



MARCH 2023

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

SEASONS OF  
PASTORAL MINISTRY

Spring  
20-35

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Ramon J. Canals

### ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL SECRETARIES

Jeffrey O. Brown, Aurora Canals, Robert  
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## The promise of spring ministry

**S**eminary was over. When I landed in London, I called the senior pastor to whom I had been assigned. “Pastor Vine, we have arrived in England and will join you shortly. Is that all right?”

“Oh, landed in England, have you? Jolly good.”

“Yes, Pastor. We intend to spend the weekend at my dad’s in London and will come up to Leeds on Monday. Will that be OK?”

“Oh, coming up to Leeds, are you? Jolly good.”

Pastor Vine’s tone, though cheery, was slightly discomforting. His next words confirmed my fears: “Any particular reason?”

### Fuzzy

Spring ministry (for many pastors, ages 20–35) often begins with fuzziness about your assignment and sometimes ambivalence about your presence, but for the most part, spring ministry is about promise. It says with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).<sup>1</sup> It says with the prophet Joshua, “Give me this mountain” (Josh. 14:12). It says with the Reformer John Knox, “Give me Scotland, or I die.” Spring ministry means being faithfully creative and fearlessly innovative because, especially in a postpandemic world, spring ministry is what the church and the world need.

Although some will label them brash and others naive, make no mistake about it, we need the passion and optimism that spring pastors bring. Preaching professor Brett Younger declared, “The church does not need any more reasonable ministers. We need ministers who will set their own hair on fire for what is right. The church has more than enough predictable, conventional, cookie-cutter ministers. We need ardent, zealous, fervent, fiery, incensed, inflamed, enraged, obsessive, impassioned, hot-blooded, and fanatical ministers.”<sup>2</sup> Sounds like James and John to me.

The seasons of ministry concern themselves with your calling as a pastor, whether single, married, or single again. The wise man said, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). Each season is a two-sided coin with mountains on one side and valleys on the other. There is a certain inevitability about the seasons, a certain naturalness. Family specialist Dennis Rainey says, “Much like the inevitable seasons of nature, our lives on earth advance in a predictable pattern.”<sup>3</sup> While in some places, spring and autumn are fleeting or unknown, in others, summer follows spring, autumn follows summer, winter follows autumn, and spring follows winter. But while birds know what season to migrate, animals know what season to hibernate, and sea creatures know what season to procreate, we stand bewildered



**Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD**, is the associate editor of *Ministry*.



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when it comes to knowing what is around the corner.

### **Frustrating**

Some begin ministry in frustration because some pieces are not in place. But Stephen Covey says, “Begin with the end in mind.”<sup>4</sup> Begin your spring ministry the way you want your winter ministry to end. That means incarnating yourself into the needs of others, not preoccupying yourself with your own needs. It means learning to appreciate the number-two position, not yearning to appropriate number one. It means getting used to ambiguity, not incessantly demanding clarity. Ministry is not about black and white; it’s about learning to live in the gray.

“It has not yet been revealed what we shall be” (1 John 3:2). Yet to this uncertain predicament, the Bible gives a prescriptive response: “For he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). How do you see Him who is invisible? Spend time at the altar of prayer. Choose a time, find a place, and tell Jesus, “I will meet you there morning and evening.” Get into the habit in the spring, and watch the Author and the Finisher of our faith pilot you through the seasons that follow.

### **Fruitful**

This journey called ministry is not for the fainthearted. It is for those who will commit to

enduring until the end. Do not pout for a season that is past or pine for a season that is future. The internship is not your ministry life; it is a season in your ministry life. This, too, shall pass. Your task, your assignment, your mission—should you choose to accept it—is to bring forth fruit in the season you are in (Ps. 1:3).

We made it to Leeds. Pastor Robert and Vivian Vine housed us with their four wonderful children—for a whole month. The church district was also very kind to us. Spring ministry embraces your first pastoral assignment, where you are raring to go. Whether single, newlywed, or with child or children in tow, go forth to conquer the world for Christ—even if not everybody has received the memo.



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Brett Younger, “Calorie Counting Ministers in a Starving World: Amos 5:14-24,” *Review and Expositor* 110, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 299.
- 3 Dennis Rainey, *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families: Eight Big Ideas for Church Leaders* (Nashville, TN: W. Pub., 2001), loc. 1659, Kindle.
- 4 Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 95.

# Empowering young adults

## What leaders can do

If our church doesn't get more young people soon, we're going to die," blurted the head deaconess during my pastoral interview. The dedicated church leaders were in their sixties and seventies. The church averaged 90 attendees on Sabbaths.<sup>1</sup> Fewer than five were 18 to 35 years old, counting my wife, Caitlin, and me. Our church was in a small city of about 15,000, next to a larger city of 40,000 in a secular area with a significant Navy presence.<sup>2</sup> What could we do to see a change?

Jesus works miracles. In four years, our church grew to 140 in attendance,<sup>3</sup> with over 30 young adults attending on any given Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> Here is what we learned in the process.

### Why young people

Throughout Scripture, God seems to have a bias toward raising up young adults (ages 18–35) as missional leaders for His people: Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel, Esther, John the Baptist, Jesus, Jesus' disciples, Timothy, John Mark, and so many others. In the mid-1800s, God raised up young people, primarily in their teens and twenties, to found the Seventh-day Adventist movement.<sup>5</sup> Should we not expect God to do the same today?

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2).<sup>6</sup> Jesus wanted to bring young adults into our church so that they could become heroes in His mission. Our job is to pray for, empower, and rally behind them.

Most young people want to change the world



# in mission:

**Dustin Serns, MDiv**, is a pastor at the LifeBridge Seventh-day Adventist Church in University Place, Washington, United States.



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but do not realize that the church is the best platform for that. Jesus portrayed His church storming the gates of hell, ripping people from the devil's grasp, and bringing them into the hope and wholeness of the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:18). A vision for impact is the most powerful thing the church can offer young adults. When they see how they can use their passions to bless the

community and see Jesus change lives, they grow, and the church does too.

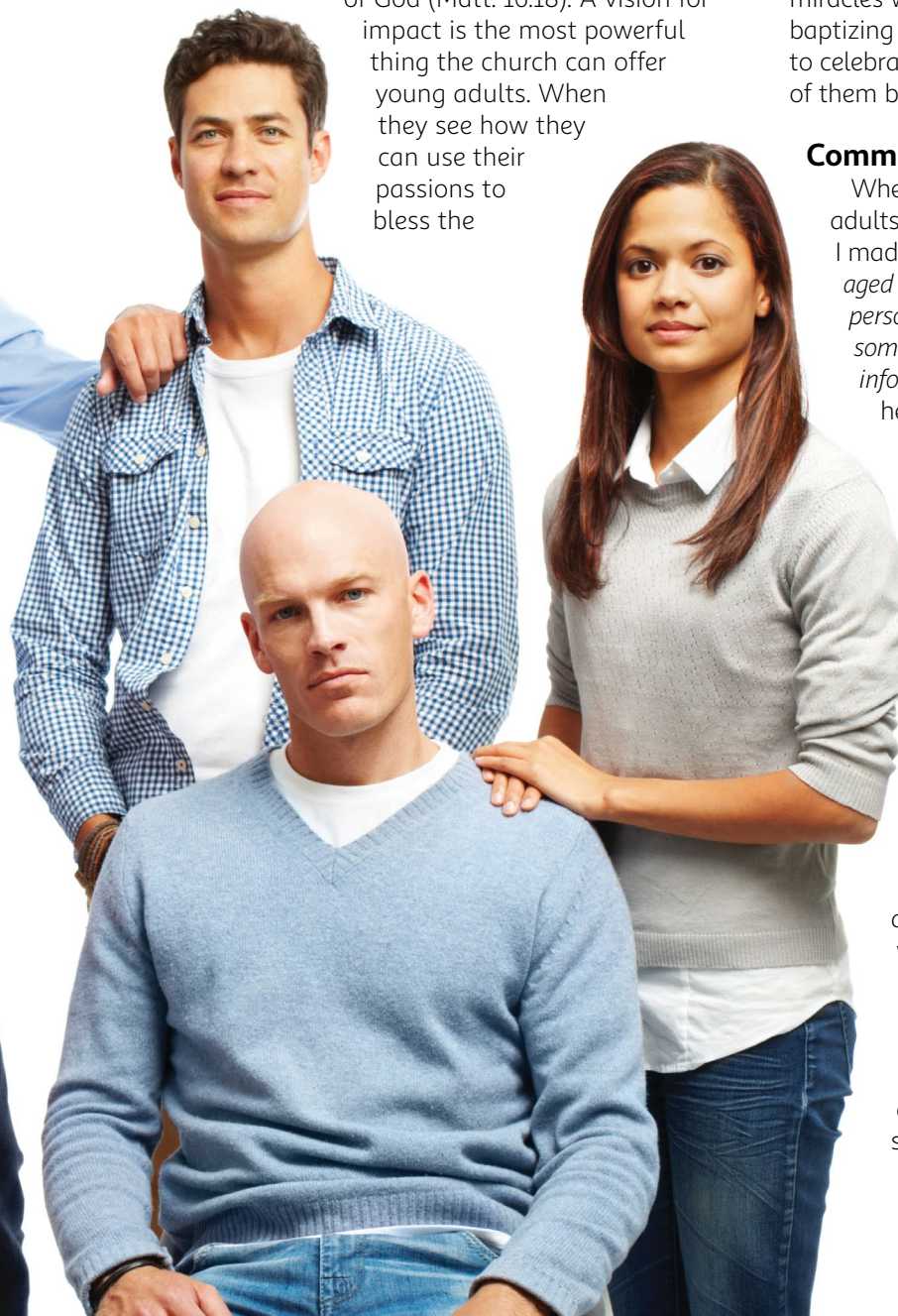
When our church became focused on evangelism (in all of its stages) and activating young adults in the mission, God started working miracles we had not seen before. We went from baptizing 4 people per year for the past 15 years to celebrating 15–19 baptisms per year, with half of them being millennials and Gen Zers.<sup>7</sup>

