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INTERNATIONAL
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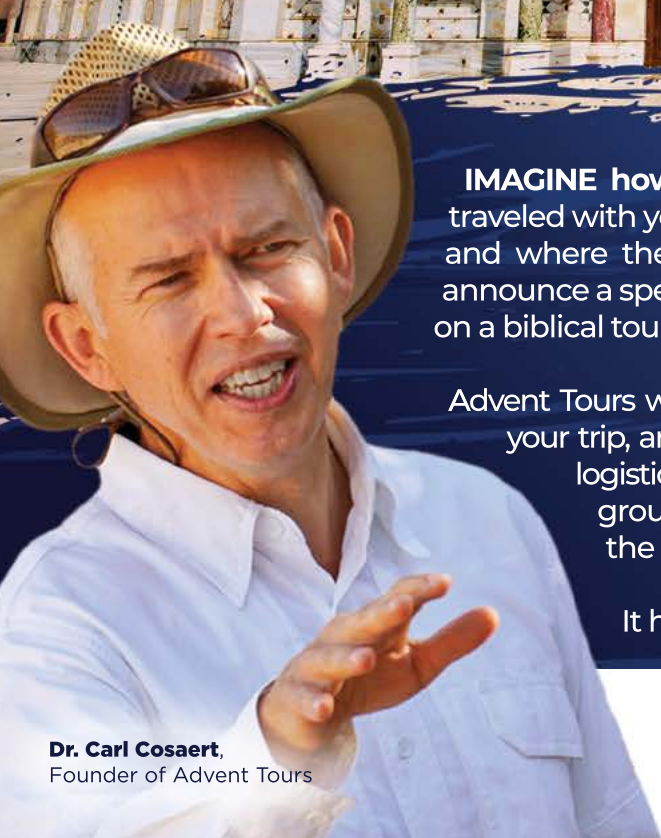
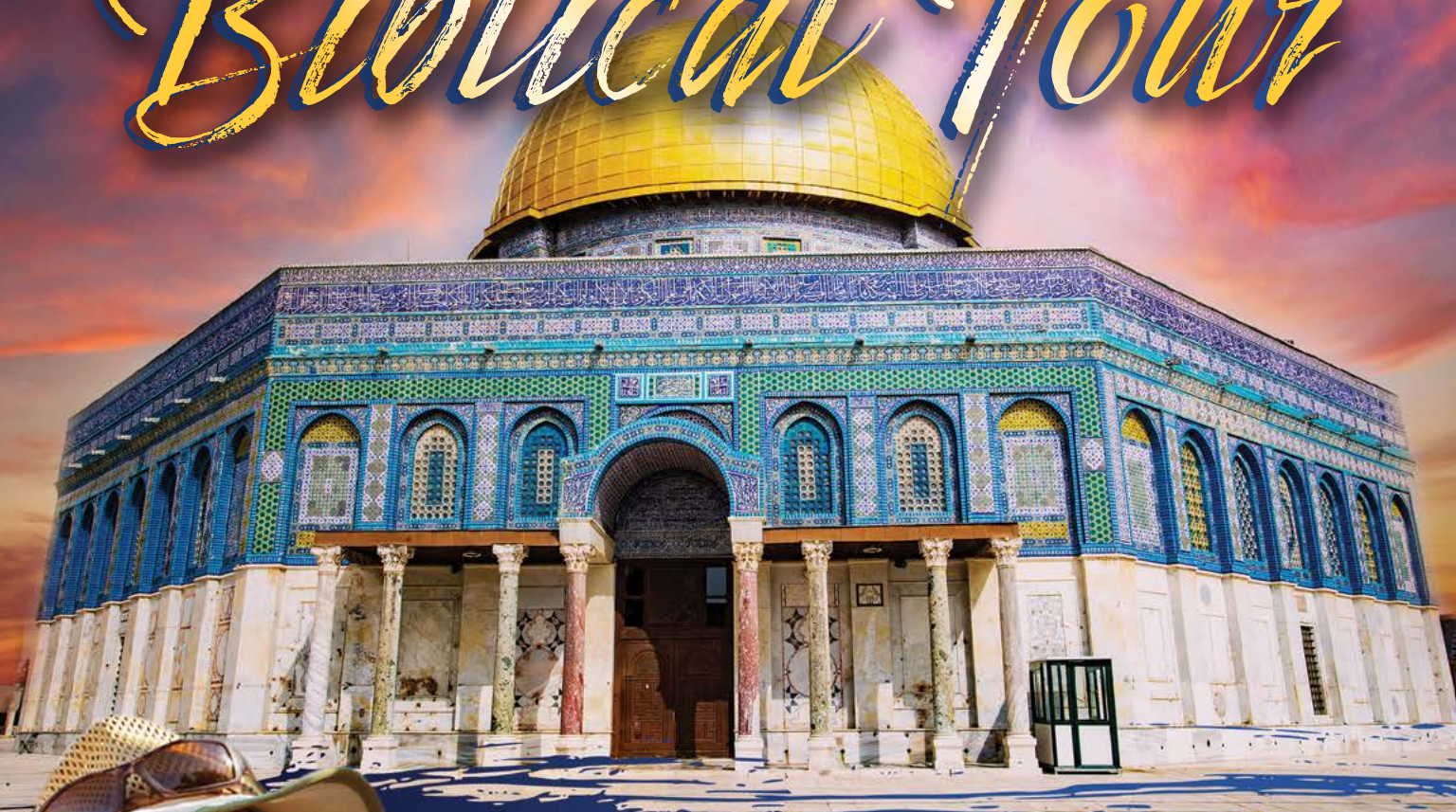
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Church. Read by clergy of all faiths.



The pressure of summer ministry

A story is told of three men sent on a mission. The first didn't make it because his horse broke a leg. The second didn't make it because he was ambushed and wounded in the neck. The third man arrived late—but he made it. Covered in blood, he apologized for his delay, saying in his defense only that it had taken him a little longer than he had hoped because he had been captured and hurt, and as he'd lost his horse, he had no choice but to walk the rest of the way.

The seasons of ministry are about the anticipation of and preparation for mission. Five words are all Jesus uses for spring ministry (approximately ages 20–35). Referring to the seemingly endless crowd—5,000 men plus women and children—He gives His disciples a seemingly impossible command: “Give ye them to eat” (Luke 9:13, KJV). But spring pastors love a challenge. They have not yet been tainted with the cynicism of reasonableness, rationality, and reality. For some reason, spring pastors still believe “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

Five words are also what Jesus uses for the summer. Summer ministry (approximately ages

35–50) is all about balance. The heat is on. Into this time of reckoning, Jesus asks, “How many loaves have ye?” (Matt. 15:34, KJV). He knows how much we have—or how little. It's the never-enough season. Never enough time. Never enough energy. Never enough money. And never enough satisfaction. The church members say they don't see you enough. Your family says they don't see you enough. And your unfinished projects—that article, book, or doctoral degree—they never see you.

