

MINISTRY[®]

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OUR READERS RESPOND...

Avoiding destructive behavior

I appreciate the consistently excellent articles that appear in *Ministry*. One such article, "How to Avoid Destructive Behavior" (March 2009), prompts me to make the following comments.

When the authors spoke of transference and countertransference, they correctly pointed out the dangers of which the pastor must be aware. In one of my seminary classes, a student asked, "If countertransference occurs at times below the conscious level, what suggestion do you have so the pastor avoids this destructive behavior?" The professor replied, "The most effective tool a pastor has is a strong devotional life. I know of no better preparation.

Taking his suggestion to heart, in an effort to avoid this trap, I have always tried to maintain a consistent devotional life and have found this to be helpful when I counsel.

—*Quentin Small, retired Presbyterian pastor, Columbus, Indiana, United States*

The article by Lawrence G. Downing and C. Richard Johnson was handled with frankness and sensitivity.

Certainly the goal of church involvement should be to protect the congregation and then, where possible, restore the violator. That second admonition is not always the priority that it should be. But read Galatians 6:1, "Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, lovingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out" (*The Message*). Sixty

years in ministry has taught me how true that admonition is.

—*Rev. Gordon McLean, River Grove, Illinois, United States*

I was a pastor who had to leave the ministry because of the behavior described by Downing and Johnson. However, the article did not deal with the circumstances at work in my case.

First of all, I loved the work of pastoring and felt strongly about my call to ministry. Under normal circumstances, I would never have considered doing what I did, and still find it almost unbelievable that I did it.

My love of ministry and a desire to excel led me to work harder than was necessary or required. I worked as an evangelist as well as pastoring two churches. I was not knowledgeable concerning symptoms of depression, nor was my wife, or we might have caught the danger signals. Unfortunately we didn't—and I fell. After a suicide attempt, I was sent to a hospital where I was treated for severe depression.

Only one of my fellow pastors ever came to visit me. Otherwise, I did not receive one word of encouragement from any of my peers in ministry.

I praise God for His forgiveness. I have spent many sleepless nights because of my sins, but I rest easy now in the arms of my Savior.

The article failed to mention the problem of depression and that it may also lead a pastor into deviant behaviors. Churches should consider a more compassionate way to deal with such situations.

—*Name withheld*

Holiness and ministry

I was disheartened to read Fernando L. Canale's article, "Holiness and Ministry" (May 2009). While we continue to give a blurred or partial understanding of the gospel in relation to our spiritual journey, we hinder our ability to properly proclaim the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14.

It's not very complicated. We obey because we *are* saved. Our growth and maturity in Christ leads to our obedience—for it is the result of our salvation. It is not the root of our salvation. This article could be understood to teach such works-oriented salvation—even if the writer didn't mean it that way. Our works, necessary as they are in a Christian's life, are not there to earn salvation or merit. However good they are, they are never good enough. That merit belongs solely to Christ and the life He lived 2,000 years ago and now credits to us. Acknowledged to some extent on page 13, Canale writes, "We need to understand that human holiness does not result in salvation." I add that it is because only the saved are sanctified. It is only the saved that grow up in Christ, learning to follow Him. It is only the saved that are made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), are called to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5), and are being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1, 2). If holiness is a required part of salvation, that is, in order to be saved, then how much sanctification is required before one is saved?

—*Karl S. Wagner, Glendale, Arizona, United States*

Continued on page 18 ►

COMPLIMENTARY SUBSCRIPTION If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all clergy of other denominations. To receive your complimentary subscription, please write to us at our Editorial Office, visit us at www.ministrymagazine.org, or email us at ministrysubscriptions@gc.adventist.org.



God our Creator: What a comforting thought!

Every worship service should be an uplifting experience, but I am inviting you to plan for a particular Sabbath worship that both you and your members will remember for a long time. This worship service will bring extraordinary blessings and help people focus on the purpose of worship. They will talk about this special experience on the way home from church.

October 24, 2009— Creation Sabbath

I'm inviting you to plan for a special worship service on October 24, 2009. The theme? Worshiping God as our Creator.

We recognize that this exact date to hold a Creation Sabbath celebration may not work for many of our readers. Thousands of clergy who read *Ministry* will not have a worship service on Saturday, October 24, 2009. Because our readership is one of the most diverse groups of clergy in the world, we suggest that you choose a date that will work for you.

Why plan a special service for Creation Sabbath? Because the Bible very clearly records that God proclaims Himself as our Creator, our Lord, and our Savior. Why not, in our worship services, focus on the theme that God is our Creator and what this means for us in our daily lives? If God is my Creator, how will my life be different when I go to work, school, or when I'm home with my family? What does God as my Creator mean when I face a crisis? Does God being my Creator change the way I respond to people or how I look at people's needs? Do I see all human beings as the handiwork of God, each one unique and special?

You will need to plan. We can help.

Each congregational leadership group needs to plan their own worship service. No one else can really prepare the best worship service for your congregation. We, at *Ministry*, are not printing material and sending it to our readers worldwide. Instead, we are providing what we hope will be helpful information on a Web site that we are launching July 1, 2009. Visit www.CreationSabbath.net and you will find material that will help you and your congregation plan for your worship service. (Should you not have access to this Web site, please contact us.)



What will you find on this Web site?

Scripture passages. A scientist shared with me a list of scripture passages he found that focus on God as our Creator. I believe you will find these texts to be rich resources in planning for your worship service. You may even find it difficult to choose which ones to use in your worship service because there are so many to choose from.


Music and reading suggestions. We will post suggested hymns and reading materials that you may wish to use in your worship service. You'll find a rich collection of hymns focusing on God as our Creator.

Sermon suggestions. Several of our readers have shared suggested sermon outlines with us that you may want to preview as you plan your worship service. We know that many pastors around the world have several congregations, so it may be a lay person presenting the sermon that particular day. You may want to share the material with that individual or use it as part of your study.

Links. Several of our sister publications and organizations will also provide material on this theme. We will share their links with you and any material that they make available to us. Our ultimate purpose is to assist you in your planning for this worship experience.

It's up to you

What will happen in your church on Creation Sabbath is up to you. We can provide material; but you and your congregation are the only ones who can decide if, on that day, you will focus on God as our Creator. Our readers represent several hundred thousand congregations around the world, and I wish it were possible for our *Ministry* team to somehow participate in those worship services, but that's not possible. What *is* possible? We will join you in prayer as you plan for this special day.

"God our Creator." What a comforting thought in our world of uncertainty. 

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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Prayer-saturated preaching —

the importance of prayer for the preacher, the hearers, and the community: An interview with Alvin VanderGriend

Editor's note: Dr. Alvin VanderGriend is a leader in the Christian prayer movement and has written several books on prayer, including Love to Pray: A 40 Day Devotional for Deepening Your Prayer Life¹ and The Joy of Prayer: A 40-Day Devotional to Invigorate Your Prayer Life.² He is cofounder, along with Henry Blackaby, of the Denominational Prayer Leaders Network and a member of the National Prayer Committee in the United States.

Derek Morris (DM): When did you first realize the importance of prayer?

Alvin VanderGriend (AV): I was taught to pray from childhood. My parents encouraged me to pray when I got up in the morning and when I went to bed at night. They led us in prayer before and after each meal. I am deeply grateful for what I learned about prayer through my Christian upbringing. Some important foundations were laid.

But there was a lot about prayer that I didn't know. I didn't know that prayer was all about relationship, a love relationship with God. I didn't know that I had to ask for spiritual blessings in order to receive them. I didn't know what a difference intercession could make.

When I was ten years old, sitting in the balcony of our church, I was convicted that if I ever became a preacher, I would emphasize prayer. Several years later, when a senior

in high school, I entered a speech contest for our church's youth convention and decided to speak about prayer. During my ministry, I was deeply moved by reading *Power Through Prayer* by E. M. Bounds. He emphasized that "in every truly successful ministry prayer is an evident and controlling force."³

DM: I have also appreciated *Power Through Prayer* by E. M. Bounds. Some have called that the greatest book on prayer ever written. Unfortunately, in my training, there was little or no training in regards to prayer or prayer ministries. Few understood about prayer-saturated lives, prayer-saturated preaching, and prayer-saturated churches. A lot of dangerous assumptions were made. Perhaps that is why Bounds, even in his day, asserted that "a school to teach preachers how to pray, as God counts praying, would be more beneficial to true piety, true worship, and true preaching than all theological schools."⁴

AV: I believe that our seminaries should not assume that pastors in training understand prayer or that they are devoted to prayer. We need to lay a proper foundation for prayer-saturated ministry by teaching the Scriptures. I was amazed to discover that the Bible is over ten percent prayer. We need to recognize the place of prayer in the Scriptures and in the lives of the great heroes of faith. All of the great heroes of faith were also heroes of prayer.

It's important to realize that prayer doesn't start with us. Prayer starts with God. God is the initiator. He moves us to pray. He gives us prayer ideas. He holds out the promises that we claim in prayer. God is at work in all our praying.

DM: You have noted in your writings on prayer that the early Christians, preachers in particular, were devoted to prayer.

AV: Prayer was a priority in the early Christian church. The prayers at their prayer meetings were not short, shallow, bless-me kind of prayers. They were truly devoted to prayer. Their leaders were devoted to prayer. The word *devoted* literally means "to occupy oneself diligently with something" or "to persist in." We read in Acts 6:4 that the apostles gave up other duties in order to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. When I first read that passage, I asked myself this question: Where did the apostles learn to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word? The answer is obvious: they had been with Jesus. They learned it from what they saw. They learned it from what they heard. Jesus spent entire nights in prayer. He bathed the key moments of His life in prayer. His words, His miracles, His power all came through prayer. The first Christians simply continued with what they saw in Jesus' life and heard from His lips. I'm convinced that the amazing growth that took place in

the early Christian church happened because of prayer-saturated lives and prayer-saturated preaching.

Bounds was right when he observed that, "God's true preachers have been distinguished by one great feature: . . . prayer. . . . God to them was the center of attraction, and prayer was the path that led to God."⁵

DM: *What have you learned about the importance of prayer specifically as it relates to the preparation and delivery of powerful biblical sermons?*

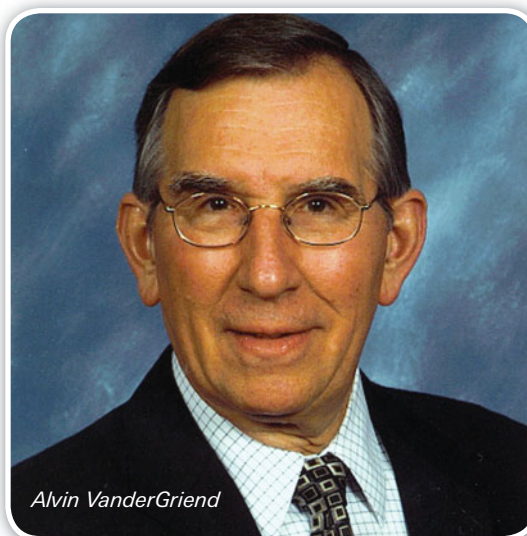
AV: The most important preparation is the preparation of the preacher. That has to happen in relationship with God, and prayer is an important part of that love relationship. By prayer, we invite the Holy Spirit to touch our hearts and lives, to impress us with the truths of a passage. The sermon needs to be born of prayer and bathed in prayer. The Holy Spirit knows the needs of my listeners, and He will reveal to me the things that they need to hear. Then when we deliver the sermon, the Holy Spirit comes in response to our prayerful invitation and anoints us with power and freedom.