## Commit to connect

When praying for God to bring us young adults, I needed to be ready for God to answer. I made a commitment: *I will never let someone aged 18–35 enter my church building without personally connecting with them, learning something about them, getting their contact info, and following up.* I asked the greeters to help me. Sometimes I had to dash past older members so I could catch a young adult in the parking lot.

My follow-up goal was to invite new young adults to share a meal at a restaurant or home. Over the meal, I would listen to their stories and seek to discover their passions. I asked, “What would you love to see God do through you?” In the last few minutes of our conversation, I would tell a story of how God was changing lives through our local church and invite them to be a part of the journey. Whenever possible, I would seek to help them get a “win” at using their passions for God within the next month. I also invited them to join a weekly group.

God's first answer to prayer came sooner than I expected. On my second Sabbath at the church, I walked Nik and Shayla with their four-month-old son. It was Nik's first time in an Adventist





church in 13 years (half his lifetime) and Shayla's first time ever. We connected with them and invited them to go to the park with us the next Sabbath. Caitlin and I started a Bible-study group in our apartment. We invited all the young adults we knew: Nik and Shayla, one young adult from church and her husband, and a couple of neighbors. Of the six young adults participating, only one was a baptized Seventh-day Adventist. Within a few months, three more had been baptized and became involved in our church.

### Create community environments

Jesus' strategy for developing young adults as missional leaders was to recruit them into a small group. "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15). With this group of 12, Jesus provided a healthy community environment where the disciples could grow spiritually, relationally, and missionally. They were given opportunities to lead and make a difference for the kingdom while they received ongoing vision, coaching, and support from Jesus.

After a year of connecting with every young-adult guest to our church, I surprisingly had a contact list with over 40 names (many of whom I had seen only once). My wife felt convicted that we needed to start a new midweek young-adult Bible-study group in our home. We set a date.

The Sabbath before the group was going to start, I was sitting at a potluck when my head greeter interrupted: "Come over and meet a couple of young-adult guests." I dropped everything to connect with them.

During the conversation, Xander asked, "What do you have for young adults here at this church?"

If he had asked a month earlier, I would have said, "Nothing." But God sent them at the perfect time. We were ready for them.

"We are starting a young-adult Bible study at my house this Wednesday!" I excitedly responded.

"Great! Cheeryl and I will be there. And I'll invite my friend Jed."

These three health professionals in their early thirties had been church-hopping or spending Sabbaths in nature for a while.

Over the next several weeks, 8–20 young adults met weekly in our home. We watched their spiritual growth as deep friendships formed and they embraced a vision for transformational impact. It changed the course of their lives and the course of our church.

### Empower young leaders

Remember Joshua, the courageous young leader of the people of God? How was he activated for God's cause? Joshua's debut in Scripture comes from an insightful story in Exodus 17. The Amalekites attacked, so Moses recruited Joshua, a young adult, to lead the charge. Moses rallied the people of God behind Joshua. Then Moses stood on a hilltop and raised his hands in prayer for the success of his new young leader. "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. . . . So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword" (Exod. 17:11, 13). As long as we hold up our hands in prayer and support of our young leaders, God will give victories. As we empower and rally behind them, battles will be won for God's mission. God will bring His people into the Promised Land!

Through the course of the young adult group, I recognized the potential of half a dozen young adults to become key leaders and began deeply investing in them. I spent significant time with them and did whatever I could to dump fuel on their fire for Jesus and His mission. One Sabbath we had them over for a brainstorming session. "What would you love to see God do through you?" I asked the group. The young health professionals wanted to organize a free health clinic for the community. They were excited to bring the kingdom of God to their city through the church.

Jed, a 31-year-old dentist who owned his own practice, put together a proposal and presented it to the church board. The board slashed it apart.

"Why would we spend so much money on people we don't even know from the community?"

"Do you really think you can pull this off?"

"This won't work."

I wondered whether this was the end of our young-adult ministry and the beginning of the death of our church.

Just before the plan was rejected, a respected elder spoke up, "Can we at least vote on the concept and let them keep working on getting more details?"

The board approved. The young adults kept moving forward. God blessed. Within a few short months, the young adults had brought together a team, found a partner organization, secured a local venue, raised over \$20,000, and recruited more than 150 volunteers. We sent out 28,000 postcards inviting the community to the weekend health clinic. The church was excited!

Two weeks before the event, the venue notified us that there had been a miscommunication.



We were allowed access to only one-third of the space that we needed. We were stunned.

A couple of church leaders called me and said, “See, this is what happens when young adults are in charge.”

We came together as a church and prayed for God to open a door. As we knelt in a circle, I caught a glimpse of the church that I had been dreaming of: people of all generations coming together to ask God to do great things through them in their community.

The next week we looked everywhere for a new venue. Finally, we got in touch with Tom, the executive director of facilities and operations for the public school district.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Tom said. He got us into an elementary school only a mile down the street from our original venue.

We provided over 350 free dental, vision, medical, and physical therapy services. Every patient received prayer. A community leader later told us our health clinic was the most significant nonprofit service in our entire county.

Tom came by the health clinic to see what he had helped accomplish.

“We host a lot of groups here at the school district,” he said, “but I have never seen anyone as clean, kind, and organized as you Seventh-day Adventists. I used to think you were a weird cult, but that belief is changing by the minute.” We started talking about his spiritual journey and how he had been drifting in recent years. “But I might come by your church sometime,” he said.

“Can you come this Saturday? We want to thank you for everything you have done to partner with us to bring hope and wholeness to our community,” I offered.

“Sure. My wife and I will be there this Saturday.”

Tom and Barbara came that Sabbath and never stopped coming. They connected with a Bible-study group and a Sabbath School group. They made decisions for baptism at the follow-up evangelistic series a couple of months later.

Our church was never the same after that experience. We were all amazed at the miracles God had done to bring victories in His mission when we rallied behind a handful of emerging, passionate young leaders.

The older members came to the young adults and asked, “Can we do another health clinic together next year?”

And we did.

## Breakthrough

We do not have to look far to see challenges in our churches with engaging and empowering young people. But Jesus is still passionately working to activate young people in His mission. He invites us to join Him. “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out [young] workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2; word added for emphasis).

As we desperately pray and prepare for God to answer, we can expect Him to break through. The Lord of the harvest will give us opportunities to selflessly and intentionally come alongside young adults in our church and community to see their passions unleashed for the kingdom of God.



- 1 Port Orchard, Washington, Seventh-day Adventist Church attendance records, accessed May 23, 2022.
- 2 “Port Orchard, Washington Population 2022,” World Population Review 2022, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/port-orchard-wa-population>; Steven Gardner, “Survey Finds Kitsap the Seventh Least Religious Area in the Nation,” *Kitsap Sun*, April 13, 2013, <https://archive.kitsapsun.com/news/local/survey-finds-kitsap-the-seventh-least-religious-area-in-the-nation-ep-416449869-356169571.html/>.
- 3 Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church attendance records.
- 4 Almost none of these 30-plus young adults transferred from other nearby Seventh-day Adventist churches.
- 5 “The Seventh-day Adventist Church began like a Silicon Valley start-up—led by young people with vision and passion for a cause. People such as Ellen White, John Loughborough, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and John Harvey Kellogg made a significant impact on the developing Seventh-day Adventist Church while still teenagers and young adults.” “Youth,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.adventist.org/marriage-and-the-family/youth/>. See also Lynette Frantzen, “Young Adventist Pioneers,” *Adventist Review*, May 27, 2004, as cited in A. Allan Martin, “Reaching Out: Making a Difference With Young Adults,” *Ministry*, July 2008, note 29.
- 6 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 7 Number includes baptisms, rebaptisms, and professions of faith. Washington Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Membership Records (2000-2018): Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church,” accessed January 23, 2018.