Anna Hayford, the wife of the renowned Jack Hayford, lamented, “As his pastoral responsibilities increased, his time at home became less and less. Resentment rose up in me against all those people who ‘needed him.’ His family needed him, too, but our needs seemed to be low on the totem pole. I started to nag. ‘I can't take this anymore,’ I'd cry. Or ‘Why aren't you ever home?’ Or ‘Don't you know the children need you?’”¹

That's why

- 20 percent of pastors agree that their family resents the demands of pastoral ministry;
- 35 percent agree ministry demands keep them from spending time with their family;

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



SCAN FOR AUDIO

It's the never-enough season. Never enough time. Never enough energy. Never enough money. And never enough satisfaction.

- › 48 percent feel that the demands of ministry are greater than they can handle;
- › 54 percent agree the role of a pastor is frequently overwhelming; and
- › 84 percent feel they must be on call 24 hours a day.²

Why is this? Research professor Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell says, “Pastors feel great internal pressure to care non-stop for others.”³

Many pastors concur with the prophet Zechariah: “Suppose someone asks, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ Then they will answer, ‘I was given these wounds at the house of my friends’ ” (Zech. 13:6, NIV). For some of us, being wounded in ministry signals, if not a new career, certainly a new placement. But true disciples think it not strange concerning the fiery trials that have come upon them (see 1 Pet. 4:12). They know that while the wiles of the devil bring pressure, no weapon formed against them will prosper (see Isa. 54:17).

Battered and bruised, summer pastor, the blood you are covered with is not your own; it's the blood of the Lamb. It's the symbol of

overcoming. It's the blood that gives you strength from day to day. And it will never lose its power.

So “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph. 4:1, NKJV). You may be tempted to give up, but the finish line is in sight. You have no choice. Walk the rest of the way.



- 1 Anna Hayford, “My Husband’s Seldom Home,” in *Help! I’m a Pastor’s Wife*, ed. Michele Buckingham (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1986), 37.
- 2 Mark Dance, “5 Self-Assessment Questions Pastors Need to Ask Right Now,” Lifeway Research, February 3, 2022; Lisa Green, “Despite Stresses, Few Pastors Give Up on Ministry,” Lifeway Research, September 1, 2015.
- 3 Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, Elizabeth L. Turner, Gary G. Bennett, Jia Yao, Xiang-Fang Li, David E. Eagle, Rachel A. Meyer et al., “A 2-Year Holistic Health and Stress Intervention: Results of an RCT in Clergy,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 53, no. 3 (September 2017).

Empowering young adults in mission:

What churches can do



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

God worked miracles to revitalize our aging church in just four years, growing the number of young adults from fewer than 5 to more than 30.¹ It radically transformed our congregation and community.

As more young adults began joining our church, one historically characterized by retirees, we encountered unexpected tension between the older and younger generations. As a result, organizational and cultural change needed to accompany our organic growth.

What could our church do to further catalyze, unify, and sustain our revitalization through empowering young adults in mission?

Representation in church leadership

Paul wrote to Timothy, the young leader overseeing the vibrant church mission in Ephesus, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but *set an example* for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12; emphasis added).² How can young people “set an example” if they are not seen and heard where church decisions take place?

When I arrived at the church in 2016, the average age of the church-board members was 61.³ Curious how the church had grown old, I asked the clerk, who had served for decades, to do some research. Using old church nominating committee reports she had filed away, the clerk compiled the names and ages of all church-board members for each of the previous 10 years as well as one year from each of the past five decades. What we found was enlightening.

Up until 2008, the average age of the church board had been on an upward trajectory since 1978 when it was only 45 (see figure 1). I was surprised to recognize the names of several church-board leaders in 1978 as some of the most involved members in 2016. They had started leading the church when they were in their 20s and 30s! Since they did not empower new younger leaders to serve in their place, the church had grown old just as they did.

Most current board members were proud to have served for at least a decade. Leaders were

Figure 1: Average Age of the Church Board 1968–2008

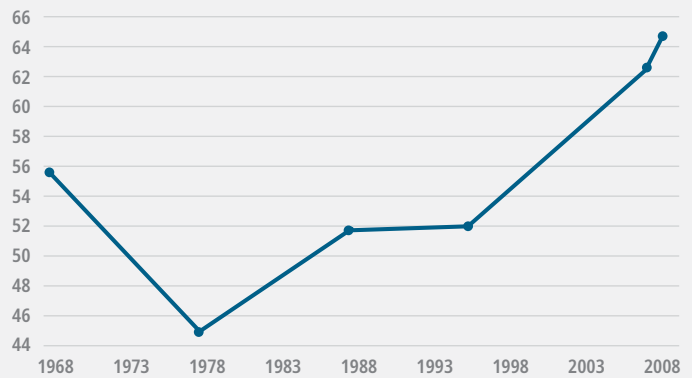
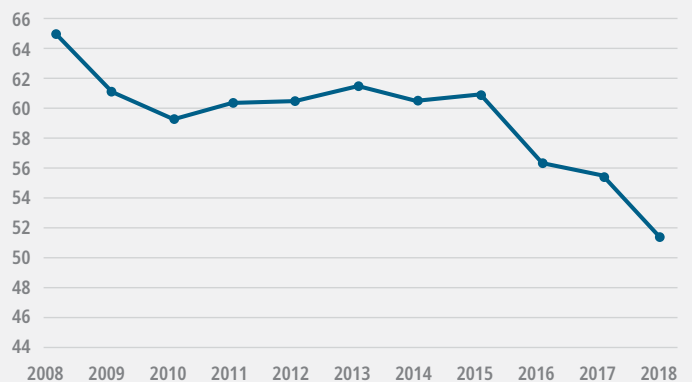


Figure 2: Average Age of the Church Board 2008–2018



automatically renominated every year. How could we, then, empower new young leaders without causing undue heartache and fallout?

We refreshed the nominating committee process, requiring at least three names to be nominated before voting on each position by secret ballot through a weighted average.⁴ We also added some church-approved new board positions. The names of young adults and others who were already leading groups and community ministry naturally rose to the top for the new board positions. Within three years, the average age on the board had dropped to 51 (see figure 2), the youngest it had been in 40 years.



We went from our youngest board member being in their mid-40s to having eight board members 35 and under (four of them as new elders).

Electing new young voices to the leadership table began changing the conversation. They often shared inspiring stories about ministry and courteously raised questions about how things were done. Older leaders grew to respect the young leaders because of their spiritual example.

Integration into church structures

As the New Testament church grew rapidly and organically, tension developed between two groups in the church. “The Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). What was the solution? “Choose seven men *from among you*. . . . We will turn this responsibility over to them” (v. 3; emphasis added). The church realized it needed to integrate representatives of the new believers into its structures.

As the number of young adults in our church increased, so did the tension between generations. It was hard to pinpoint exactly what was going on or how to move forward. One year into our journey, our union sponsored us to participate in the Growing Young Cohort by the Fuller Youth Institute. Based on extensive research of Christian churches in North America, the book *Growing Young* discovered a critical link between young adults and church health. “Healthy churches reach young people, and young people make churches healthier. If your church is reaching 20-year-olds, your church will reach 60-year-olds.”⁵

Four intergenerational lay leaders and I participated in two in-person summits and monthly webinars for learning and strategic implementation over the course of one year. The cohort journey brought helpful focus to the young adult conversation in our church. *Growing Young* covers six essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church:

1. Unlock keychain leadership
2. Empathize with today's young people
3. Take Jesus' message seriously
4. Fuel a warm community
5. Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere
6. Be the best neighbors

We used the Growing Young Church Assessment Tool to reveal how we were doing in

those six areas. More than 50 members filled out the 60-question assessment. We discovered that different generations had vastly different perceptions of our church. (See figure 3.)

