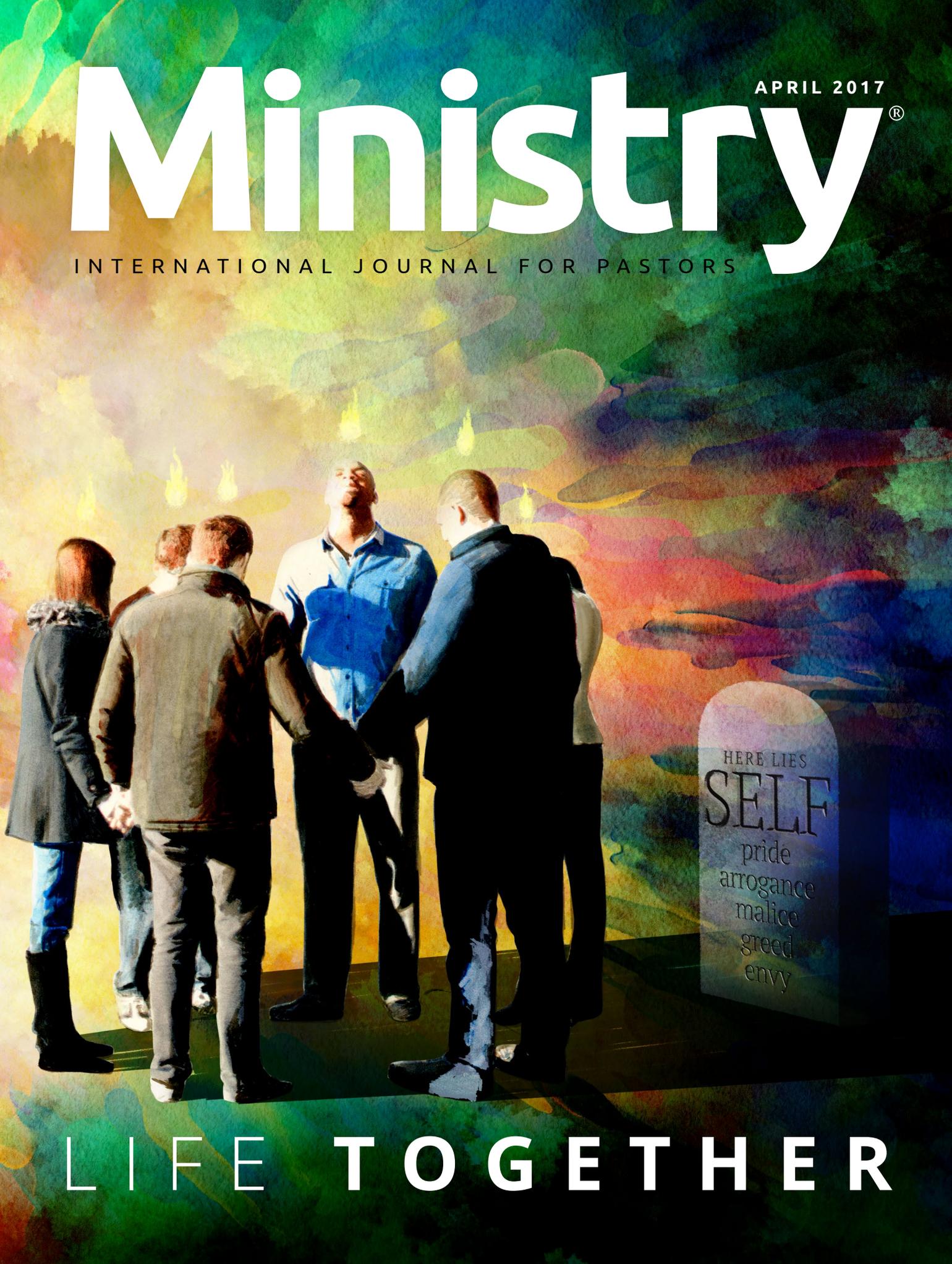


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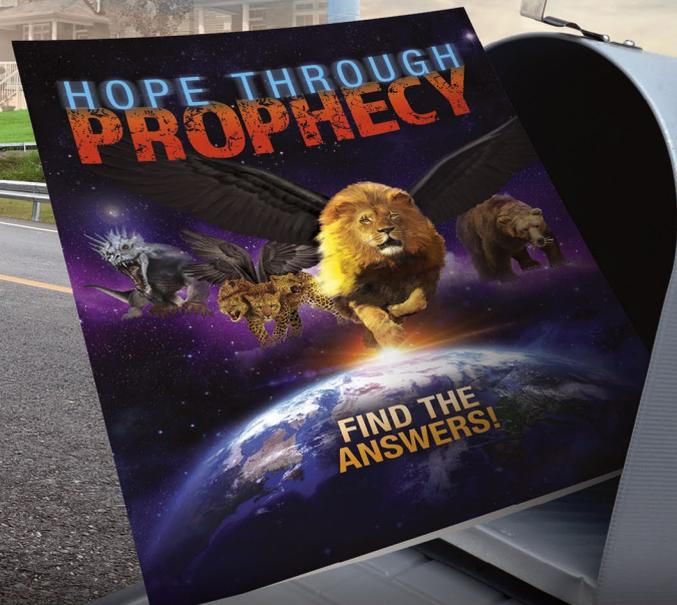


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“After all, one can be sincerely wrong. But sincerity is indispensable to any truth we wish others to believe.”

Funeral etiquette

I thought Larry Yeagley’s article (“The Funeral,” December 2016) was very practical and helpful for pastors. There are many areas where elders have to take funerals, in the absence of a pastor. Could this article be printed in the *Elder’s Digest* as well? One further practical point: where there is an obituary column in the regional church paper, send in funeral details immediately following the service. Families wait for the printed acknowledgement, as part of their grieving and closure. For it to be delayed a year or more (and it has happened) is distressing to them.

—Helen Miller, email

Credible preaching

Thank you for the great article, “Treating Preaching as a Practice” (December 2016). Michael Goetz’s well-informed and thoughtful ideas need to be placed before preachers, including myself, regularly. (Loved the quotes from Haddon Robinson, too!) I’m wondering if one more concept could help round out the points presented. David E. Thomas calls it “the internal dynamic of credible preaching” (*Ministry*, May 2010). He writes that “even a poorly constructed and delivered sermon may have considerable effectiveness, more so than

another sermon that has only technical grandeur” if there has been an “intersection between a preacher’s heart and message.” I.e., have I been touched by my own message? This may be one reason why testimony services often seem to have a greater spiritual benefit than preaching, especially in today’s society with its natural skepticism of preachers and value placed on personal experience. Larry Alex Taunton writes, “Sincerity does not trump truth. After all, one can be sincerely wrong. But sincerity is indispensable to any truth we wish others to believe. There is something winsome, even irresistible, about a life lived with conviction. I am reminded of the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, David Hume, who was recognized among a crowd of those listening to the preaching of George Whitefield, the famed evangelist of the First Great Awakening:

“‘I thought you didn’t believe in the Gospel,’ someone asked.

“‘I do not,’ Hume replied. Then, with a nod toward Whitefield, he added, ‘But he does.’”*

—Bill Krick, Clovis, California

* Larry Alex Taunton, “Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity,” *The Atlantic*, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/listening-to-young-atheists-lessons-for-a-stronger-christianity/276584/.

Lay-led churches

Dear brothers, the article by David M. Klinedinst (“Back to the Future: Lay-Led Churches and a Return to our Roots,” February 2017) has hit the proverbial nail on the head. I pastor a six-church district in southwest Virginia, United States. Our people need this message. Thanks for sharing.

—Don Elswick, Facebook

Athletic and spiritual striving

Steven Thompson’s article, “Christian Faith and the Olympic Games” (December 2016), is intriguing and motivational. Thompson, in his analysis of 2 Peter 1:1–8, achieves a superb presentation of the highly instructive comparison between athletic striving and spiritual striving. However, the sole focus on Petrine perspectives, and the complete exclusion of Hebrews and various texts in the Pauline corpus, leaves full room for the development of the aspect of contrast in the context of athletic and spiritual striving. That this contrast between athletic contests and spiritual striving is an important safeguard in spiritual growth and witnessing is evident from the following Old and New Testament perspectives. All Scripture references, where not from the original language, are from the NKJV (1982).

The Bible indicates that Enoch and Noah “walked with God” (Gen. 5:24; 6:9). While the thrust of these verses indicates spiritual consistency and excellence in the relationship of these two with God; yet the “walking” imagery also indicates an underlying, underlining perspective of the value of consistent, moderate exercise in maintaining and enhancing health. In fact, in Genesis 3:8, the guilty pair “heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the

Continued on page 25

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The joys of being dead

An Adventist university professor tells of one of his most embarrassing moments in life. He had the opportunity to preach to the entire campus family for a chapel service. He preached on humility, and it was a deeply moving message. He said it was evident that everyone was meaningfully touched by the Lord because fervent amens were heard and tears were in many eyes.

After he finished, he went off the platform into an empty side room. Feeling that he had just preached one of his best sermons ever, he said out loud to himself with satisfaction, “Eat your heart out, Billy Graham!” Unfortunately, he had forgotten to switch off his lapel mic. His comment was amplified to the entire congregation, still sitting in silence after his message.

It reminds me of a comment I heard C. D. Brooks make one day, talking about how he was very careful how he prayed for humility. “I pray for the Lord to humble me so I won’t have to be humiliated!” I agree with him. When you are humble by dwelling with Jesus privately, there is no need for being humiliated publically. “And whosoever shall exalt himself will be abased; and he that shall humble himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12, KJV).

It seems that most problems blocking our real joy and power in life and ministry track back to “self” and the pride that causes us to protect it, try to exalt it, or indulge it. As Clarence Schilt and Stephen Schilt say in *A Life to Die For*, “When self is alive two major issues result: a. spiritual power in us is blocked; b. and spiritual power through us for others is blocked.”¹ Ellen White said on the matter, “There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of

the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.”²

Most of the tension or conflict Janet and I have had in our marriage over the years was because of self still being alive and getting offended (most often in me). For example, we had just arrived late one night, very tired, for our first visit to China. At the hotel room Janet said something that I misunderstood, which caused me to get upset and say something not so nice to her. This upset her, and she made another comment. That upset me more, and I made a worse comment, and so it escalated until

we were both very angry and wished we had separate rooms for the night. How could we ever minister to others in China the next day?

The next morning we were still upset, but we both went aside and spent time with Jesus alone. By the time we left the room, we had apologized and were in each other’s arms. God really blessed our time in China! The solution is always putting self aside by abiding in Jesus. The joy of agape love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) is always so good. And self being alive leads to unrest and destroying our

Principles of the exchanged life*

1. When self is alive, two major issues result:
 - a. Spiritual power in us is blocked;
 - b. And spiritual power through us for others is blocked.
2. Resurrection power comes only to the dead—those who are dead to self.
3. A corpse can’t be hurt, so when self is dead, its feelings can’t be hurt.
4. Those who are dead to self aren’t surprised when things don’t go their way; they aren’t offended when things don’t go their way; and they aren’t controlled by the things that don’t go their way.
5. We do much if not most of our sinning when we are in the right but we’re not being treated justly or fairly.
6. What happens *to* us is relatively inconsequential; what happens *in* and *through* us has far-reaching consequences.
7. We should be willingly surrendering to receive rather than willfully trying to achieve.
8. What gets the mind gets us, and what gets us is reported through our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions.
9. Practice makes perfect, so we must be careful what we practice. (Are we perfecting habits of self or of Christ in ourselves?)
10. Sin is what we do when our hearts aren’t satisfied with God.