Bounds puts it this way, "Prayer, in the preacher's life, in the preacher's study, in the preacher's pulpit, must be a conspicuous and an all-impregnating force and an all-coloring ingredient."⁶ He continues, "The text, the sermon, should be the result of prayer. The study should be bathed in prayer, all its duties impregnated with prayer, its whole spirit the spirit of prayer."⁷

DM: *That is powerful! Now tell us about the listeners. What is the role of the congregation in prayer-saturated preaching?*

AV: Once I realized the importance of prayer for the preparation and delivery of powerful biblical sermons, I encouraged my listeners to pray for me. I agree with Bounds that

"it is an absolute necessity that the preacher be prayed for."⁸ I came across a quote by Frank Laubach in his book, *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World*, that deeply moved me. This is what he said, "In nearly all congregations where we plead for every listener to pray hard we feel a strange, strong, delightful response from all parts of the room. Always, when congregations pray with great earnestness and unanimity, we feel lifted almost as though an invisible arm held us up; our hearts burn, tears



Alvin VanderGriend

lie close, and ideas come fresh and far better than any written address. Commonplace truth becomes incandescent, and burns like liquid metal. A congregation is three-fourths of a sermon!"⁹

Laubach continues, "Pastors around the world in ever increasing numbers are testifying that their preaching has been transformed by asking people to lean forward and pray."¹⁰ That quotation just gripped me and confirmed my own experience that a prayer-saturated congregation makes a significant difference when I preach. When people in a congregation pray, something also happens for them! Their own hearts are brought under the authority of the Word. They are transformed from sit-and-soak listeners into giving and reproducing Christians. Their praying helps in that transformation. Prayer-saturated

listeners are also impacting the people around them. A lot of good things happen when people devote themselves to prayer during the preaching of the sermon.

DM: *So a preacher who is committed to prayer-saturated preaching would want to educate the congregation about the importance of prayer?*

AV: Very much so! There is a church in Chino, California, that gives about twenty people who attend the worship service a "pray through" card. This card invites them to be designated prayers throughout the worship service. That's one way that we can train members. We would like every listener to be devoted to prayer, but by selecting a certain number of designated prayers each week, we can educate our congregation about the importance of saturating the service with prayer.

DM: *As you look back over your ministry, both as a local pastor and as a prayer leader, what is it that confirms for you the importance of prayer?*

AV: There was a time in my ministry when I was functioning alone. The Holy Spirit led me to four other men; we covenanted to meet together for one to two hours every week to pray for each other. As we prayed for each other, I experienced a huge lift in my whole ministry, including my preaching.

Once I became a denominational prayer leader, I visited churches that were strong in prayer. After I had visited about six of these churches, it dawned on me that every church that was strong in prayer was essentially healthy—impacting its community and growing through evangelism. One pastor gave this testimony: "When we work, we work; when we pray, God works!"

I have also seen prayer impact whole communities. When I was serving as a pastor in Chicago, we

prayed fervently that God would show us a way to impact our community. I can still remember the prayer team kneeling in a circle in the living room of one of our members. They prayed passionately for about half of the meeting time and the other half of our time was spent discussing ways to impact the community for Christ. Out of that effort came a ministry to children called Story Hour that brought eighty-five neighborhood children to our church building each week. Then we offered Bible study opportunities to mothers who brought their children. Those mothers brought other mothers, which led to an evangelistic Bible study ministry that resulted in many people coming to Christ. That Bible study ministry has now become an interdenominational ministry. All of that community impact flowed out of prayer.

DM: *Tell me about your efforts to encourage other pastors to devote themselves to prayer.*

AV: We put together a prayer leadership team. The first meeting we prayed for a couple of hours—and then we worked. The second meeting we prayed for a whole morning—and then we worked. The third meeting we prayed the whole day and then worked the second day. Out of that prayer leadership team came *The Praying Church Sourcebook*.¹¹ It was one of the first sourcebooks on prayer. It included twenty-seven different strategies that churches were using to grow and strengthen prayer in their churches, along with many stories and illustrations.

DM: *That sourcebook is an amazing resource. I appreciate the practical suggestions, such as houses of prayer and the pastors' prayer team. Since we began a House of Prayer at Forest Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church, our prayer service attendance has grown under God's blessing. Now,*

instead of a handful of believers, our church sanctuary is filled with earnest praying Christians and seekers after God. What are other ways that you have encouraged pastors and their congregations to devote themselves to prayer?

AV: We have developed Lighthouses of Prayer, little groups of Christians praying in their homes and their churches. They focused on praying for hurting and unsaved people that they knew in their workplaces, and in their neighborhoods. As a result, the Lighthouse Movement developed, teaching thousands of people to pray particularly for the unsaved. We are continuing that emphasis in our 40 Days of Prayer initiative, which helps a whole church get lifted in its prayer life through prayer-saturated preaching, small groups, and prayer events.

DM: *I understand that you were also involved in the formation of the Denominational Prayer Leaders Network.*


AV: That started back in 1989 with about fifteen denominational prayer leaders. At one point, we tabulated the number of local churches that were served by the leaders who were present and discovered, to our amazement, that we represented about one hundred forty thousand churches! This group has met at least annually to pray together, encourage each other, and share resources and strategies. We find that each time we gather together we are strengthened in our efforts as denominational prayer leaders as we try to help our congregations grow stronger in prayer and be Houses of Prayer.

DM: *Can we expect a revival of prayer in the days ahead?*

AV: Peter Wagner once said that the prayer movement was out of control.

By that, he meant that the prayer movement is out of our control and under the control of the Holy Spirit. There have been a lot of roadblocks, a lot of resistance, but there is still a growing interest in prayer. I believe that prayer is the key to a revival of the church and the church's ministry and mission.

DM: *What appeal would you make to each reader?*

AV: We have to begin with ourselves. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a holy discontent with the status quo, with maintenance-oriented Christianity. Ask for a spiritual hunger that you might long for the presence of God, the breaking in of God. We must be poor in spirit, beggars before the Lord. If we start there, the Lord is eager to answer that prayer. Beyond that, we have to become part of a praying community. Vital, powerful praying happens in a context with other believers. Jesus, in Matthew 18, encouraged corporate prayer and gave some promises in that regard. In the book of Acts, there are at least thirty-three references to prayer, twenty-six of which are references to corporate prayer. God's Word pictures a church devoted to prayer, persisting in prayer, and occupied diligently with prayer. That is what Jesus taught. That is what the New Testament church modeled. That is what God still expects today. 

1. Alvin VanderGriend, *Love to Pray: A 40 Day Devotional for Deepening Your Prayer Life* (Terre Haute, IN: Prayershop Pub., 2007).

2. Alvin VanderGriend, *The Joy of Prayer: A 40-day Devotional to Invigorate Your Prayer Life* (Terre Haute, IN: Prayershop Pub., 2007).

3. E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 38.

4. *Ibid.*, 25.

5. *Ibid.*, 41.

6. *Ibid.*, 32.

7. *Ibid.*, 40, 41.

8. *Ibid.*, 109.

9. Frank C. Laubach, *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1946), 33, 34.

10. *Ibid.*, 34.

11. Alvin VanderGriend and Edith Bajema, *The Praying Church Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Church Development Resources, 1990).

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Creation, the Sabbath, and worship

Sabbath afternoons were always a delightful time in my childhood—particularly when we as a family took leisurely walks in the fields around La Sierra University in Riverside, California. The air was fresh and balmy. Butterflies flew in concert and color. The tall trees were swaying, sending a gentle breeze that caressed my checks. As we walked through some of the beautiful spots of nature, my parents would inevitably talk of creation, of how God had chosen to create this world with so much beauty, variety, color, and complexity and gave it all for us to enjoy. Not just things to enjoy, but also time to see, sense, and smell all the glories of nature. Talking about the beauty of creation and time to enjoy it would inevitably lead us to a spirit of thankfulness for one of God's greatest gifts to humanity—the gift of the Sabbath. As children, we looked forward to the Sabbath, this special time to worship the Creator and enjoy all the gifts of beauty He has given us in nature. As a result, early in my life, the Sabbath, worship, and creation bonded together, and in that bonding I found that I am a child of God—the One who created this universe placed me here on earth to worship the Creator and be bonded to Him.

Thus, from early childhood when I played amid the beauties of nature to life's maturity when I was called to the ministry of teaching about nature's Creator, three facts have impressed me the most: (1) the doxological nature of creation, (2) the

beauty of the Creation week and the Sabbath, and (3) God's marvelous revelations in His creation that lead us to adore and worship Him for ever and ever as our Creator and Lord.

Creation is doxological

The doctrine of God's creation is doxological, serving as the basis of worship and spirituality by exalting the power, greatness, goodness, and love of God. Nothing was before Him, and nothing will be without Him. Nothing is greater than the Creator. He is the Cause and Sustainer of all reality. Hence John exclaims and commands, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created" (Rev. 4:11, ASV). "[W]orship him that made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:7, ASV).

The doxological imperative of creation provides an overarching basis for a special creation worldview that calls for a recent Creation, accomplished in six literal days, leading to the seventh day of rest and worship. Such a worldview also informs other interrelated doctrines, such as the Fall and the Deluge, sin and redemption, ethics and eschatology, and preserves the integrity of Scripture, proclaims love as the essential character of God, and establishes the reality of ultimate restoration. The more we review the basic elements of this fundamental faith structure, the more we are led to believe why a special creation

worldview matters, which leads to creation becoming the basis of worship. Thus, when the doxological nature of creation is made clear as both Genesis and Revelation do, is it any wonder that the Sabbath is a memorial of this worship-inspiring worldview?¹

The beauties of the Creation week

Creation, an act of God's love, demonstrates His free and unfathomable love. Holy beings in an already existing universe shouted for joy at what God had accomplished on this recently created earth. His infinite wisdom and power brought into existence the first life-forms on earth, culminating with creatures bearing His own image (See Gen. 1: 2; Job 38:4–7; Pss. 33:5, 6, 8, 9; 146:5, 6; 148:5; John 1:1–18; Col. 1:16, 17.) Genesis describes that God's creative activity on this earth was concluded in six literal days, followed by one day of rest (Gen. 1 and 2; Exod. 20:11; 31:17; Heb. 4:4; 11:3; Rev. 14:7). That one day of rest, the Sabbath, was not meant to be a period of idleness but rather a celebration of what God's love has accomplished in the previous six days of work. The celebration is one of creatures turning in love to worship, adore, and commune with their Creator God (Rev. 14:7).