Those 40 and above had a much more positive view of how the church was engaging and empowering young adults than the young adults themselves did. Young adults, ages 18–29, rated our church significantly lower.

A year and a half later, we used the Growing Young Church Assessment again. This time it indicated very little disparity between generations. (See figure 4.)

The highest scores actually came from young adults who were 18–29. What had changed?

Young adults were now being integrated into church structures. Half of the elders were under 35. One-third of the church-board leaders were under 35. The church elected a young-adult leader. They voted for a new \$2,000 young-adult budget (up from \$0 for the past 60-plus years). The church provided facility space to a newly formed young-adult Sabbath School group. Worship coordinators integrated youth and young adults into various platform roles every Sabbath (until then, nearly everyone up front was 65 or older). New young-adult praise teams joined the rotation. Youth and young-adult preachers were empowered. Young adults were elected to serve on the nominating committee and as delegates to the conference constituency session. In addition, young adults now led several of the church's small groups.

A common question while forming committees or ministry teams now became, “How can this involve young adults?” While true culture change begins organically in the margins, it must ultimately be reflected organizationally through church structures for it to continue and have any true influence.

Meaningful intergenerational relationships

Older church members began intentionally seeking out young people for meaningful intergenerational relationships.

Chuck (in his mid-70s) pursued a relationship with Caleb and Virginia when the couple moved to town after graduating college. Learning that Caleb liked to work with his hands, Chuck invited him to help fix up an old pickup truck he had. When they finished, Caleb could have the truck. Caleb could not believe it! He got a new truck, new skills, and a new mentor. “Chuck is basically

Figure 3: Graph of Average Ratings by Age Group (January 11, 2018)⁶

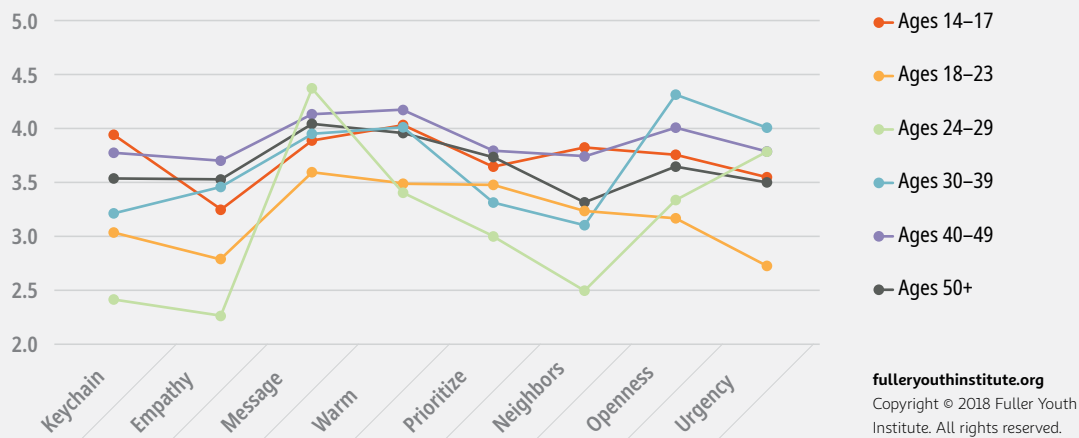
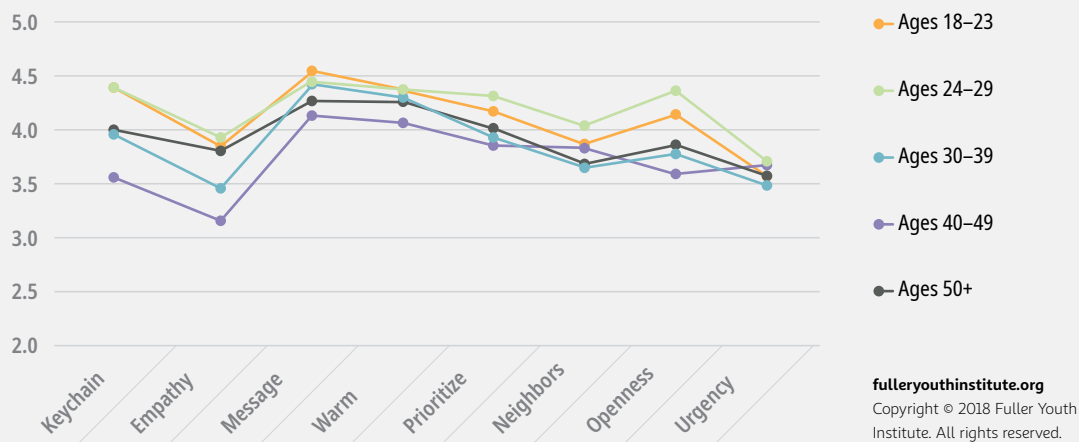


Figure 4: Graph of Average Ratings by Age Group (October 14, 2019)⁷



like family to me,” Caleb shared. When a need arose for a new youth Sabbath School teacher, Caleb volunteered. He was happy to pay forward the investment that Chuck had made in him.

As one of the most respected leaders in the church, Troy (early 70s) served as church-board chair and supervised facility improvements. He connected with Trei, a new young engineer. Trei was highly gifted with audiovisual skills and suggested upgrades for the church’s outdated equipment that would add quality video streaming capabilities. Troy encouraged Trei and used his influence to win over stakeholders to Trei’s plan. When Trei’s \$80,000 proposal reached the business meeting, it was voted unanimously. The church had the money. They invested it not only in new equipment but also in a new young leader. Together, Trei and Troy spent countless hours installing the new equipment. Then Trei trained some of his young-adult friends from work to help run the new system.

The first stages of the upgrade were installed right before the COVID pandemic lockdown. God promises to pour out His Spirit in these last days: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28). Who could have predicted that God would give an emerging young leader a vision in advance that would carry the church through the looming crisis?

Mobilization for kingdom growth and multiplication

Mobility due to job and life transitions is one of the greatest challenges to revitalizing churches through empowering young adults. Local churches that maintain a strong focus on connecting with, involving, and empowering young adults as leaders will see growth and multiplication despite young-adult mobility. However, if a church loses its focus and key young adults move away, positive results can be quickly eroded.



When we embrace a kingdom mindset about the spiritual harvest, young adults who move away are not leaving but being sent out as missionaries to new cities and churches. Mobility is a tremendous opportunity for the kingdom.

When Jesus brought great healing to Capernaum, people “tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the *other towns* also, because that is why I was sent’ ” (Luke 4:42, 43; emphasis added). Jesus cares about all towns, not just ours.

With a kingdom mindset, we trust Jesus to provide the gifts needed for His mission. We move forward as rapidly as possible with the young people He brings by giving them experiences that will grow them as missional spiritual leaders. If God calls them elsewhere, we want them to be ready to lead. In addition, we help them think about what they can do to make a difference for the kingdom there.