* W. Clarence Schilt and Stephen Schilt, *A Life to Die For: Discover the Secret of Christ’s Transforming Power* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2009), 261.

peace—every time. “Those who are dead to self will not feel so readily and will not be prepared to resist everything which may irritate. Dead men cannot feel.”³

Paul was a very successful, highly educated, “always right,” harsh-on-others, young church leader who had it all wrong. But he finally found that the secret of joy, power, and truly successful ministry was in knowing Jesus and being conformed to His death and resurrection power (Phil. 3). Paul calls us to the joys of being dead, buried, and resurrected in Jesus for a life of self-giving, loving service.

“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem

others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation” (Phil. 2:2–7, NKJV). Jesus humbled Himself to become a Man and was obedient even to the death of the cross, and He has been exalted higher than any other throughout eternity!

After receiving an amazing vision of how God is displeased over our defense of self and justifying why we are right, Ellen White makes this profound statement, which is the best conflict management seminar you could ever receive in just one sentence: “If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”⁴

This month’s *Ministry* has several articles about how we can live our Lord’s agape love like the New Testament church did in Acts: being one in *koinonia* fellowship, mentoring, listening to each other, and respecting the organization of the church we have agreed to. Jesus holds out to all of us an amazing life of joy and peace if we crucify self and live in His resurrection power and selflessness. Help self stay dead, Lord! 🙏

- 1 W. Clarence Schilt and Stephen Schilt, *A Life to Die For: Discover the Secret of Christ’s Transforming Power* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2009), 261.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 159.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 425.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1945), 119.

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“Life together” for church leaders: Learning from the book of Acts

The book of Acts stands out as the only New Testament book containing a clear historical account of the origin and spread of the early Christian church.¹ With a prologue addressed to the “most excellent Theophilus” (Acts 1:1), the text is believed to be the sequel to the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:3). While the Gospel focused on the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem to fulfill His mission, Acts focuses on the spread of the church out of Jerusalem.

Based on geographical considerations, the book of Acts can be broadly divided into two major parts: (1) the church in and around Jerusalem (Acts 1–12) and (2) the church beyond Jerusalem (Acts 13–28). This spread of Christianity and its gospel beyond the headquarters of Judaism (hinted at in Acts 1:8)² appears to be the aim and/or purpose of the author, Luke (the only Gentile among the New Testament writers). By the way the book is structured and narrated, “it seems probable that we are to view this triumphant, joyful, forward-moving expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and resulting in changed lives and local communities, as God’s intent for the continuing church. And precisely because this is God’s intent for the church, nothing can hinder it, neither

Sanhedrin nor synagogue, dissension nor narrow-mindedness, prison or plot.”³ This, in many ways, serves as a model to the Christian church in every age,⁴ presenting the potential possibilities when God’s people are led by and filled with the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is a real picture of the ideal church—a picture that every true pastor and church leader desires for God’s people and work in contemporary times.

Alive together

One prominent feature in the book of Acts is the unity and “togetherness” of the church’s leaders and members. The early Christian community was noted for “praying together (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24), being together (Acts 1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 5:12), holding everything in common (Acts 2:44), being of one heart and mind in agreement (Acts 4:32; 15:25), and sharing possessions (Acts 2:45; 4:32, 34).”⁵ Some of Luke’s favorite expressions for the communal unity of the early church include “of one accord” or “with one mind” (*omothymadon*) (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12) and “at the same place” (*epi to auto*) (Acts 1:15; 2:44, 47; 4:26).⁶ These expressions are descriptive of the internal state of a church community enjoying peace and harmony.⁷

One of the most beautiful pictures of this “togetherness” in Acts is seen in

the praying, worshiping, and sharing communities of Christian believers found in house churches. Luke’s first picture of this is captured in the “upper room” after Jesus’ resurrection: 40 days of nurturing followed by ascension (Acts 1:1–11). The original 120 members, the initial population of the early Christian church, are praying and waiting for the promise of the Father to be fulfilled (vv. 14, 15). This seeking and waiting together creates the fitting atmosphere for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1), resulting in an explosion of church membership within Jerusalem from 120 to more than 3,000 people in one day (v. 41). After this mass conversion, Luke records what could be described as the ideal church community life. Christian believers are noted to enjoy the experiences of learning sound doctrine, or teaching, together (v. 42), sharing food and possessions together (vv. 44, 45), and worshiping together (v. 46). Acts 4:32–37 presents a similar account of togetherness among the early Christian community. These experiences have become the best descriptions in the New Testament for ministry and mission through small groups today.

In addition, the early church thrived through the “togetherness” experience of house churches. Numerous house

churches are mentioned in the book of Acts and Paul's letters. Examples that possibly include house churches are Jerusalem (Acts 1:12–15; 2:41–47; 5:42; 12:10–17), Philippi (Acts 16:11–15, 25–34), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9), Corinth (Acts 18:7, 8; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:15, 17), Cenchræe (Rom. 16:1, 2), Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19), Rome (Rom. 16:3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15), and Colossae (Philem. 1, 2).⁸ John Mallison comments on the mention of these churches in the New Testament by stating that “It is almost certain that every mention of a local church or of a church meeting [in the New Testament], whether for worship or fellowship, is in actual fact a reference to a church meeting in a house.”⁹

The church leaders and members are also noted to have actively used every spiritual gift and ministry to get involved in every aspect of evangelism. Beginning with the earnest prayers and preparation in the upper room (Acts 1:14; 2:1) (“pre-evangelistic campaign”) and the preaching on the Day of Pentecost crowned by Peter's sermon (vv. 4–11, 14–41) (“evangelistic campaign”), the church leaders and members were involved in active small group ministry (Acts 2:41–47; 4:32–37), healing and health (Acts 3:1–10; 9:33–35), and welfare (social) ministry (Acts 6:1–7; 9:36–42) among others (“post-evangelistic campaign”).¹⁰ Through the power of the Holy Spirit, this active participation of every member of the church together in reaching out to the world brought great increase and progress to the work of the gospel in the first century A.D.

This togetherness does not suggest the absence of conflict within the early Christian community. The book of Acts faithfully recounts episodes of disagreement among believers as a result of the growth and spread of the church beyond the regions of Jerusalem and Judea. Three prominent examples of these include the complaint of unfair distribution of needed supplies among Hebrew and Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1), the negative reaction to the visit of Peter (a Jew) to the house of Cornelius (a Gentile)

(Acts 11:1–3, cf. Acts 10), and especially the debate over the teaching that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1–5). In each instance, the believers (especially the leaders) were willing to come together, carefully listen to the problem and consider the case, prayerfully deliberate, and come to peaceful resolutions (Acts 6:1–7; 11:1–18; 15:6–29).

The quality of “togetherness” in the early church of Acts (especially among the leaders) is worth emulating in contemporary times. It can be said that this was a key factor that contributed to the successful and prosperous growth of the Christian church across the borders of the then Greco-Roman world.

Fellowship together

The foundational experience of “togetherness” among the church leaders of the book of Acts led to the growth and expansion of the Christian movement. This experience can be found in the word *koinonia*, usually translated “fellowship.” While the word *fellowship* has become a casual religious word in Christian circles, there is more to it than is practiced in churches today.

In the Christian world today, “‘fellowship’ now usually refers to casual conversation, socializing, food, and fun. The question, ‘Where do you fellowship?’ means ‘Where do you attend church?’ ‘Stay after for fellowship’ usually means ‘wait for refreshments.’ Real fellowship is so much more than just showing up at services. It is *experiencing life together*. . . . Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart-to-heart, sometimes gut level sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives. They share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses and ask for help and prayer.”¹¹

This *koinonia* experience, which became the basis of the *modus operandi* for the church leaders, must have been established in the upper-room experience briefly mentioned in

Acts 1:14, culminating on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). In her commentary on the ten days preceding Pentecost, Ellen White describes in some detail what transpired among the neonate leaders of the church of Acts: “Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship.”¹²

This description is significant in light of the disciples' continual struggle over who is the greatest among them (Matt. 18:1; Mark 9:33, 34; Luke 9:46; 22:24). Constant quarreling over this issue must have caused hurt and created enmity among them. During this upper room period, the process of deep soul searching, heart-to-heart confession, and reconciliation among the disciples created the perfect basis for authentic fellowship. From then on, the church leaders began to practice *koinonia* as they gathered to pursue a common purpose for their lives.¹³

As the early church faced conflict and crisis in its beginning stages, this life of *koinonia* played a significant role in helping keep the growing movement stable and united. This life of “fellowship together” is especially manifested in the gathering of church leaders in prayer and worship to seek the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit for the unity and mission of the church amidst challenges.¹⁴ Examples of this fellowship in prayer include the leaders and members praying for boldness after the arrest and release of Peter and John (Acts 4:23–31), the focus of the apostles on devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word in the disagreement between Hebrew and Hellenist Christians (Acts 6:4, 6) and the church praying continually for Peter in prison (Acts 12:5, 12), among others.¹⁵ In their selection of missionaries and elders (Acts 13:1–3; 14:23) and in their planning for evangelism and mission (Acts 16:6–10), the church leaders sought for the Holy Spirit's leading through worship, prayer, and fasting together. “After seeking the Holy Spirit's leading, they could say of their decisions, ‘it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us’ (Acts 15:28).”¹⁶

There is a need to learn from the church leaders in the book of Acts by making earnest corporate prayer an inevitable component of meetings. Like it did for the early church, prayer can bring the group of church leaders together to God, seeking His guidance in making decisions, resolving conflicts, and bringing unity of mind and

Another way of *koinonia* for church leaders today is to be involved in small groups that go beyond superficial, impersonal conversation and “learn to trust one another, openly expressing their thoughts and feelings, confident that what is shared within the group will not go beyond the group. They must also learn the art of respectful

of individual confidant friendships that promote personal, spiritual, and professional accountability.²³ Though such friendships develop with much time and sacrifice, it is a critical need that church leaders find people in their lives whom they can trust and with whom they can bare their souls, challenging each other to live holy lives.²⁴

There is a need to learn from the church leaders in the book of Acts by making earnest corporate prayer an inevitable component of meetings.



heart among God’s appointed heads.¹⁷ In addition, this kind of fellowship transforms our prayers from focusing on asking God to bless our decisions to directing them [our prayers] toward being willing to open our minds and wills to God’s will. Without fellowship in prayer together, human-made plans (which are more trusted than God’s) emerge and are forced on God to approve.¹⁸

disagreement, challenging each other when necessary.”¹⁹ Church leaders, including pastors, need a support system.²⁰ They need a place with a group of fellow church leaders and members, a twelve-step group program for recovering sinners.²¹ They need a place where they can share their weaknesses, be prayed for, and grow in grace and acceptance.²² Apart from a small group, this support can also be found in the form

Indeed, such support systems will create an atmosphere for church leaders to experience *koinonia*—that “life together” of “God-given unity of heart and mind . . . [that] signifies a close connection among the believers for mutual support and involvement in each others’ lives, both spiritually and materially.”²⁵

The life of fellowship together, practiced mostly in the first half of the book

of Acts (chapters 1–12), established a mode of operation for the leaders of the church, providing a foundation that led to consolidated, united church leadership and membership throughout the rest of the book.

