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The One Project at Newbold College

7 November 2013 | Bracknell, United Kingdom [Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist, BUC News] The One project, a gathering of Adventists that focuses on the primacy of Jesus in their lives, has hit Britain for the first time in its three-year history. The weekend of 1-3 November saw almost 200 people gathered at Newbold College... Read more

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Going Beyond Normal to Make God Known in Europe

21 November 2013 | St Albans, England [ted/NEWS Staff] Ninety-six delegates from the eleven Unions and three attached Fields, which constitute the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Trans-European region (TED), met from 15-20 November in Bečići, Montenegro. The theme of the Annual Council was 'Making God Known in Europe – Go Beyond Normal'.

Although the primary purpose of these annual councils is to consider various reports, plans and projects, this year's council was a little different in at least two aspects. The first of these was the presence of Pastor Ted Wilson, General Conference President (GC), who attended all of the meetings, including the preceding Secular and Postmodern Conference. Delegates were also delighted to meet his wife, Nancy, who made a significant contribution to the council. The second special aspect of the council was the much anticipated presentation of a major study on the Theology of Ordination by Pastor Bertil Wiklander, President of the TED. A separate report has been published on this but the implications of the study, particularly for the role of women within the TED, were an underlying theme of discussion in the dining room and corridors for much of the council.

There were other special guests at the Annual Council, including: Daisy Orion from the General Conference, Radiša Antić from the Ellen White Centre at Newbold College, Sandra Richards Grice, Alan Redfern and Frensly Panneflek (board member) from the GC Auditing Service, Tim Northrop and Cesar Medina from Adventist Risk Management, and Rene Metz from ASI Europe.

The Fields are Ripe
In his keynote address Pastor Wiklander focused on Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman as recorded in John chapter 4. Painting a picture of the tension which existed between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day, Wiklander said, "Jews detested Samaritans, they planned their journeys to avoid them and had special rules of how to deal with them if they happened to meet. A Jew couldn't marry a Samaritan and they wouldn't even use dishes that Samaritans had used." Jesus however, deliberately chose to travel through their territory and because of this a Samaritan woman was converted and became the first missionary to those people. Drawing a parallel with the current situation in the TED, Wiklander challenged his audience to find new ways of encountering the predominantly postmodern people of Europe. "Do we really think that the people of Europe don't want to know God?" Quoting Jesus in John 4:35 he said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

**Mission with Maintenance**

Audrey Andersson, TED Executive Secretary, presented the Division’s statistical report showing that the membership of the Trans-European Division was 84,093 in June 2013, a net increase of 1,325 since a year previously. There had actually been 3,768 baptisms during the year, averaging 10.3 people per day. The difference between these two figures was accounted for by deaths, members being dropped from membership, and others going missing. With 334 dropped and 450 missing over the last year Andersson pointed out that we obviously have a problem. "Our motto," she said, "is Mission with Maintenance. We must hold those who we win." One way to do this is through the church's Sabbath School programme. "A recent survey has shown that 90% of those questioned found Sabbath School to be helpful in their spiritual development," Andersson concluded.

**Finances**
The financial report was presented by Nenad Jepuranović, newly appointed TED Treasurer. With charts and graphs going back more than ten years Jepuranović showed how the TED had largely weathered the financial storms and maintained balance by keeping some investments in fixed income bonds and other in equities. He also showed how the US investment market had helped to keep stability during times of European volatility. This was of course during the time of his predecessor, Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, who had recently accepted a call to serve in the Norwegian Union. Jepuranović explained that other staff changes were also presenting a challenge to the department: Caroline Swain retired earlier this year and Pat Walton will be retiring at the end of the year.

**Strategic Plan**

In an information-packed eight-minute report Pastor Raafat Kamal, TED Field Secretary, gave an overview of how the Division was meeting the goals of the General Conference’s 'Tell the World' strategic plan. This plan has three specific aims: to Reach Up (worship), Reach Out (witness) and Reach Across (build community). In pursuit of these aims, which have been grouped together under the banner 'Making God Known in Europe', the TED has run 110 separate training events throughout its territory this year. Numerous resources have been produced, ranging from DVDs, books and magazines, to websites and multi-media programmes. Particularly impressive is a more than doubling of activity on the LIFÉconnect social media website, with nearly two million visitors so far this year.

**Evangelism**
Pastor Janos Kovacs-Biro, TED Evangelism Director, reported on the Mission to the Cities project. While some may think that this is a fairly new initiative, Kovacs-Biro quoted from the writings of Ellen White to show that the cities have always been a priority for Seventh-day Adventists. "The work in the cities is the essential work for this time." (Letter 46, 1910). "There is no change in the messages that God has sent… The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed." (Medical Ministry p. 304). With this mandate Kovacs-Biro went on to emphasise the challenge that we face. In 1850 only 9.5% of the world's population lived in cities; in 2007 it reached 50% and by 2050 it is projected to reach 67%. However these are world figures; in Europe the percentages are even higher. Reaching the urban masses is not an easy task. They have been affected by their environment and traditional values have, in many cases, been eroded. "We need to analyse all our cities, set time-based goals and make plans for their implementation. In particular we need to focus on the indigenous population of these cities," Kovacs-Biro said.

Pastor Wilson expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the way that the Trans-European Division was taking the Mission to the Cities so seriously. "I'm delighted for the way you are moving full force into this through the power of the Holy Spirit," he said.