We loved hearing stories of young adults whom we had mentored going to other places, getting involved in other churches, and making a difference in mission.

After the opening night of our newly restarted young-adult home Bible-study group, I connected with Jed. He shared how he had recently purchased a dental practice and desired to use it as a way to minister to people. I told him a story about a dentist I knew who had planted a church out of his dental practice. “God could do that through you!” I encouraged.

Jed got really excited. It was the first time anyone had suggested church planting to him. The dream continued to grow.

He and a couple of friends gained valuable experiences in spiritual leadership with our church’s enthusiastic support. They spearheaded community health clinics and started a conference-wide young-adult retreat. In time, they became leaders and elders on the church board. They led a worship team that led to the formation of small groups that eventually brought people to baptism.

After a couple of years, Jed and his friends were ready to plant a new church near his dental practice in a nearby urban area. It was hard for many loving church members to see them go, but they understood the significance for the kingdom.

Our church sent a few young adults to become key leaders for the new church plant’s core team. They began the planting process during the pandemic and celebrated their grand opening at the beginning of 2022. From 2020 to 2022, Jed and

others organized seven more free health clinics, celebrated more than a dozen baptisms (including patients and employees from Jed’s practice), and saw God grow the church plant to more than 50 people.

The Lord prepared those young adults for massive kingdom impact through an aging, small city local church that was intensely focused on empowering young adults in mission.

Empowerment

God can revitalize and multiply churches anywhere and everywhere through empowering young adults in mission. Ellen White writes, “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world!”⁸

When we live with intense focus, prayer, and action, we can expect God to break through. It is His will. He will help us. As we identify, rally behind, and hold up our hands in prayer and support of our young leaders (Exod. 17:8–16), God will lead His people to the Promised Land.



- 1 Virtually none of these 30-plus young adults transferred from other nearby Seventh-day Adventist churches. If you missed it, read “Empowering Young Adults in Mission: What Leaders Can Do” in the March 2023 *Ministry* issue (6–9), which discussed what leaders can do to revitalize their churches through empowering young adults in mission.
- 2 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 3 Ages of the church-board members gathered by longtime Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church clerk Barbara Dietrich from the eAdventist Membership Database and Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church Nominating Committee Reports 1968, 1978, 1988, 1996 (closest data available to 1998), 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019; accessed October 4, 2018 and updated May 7, 2019.
- 4 For more details on the nominating committee process (in harmony with the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*) we followed, see Dan Serns, “Nominating Committee: Ministry Models,” *Elder’s Digest*, July–September 2020, 4, 5, <https://cdn.ministerialassociation.org/cdn/eldersdigest.org/issues/ED%20Q3%202020.pdf>.
- 5 Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 42.
- 6 Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church Growing Young Church Assessment Report, January 11, 2018.
- 7 Port Orchard Seventh-day Adventist Church Growing Young Church Assessment Report, October 14, 2019.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *A Call to Stand Apart* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2002), 66.

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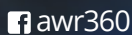
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“My well is empty”:

Adverse childhood experiences among pastors

Recent research on pastoral stress has revealed startling insights into the emotional needs of pastors in the United States.¹ In one study, a pastor shared: “When it is expected from you to give, and to give, and to give, and to teach, and to be a wise man and a counselor that comes with a pastoral job description . . . I feel that I am kind of exhausted, and my well is empty. And I’m just not excited by helping people, by preaching, by ministering anymore.”

This one statement offers insights into several sources of emotional challenge among pastors. For example, such emotional problems may include unending and often unrealistic expectations as well as constant pressure to teach, provide comfort and counsel, and tackle ever-expanding pastoral functions.

Besides such external pressures to perform, research reveals that pastoral training generally lacks preparation for dealing with the impact of emotions, either their own or those of the people they serve.² One research participant observed, “We exactly know what the Bible stands for, what we stand for. But emotionally . . . we don’t know how to deal with it.”

The drive

What might be driving such emotional challenges so far that pastors lose their excitement about ministering and feel lost when it comes to handling them? Research indicates that one area to consider is trauma experienced in childhood. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) represent various types of traumas that lay the foundation for long-term negative effects on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, and behavioral health.³

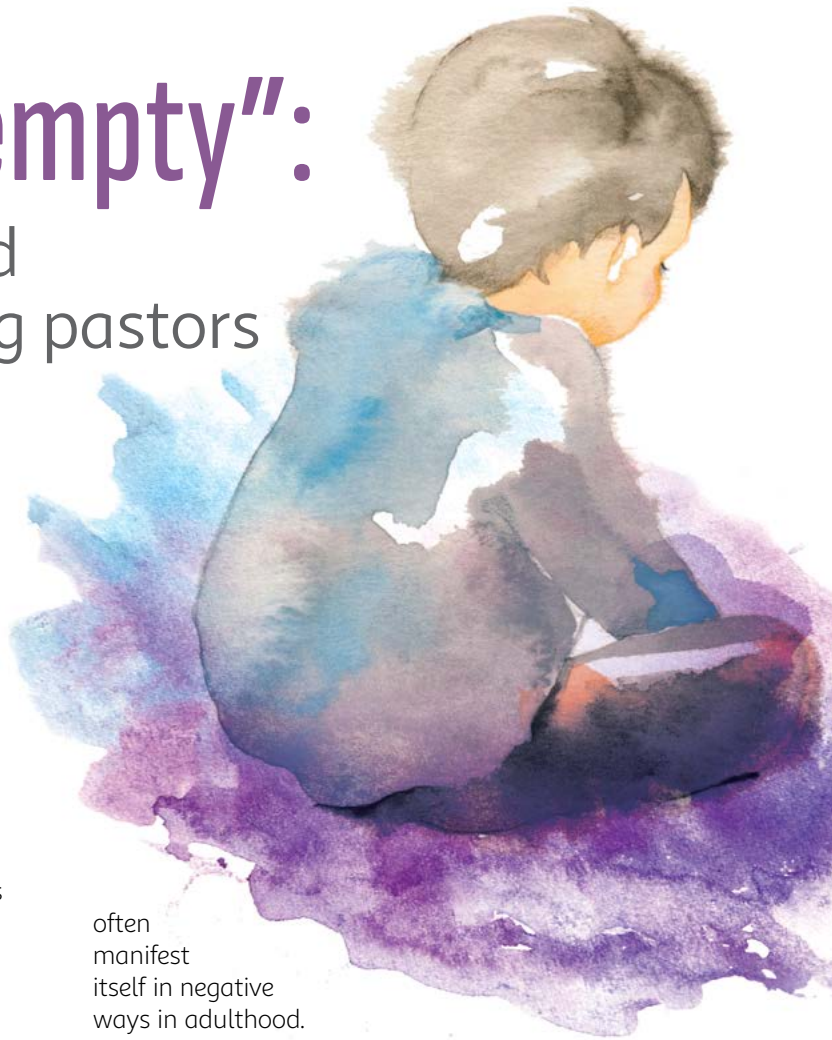
Several decades of research have shown a strong causal connection between ACEs and overall well-being challenges in adulthood.⁴ It means that experiencing childhood trauma may

often manifest itself in negative ways in adulthood.