Thus, the Sabbath shows that Creation resulted from God's work in six literal days. That means the seventh-day Sabbath is a perpetual reminder that the days of Creation were not mythical, symbolic, or

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metaphorical. They are not so-called divine days, with each day translating into multimillions of earth years of supposed divine creation, with the entire process evolving through disease, suffering, predation, death, and mutation, eventually resulting in the appearance of the human—the apex of the creation-evolution process, with the humans themselves becoming subject to evil and death. Such a method of “creation,” would render God a cruel, vile, demonic creator, unworthy of worship.

But look at the Genesis record. At the climax of the Creation week, God rested on, blessed, and sanctified the seventh day, thereby instituting the creation-based Sabbath for all humanity. The Sabbath thus serves as an unchangeable memorial of a completed creation in six days and as a sign of the sanctifying relation existing between the Creator and the beings created in His image (Gen. 2:1–4; Exod. 20:8–11; 31:17; Ezek. 20:12). The Sabbath shows that we belong to God, that “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100:3, KJV). Hence, we are invited to join the doxology: “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty” (1 Chron. 29:11, KJV). And again: “How blessed is he . . . / Whose hope is in the LORD . . . / Who made heaven and earth, / The sea and all that is in them; . . . / Who gives food to the hungry. / The LORD sets the prisoners free. / The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; . . . / He supports the fatherless and the widow, . . . Praise the Lord!” (Ps. 146:5–10, NASB). This focus on the glory of the Creation week invites us to explore God as revealed in His creation.

God revealed in His creation: A basis of fervent worship

While Christians are not to seek to prove by science and reason the reality of God and divine attributes, they must, through faith, thank God for revealing His love, wisdom, and power in the visible things He has

created. As Paul states, “Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19, 20, NASB). These words encourage us to step out into nature, to look at God’s wonderful creation, and to learn about God through the things He has made. Then we can worship Him for His great kindness and power in giving us such marvels. Michael Denton, a scientist, is similarly impressed by the wisdom seen behind the designs in nature, particularly in the avian lung and respiratory system. From hummingbirds to bald eagles, the winged creatures that can both walk and fly, continue to charm the human imagination. How has God designed the breathing mechanism of birds? Only with modern advances in biology have we been able to appreciate even more deeply the wisdom displayed in avian design, particularly its respiratory system. As far as we know, only two types of respiratory systems exist in nature. The first can be called the “dead-end” type that all animals except birds display. Humans and other animals draw air into the lungs through branching tubes called *bronchi* that divide into smaller bronchi, ending in tiny air sacs called *alveoli*, which are located at the tips of the smallest bronchi. Then the air flow reverses and is breathed out through the same tubes.² This is in-and-out breathing through the same passage.

The second, but contrasting, type of lung respiratory system, present in all birds, can be called the “continuous through-put” type of lung.³ The birds draw in the air that passes into major bronchi, branching into tiny cylindrical tubes called *parabronchi*. These parabronchi eventually merge again into major bronchi “forming a true circulatory system so that air flows in one direction through

the lungs."⁴ It is important to note that the "unidirectional flow of air is maintained during both inspiration and expiration by . . . air sacs [the tiny cylindrical tubes] . . . so as to ensure a continuous delivery of air through the parabronchi."⁵


Why does the respiratory system in birds differ from that of other animals? God must have had some special reason for designing an entirely new kind of respiratory

The special design of the avian lung illustrates that God's care for His creatures is everlasting. Such a Creator God, who cares for the sparrow as He does for us, is worthy indeed of worship and adoration.

Conclusion

If the avian respiratory system reveals the wisdom and caring nature of the Creator, should we not, being His workmanship, hasten to

attention to the primacy of Sabbath in the divine-human relationship.

Therefore, the next time we take a walk on a Sabbath afternoon, let each step we take be in tune with the delightful praise song of a meadow-lark, or the cry of a wheeling seagull. Let our Sabbath worship and praise be an acknowledgment of the Creator whose love and self-sacrificing nature is unfathomable, and whose faithfulness is everlasting. 

WHILE CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TO SEEK TO PROVE BY SCIENCE AND REASON THE REALITY OF GOD AND DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, THEY MUST, THROUGH FAITH, THANK GOD FOR REVEALING HIS LOVE, WISDOM, AND POWER IN THE VISIBLE THINGS HE HAS CREATED.

system for His flying creatures. The energy requirements needed for flying are greater than the energy needs for just walking or running. Thus, God designed a special lung system for birds in order to provide a more efficient respiratory system to supply the extra oxygen requirements needed for flying. God provided a system in which pure air contact with blood is maintained by means of the one-way flow. Waste air goes out another direction. In this fashion, pure air, not mixed with stale air, gives the most oxygen possible to the blood for the additional energy needed for flying. This solution is a concept intentionally created by the Creator. We may not understand this fully, but in faith we can acclaim with the psalmist: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (Ps. 139:6, KJV). Indeed, avian respiratory system is one of God's wonderful works (Ps. 139:14).

acknowledge God as a God of love and wisdom, care and guidance, and that He is worthy of unreserved worship of all creation? To this worship the first angel's message of Revelation 14 sends a clarion call to the entire world: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:6, 7, KJV).

Inspiration places this call to worship as the ultimate obligation of human beings to their Creator. This context of creation for the act of worship proves that creation is doxological. Neither creation nor doxology can be fully appreciated without due

- 1 The concepts and language of the second and third sections of this essay are informed by an unpublished, working document on creation, which is being formulated by the 2009 Seventh-day Adventist Faith Study Committee, of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, of which the author is chair. The language of section two of this essay, "Creation Is Doxological," represents largely the language of Dr. Robert Johnston, while the wording of the third section, "The Beauties of the Creation Week," is the work of the author.
- 2 Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1985), 212.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.



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Bob Haslam is a retired pastor and editor who lives in Hermitage, Tennessee, United States.



A pastor's struggle toward preaching stewardship principles

Sam Shuster* sat in his church office, pondering aloud one of his most distressing failings. It wasn't exactly a prayer, but a realization that he had neglected one of the major themes of the Bible in his ministry: stewardship.

Sam had an idea. A retired minister in his congregation, Will Duffey, had a lot of wisdom from years of experience that he, no doubt, would be willing to share. Sam invited Will to be his guest at lunch the next day.

Sam began, "Right now I'm disappointed with myself. I realize it's been a long time since I've brought a message on giving as a stewardship principle. But I'm reluctant to preach on that subject since people may think I have selfish motives.

Will grinned as he looked Sam in the eye. "In the past, I, too, have thought that. A wise church member once asked me why I avoided preaching on giving. When I told him, he laughed. 'You're wrong about the way we lay people think. We want to know what the Bible teaches on all matters of faith and practice. One reason we have financial problems in our church is that members are not willing to give up to their potential because they haven't been taught.' "

Hmm. I'm sure he was right, Sam thought. Then he questioned Will, "But how do I know that's the case in our church?"

"Find out. I suggest you ask several church members how they would feel about you preaching on the biblical truths about giving. See

if they think you'd be doing it for the wrong reasons."

"But whom should I ask?"

"Ask someone from the finance committee and ask the opinion of several individuals who do not have leadership positions. This might help you determine how receptive people are or are not to this subject."

Sam began with Tom, chairman of the finance committee. "I thought you'd never ask," said Tom. "We need biblical instruction on the stewardship of giving, but I've been reluctant to mention it. I felt it was inappropriate for me to suggest what you preach about."

"But will people think I'm trying to get more money for myself?" asked Sam.

"A few may think that," agreed Tom, "but without good reason. When you preached on the gifts of the Spirit and spoke about the gift of hospitality, we didn't conclude that you were hinting for us to have you over for dinner. Why should we think that about giving?"

Sam was surprised at Tom's insights. "What do others sitting in the pews think about this?"

"You know Don and Wilma Akens," responded Tom. "They've been coming to church for about a year and a half. Why don't you ask them?"

Sam called Don to ask if he could come to their home for a visit. The next evening as Sam talked with Don and Wilma, he began by telling them how much he enjoyed having them in his congregation. Then, reluctantly, he said, "Folks, it's been a long time since I've preached about

biblical teachings on giving. How do you feel about hearing that from the pulpit?"

They looked at each other and smiled. "We've been wondering about this ourselves," said Wilma. "We've only been Christians for three years and don't know much about our responsibility to God and the church. We would welcome that."

Sam had married Jim and Carla a few months before. Now the pastor realized he had failed to mention stewardship to them during marriage counseling. He made an appointment.

Jim began the conversation. "We've wished we could talk to you some more now that we've been married a few months."

For the next half hour, the couple asked questions of their pastor, and he responded to the best of his ability. Then Jim spoke up. "Pastor, as you know, both Carla and I have jobs, and we've been wondering what kind of expectations the church has of us in terms of what we give in the offering plate."

"I've let you two down," Sam said, "along with our entire congregation. I've not been faithful to present what the Bible teaches about the stewardship of giving. I promise you that within a few weeks I'm going to respond to the needs of our congregation and convey the truths of the Scriptures about this topic."

Following these conversations, Sam had lunch again with Will Duffey, the retired pastor, to report on his visits. Pastor Duffey was not surprised at what the laypeople had said.

"Sam, don't forget that stewardship includes talking about more than money. It's about using our time, energy, abilities, friendship—in fact, all of our resources to the glory of God. I suggest that you preach a sermon series on various aspects of stewardship to get your members thinking about their responsibilities to God. End your series with a message on giving. By then people will be ready for that stewardship principle."

The following Tuesday, the two men met in Sam's study and planned the series of sermons. Sam suggested that the introductory sermon emphasize every member's responsibility to God, followed by a specific emphasis in each of the sermons.

"Great idea, Sam!"

"And," continued Sam, "I've been thinking of using titles in the form of questions to be answered. My first title would be, What Is My Responsibility to God?"

"I like it, Sam," agreed Will. "You can emphasize the overarching principle that in our lives we are accountable to God. Use as much Scripture as you can to show that the truths presented in these sermons are God's ideas, not yours."

"Now that we have an introductory sermon idea, where do we go from here?" asked Sam.

"Why don't we begin at the beginning?" suggested Will. "In the early chapters of Genesis, God made mankind responsible for all of His creation. This sermon would concentrate on our accountability to God for the welfare or quality of everything God created on the earth. You can suggest ways in which, we as God's people, may make positive contributions to fostering a healthy creation."

"What title question can we use for this sermon?" queried the pastor.

"What do you think of, What Is My Responsibility to God for the World He Created?"