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# Jesus champions “silver medal” leadership:

## Becoming number one by embracing number two



In 2020, Kyrie Irving of the Brooklyn Nets National Basketball Association (NBA) team was elected a vice president of the National Basketball Players Association in the hope that he would embrace his number-two position willingly and allow time and circumstances to elevate him to number one.

In the same way, church leaders in number-one positions should affirm their number-two persons by educating, developing, equipping, and empowering them to become “gold medal” champions. In the book *Leading From the Second Chair*, coauthor Mike Bonem defines a second-chair leader as “a person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value throughout the organization.” He adds, “Those who thrive . . . find much of their success through influence and relationships.”<sup>1</sup>

When church leaders affirm the number two in others, organizations become more effective witnessing and evangelistic bodies. Most people, however, dislike their “silver medal” labels. This dislike may not be entirely their fault. Just ask Kyrie Irving.

### **A shining star, but . . .**

Kyrie Irving entered the NBA as its first draft pick in 2011 and earned the Rookie of the Year award that season. In 2016, he shot the winning three-pointer that gave his Cleveland Cavaliers the NBA championship, ending that city’s 52-year championship drought in professional sports. LeBron James, his Cavaliers teammate, was named the Associated Press’s “Male Athlete

of the Decade.” Irving had to work to prevent the public from believing he disliked being regarded as LeBron’s number two.

We know of someone else who despised the number-two position. Those of us who study both our Bibles and the sports pages know that Lucifer hated being number two (Isa. 14:12–15), a hatred that forced him to leave heaven. Called “the shining one,” Lucifer, now Satan, came to Earth and polluted us with his hatred of being number two. Fortunately, Jesus changed Satan’s negative stereotype of being number two. He chose to become the ultimate number two being by leaving heaven, coming to Earth, and dying to save us. He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant. . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient.” His Father subsequently elevated Him to the number-one position, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (Phil. 2:7, 8, 10).<sup>2</sup> In so doing, He modeled for us how to achieve number one by embracing number two.

As your church’s number-one leader, your task as pastor will be to redirect your followers’ Lucifer-originated low esteem, stemming from their number twoness, and, instead, elevate them to mimic Jesus’ role model as the ultimate number-two Being. You teach them to be gold in love and quality yet silver in humility. Also, teach them to forget self, to be silver in relation to others, and to develop others around them to be gold.

**Tim Allston, MS**, is an author and certified life coach with the American Association of Christian Counselors, Huntsville, Alabama, United States.



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## The Jesus do-over

For many of us, being in second place is neither inspirational nor aspirational. We do not focus our daily agenda on being number two. We do not teach our children to pursue silver medals, and we may not list becoming an “effective follower” on our job applications. We claim Jesus as our perfect (gold) standard but often fail to adopt the (silver) process that made Jesus our Savior. He

- chose to leave heaven to live with sin-cursed humanity;
- defied “kingly” expectations and was born to an unmarried woman in an animal’s barn;
- included in His “cabinet” hot-tempered, common laborers, egomaniacs, and even a tax gouger; and
- served dutifully as a carpenter’s apprentice throughout His young-adult years, before His three-year public ministry ended in an unfair trial, unjust verdict, and unmerciful death.

Leading like Jesus requires us to follow Jesus by forgetting self and investing in others (v. 3), humbling ourselves, being sacrificially obedient (v. 8), and declaring, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30).

Was Jesus the ultimate Leader or the ultimate Follower? His earthly résumé shows that He was both. Jesus modeled to us that, as the number-two Being, He had to possess both leadership and followership acumen. As His followers, we must possess both traits too. How does this show itself practically?

## How does this play out?

First, like Jesus, we need to *humbly identify opportunities where others see obstacles*. At the Cana wedding reception, where the wine ran out, Jesus’ silver-medal leadership acknowledged that His “appointed time” had not yet come. But He sensed that this problem presented a great opportunity to showcase God, so He performed His first miracle by turning water into wine.

When Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well and asked her for a drink, what His disciples

saw as a problem—Jesus talking to this woman from a denounced ethnic group—instead created the opportunity for Him to launch this woman as the first evangelist to the Gentile world. When the disciples sought to dismiss 5,000 men and their families to go home to eat, Jesus initiated a value-added witnessing platform by feeding an estimated 20,000 people instead. Effective followers spot opportunities to witness and serve where others see only problems and difficulties.

Second, Jesus urges us to *mimic Him and refrain from self-promotion*. Our sin problem and subsequent disdain for number twoness began with Lucifer, who sought unsuccessfully to promote himself in heaven. Judas Iscariot showcased a devious and ultimately fatal attempt at self-exaltation. He sought to force Jesus into setting up an earthly kingdom because he wanted elevation to a higher profile. Just three chapters earlier, Jesus had taught, “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). Judas later went out and hanged himself.

Finally, *allow time and circumstances to elevate you to mimic Jesus “in favor with God and men”* (Luke 2:52). Never forget that we are enlisted in God’s army. Because this is a spiritual battle, the rules of engagement are different. Paul says, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself” (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). Silver-medal leadership may not be our preference and may grate against our nature, but it is God’s *modus operandi*.

## In praise of followership

In our clamor for leadership posts and titles, we often spurn followership and miss Jesus’ object lesson: the best leadership graduates are effective followership disciples.

In her article “Want to Be a Good Leader? Learn to Follow,” executive leadership consultant Terina Allen writes, “There’s real value in followership. Yet, if I offered a workshop on ‘followership’ the response would likely be very poor. Why?

Because we don't put a lot of worth on that skill, and we don't give a lot of respect to people who excel at 'following.' We don't appreciate its unbreakable connection to leadership."<sup>3</sup>

Numerous books, training programs, and courses address top leadership, yet precious few address affirming and equipping number-two persons.<sup>4</sup> Because each of us reports to someone, either professionally or personally, we are all followers at some point in our lives. All organizations, whether workplaces, families, churches, or ministries, resemble icebergs where only 10 percent (top leadership) is visible and the remaining 90 percent are silver medalists below the surface.

Joseph, Esther, and Elisha give us sterling examples of silver-medal leadership. Each held a number-two position in spite of possessing number-one qualifications. However, they did not manipulate hierarchies, manufacture circumstances, or maneuver themselves to gain personal advantage. Effective organizations combine top leaders with affirmed followers. Ants, nature's longest-living insects, function optimally without a leader (Prov. 6:6–8). Yet through Satan's influence, beginning with Adam and Eve, number-two persons are their organization's least acknowledged, most invisible, and most disregarded persons.

### “How beautiful are the feet . . .”

In 2015, basketball player Steph Curry led the Golden State Warriors to their first NBA championship in 40 years. He was named the league's most valuable player (MVP), the number-one person on the number-one team. The following year he led his team to the most regular-season victories in NBA history. He led the NBA in scoring, free-throw percentage, and steals. Additionally, he was the first-ever unanimous choice for the league's MVP.

But in the final two minutes of the 2016 NBA championship, the Golden State Warriors suffered a jarring defeat. The number-one team became number two. So, what did the league's number-one superstar do?

Curry helped his team recruit a superstar—four-time scoring champion and four-time winner of varied NBA MVPs, Kevin Durant. Curry agreed with the decision, acknowledged Durant's capabilities, and accepted a number-two position. For many, Curry's 2016 decision defied human logic, but it worked. The Golden State Warriors regained the championship in 2017 and 2018.

What would make this former number-one player choose to become number two? The

answer is not found in his head; it is discovered on his feet! Steph Curry's signature Under Armour sneakers have “4:13” stamped on the tongue.

“It represents a Bible verse I wear on my shoe. . . . Philippians 4:13. It says, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ It's also my mantra, how I get up for games and why I play the way I do.

“Obviously, there's a lot of hoopla and fanfare that follows you wherever you go, but I know where my talent comes from. . . . I know why I play the game, and it's not to score 30 points a night, but it's to use the stage I'm on. I've been put here for a specific purpose: to be a witness and to share my testimony as I go through it.”<sup>5</sup>

Top leadership will change more frequently than silver medalists—an organization's most consistent and stable core. Organizations can and occasionally must function without top leaders, but they are doomed without effective followers. Physical and fiscal resources are important, but nothing is more essential than the human resources of which the effective followers—silver medalists—form the majority.

Whether associate pastor, lead pastor, or administrator, recognize that throughout your ministry, God will call you to alternating positions of leadership and followership. Our goal is not to be a medal-winning minister but a faithful follower.