**Health Evangelism**

In order to implement the Mission to the Cities project, and to facilitate evangelism in other areas, the TED has made an almost bewildering variety of resources available. Stephen Cooper, TED Health Ministry Director, spoke of how Health Ministry is being integrated into all the departments of the church, with the specific aim of reaching out to the community. "Our health ministry should be Christ-focused; it should create positive friendships and foster good will; and it should be evidence-based so that we can avoid the conflict and arguments that arise from the taking of extreme positions," he said.

Again Pastor Wilson endorsed this message. "The Health Message is the right arm of the Gospel," he said, "but it is not the gospel – that’s when fanaticism comes in. Our health message is a moderate approach, a middle of the road approach, but it's also integral to the final loud cry – to return to a simple understanding of our responsibility to God."

**Social Media Evangelism – LIFEconnect**
Evangelism in the 21st century is becoming increasingly hi-tech and the report by Miroslav Pujić, TED Communication & Media Ministries Director, on the LIFEconnect social networking project was an eye-opener for many of the delegates. "We don't have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it," he said, quoting an authority on the subject. Through the LIFEconnect website Pujić is putting in place a complete digital discipleship process. This includes: connecting with people, through Facebook; sharing ideas; dialoguing with people; meeting them – either virtually or physically; and finally inviting them to join more traditional communities, such as our churches.

The website is only part of the LIFEconnect process as there have also been a number of live events which have been simultaneously broadcast on the internet. "These events have been a great success," said Pujić. "Over seven weekends we had 31,911 viewers and 1,629 live-chat users from 86 countries. This figures aren't just guesses – with electronic media we get precise information reported back to us." To date there have been 20 baptisms as a direct result of the LIFEconnect project, but Pujić expects many more.

Youth Congress

Pastor Paul Tompkins, TED Youth Ministries Director, spoke enthusiastically about the ‘Power of One’ Youth Congress that was held in Novi Sad, Serbia, this summer. It was a joint venture with the Inter-European Division (EUD) and attracted over 3,000 young people from across Europe and even further afield, plus many more day visitors. In addition to the regular meetings the Congress had a practical impact on the local community as attendees took part in a number of local community project. Some gave blood, others painted fences, and still others gave out literature. The evangelistic impact of the Congress was underlined by the fact that 12 young people were baptised at the event itself, while a total of 200 filled in cards saying that they wished to be baptised at some stage in the future. Miroslav Pujić, who was heavily involved in the multimedia and artistic side of the Congress, was thrilled with the way that everything came together for the meetings. "This is the most advanced technological event that I've ever been involved with," he said. "We had professional companies setting up the video and audio equipment and the end result was fantastic. The young people really loved it!"

Our Ministry is to Protect Your Ministry

Tim Northrop from Adventist Risk Management (ARM) gave some very useful information about church insurance and how it can enhance the work of spreading the gospel. "Our ministry is to protect your ministry," he said. "We want to make your activities as safe as they can be." Northrop went on to explain that it's not just about insurance, it's also important to assess risks so that you can minimise and control them. Prevention is better than cure, as the saying goes, but when the worst does happen it is important to have a protective net in place. Pastor Wiklander reminded the delegates that it was just five years ago that the British Union Conference office burned down. It was largely due to the insurance cover that office was able to be rebuilt relatively quickly. Pastor Wilson endorsed the report and explained that ARM really did want to help the churches. "Some places think they can get a better deal by going to other providers," he said, "but I ask that you give our own organisation a chance to provide for the church. Work with them and see what they can do for you."

Regional Reports

Each Union and Field presented a report to the delegates. There were literally hundreds of encouraging projects, events, and stories giving very clear evidence of commitment of the leaders, ministers and members in each part of the Division. A number of factors were common to most, if not all of the reports, including the challenges of postmodernism and secularism. However it was good to hear that certain things seemed to be working across a wide range of cultures. One of these is the Great Hope Project, with its emphasis on the mass distribution of magazines like 'Escape' and 'Connect', backed up by a full suite of multimedia resources. Also very popular was Messy Church – an Anglican initiative, now fully adapted for use within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the monthly Messy Church meetings, children and parents are educated and entertained and generally made at home in a warm and welcoming environment.
Here we will pick out just a few highlights from each region: In Belgrade an evangelistic series run by Pastor Radiša Antić, from Newbold College, was so popular that people were in their seats an hour before the scheduled start time. In the Swedish Union, which has 2,786 members, the Impact Scandinavia event attracted 400 participants from 25 countries, 15 of whom made a decision for baptism. In Poland good work by those involved in Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) enabled a message by Pastor Wilson to be broadcast on state television. In Norway the government has recognised the work of ADRA-Norway and pledged the equivalent of half a million pounds to them for next year. In Hungary, where Adventist are not very well known, 70,000 copies of the Great Hope have been distributed. In Finland, where only one or two percent of the population attends church, the challenges are great, but tithe income is increasing above inflation. In Denmark a new film produced by the General Conference entitled 'Creation' has been shown to 1,500 people, 123 of whom attended follow-up lectures. In the United Kingdom and Ireland there is a big challenge to reach the majority population, but the Mission to the Cities initiative has already led to 200 baptisms. In Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia - the countries of the Baltic Union - tithe is up by 7% and there have been 194 baptisms in the last 12 months. In Croatia a youth café is using pancakes and fruit drinks to engage the public once a week, and in Slovenia the 'Agape' Adventist music group featured on a TV show. In Albania, where the church is just 20 years old, public evangelism has doubled over the last four years. In the Netherlands there have been 33 church plants since 2000, 20 of which are still going strong now, and seven have been organised into churches. In Greece new websites are reaching new audiences, with one attracting more than 46,000 visitors over the last year. In Iceland the church is facing great challenges due to the fallout from the recent economic crisis, but the church still maintains eight properties and is finding new ways to promote their use. Cyprus probably faces the greatest challenge of all the fields in the TED. Although it has been in existence for 100 years, it still only has about 100 members. Nevertheless there have been 16 baptisms in the last twelve months.