"I like that one. Will," Sam continued, "I hesitate to even bring to

the pulpit the stewardship of our bodies that the Bible refers to as temples of the Holy Spirit. Is that preaching too personally?"

Will explained that the apostle Paul had made some significant statements about our bodies. He recited some recent medical developments showing that people need to be more careful about what they eat and drink and getting adequate exercise. "Combining biblical principles with the practical should inspire the listeners," said Will. "And, talking to a doctor, a physical trainer, and a nutritionist would help create sensible guidelines for proper stewardship of our bodies. You could have as a title for this sermon, What Is My Responsibility to God for My Health?"

"Good. Now let's talk about the next sermon," said Sam.

"I think a twofold emphasis on stewardship of our time and our abilities," advised Will, "and giving a portion of our time and energy to serve God by serving others should follow. You could quote verses on the subject of being a servant, plus examples of ways to serve the needs of others. This would be a powerful sermon causing people to ponder, 'What can I do to help someone?' "

Right away, Sam had an idea for a title: What Is My Responsibility to God to Serve Others With My Time and Abilities?

"Now, are we ready for the last one?" asked Sam. "It could read something like this, 'What Is My Responsibility to God for My Use of Money?' By the time I get to this final sermon, I won't feel at all apologetic for preaching on the stewardship of giving. I'll deal with biblical principles of both giving to God and His work, as well as using all our financial resources in ways that honor God."

"Yes, Sam. You can begin with Old Testament teaching on tithing and move into the New Testament. Paul's teachings on giving create positive and inspiring responses. Huge numbers of church-going


people don't realize that the biblical word *tithe* means ten percent. Beyond this, Paul deals with attitudes when we give. He wrote about giving 'not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' " [2 Cor. 9:7, NIV].

Soon after these conversations with Will, Sam stepped to the pulpit, opened his Bible, and began by making a startling confession. "I want to apologize to you for having let you down in an area of biblical truth that I've been avoiding. I thought wrongly that if I preached about Christian stewardship, including a Christian's role in giving to God and His work, you would think I had wrong motives. But I've talked to several of you, and every one I've spoken with has expressed a desire to know more about what the Bible teaches.

"This morning I'm beginning a series of five messages that will be straight from the Scriptures. My introductory sermon is titled, What Is My Responsibility to God? In the following four sermons, I'll focus upon four specific areas, giving you biblical principles upon which you may base your living and giving to God and His work."

Three weeks following the close of the sermon series, the treasurer reported to Sam that giving had increased.

The pastoral staff called a congregational meeting where people were invited to share their dreams for the church's expanding outreach. The theme of their dreams was they wanted to see their church do as much as possible to be a Great Commission church. And they saw their increased giving as a way to make those dreams possible.

A new day had dawned at the Shepherd Hills church. Dreams and plans were born that evening as the congregation, mobilized with a new vision, was ready to reach out from their doorstep to the ends of the earth. 

*All names are pseudonyms.

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The pastor and the law:

Challenges of pastoring in a legally charged environment

Editor's note: While many of the examples in this article are based on the legal situation in the United States, we believe that readers around the world will benefit from the principles discussed.

Pastors today have an increasingly complex role. There was a time when the pastor's work could be done with little fear of litigation or having to get involved in the legal issues impacting the church, such as property tax matters, volunteer concerns, employment issues, and a plethora of other matters that come up in today's church environment. The old days of a pastor shaking hands with a parishioner to seal a deal have given way to a much more challenging role for clergy and church administration. Here are some of the legal hot spots that clergy are now expected to deal with as they lead their congregations.

Legal authority of the pastor

Where does the pastor's authority to legally commit the church begin and end? This may vary considerably from a congregational-based church where the local church board compensates the pastor and its board defines the pastor's authority, to a pastor employed by a denomination where the controlling body of the denomination provides the parameters for what the pastor can

do and commit to on behalf of his church. Pastors should have a clear understanding of these parameters when assuming the position so that they can be guided in their activities. This is especially critical when pastors have the assignment of contracting services for their churches. To what extent can this be done without creating problems of overstepping one's authority? In most instances, a pastor will not be an officer or have signing authority of the legal organization that employs the pastor. As such, the pastor's ability to enter into legally binding contracts to purchase property or sign lease agreements binding the organization may not be valid unless authorization has been granted by the appropriate body to execute such documents on its behalf. This could put any agreements entered into and even the employment of the pastor in jeopardy. As such, the pastor should endeavor to always involve the legal organization in such decision making.

The church board

Most congregations have a leadership group designated as such in their organizational bylaws. In most instances, this group will be known as the local church board. The pastor is involved in the selection of the board, but the congregation as a whole has the final authority. However, the pastor would do well to take the time, when a new group

is formed, to provide leadership for the church, to share instruction and information on how the board is supposed to work, its scope and function, the need for privacy and confidentiality in handling certain matters, and how the group's activities may create a liability for the church and the group's members. If the pastor is not equipped to handle this kind of informational sharing, then the pastor should look to find someone competent to provide this type of orientation for his church.

The pastor as counselor

The days of pastors being able to counsel their parishioners on everything from marriage issues to children and a large number of other topics that historically fell to the pastor to "fix" are gone. Litigation today has revealed pastors who have been charged with unauthorized practice of counseling when they venture into certain areas and being sued for malpractice when the advice given does not work out. Certainly, it is appropriate for pastors to assist their parishioners in areas of religious counseling and other areas where advanced and special training has been taken. But they should be warned to find out what the laws are in their jurisdiction for various types of counseling and have an understanding of the scope of any malpractice coverage provided by their employer.

Legal privilege

It is commonly thought that anything shared with the pastor becomes privileged information. Pastors should check the laws of their jurisdiction to see the extent of the privilege and whether or not it is applicable. The privilege in most instances can only be waived by the person sharing information with the pastor and not by the pastor. In most jurisdictions, the privilege does not extend to cover certain types of anticipated crimes that may be committed. Most jurisdictions do not extend the privilege outside of a “priest-penitent” setting. Ordinary conversation between individuals not intended to be in this sacred environment and conversations that include a third party are not generally covered.

Resolving disputes and correcting errors

Pastors assist members in resolving disputes at times. But when two members cannot agree on an outcome, the pastor may very well become a party to the dispute, not merely the mediator. Similarly, pointing out the error of a parishioner can be risky. While church processes may indicate the need to expose sin, the pastor must be very conscious of and alert to the fact that such exposure in public forums may expose the pastor and the church to legal liability concerns for defamation and invasion of a member’s privacy.

Employees

Many congregations have a need for employees beyond the services of the pastor. A minister of music, a secretary, a groundskeeper, a janitor, and maybe even assistant pastors are needed depending on the size and resources of the church. Churches oftentimes deal with their employees in informal ways. The secretary may work 20 hours a week but then volunteers to do similar work for no compensation. The groundskeeper may mow the lawn and trim the hedges, but is given the title of grounds manager and classed incorrectly as an employee exempt from overtime pay. The congregation may

actually be part of a denominational pay system where the local church secretary receives pay on a different set of standards of compensation and benefits than others working for the broader church. Oftentimes when concerns of such arrangements are raised by lawyers, they are responded to with “we have always done it this way, and it has not been a problem.” That may be true so long as you don’t end up with a disgruntled employee who discovers that “the church has been taking advantage of me.” There are many cases where these scenarios have led to the church being required to compensate the employee for back pay, overtime, and penalties. It not only makes legal sense to meet the requirements of employment laws, but is inherently the right thing to do for a church to be fair to its employees.

Volunteers

Churches could not fulfill their mission without volunteers—members who are willing to give of their time and talents to advance the work of their church. Thus, it seems burdensome to subject volunteers to screening for abuse problems, prior theft problems, or criminal behavior. The purpose of these screenings is not to punish the volunteers or make it difficult to have them as part of the ministry. Rather, screenings safeguard the congregation, resources, members, and especially children from those who might lead a double life or fail to provide the church with information about their past misbehavior. Most members who volunteer have nothing to hide and the background check simply affirms their ability to work in their ministry without the fear of others worrying about what they bring to the position. Volunteers should be trained on an annual basis regarding child abuse policies and procedures that should include information such as the six-month rule¹ or the two adult rule² when dealing with children.

Sexual abuse

While pastors must take all steps necessary to avoid the appearance of

any inappropriate conduct on their part, they must also make sure to safeguard their members from all forms of abuse. Of special concern are the children and young people entrusted to the ministry of the church. Proper procedures should be in place to screen employees and volunteers working for the church, especially with young people. Any known pedophile or abuser who wishes to be part of the congregation must be dealt with in a positive but firm way as to what church-related activities they may and may not be involved with and how they will be supervised. Additionally, pastors should have a good understanding of the governmental requirements for reporting any abuse that arises and how to relate to the needs of the victim, dealing with the authorities, the families involved, and the congregation. There are many fine lines in dealing with these issues. While prevention is certainly the primary objective, proper handling of a complaint is critical to the overall outcome of such unfortunate situations should they arise.

Political activity

Pastors are on a slippery slope when they move beyond the religious to the political. Certainly, there are matters of legislative interest to churches today that deal with morality and other social issues that impact the church. However, laws, such as in the United States, expressly prohibit churches from supporting or opposing candidates for office, no matter what their positions. Other countries also have their own laws and policies. Pastors must be careful not to let candidates campaign in the church. Supporting or opposing legislative issues must stop short of supporting or opposing candidates based on their views of the issue. Voter guides may be packaged as merely helpful information, but candidate comparisons of this nature cross the line into unacceptable political activity.

Property issues

Pastors should be aware of what their church facilities can be used for

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The 15 accredited Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America are working together to create a broader awareness of the benefits of Adventist higher education. “The Adventist church looks to our colleges to supply a steady stream of leaders—pastors, educators, healthcare professionals, as well as well-rounded and ethical professionals in a variety of fields,” states Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University. “We want to make sure our young people are aware of what we offer as a system of Adventist colleges.”

To better understand what Adventist students are looking for, focus groups were facilitated on the east and west coasts, and a nationwide telephone survey was conducted. These conversations revealed a general lack of awareness about Adventist college options, especially among students who don’t attend an Adventist academy.

Further research* showed Adventist colleges promote the faith factor—the ability to find friends, peers, mentors, and teachers who believe and reinforce a common faith. These students, whether they attended an Adventist academy or not, also stated that Adventist colleges offered the chance for personal attention and meaningful interaction with professors that may be hard to find at other larger educational institutions. Additionally, all groups of Adventist students regard Adventist education as providing quality academics.

Adventist colleges have joined together in a coordinated effort to help young people, their families, and local church pastors, understand the benefits of a Seventh-day Adventist education. A direct mail campaign, print advertising, e-mails, and a website, www.adventistcolleges.org are some of the methods being utilized.

We encourage pastors to share the benefits of Adventist education with their congregations.