- 1 Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading From the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005) 2, 3; emphasis in the original.
- 2 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 3 Terina Allen, “Want to Be a Good Leader? Learn to Follow,” Fast Company, November 28, 2018, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90273002/want-to-be-a-good-leader-learn-to-follow>.
- 4 See Becky A. De Oliveira, “Where You Go, I Will Follow,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 3, no. 1, 2; S. C. Lundin and L. C. Lancaster, “Beyond Leadership . . . The Importance of Followership,” *Futurist*, May-June 1990, 18; and, Bill Knott, “Can We Trust Our Leaders? Whom Is It Safe to Follow?,” *Adventist Review*, June 2021, 18, 19.
- 5 “Steph Curry Carries Scripture on the Court,” Praise 104.1 FM, February 26, 2016, <https://praisedc.com/1778608/steph-curry-carries-scripture-on-the-court/>.

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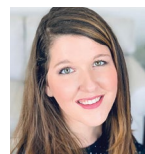


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# Rethinking worship space and “phygital” culture in ministry

**Cynthia Craddock**, from the United Methodist Church, is a managing partner at Cecilia Russo Marketing, Savannah, Georgia, United States, and was recognized as a “40 Under 40” leader by *Georgia Trend Magazine*.



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# the emerging architecture

**A**mong the institutions adversely affected by the pandemic, few have felt the sting of lockdown more than churches. To maintain their services, many became instant pioneers of online worship. While such elements as prayer, mission, and community involvement remained paramount for church health, churches identified opportunities for growth and change. Fueled by the process of building strong online audiences, a brand-new opportunity has emerged.

With the pandemic waning, people are returning to in-person worship services. Many, however, prefer to maintain the online pattern they have grown accustomed to over more than two years. Catering to both groups may seem like a conundrum, but people experienced in designing church buildings and interior spaces see a chance to bring the two audiences together to support spiritual growth.

## **Togetherness**

One way to bring the two audiences together is to make more efficient use of the space to maximize engagement. The other is a new hybrid trend, sometimes referred to as “phygital,” that seeks to create a seamless integration between the in-person experience (physical) and the online (digital).<sup>1</sup>

How the two factors will progress depends on the health of each church before the pandemic.

According to Pat Kase, a senior project developer with the ministry-focused design-build-furnish firm Aspen Group, based on information available in the first quarter of 2022, thriving churches are back to 70–80 percent of their prepandemic attendance. Less healthy churches are closer to 30–40 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic magnified both the good and bad, as reflected in current attendance. Churches starting pilot programs for online worship, online giving, and other online services immediately before the pandemic were already way behind. Those who already had flourishing online services took full advantage of the knowledge they were building on before 2020 and used what they also learned during the height of the pandemic. Thus, early adopters are ahead of the curve on optimal use of space and a phygital culture and are much healthier for it.

## **Understanding the basics**

Brian Felder, founder and principal architect of the architecture firm Felder & Associates, based in Savannah, Georgia, notes that understanding the basics of approaching the future of ministry spaces is essential to succeeding in meshing the physical and virtual.

“A church’s digital presence is its ‘front porch,’ but ‘the family room’ inside the building is where the more meaningful connections occur,” Felder explains. “As explored in the book *Analog Church*, the physical design of a church can result in deeper engagement among congregants and newcomers.”<sup>3</sup>

His insight underscores the profound role architecture plays in the future of worship and how the space that people are welcomed into—real world and virtual—and the experiences offered there are more critical than larger societal happenings, such as a pandemic or a steep economic downturn.

“During the 2008–2009 recession, two-thirds of churches were at the same or increased levels of giving. Then, like now, it was never about the economy; it’s about vision,” Kase reports. “People primarily give to clear, compelling vision. Vision matters to the intentional gathering space.”

## Youth spaces

From working with churches and speaking to their leaders, Felder has observed that not as many older attendees are returning as one might think. Picking up the slack are younger people who may have stopped going in their twenties and now, after marriage and having children, are returning in droves. This crucial population highlights the importance of youth spaces.

“Children’s space is really for parents. Parents need to feel comfortable that it’s safe for their babies to be in the room while the parents are elsewhere in the church,” Felder explains.

Making church space for children fit into a phygital culture involves acknowledging and accepting the connection between kids and technology. Greg Snider, a ministry space strategist at Aspen Group, notes that kids are often on their smartphones four or more hours a day but in church for only one or two hours a week.<sup>4</sup> To make the space more conducive to spiritual growth, he suggests that churches incorporate technology. For expanded use of the space, Snider suggests using it for family learning to allow parents to engage more in their children’s spiritual growth.

## Lobby space

Another area where mixed-use and multigenerational fellowship can occur is the church lobby. Rather than simply an entryway and default gathering place before entering specialized nearby rooms, a lobby can serve multiple purposes.

“During coronavirus, I visited a church where I was so impressed by their lobby space. There was something for everyone in the furniture, colors, textures, and flooring. It included contemporary furniture for adults next to lower furniture for kids. I could picture grandparents, parents, and kids interacting in the space together. These are simple solutions to bring generations together,” Snider said.

Another reason lobbies are essential is that they are public-facing spaces that should be welcoming and bright, traits one associates with inviting people in to explore and feel comfortable. Whenever and wherever a physical space can enhance an atmosphere of engagement and outreach, it should be seen as an opportunity. Like modern offices, churches can transform their lobbies into multiuse spaces for meetings, events, volunteer gatherings, and training. A well-designed, uncrowded area buzzing with activity can do wonders for a church’s reputation.

## Worship space

A church’s main worship space, the area most often seen in online services, might be the most important. The phygital elements must not overwhelm the sacred. Churches need to have the equipment and lighting to produce a watchable, high-quality service on a screen, but they should not interfere with the worshipers in the room. Finding the right balance is key, which can be difficult for struggling churches unable to afford or operate the technology to broadcast a worship service. Thus, congregations must approach the idea of multiple purposes of the sanctuary carefully.

Thoughtful use of space and the emergence of a phygital culture lead to rethinking a ministry’s overall outreach. Churches that have worked to create a successful online presence have bridged the gap between their online presence, which can easily defy the reality of the building they are broadcasting from, and the actual physical space. Kase has heard how many pastors lament for relevancy to boost attendance and church health, but he upholds that what is needed is transcendence.

“As examined in the book *Analog Church*, relevance can be found almost anywhere. Transcendence cannot. I completely agree with this statement,” he explained.

To reflect this, a commitment to improving the space goes hand in hand with efforts to offer something hard to find. A holistic approach to outreach starts with reaffirming the spiritual mission, and transcendence is a significant element. What people see and the space they occupy when they receive the message plays a part in how effective it will be.

Felder identifies three architecture and design trends that support the mission. First, merging the digital presence with the physical space increases a church’s perceived integrity. The appearance of an online worship service will surely be in the best light, but it should, at the same time, faithfully reflect the actual space. Second, in regions where the weather allows for its practical use, the addition or employment of outdoor space is growing in popularity, something more common in cases of new construction. Finally, the art and architecture—again, easier and more common with new buildings—can also support the spiritual mission. With nods to multiuse space and the phygital, they create a feeling of openness to the transcendent.





Sample design



Sample design

## Exhibit A

Cross Community Church in Port Royal, South Carolina, is a new project involving Aspen Group and Felder & Associates that incorporates multi-use spaces and the phygital concept. The growing congregation, which is diverse and multigenerational, began meeting in a local high school. They then moved to the YMCA, but growth demanded a modern building. The unique design solution includes the elevation of the building on 10-foot-tall pilings, providing covered space underneath for a children’s ministry, small-group meetings, and other social events. Exterior architectural elements include clapboard siding and awnings that fit the coastal environment.

Leading up to the main entrance is a large, wide ramp that can be used for gathering space, worship, or musical performances, all conducive to online services. A total of 13,000 square feet includes modern office space, more gathering areas, a café connected to a large open lobby, and additional children’s facilities. The contemporary design is bright and airy, with an excellent combination of modern and traditional elements that appeal to the wide range of the congregants’ age groups.

“Whether you’re in your twenties or eighties, there will be something you’re drawn to, and the space communicates ‘there is a place for me here,’” said lead pastor Taylor Burgess.<sup>5</sup>

## Exhibit B

Another church embracing modern architecture and design concepts is the Bridge Church in Bradenton, Florida. The existing building was not serving the needs of the large, tight-knit community. The original plan was to add gathering space, a defined front entrance, and an area for children’s ministry—then the pandemic hit. While in-person attendance was low due to pandemic restrictions, the church instead chose to modernize the worship space. With an eye to the phygital, they had the auditorium completely renovated. They also constructed a balcony for the growing attendance predicted when the pandemic ended and installed a full audio, visual, lighting, and electrical infrastructure upgrade.