The pervasiveness of ACEs is alarming and has far-reaching effects. Early research in the United States revealed that about half of the study samples had experienced at least one adverse event, while a quarter had suffered two adverse events.⁵ The researchers discovered that for each adverse experience, individuals had a corresponding increase in health challenges, such as higher levels of alcoholism, smoking, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempts.⁶

Although pastors do not often report such extreme effects from childhood difficulties, their distress can present itself in discouragement, spiritual dryness, and burnout.⁷ Results from ACE studies suggest that, at least in part, such afflictions should be addressed by dealing with childhood trauma.⁸

In addition to their personal emotional lives, pastors are often seen as sources of help for their parishioners. Pastors “who have experienced the healing of their own [emotional] pain can better value mental health care and the need to address the emotional pain of others.”⁹



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

The statistics

To study ACEs in pastors, researchers have obtained data from several sources. At the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (SDATS), ACE scores were collected from all incoming students. Then, at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, ACE scores were

again gathered from incoming SDATS students as well as from pastors in the Allegheny East Conference (AEC) of Seventh-day Adventists. Also, researchers at the 2022 Called Pastors' Family Convention gathered more data. Table 1 compares pastors at each of the three data collection points with the ACE scores of the general population.

Table 1. Samples of pastors with national percentages of ACEs

ACEs Prior to age 18	2020–2021 (n=96)	2021–2022 (n=194)	Called 2022 (n=94)	Adventist average	National data (general population)
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	40.6%	28.9%	37.84%	35.78%	33.46%
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	28.4%	20.2%	21.62%	23.41%	17.5%
3. Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?	26.3%	13.0%	18.92%	19.41%	11.31%
4. Did you often feel that . . . no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	24.2%	15.5%	16.22%	18.64%	14.8%
5. Did you often feel that . . . you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	11.5%	7.7%	5.41%	8.20%	9.9%
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	39.6%	30.8%	29.73%	33.38%	28.24%
7. Was your mother or stepmother often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or other object?	24.2%	10.8%	13.51%	16.17%	17.76%
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?	21.1%	14.9%	21.62%	19.21%	26.83%
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	29.5%	23.1%	16.22%	22.94%	16.16%
10. Did a household member go to prison?	10.4%	7.7%	0.0%	6.03%	8.08%

Evaluation

An examination of the data reveals that pastors experienced emotional abuse at approximately the same levels as the general population, though the rates of both physical and sexual abuse were consistently higher among pastors than the general population. Emotional neglect was higher for the pastors' samples, but the same was not true for physical neglect. Having parents who were separated or divorced was higher for pastors than the general population, but the rates of domestic violence were generally lower. The percentage of pastors who had a parent who struggled with alcohol or drugs was lower than the general population, but the rate of parents with depression or mental illness, or who attempted suicide was higher. Finally, those who experienced a family member in prison was generally lower for pastors.

It is important to note that current statistics for the general population indicate that 67 percent have one or more ACEs, but among our pastor sample, this figure was 87 percent. This is worrisome because having at least one ACE predicts the probability of chronic physical illness, emotional challenges, and self-destructive behavior, as the literature review has demonstrated.

The rates of both physical and sexual abuse were consistently higher among pastors than the general population.

More importantly, 12.5 percent of the general population have four or more ACEs compared to 24 percent of pastors. Having four or more ACEs leads to an exponential increase in physical, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

It is the hope of the researchers that both pastors in training and in the field will begin to address their own trauma, thus growing in resilience and commitment to self-care. Addressing it—a sometimes-painful process—may involve trauma resources or education and counseling. As a result, pastors will then be able to take the lead in creating trauma-informed churches that will help church members face their own ACEs. Such congregations will, in turn, become safe places for people in the surrounding communities to find healing. Church members who have been healed themselves will become vital channels to bring healing to others.



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- 2 Činčala and Drumm.
- 3 Vincent J. Felitti, Robert F. Anda, Dale Nordenberg, David F. Williamson, Alison M. Spitz, Valerie Edwards, Mary P. Koss, and James S. Marks, "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245–258, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8).
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Results of real communion with God

I sat there in disbelief. I could not imagine what I was witnessing. The once peaceful business meeting had turned into chaos and confusion, with church members shouting and almost coming to blows over the proposed move and merger. This meeting was supposed to be a spiritual gathering—a time to come together in real communion with God and one another—yet it had become a battleground.

The church members had assured me that they would seek the Lord and be in communion with Him by fasting and praying. They knew we were dealing with a sensitive subject. That kind of conflict was not what I expected when I took on my role as their new pastor. I wondered whether this was what true Christianity looked like. Had we truly become consumed with our self-interests and desires? I felt disheartened by the behavior of persons in leadership claiming to be followers of Christ.

I left the meeting that day with a heavy heart and a sense of disappointment in my fellow church members and leaders. Despite this, I held on to the hope that one day, we would truly experience a deeper communion with God, and our behavior would reflect the love and kindness that is at the core of the Christian faith. “There is nothing more needed in the work than the practical results of communion with God.”¹

Real communion

The behavior exhibited in that meeting went against everything Jesus taught us about love, peace, and unity. In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus tells us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves. For pastors, this teaching means not only are we called to preach and teach love, but we are called to live lives that reflect the love and grace of Jesus by putting others before ourselves. A genuine spiritual connection with God can help us love others more deeply, forgive more readily, and treat others with kindness and compassion.

As we proclaim the second coming of Jesus, we must remind ourselves to learn to get along

on this earth if we aspire to live together in heaven. But too often, we become caught up in our own emotions and interests and forget what it truly means to be a follower of Christ. Instead of seeking to find a solution that would benefit everyone, we focus on our selfish desires and argue and fight to get what we want. I often remind myself of a simple formula to solve almost any problem: “If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”²

As we read in Philippians 2:3, 4, we are called to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,” but in humility consider others better than ourselves (NIV). Christianity is about being like Jesus. And since we are constantly fighting the carnal battle, that can be accomplished only as a result of real communion with God. When we experience a genuine spiritual connection with God, we become more aware of His love for us, which can bring a sense of peace and comfort to our lives that we can extend to others. Our faith in God strengthens when we experience His presence and the transformative power of His love. These can give us the courage to face challenges and overcome obstacles.

Pastors, take this opportunity to renew your commitment to God and each other and strive to live your lives in a way that reflects the love and grace of Jesus. May we always remember the purpose of practicing spiritual disciplines like fasting and prayer and the practical results of communion with God. May our behavior reflect the love and kindness at the core of the Christian faith. And may we experience the transformative power of God’s love in our lives, bringing peace and comfort both to our hearts and to those around us as we navigate the complexities of twenty-first-century ministry.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 47.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882), 119.

Experiencing happiness— producing fruitfulness:

A pastor's reflection on Psalm 1

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Fulfilling pastoral goals can sometimes lead us to pursue happiness within such accomplishments. Unfortunately, “research on daily happiness has revealed an interesting paradox: pursuing daily happiness is one of the surest ways to impede or diminish our capacity to experience it.”¹

I can remember being in pastoral meetings and feeling happy for having been able to report a number of baptisms from my pastoral district, yet at the same time, I observed some of my colleagues were unhappy because they had a low figure or none at all to report. We cannot forget the reason we are called: “go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV). But what if our pastoral goals are not met? Should that affect our happiness? Should our happiness not be based on Someone far more personal and transcendent? Bloom, Bales, and Colbert noted that in their research with pastors, “It is possible to thrive in one’s work, but experience very little happiness.”² Nevertheless, a deeper reading of Psalm 1 may unearth something that may help free us from our pursuit of happiness so that we can experience true happiness.