Teamwork network

The second half of Acts (Acts 13–28) focuses especially on the Christian church going beyond Jerusalem, especially through Paul’s missionary journeys.²⁶ Though Paul stands out as the prominent, ideal evangelist or missionary in the book of Acts, he manifests another very important

Paul’s example in Acts serves as an encouragement to contemporary church leaders to experience “life together” by working with others. The human tendency to compare and compete with other church leaders based on worldly standards creates pride and disunity that prevents the steady progress of God’s work in ministry. The book of Acts shows that the missionary spread of the gospel farther and faster across the Greco-Roman world was the result of teamwork under the leadership of the apostle Paul. In order to accomplish the same result, church leaders today must reject competitive

missionary journey of Paul (Acts 12:25). He was doing fine until he suddenly deserted the mission, leaving the missionary team and returning to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13, 14). When an opportunity arose to take him on another trip, Paul vehemently refused because of John Mark’s previous abandonment. This led to a serious disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–39). However, Barnabas never lost faith in John Mark and took him along (v. 39). In later years, the epistles of Paul and Peter testify that Barnabas’s effort in mentoring John Mark paid off, making him useful and

Church leaders today must reject competitive comparison and embrace collaborative cooperation.

aspect of “life together” often overlooked: teamwork.

It is interesting to note that in the accounts of Paul’s evangelistic and ministry activities in the book of Acts, he was never a “loner” but lived, traveled, and worked together with other leaders and believers (Acts 9:28–30; 13:1–5, 13–16, 44–46; 14:1, 7, 20, 21, 25; 17:1–15; 18:5–8).²⁷ A simple survey of the book of Acts makes Paul’s emphasis on togetherness clear. Some prominent coworkers of Paul in Acts include Barnabas and John Mark (first missionary journey—Acts 13:2–5); Silas and Timothy (second missionary journey—Acts 15:40; 16:1–3); Luke (Acts 16:10); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1–3); Erastus (Acts 19:22); Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29); and Sopater of Berea, Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia (Acts 20:4). While others are mentioned in Paul’s epistles, the book of Acts makes it clear that Paul never worked alone.²⁸ He enjoyed “life together” with other church leaders and members in a teamwork network.

comparison and embrace collaborative cooperation. Creating a teamwork network by inviting and involving the spiritual gifts and ministries (specialization and expertise) of other church leaders in ministry and evangelistic efforts within and without the church will always be as effective and productive for the gospel work today as it was for Paul and the church in Acts.²⁹ It is another manifestation of “life together” for contemporary church leaders.

Bridging the gap together

As a result of meaningful fellowship and networking, the church leaders of the early church mentored young leaders and prepared them for ministry. The book of Acts briefly mentions three young men who later became church leaders and played a very significant role in the growth of the early church. They are John Mark, Timothy, and Apollos.

Barnabas saw potential in his cousin, John Mark. Consequently, he invited him to join in on the first

valuable in ministry (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). He eventually became the author of what is believed to be the very first Gospel of Jesus: the Gospel of Mark.

Paul took interest in Timothy when he met him in Lystra (Acts 16:1–3). Though Timothy’s father was a Greek, he grew in knowledge of and love for the Holy Scriptures through his Jewish mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15). In time, Paul took Timothy along in his missionary journeys and mentored him in church leadership (Acts 17:14, 15; 18:5). The result was that Timothy shared the Gospel in Ephesus as evidenced by Paul’s injunctions and admonitions to him in the pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy (1 Tim. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:6). Timothy also joined Paul to write letters of encouragement to other Christians as recorded in some of the Pauline Epistles (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1).

Aquila and Priscilla, a couple involved in the leadership of the early church (Rom. 16:3–5; 1 Cor. 16:19), met

Apollos, a Jewish young man from Alexandria, when they heard him in Ephesus. He is described as competent and eloquent in Scripture and as speaking boldly in the synagogue (Acts 18:24, 26). Though he knew only the baptism of John and preached it with fervent spirit, Aquila and Priscilla took time to take Apollos in and explain to him the truth as it is in Jesus (v. 26). This growth in knowledge and brief mentoring resulted in the conversion and discipleship of many to the faith (Acts 18:27, 28). Apollos became a notable leader in the work of the early church and brought many to the faith as confirmed by the mention of his name in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:10–12; 3:1–9, 21–23; 16:12).

These three examples clearly illustrate that leadership of the church in Acts intentionally worked to “bridge the gap” between the older and younger generations to provide continuity for church life. Contemporary church leaders need to prayerfully and strategically mentor and train young leaders to become potential successors in the Lord's work. There is a need for church leaders to be comfortable and confident in involving and delegating leadership responsibilities to the young members of the church. This can also include giving them the freedom to create and lead their own ministry for the church.³⁰ Pastors as leaders of the church should not be left out in this process. Older and more experienced ministers should intentionally make available time to mentor young ones as they struggle with the vicissitudes of the ministerial life and work.³¹

In the twenty-first century, the work of church leaders as they seek to reach out to the youth and involve them in leading the church can be summarized in these words: train them and trust them.³² Bridging the generation gap by mentorship, involvement, and delegation is another important aspect of “life together” for church leaders.³³

Needed: Life together

During the Nazi years in Germany, a young minister sought and worked

to train young seminarians to live in genuine Christian community as they prepared for ministry and leadership.³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer “led a fugitive community of seminarians, living with them in a daily quest to discover for themselves the meaning of being a family of faith in Christ and training them in the pastoral ministries that would lead others into that fellowship of a common life. It was during this period that he wrote [the book] *Life Together*.”³⁵

“At a time when hatred and suspicion were on the rise due to the world wars, . . . [Bonhoeffer] was able to articulate what he saw as the gap in reality between what the Church should look like according to the Book of Acts, and what the Church actually looked like before the eyes of the world.”³⁶

“When the people of God come together to share their lives openly and freely, accepting each other with a kind of unconditional positive regard, there is a sort of social-spiritual ‘chemistry’ that emerges, and those who come together experience a delightful cohesion and sense of belonging.”³⁷

As exemplified by the leaders of the early church in the book of Acts, “experiencing life together” should be a key emphasis for church leaders in the twenty-first century. In an age where division and competition are rife, where racism and tribalism abound, lethargy and hypocrisy thrive, “life together” is an essential component for Christian leadership today.

One of the greatest weapons of the devil against the church is to cause disunity among members, and unfortunately, many times it begins with the church leaders. When leaders are divided among themselves and attack each other, the church members follow and factions form. This definitely affects the mission of the church in the community by misrepresenting the character of Christ and depriving the church of united strength and focus in outreach.

The solution to this is “life together,” first among the church leaders. This will also extend to the members, leading to a united church.³⁸ Church leaders need a community where they can enjoy each

other in a common life (fellowship), serve each other in common commitments (accountability), and commit to doing good with a common vision for mission (partnership).³⁹ In order to experience this, they need to commit to investing time (commitment), investing energy (intentionality), and risking vulnerability (authenticity).⁴⁰ These, among others, are essential factors for the “life together” experience needed by church leaders for personal and corporate progress of God's work in the church and in the world.⁴¹

Conclusion

The book of Acts “reminds us what it means to be the church: a Spirit-filled and Spirit-directed body of believers whose purpose is to cross every ethnic and geographical boundary to take the message of salvation to the ends of the earth.”⁴² Though the book of Acts was not written as a handbook on how to run the church and not everything that happens in Acts is meant to establish the pattern for the church today,⁴³ the unity of the church and the “life together” of its leaders are definitely worth emulating for contemporary church life and mission.

The book of Acts is clear that church unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, but it requires human effort (cf. Eph. 4:1–3). Leaders need to create an atmosphere for unity by being united and supporting one another in such a way that church members can follow and all experience life together. ❧

1 Without the book of Acts, there would be no clear information from the biblical records on the early Christian church apart from the letters of Paul. Therefore “in one sense, it is true to say that the book of Acts is the most important book in the New Testament.” William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh, UK: The Saint Andrew Press, 1955), xiii.

2 Acts 1:8 is the programmatic statement of the book of Acts. The gospel begins in and revolves around Jerusalem in Acts 1–7, then it expands to include Judea and Samaria in Acts 8 and 9. Finally, the Christian movement spreads across the Jewish barriers into Gentile territory (“the ends of the earth”) from Acts 10 to 28 until it gets to Rome, the capital city center of the Roman Empire. David A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 356.