The design and construction of the planned two-story addition added nearly 30,000 square feet of interior space and more than 8,000 square feet of exterior green space as well as a playground. Like Cross Community Church, the design is bright, airy, and welcoming. The entrance offers a gathering space and connection zones, a café, children’s check-in, and ministry rooms. There is also office space with reception and conference areas and a break room. A student wing has its own entrance, a dedicated worship venue, a café, and a lounge area.

In both buildings, the physical space matches, if not exceeds, the online presence. Architecture that welcomes and engages with people helps a congregation grow.

## Connection

As much as the phygital concept is essential to the future of ministry, it cannot replace the experience and connection of in-person worship. Growing both audiences is vital. Creating real disciples, however, is a more profound challenge. Fellowship, relevancy, and transcendence are the goals, and a space that fosters those ideals in the physical world is irreplaceable.



- 1 Paul Prior, “Phygital—What Is It and Why Should I Care?,” *Forbes*, June 30, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/06/30/phygital--what-is-it-and-why-should-i-care/>.
- 2 Per a personal interview with the author.
- 3 Per a personal interview with the author.
- 4 Per a personal interview with the author.
- 5 Per a personal interview with the author.

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**W**hen Charles Dickens stated that another era was “the best of times, it was the worst of times,” little did he know that his description would align perfectly with the times in which we are now living.<sup>1</sup> We find ourselves caught in the clutches of a paradoxical era. It is one of complex and confusing peril yet great opportunity.

Before COVID-19 struck suddenly and without warning, congregational life in the United States was reeling from forces that threatened the very survival and sustainability of the church. The fastest-growing religious group or category in the country at the time was the Nones—those who claimed no religious affiliation while asserting they were deeply spiritual. The pandemic upended every aspect of life, especially the religious aspect. It affected church buildings, and the social distancing restrictions challenged fellowship among believers—the very foundation of the Christian faith. The contagion resurfaced theological questions about pain and suffering, with families watching in horror and helplessness as loved ones succumbed, often in isolation, to the deadly, mysterious virus.

### Now what?

As we emerge from the darkness and uncertainty of the past three years, the church now wrestles with crucial questions, such as, What will the postpandemic church look like? What will postpandemic ministry entail? What should the critical competencies of the postpandemic pastor be? How much of the past should the church seek to recover as it plots a path forward?

I read Fareed Zakaria’s book on what the world may look like beyond COVID-19. Titled *Ten Lessons for a Post-pandemic World*, it examines and analyzes 10 phenomena Zakaria believes will be significantly affected by the coronavirus. Eminently qualified to author the book, Zakaria is a political and social scientist, TV show host, and author.

As I read Zakaria’s important contribution to the discussion about what life in the era after the coronavirus may look like, I could not help but think about the church. What are some lessons we have learned? And what elements of church life has the pandemic affected?

### Simple lessons

I think the lessons run the gamut from the simple to the profound. The simple lessons remind us that life is unpredictable and full of

surprises. Did anyone see COVID-19 coming? The profound lessons force us to recognize that the postpandemic world and church will be markedly different from what they were before the virus began its deadly march around the world. We can view the pandemic as a watershed event.

A groundbreaking study titled “The Pandemic’s Impact on Congregations, Clergy, and Seminaries” revealed that the pandemic only amplified several trends already in existence.<sup>2</sup> Without a doubt, the pre-COVID church was already in decline. Interestingly, the church was not inoculated against COVID, as church members tested positive for the deadly virus, and a significant number of the congregations surveyed lost at least one member to it.

The coronavirus caused us to ponder and probe the very church itself. What are its nature and purpose? Why do people attend church? What is the call or mission of the church today? What impact will COVID have on the demographic profile of our congregations? Where is the Spirit of God at work today? Where is God present? These are deep theological questions that cry out for answers as we seek to recover and stress the meaning of church in the post-COVID era.

### The purpose and future

On a practical level, what will church leadership look like in a postpandemic world? What new realities and pressures will reshape pastoral leadership? Which does the church need more—a rediscovery and growth of professional competencies or a focused and intentional nurture of biblical spirituality?

As the dean of Oakwood University’s School of Theology, I ponder the purpose and future of theological education. How may theological schools best prepare pastors for a changing church? What must we teach students that will not only inform them but also, more importantly, transform them? And how will we inspire them to grow their





**R. Clifford Jones, PhD, DMin**, is dean of the School of Theology, Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Postpandemic pastoral ministry:

What now? What next?

relationship with God, recognizing that He is the source of all knowledge, which we access through our relationship with Him and His creation? In the end, knowing God is what the church and theological education should be all about. Jesus should be the core and content of congregational life and Christian education. To know God, we must get to know each other, and knowing God and His love naturally leads to mission and service.

### Thing of the past?

One of the profound lessons of the pandemic is the emergence, growth, and dominance of digital culture. When churches had to close their doors in March 2020, many had to scramble to procure technology and increase the technological literacy and competency of members to deliver services virtually. Virtuality is neither temporary nor fleeting. It is a phenomenon that has redefined and continues to redefine life, and hybrid worship services are here to stay.

The pandemic underscored that the people of God compose the church, not a building. Philosophically and theologically, Christians have known all along that the church is not a physical structure. The pandemic may have dealt a deadly blow to the idea that majestic cathedrals and elegant buildings are critical to congregational life. During the pandemic, buildings remained, for the most part, closed. Yet the church rolled on, and in many instances, the stewardship of members did not wane or suffer. In fact, tithe and offerings increased almost across the board in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>3</sup> There was a time when a successful church-building program set a pastor apart as being specially gifted. It may be too early to tell if the centrality of a building or the building-centric nature of some ministries is a thing of the past or still necessary in the present. Successful ministry will require a willingness to function well in either scenario, with building or without.

Calls for what the postpandemic church should look like include that it somehow returns to its prepandemic days. If we are to go back to the prepandemic church, I contend and urge that we should go all the way back to the apostolic church and recover and retrieve perspectives and practices that caused it to explode in growth and numbers.

Without a doubt, we are at a dramatic moment in history, and the contours of tomorrow are not as clear as we may wish. Ours is a time

of diversification that faces the threat of polarization. The task we have is one of reordering our steps in the Lord, of revisioning the future so that we pursue and achieve essential purposes and mutual goals.

It is the best of times, and it is the worst of times. Change is not easy and often takes time. Yet this moment shows the need to adapt and calls for freshness and innovation that is informed and shaped by the Spirit of the Living God. Now must be a time for collaboration. Credible and compelling ideas of togetherness will yield rich and riveting pathways to a future of triumph. As we willingly risk transparency and vulnerability, mission and ministry will become robust and compelling.

### Business as usual?

Since relocating to Huntsville, Alabama, I have had to seek a haven in my next-door neighbor's tornado shelter on two occasions. I have been intrigued by the drill and particularly struck by how, after the warning was called off, my wife and I returned to what we were doing before it was issued. On both occasions, we picked up exactly where we had left off, continuing into the evening with business as usual. Is that what we are going to do in terms of ministry and church leadership after the scare of the pandemic? Or will the experience fundamentally alter at least some of what we do moving forward?

When Noah and his family exited the ark, the world they encountered was unlike the one they left behind when they entered it. In a sense, the world the church is facing has changed, perhaps like it did post-9/11 or after the two world wars of the twentieth century. We are facing a new landscape that requires a new set of assumptions and vision.



- 1 Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London, UK: James Nisbet, 1902), 3.
- 2 See the "Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations" project at <https://covidreligionresearch.org>.
- 3 Christelle Agboka, "NAD Treasurer Randy Robinson Testifies to 'the Goodness of God' in 2022 NAD Year-End Meeting Report," *Seventh-day Adventist, North American Division*, November 4, 2022, <https://www.nadadventist.org/news/nad-treasurer-randy-robinson-testifies-goodness-god-2022-nad-year-end-meeting-report>.

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**Ramon J. Canals, DMin**, serves as ministerial secretary of the Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



## Be still, and know that I am God

**H**anging on one of the walls in my house is a beautiful nature scene with Psalm 46:10, which reads, “Be still, and know that I am God.” This is a daily reminder of the most important thing in my life—to know God. But it also reminds me that I must be still to know God, which is a tall order for me. How can I “be still” when there is so much to do? I can hear the phone ringing and ping. I hear the notifications flooding in, followed by a text, a tweet, and the Facebook reminders that keep coming in.

In the busy, noisy, and crazy world we live in, it is increasingly challenging to be still.

I am a pastor like you and know from firsthand experience that we are some of the busiest professionals on the planet. And yet, I hear the voice of God through His Word saying to me, “Be still, and know Me. I want to have a personal, intimate relationship with you. You need to be still for our relationship to grow.” All too often, my reply is, “But God, I have so much to do. I have committees to run to, sermons to prepare, visits to make, appointments and deadlines to keep, projects to complete, emails to answer, phone calls to return. How can I find time to be still?”

