eat well, I try to get to bed at a reasonable time and I love running, climbing, surfing; I’ve always been very active. I just love it.

ted/MEDIA: Do you tailor your style of preaching to the audience? Is it different when you speak to adults?

David Asscherick: No, this is how I preach. This is who I am. In fact, when I’m at home playing with the kids or just acting crazy, my wife will say: "If people only knew what you’re really like." And then she’ll say: "Wait a minute, they do!" This is who I am. When I stand up there I just know the major points that I want to say, and to be honest, even many of the things, like getting down on my four legs and acting like a dog, I didn’t plan that beforehand. I was just going to talk about the stability of the tripod and then it dawned on me, I could talk about the difference between a two-legged animal, namely a human being, and a four-legged animal, so I just said: "I’ll get down on my hands and knees".

So a lot of that stuff just comes, in fact, most of it. Not the theological content, which I have really thought through, but the delivery is almost entirely spontaneous.

ted/MEDIA: You’ve travelled the world and you’ve done all kinds of things like workshops, seminars, Bible boot camps and conferences. What do you think works best for the youth to keep them focused and inspired, not just for a short while?

David Asscherick: For me 100% the thing that works both short term and long term is getting young people two things: in the Word and really connected to Christ and ministry. That’s it. Don’t get me wrong. I love good production and I think they’ve done a fantastic job but what if you had all of this beautiful production without substance? The production can’t sustain an ongoing enthusiasm. You have to
connect people to the Word, to Christ and to ministry. And when that happens, young people, like anybody, whether you’re 20, 30, 40, 50, 60; people turn on, the switch is flipped. So 'yes' to good music, 'yes' to good drama, 'yes' to good production, but if you don’t have good substantive teaching and preaching and workshops, you can’t generate enough power or enthusiasm in those things to sustain. Here’s what I tell people: "Content and charisma together are great. But if you have to choose one, choose content." What they have been able to pull off here very nicely is an excellent mixture of both content and charisma. But if all we have is charisma in terms of our presentation, it’s not enough to really keep people. It’s like eating dessert; it can give you energy for a short time, but if you didn’t eat the meal, you don’t have ongoing sustenance.

**ted/MEDIA: You are a role model for young people. Lots of them follow you on Facebook or Twitter. Is there anyone that you look up to?**

**David Asscherick:** Yes, absolutely. Some of them are here. The people that I really listen to in the church are people like Matt Parra, Nathan Renner, James Rafferty, Ty Gibson, Jeffrey Rosario and many others. In fact many of my best ideas in sermons or workshops or other things come straight from them. I consider myself, and I am, a very collaborative person. Many people might not know that. They might think, David is kind of a loner by himself, but it’s quite the opposite. I have never not worked with a team. I love collaboration, I love synergy, I love connecting with other people so there’s tones of people both in the Adventist church and outside of the Adventist church that I look up to very much.

**ted/MEDIA: You did a seminar on the prophetic identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Do you think there is a need to rebuild the identity among the youth. If so, in what way?**

**David Asscherick:** We don’t need the identity rebuilt but we need it understood. Maybe reimagined in some senses. For example, we hear a lot about the remnant church and I support that emphasis but we need to hear even more about the remnant message. I think young people are not exactly sure what to do with that idea of the remnant church. Does that mean we’re the only church, does that mean my friends who are Baptists or Anglicans or Catholics are not real Christians? No. The real emphasis in the Bible in terms of the remnant is on the message of the remnant; the truth of the remnant. The remnant as an institution is important, but our identity is not in a cultural, ecclesiastical institution; it’s in Christ and in the message that we preach. So does it need to be rebuilt? No. Does it need to be believed and understood? Yes, it does need to be re-envisioned a little bit? Yes, probably. Because many people perceive it incorrectly and unbiblically and we should think of it in terms of the message content rather than, now you’re a member of this institutional ecclesiastical body, now you’re in. No. It’s about being connected to Christ and to His word.

**ted/MEDIA: Friday was all about making a difference in Novi Sad. Did you join the Impact Day?**

**David Asscherick:** Yes, my participation was fairly modest because I’m a photographer and I wanted to go out and get pictures of the city and pictures of some of the young people interacting. We were right downtown here with a group that was giving out water bottles. It was a fairly modest outreach effort, not unimportant, but I was able to get some pictures that I was happy with. Frankly, at the site that I was at, they had way more people helping than they had need of, so I was a bit of a fifth wheel, as we say in the States. If I hadn’t gone downtown to the group that interested me the most, I would have wanted to go along the Danube river and pick up things. I’m very passionate about biblical ecology and I just recently spent some time in another eastern European country and I was really discouraged with how much trash there was everywhere. It’s very different where I’m from in the United States. You just wouldn’t see that what we call litter and so that’s the thing that would have really interested me.