Comments
Pastor John Surridge, President of the Welsh Mission, commented on the atmosphere of prayer and worship which surrounded all of the meetings, "Pastor Michael Hamilton did a good job of keeping us spiritually focused through a variety of different prayer approaches – in pairs, groups, and even some times of silence. The music was also great, with the ted/MEDIA DVDs demonstrating just how useful they can be in a worship setting. All in all we kept a good balance between business and worship, which is as it should be at these events."

Carolyn Guenin who joined the TED staff earlier this year said that the best thing about the meetings for her was how open minded people were. "I was expecting there to be a strong contrast between the conservatives and the more liberal thinkers at the council. In fact I found everyone to be very forward thinking, which was quite refreshing."

Conclusion

At the end of the meetings Wilson had all the delegates join hands in a circle which went right around the meeting hall. In his closing prayer he asked for God's special blessings on a territory which has tremendous challenges but also great potential for growth. [tedNEWS]

If you would like to see more photographs from the TED executive meetings, please click here.

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The Church in Europe challenged to 'Go Beyond Normal'

The Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (TED) organised a conference entitled ‘Go Beyond Normal: Making God Known in Europe’ which took place in Bečići, Montenegro from 12-14 November 2013. The purpose of the conference was to start a journey for the participants to deepen their understanding about the mindset of people in Europe, talk about experiences in the community and plan to be part of the movement to ‘Making God Known in Europe’.

What united this diverse group of 140 church leaders and members was their desire to find effective ways for sharing the Great Hope in a predominantly postmodern Europe.
Over three days, twelve presenters introduced the challenges and opportunities arising from the changes that have taken place in our society during the last half century. The talks touched upon three general categories – culture, essence and praxis – as they described, contextualised and explained the characteristics and history of postmodernism; explored the phenomenon from a theological perspective; and emphasised some essential elements of practical sharing in a postmodern environment. Each talk was followed by general discussion around tables, the results of which were recorded and gathered in order to form a statement of currently relevant emphases. (To read the statement, please click here.) In addition to that, the participants listened to many practitioners sharing their experiences, enjoyed worshipping and praying together and experienced the journey of vibrant faith in the Discipleship Maze.

Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, who attended the conference with his wife Nancy, emphasised the need to creatively focus on specific things that will help reach people in the contemporary culture: "This conference helped to orient people to some of the challenges that you face when dealing with people who don’t even have a reference point for the Bible." He
pointed out how important it is for the church 'to engage people in conversation and fellowship and, ultimately, to bring them into contact with the Bible'. In summarising the main message of the conference, Wilson said, "People need to do something! Get out there and do something to share Jesus’ love in your life with somebody else."

Pastor Wayne Krause, church planter and pastor of Central Coast Community Church in Australia, highlighted the need to slow down and listen to people before we share our story. He also said that the TED has become a pioneer in the field: "In the years to come – when the rest of the world is facing a similar situation to what Europe is facing now – people will come to you and want to know what solutions you found."

"What I’m taking away from this conference is that there is hope for the Adventist church to change its approach to reach this generation," commented Pastor Michael Simpson from the UK. "It was an excellent conference on the topic of postmodernism and evangelism. I can go back to my conference and tell them we are not alone. There are other people thinking the same and fighting the same battle for postmodernism and reaching out to the community."

The youngest participant – Melvin Kok, 21 – came from the Netherlands and is an active 'postmodern Adventist' hoping to become a pastor. "It is great to see that the mindset in the church is really changing," he said and admitted that the conference encouraged him to do some more self-reflection in his model of leadership.

Pastor Bertil Wiklander, President of the TED, commented, "Our purpose with this conference was a two-fold one: firstly, to look back at the history of postmodernism and make a critical evaluation, and, secondly, to learn about its characteristics, its patterns and values, so that we understand how to connect with people who are influenced by this mind-set and be more successful in reaching them for Jesus Christ. I am very grateful to those who planned and executed the conference so well, and I am confident that this conference achieved this dual objective and that participants returned home inspired by a new vision to 'Go Beyond Normal in Making God Known in Europe',"
concluded Wiklander.

As the participants return to their churches and apply what they have learned to their ministries, the organisers of the conference are already shaping visions and making plans for the next conference – one that will take a step further and move from providing information to practical equipping.

For more educational resources about ministry to postmoderns, please visit www.ministrytopostmoderns.com and www.lifedevelopment.info.

To see more photos from the conference, please click here. [ted/NEWS]
TED Executive Committee recommends inclusive ministry without gender distinctions


18 November 2013 |

Bečići, Montenegro [tedNEWS staff] At its 2013 Annual Council the Trans-European Division Executive Committee received and discussed a Report on the Theology of Ordination prepared by the TED Biblical Research Committee.

The Report is extensive and comprises 730 pages. It responds to a large number of questions regarding ordination which have been put to the Biblical Research Committees of the world divisions. This does not only include the issue of women’s ordination, but the matters of biblical hermeneutics, the biblical teaching on ordination, ministry, offices, terminology, rituals, the significance of laying on of hands, the development of ordination after the completion of the writings in the New Testament, the understanding and practice of ordination in the major Christian churches, its introduction and later development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the view of Ellen White. At the end of a two-hour discussion, the committee members voted unanimously in a secret ballot to recommend the Report to the Seventh-day Adventist World Church’s Theology of Ordination Study Committee, which will meet on 21-25 January, 2014.