### No noise, no action?

The Word of God gently speaks to my heart, saying, “Be still.” God speaks to us in silence. But silence can make us uncomfortable. We feel lost if there is no noise, action, or direction. Is it God’s will for us to be constantly busy, running to and fro without pausing to spend time in communion with Him?

When we habituate ourselves to busyness, it becomes difficult to be still. Doing nothing seems to be a waste of time. We would not admit it, but often, we are afraid of silence. We feel that we must avoid silence. Yet it is during the silence that we position ourselves to hear the voice of God calling us to commune with Him.

Silence is the environment God designed for us to commune with Him. Author Ellen G. White writes, “An intensity such as never before was seen is taking possession of the world. In amusement, in moneymaking, in the contest for power, in the very struggle for existence, there is a terrible force that engrosses body and mind and soul. In the midst of this maddening rush, God is speaking. He bids us come apart and commune with Him. ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10.”<sup>1</sup>

I was struck by the following statement which says that even during our devotional times, our minds are restless and do not enter into real communion with God. “Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ’s loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.

“These workers can never attain the highest success until they learn the secret of strength. They must give themselves time to think, to pray, to wait upon God for a renewal of physical, mental, and spiritual power. They need the uplifting influence of His Spirit. Receiving this, they will be quickened by fresh life. The wearied frame and tired brain will be refreshed, the burdened heart will be lightened.

“Not a pause for a moment in His presence, but personal contact with Christ, to sit down in companionship with Him—this is our need.”<sup>2</sup>

Pastor, God knows how busy you are. Nevertheless, He loves you so much that He invites you into a closer relationship with Him amid the silence. Be still, and know that He is God.



1 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 260.

2 White, 260, 261.

# Taking care of the living after a death



**T** Tyler was a responsible 15-year-old who worked on a ranch after school and on weekends. One morning he finished work and noticed that some cattle had gotten loose. He jumped on a dirt bike to bring them back. Attached to the bike's handlebars was a revolver in a holster used for rattlesnakes. Unfortunately, the pistol was cocked, and as Tyler rode over the rough ground, the gun discharged. It was an unusual but fatal accident. I arrived at

the police station to find the parents in shock. We cried together, something we would do again and again in the coming days.

The day following Tyler's death, I visited the family. It was breakfast time. What could I say to take away their pain? Nothing. After breakfast, Tyler's father and I walked along the fence line where Tyler's prize-winning sheep were grazing. After a few steps, Tyler's father turned and hugged me. We exchanged no words. We simply shared

**Gene G. Bradbury, MDiv,  
MA in Theopoetics and  
Writing,** is a retired pastor,  
author, and chaplain,  
residing in Sequim,  
Washington, United States.



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the pain. I was a physical presence to hold on to when the solid ground was collapsing.

This is the world of pastoral care, so often dealing with death. But I have discovered that pastoral care in the time of death is not about the dead; it is about the living.

## The Vietnam War

I began my pastoral internship in the late 1960s. My first funeral was the result of a car accident. Shortly after the senior pastor had left, the local funeral home asked if I would take the service for a young husband. It was the first time I knocked on a door where death had occurred—the first of many.

My second funeral came soon after. The funeral director told me I would have to put aside the whole day because the cemetery was 40 miles out of town—“where cattlemen and shepherders are buried.” He said the deceased was the last of the Basque shepherders. I thought to myself, *Welcome to Wyoming.*

What do you say to six cowboys who were rounded up (pun intended) to be pallbearers? The ranchers arrived at the funeral home after a stop at the local tavern. They passed by old Chaco's body to pay their respects and took their places in the front row of the chapel with their Stetsons below their chairs.

“Make it short and simple,” I whispered to myself. I read Psalm 23 and said a few words about Chaco. After the Lord's Prayer, I gave the benediction. The pallbearers rose and carried the casket to the hearse. I joined the funeral director in the limousine for the 40-mile ride to the graveyard. As we waited for Chaco's grave to be hand dug, a cowboy sidled up to me. “Reverend,” he said, “that was one of the best services I've been to.”

And then there were the Vietnam War funerals. The 1960s were fearful years for families with children in the military. Deaths were announced by two officers who came to the home. The casualties were most often young men in their early twenties. Each death was traumatic. One,

in particular, was more difficult because of the circumstances of the soldier's death.

On this occasion, the funeral director explained why the casket could not be opened. The young man's body had been badly burned. Most of the family understood the reason for a sealed casket, but the soldier's mother could not. She insisted on seeing her son. We finally convinced her that it would be better if she remembered her son as he was when he left home, and the service proceeded with a closed coffin.

During the three months following my supervising pastor's departure, I presided at eight funerals overall, many of them military. This early experience was like watching my grandmother embroidering a tablecloth. She would follow a pattern printed on the fabric and use colored thread to bring the design to life. These experiences were the pattern that my ministry would take in the future.

After three months, I was emotionally ready for the next pastor to arrive.

## Home visits

Every crisis is different. Each family's grief is its own. Family members grieve in their own way because each individual has a unique relationship with the deceased. These truths are noticeable when visiting the family's home. The quiet presence of the pastor in the room is a living metaphor for a higher presence. If he or she is a good listener, it can pave the way for future visits.

When asked to do a memorial service for an unchurched family, I request a visit to their home. “It is an important time for you and your family,” I tell them. “I would like to know more about you and hear your story.”

In one case, the young woman I met at the funeral home had lost her husband of just three years in a snowmobile accident. After the preliminaries, I asked if I could come to her home the next day. The initial visit brought an invitation to dinner the next evening to meet her husband's best friend. These visits opened the way for extended ministry in the following weeks.

Home visits give permission to each person to tell their story and begin the healing process. It is also an opportunity to talk about the grieving process. We cannot change the circumstances, but we can give comfort. What else, really, can we do?

### Educating for the end of life

As pastors, have we done a good job of preparing people for the end of life? We seem to be more comfortable talking about the new heavens and the new earth than we are about death. It is certainly easier to use common clichés than to hold our tongues and acknowledge what has happened.

Perhaps you have heard some of these: “Aren’t you glad that you have another son?” Or “God had a reason for this; we just can’t see it now.” These attempts at comforting are not helpful. It is often best to say nothing at all. Too often, we want to provide answers that make no sense to the grieving person. The person who has lost a spouse of 60 years is screaming inside. Our role as pastors is not to provide pat answers but to listen to the heart that suffers and then suffer with that person. That is the meaning of compassion. By this, we acknowledge what has happened. Only then can healing begin.

We can read books from experts and glean what is helpful, but most often, a person’s own life experience will dictate how one handles the loss of a loved one. Most will find it difficult to believe the person whom they have lived with is really gone. How often I have heard someone say: “I keep waiting for him to come through that door.” In the end, we find that the grieving process is something we must go *through*, not *around*, if healing is to take place.<sup>1</sup>

### Being present

One time there was a murder-suicide—the first time I had to deal with more than one death. The couple was known and loved. The incident affected their families, friends, neighbors, and business associates. Before their divorce, they were known as a happily married couple. How could this happen? What the people in this bewildered and grieving town needed was one another’s support. Friends and neighbors came together in a large auditorium to recognize what had happened. They grieved and shared a common experience of loss.

A murder-suicide is a special case, of course. But every death is unique for those who experience it. Some deaths are more difficult than

others for pastors. The death of a child or young adult usually sends ripples of pain wider than the death of an elderly person who has lived a long life. The death of a student can affect an entire school body.

When called to the home of a 14-year-old middle-school student, I braced myself for the deep grief I would encounter. The young boy had shot himself while on the phone with a friend. The details need not be told here, but the father and stepmother became concerned about their son’s classmates. In preparing for the community memorial service, they asked me to bring a message to the boy’s friends: “Please tell them this is not the way to deal with their feelings. Tell them, if they find themselves in a desperate situation, to seek the help of a friend, parent, pastor, teacher, or coach.” The message, of course, was delivered.

### No rule book

How does a pastor or caregiver best serve those in crisis? The emotions of those who grieve are deep and cannot be explained away. There is no rule book that can tell us to follow rules one, two, and three. We walk into the unknown. But we can still follow some principles to help the living grieve their dead.

First, as you walk into the situation, let the circumstances dictate what comes next. Be the calming presence. Avoid easy answers because there are none. Pray with the family and, if they are believers, talk about the hope we have in Jesus, the certainty of the resurrection, and the promise that “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26, NKJV). Be an active listener—that is what is needed. Provide continued support and pastoral care after the memorial service.

Pastors are not called to solve the unsolvable. Perhaps the best we can do is follow the apostle’s words: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15, NKJV).

The dead are dead; there is nothing we, as pastors, can do for them. Our job is with the living.



1 See American Hospice Foundation, “My Story Grief Resource,” Adventist Chaplains, accessed February 20, 2023, [https://www.adventistchaplains.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/My\\_Story\\_Grief\\_Resource\\_TAC\\_1\\_2015\\_Fillable.pdf](https://www.adventistchaplains.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/My_Story_Grief_Resource_TAC_1_2015_Fillable.pdf).