- 3 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 114.
- 4 Much of the book of Acts is intended to serve as a model for the church today. "But the model is not so much in the specifics as in the overall picture." Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 114.
- 5 Alan J. Thompson, "Unity in Acts: Idealization or Reality?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (September 2008): 523.
- 6 The Greek terms describing the unity of the early church appear almost exclusively in the book of Acts among the writings of the New Testament. Bernhard Oestreich, "Preserving Church Unity: Lessons From the Jerusalem Church," *Ministry*, October 2011, 10; J. Lyle Story, "The Jerusalem Council: A Pivotal and Instructive Paradigm," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 46, 47.
- 7 Story, "Jerusalem Council," 47; Oestreich, "Preserving Church Unity," 10.
- 8 Kwabena Donkor, "New Testament House Churches: A Model for Today's Complex World?" *Ministry*, April 2008, 6. See also Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches*. (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Lifestyle, 2001), 92–94.
- 9 John Mallison, *The Small Group Leader: A Manual to Develop Vital Small Groups* (Adelaide, South Australia: Openbook Publishers, 1996), 6.
- 10 Marlon Robinson, "Evangelism in the Book of Acts: A Biblical Model for Churches" *Elders Digest* 18, no. 2 (April/June 2012), 24–26.
- 11 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 138, 139.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 37.
- 13 "The gathering for pursuit of common purpose and life together is affirmed in the New Testament. This gathering for common life is called *koinōnia*." Gareth Weldib Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 14.
- 14 Robert L. Gallagher, "From Doing to Being: A Missiological Interpretation of Acts 4:23-31," *Journal of Asian Mission* 5, no. 2 (2003): 173n54.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ikechukwu Michael Oluikpe, "Biblical Principles of Spiritual Leadership: The Early Church of Acts as a Case Study," *Journal of AIAS African Theological Association* 3 (2012): 28.
- 17 Ben Maxson, "Where Are the Spirit-Filled Leaders?" *Ministry*, January 1993, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1993/January/where-are-the-spirit-filled-leaders.
- 18 Oluikpe, "Biblical Principles of Spiritual Leadership," 30.
- 19 Lois Tverberg, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 75.
- 20 "Participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric's health and well-being. Clergy, like other human beings, need to be known and loved in a circle of face-to-face relationships with peers. . . .
"The need is to be honest about one's own life, to give and receive affection, to give and receive forgiveness, and to express one's personal faith and faith-struggles. In the long run, no one—clergy or lay—can live a healthy spiritual life without that kind of a life-context for his or her journey.
"Clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow." Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1993), 67.
In his list of eight things that can improve pastoral ministry and leadership, Ivan Blake suggests in the fifth point the need to establish local ministerial support groups that provide a nonthreatening environment for spiritual and professional growth, including peer accountability. See Ivan Charles Blake, "Pastor for Life," *Ministry*, July/August 2010, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/07-august/pastor-for-life.
See also Benjamin D. Schoun, *Helping Pastors Cope: A Psycho-Social Support System for Pastors* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 174–176, 178–181; Derek Morris, "Building a Support Network," *Ministry*, May 2015, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2015/05/building-a-support-network.
- 21 Jackie Bishop, "Grace and the Twelve-Step Group," in *We Can Keep Them in the Church: How to Love Our Children so They Won't Leave: Success Stories and Ideas That Really Work*, comp. Myrna Tetz and Gary L. Hopkins (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2004), 206–213.
- 22 Bernie Anderson, *Breaking the Silence: A Pastor Goes Public About His Battle With Pornography* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House Publishing, 2007), 134; Dwight Nelson, *The Chosen* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2012), 329.
- 23 Matthew D. Kim, "Creating Healthy Habits," *Ministry*, September 2016, 12.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Donkor, "New Testament House Churches," 6.
- 26 "Virtually the entire second half of Acts is dedicated to Paul's catalytic role in the advance of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire." Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 56.
- 27 George W. Murray, "Paul's Corporate Evangelism in the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (April–June 1998), 190.
- 28 Murray, "Paul's Corporate Evangelism," 191–193.
- 29 Schoun, *Helping Pastors Cope*, 181–183.
- 30 "So give your young people opportunities for real leadership and not just token involvement. Nominating committees are notorious for wanting to 'get the young people involved' by putting one or two on every committee. In this way members appease their consciences by saying that their kids are involved without really releasing to them the possibility of changing something. What if we monitored our young people's growth, helped them understand their spiritual gifts and special abilities, and then gradually mentored them into the leadership of some ministry? Or better, what if we helped them develop a new ministry that is close to their heart?" Ryan J. Bell, "The Whole Body of Christ" in *We Can Keep Them in the Church*, ed. Myrna Tetz and Gary Hopkins, 39.
- 31 Schoun, *Helping Pastors Cope*, 166–168.
- 32 Jan Paulsen, "The Openness That Lies Before Us," *Ministry*, September 2006, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2006/September/the-openness-that-lies-before-us.html. See also Tom Grove, "Developing Spiritual Leaders Like Jesus," *Ministry*, December 2015, 14–16.
- 33 The close association and interaction between the youth and the older members of the church congregation can be described as intergenerational relationships. As youth transition from the teenage years to the young adult years, they need committed mentoring relationships with older members more than they do with their peers. Contemporary church leaders should actively initiate, facilitate, establish, and encourage more relationships that bridge the generation gap in the church. "Bridging the gap" together plays a major role in keeping the youth from leaving the church. Clint Jenkin and Allan A. Martin, "Engaging Adventist Millennials: A Church That Embraces Relationships," *Ministry*, May 2014, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2014/05/engaging-adventist-millennials.
- 34 After his license for teaching at Berlin University was taken from him, Dietrich Bonhoeffer served as pastor, administrator, and teacher at an underground seminary in Finkenwalde, Germany (now located in Poland), from 1935 to 1937. Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2013), 23, 24; Dale Ziemer, *Life Together: A Study Guide* (July 2006), 9.
- 35 Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 184.
- 36 "Life Together," *Wikipedia*, last modified January 21, 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_Together.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Bonhoeffer's "life together" experiment with seminarians was built on the premise that the spiritual life of the pastor was not different from that of church members. Therefore if the pastors as church leaders will faithfully nurture their faith life through the regular practice of Bible study, prayer, and worship, they will be an example to the church members and have authentic experiences of spiritual growth to share with their congregations in the shared life of discipleship. Ziemer, *Life Together*, 9.
- 39 Richard Lamb, *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 202.
- 40 Ibid., 208, 209.
- 41 Some other key factors essential for community include mutuality, sympathy, mercy, honesty, humility, courtesy, confidentiality, and frequency. These are mentioned and described in chapters 18 ("Experiencing Life Together") and 19 ("Cultivating Community") of Rick Warren's book *The Purpose-Driven Life*.
- 42 Mark Strauss, "Acts" in *IVP Introduction to the Bible: Story, Themes and Interpretation*, ed. Philip Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 213.
- 43 Strauss, "Acts," 212; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 114.

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United in message, mission, and organization

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus emphasized the divine nature of the church. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the divine Son of God, our Savior replied, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18, KJV). The church cannot be classed as some human, bureaucratic, manmade institution; it is a divine movement raised up by God. Its purpose is to nurture and foster the spiritual life of each believer and equip each one to use their gifts in the proclamation of the gospel in a life of self-sacrificial service to others. The church is the body of Christ, the flock of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, a holy temple, and the remnant of His seed. It is “God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”¹

Church organization in a growing church

With the ordination of the twelve disciples, Christ laid the foundation for the organization of His church. The ordination of the twelve was a crucial step in Christ’s plan for accomplishing heaven’s mission to the world.

The church’s organizational structure continued to grow and more fully develop in the early decades of Christianity. In the book of Acts, church

organization is paramount to the unity of the church. Without organization, the church’s message could easily have been hijacked by false teachers and its mission sidetracked. Without church organization, the biblical message of truth, based on the Word of God, would have been distorted and the mission of Christ diluted.

Let us review church organization in the book of Acts and notice its function in nurturing a believer’s spiritual life, preserving the church’s message, and fostering its mission.

In Acts 1, a united group of 120 believers met in the upper room to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–15). They were united in their love for Christ. They were committed to His teachings. Their hearts beat with an overwhelming desire to share His love with everyone they met. The record states that they were in “one accord,” seeking God for the outpouring of His Spirit and power to reach the world (Acts 1:8, 14, 15).

A potential problem arose at the end of the chapter. The position vacated by Judas’s betrayal and death needed to be filled. The early church considered two of their number as possibilities. This could have been problematic. These New Testament believers could easily have taken sides with hardened positions on the name they thought was God’s will for the position. Instead

they mutually agreed to seek God’s wisdom on the matter (v. 24).

The fact that they chose two when they were going to select only one indicates that there were differences of opinion among the group. This experience of selecting one over the other could have easily divided the church, but they agreed on a process of discerning God’s will and also agreed to accept the outcome. They were willing to surrender their own convictions to the revealed will of Christ through the selection process. Even in its embryonic stage, the church was learning lessons of submission for the sake of unity and mission.

In Acts 2, 3,000 people were baptized on the day of Pentecost. They united with the church and continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine, fellowship, and prayers (vv. 41, 42). Those baptized became part of an organized movement. They were taught the “apostles’ doctrine,” enjoyed the believers’ “fellowship,” and joined in the congregation’s “prayers.”

According to Acts 6, as the church grew it faced new challenges. The Greek widows were not receiving their fair proportion in the food distribution. Once again there was open discussion and a mutually agreed upon solution. A representative group of deacons was chosen. These deacons ministered to the needy Greek widows and maintained the unity of the church in a time

of crisis. They were chosen because they had “good reputations,” were “full of the Holy Spirit,” and were guided by divine “wisdom” (Acts 6:3, NKJV). At each step of its development, the early church refined its organizational structure for the sake of nurturing the growing church, safeguarding its teachings, and fostering its mission.

Acts 9 records the conversion of the apostle Paul. Immediately upon Paul’s Damascus road conversion, the Holy Spirit led him to Ananias, a representative of the church. The Spirit did not, at this juncture, lead him into the wilderness to spend time alone; neither did the Spirit send him out immediately on

millennia and was part of their identity and deeply imbedded in their culture. Consequently, Paul and Barnabas had “no small dissension and dispute” with these Jewish leaders (Acts 15:2, NKJV). They mutually agreed to refer the matter to the Jerusalem Council. The Jerusalem Council had the authority to make a decision that not everyone was pleased with but that the majority of the church accepted. Its decision was accepted by the church at large and brought unity to the body of believers.

Unity came as individuals surrendered to the authority of the larger body. My point here is not the decision that was made but the process by which this

of the book of Acts was spent discussing the varying sides of a debate over circumcision for Gentile converts to Christianity. Imagine the tragic impact on the growth of the church that an endless debate on this matter would have had. Wisely, the New Testament Church accepted the decision of the larger body, the general council of the church, and passionately moved on with mission.

In Acts 20:17–32, the apostle Paul instructed the elders of the church on both building up and safeguarding the flock of God. He counseled them that one of the functions of church organization and an ordained ministry was to

At each step of its development, the early church refined its organizational structure for the sake of nurturing the growing church, safeguarding its teachings, and fostering its mission.

an evangelistic mission. He was brought into contact with a representative of God’s church. One reason for this was to illustrate the importance of church organization and authority. In the book *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White puts it this way: “Thus Jesus gave sanction to the authority of His organized church and placed Saul in connection with His appointed agencies on earth.”² Paul was nurtured in his faith by Ananias and further taught about God’s plan of church organization.

In Acts 15, the New Testament church faced a critical juncture in its development. A conflict arose over how Gentile believers, who now had accepted Christ, should relate to Jewish customs, especially circumcision. This was no little matter. Circumcision had been practiced by Jewish believers for

decision was made. A complex issue was brought from the local church to a larger administrative body. Both the leadership and membership agreed to accept the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

A very difficult issue that was troubling Christianity was settled by the willingness of both sides to accept the decision of the Jerusalem Council. People had convictions on both sides of this question, but most were willing to accept the decision of a representative body of leaders for the sake of God’s mission.

This general meeting of believers with delegates from varying churches brought unity to the body of Christ, and once again they focused on what was the most important thing on God’s heart—saving lost people. Think of what could have happened if the rest

protect the church from false teachers and to keep it focused on mission. Once again, he emphasized the importance of church organization and its relation to both building the faith of the church members and protecting them from false teachers.

Paul’s letters to Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae and his counsel to Timothy and Titus indicate a cohesive organizational structure with elders, deacons, and deaconesses. A financial sharing plan emerged as Paul took an offering for the suffering believers in Jerusalem and encouraged that “those who preach the gospel shall live from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14, NKJV).

When we differ

There will be some issues where honest people see things differently.

In these instances the gospel invites us to treat one another with respect and dignity. But this one thing is clear: the gospel also demands that we place a high priority on the unity of the church and respect the decisions of the corporate body. The unity of the church comes near to the heart of God, and the organization of the church represents a central truth in the New Testament.

Without church organization, the church would quickly develop a congregational system of theological pluralism, weakened mission, and organizational chaos. To disregard or minimize the corporate decisions of representatives of the world church creates disunity and pains the heart of God. The New Testament church was unified in its commitment to Christ, His present truth, His prophetic message, His mission to the world,

and His divinely established church organization.

In the development of church policy, faithfulness to the unchanging truths of Scripture and a commitment to mission guide the church. The policies of the church never are a substitute for the eternal, unchanging truths of Scripture. They are mutual agreements of trust by representative leadership in harmony with Scripture to facilitate mission. They are to be neither exalted above Scripture nor treated lightly, or else either a hierarchical lifeless structure on the one hand or organizational chaos on the other will develop.