Bertil Wiklander, President of the TED and chairman of its Biblical Research Committee, has been significantly involved in the research and said after the decision: ‘It is clear that the leaders in the TED wish to see a thorough review of ordination as a whole and to have an inclusive ministry without gender distinctions. We have worked for 19 months with this report and have become astonished at what we have discovered in the Bible and various historical sources. The Report gives good reasons for the Church to review its practices in order to let them harmonize more with the Bible. We understand, however, that our contribution is only one of many and we are looking forward to continue working with the world church to seek biblical solutions while preserving unity of purpose.’

The Report is part of the World Church’s study of the theology of ordination. This initiative was first voted by the General Conference Session in 2010, and the process was approved in October, 2011. Each of the Church’s thirteen world divisions has been asked to study ordination and bring the relevant recommendations to the General Conference Biblical Research Institute. From there it will go to the
Theology of Ordination Study Committee, who has been asked to prepare recommendations to the General Conference. The GC Annual Council 2014 will decide what recommendations will be brought to the GC Session in 2015.

Besides a detailed biblical-exegetical and historical study of ordination in all its major aspects, the Trans-European Division’s Report contains the following twelve recommendations:

**A. TOWARDS A BIBLICAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS:**

1. **Focus on the Mission of God and All Being Servants for the Salvation of the World.**

   The entire matter of ordination should be seen and our terminology should be defined in the context of God’s purpose for the world as the Creator in *Genesis 1-2* and the end-time vision of *Revelation 21-22*. This will revive the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers and the inspired biblical theology of mission, church, and service. It will give a theological foundation for activating all members in mission.

2. **Remove the Current Distance between Clergy – Laity and the Levels of Ordination.**

   We recommend that the Church embraces truly biblical principles and frees itself from the continuing dependence on ‘Roman’ practices, for example, by:

   (a) Finding ways to visibly include the role of lay people in the ordination ceremony (lay people are theologically included in the idea of the church delegating authority to ordained pastors, and lay people participate in the conference/union committee decisions to ordain a pastor); (b) Removing any idea of ‘(apostolic) succession’; (c) Removing the existing distance between clergy and laity, and the idea that the ordained clergy forms a separate class of members who are elevated to a higher status than others; (d) Removing the levels of ordination between all the different ‘servants’ who work in the church (globally and locally) and applying, rather, one concept of servanthood but with distinctions of duties and responsibilities which are documented in written credentials; (e) Removing the intricate differences between various levels of ministry, such as the licensed and ordained minister, the licensed minister and the ordained local church elder, the pastor and the local church elder, etc.; (f) Admitting that there is no biblical command to ordain anyone by the imposition of hands and that there is no consistent biblical formula for how a leader is inducted to office in the Christian church.

3. **An Inclusive Ministry.** Where it is culturally appropriate, the Church should allow for an inclusive and gender-neutral ministry, which means that credentials will be granted to men and women on equal terms for all offices which require ordination, presently the gospel minister, the elder, and the deacon/deaconess. This means that the Church removes all gender distinctions in its *Working Policy* related to the ministry and thus fulfils the biblical intent of the *Working Policy* BA 55 on ‘Human Relations’.

   If this cannot be implemented across the world at the same time, the Church should allow it where unions/divisions request permission to
do so. This may mean that the world-wide recognition of an ordination in one country may have to be reworded in the Working Policy to the effect that an ordained minister’s credentials are subject to the acceptance of a receiving division/union/conference.

4. Recommendation to the GC Session in 2015. We propose that a recommendation be brought to the General Conference Session in 2015, that it approves a revised policy in which unions, whose constituency meetings in session have voted approval and whose division committee has voted approval, be allowed to maintain an inclusive pastoral ministry which removes all gender distinctions within the work of the church in that union territory.

5. Theology and Practice of Ordination – Education of Members.

The Church should continue its development of the biblical theology of ordination. Based on our study, we urge the Church to proceed in considerably more detail than in the brief consensus statement now considered by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee. This should be accompanied by an organised and intentional attempt to educate members regarding the biblical rationale for ordination and what Seventh-day Adventists believe about it in view of the teaching of the Bible, our only authority for life and practice.

There should be an on-going teaching of church members regarding the mission of God, the nature of the Church and ordination. This is especially important for new members who come from Roman Catholic or Orthodox backgrounds. The Roman Catholic Church has extensive catechetical teachings about ‘Orders’, which is one of seven sacraments and lays the foundation for the priesthood and the right to determine a person’s salvation or condemnation. ‘Orders’ are part of even brief and popular Catholic Catechisms, but in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we say almost nothing about ordination. This deficit has generated bias and unwarranted traditions that have determined members’ opinion on both ordination in general and women’s ordination. The text of the Working Policy is hardly known by members and is even insufficient as it now stands.
B. A REDUCED CEREMONIAL EMPHASIS:

6. Consider the Best Terminology. The Church should carefully consider the wisdom of using the term ‘ordination’, which is ambiguous and loaded with meanings from the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations that are not biblical and that are confusing our members who have come to us from other churches. Its origins in the pagan Roman empirical administration, its laws and idol worship, and in the false Christian theology introduced by Tertullian and Cyprian and others after them, make a Seventh-day Adventist hesitant and uncomfortable about this term. We recommend therefore that terms that are closer to the biblical terminology are introduced, such as ‘appoint’, ‘commission’, ‘dedicate’. If for traditional reasons, it is decided to keep ‘ordination’ as a technical term in denominational language, it should be acknowledged that each language in the world has ways of referring to the concept of ‘ordination’ that does not reflect the English ‘ordination’ or Latin *ordinatio*. For example, Greek Adventists use the common Greek term of *cheirotoneo*, which is found in Acts 14:23. Other options abound in various languages and the Church should acknowledge the wish of a union to choose better terms in the local language than ‘ordination’ or ‘ordain’.