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).





## Love Fights Back: 3 Stories to Save the World

by Patrick Johnson (Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press, 2022).

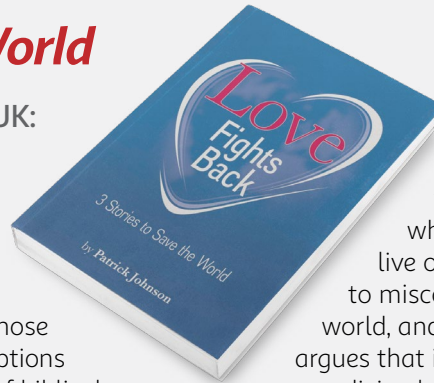
Some of the major challenges pastors may face are misconceptions about God in the minds of those to whom they minister. These misconceptions are often fueled by a misinterpretation of biblical texts that picture God in terms of an arbitrary despot who imposes His divine will and punishes those who do not comply. Picturing God as punitive rather than loving results in fear-based obedience, often producing rebellious characters.

In *Love Fights Back*, Patrick Johnson, Ministerial Association director at the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, explores the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14:6–13—typically thought to contain the most frightening warnings in the Bible—and suggests that it is not a threat from a harsh, merciless dictator but an appeal from a loving heavenly Father.

The author confesses an underlying unease that marked years of pastoral ministry. A radical shift in his perception of the character of God transformed not only his relationship with God but also his approach to pastoral ministry.

The author convincingly argues that a genuine understanding of the three angels' messages necessitates a healthy understanding of God's character. Otherwise, the second (v. 8) and third messages (vv. 9–11) will seem not only complex but also condemning and arbitrary. Both of these traits make Christianity unappealing to a contemporary generation unattracted to a divine version of Nebuchadnezzar, who exerts arbitrary power and eliminates those who oppose him.

A healthy understanding of God's character necessitates reading the book of Revelation, including the three angels' messages, within the framework of a cosmic conflict. Salvation history recognizes the heart of the conflict as a diabolical campaign against God and His reputation, a deceptive attack against the trustworthiness of His character.



The three angels' messages are intended to unmask the deceptive work of the archenemy, who manipulates those who live on the earth to subscribe to misconceptions about God, the world, and their human life. Johnson argues that in the three angels' messages, divine love fights back. The first message demonstrates that judgment is not an arbitrary decision but good news. The second message unmasks the character of Babylonian human structures as broken because they operate through force. The third message points out that God allows human beings to have the freedom to reject Him, despite His decisive warning: "Choose wisely!"

The author argues that misleading presentations of doctrines that picture God in an arbitrary light need to be rethought, particularly since our age is characterized by a crisis of trust. By focusing on God's character, the author demonstrates that the three angels' messages present an attractive gospel about an attractive God who is attractive to serve. The doctrines of law, salvation, and judgment are explored within this framework.

Some readers might take issue with a lack of attention to the prophetic significance of Revelation 14:6–13. This book is not an exegetical, scholarly study of the Apocalypse or some other interpretive issues. Such discussions might miss the point. Rather, the book is a creative, pastoral attempt to demonstrate to a generation of contemporary readers, growing up in an age of distrust, the relevance of the three angels' messages and the essence of the gospel: God is not a God to be afraid of—He is a God to be a friend of. He is not a dictator who operates on fear. He is an attractive character who treats human beings with dignity, not oppression. He can be fully trusted. This perspective is a much-needed corrective for curing an unhealthy fear of God, which is ingrained in the minds of many pastors and church members. I recommend this book to all who are ready to rethink and grow. 📖

Laszlo Gallusz, PhD, is a senior lecturer in New Testament Studies at Newbold College of Higher Education, Binfield, Bracknell, Berkshire, United Kingdom.





## Respect for Marriage Act and Fairness for All Act

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not endorsed or advocated for the passage of the Respect for Marriage Act, voted by the United States Senate on November 16, 2022. The legislation requires states to recognize marriages from other states, including same-sex marriages.

Due to concerns expressed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other religious freedom advocates, amended legislation now contains provisions that address core religious freedom concerns raised by the bill. These include Congress acknowledging that “both traditional marriage supporters and their beliefs are decent and honorable,” which protects churches from being forced to facilitate same-sex marriages and prevents retaliation

against religious organizations for their views on marriage.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church greatly appreciates the congressional offices that responded to its concerns by including these religious-liberty provisions. It prefers to be known by what it is for rather than what it is against, who the church supports rather than who it opposes. It, therefore, continues to support legislative initiatives such as the Fairness for All Act, a balanced piece of legislation that provides LGBT nondiscrimination protections in areas such as secular employment, housing, and public accommodations while preserving religious-freedom safeguards for people of faith and the institutions they maintain.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church respects the right of others to believe differently; however, the church does not base its view on marriage upon a secular rationale, and it will continue to teach and promote its understanding of marriage, sexuality, and family. [North American Division]

## A ministry of care for university students in Australia

According to statistics from the Barna Group, 72 percent of young people who attend church in Australia drop out of church life as they transition into university and young adulthood. The Australian Union Conference (AUC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

has therefore launched Disciple Focused Life Group Leadership, a project that offers ministry to university students outside of the church and supports Adventist students within secular universities. This four-year initiative aims to help Adventist young adults stay in the church and facilitate outreach to secular university students by placing two young adults within selected secular universities around Australia to set up life groups on campus.

Life group leaders will have training and support from mentors—from the local church level up to the South Pacific Division.

**Jeffrey Parker**, Youth director for AUC, said, “It is so exciting to see all of our Australian conferences wanting to be a part of this Life Group ministry proposal as it rolls out over 2023–2024. All the conference administration teams see the need to move forward in this space and want to act fast to connect with both our own Adventist young adults and other university students that can be reached for Christ.” [Kimberley McMurray and Juliana Muniz, *Adventist Record*]



Photo: ?

## The gift of Bert Beverly Beach

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

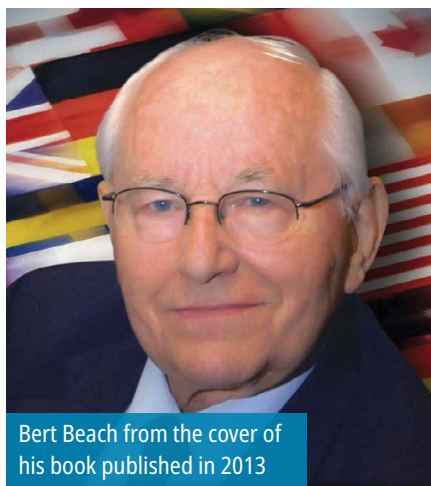
For decades, **Bert B. Beach** was the face of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to other faiths and civic entities. Beach passed to his rest on December 14, 2022, at 94, in Silver Spring, Maryland. Beach was born in Gland, Switzerland, to an American family. His father, **Walter Raymond Beach**, was a Seventh-day Adventist Church administrator. He received a PhD from the University of Paris and spoke six languages. Beach served as secretary general of the General Conference of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, and was secretary general of the International Association for Religious Freedom until his retirement in 1995.

His reach extended to the far corners of Europe and West Africa. Former General Conference president **Jan Paulsen** stated, “Bert Beach, more than any other leader from . . . our church, pioneered for us the importance of communicating with people whose religious convictions and values differed from ours—important for us to understand them and for us to be understood.”

In his 1974 publication *Ecumenism: Boon or Bane?* Beach declared, “Adventism is not a utopian vision of pie in the apocalyptic sky by and by. Adventists wish to be seed planters—seeds of love, kindness, peace, justice, temperance, health, purity, and brotherhood. . . . Although such a society will never fully materialize prior to the Parousia, it is the mission



Bert Beach in 1961



Bert Beach from the cover of his book published in 2013

of the church to witness and proclaim the coming accomplishment of such a truly new and revolutionary society by standing for justice and peace.”

**Ganoune Diop**, director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, called Beach, a predecessor, “a gift to the world of faith and beyond,” who brought “legitimacy and credibility” to Adventism in the eyes of the other Christian denominations. Diop concluded that both “the political and religious worlds owe him a debt” and we are all “grateful to God for giving us a gift in the person of Bert Beach.” [Tor Tjeransen, Trans-European Division, *Adventist Review* staff, and Andy Roman]

*Editor’s note:* This editor’s very first ministerial call came from Dr. B. B. Beach. I treasure his decades-old letter to the Ghana High Commission in London: “Mr. Jeffrey Brown has been asked by our organisation to spend

approximately one year teaching at Bekwai Secondary School . . . His stay in Ghana will be fully supported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” It was the beginning of a life of mission for me. Michelle, daughter of Bert and his wife Eliana, studied with us at Newbold College in England and later the family instituted the annual W. R. and B. B. Beach Lectureship on the campus. Thank you, Eliana and the Beach family, for your incredible service to people of all faiths—and none. —Jeffrey O. Brown



Just wanted to let you know that I've been deeply impressed by Ministry magazine, specifically by the January 2023 issue. I had viewed the magazine as more theoretical than practical, but this issue challenges me to seek God. And that is very good! God bless you and the team there.