The unity of the church is maintained when our commitment to Christ is foremost, when we are united in the truths of Scripture through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, when we place priority on mission and are moved by

what moves the heart of God, and when the mutual agreements or policies of the church serve as the foundation for a system of church governance and authority. To neglect any one of these four aspects of unity would be to invite disunity, a dismantling of biblical truth, and a distortion of mission. To downplay church organization or authority is to leave the church in disarray and fundamentally erode its mission.

May we be filled with the Spirit of Christ, proclaiming the message of Christ, fulfilling the mission of Christ, and upholding the church of Christ. Then and only then will the church arise to fulfill its destiny and reveal the glory of God to a waiting world and watching universe. 

- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 9.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 122.

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The Practice of Listening

—Part 2

Pastors are proficient at many things. They are good teachers of the Word. They have been trained to expound the truths of the Scriptures so that their hearers can be challenged, rebuked, encouraged, and enriched. Most preach powerful messages from the pulpit that give evidence not only of thorough exegesis but also of hours spent to ensure the presentation has become interesting and creative and can still be remembered after the Sabbath lunch haystacks are consumed. Pastors are often very good at administration; they can conceptualize problems concisely and oversee the church finances as if it were their own family budget. Ministers are also skilled in making people feel comfortable through their friendly, often chatty, interpersonal style. Pastors also excel at giving advice: wisdom that comes out of years of personal and professional experience is dispensed with ease. However, anecdotal evidence aplenty would suggest that something pastors are not good at includes the spiritual discipline of listening.

Are you listening, really listening?

Listening, as the term will be used in this article, refers to an intentional, focused activity that gives attention to both explicit and implicit messages. It involves not just hearing content but

listening for feelings and tapping into key process issues. Of course, it also includes picking up messages relayed by the nonverbal indicators, such as body language and tone.

Most of those involved in ministry would like to believe that they are good at listening. Good listeners are applauded and sought out for comfort and solace. How can we know whether we are listening or not? The following checklist may help:

- How often do I interrupt the person speaking to me before allowing him or her finish their story?
- Do I change the topic from what the person has told me to what happened to me (implying that the other should not feel so bad because of what happened to me or that they should do what I did because that worked for me)?
- Am I quick to offer solutions, even before the person has finished their story?
- Do I find myself framing an answer in my mind while the other is still speaking?
- Do people who speak to me regularly check in to ask whether I am still listening, or do they ask, “Am I making sense?” or do they say things such as “I am probably boring you”?
- Do I often find myself wishing the person would hurry up and finish their story?

- Do I find my mind wandering, or do I get bored?

It might be worth asking a trusted other (spouse, mentor, associate, or elder) to rate one’s listening skills. If they hesitate, it might be a sign that they are not sure you will hear!

Listening is about being present

Frequently in human communication we are not listening but simply waiting for a gap in the conversation to say our piece, which we compose while the other speaks. The root cause of this unhelpful behavior is usually that we are unconsciously more interested in ourselves than in the person we are supposed to be helping. It may well come from our need to rescue or fix the other person.

But healing power exists in quiet listening, forgetting our agenda, and hearing the other person’s needs. Job’s infamous comforters did well for the first three days with Job. While they listened silently, there was no rebuke from either Job or the Almighty. The problem arose only when they began to speak, seeking vainly to explain pain and suffering. They only alienated Job in his suffering. They were so busy talking that they failed to understand their ignorance and helplessness. At the end of the story, God expresses His anger at Job’s three friends for their misrepresentation of

His character, though their advice largely reflected their society's understanding of God and how He operates in the universe. However, it lacked the empathic heart of God.

One of the foundational concepts of pastoral care is developing the art of "being present." Through a pastor's very intentional listening, people in need feel accepted, validated, and understood. Recent research has shown that what seems significantly most effective in helping the hurting is not the particular seemingly clever interventions that counselors use but rather a collection of common factors that center on the relationship formed between client and therapist.¹ The creation and nurturing of this relationship occurs, at least in part, through listening, taking the person in front of us seriously, and giving empathy.² From the current research, we can safely say that healing occurs not so much as the result of what we do or say but as the result of an empathic, accepting relationship, built through genuine, caring presence.

What makes listening so hard?

The consequences of listening with no agenda other than to be present are most evident in our interpersonal relationships. Arguments usually happen when both sides are talking and neither side listens but are often diffused when those involved are as keen to understand the other as they are to impose their opinion. While many of us are familiar with the basic communication skills (for example: focus on the speaker, reflect back what you think you have heard, make empathic statements, and do not judge), the real issue seems to be our inability to practice these. We can acknowledge the biblical foundation of the spiritual discipline of listening and intellectually assent to its importance; however, the practice of this discipline seems far from easy.

As well as our innate tendency toward selfishness, there are also powerful psychological processes at play that mess with our ability to be present and listen effectively. John Gottman,

famous for his research on what makes marriages last, popularized the term *flooding*, referring to the process of our rational thinking being overrun by a veritable cocktail of chemicals designed to trigger a "flight or fight" response.³ Once flooding occurs, we find it almost impossible to listen, be present, or be empathic because the alarm has been sounded. Daniel Goleman, who popularized the construct of emotional intelligence, speaks of "emotional hijacking." He points out that the neural pathway from the thalamus (the relay center that receives signals from our senses) to the amygdala is quicker than the pathway from the relay center to the neocortex, the center of refined, critical thinking. Because the amygdala stores emotional memory and underpins our emotional responses, we often react to triggers of this neural alarm system rather than to the input from our senses being processed through the rational neocortex.

Once the primitive defense system kicks in, we become flooded, and our urge for flight or fight becomes irresistible.⁴ As listening is about being present for the other, we need to first soothe our own reaction (rather than blame others for how we are feeling) and then endeavor to return, using the listening skills that we have developed. The ability to be able to do this hinges on our own self-awareness; if we are in tune with our own emotional reactions (and the physiological manifestations of the emotional arousal), then we can become skilled at emotional containment.

Another powerful process that can make it difficult or even impossible to be present for another comes as a phenomena known in psychology as *transference*. Transference occurs when a current situation triggers memories of a previous experience or series of experiences with significant persons from our childhood. These memories are then transferred to the current person, who then can be mistakenly seen as causing the current emotional reaction that we are experiencing. We will then react to the person in our presence as if he or she were the person who caused

us hurt during our upbringing. As these reactions are largely unconscious, we are not aware of why we have reacted in certain ways to a particular person. Transference reactions, if not explored and brought to the surface, can be powerful saboteurs of a listening, accepting presence.

As stated in our previous article,⁵ the Scriptures admonish us to listen to ourselves by being aware of our own spiritual and emotional needs. When I take the time to increase my self-awareness, I become more aware of the signals of emotional flooding, triggering, or a transference reaction. It is simultaneously true that God exists as grand and omnipotent as well as personal and indwelling (Rom. 8:11). In a digital age, where our lives are constantly peppered with messages about who we should appear to be, what we must own, and what we must strive to become, the advice of the psalmist appears more relevant than ever: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, NIV). In the stillness God can guide us in His ways.

When I am in tune with my own experiences I am better able to hear the experiences of others. I am better able to know when an emotional hijacking has taken place and ask for God's healing and calming presence to help me empathize with the pain of others.

A few suggestions on how to listen

Here are a few very practical suggestions as to how we might listen to ourselves, others, and God:

- Make a conscious effort to acknowledge your emotions as you experience them, rather than seeing them as an interruption or nuisance to your list of activities. Our emotions, while not always telling the whole story, tell an important story. We ignore our feelings at our own peril.
- Make a practice of spending some time alone each week. In solitude, we turn down the noise of our lives and can hear the stirrings of our own disquiet.

- Become intentional about listening to others. Give them 100 percent of your attention and put everything else in your mind on hold. Occasionally paraphrase back to the speaker, to make sure you listened well. Also ask yourself what else the person might be communicating that you find implicit rather than explicit.
- Be careful not to tell your story until you have heard the other's story. Or better still, leave your story for another time, so that you can focus on the person who seeks your listening ear.
- As God has many languages and numerous voices, seek to hear with ears wide open, so that you may not miss the presence of God in our broken world. Do not limit the ways that God may speak to us. "Our

heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing."⁶

- Check your prayers—how many of your prayers are requests and in how many are you reaching out with open ears and receptive heart, ready to listen to your Father? Try praying and only giving thanks to God for all that you can think of to be thankful for.

So, why practice the spiritual discipline of listening? Because that is what God did when He sent Jesus.⁷ Because it works. Because as we first listen to God through His Word,⁸ our well-being improves. Because our relationships with others improve. Because it is a great alternative to running away from that which we do not want to deal with, either in ourselves or in others. Because God asks us to listen. 🙏

- 1 Barry L. Duncan, Scott D. Miller, Bruce E. Wampold, and Mark A. Hubble, eds., *The Heart and Soul of Change: Delivering What Works in Therapy* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010).
- 2 John C. Norcross, ed., *Psychotherapy Relationships That Work: Evidence-Based Responsiveness*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 3 John Gottman, *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).
- 4 Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 1996), 17.
- 5 See part 1 of this series, "The Most Overlooked Spiritual Discipline—Part 1," in the February 2017 issue of *Ministry*, 6–9.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 330.
- 7 John 11:41b, 42a "Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me' (NIV).
- 8 Ellen G. White, "The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears." *My Life Today* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 283.

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The church: What is it? How does it work?

While president of the South Pacific Division, I was visiting a church on a Sabbath morning. I thoroughly enjoyed my time of worship, study, and fellowship. We had an excellent Sabbath School lesson. The music was special, and the involvement of people from the various age groups and ethnic backgrounds within the congregation was a foretaste of heaven. I was greatly blessed, and encouraged, by my brief time there.

But something occurred after the Sabbath morning services that has caused me unease since. The pastor and I were chatting over lunch. I commented on how much I had been blessed by my visit. I had been warmly welcomed at the door; several people, young and old, had chatted with me about a range of topics. One person even lent me their Sabbath School lesson when they discovered that, due to my travels, I had not been able to get one for myself as yet (it was the beginning of a new quarter). I noted that the church was comfortably full.

“But not as full as usual,” the pastor replied.

“Is that so,” I responded. “Was something else happening?”

The pastor then hesitated. His head went down just a little as he said, “No, nothing else. It’s just that we have some members who stayed away today because the division president was the

preacher, and on principle, they do not want to listen to anyone who is an administrator in the church.”

Reality check

Even as I pen these words, I am deeply saddened. I did not enquire and do not know who these church members were. I do not know whether they know me personally or not, and thus I am not aware of anything of a personal nature that would have caused such a reaction. I did get the impression, however, that they may well have had a problem with an administrative decision that had been made somewhere in the organizational structure of the church, and that the problem had loomed so large in their minds that their absence was a response to whatever decision it was.

We all experience occasions when we find ourselves in disagreement with decisions that have been made. This happens in the context of our employment, family, and church—whenever there is an established relationship between two or more people. We do not live in a perfect world. We are not perfect, and because we make up the church, it is not perfect either. But we do serve a perfectly gracious God who can transform our imperfect decisions into instruments of the outworking of His will and of His purpose as we together commit ourselves and our decision-making processes to Him. Maturity and Christian grace demand

that we live together as the sons and daughters of God. I am not advocating an abrogation of accountability, lack of integrity, or an attitude of slackness. I am simply saying that though we will not always agree with every decision, we can live together in harmony nonetheless.