Happiness is not in conduct

Psalm 1 begins with the word *ashrei*, often translated as “blessed,” which is also one of the Hebrew words for “happiness.”³ It is an idea especially pronounced in the book of Proverbs: happiness is for those who hide themselves in God (Prov. 16:20), for those who care for the oppressed (Prov. 14:21), and for those who obey the law (Prov. 29:18).

Psalm 1’s nominal clause “happy [is] the man” indicates that the psalmist is speaking about someone defined by certain qualities. He illustrates this using three negatives in synonymous parallelism (three cola): walk not in the counsel of the wicked, stand not in the way of sinners, and sit not in the seat of the scornful.

The verb “walk” (*halakh*) in the context of Psalm 1 seems to suggest the idea of service in

contrast to the counsel or advice of the ungodly. We observe the idea of service with the use of *halakh* in Genesis 5:22, 24, and Genesis 6:9, which say that Enoch and Noah “walked” with God. The texts indicate they were walking in service to Yahweh. As such, the happy person does not serve according to the advice or counsel of the ungodly. His direction comes from the mouth of Yahweh (Ps. 119:105).

The psalmist notes that the happy person does not *amad* (stand) in the “way of sinners.” The word *amad* can mean to approach someone or “to go and stand” (Num. 16:18; 22:24, 26; Exod. 9:10). The verb also depicts a judicial meaning. For example, Ezekiel 44:24 calls upon the priests to stand and judge, which carries the meaning “to act as judges” (see also Is. 3:13). Reading *amad* with this judicial connotation is faithful to the context in the sense that we find a contrast between the righteous (Ps. 1:1–3, 6) and the sinner (vv. 5, 6).

The happy person also does not stand in the way (*derekh*) of sinners. The noun *derekh* has to do with one’s “way of life” (Prov. 4:19; 5:8; Pss. 1; 25; 37). *Derekh* is “an idiom . . . that refers to the course of life, how one lives.”⁴ Therefore, the happy person does not serve according to the lifestyle of sinners.

The third line in the parallelism intensifies the attitude of the happy person: he “does not sit in the seat of the scornful.” “‘Sitting’ . . . has legal overtones when the text involves furnishing hospitality (Gen. 19:1; cf. also 18:1) or a formal judicial assembly (as in the case of Jeremiah: obviously a ‘regular court session’).”⁵ The idea of “seat” here in Psalm 1 denotes a place where judicial proceedings take place. With this judicial overtone, the psalmist seems to be saying that the happy person does not serve in the meeting place of scoffers.

Therefore, the person who is happy does not serve according to the advice of the ungodly, the lifestyle of sinners, or in the meeting place of scoffers. The implicit call to reject such a lifestyle

is especially applicable to pastors. Paul exhorts Timothy to be an example to the believers in conduct, faith, speech, purity, and love. Though he does not indicate that it will bring happiness, Paul nevertheless mentions that doing these things, along with teaching the Word, will save Timothy and his hearers (1 Tim. 4:6–16).

The foundation of happiness

The foundation of happiness is not the result of staying away from the lifestyle of the ungodly (even though pastors should do that) but rather of delighting in the law of Yahweh. Therefore, a life lived not according to the lifestyle of the ungodly becomes the identity marker of the happy person, not its basis. We see this idea introduced in Psalm 1:2 with the double conjunction, *ki im* (but if), which stands as an adversative that denotes the opposite of the negations in the previous clauses (not walk, not stand, not sit) and also connects with verse 1a by the use of the restrictive relative pronoun⁶ *asher* (who) in 1b (“who walks not in the counsel”). Consequently, we may render verse 2 as “providing that his delight is in the teachings of Yahweh and he continues to meditate day and night.”

Therefore, a person is happy when he or she delights in the instructions of God and meditates on them every day.

Pastors' happiness is, therefore, not in the number of hours spent in devotions (as important as they are) or years of service in the church, but rather in their delight (“pleasure”) and meditation on God's Word and instructions. Psalm 119:97 states, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (NIV). Pastors' devotion to God's words and instructions should be a lifestyle, not just individual acts.

Happiness produces fruitfulness

Psalm 1:3 compares the happy person with a tree that is planted. The passive in the context of Psalm 1 suggests that God does the planting, and the participle indicates that the planting is ongoing in a stative position. Therefore, before fruits can result in their season, the tree (happy person) must first be in a state of being planted.

This tree is planted beside a flowing stream, thus depicting God as transplanting the happy person to a nourishing and flourishing place. The leaf of the tree does not wither, indicating continuous fruitfulness. This reflects Joshua 1:8: “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be

careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (NIV).

The coordinating conjunction (*waw-hayah*) in verse 3 (“and he is like a tree planted”) introduces the idea that devotion to the Torah brings fruitfulness. This idea is evident elsewhere in the Bible. It is the disciples' connection with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that resulted in about 3,000 individuals being added to the body of Christ (Acts 2). And it was after Paul and Silas prayed and praised God that a prison guard and his whole family were baptized (Acts 16:25–33). As pastors, our success in ministry is largely based on our devotion to God and His Word. Just as Yahweh is the One who plants the tree (v. 3a) and yields the fruits (v. 3b), God is the One who brings success in our ministry—it is not because of our efforts.

The happy vs. the unhappy

Psalm 1:4–6 identifies the happy person as the righteous who stands opposite the wicked (the unhappy). The psalmist compares the wicked to chaff that winds blow away. Harvesters would toss the grain in the air, and the wind would carry off the husks and the chaff, leaving the heavier grain to fall back to the ground. The chaff had no value to the farmers.⁷ Not meditating on the Torah is the basis of the uselessness of the wicked. “Those who have rooted themselves in evil and have drawn their nourishment and delight from their association with the wicked will dry up and blow away.”⁸ Therefore, unhappy pastors are a danger both to themselves and to the entire ministry.

As a result of the uselessness of the wicked, they will not be allowed to serve (“stand”) in judicial situations that pursue justice.⁹ The wicked cannot take part in the justice of others because they live only for themselves.¹⁰

To “stand” (*qum*) means to receive the opportunity and platform to speak concerning the issue at hand in a court scene (Deut. 19:15; Ps. 27:12).¹¹ Psalm 1:5b reads, “Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” (NIV). This claim rests on the fact that the wicked do not follow the instructions of Yahweh and, thus, have no legal right to participate in the court where the Torah is essential in deciding cases.

Therefore, for God to be able to use pastors, they must be feasting on the words of God. Paul emphasizes in Galatians 1 that the gospel he preaches is not from man but from God. We are not qualified to determine justice for others if we are not living in accordance with God's Word.

Choose your path

In Psalm 1, it is evident that pastors are exceedingly happy not simply by abstaining from the ways of sinners but, rather, by delighting in God's instructions and concentrating on them daily. Piety to God's instructions stands as the basis for the pastor to be transplanted like a tree to a place where he or she will flourish and prosper in ministry.