7. Remove Ritualistic and Consecrational Flavour. Seeing how ‘ordination’ is treated in the New Testament – which is where we must find our guidance on Christian ministry – we recommend that the ritualistic and consecrational flavour of the act of ordination, its vague mixture of granting the Holy Spirit or gifts for ministry and ecclesiastical authority be radically toned done and removed from policy and practice.

8. Make the Imposition of Hands Optional. While an installation ceremony is a positive and needed feature in church life, we recommend that the imposition of hands be an optional part of the ceremony. In the New Testament, the apostle, servants/ministers, overseers/elders are nowhere ordained by imposition of hands in clear terms. For these functions, however, there is a clear biblical ground for talking about being ‘appointed’.
9. Emphasis on God’s Blessing and Practical Aspects. We recommend that the emphasis in the ceremony be placed on the public recognition of the ordinand, the church’s confirmation of the ordinand’s call from God and commitment to serve Christ and the Church, the Church’s approval of the ordinand as teacher, preacher and spiritual leader, and the invocation of God’s blessing.

10. Review Who Is To Be Ordained in the Church. A special study should be conducted regarding the biblical basis for applying ordination to some offices and not others in the Church. All office holders in the Church are servants of God, but the Bible is not clear on who is ‘ordained’ and who is not. All officials at local church level and in conferences, unions, and the General Conference can be introduced to their functions when they start. This is practical and encouraging, but the biblical basis for ordaining only the pastor, elder, deacon/deaconess is very scant.

C. SOME OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

11. Separate Ordination from Election to an Organisational Office of Leadership. A clearer distinction should be made between the ordination (i.e. the ordained minister’s credentials) and the election of leaders for regular church offices in missions, conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference. Ordination for the gospel ministry should be for the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2) and not for administrative positions. If an ordained pastor is elected for a church office of organisational leadership, this is a different task from being a pastor (although some functions may overlap). Holding ministerial credentials may certainly be a merit of one who is elected as a leader, but in its theology and policy, the Church should ensure that the two are clearly distinguished, so that ordination does not automatically imply administrative or organisational leadership.

12. Improve Ministerial Training, Education, Preparation for Ordination, and Clarify Processes, Requirements, and Qualifications. We recommend that, based on the study we submit, the Church sharpens its processes and requirements for pastoral education and training, and develops better means by which the qualifications of an ordinand are examined, evaluated, and developed. [tedNEWS]
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14 November 2013 |

Watford, United Kingdom [Victor Hulbert, BUC News] In a video to be shown in Adventist churches across the UK and Ireland this weekend, Pastor Ian Sweeney, President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church expresses his emotion at seeing the TV pictures following the destruction and loss of life caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. "I was really shaken at the power of nature and the frailty of humanity" he stated, adding, "it's a tremendous human tragedy."
However, tragedies do have the power to demonstrate the best of the human spirit. Todd Frias, pastor of the London based Filipino International church states, "From Sunday until today, I am overwhelmed with phone calls and emails from colleagues and friends who are so concerned about my family and my church families' relations." He adds, "Neighbours are even knocking on our door to check on us and how we're doing, knowing that I am from the Philippines and that I am pastoring churches with mostly Filipinos. All these gestures and words of comfort, truly alleviated my sadness and the same feeling has been expressed by my church family as I share with them the great love and concern of the wider Adventist Church family here in the UK."

That concern is resulting in immediate action. ADRA-UK is flying two of their office staff to the Philippines to help coordinate relief operations. Zeny Cooper, herself a Filipino, flew out on Monday, 18 November to assist in financial accountability and grant control. This, she says, is an essential role "to ensure that internal control systems are in place and that the supplies will get to the people who really need it."

Programmes officer, Tom Pignon, will follow soon after. "The team already on the ground are reporting that transportation is incredibly difficult", says Tom. "Aid is waiting to be delivered. ADRA is currently distributing 3,500 food kits that will feed families for 3 days." That relief will then be scaled up over the next few days. ADRA has begun assessment in the three highly affected areas of Bohol, Northern Cebu, and Iloilo. Because ADRA already has a presence the ADRA response team states that they believe it to be the area where they can be of most help and bring the most assistance.

"My family live in the Northern part of the Philippines and so are safe", Zeny states in the video report, "but as I watched the typhoon approach and then saw the devastation in its wake my heart went out to so many who are suffering. I know many who have lost loved ones. I'm just grateful to be able to do a little bit to help."

Roman Smejkal pastors in South Cumbria where one of his member's families has been affected. "Divina is in touch only with her cousin and has not yet spoken to her mum. All four of their houses were apparently destroyed. Divina is trying to help them because most of the help goes seemingly to the big places but her family lives away from large cities."

Dodge Wyndel, a Filipino volunteer missionary working in Manchester, understands that pain. "I'm begging also to help other places like Panay provinces and other neighbouring small islands" which, he states have been neglected as they don't get seen in the broadcast news.