—Pastor David Miller, email

Especially appreciated Ken Crawford's article, "Sprinkling Pastor Dust," in the January [2023] issue. Just the presence of a pastor at traumatic times means so much.

I recall our young pastor sitting on the front steps with me after my mother died when he was supposed to be at Vacation Bible School to lead the singing. He chose to stay with me instead at a time of deep grief. Still reverberates after 20 years. Pastor dust!

—Ruth Wright Hoffer, email

I am a pastor in another denomination, but for some reason, I received a copy of the November [2022] issue of *Ministry* magazine. In this issue, I read a very encouraging and well-written article by Dr. Osei-Bonsu, titled "Ruled by a Clear Conscience."

I cannot tell you how encouraged and impressed and aided I was by this article, and I hope you will let the author know how much it meant to me.



I struggle, as a pastor, with my relations with colleagues in my denomination who will tell me that they are "ruled by a clear conscience," yet I know that their actions and priorities are contrary to the clear teachings in Scripture. The whole article was helpful and encouraging, but perhaps this one statement stands out in particular: "When people are misinformed, they can have clear consciences yet still be wrong."

There seems to be an unwillingness to be guided by the clear counsel in the Bible and, instead, a wholesale adoption of whatever politically correct wind is blowing. If there is any appeal to Scripture at all as a basis for their views and their actions, it is only to co-opt passages chosen at random to justify a kind of morality and a set of values that originate in the relativism of this (unregenerate) world.

Ours (in America) is a secular society. So it is no surprise that the values adopted by our society in general are splintered and based on nothing more substantial than the subjective whims of individuals.

However, it is my belief that the human conscience is corrupted by sin, and so the causes and priorities and values that spring from such a culture will invariably be tainted and misdirected by that sin. That is, and always has been, the mindset of this world, and as such is no surprise.

However, as the wise man puts it, "There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is death." When my ministry colleagues agree with and support these secular value systems—regardless of their "clear" consciences—I fail to see what witness to the gospel they offer as a contrast and a means of salvation from the death to which those paths must inevitably lead.

That is why I believe this article that examines the relationship between conscience and the Holy Scriptures in choosing the direction for living and ministry is so needed and was so helpful to me.

Thank you, and thank Dr. Osei-Bonsu for this "cool

drink of water in a dry and thirsty land.”

—Rev. Wyn Bryant, *Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA)*

## Name tags do work

May I begin by thanking the Seventh-day Adventist Church for producing and kindly distributing *Ministry* magazine to me?

I had never heard of the church until I had a parish next door to the church in a place called Porter Creek, Yukon.

I have many stories of the neighbors, their minister, and church members reaching out to me and my family as well as to the community locally.

The article on making social engagement happen [“Five Steps to Successfully Make Social Engagement Happen in Your Church,” September 2022] reminded me of an initiative I started in my church.

I instituted a “Name Tag Sunday”! Simple enough, everyone arriving for Sunday Mass was given a name tag on the way into the building. As [happens] everywhere, one or two groaners, but everyone, including me, tagged up! At the end of Mass, during the last verse of a hymn, I would take myself down to the door, pick up a bundle of parish bulletins, and walk outside. When the hymn finished, I braced myself for the usual exodus. Normally, half the congregation would leave, and the remainder would remain and socialize over coffee. I waited, and I waited, and I waited! Nobody

left the building. I went back in, and the entire congregation was socializing! Talk about amazed! Still, it was a very beautiful experience!

About a week later, one of my congregation’s families was broadsided by a snow-plow. A member of the parish, on her way to work, asked God’s favor on those involved.

The Sunday following, I encountered the wife of the injured driver and told her about the prayer. She asked me who that person was, and I replied that she wouldn’t know her. She persisted, and I gave her the name. She told me that she wouldn’t have known the person save for Name Tag Sunday the previous week. She and some of her family had been among the groaners that first Sunday but not after that day. Her family recovered.

Every gathering I have ever been leading since that Sunday, religious and lay, were given name tags on entering to meet. Apart from helping me remember names, a blessing as I age, it took down any sense of formal barriers, encouraging folk to open up to each other and to me. It works! Try it!

—Most Rev. Niall Sheridan, *email*

Thank you for the excellent article “The New Covenant of Exodus” by Elizabeth Ostring [March 2022]. What a refreshing presentation of “the ‘new’ covenant of Sinai” based on the revelation and context of Exodus 34:6, 7. Concurring evidence of the same occurs

in Psalm 103’s expanded and superlative expression of the Sinai covenant’s theology of divine love and grace. (Note its allusions to Exodus 34:6, 7 as well as its own verses 7, 18, which identify the [renewed] Sinai covenant as its point of reference.)

—Skip MacCarty, *email*

I would like to say thanks for the November 2021 *Ministry* magazine, which contained an article titled “Best Practices for Trauma-Informed Preaching.” I really enjoyed that article. I am not a pastor yet, but I must say that the information in this article is very informative, timely, and modern.

When I think about the pandemic and the personal injury that I recently experienced, how timely and God-sent this magazine and article were to my life. How comforting, healing, and encouraging is this information in a time like this! I would like to say thanks very much to the author [Rodney A. Palmer] of this article.

Thanks for the new perspective and points on the topic of trauma; may God continue to bless you all at this ministry.

—Mr. Pemberton, *email*

Thanks for the great work you are doing with *Ministry*.

Pastors and church leaders are blessed around the world, including me! May you be blessed, now and forever.

—Derek Morris, *Hope Channel International*



## Sharpen your axe

**A**braham Lincoln is reported to have said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend four hours sharpening the axe.” The idea is that a dull axe will multiply the amount of energy and action required to chop down a tree. A sharp axe will make quick and effective work of the task.

When I lived in Oregon, I had a woodstove to warm the house. In my shed, I had two axes to chop wood, one dull and the other sharp. Sometimes I would thoughtlessly grab the closest handle without paying much attention. When I swung the axe, I would feel the shock in my arms as the head bounced off the wood instead of sinking in deep. I had grabbed the dull axe.

### Right tools

Too often, we grab the tools closest to us without putting much thought into their condition. We use resources and ideas that are closest, familiar, and what we think we need. Sometimes we do this because we are too busy or too lazy to put much thought into researching what is appropriate, current, or the most accurate for our task.

We have all wasted time hacking away at an idea or project without the proper tools and resources. Without the right background, history, and knowledge, the only things we have to show for the time and energy spent are an exhausted mind and sore body. Take the time to research, read, and reflect and then approach the task with the right tools and knowledge. When the axe is sharp, it cuts quickly.

### Sharpening

Parkinson’s law essentially states that work will expand to fill the time available for its completion.<sup>1</sup> It says that people tend to take all the time allotted (and occasionally more) to accomplish a task. This situation hints at things like procrastination and other avoidance methods to put off unpleasant or overwhelming tasks. Squandering the time allotted could result in an unfinished task.

The ratio of making preparations for the action compared to the action should be intentional.

**Timothy Floyd, MS**, is director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Kansas-Nebraska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Kansas City, Missouri, United States.



When we have a plan, we are nearly always more successful. As Benjamin Franklin said, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” Grabbing the right axe, sharpening the axe thoroughly, and then taking action within the allotted time will lead to greater results.

### Opportunities

The coronavirus pandemic gave us several opportunities to sharpen axes and learn new swinging methods for chopping down trees. We have learned how to communicate, show empathy, deepen relationships, grow friendships, and guide others on a spiritual journey. We have developed new skills with resources such as Zoom, Ecamm Live, Facebook Live, and Facebook’s Group Unit feature to carry on discipleship and encourage our members’ spiritual development. We have sharpened our axes for the sake of the gospel.

Some saw this time with the virus as an opportunity and immediately got to work. Others took the unspecified time as a sort of vacation and later realized they would have spent their time better had they known what they know now. Yet others still are realizing that something was not working. They made a course correction and are making a second attempt with the right equipment for the task at hand. Sadly, still others are hacking away at the tree with a dull axe, wondering why nothing is changing.

### Stewards

We have been called to “go [get an axe] therefore and make disciples [sharpen] of all nations, baptizing [cut down a tree]” (Matt. 28:19, ESV). We must approach this task to the best of our abilities, with the right tools and preparation, and be the best stewards of the time God has given us. At some point, He will say that time is up. Will we have been found to have embraced our opportunities—or squandered them?



<sup>1</sup> C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson’s Law* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1968).

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