Claiming Jesus as Friend and Savior is very much the same as demonstrating it through our lives and service because our happiness and, ultimately, our destinies are determined by the paths that we choose to take (Rev. 14:12; 22:12). "The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us."¹² "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21, NIV). "If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15, NIV). Happiness is essential—experience it!



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Learning from the diversity of the disciples

Jesus' calling of the twelve disciples was intentional, not haphazard. He spent an entire night in prayer, specifically to ask for His Father's guidance (Luke 6:12, 13). He selected twelve disciples who were different from each other and from their Leader in so many ways. How did such a diverse group become united in their love for Jesus, for one another, and in their commitment to accomplishing His mission?

Who were they?

McKinsey & Company report that "the most diverse companies are now more likely than ever to outperform less diverse peers on profitability."¹ What is true in the corporate world has been seen in the church.

"The apostles differed widely in habits and disposition. . . . These [the disciples] were brought together, with their different faults, all with inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil; but in and through Christ they were to dwell in the family of God, learning to become one in faith, in doctrine, in spirit. They would have their tests, their grievances, their differences of opinion; but while Christ was abiding in the heart, there could be no dissension. His love would lead to love for one another; the lessons of the Master would lead to the harmonizing of all differences, bringing the disciples into unity, till they would be of one mind and one judgment. Christ is the great center, and they would approach one another just in proportion as they approached the center."²

The disciples had differences that threatened to divide their loyalty and destroy their unity.

Leadership differences. Peter quickly emerged as the leader of the group.³ While all, at one time or another, argued who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, by asking to be at the right and left hand of Jesus, James and John more visibly aspired to leadership positions of prominence (Mark 10:35–41).

Personality differences. James and John were called "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), often quick-tempered (Luke 9:54) and demanding (Mark 10:35). Peter was impulsive; he often spoke or acted impetuously (Matt. 26:35; John 18:10). Thomas was introspective and often skeptical (John 11:16; 14:1–6; 20:24–29). Andrew was warm and winsome (John 1:40–42).

Political differences. Simon the Zealot hated Rome and wanted to conquer by force and bring about the kingdom of God (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:1–13).⁴ In contrast, having compromised himself with Rome, Matthew was a tax collector who worked for the Romans (Matt. 9:9).⁵

Prominence differences. Peter spoke more than any other disciple, and Jesus spoke to no other disciple as much as He did to Peter.⁶ James and John, along with Peter, were considered the "inner circle" of Jesus (Matt. 17:1–13). John called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:7, 20; see also John 13:23; 19:26). Other than their names, we know very little about the remaining disciples.

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Racial differences. Philip may have been partially Greek, but the others were pure-blooded Jews.⁷ Perhaps because of his heritage, the Greeks specifically sought Philip when they wanted to see Jesus (John 12:20–26).⁸

Socioeconomic differences. Matthew was most likely affluent because he was a tax collector.⁹ Peter, James, John, and Andrew could have been middle-class fishermen because they owned their own boats, and Peter owned his own home.

Theological differences. All the disciples misunderstood the mission of Jesus, believing that His kingdom was going to be established on Earth. Here we see marked differences between Jesus and His disciples, between the Leader and His followers.

How did it happen?

How, then, did this diverse group of people come to work together and love each other? Three events made the difference.

The cross of Calvary. Just before the Last Supper, the disciples argued over who would be the greatest. In response, Jesus prayed for them and their unity (John 17). “That union and love might exist among His disciples was the burden of our Saviour’s last prayer for them prior to His crucifixion. . . . The severest trials awaited them, but Jesus saw that their greatest danger would be from a spirit of bitterness and division.”¹⁰

Their unity was of utmost importance to Jesus because He knew that if they were united, the power of God would be unstoppable. Jesus

modeled for us the importance of praying for the unity of the church and its leaders.

The upper room. Jesus’ prayer for unity was accompanied by a love seen anew through the lens of the cross. “‘A new commandment I give unto you.’ . . . John 13:34. At the time when these words were spoken, the disciples could not understand them; but after they had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, after His crucifixion and resurrection, and ascension to heaven, and after the Holy Spirit had rested on them at Pentecost, they had a clearer conception of the love of God and of the nature of that love which they must have for one another.”¹¹

The vision of the sheet. As pivotal as the upper room was, Peter’s vision of the sheet was to prove equally transformational (Acts 10). “The time had come for an entirely new phase of work to be entered upon by the church of Christ. The door that many of the Jewish converts had closed against the Gentiles was now to be thrown open. And the Gentiles who accepted the gospel were to be regarded as on an equality with the Jewish disciples, without the necessity of observing the rite of circumcision.”¹²

Familiarity was disrupted by diversity, inequality was replaced by equality, closed doors gave way to open doors—and the world was turned upside down. As the “sons of thunder” matured in discipleship, James gave his life out of love for Jesus, the first apostle to be killed (Acts 12:2), and John earned a new nickname—the ‘Apostle of Love’ ” (1 John 4:16) ¹³.

Lessons to learn

Now that we have seen how the transformation of the disciples happened, what lessons can we learn?

Accept one another. The disciples came to appreciate and love one another, even for their differences. The more time they spent with Jesus and one another, the more their appreciation of one another continued to grow. Throughout their time with Jesus and following His ascension, the disciples saw their diversity as a gift from God. They saw each of the others as uniquely created by God, and it was in that uniqueness that they could minister to various people and groups, as seen in the book of Acts. If they were a homogeneous lot, they would not have been as effective in reaching Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world (Acts 1:8).

Even when disagreements arose, as shown in Acts 15, they came together, listening to one another and the voice of God. This is an important lesson for the church: our diversity is not a hindrance but an advantage in taking the gospel to the world.

Learn from one another. The disciples also learned from one another. So often, we think of them learning from Jesus, but just by spending time together, they learned from one another as well. While Jesus specifically taught lessons to the disciples, learning also took place in the informal moments of life. One can imagine that the disciples learned a great deal from one another as they were sitting around the fire and discussing what they had seen, heard, and experienced in proclaiming the gospel.

So often, when we talk about diversity in the church, we concentrate on accepting one another, but we need to go beyond just mere acceptance. Everyone can learn something from others.

Unity in action

The authors of this article have observed, through extensive travel to local churches, some healthy churches that, through prayer, Scripture study, and intentionality, have found ways to appreciate and celebrate diverse ideas and personalities.

These churches have demonstrated that unity in the church is based upon the commonality of being brothers and sisters in Christ. They prove that there can be unity in diversity, alignment does not always involve agreement, and disagreement is not synonymous with division. "Christ prayed that His disciples might be one, even as He and His Father

are one. In what does this unity consist? That oneness does not consist in everyone having the same disposition, the very same temperament, that makes all run in the very same channel."¹⁴ These churches can leverage their diversity in a way that more effectively reaches their community for the kingdom of God, just as the disciples did.

Make a difference

The disciples, enhanced by their diversity, could preach and minister more effectively in a pluralistic world. If we follow their example, as diverse as we may be, driven by our love for Jesus, united by His presence, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, our diversity can make a vast difference in our world for the kingdom of God.