Hearing from a high school classmate through Facebook he reports that in Ajuy, Ilo-ilo, 90-95% of the houses were washed away or devastated by the typhoon. He also noted the very sad news that Sir Eli Macawili and his wife Myrna, Publishing director of East Visayan Conference were found dead, hugging each other in their last moments. Wyndel states, "He was a very humble and smiling kind of person. Please pray for his family to comfort them."

Joy Pontanar, whose serves, together with her husband Ben, in the Dublin district of churches movingly stated that she was "Just overwhelmed by the rapid, kind and generous response of other countries towards my homeland Philippines. I personally can never repay you nor thank you enough."

Pastor Frias adds, "Looking beyond the Church circle and how the British people responded to the needs of the Filipino people through
their monetary contributions, these made us so thankful to God for showing and extending His hands right before our eyes. Church members are not just sitting on their hands.” Pastor Frias states that dedicated members and friends of the Filipino and Heathrow International churches, have drafted a plan for the fundraising projects, aiming to raise a minimum goal of £10,000. This will include a concert at the Advent Centre, London, on 23 November at 6:30 pm and on 30 November at The Church Hall, Brentmead Gardens, West Twyford, London NW10 7ED. Similar initiatives are happening across the country.

ADRA-UK made an immediate initial contribution of £30,000. With money starting to pour in this figure will increase and already adds to the half a million USS across the ADRA network already pledged to get relief operations off the ground.

Your urgent donations are welcomed now using www.justgiving.com/ADRA-UK-Haiyan or simply send a text message donation to: ADRA00 £10 to 70070.

Adventist Church leadership across the whole of the British Isles have called for churches to make this Sabbath, 16 November, to be a special time of prayer for the Philippines. Many churches will also make a special collection on the following Sabbath, 23 November.

To all those generous individuals and families and organizations providing prayer, comfort and support, the Filipino community say, "God bless your heart. Maraming Salamat! (Thank You!)" Pastor Frias concludes, “Our prayers continue to go to those survivors who lost their loved ones, their houses, their livelihoods and are now in a desperate situation because of their need for food and water. We pray for a speedy delivery of goods and medical help to all these people in need. To the charity organization volunteers and individuals helping in the rescue operations, we pray for your health and safety as you do your work each day.”

The full video report can be found on YouTube and on the UK Hope TV website. It can also be downloaded to your computer to show in church or other gatherings. [tedNEWS]

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Bracknell, United Kingdom [Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist, BUC News] The One project, a gathering of Adventists that focuses on the primacy of Jesus in their lives, has hit Britain for the first time in its three-year history. The weekend of 1-3 November saw almost 200 people gathered at Newbold College to dialogue, listen and refocus on Jesus Christ as the centrality in the Adventist faith. A group of 12 pastors, lecturers and one nurse all preached on the theme of 'Jesus-All'. "The Christ-centred message" observes Dr Brown, "is compatible with the Newbold College mission statement, so Newbold was a natural place to have the first One project gathering in the United Kingdom."

Preachers included several South England Conference pastors, lecturers from Newbold College and speakers from the USA. It was positive and intentional that this gathering had a strong local flavour.

Pastor Sam Davis, South England Conference President was one of the preachers who asked the gathering "Are we so focused on doing church that Christ is overlooked? That we do Bible study on prophecy but miss seeing Christ?"

There were plenty of short sermons, but what makes this a different gathering is that each presentation is followed by 'round-table discussion' where leaders and laity, students and retirees meet to dialogue around the centrality of Christ in so many aspects of the Church and faith. "This dialogue is an integral part of the gathering", explains Pastor Kirsten Øster-Lundqvist, SEC Communication director. She has attended several gatherings. "Each dialogue is unique to each table, but the presence of the Holy Spirit clearly guides in the open ended discussions as similar thoughts and discussions echo throughout the room."

Those watching on live stream did express that "you probably had to be there" but were nevertheless blessed by the messages. They will shortly be available on demand, thanks to the efforts of the Newbold church media team.

"It's always good to be home and be able to connect with people who have impacted my life," stated British-born pastor, Japhet De Oliveira, chaplain at Andrews University and co-director for the One project. "It was an overwhelming result, as people shared with me how much this gathering has renewed their faith, not only in Jesus but also in the Adventist Church."

With his guitar Pastor Nicholas Zork led in worship, and the hall was filled with passionate voices singing 'In Christ alone' as well as old
favourites such as 'What a friend we have in Jesus'. It was a thoughtful mix of old and new songs.

Mervyn Weir, who facilitated a table discussion stated, "We need more of this emphasis. If this was the filter for everyone to go through to become a member, our church would be more effective." Edit Liebhart added, "It's been good to meet people and discuss important stuff." Several attendees expressed that it had been refreshing to refocus on Jesus.

The weekend culminated in a communion service with a blessing prayed over each person. Executive Secretary for the Trans-European Division, Pastor Audrey Andersson concluded, "It has been a real blessing to be here. I just wish everyone could have the opportunity to come to the One project." To learn more about the One project and to find out about the next gathering, visit their website: the1project.org. [tedNEWS]
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ADRA Norway commended in Norwegian National Budget

22 October 2013 | Oslo, Norway [Tor Tjeransen & Gry Haugen/tedNEWS] Adventist Development and Relief Agency [ADRA] Norway is mentioned in positive terms in the Ministry’s detailed notes to the Government Budget. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentions ADRA Norway as an organisation with a high degree of goals achievement.

ADRA Norway is listed among six organisations that in 2012 received increased support for working with children's rights to education in conflict and disaster areas.
ADRA is then mentioned in the government’s budget in conjunction with reporting on selected results for Norwegian assistance supported by Norad, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Norad visited ADRA’s project in Ethiopia in 2012 to review the costs and effectiveness of the work and ensure the quality of Norwegian development aid.