**ted/MEDIA: How do you find the balance between reaching out to those who have never met Christ and catering for the needs of the church family? What’s your main focus?**

**David Asscherick:** That’s a great question. It depends year to year. Sometimes I find myself speaking more in house to the Seventh-day Adventist congregations and gatherings and other times my meetings are almost exclusively to the public. To be honest if I had to choose between one or the other, I would choose to preach to the public. Just like Paul said, I’d rather go built where there’s no foundation, where the name of Christ is not named, than build on somebody else’s foundation. I like a good mix. If I could choose a ratio of 2:1; two public meetings to one Adventist meeting, that would be ideal for me. Whether I’m preaching to so called Adventists who already know the Lord; many of whom don’t, many of whom do, or people who don’t know the Lord at all, I just love to preach Christ and whoever is willing to listen, I am willing to speak.

**ted/MEDIA: What should be the focus of the Adventist youth?**

**David Asscherick:** I think that the number one thing that Adventist young people need to concentrate on is being really connected with Scripture and really connected with the ministry of Christ. Being involved, not just in the wordy way but in an actual, physical, relationally
significant way. Bring the ministry of Christ into the university, into the workplace, into their family. This is the only thing that has the ability to sustain us; the Word and ministry. Apart from that, religion is largely just a club, it’s a social gathering, it’s a show. But with those things, if that can become an emphasis and a priority, then the sky is the limit.

**tedMEDIA:** You are a frequent visitor to Europe. What is the biggest challenge in your opinion that we are facing as youth here on this continent? Is there anything that puts us in a better position or worse position as compared to youth on other continents?

**David Asscherick:** I think there are several struggles in Europe but the two I will speak about here is - number one: many of the countries here are very secular - but I think even worse than that is that the church in the past had a kind of resignation to the fact. „Oh I live in a secular country, oh it’s so hard here“. But don’t you serve an infinitely powerful God, don’t you serve the Lord of glory? So is there a problem with secularity and getting access to people? Yes. Has the church exacerbated the problem sometimes and just spent so much time talking about it and worrying about it and discussing it? I think that has been at least as much of the problem. Let’s just say everywhere is hard. We live in a world that is hostile to the gospel. Let’s get to work. We don’t find Paul in the New Testament saying „man, Corinth is tough. And Galtia, oh really..“ No! Let’s do what we can and make a difference.

**tedMEDIA:** Is there any country that you’d still like to visit or is there any region that God put on your heart?

**David Asscherick:** Yes, of course, every country! I want to go to every country I’ve not been to, every single one. Some people when they go to a restaurant and they get a good meal, they always order the same thing. I’m a little bit that way. I went to New Zealand and I was like, this is the best country on Earth! And then I went back five years in a row. And I’ve been to Australia like five years in a row and I’ve been to Sweden numerous times, to Norway numerous times. I’m torn because when I go to a place and have a really good experience, I just want to go back. So I want depth, but I also want to go to new places as well, so I want breadth. Is there an area that I really am passionate about? Yes, to be honest right now it’s the Mediterranean. I’d love to spend time in Italy, Macedonia, Greece. The Middle East is really intriguing. I was just in Turkey for the first time a couple of weeks ago. You pretty much couldn’t name a place on the Earth that I would not be passionate about going. At least for a short time.

**tedMEDIA:** When do we see you next in Europe?

**David Asscherick:** I’ve got a lot of invitations to come back next year but right now, to be honest, my family and I are contemplating taking a call to pastor a church in Australia and we’re kind of looking at settling down because our boys are just coming into their teen years and we really want them to have a good, stable, local church situation for next 5-7 years. So if I take that call, I will probably be travelling only two or three months out of the year, as opposed to six. So I would say there’s a 100% chance I’ll be back in Europe next year, but where exactly remains to be seen. [tedNEWS]
Seventh-day Adventists in Sweden elect new Union President

25 July 2013 Stockholm, Sweden [Rainer Refsbäck, tedNEWS] The Swedish Union Session, took place at Ekebyholmsskolan on 2-6 July 2013. Although much time was spent discussing and negotiating, the overall atmosphere was one of spiritual enrichment and challenge.