Visit our website at www.adventistcolleges.org



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- Loma Linda University, California
- Oakwood University, Alabama
- Pacific Union College, California
- Southern Adventist University, Tennessee
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- Union College, Nebraska
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Adventist Colleges and Universities

under the law. Good legal counsel can prevent a lot of costs and problems for the church. In many jurisdictions, the property will be exempt from property taxes if used exclusively for exempt purposes. Thus, renting out the church for nonreligious activities may trigger costs of property tax far in excess of the income. Even renting out the church to another congregation may jeopardize the property tax exemption if the primary purpose is to produce income rather than to accommodate the religious use by another group.

Another major concern in renting out the church property is the liability that may be created if an injury or other problem develops, such as an act of abuse or loss of property. The landlord church should take care to assure that the renter has adequate insurance to cover such contingencies and that the landlord church group is covered as an additional insured party in case it is sued as the property owner. All of these items of concern and the terms of the rental should be addressed in a written document between the parties.

Facilities

How safe are your facilities? Do the fire alarm systems work? Are the floors and ceiling in good repair? Is there appropriate lighting throughout the facility? What about handrails on staircases? Are there obstacles that are just looking for someone to trip over? What steps have you taken to assure your members' and visitors' safety when they come to worship at your church? Too busy to do this? Well, a lawsuit will take even more time if someone is injured by the church negligently failing to maintain a safe environment. We are not suggesting the pastor be a good carpenter. But the pastor should be satisfied that qualified people have been assigned to this important task of maintaining the structure.

Income tax

Churches are generally treated as tax exempt from the income they

receive. The offerings given by members to support the mission are not taxable. But that does not mean that all income received is income tax free. For instance, in the United States, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has addressed this matter through what is called *unrelated business income tax*. Nonprofit organizations such as churches may be subject to tax for income generated from a business activity that is not part of its exempt purpose. Some church leaders may argue that the proceeds of the activity are used for a religious exemption purpose. However, the IRS does not ask what the profit is used for but rather how it was generated. If the income is derived from what is typically a commercial activity, it is likely subject to income tax and, depending on how much income is generated, could jeopardize the denomination's tax exempt status.

Mission trips


Mission trips are a great idea for team building and sharing the gospel—"Let's take a church trip to another country to build a church and share the gospel while we are there." The pastor gets everyone excited and then the plans are made. Before long, questions start to come up: I can't go on the trip, but can you take my teenage son on the trip? Who will provide medical assistance if someone gets sick or injured on the project? What hospitals are available for any injury? Will our medical insurance cover this or is the church providing coverage for us? The list goes on. Plan thoroughly before you embark on such a venture. Seek the guidance of experienced planners who have done these types of trips. Be sure to check the stability and safety of the location where you plan to go. Is there a travel advisory from your government regarding travel to this country?

Affinity fraud

Whether we like it or not, the church is often the hunting ground for unscrupulous people looking for easy,

trusting prey. As pastor you should be aware of this and prevent your congregation from getting dragged into money-losing propositions that are "just too good to be true" but come from this good brother or sister who wants to help out their fellow believers. Watch out for the promoter who speaks the language of the church or attempts to gain your support by giving you special favors or consideration. Recently, a congregation was subject to one of these "fellow believer" schemes in which a large number of the membership was taken advantage of, causing many elderly members to lose their retirement savings. The aftermath of one of these financial fiascos drains the church of its energies to do its mission, to say nothing of the personal impact it has on the lives of those financially ruined.

Conclusion

The pastor's primary motivation in life must be to preach the gospel and provide spiritual leadership and encouragement to the members. Leaders can easily get distracted from that mission with challenges inherent in doing the business of the church in today's legally charged environment. We are not suggesting that the pastor's mission should be sacrificed for the sake of addressing legal issues, but careful thought and planning must be given on how such issues are cared for. The pastor should seek competent assistance from an employing church organization, key leaders of experience in the local congregation, or through local legal counsel for guidance in such matters. The mission of the church will be seriously distracted and displaced if pastors fail to recognize and plan for these issues as part of their ministry. 

¹ The six-month rule addresses the understanding that new members of a church not be assigned duties related to children and young people during the first six months of their attendance with a congregation. This allows time for the church leadership and congregation to become acquainted with the new members.

² The two adult rule states that when working with children and young people, two adults should always be assigned to work together, and children and young people should never be left in the care or supervision of only one adult.

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Fernando L. Canale's article sounds more like a paraphrase of a declaration from the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema" (canon 24). How sad to have an article like this appear. Justification is God's gift whereby the sinner is declared righteous, treated as righteous, and placed in a right standing before God. Sanctification, like justification, is also a gift from the same God who has promised to complete the good work He began in us. Nowhere in my Bible does it say that I am saved by grace and obedience.

—Lou Toscano, retired pastor, email

Responses to Pastor's Pastor

I love the prayer points in James A. Cress's article, "Pray for Rain" (January 2009). As prayer ministry coordinator in our church, I am delighted to see such articles. I only wish that we, as a church, had better resources on this vital topic.

Thank you so much both for this article and other resources you have and will provide in the future.

—Noeleen Threlfo, Wollongong, Australia

With respect, James A. Cress's article titled "Visitation Expectation" (May 2009) is archaic, unrealistic, and positively harmful to a pastor/member relationship. I could not believe I was reading such a cold and calculated pastoral visitation procedure. I don't care how busy a field minister is, if he thinks he can meaningfully and positively interact with his most treasured church responsibility in a fifteen minute rush job such as described, then he will never succeed in developing a warm and lasting bond with his people. And to suggest that you

block a person in their home from going, "Back in 1967," to share with their pastor an incident they might think interesting is downright rude and unfeeling.

You are not in the pulpit when you visit your members. You are in their homes, endeavoring to get into their hearts as a caring and loving leader. Take off the clergy collar at this time and let them enjoy you as a person. You will not surrender even the smallest measure of spiritual leadership with them in this vital member/pastor relationship.

Pastors can never have a warm trusting relationship with their members unless they spend quality time with them. I loved visitation, for I loved my people, and they knew it. Respectfully speaking, forget about trying to "understand the power of even a brief visit." If you give your members quality time, your ministry to them will be rich and beneficial—not only to them, but to you as well.

—Merv Sparrowhawk, Melbourne, Australia

Responses to editorials

I appreciated Nikolaus Satelmajer's editorial, "Secular Evangelists" (May 2009). When facing a proponent of an issue like evolution, it is easy to lose perspective and emotional control. Conviction is often weakened because we may not know or understand everything about Creation.

There is another lesson we can learn from our "evangelists of evolution." It is OK to say, "I don't know." Satelmajer expressed surprise when a radio program participant stated they did not know "how original matter came into existence, but then moved into other areas." How often we, as creationists, speak with certainty even when we do not have an answer. God is our confidence when we say, "I don't know," and "then move into other areas as if the admission was a minor point,"—other areas like our hope in

salvation, the relief of forgiveness, and the promise of everlasting life in Paradise. Our Creator God will set us *all* straight when we get to heaven and watch with our own eyes the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). Until then, let's not let evolution supporters intimidate us and keep us from moving on.

—Susan L. Brown, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States

I was wondering if there would not have been a better way to express what Nikolaus Satelmajer was trying to convey when he closed his editorial with "Yes, I admire the evolutionists who present their view with evangelistic fervor." Would we say that we admire the devil for his enthusiasm and commitment in his war against the Almighty?

Though the word *evangelist* has developed other meanings over the years, its original meaning was one who was preaching the good news of salvation. I once heard someone say that if you want to make it impossible for your enemy to convey his ideology, take over his language. As ministers, our use of language must not leave the door open to ideas that could, along the way, dilute or even misrepresent our preaching of the gospel.

—Richard O'Ffill, email

Forgiveness

I greatly appreciate Colin T. Richardson's article, "Forgiveness: An Essential in Christian Life" (March 2009). Not only is forgiveness essential, but releasing anger is also very important.

I recall the example of my uncle whose wife was murdered in India. Some time afterward, he met the murderers in jail and forgave them. It was a powerful lesson.

—Dorothy Oster, Weimar, California, United States

Charles Sandefur is president of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



“A little bit of the Second Coming now”

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”
(Romans 15:1).¹

What does the Second Coming look like to a three-year-old child living with AIDS, whose parents have died from the disease already? When I visited Patricia’s home in southern Africa, I found out.

Several years ago, Patricia quit her government job and began her Christian vocation to open her home and her heart to nearly 20 children who have contracted AIDS or have lost their parents to AIDS. As I was getting out of the car, she met me and said, “Don’t even think of coming inside unless you want to be a human jungle gym. These children love to climb all over visitors.”

I entered a house and yard full of laughing, giggling, and climbing kids. It was carbonated joy—and sadness. Some of these children die, Patricia said; two of them did last year. “I promised God,” she said, “that these children would die in my home in arms of love and not at the local hospice.”

In all my travels to the broken parts of our planet, few places have touched me more than this one: to see such innocence and injustice mixed together, to see again how broken our earth is, and finally to see how we as followers of Christ can’t just sit still and wait for some miracle to do the work that we, ourselves, have been called to do.

I was so impressed by Patricia’s poised and pure heart, her self-assured but selfless emotion, her calling to make a difference in the lives of these children, that I asked her why she did it.

“Because,” she said, “I want them to have a little bit of the Second Coming now.”

So that’s what the Second Coming looks like to a three-year-old. It looks like good food, lots of laughter, and play. Right now. It looks like receiving Anti-Retro-Viral treatment. Right now. And maybe that is what the Second Coming should look like to us. Right now.

A little bit of the Second Coming now?

Her words have never left me. In fact, perhaps better than any others, they have captured what I believe should be our church’s call to social responsibility, our mission to show unconditional love and care to the weak and needy among us—even if for no other reason than that they are weak and in need, just as Christ gave Himself for us because we were weak and in need.

After all, what other reason is needed?

“What good is it?”

Early in His ministry, Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Jesus proclaimed that kingdom to the poor, to the oppressed, to the neediest elements in that society. He was, through His ministry, bringing “the kingdom of

God” to the people here and now through a work, not just of preaching, not just of teaching, but of healing, of ministering to the physical needs of those around Him.

Christ lived in the present tense; He would not wait for the Second Coming to witness to the kingdom. And through His work, He was a transforming agent. He changed lives, then and there, for their immediate good, regardless of what final choices those people made about Him.

No wonder, then, that our Seventh-day Adventist mission statement reads, in part, that we are called to “a ministry to the poor and oppressed,” a ministry through which we “cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.”²

The call to minister to the needy, the poor, the oppressed—this isn’t all of the gospel, but I can’t imagine the gospel without it. Telling AIDS orphans in South Africa about Jesus and the hope of the Second Coming without filling their empty stomachs with food or their hearts with love isn’t such good news, is it? But as Patricia said so poignantly, by ministering to them in their immediate needs, we’re not just telling them about the Second Coming. We’re giving them a little bit of it now.