Over the years I have discovered, both in my own reactions and in those of others, that one reason why we may not agree with a particular decision is that we do not understand the context in which it had to be made. We do not necessarily have all the information available to those who had to make the decision. We all see reality through our own perspective; our own perspective is, therefore, reality for us. The complete picture may be very different.

The purpose of the church

This is certainly the case with the church and the decisions that are made in the day-to-day operations of the church. We find it really a challenging task to grasp the reality of our church currently and understand its complexity. Yes, salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is simple, a personal transaction between the believer and Christ. But as soon as that vertical transaction is experienced by more than one person and a horizontal connection forms, you have the beginnings of a reality that Christ called the “church.” By virtue of

His saving actions, He Himself founded it. There is no such thing as one who believes in Christ who is not compelled to enter into a relationship with other believers. Such, in its most elementary form, we call “the church.”

Of course, the church is far more than this, and I think that one of the things we need to do, as Seventh-day Adventists, seems to be to have a good hard look at the purpose and nature of the church. I fear that we are in danger of losing our identity as a prophetic movement; that is, if we do not reexamine what makes us who we are and reacquaint ourselves with the values, principles, and doctrines

a series of articles describing various aspects of the operation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific Division. Each article was written by a person who had particular expertise and acquaintance with the specific topic.

The articles described aspects of the church that are not necessarily recognized or understood by most church members. The articles discussed, for example, the fact that the church not only provides an opportunity to worship each Sabbath but also has an extensive network of preschools, primary and secondary schools, aged care facilities, hospitals, colleges, and universities; the Adventist Media

and human resources in meeting the demands of society and government in order to ensure compliance with requirements that did not exist just a few years ago. I am thinking, for example, of occupational health and safety, risk management, privacy, and child protection, as well as the requirement for highly developed information technology resources, just to name a few things that we as a church, by law, must follow.

Mission

In the midst of this increasing complexity, the church is called to maintain its commitment to its mission. In this,

We all see reality through our own perspective; our own perspective is, therefore, reality for us.

that have been hard won by those who preceded us.

The church is, after all, a theological entity, called into existence and defined by theological categories that render it distinct from other entities. But, at the same time, the church has become a sociological entity and social in the sense that it is made up of people—people in relationship. These relationships in the church are experienced in a whole range of circumstances. The more people and circumstances involved, the greater the need for the relationships to be regulated or ordered—thus, the need for church organization, church organization that enables the church to fulfill its mission, despite a whole range of local and global circumstances.

Explaining the system

To assist us in understanding how the church operates and, thus, makes decisions, the South Pacific Division in 2009 published in its division magazine

Network; and the Sanitarium Health Food Company. We discussed the role of the incorporated entities, which hold the real and intellectual property of the church and protect the use of its name and its many trademarks—all of which is necessary for the operation of the church. Articles described the necessity, function, and operation of constituency meetings, selection and nominating committees, as well as the role of the auditors, accounting systems, and supporting institutions.

The church and its operations do not happen by chance but by a great deal of hard work and the dedication and commitment of church members who support it with both their financial resources and their countless hours of volunteering. Further, the church must operate in an increasingly complex legal, legislative, and compliance environment. In recent years, in every country of the South Pacific, for example, the church has been compelled to deploy financial

we have no alternative. We are not called into existence merely to maintain ourselves. We are called to fulfill the commission of Jesus, Himself, when He said: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded.” And then He added: “And behold, I am with you always—to the very end of the world” (Matt. 28:19, 20).*

Our privilege is to take Jesus at His word and in everything we do accept His promise of presence and power. With the increasing complexity of the world, our responsibility includes being the people of God and ensuring that the church is where God wants it to be—even if, at times, as I have painfully learned, there will be members who will not necessarily like some of the decisions made in our attempt to do the work we believe God has called us to do. 

* Author's translation.

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The blessing of spiritual mentoring

Spiritual mentoring is built into the fabric of the Bible.¹ The Word of God urges parents to “start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).² Such instruction is repeated throughout Scripture. Moses, for example, commanded the children of Israel: “Teach them [Moses’ words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 11:19). Says the psalmist: “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born; who should arise and tell them to their children” (Ps. 78:5, 6, KJV).

The same emphasis is repeated in the New Testament. Jesus focused a major portion of His ministry on mentoring the disciples spiritually and in ministry. Paul repeatedly talks about the importance of sharing our lives, knowledge, and experience with others. “So we cared for you,” he writes to the Thessalonian church. “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess. 2:8). He also extended mentoring to include modeling by urging the imitation of the faith of others.

Moreover, Paul wanted to create a culture of mentoring in the church so the young could learn from the example, experience, wisdom, and fortitude of the old. This should be done through intentional training and teaching. Thus in Titus, he admonishes older men to mentor younger men and older women to do the same for younger women in character, conduct, and self-control. “Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

“Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

“Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:2–8).

Paul’s core argument for spiritual mentoring includes that to be effective mentors, our teaching must be backed by the witness of our own lives. We are

to demonstrate all that we teach. What is laid upon us is the tremendous task of not only talking to men about Christ but showing Him to them through our lives. The experienced and exemplary Christian creates a responsible atmosphere for spiritual growth, sharing life experiences and skills and sacrificing time and energy.

As part of the mentoring process, Christians are to take every opportunity to teach younger people about God. This can be done by praying with them and for them, by bringing them under the means of grace, by instructing them in the principles of the Bible, teaching them their duty to God and man, and setting for them good examples of a holy life. This should be done by taking into consideration their age and capacity for understanding.³

Mentoring by spiritual mothers

A friend of mine, Ashley, shared her mentoring experiences with me recently. As a young adult, she moved far from family to another state to start her career. A mature woman from the local church took Ashley and another young woman under her wing, and the three ladies formed a mentoring relationship. The mentor and the two young ladies met every Thursday to pray and discuss their lives. Their mentor would take the time to intentionally listen to, teach, and guide these young women.

Along with these acts, the mentor would invite the young ladies over for Sabbath lunch, bike rides, shopping, and other social activities.

What Ashley learned most from her spiritual mentor was how to hear God's voice, especially in decision-making. When she was struggling to make a major decision as to whether to leave her comfortable job and go back full-time for her master's studies, she weighed the pros and cons with her mentor over a period of months. Finally, it became clear what to do when her mentor posed the question, "What does God want you to do?" Ashley knew she had been ignoring God's Voice, and right then she made the decision to go back to school.

After moving back to school, Ashley found another spiritual mentor in a woman, with whose family she ended up living. By living with her mentor,

women shared with my friend: "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts" (Ps. 145:4). These mentors were to Ashley as Naomi was to Ruth. Though we do not know the details about what Naomi did for Ruth, we know that Naomi made God attractive by example and teaching and as a result Ruth gave up everything, including her family, her heritage, and her homeland, to follow Naomi and her God (Ruth 1:16). Likewise, Ashley's spiritual moms led her to become a more mature Christian through their examples and teaching during this time in her life.

Mentoring by spiritual dads

Michael grew up without a father and with a disengaged mother. As a teenager, Michael was invited to church by a friend. The friend's family picked

phone. John, the "adopted" dad, was persistent, though, and would not give up on Michael. He would call Michael every week and show up at his house on Sabbath mornings, telling Michael he wanted him to come and spend the Sabbath with them because he was part of their family.

The family consistently prayed for Michael during that two-year period of rebellion that included experimenting with drugs and gangs. Eventually, Michael came back to the church. He credits the "father's" perseverance and the family's love and acceptance as the reasons he is in the church today.

If the "adopted" dad never gave up on Michael, how much more does our God, the Father, never give up on us. God sought Adam and Eve hiding in the garden, and today He continues to seek us. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). His love and faithfulness toward us endure forever (Ps. 100:5).

Wholistic spiritual mentoring

Spiritual mentoring, in order to be totally effective, must be wholistic. The following six steps will help us discover the biblical way of wholistic spiritual mentoring:

1. *Pray for them.* Jesus prays and intercedes for us (John 17:20; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). The apostle Paul prayed for his mentees (1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 3:10–13). The common denominator of the spiritual mentoring stories includes prayer. Michael came to the Lord because his "adopted" family interceded on his behalf daily. Ashley grew spiritually through the prayers of her "spiritual moms."
2. *Share your life with them.* Jesus spent three and a half years with His disciples. During that time, He taught them how to pray, how to minister, and how to live the kingdom life. Paul was intentional about

For Christians, mentoring becomes rooted in the biblical principle of discipleship. It comes about by mutual edification.

Ashley could see how her mentor lived by example. This mother took time to walk with Ashley each evening, discussing spiritual matters and the happenings of the day.

Both mentors are highly respected by Ashley. She loves them deeply and considers them both adopted moms, as they consider her an adopted daughter. She takes their advice seriously and is grateful for their wisdom. They have shaped Ashley into the woman she is today as she grows in her spiritual walk with God. The mentors' time commitment impacts Ashley's eternity.

The psalmist calls us to share God with the next generation just as these

him up and took him to church. On the way back, the friend's father, John, could tell that the young man did not want to go home, so he invited him over for lunch and a Sabbath afternoon walk in the park. This became a weekly routine—Michael joining the family for church, lunch, afternoon activities, and evening worship. He became "adopted" by this family. During this time, Michael learned how to read the Bible and pray, worship and share testimonies as a family, and enjoy God's nature.

As the years went by, Michael drifted away from the church. Over a two-year period, he would come up with excuses as to why he could not go to church and would sometimes just not answer his

sharing his life and time with all of his mentees (1 Thess. 2:8). In all the mentoring experiences, we note a pattern that mentoring included sharing life experiences, opening up homes, and spending time together.

3. *Be available in their time of need.* Jesus was consistently there for people in their time of need. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, and calmed the storms. Ashley repeatedly told me that her mentors were always available to her in times of need. Recently, after Ashley went through a breakup, one of her mentors took time to listen, comfort, and give advice—something Ashley desperately needed.
4. *Confront negative behaviors.* Jesus confronted the self-centered and negative attitude of James and John when they placed before Him

their concern for being the first in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35–45). Confronting people in love is always constructive. Hopefully, it will lead to a better life like it did in the case of the Zebedee brothers and as it did with Michael. When Michael started to fall into drugs and gangs, his “adopted” dad confronted him and showed him that there is no future going that direction but that the better future is with Jesus. He cited Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” This confrontation, done in love, brought Michael back to the Lord and to the church.

5. *Model spiritual life and disciplines.* Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, worship, do ministry, and live

the Christian life. Michael learned the joy of the Christian life from his “adopted” family, which was a better life than the life he was living in his own home. He also learned the importance of going to church and of family worship, which now he leads for his own family.

6. *Help your mentee shift paradigms.* Jesus confronted His disciples with a radical paradigm shift in their thinking when He called them to be fishers of men rather than fishermen (Matt. 4:19). This radical shift that Jesus brings is all throughout the Gospels. He brought people from darkness to life, from preoccupation with this world to preoccupation with God, from being obsessed with money to being obsessed with Him. Ashley was encouraged to look at God’s perspective when making

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important decisions in her life. Michael's paradigm shifted when his "adopted" dad told him God had a better plan for his life.

Remember, as the mentor, you are there to set the pace in spiritual and personal matters, to lead them to look to God as the problem solver: the One who meets all their needs.