During the first Thursday morning session, Göran Hansen was elected Union President for the Swedish Union of Churches Conference.

"I feel a lot of gratitude for the trust," said Hansen in his brief acceptance speech. "I will work wholeheartedly to develop our churches and support their growth."

Hansen also expressed his understanding that some felt hesitant about his suitability for the role of Union President but hopes that everyone will get to know him better in the months and years that lie ahead.

Hansen returned to Sweden in 2012 after many years serving as ADRA country director abroad, among other roles. For most of the past year he has been assistant pastor in the Stockholm Adventist Church, with responsibility for its ‘Center of Influence’ evangelism project. In his youth, he studied theology at Newhold College and then attended the seminary at Ekebyholmsskolan. However, for most of his life he has worked as a teacher and held administrative positions inside and outside the Church. Hansen was ordained and welcomed among the pastors during the Sabbath afternoon Mission programme.

Göran Hansen succeeds Pastor Robert 'Bobby' Sjölander who has requested an alternative assignment. Bobby Sjölander was elected as leader of the Evangelism Department later that day.

Daniel Hailemariam, who since 2010 has served as Executive Secretary, received renewed confidence as he was re-elected by an overwhelming majority.
Ronny Hermansson was also re-elected as Union Treasurer by a large majority.

Willy Aronsen was elected Deputy Youth Leader until a long-term leader can be found. Assistant Karolina Poland was re-elected as Assistant Youth Leader.
The Swedish Union Session began with a series of evening worships on Tuesday night, July 2. Pastor Derek Morris, editor of the Ministry Magazine, was invited to speak during morning and evening worships about life as a radical disciple of Jesus Christ. The theme of the Union Session was ‘In the Master’s Footsteps’ and summarised the strategic goals of the Union for the coming period: ‘Walk in Worship’, ‘Walk in Service’ and ‘Walk in Fellowship’.

In the Swedish Union, many proposals are prepared months before the Session takes place. Among the proposals winning favor with the delegates were more education for lay preachers, a new strategy and vision document, more churches encouraged to become Churches of Refuge, the Union paper Missionären to be sent to all Church members without cost, the work environment of pastors to be analyzed and attended to an the necessity of a three-party dialogue when pastors are asked to move to another church.

Other proposals greeted with favour included the idea that an interest group should take responsibility for the going interest in health ministers in local churches and the creation of the full-time post for a children’s, family and youth ministry director to expand the work in this important area.

One proposal that was sure to be divisive was that of 'Men and Women Ministers in the Swedish Union'. In December 2012, the Union Board issued a statement regarding the attitude of equality which is currently held within the Union concerning its male and female pastors. It stated that the Union regards women and men as equals in ministry as far as General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Trans-European Division policy permits (at present, the only office a female pastor may not hold is that of Union President). Moreover, the statement mandated the Union leadership to promote its view among the decision-making bodies of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. This statement was presented as a motion at the Session but, after a lengthy and lively debate, it was voted that the Union should not take a stand regarding this issue until it is resolved by the General Conference in 2015.

After three days of deliberations the Session ended with a Sabbath filled with opportunities for spiritual renewal, beginning with a much appreciated 'Shabbat Shalom' Vespers and Communion Service on Friday night. On the following sunny Sabbath morning, 500-600 members from all over Sweden gathered for Bible Study in small groups all over the Ekebyholmsskolan Campus, a worship service filled with song and music, a Mission programme in the afternoon and a musical programme in the evening.

Post-Session Discussions

The newly elected Union Board gathered for its first meeting as soon as the Union Session ended and decided to clarify the nature of both its statement and the decision made at the Union Session.

In essence the Union Board pointed out that the December statement is not 'a final standpoint on the issue of women’s ordination', but rather an expression of support for the ongoing study of ordination theology and a message to the Division and the General Conference (GC) explaining the current stance of the Union.

The Board also wants to point out that the Session’s decision is in no way a stance against the ordination of women pastors, but a request to await the decisions of the GC in 2015.