God doesn’t have different smiles—one for a girl who is baptized with living water in order to live forever, and another when she is able to drink clean water to live today. God’s joy is indivisible. He smiles for both. And so should we. A commitment to God’s vision and a call to live out that vision now is not

all that the gospel entails, but it's not gospel without it because—without it—where's the “good news”?

Sure, we've got our marching orders from Revelation 14:6, in which we are called to proclaim the “everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Yet so many of those nations and tongues and people face desperate conditions, needing the kind of basic necessities that most of us all but take for granted. In the face of this, our mission, first and foremost, is to minister to those needs.

Perhaps that is why (no, that's *definitely* why) we hear Jesus speaking to us through Isaiah:

“Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”
(Isaiah 58:5–7, NIV).

In other words, what are our traditions, doctrines, and teachings—apart from ministering to the needy among us—but just another form of what James warned about when he said: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15, 16, NIV).

“What good is it?”

There are a lot of people today who want spirituality without the kingdom or Jesus—without the inconvenience of social responsibility or personal sacrifice, without having to live uncomfortably and subversively in the present tense. They want all the promises without any of the conditions and, as I read my Bible, I can't help but see, time and again, the call for us to give ourselves for those who have so little. Or as Paul said, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1)

Without that, “What good is it?” Indeed, without that, “What good are *we*?”

Apocalypse now

Our very name itself, *Adventist*, witnesses to our hope and vision for the future, a radical vision of a radical future. What is that vision? Pretend that, right now, for the first time in your life, you are presented with this view of the future: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:1–4).

No more tears, no more death, no more sorrow in a world that for now is all but defined by these things? That's how radical, that's how apocalyptic, that's how astonishing our vision of the future is. What secular utopianism even comes close to offering something like this, much less giving us a viable chance of ever achieving it?

We are an apocalyptic people: we believe in the apocalypse, our mission is tied in with the apocalypse; we work toward the goal of the apocalypse. We don't just sit around and wait for God to do what He promises to do. We are involved in doing that work now. We've never been called to withdraw from the world; on the contrary, we've been called to engage the world, to improve the world, to proclaim the kingdom of God is here and, again, to give folks “a little bit of the Second Coming now.”

In a real sense, then, a church committed to biblical social responsibility reveals a resurrection commitment. It is a faith that says 2,000 years ago God defeated evil and will soon destroy it forever. But that is a victory we speak of and act out, now! Because of Christ's resurrection, we are all rebels against evil. There is nothing right about children dying of starvation and water-borne diseases. We must do all that we can to fight that evil.

Many of us are pastors—called by God to help shape our congregations into communities of hope, of witness, and of healing. Pastors are well positioned to be agents of love and justice. They have performed too many funerals, seen too much abuse, heard too many stories of defeat and sadness to be sentimental triumphalists. Pastors hope with their eyes wide open. They know that there are wicked things going on in this world. We must speak out and act out against them, just as Jesus did.

That's why so much of our work of proclaiming the gospel involves dealing with social ills: poverty, disease, homelessness, disaster relief, hunger, war—all the things that we know will one day be gone. While violence abounds and society crumbles and creation groans, we live imaginatively in God's vision and witness to a new heaven and earth.

We dig wells and feed the hungry. We combat sex trafficking and violence against women. We help bring people out of brutal and mind-numbing poverty (literally, hunger and malnutrition stunt physical and mental development). We, the

church, are called in our own ways to do all this, and more, whenever and however we can.

And by doing this, we are anticipating the future, the radical future that we've been promised in Christ. We seek to give them a type, a shadow, of what God has for all of us. After all, Revelation 20 and its vision of the New Jerusalem and Revelation 14, and its call to proclaim the gospel are part of John's seamless vision; the work of one (Revelation 14) is what precedes what happens in Revelation 20. In a sense, we can say one leads toward the other.

Are we going to solve all the world's problems through our social witness and engagement with the broken parts of our world? Of course not! I know of no text which says that we ever will. Even Lazarus, raised from the dead, died again. We must, instead, look to the risen Christ in order to grasp the glory for which we are intended. We must look to His vision of a new heaven and a new earth for the community of love and justice for which we begin working for, even now! We seek to "pre-enact" God's future, no matter how faintly. In the words of N. T. Wright, we should "acquire a taste for it here and now."³

Look at the world that Christ left. It's better than it was before He came into it, for sure—but still sadly and painfully broken. And though no text tells us that we will fix it all, many tell us that it's our job, here and now, to at least try. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is part of this effort.

Body language

Some believe that it is possible to do the work of evangelism without a social or developmental dimension; in contrast, some believe that we can do a work of relief and development without an evangelistic component. Both views are shallow, each presenting a one-dimensional component that implies the other is merely optional.

No such dichotomy exists in Scripture, however, no such radical

break between the Word spoken through preaching and evangelism, and the Word made visible in actions of biblical social responsibility, justice, and development. Jesus preached, but He also ministered to people's needs; Jesus ministered to people's needs, but He also preached.

Scriptures is clear what building the kingdom of God entails: people's hearts are turned to God; the blind can see and the lame can run; the poor can make a living and peace prevails in the land. There are no dichotomies here, no conflicts between evangelism and development. They are all part of the same mission of God. All activities Christ Himself was involved in are "sacred," aimed at the goal and purpose of restoring humanity and of bringing about the kingdom of God. His preaching, His healing, His call for social justice, His liberation and elevation of the poor and the powerless, His criticism of the government of Herod, His work for peace—these are all part of the package, and to neglect them is to be unfaithful stewards of what we have been given and to be unfaithful with what we have been called to do with what we have been given.

Here, too, I want to clear up a common misconception: we must do what we do with no strings attached. And no strings means just that—*no* strings. To make service dependent on people's interest in or potential for becoming a follower of Christ would be a tragic distortion of the principle of love, which gives, expecting nothing in return.


What, then, is the relationship between acts of service and witness? Christian service calls us to serve human need, even if there were no reason to hope that our ministry will now or later create opportunities for outright evangelism. Of course, we must never seek to hide the source of our motivating Christian values, and we should always be ready to give an account of our faith when asked. But we should not have a guilty conscience if we have to wait

a long time to give that account, or even if the opportunity to share our belief never comes.

Who knows? In some cases what we do can be a better witness than what we say. At ADRA, for example, we want our work, what we do with our bodies, to proclaim what we, ourselves, can't always verbalize. In other words, let our body language preach the gospel.

When we practice resurrection faith and the vision of Revelation, we witness to God's overturning of the fallen world. We shatter the power of evil; we rebel against the idea that we are helpless and passive in the midst of pain and suffering. We witness that we are not going to take poverty, injustice, and hate passively. We will fight back.

Recently, I was in a destitute country, so full of needs. I have no idea, in the end, what choices those people will make regarding Jesus and salvation. What I do know, however, is that through the selfless and self-denying service of our workers, these people are seeing a living witness of the gospel. And, too, they are getting, as Patricia said, "a little bit of the Second Coming now."

And what could be more Christ-centered, more gospel-centered, than that? 

¹ Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations in this article are from the King James Version of the Bible.

² www.adventist.org/world_church/name_mission/index.html.en.

³ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).



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How to become an authentic Christian leader

What you see is what you get." Computer veterans know what that means. When you work on a keyboard and then print what you have written or developed, you will get on paper what you see on the screen. That sentence expresses succinctly what most people expect when they associate with others, especially their leaders: *They want to get what they see*—the real person, not some role-playing individual, who hides their true identity behind a consciously or subconsciously constructed mask.

People seek authenticity, but what does "being authentic" mean? The dictionary defines *authentic* as "real, trustworthy, pure, not phony, conforming to the original." Young people have the uncanny ability to smell phoniness from a mile away. If you are not for real, forget it. They have no use for you.

Christians have not always had a good reputation when it comes to authenticity. For some people, the word *Christian* is virtually synonymous with hypocrisy. The church, they say, may look pretty good on the outside, but inside, it is not trustworthy. Something like the products one can buy from street-smart vendors: expensive watches for very little money.

When things prove to not be genuine, this can be a serious matter. Producing and selling fake products may easily land people in court. But an even far more serious consequence than producing

and selling fake products comes when those who profess to be Christians turn out to be fake. In my country, we have a saying: *Shaking hands with a Christian is a risky business; count your fingers after you have done so!* Tragically, many non-Christians associate the word *church* with deceit, power plays, politics, and, in particular, greed and money. The church always comes after more of your cash, they say. At best, some people will tell you that they find the church to be an utterly outdated, totally irrelevant institution.

As a committed Christian, I often ask myself whether the religion of people I see, meet, or hear about, is real. For instance, what are we to think about some of our politicians who emphasize, time and again, that they are born-again Christians while many of their actions do not demonstrate Christian values? Bringing it closer to home: many pastors and church leaders can tell you of instances where the most pious-appearing church members are the ones who hide many of their past acts. Older people, always criticizing the young for their behavior, conveniently forget their own far-from-perfect conduct. Judging others becomes a dangerous business. When we do so, as Christ reminded us, we are likely to be oblivious of a serious plank in our eye while worrying about tiny specks in the eyes of others (Matt. 7:3).

What do people expect?

When church members look at leaders, what do they expect to

see? Not someone totally perfect, but someone they can respect. They do not expect that we never make mistakes, never have occasional lapses of good judgment, and never have personal failures. They do not expect to meet someone who knows everything or has an instant solution for every problem. They do not even expect to deal with those who never have any doubts and are always absolutely sure about everything they believe. *But they do expect us to be real and authentic.* If we want to be listened to, and hope to have our leadership role recognized; if we want to bring the gospel to a nonchurched audience, and if we seriously try to relate to secular people—inside and outside of our own congregations—we must be authentic. Otherwise, however hard we try, we will not connect.

What are the main ingredients for authenticity? No detailed, strategic plan exists that, if carefully executed, will transform us from someone who mostly plays a role and hides behind a mask into a transparent, open, and genuinely authentic person. But here are several elements that can help us become real and authentic.

1. *Honesty.* If we want to be authentic, we must learn to be honest with ourselves and others, in particular about who we are and what happens in our own lives. Some of us are extremely clever in hiding who we are deep down, and often we have become quite skillful in running a constant public relations campaign for ourselves. The actuality of our life may, however, differ quite

sharply from the image of ourselves that we seek to promote. Some of us may not be the caring husband or devoted wife we pretend to be. Some of us may not be as conscientious in all aspects of our pastoral or administrative duties as we would like people around us to believe. And, worse still, some of us may not have the deep-rooted, genuine spiritual life that we suggest we have when we talk with people or preach to them.

The truth may remain hidden for a long time. The sad reality remains

confessions. It may require asking for forgiveness—from God as well as from fellow human beings. But being honest will eventually earn respect. Living a lie does not bring that respect—in the end it only brings disillusion.