The following is a quote from Proposition 1 to the Parliament (proposed resolution) for fiscal year 2014, page 161:

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) receives support for, among other things, improving the quality of life of local people in Ethiopia through various health and school projects. The projects have been planned in collaboration with the local community and authorities based on locally defined needs. The projects are sustainable because the community and local authorities take the responsibility for running the schools, and maintaining buildings and water wells after they have been handed over by ADRA Ethiopia. The seven schools that have been built so far provide education for 5,500 children. A number of volunteers are also involved in the training of villagers in health, family planning and environmental issues. Moreover, local authorities have received training in health, including HIV/AIDS. The high level of achievement is the result of a partnership based on equality and reciprocity. Reviews and visits in the field have shown that ADRA is a cost-effective organization.

The director of ADRA Norway, Birgit Philipsen, is very pleased with the positive mention of the agency in the Government Budget: “We base all our programmes on strong partnerships” Philipsen says. “We do not set the development agenda in Norway. This is done by our partners. It is of fundamental importance that we build local capacity and that our partners set the premises and priorities in order to achieve relevant, sustainable and cost effective programs.”

ADRA Norway raises approximately GBP 360,000.00 annually through the Ingathering Programme. The Norwegian Government has channelled substantial funding through ADRA Norway for development projects in a number of countries. [tedNEWS]
What’s God got to do with it? Part II

22 October 2013 | London, United Kingdom [Katie Ramharacksingh, BUC news]

Who could say no to a fully catered meal, down-to-earth speakers and an inviting atmosphere? That is the welcome that met visitors to the Mission to the Cities Youth programme, at the Central London church, on Saturday, 19 October.

The evening kicked off with a 3-course dinner. This led into discussions on topics of spirituality and sexual baggage. Young people from all over London gave their thoughts and opinions around questions posed by host, Michael Agyei.

Organised by the South England Conference Youth department, the evening signalled the halfway point in a month-long initiative to reach out into the community. The programme was the last for presenters Roger and Ivona Bernard. Over the week, they had shared their experiences and stories as a couple, both encouraging and warning about real things that could happen in any relationship.

"Tonight was my first night here and I was taken aback", commented Pharez Moodie. "The atmosphere is really laid back, you can easily get into it. The speakers were real, they just gave us the information straight. I really enjoyed that because it's what we need. Sometimes we can appreciate all the preaching, but sometimes we just need to hear what is important to us, now."

At the end of the evening, Roger and Ivona Bernard handed over the reigns to Pastor Vandeon Griffiths, the speaker lined up for the next week of programmes. As Youth Director for the South Central Conference, Pastor Griffiths has had much experience in reaching young people where they are currently.

"This section of our Mission to the Cities project is a sowing event, we need to sow and make a connection with the young people", explained Pastor Steve Thomas, SEC Youth Director. "We want to provide a place where young people are comfortable to ask those tough questions, a place where people understand what they are going through. This is a bonus on top of the CRAVE project, where we have been visiting students at universities around England. This is more of the beginning of an initiative, rather than the end."

As well as captivating performances from female group, 'Royal Diadem', and soloist, Victor Acquah, Christina Thomas led those gathered in a season of prayer. She invited anyone to bring their challenges to God, there and then, to have a special prayer said over them.

After a full schedule of visiting different churches, the second half of this Mission to the Cities programme will conclude on Saturday, 2 November, at the Emmanuel Centre, Central London, celebrating why God has everything 'to do with it'. [tedNEWS]
Division.

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Creation Movie Central to Church Identity is Key to 2014 Evangelism

15 October 2013 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Edwin Manuel Garcia/ANN] Hundreds of church officials settled into the plush burgundy theater-style seats. Conversations faded into silence. As the overhead lights dimmed, all eyes were fixed upon the huge movie screen, assembled for the occasion. Suddenly, the hushed room was pierced by the shriek of a howling wind projected through the surrounding speakers. Then an image of Moses appeared to the booming rhythms of symphonic sounds, until the prophet dissolved and the scene gave way to clouds rolling over a mountain range.

The setting of the presentation may have well resembled a movie theater, but in fact, it was the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

And the 27-minute, professionally produced film that the General Conference Executive Committee premiered in the auditorium Tuesday, called “The Creation: The Earth is a Witness,” will be one of the denomination’s key evangelism efforts for 2014.

“This incredible project is going to be a blessing to every single church around the world that is able to show it,” President Ted N. C. Wilson told the gathering of 350 pastors and other Annual Council delegates who watched the movie, which shows a day-by-day account of the Earth’s beginnings, filmed and edited with the cinematic quality of a major motion picture.

Wilson added: “This, I believe, is going to be a magnificent tool to bring thousands of people to the foot of the cross.”

In addition to reaching non-believers, the four-years-in-the-making movie by Adventist filmmaker Henry Stober can also send a message to a few vocal critics inside the church who have questioned the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief in a literal, six-day creation.

The film was initially a project Stober was preparing for his local congregation in Nürnberg, Germany. He studied photography for a year...
in Canada, and then traveled to five continents because he wanted to present God’s love and unique creative power.

More than 70,000 people have viewed the film in nine countries.

“I never realized it was going to be worldwide,” Stober, 46, said after the General Conference premiere.

The movie was introduced by Williams Costa Jr., director of the denomination’s Communication department, which has championed the project.