The Board confirmed that male and female pastors will continue to have the same benefits and responsibilities and that the Union Session's decision in no way changes the status of female pastors in the Swedish Union. "We will continue to support our women pastors and to encourage more women to serve the Lord and our churches as pastors," the clarifying statement reads. [tedNEWS]
23 July 2013 Linthicum Heights, Maryland, United States [Mark A. Kellner, Adventist Review] By a vote of 86 to 8 – a ratio of almost 11 to 1 – delegates at the Seventh-day Adventist® Church’s Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) agreed yesterday to approve a consensus statement on an Adventist theology of ordination. The action was an early endorsement of the goal of TOSC leaders to move unitedly through the challenging issues surrounding the church’s discussion of ordination.

According to the statement, “Seventh-day Adventists understand ordination, in a biblical sense, as the action of the church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global church ministry.” Biblical examples of ordained persons include elders/supervising elders and deacons, the document says, as well as “elders who were itinerant and supervised greater territory with multiple congregations.”

Explaining the role of an ordained person, the statement continues: “In the act of ordination the church confers representative authority upon individuals for the specific work of ministry to which they are appointed. These may include representing the church; proclaiming the gospel; administering the Lord’s Supper and baptism; planting and organizing churches; guiding and nurturing members; opposing false teachings; and providing general service to the congregation.”

Unlike the beliefs of some other Christian faiths, however, Seventh-day Adventist ordination “neither conveys special qualities to the persons ordained nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith community.”

The statement concludes by noting “the ultimate model of Christian ministry is the life and work of our Lord, who came not to be served but to serve.”

The approval of the document came on the second day of the second 2013 gathering of TOSC members, who met at a private, non-church
conference center near the Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. Delegates included church pastors, lay members, scholars and officers from throughout the Seventh-day Adventist global community, with Artur Stele, a general vice president of the world church and director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, as chairman. Geoffrey Mbwana, another general vice president, is vice chair.

“This is the first time the church has taken a serious study to develop a theology of ordination,” Mbwana said shortly after the vote. “It’s critical that before we discuss any issue of ordination, we actually understand a theology of ordination. Today, I think a milestone is beginning to happen: that a consensus statement has been accepted to be recommended to the General Conference, the Annual Council and then to the [GC] Session to be adopted as a statement of a theology of ordination.”

Agreeing on a theology of ordination is preparatory to the TOSC’s other task, discussing the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The subject has been debated among Seventh-day Adventists for years, with the worldwide General Conference Sessions of 1990 and 1995 declining to permit such ordinations. The TOSC is charged with producing material for discussion and making recommendations that will be acted upon at the church’s July 2015 world session, due to be held in San Antonio, Texas.

According to Bill Knott, Adventist Review editor and a member of the TOSC, “If the church can reach consensus on a common theology of ordination, it offers hope that it may also find a solution that honors the strongly held convictions on both sides of this issue.”

Committee meetings continue through Wednesday, July 24. [tedNEWS]

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tedNEWS Staff: Miroslav Pujic, director; Deana Stojkovic, editor

119 St Peter's Street, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3EY, England

E-mail: tednews@ted-adventist.org

Website: www.ted-adventist.org

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You are a failure! These are words we fear to hear. Failure is a subject we do not like to talk about. It is the elephant in the room that no one mentions, yet it is always there, because failure is a part of life. Consider how many successes do you forget? How many failures do you forget? How many times did things not work out as you planned? To put it bluntly, how many times have you failed? What is the ratio of success to failure? Is it true that behind our success is a series of failures?

Thomas Edison, inventor of the electric light bulb and phonograph, at one time held the world record for the number of patents owned by one person, a staggering 1093, confessed: “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”

Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of America, expressed a similar sentiment: “I didn't fail the test; I just found 100 ways to do it wrong.”

There are countless leadership books and articles on the “How To” of success. There are few dealing with failure. Yet failure is often the essential part of success.

In a spiritual context we learn how failure focuses our minds on the relationship between victory and failure. This is positive and necessary. Listen to the Apostle Paul in Rom 7:19 when he says: “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.” His failure became the ground of his success and victory, but if he had never failed he would never have known success.

Hebrews 11 is a catalogue of faith – those who are held up as examples for us to follow. A quick survey shows that even these giants experienced failure.

Abraham is called by God to leave Haran and go to the Promised Land. He goes without questioning. He is overly generous towards Lot. He pleads for the people in Sodom. He is even willing to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Yet he tells a half-truth to Pharaoh that Sarah is his sister rather than his wife. Impatient for God to fulfil his promise of a son, or perhaps, doubting that God could fulfil the promise, due to Sarah’s age, Abraham fathers a child by this wife’s maid Hagar. Then he sends Hagar and the child away. Yet he is known as the friend of God, and father of the faithful.