2. *Acknowledge doubts.* Admitting that we, at times, have our doubts does not undermine our leadership role. Those who say they never have had any doubts either never do some hard thinking or are fooling themselves and others. Every Christian, including pastors, will at

are more inclined to hear me when they sense that they are connecting with someone who knows from his own experience what he is talking about. This builds their willingness to communicate with me when they sense that I am no stranger to many of the things with which they are currently struggling.

One of the great disappointments for many church workers happens because their own children have not made the choices that they had hoped they would make. Many children from pastors' families

IF WE WANT TO BE LISTENED TO, AND HOPE TO HAVE OUR LEADERSHIP ROLE RECOGNIZED; IF WE WANT TO BRING THE GOSPEL TO A NONCHURCHED AUDIENCE, AND IF WE SERIOUSLY TRY TO RELATE TO SECULAR PEOPLE—INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF OUR OWN CONGREGATIONS—WE MUST BE AUTHENTIC. OTHERWISE, HOWEVER HARD WE TRY, WE WILL NOT CONNECT.

that some people who faithfully attend church—even very active people—do not have a meaningful, personal spiritual life. Some may claim to be Christians but secretly cheat on their spouses. Some may be church elders but do not return a faithful tithe. Research shows that there are pastors who seldom read the Bible and pray outside of their professional engagements. But, sooner or later, it will show. And, whether we like it or not, there are people around us who have an uncanny ability to smell that something does not add up in the life of their pastor.

Be sure to pursue honesty. Take a personal inventory, and if you do not like what you see in your life, then pray and allow God to change your life. It may require a few

times have to deal with doubt. The question focuses not so much on whether we have doubts, but rather what we do with them. Do we cherish the doubts and claim that our doubts are the result of our superior intelligence? Or do we search for more depth? Do we struggle with our questions, one by one, and read, talk, and pray to find answers?

3. *Face vulnerability.* To always talk about ourselves would be wrong. After all, what we have to say in our role as a Christian leader is not just about us. Yet, we should be open about ourselves and make no secret not only of the things that have gone well in our lives, but also of the things that did not go so well or of moments when we failed. It took me some time to learn this, but I have discovered that many people

have not joined the church. Some have not even retained the basic Christian values their parents sought to instill in them. I have two adult children. I am proud of them. They lead positive lives, and they enjoy a good relationship with their parents. But they have not chosen to join the church that I have worked for so hard during the past 40-plus years. For many years, I used to remain rather vague when church members asked me whether my children had joined the church. Some time ago, however, I decided that I would be more open about this, even if that might harm my prestige as a church leader. Somewhat to my surprise, however, I have found that most church members who hear that my children are not church members are not judgmental and do not (at

least not publicly) wonder what went wrong in our family. Many of them have the same experience and talk to me about it more willingly now that I have told them of my disappointment. They know that I can understand their plight because I have (yes, with difficulty) made myself vulnerable in this respect.

4. *Listen to the stories of others.*

At times I find it hard to take time to listen to the stories of others. Yet, I realize that people today are looking for someone to listen. Television viewers want to see the people behind the news; they want to know more about famous people and royalty. Newspapers and journals abound with interviews and news about people. Often the method of gathering this information goes far beyond what we consider acceptable, but this is what sells.

People want to see a picture of the real us, and—within limits—they have a right to have this. But never forget that people are just as eager to tell their own story to you. People today may reject grand stories (the so-called meganarrative), but they embrace small, local personal stories. Real relationships do not come about until personal stories are told about who you really are and who the people you connect with really are.

5. *Act authentically.* Most church members want pastors who, in their theological views, do not deviate too much from middle-of-the-road Adventism, but neither Adventists nor non-Adventists will be impressed by our theological orthodoxy if the choices we make in our lives do not reflect basic Christian ethics and values. Far more people are interested in knowing that we are quality individuals—pastors who have a genuine interest in who they are and what they feel, rather than in hearing our views on all kinds of theological minutiae. Most people consider it far more important that we are honest people who live up to the promises we make than to

be assured that we understand all doctrinal interpretations. This does not say that doctrinal beliefs are unimportant, but we cannot over-emphasize the enormous shift that has taken place in the minds of many church members and nonchurched people alike. Before they will listen to us, they must be convinced that we are real.

The ultimate litmus test in today's world is not whether the things I preach are biblically true and defensible, but whether the people I work for and with whom I associate see that the things I proclaim and promote have become a concrete reality in my own life. Has my faith clearly changed the priorities in my daily life? That is what people want to see. Has my belief in the second coming of Christ influenced the values by which I live? Has my conviction about the seventh-day Sabbath really provided me with a weekly time slot that remains different from the rest of the week, and has this clearly become a focal point for my spiritual nurture? Has my belief in the life hereafter not only helped me find the subject matter for funeral sermons but also given me the inner peace that shines through on the outside?

Do people see that my life is real, that it matters? A few months ago, I was asked to preach at the funeral of a good friend. Although he had a Christian background, I never knew in any detail what he believed—that was a domain in his life where no one could enter, not even his wife. But he was a great person to be with and a loyal friend. For my talk at his funeral, I took my cue from a sentence the family had included in the obituary they had placed in the papers: *His story was not finished!* These words expressed their conviction that he had really lived. There was a story, albeit unfinished, that was worth listening to.

When people around us look at us, what do they see? Someone

who leads a real life and leaves a trail worth following and a story worth listening to? Do they see a faithful steward who always acts with integrity? A genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? A person who always attempts to relate to others in a truly Christian way? Someone who is transparent and can be trusted in every respect? Not just occasionally, when we have a good day, but 24/7?

Christ: The ultimate Example of authenticity

Becoming authentic is a process that we can never complete—it will always remain a work in progress. We find complete authenticity only in Jesus Christ. He was who He was and is who He is. The process towards becoming authentic is, therefore, one of becoming more like Him. Paul urges us: “Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form” (Phil. 2:5–7, NLT).

What applies to us individually also applies to us as a faith community. The question is not limited to, Am I an authentic person? The question has a sequel: Is my church a community that radiates authenticity? Is it an open community that attracts people, because it clearly cares for people and lives up to what it pretends to be? The church we serve does not become a truly authentic community simply by talking about or writing about it. Slogans by themselves are not sufficient.

Becoming authentic, individually and collectively, calls for a positive response to God's invitation. But if we are not authentic, no hope exists of genuinely connecting with the people we seek to serve. Our authenticity is an invitation for others to respond to God's call. **M**

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- Make new friends and build closer relationships

Impacting your community

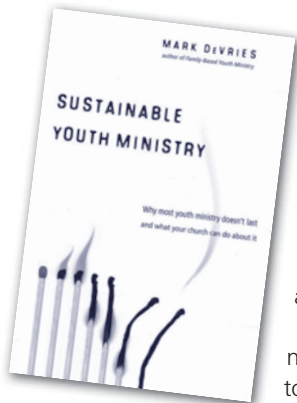
- Build relationships between your church and community
- Meet real needs
- Reach out to people looking for a service-oriented church
- Earn the right to be heard

**Reaching out and Transforming the
Community for God and His Kingdom**



Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do

About It, by Mark DeVries, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.



For most pastors, youth ministry occupies only a very small fraction of their ministry time each week, so why would they want to spend their time and money on a book about youth ministry? While youth ministry might not be an area of ministry emphasis for many pastors, there should be a desire to have youth regularly involved in worship and ministry. Mark DeVries's *Sustainable Youth Ministry* is a careful, thorough study of youth ministry

and how the local church can systematically develop a long-term approach to ministering to and with the youth of that congregation and community.

The author challenges the myth that all a church needs to do in order to have a strong youth ministry is to recruit a young, charismatic youth pastor and give them a meeting place and a budget. While DeVries admits that, on occasion, this approach may work for a while, all too often it ends with the youth pastor and/or the church frustrated and discouraged. Sustainable youth ministry becomes a much different approach to youth ministry.

DeVries writes from his personal experience as a youth pastor of the same congregation for over 20 years. His honesty, especially about his failures in ministry and the areas in which he has had to personally grow,

is particularly helpful. Packed with illustrations, quotes, and stories that help explain sustainable youth ministry, this book took longer to read than I expected because the concepts presented often caused me to pause, reflect, pray, and look at ways to implement them in ministry.

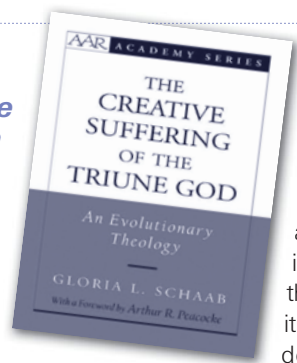
The principles of this book can also be applied to other areas of ministry because establishing a sustainable ministry of sharing the gospel of Jesus should be the goal of every pastor and church.

So, if you want to read a book that will challenge you to develop the gifts God has entrusted to you, whether you will be personally involved in youth ministry or not, you will find practical advice in it to help you and your church build a strong, sustainable youth ministry.

—Reviewed by Russ Laughlin, pastor for youth ministries, Keene Seventh-day Adventist Church, Keene, Texas, United States.

The Creative Suffering of the Triune God: An Evolutionary Theology

by Gloria L. Schaab, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.



This book, an exposition and evaluation of the merging of Christian theology and evolutionary thinking, was proposed by Arthur R. Peacocke (1924–2006), an Anglican canon with doctoral degrees in science and divinity. Gloria L. Schaab does more than summarize Peacocke's views. She uses the results of his theology to develop a view of divine suffering from an evolutionary perspective that supposedly is more defensible than those proposed by traditional

Christian theodicies. She adds very little to what Peacocke had written.

Schaab, following Peacocke, begins with the assumption that evolution is a fact and that Christian theologians should incorporate it in the formulation of Christian doctrine and theology. They both reject classical Christian theism with its emphasis on the immutability and impassability of God, as well as any attempt to restrict the formulation of doctrine and theology to the content of Scripture. They also assume that quantum theories provide a basis from which one could begin to formulate an evolutionary theology. Natural theology is at the very core of their proposal (i.e., the entities, processes, and structures of creation reveal the nature and attributes of God). Since classical

Christian theism is unable to coexist harmoniously with natural evolution, they look for a different model of God. They, together with other Christian theologians, find in pantheism what they need. Pantheism "denotes that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe—a universe pervaded by pain, suffering, and death—but is not exhausted by the universe itself" (p. 9). That is to say, the universe is not God, but the universe is in God. They also assume that God is the Creator and that by looking at nature we can apprehend the processes of creation.

For Peacocke and Schaab, the study of evolutionary cosmology, biology, and quantum physics reveals the inherent unpredictability of the cosmos. There seems to be an intrinsic indeterminacy and unpredictability at the microlevel of the cosmos. There

Continued on page 28 ►



we find, they argue, the operation of chance and randomness as the cosmos creates itself. Randomness, unpredictability, and chance are at the center of natural evolution. Nature tells us how God creates. He does not intervene in the evolutionary process because it takes place within His own being.