Quoting from Genesis 1:1, Costa said, “We need to proclaim to the world this prophetic truth,” and later added, “I don’t know why many people of faith have difficulty believing that the world was created in six days.”

“Creation,” opens with music to a scene shot in Iceland, in which Moses shows his scroll to his son, Gershom, while teaching him about the creation. A narrator, meanwhile, reads from Hebrews 11, explaining the meaning of faith.

The next scenes focus on each creation day using powerful images of nature that play out while the male narrator reads from Genesis 1:1-2:3.

In day one, the movie shows darkness and a bubbling body of water, and displays lights in bright yellow and orange filtering into the clouds, which turn to an orange and brown tone, to show the creation of light. In day two, to the sound of water drops, the camera soars through and above white clouds, and captures lighting to illustrate the creation of sky.

The dramatic footage continues into day three, at Brazil’s enormous Iguazu Falls, and also includes close-ups of vivid green vegetation and colorful flowers sprouting into full blossom using time-lapse videography.

The fourth day portrays footage of stars, constellations and planets, showing the magnitude of the solar system. On day five, to the narrator announcing, “Let the water teem with living creatures,” the film captures underwater sea life, including a shark and brightly colored fish, and later sea lions and exotic birds. On the sixth day, the film shows an impressive collection of wild animals and insects and finally, an image of hands molding dirt to form a human body.

At the end of the film, Moses and his son are kneeling before an altar, while the narrator reads the command to keep the Sabbath day holy. Then the screen fills with shots of waterfalls, clouds and sunlight emerging over snow-capped mountains, followed by the logo, “Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

The movie is the highlight of a multi-faceted approach to teach creationism around the world. Other components of the educational initiative include the book, “Beyond Imagination,” Bible studies, tracts, a Sabbath School curriculum, Hope Channel programming, and dozens of articles in the Adventist Review, among other efforts.

Church officials believe the movie, available on DVD, will captivate viewers and compel them to learn more about the denomination’s strong ties to other Bible-based beliefs.

Vice President Ben Schoun made a direct appeal to the delegates, most of whom are officers of the 13 divisions and presidents of unions from every region of the globe.

“We encourage you, we invite you, we challenge you, to be a part of this. Make the creation project a meaningful one in your territory,” Schoun said.

--For more information about the church’s emphasis on creation, visit www.creationsabbath.net. [tedNEWS]
Leading from Within

Leaders lead more from who they are than any other leadership qualities or skills they may possess. Who leaders truly are influences others and if leadership is to be authentic, all leaders who function in the Christian context need to lead spiritually. Spirituality is not measured in number of hours spent in meditation or meetings attended. Spirituality is much more complex than just activities – it is indeed a pilgrimage; a walk with God who forms us and gradually transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Spirituality is dynamic, relationship-based, experiential and unique to each individual.

The process of becoming is the heart of leader’s spirituality. Given the importance of this aspect of leadership, it is vital to understand that spirituality interacts with a number of aspects of our growth into what God has in mind for us as His leaders.

Spirituality and Identity

Our identity is in Jesus Christ and our of that secure identity can flow humble yet powerful leadership that makes a difference. We are created into God’s image, we are in Christ – saved, redeemed, destined for greatness and assured of eternal life. Only leaders who are secure in Christ can lead others in a way that is God-honouring. Our treatment, our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts, all determine our unique identity which can only be appreciated in a close relationship with the One who made us.

When we have this sense of security in Jesus Christ our Creator and are in the constant process of discovering who He created us to be, we can lead with freedom and assurance; no need for pretending, impressing or hiding. We lead as an expression of our identity in Jesus.

Spirituality and Integrity

The second aspect of our journey as leaders has to do with integrity. We live on a planet infected by sin – and sin is impacting and challenging our sense of identity. The enemy is actively pursuing people to destroy God's image in them. Everyone has inconsistencies between who God wants them to be and who they actually are – thus our integrity is challenged. The moment we start covering up the gap we become less than transparent and our influence becomes tainted with dishonesty. Who we are inside is not what people see on the outside, and the greater the gap the more destructive our influence. Spirituality is therefore an awareness of that gap and an openness to God and others to correct us, encourage us and help us grow to become spiritually whole.

Spirituality and Intimacy

Leadership is inevitably expressed in relationships – and relationships require appropriate levels of intimacy with those we lead. The degree to which we allow people to come close to us is determined by how secure we feel in Jesus Christ. If our identity is strong and our integrity is transparent and authentic, people will feel invited – and when they engage with us they will not feel betrayed or disillusioned. Thus our speciality affects the degree of authentic closeness and ultimately this will determine our ability to influence others positively.

Spirituality and Intensity (Passion)

Leaders who are deeply aware of who they are and who extend that awareness to those whom they have been given the privilege of leading will develop an intensity – a passion – to be instrumental in assisting others to be spiritually mature and to increase their own awareness of God's plan for them. More than that, they will also passionately pursue the bigger picture, the vision of what God has in mind not just for individuals, but for entire groups, congregations and communities. This is the beginning of a vision for the preferred future God is preparing for those who are in close relationship with Him. A leader can sense that future, can articulate it with passion and can invite others to engage in that journey towards the future.
Leading Well

The core of leadership is spiritual. Only leaders with a spiritual heart are qualified to lead God's church. It is the quality of the leader's on-going relationship with God which gives life and direction to all the elements of his/her leadership.

By Branimir Schubert, DMin - Manager, Leadership and Professional Development People Services, South-Pacific Division

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Is Failure an essential ingredient of success?

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.
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 Gibb’s 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.

‘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 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-lay 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

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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)”

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.”

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.”

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

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