Isaac repeats his father’s mistake and lies to Abimelech’s men, telling them that Rebekah is his sister rather than his wife, yet he is the model of the born again believer.

In Jacob we see another flawed character. He manipulates his brother to sell him his birthright for a meal, then deceives his father Isaac into giving him the blessing by deceit. As a result he has to run away from his home, never to see the mother he loves again. When he is at his lowest God give him the marvellous dream at Bethel, of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth and Jacob promises to follow God. However the intrigue and deceit did not stop. He was cheated by his father-in-law. In turn when Jacob decided to return to his homeland he runs away. In the end his life becomes a story of victory and success. He becomes the father of all the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses successfully led the children of Israel to the boarders of the Promised Land, yet his failures were spectacular. He was a murderer. As a result of losing his temper, he was not able to go into the Promised Land instead he went to heaven.

These heroes of faith were definitely not saints who never put a foot wrong.

The writer of Hebrews mentions others like Able, Samuel and the prophets.

We know very little about Able except that he was the first victim of violent crime. Even though he did what was right, things didn’t work out well for him.

Samuel from a child was in the temple and did God’s work. He judged Israel, yet under his leadership the Israelites chose to move away from God and have their own king, Samuel felt a failure, but he was the last of the Judges and the first of the Prophets.

Of all the prophets, Daniel, is a classic success story. Yet at times it looked as if he were a failure, not least when he was thrown into the den of lions.

What all these people learned was that there are two perspectives in life: short term human perspective and God’s long term eternal perspective.
We all make mistakes. As leaders our mistakes are often more public than most. We all fail, but failure can be the price of success. Failure is not the problem. The issue is: how we handle failure? Failure is cumulative: the older you get the more failures you become aware of. Failure can either weigh us down or shape us up.

Compare Judas and Peter’s response to failure. Both failed to grasp the true nature of Jesus’ mission. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied Jesus. When Judas understood the enormity of what he had done, he felt there was no way back. The only solution was to give up; he went out and hanged himself.

Despite having been warned in advance, Peter denied Jesus in style, with cursing and swearing. When the cock crowed and Jesus looked at him, the enormity of what he had done engulfed him. He ran out into the night buried in an avalanche of guilt and remorse. Thankfully he didn’t hang himself. He reflected, and repented. He learned the lesson, there is forgiveness and freedom from failure. On the Day of Pentecost it was Peter who unashamedly stood up and preached salvation. Failure is not necessarily a disaster.

At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Derek Redmond was strongly tipped to win the 400 meters. He exploded out of the blocks and it looked as if he would win. In a painful, humiliating moment his hamstring snapped and he collapsed on the track. His race was over. Then he did the unexpected. He got up and began to hop down the track. A man pushed his way past the security guards and ran onto the track. It was his father, who told him he did not need to do this. Derek replied “I do”. Supported by his father, sobbing with pain, Derek crossed the finishing line. He received the longest standing ovation of the games as 65,000 people cheered him home. Derek finished the race!

Whether you are struggling in your leadership or everything is going well, sooner or later you are going hit a bump. You are going to make a mistake or fail. It is inevitable, unavoidable. You know it, because you have had the experience of failure, but you are still alive, the world didn’t end. Failure need never be an end except we choose it. It can and should be a learning experience.

Fight on my men said Sir Andrew Barton, I’m hurt but I am not slain I’ll lay me down and bleed a while Then I’ll rise and fight again.

By Audrey Andersson, Executive Secretary, Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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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 you 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 conceal, 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.

   ‘Clergy’ means ‘called’ (kleros), and the term carries the unspoken implication that the laity is not called by God. As a result, the church is built around the call and gifting of this elite group surrounded by a marginalised laity. Such a separation breeds, on one hand, resentment and struggles for power and influence and, on the other hand, passivity and the avoidance of responsibility over spiritual issues which are regarded as the domain of the clergy. I see this in my beloved Adventist church today, and I hear the many lay people who feel marginalised by the ordained clergy – for example, in a break-out group discussion within the TED Executive Committee in 2006.

   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:5

- 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.
5 Leith Anderson, Leadership that Works, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999, pp. 164-174 (as summarised and quoted in Gibbs, Leadership Next, p. 194.)

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

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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

Lowell C Cooper, Vice-President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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The Reluctant Leader

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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By Richard H. Hart, MD, DrPH - President, Loma Linda University

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