What kind of God does the evolutionary process reveal? First, they argue, it reveals an immanent God. He is present in the cosmos in a unique way, in that it exists within Himself. But since the cosmos cannot be equated with God, He is also the transcendental God. By allowing for randomness and chance to be the vehicles of creation, it is implied that God imposed limits on His omnipotence and omniscience. This made possible the creation of an autonomous, free, and unpredictable cosmos. Peacocke and Schaab argue that such self-limitation reveals God's self-sacrificing love. This God is a Triune God in that He is active *in* (Father), *within* (Son), and *under* (Spirit) the entities, structures, and processes of the cosmos. Since the process of evolution has resulted in human personhood, they suggest, one must conclude that God is personal, suprapersonal, or transpersonal—not a person.

The cosmic realities of pain, death, and suffering are the agencies of natural evolution and they occur within God and have an impact on Him. He suffers in, within, and under the self-creating process of nature. Both are becoming. But the process brings out of death, pain, and suffering new emergent forms of life. They argue that this is similar to the experience of Jesus who, out of His death, brought into existence a new form of life. The idea that God directly involves Himself in suffering is supposedly pastorally encouraging, in that this depicts Him as not only familiar with our experience

but, in fact, participates in it. It also speaks to female concerns in that God creates through birthing. The cosmos self-creates within Him. This experience of constant cosmic pain was aggravated by the suffering introduced into the cosmos by intelligent creatures unwilling to cooperate with the creative process of evolution. Each member of the Trinity suffers in their own particular way as Father, Son, and Spirit. Schaab talks briefly and vaguely about a future in which weeping and suffering will come to an end in a new creation.

We should ask several questions. The first one is about method. Is it sound to define Christian doctrines by merging the results of scientific evolutionary research with scriptural materials? Theologians and scientists have not been able to agree on the proper way to combine them. In fact, the attempted combinations are characterized by a significant amount of speculations on the part of scientists and theologians. This suggests that we should not take any combination as final (Peacocke and Schaab acknowledge this). But it could also suggest that this approach leads to a dead end and, therefore, is unreliable. Besides, the model proposed in this book requires a panentheistic understanding of God, not drawn from the biblical materials but from philosophical speculation about the Divine Being.

What comfort can suffering human beings obtain by knowing that their God suffers as a result of the randomness and unpredictability of the process of evolution? If the universe is self-creating within God, then He has no control over what takes place within Himself; He allows things to develop as they please. In that case, the suffering introduced by self-conscious, intelligent beings is an intrinsic part of the megadrama of evolutionary development and is justifiable, and, in fact, indispensable.

In a sense, it could be argued that since God has limited His omnipotence, He and humans are victims of evolutionary pain and suffering. The model does not provide a valid pastoral dimension to assist suffering humanity. Even the female model seems to be out of place. The female procreative process is not a state of chaos but a process of order and beauty. The presence of evil does not always allow for that beauty and order to be visible, but is fundamentally structured for goodness. In the case of panentheism, what we find inside God's being is chaos, disorder, and death. Birthing perpetuates them.

Finally, does evolutionary theology anticipate the ending of pain and suffering? Peacocke and Schaab have rejected any form of Christian eschatology as a solution to that problem. But when she says, "The birth of the cosmos in its fullness is an eschatological event to be completed only in the new creation in which all weeping and suffering and death will be no more" (p. 172), she has introduced some type of Christian eschatology into the discussion as well as divine intervention. How does she know that such a new creation will take place if God Himself does not know it (He limited His omniscience)? If what she argues is true, we would have to conclude that according to evolutionary theology the self-creating activity of the cosmos will come to an end. Generally, scientists argue that the evolutionary process is open-ended and lacks a particular *telos*. They do not anticipate an end except in the form of a deep freeze—the uncontrolled expansion of the universe, or in a self-destructive inferno—the reversal of the big bang. In either case, death would have won. A theology of natural evolution is practically an oxymoron.

—Reviewed by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD,
director of the Biblical Research Institute,
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. 



Positive response to evangelistic meetings

Lahore, Pakistan—The Seventh-day Adventist Church in northern Pakistan has completed an evangelistic series of meetings in an area near the cantonment of Lahore, which accommodates more than 5,000 Christian families.

In preparation for the meetings, a team supervised by **Abbas Suba**, secretary for the Adventist Church in northern Pakistan, worked long hours visiting people and inviting them to the evangelistic meetings held April 23–May 2, 2009.

Between 300 and 400 people gathered on the housetops for each meeting.

The main speaker was **Younis Noor Bhatti**, president of the Adventist Church in Pakistan, and other church leaders assisted in presenting lectures on health and lifestyle issues.

Before these evangelistic meetings, only two Adventist families lived in this area. But, as a result of these meetings, 29 people have already been baptized.

At the final meeting of the series, when the congregation was asked whether they would like an Adventist church to be established in the area, everyone lifted their hand in support. The challenge now is to meet the needs of this new community. Already literature on the Sabbath, the book *The Acts of the Apostles* translated into Urdu, and several Adventist magazines have been distributed.

This group of newly baptized members is meeting with other believers in a home to worship together every Sabbath morning until a more permanent place can be found for them. “We hope and pray that God will open the door for us to

have a place for worship, and reach more new communities in Lahore and more cities [in Pakistan],” said Younis Noor Bhatti. [TED News Staff/TED News]

Global Christian Forum

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—In the late 1990s, a few Christian leaders shared the dream of seeing all of the diverse Christian families talking to each other and praying together. This was the beginning of the Global Christian Forum (GCF). According to its founders, it seeks “To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch organizations that confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.”

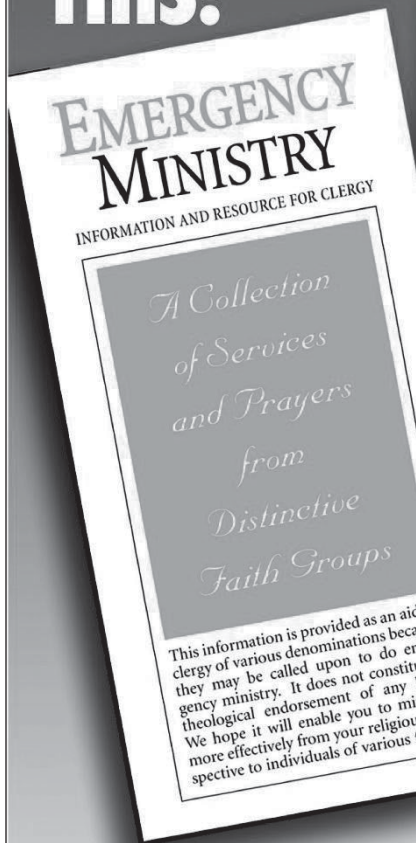
In 2007, the first global gathering was held in Limuru, Kenya, with 226 participants. Instead of talking about visible unity, the meeting focused on the Christian’s experience and spirituality. Discussions between various Christian denominations were possible in such a setting, as all participants were able to maintain openness throughout the experience.

An 18-member committee now works on the activities of the GCF for the next global gathering, to be held in a yet to-be-determined location in 2011.

For **John Graz**, general secretary of the General Conference Council on Interchurch/Interreligion Affairs, the GCF is important because it creates a space where Christians can develop relationships and share spiritual experiences and ideas. [John Graz]

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What pastors owe to their associate leaders

Whether the church has a large membership with a pastoral staff or is a small church with a pastor and local church elders, a team effort becomes necessary to have a successful ministry. Although they are colleagues in sharing the gospel, the pastor* assumes the lead in fulfilling the Great Commission in that particular area of God's vineyard.

In order to effectively labor, pastors must place their associates in the best possible position. What, then, do they owe those who assist them?

Trust

Associate pastors bring their own academic and specialized training with them, which prepare them for the tasks to which they have been called. Having given them their responsibilities and instructions, trust them to effectively and efficiently fulfill those areas of obligation. When you have to preach at another church, it does not matter whether the church elders who speak during the divine worship hour have degrees in theology or accounting or whether or not they are dynamic speakers. They want and need your trust. Empower them and release them to employ the spiritual gifts God has placed within them.

Equipping

Provide resources for continuing development. As possible and financially feasible, such resources can take the form of workshops (inviting others with expertise in various areas to come and train them), books and journals (such as *Ministry*), discussion forums, and many others. And don't overlook what, for many, is the most vital resource—you and your presence. Young associates especially appreciate the time you spend in mentoring them, for even the very words you speak one-on-one serve to equip them for the challenges ahead.

Direction

From the time Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness to today, leadership has been vital for the church. Although the Holy Spirit can and will directly share a vision with associate pastors and other church leaders, the lead pastor must also provide direction for the church. Pastors who exhibit such leadership qualities inspire confidence from their associates and the church membership at large.

Motivation

Closely connected with direction is motivation. It's one thing to point others toward the goal. It's another thing to inspire them to believe they can accomplish the task.

Motivation either comes from inside the person (intrinsic) or from outside the person (extrinsic). Some people merely need to know what is expected, and that is all the impetus they need. But most people, even in ministry, need to know that you, as pastor, believe in them; and that is often all the motivation they need. Tell them you have confidence in their ability to succeed—that will greatly benefit your associates.

Another source of motivation is *appreciation*. Say *Thank you*, and say it often. No one wants to feel that they are merely workers in a system, but rather unique individuals, fulfilling the call that God has placed upon them.

Cooperation

Confidence in pastoral leadership is enhanced when those who assist you see that you have been or are doing the same activities you ask them to do. Associates want to know that the leaders comprehend the challenges that they themselves face.

This does not imply that the pastor can ably perform everything that the associates can; rather, that the pastor has a working familiarity with the


assigned task and, more importantly, that the pastor actively works with the staff. This involves more than delegation; it involves cooperation. While Jesus delegated tasks to His disciples, He was actively involved in showing them how to fulfill those tasks, taking the lead, being the Chief Servant among the servants.

Rest

Placing too many responsibilities upon your associates—no matter how competent they are—leads to burnout. They may be willing to work long hours, but even if they are unwilling to slow down, the pastor must slow them down—requiring they take time for rest and rejuvenation. Although ministry is important, rest is equally important. And Jesus is our Example in demanding rest of His colleagues (cf. Mark 6:31).

Personal ministry

Pastors are understandably seen as shepherds to their congregations. But they also are shepherds to their associates, for ministers need ministry. Remember that your associates—whether paid or volunteers—are not mere workers in a system; rather, they are human beings first who have their own spiritual, mental, and social needs to address.

Ministry has always been, and always will be, a team effort. While the dynamic between pastor and associate exists, we are all colleagues in service to the Master, and as such, we exist to serve our congregations *and* one another. Let us work together, and in doing so, we will all grow together in Christ, rendering greater service as time goes by. 

* In using the word *pastor*, I refer to the senior pastor who has other pastors who serve on his staff or the solo pastor who has elders assisting at the local church level.

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