The nature of spiritual mentoring

Establishing a relationship with another person is always a two-way process, a partnership. Expectations must be defined as to what the mentoring relationship will include. These expectations may be a desire to know how to hear God's voice, to receive help with painful problems, to find answers to

spiritual questions, and to acquire new ideas for ministry. You will both make decisions about when and where to meet each week, which day and hour, and who may be included. We find it best to set starting and ending points. For some, three months may be the ideal time for a healthy mentoring relationship. Celebrate the close of the mentoring relationship with some special event, such as going out to dinner. Then, if both desire to continue for another three months, you may do so. At that time, spell out in detail the new expectations you have for each other, and stick to them.

A spiritual mentor should reflect the character, love, and grace of Jesus.⁴ As an experienced mentor, Paul was very conscientious of imitating Christ because he knew his disciples would imitate him. "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). A mentor lives as an example for the mentee to follow. Therefore, the mentor should pay very close attention to his spiritual walk with God, allowing the Holy Spirit to shape him, making him more and more like Jesus (see 1 Cor. 4:6).

Paul also tells the second generation of mentors to be spiritual examples to their mentees. He told Timothy: "Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). People are always looking at us; therefore, we need to be spiritual examples for them.

When I was in college, one professor took a special spiritual interest in me. He prayed for me on a regular basis, taught me how to pray, instructed me on how to read the Bible, and showed me how to worship. But what I admired most was that he lived the way Jesus would live. He taught me the value of representing Christ in everything. I was often inspired to imitate his example to become more and more like Jesus. He was an exemplary mentor. Today, I aspire to be like him and do the same for my students. "It is heart missionaries that are needed. He whose heart God touches is filled with a great longing for those who have never known His love. Their condition impresses him with a sense of personal woe. Taking his life in

Mentoring: The biblical command

Deuteronomy 6:7: "Impress them [the commandments] on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Deuteronomy 11:19: "Teach them [Moses' words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Psalms 71:18: "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come."

Proverbs 1:5: "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance."

Proverbs 9:9: "Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning."

Proverbs 13:20: "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

Proverbs 22:6: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Ecclesiastes 4:10: "If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."

Matthew 28:19, 20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Philippians 4:9: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

1 Thessalonians 2:8: "So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."

2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

Titus 2:3, 4: "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children."

Hebrews 13:7: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

his hand, he goes forth, a heaven-sent, heaven-inspired messenger, to do a work in which angels can co-operate.”⁵

Conclusion

Mentoring is a process of learning and maturing. It takes time and involves various kinds of relationships and accountability. Mentoring is not define the latest fad or buzzword. For

Christians, mentoring becomes rooted in the biblical principle of discipleship. It comes about by mutual edification. Through the time you spend together, you should experience emotional and relational growth, as well as personal and spiritual nurturing. 

1 For 15 significant biblical references to mentoring, see sidebar.

2 Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

3 John Gill's Exposition of the Bible, www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/proverbs-22-6.html.

4 For more detailed analysis, see N. Ashok Kumar, "Mentoring: Training the Second Line of Leadership," *Ministry*, March 2013, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/03/mentoring-training-the-second-line-of-leadership.

5 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 150.

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LETTERS

Continued from page 4



garden in the cool of the day," which we understand to be physical and habitual walking.

In the New Testament, a cluster of texts make clearer the contrast between physical exertions and spiritual striving than is immediately detectable in 2 Peter 1:1–8. Texts showing the superiority of the spiritual over the physical, or directly contrasting these two elements, include the following: Hebrews 12:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8; Galatians 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:3–5; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; and 1 Timothy 4:8–10. Of these texts, two are particularly relevant to the topic under focus:

1. *1 Corinthians 9:24–27*. In this passage, although it is the milder opposing conjunction, *de*, that separates contrasting elements, yet *de* ("but," "and") is used to separate polar concepts. These polar concepts are winning and implied losing (v. 24); "temperate" and implied intemperate (v. 25); and "perishable" and "imperishable" crowns (v. 25). The repetitive usage of *de*, in 1 Corinthians 9:24, 25, constitutes a rhetorical build-up to the usage of the adversative conjunction, *alla* ("but"), in verse 27, where, as the first word of the verse, *alla* contrasts the spiritual athleticism of verse 27 with "uncertainty" and beating "the air" in verse 26.

2. *1 Timothy 4:8–10*. In this passage, especially in verse 8, the underlining thought is that "bodily exercise profits

a little, but godliness is profitable for all things." Again, it is the milder opposing conjunction, *de*, that is used, indicating that contrast of elements and contextual indicators obviate the necessity of usage of the adversative conjunction, *alla*.

Perhaps the incorporation of Pauline and other biblical perspectives, briefly presented above, could enhance Thompson's worthy goal of linking physical and spiritual excellence in the context of spiritual growth and witnessing. The Gospel's frank presentation of the fact that Peter was outrun by John in the race to the empty tomb, but then went further (John 20:1–10, esp. v. 4), appears to indicate that Peter espoused the higher value of spiritual excellence over athletic capability.

—John Tumpkin, pastor, South Africa

Christ's Nature

I have waited to bring this to your notice, but you have asked for what we think of articles in the good magazine.

Dr. Rodriguez's very fine article on Christ's Incarnation ("Christ's Incarnation: Testing the Prophets," October 2016) is very well written, but when he discusses Christ's human nature, or "Purpose of the Incarnation," I find his discussion sadly incomplete and belying the truth. No where can I see any reference to the most important

text in the New Testament, found in Hebrews 2:14ff, as if he purposely avoids causing strife with the many "new theology" leaders and pastors found in several White divisions, including Australia.

I appreciate every quote backing up his arguments from Ellen G. White (EGW) right through, but again he consciously missed the most important belief upheld by EGW in strong words and a few hundred references according to Dr. Ralph Larson's wonderful book on the nature of Christ, that shows so clearly from inspired writings the true human nature taken after 4,000 years of sin and degradation as He was one of them at that time He came.

As long as we are only for peace's sake talking about the incarnation as taking on man's "human nature" and leave it there without further emphasis on Christ's true humiliation by not showing from Hebrews 2 and EGW what human nature He took, such a compromise is degrading for the writer and a slap in Christ's face. The writer is denying Him His true sacrifice, the true humiliation in love for us. EGW calls today for men who will stand up for the real truth without fear or favor. The writer needs to be asked to clarify his position and why in an additional note based on an otherwise excellent discussion.

—Thor Pedersen, pastor, Australia

▶ Japan's Adventist pastors commit to ten-month evangelism training and outreach

Tokyo, Japan—Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Japan, a nation with one of the largest unreached people groups in the world, are committing to months of evangelistic training and outreach to bring the three angels' messages to its 121 million people.

Ron Clouzet, Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) ministerial secretary, will lead a field school of evangelism. Along with public meetings, a ten-month, comprehensive outreach strategy is planned.

Clouzet met with pastors from the West Japan Conference and the Okinawa Mission in the city of Osaka. An organizational meeting took place in Tokyo with the pastors of the East Japan Conference, followed by a second meeting with about 150 lay leaders from various Tokyo churches. The last meeting was transmitted live online to churches throughout Japan. Speakers included **Michael Ryan**, an assistant to the president of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference.

The first major training weekend focused on personal evangelism as well as specialized training for effective prayer intercession on behalf of those who do not know Christ and His Word.

Part of the prayer training deals with the formation of prayer-walking teams. With so many people in Japan who do not know Christ—as much as 99 percent of the population—serious intercession must be done for everyone, leaders say.

Other evangelistic training events will follow in April, May, and July on how to reach out to former members, give effective Bible studies, and form mission-driven small groups.

In April, Clouzet will hold a week-long revival meeting at the Amanuma Seventh-day Adventist Church, and other churches will be able to view the meetings online. The revival will focus on the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit and on the hope that is ours for real, lasting change in our lives. Late in August, the participating churches will begin 40 days of special prayer prior to the evangelistic meetings.

Each participating church is committing to doing at least three outreach events in the next nine months. The events, designed to build relationships with nonmembers, are expected to include stop-smoking clinics, vegetarian cooking schools, English language classes, and Vacation Bible Schools, among other options.

In September a major “preharvest” event is expected to take place, a series of five lectures on worldviews and Christian apologetics aimed at people with a secular mind-set who do not believe there is a true, personal God.

The capstone evangelistic meetings will be held October 6–28. Clouzet will present a range of topics during that three-week period at the Amanuma church. Congregations throughout the country can participate live online or conduct their own set of meetings for at least ten of those nights. Evangelistic visitation training will take place during those three weeks, and resources will be made available to all those who attend. Simultaneous children's meetings will also be encouraged.

At the end of the series, the last training event will implement a mentoring and assimilation program for new believers. The expectation is for the participating churches to experience true revival, a renewed sense of Adventist identity, and more commitments to baptism than typically seen in a given year.

This concept of process evangelism, founded on solid biblical principles, has been successful elsewhere. Church leaders are praying for God's abundant blessing as they move forward in faith. [NSD News]

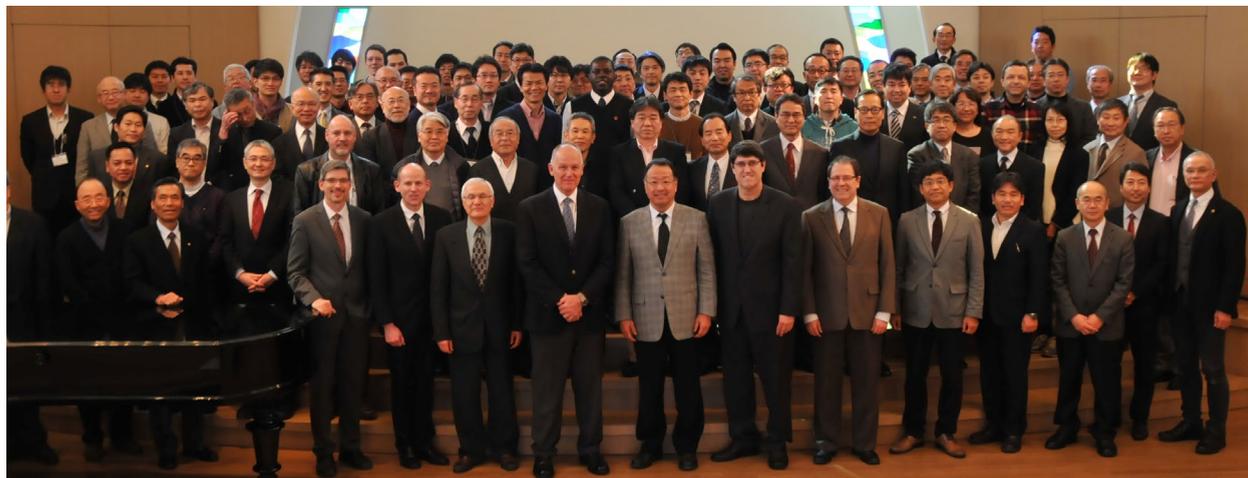


Photo Credit: NSD

► The prison encounter

Wa, Ghana—Evangelism remains the core mandate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Because of this, the Ghana National Association of Adventist Students in the upper west region of Ghana visited Wa Central Prison with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This one-week campaign was conducted by the chaplain of the fellowship, Pastor **Allan Norman K. Avi**, in November 2016. Forty inmates were baptized. One of the inmates, **Thomas Owusu Ansah**, announced he would postpone his baptism until after his release from prison. From that day forward, he stated, he could worship God faithfully.

Thomas was released from prison February 15, 2017. True to his word, he wished to be baptized as soon as possible. He quickly called Pastor Avi and told him that he would like to give his life to Jesus through baptism immediately. The pastor told him he was 200 miles (325 kilometers) away at the ministerial



Photo credit: Believe Agboli

retreat in Techiman, organized by the Northern Ghana Union Mission, featuring **Daniel Opoku-Boateng** from the West-Central Africa Division and **Kwabena Donkor** and **Jeffrey Brown** from the General Conference.

Thomas did not hesitate. He boarded a bus bound for Techiman. The next day, February 16, 2017, in an emotionally charged ceremony,

in front of 300 pastors and church officials, Thomas Owusu Ansah, a one-day ex-convict, was baptized by former Ghana Union president Pastor **P. O. Mensah**.

We thank God for what He has done, and with the support of our brethren globally, it is our fervent intention to do more and more, to the glory of God. [Believe Agboli]

► Intensive media training a first for Lithuanian church pastors

Kaunas, Lithuania—Adventist church pastors need more than just theology. In the modern world they also need a clear understanding of media. How do you make a picture tell a story? What can make an article or news report not only interesting but also relevant? How can social media be an evangelistic tool?

Over two intensive days in January 2017, **Victor Hulbert**, Trans-European Division Communication and Publishing Ministries director, shared not only those skills but also how to profile your church in the community and the skills needed to interact positively with the media during a crisis.

The training had an immediate effect. **Mindaugas Pikūnas**, Youth Ministries



Deividas Vanagas, treasurer, practices in front of a camera.

Photo credit: Jurgita Kregžaitė

director for the Baltic Union Conference, pulled out his iPhone and immediately

started collecting a series of short testimonies to share via his social media.

Practical exercises included working through realistic crisis scenarios.



Arunas Cerkesas, a pastor who produces an outreach newsletter, *Vilties Saltineis*, looked through his content ideas seeking ways to engage more actively with the public.

“This was the first such seminar in the history of the Adventist church in Lithuania since the country regained independence in 1990,” stated **Bertold Hibner**, conference president. “When planning the seminar, we thought about several strategic purposes: to

educate and train pastors and administrative workers in communication, to give tools for pastors to work with church members in evangelism, and to encourage our workers to use media for mission.”

Gintaras Nekis was impressed with the crisis management training. He said, “We need to prepare in advance because the future may bring a crisis.” That preparation was practical as well as theoretical as the team worked through

real-life scenarios, discussing them together and eventually facing a TV camera.

Pastors expressed their gratefulness for a better understanding of how social media can aid evangelism and for assistance in developing skills to be prepared for crisis. **Jurgita Kregždaitė**, Lithuanian Conference executive secretary, stated, “We, as a church, and each of our members, have a great responsibility to offset the negative information often seen in real life and cyberspace by sharing the love of God in people’s lives.”

Various church-related websites especially related to family, health, and Bible studies will now be reevaluated in the light of the newfound knowledge, and the attendees are now equipped to actively look for improved ways of making God known. Plans are also being formulated to expand the training of students at the Lithuanian mission training school. [Jurgita Kregždaitė | tedNEWS]

A modern-day miracle

I had 25 minutes to spare before my next Bible study. While considering ways to pass the time, I received a distinct impression: “Take the next left, fourth house on the left.”

As I wrestled between doubt and the possibility that God was guiding me, I quickly came to a few conclusions. I had previously thought about knocking on some doors before my study and prayed for guidance to the right homes. The worst thing that could happen was that no one would be home. With these thoughts in my mind, I drove around the corner and arrived to find three cars in the driveway. As I pinned on my name tag and stepped out of the car, a woman came out onto the porch.

“Hello, my name is Jacob, and I am with BibleStudyOffer.com. Do you enjoy the Bible?”

“Yes,” she replied.

I handed her a tract and began to share more about the program. After finishing, I offered to pray for her. Instantly, tears welled up in her eyes. She told me that there was a serious issue in the family. We prayed, and I sensed that God was touching her. As we chatted, her husband came outside and shared more details of the stress they were feeling.

“It’s interesting you showed up today. We were just now doubting the existence of God,” he said.

His wife replied, “But God sent a messenger!”

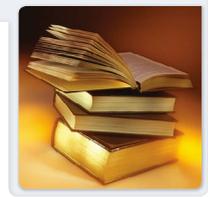
Revival
and **REFORMATION**
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

In the book *The Desire of Ages*, it states that “Jesus knows us individually. . . . He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep.”

May God help us be sensitive to His Voice and lead us to His lost sheep.

—Jacob Gibbs pastors the Escanaba, Munising, and Riverside Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Michigan, United States.

* Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 479.



Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church

by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.

Over the last decade, a lot has been written about the “graying” of the local churches across the country. The Center for Creative Ministry coined the phrase “the graying of Adventism” in observing the rising median age of the membership in many Seventh-day Adventist churches.* Having pastored a local church for more than 40 years, this shifting is alarming to me, for it indicates the inability of the local church to attract or keep youth and young adults. Without addressing the inclusion of younger generations, the local church’s own existence is doomed sooner or later.

I have absorbed a lot of information about why this loss of younger generations is happening and what to do about it. I found some of the advice valuable. But sometimes the suggestions seemed to take on a quick, “stop-gap” type of solution rather than a well-thought-out plan. *Growing Young*, a Fuller Youth Institute resource, appears to contain just such a matured plan.

Powell, Mulder, and Griffin used the resources available to them at Fuller Theological Seminary to understand what was really happening to those aged 15 to 29. In reviewing more than 80 books and interviewing the staffs of 363 churches, they were able to recognize six linked factors which churches that were *growing young* have.

What the book focuses on are six core commitments the local church needs to grow young. Here is their brief summary of those six core commitments:

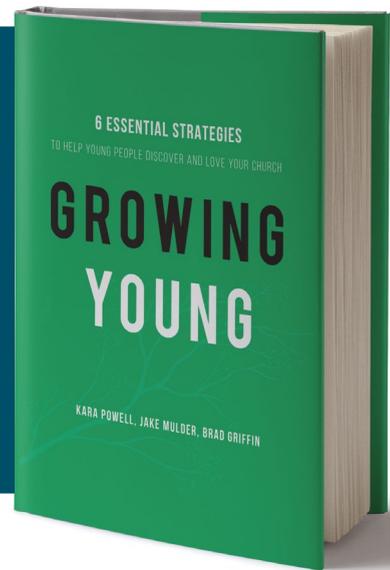
1. *Unlock keychain leadership.* Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.
2. *Empathize with today’s young person.* Instead of judging or

Without addressing the inclusion of younger generations, the local church’s own existence is doomed sooner or later.

criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.

3. *Take Jesus’ message seriously.* Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.
4. *Fuel a warm community.* Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.
5. *Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere.* Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.
6. *Be the best neighbors.* Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.

Although none of those factors listed were of surprise to me, it was how the authors pulled each of those core commitments into a revolving wheel where each core commitment fed into the next that did. Churches that were



growing young had incorporated into their church DNA those core commitments. Their research also showed that before any one of those core commitments, opportunity for the local church to opt out, and head back towards growing old, could and does happen.

After a chapter devoted to each of those six core commitments, the authors devote a chapter to how to implement all six into the local context of my church. I found their process of change important and of great value to me. I have asked my main leadership team to read the book, and then we will meet to discuss how we can establish these six core commitments into our church missional ministry.

—Reviewed by Bill Bossert, DMin, pastor of the Naples Seventh-day Adventist Church, Naples, Florida, United States. 

* Monte Sahlin and Paul Richardson, *Seventh-day Adventists in North America: A Demographic Profile* (Milton Freewater, OR: Center for Creative Ministry, 2008), 5, accessed March 7, 2017, circle.adventist.org/files/icm/nadresearch/NADDemographic.pdf.

Ray McAllister, PhD, is a faculty professor for Griggs University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



The ordinance of true humility

In observing Communion, my denomination, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, includes the ritual of washing one another's feet as Jesus did in John 13:3–13. This service, referred to as the ordinance of humility, we note as a meaningful way

Everyone has the right to practice all church rituals, even if we have to adjust how they are done.

to remind ourselves how we should be humble enough to serve one another in all ways. Performing this ritual with someone who has a physical disability can become complicated. Here I discuss my experience with this ritual, being completely blind, and how I have developed simple ways of sharing this experience with someone in a wheelchair. Learning how to do a ritual like this with a disabled person may help us understand more about what it means to truly be a humble servant.

Before I went to college, I simply washed feet with my immediate family with whom I was living. During college and seminary, though, I had to find partners for this ritual on my own.

Sometimes someone would come over to me and offer to do the service with me. Other times, I would ask around and find someone. The trouble was that I had no idea who had partners and who didn't. I would just have to randomly canvass the room, hoping I would find someone willing and able. Then, when I found someone, that person would get the towels and basins of water so that we could participate.

Once Sally and I got married, I had a regular foot-washing partner again. Then, a few years into our marriage, Sally's mother began to need a wheelchair. It was time for some creative thinking. Since, among the three of us, I had the strongest legs, I would be the one to hold my feet up in the air over Momma's lap while Sally held the basin underneath. Then, Momma could wash my feet. I would kneel on the floor and wash Sally's feet, and Sally would wash Momma's feet. Sally and I could tell that Momma appreciated still being able to participate.

When Momma was no longer able to leave her adult foster care home to attend church, we would bring Communion to her. (Sally and I are ordained local elders.) Since we did not want to deal with three separate basins of water, we, again, resorted to creative thinking. We would bring one basin and several paper towels. Instead of actually placing someone's foot into the basin, we would use the paper towels to sponge-bathe the feet, enveloping each foot with the water. We would then use a new towel for each person. The ritual was still performed, and everyone was happy to be involved.

After Momma passed away, Sally and I began attending a church where the men wash feet with the men and the women with the women. Since I

am a rather orderly person, I would arrange with a man in advance to meet up at church to do the ritual with me. One time, the man I asked happened to be a gentleman who used an electric wheelchair and had mobility in only one hand. I had actually talked about wanting to do foot washing with this person, so I found this encounter quite providential.

On the morning of the service, my wife brought me over to him at church. I held my hands on the back of his wheelchair, and he led me to the room. For simplicity's sake I opted to use the sponge-bath technique. I handed him a paper towel and put another over his lap. I then gave him one foot, and then the other, to wash. Then, I helped him out of his shoes and socks, and he instructed me on how to unstrap his feet from the wheelchair. I, using another towel, washed each of his feet. I helped him back into his shoes and socks, and we prayed together. He said that no one had ever washed feet with him before. He, the men who were helping us, and I all felt moved by the experience.

What, then, do these stories teach us? Everyone has the right to practice all church rituals, even if we have to adjust how they are done. True humility is not simply looking for someone who would be "easy" to wash feet with. We must be willing to take the time to creatively figure out how to help these people participate. With someone who is blind, it may simply be a matter of making sure they have a partner in advance of the service, if possible. With someone in a wheelchair, the ritual itself may need to be adapted in ways discussed above or others. In doing so, we can show the love of Jesus, who adapted Himself to become human in order to save all of us. 🙏

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