- 1 Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, Kevin Dolan, Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters," McKinsey, May 19, 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters#.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 296.
- 3 Peter is always listed first in the list of the disciples. He was the one who spoke on behalf of the disciples and declared Jesus "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:13–20, NIV; see also Mark 8:27–30).
- 4 See Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve; or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus Under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York, NY: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), 34.
- 5 "Since the Jews considered themselves victims of Roman oppression, Jewish tax collectors who overtaxed their fellow countrymen were especially despised. Jews viewed such favor for Rome as betrayal and equal to treason against God. Rabbinic sources consistently align Jewish tax collectors with robbers." Jeffrey E. Miller, "Tax Collector," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
- 6 John McArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 39.
- 7 "Philip is a Greek name meaning 'lover of horses.'" McArthur, 119.
- 8 Philip is specifically mentioned in John 1:43–51; 12:21, 22; 6:5–7; 14:8, 9.
- 9 See Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 236.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 547.
- 12 White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 136.
- 13 "Why Did Jesus Refer to James and John as the Sons of Thunder?," Got Questions, last updated January 4, 2022, <https://www.gotquestions.org/sons-of-thunder.html>.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2017), 149.

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Lead Like It Matters: 7 Leadership Principles for a Church That Lasts

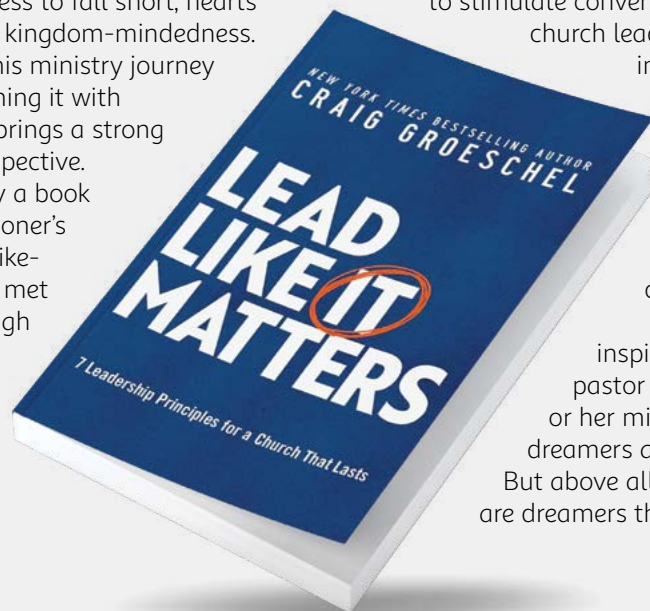
by Craig Groeschel, Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan Books, 2022.

Craig Groeschel, an entrepreneur, church planter, and best-selling author, revised his 2008 church-leadership book to bring a current perspective to timeless principles responsible for his success in church planting and growth.

Using relational language sprinkled with many personal illustrations and good humor, Craig intrigues his readers with a simple pronoun displayed in the title as well as throughout the book: “it.” A ministry—and therefore, a leader—either has “it” or not. “It” is easier to describe than to define. Unfortunately, a ministry that has “it” can lose “it.” Fortunately, a ministry that loses “it” or does not have “it” can get “it.” More importantly, constant dependence on God causes a ministry to have “it.” Yet, there is more to “it.”

“It” is a group of tried-and-tested principles that fuel ministry and create momentum: vision, divine focus, unmistakable camaraderie, innovative minds, willingness to fall short, hearts focused outward, and kingdom-mindedness. Generously inserting his ministry journey experience and seasoning it with biblical quotes, Craig brings a strong foundation to his perspective.

This is undoubtedly a book written from a practitioner’s perspective for other like-minded leaders. Craig met Christ in college through a Gideon Bible. Soon, his raw passion for the Lord compelled him to invite other peers to simply read the Bible, which



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transitioned into a church plant in a garage. As an impulsive young naïf, Craig made many mistakes that “are hard to share in print.” However, it is this very vulnerability that makes this book a must-read for church planters, pastors, and lay leaders. It is light on quotes from other authors and filled with countless illustrations, which makes the reading enjoyable, engaging, and motivational.

Some readers may dismiss this book as pop Christianity and not relevant for small congregations. Some may consider Craig’s unique gifts, context, and other factors to be more directly related to his leadership success than the principles he outlines in this book. Despite possible objections, most readers would agree that successful church planting and sustainable church growth are possible only through the power of God. Therefore, beautiful buildings, cool environments, and the right technology are not what really makes the difference, as Craig successfully argues. To have “it” means, therefore, that God is in control and the leader is leading change through vision and innovation while being transparent in the community.

Craig uses simple, contemporary language to express church lingo to model an outward-looking church (mission). Furthermore, the author ends every chapter with a series of introspective questions. They are meant for group discussions, to stimulate conversations with the core church leadership, therefore, bringing

each principle outlined in the book into the open. In this way, the team can wrestle with the simple questions: Do we have “it”? If we do not have “it,” how can we get “it”?

This is certainly an inspirational book for any pastor seeking to refocus his or her ministry. “The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, what the world needs are dreamers that do” (90).

Where do barriers to church growth come from?



Onajite Akemu is
an entrepreneur,
church planter,
and author
residing in Abuja,
Nigeria.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Many years ago, I was called to pastor of a small church with about 70 members. To grow the church required so much effort and energy that I told myself, “Never again!” Yet taking that church past the 200-person mark was both my greatest ministry challenge and my highest pastoral privilege.

Today, I realize that the difficulties I faced in that small church (payroll had not been met for six months, rent on the facilities was overdue, and staff and congregants were demoralized) were only symptoms of a stagnation commonly found in small churches. Why? Because small churches come with a built-in barrier to growth at, or close to, the 200-person mark.

What causes barriers to growth?

While almost every ministry leader has encountered barriers to growth, few have addressed the question at the heart of the matter: What causes these barriers to arise in the first place? Church-growth writers Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer attempt to answer this pivotal question in their illuminating book *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*.

“In all of these churches, plus the seven churches in Revelation, the Bible does not specifically address issues concerning size. What we discover, however, is that failure to grow or to overcome growth barriers is often symptomatic of disobedience to biblical truths.”¹

Those words helped me see that barriers to growth may originate in “disobedience to biblical truths.” The question then becomes: Which truths are being disobeyed when pastors face these barriers to growth?

As I studied Ephesians, I came to see one such truth: “From whom [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies,

according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16, NKJV; emphasis added).

A managerial issue

If growth comes when pastors and ministry leaders work effectively, then stagnation (negative growth) comes when pastors work ineffectively. Ineffective church management is a root cause of barriers to church growth!

If, as management teacher Peter Drucker famously said, “Effectiveness is doing the right things,”² then barriers to growth happen because pastors are doing the wrong things. This verse in Ephesians helped me see that the struggles I faced in that small church were not rooted generally in spiritual warfare but specifically in church management. Certainly, there are spiritual warfare challenges in church growth, but the barriers to growth that we are describing here have their roots in management and personal effectiveness.

Sharing the burden

Ephesians 4:16 says, “The effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth” (emphasis added). Church growth comes when there is effectiveness, and effectiveness occurs when every part does its share of the work. But what do we see in a typical small church? We often see the pastor monopolize most of the ministry—preaching, visitations, and pastoral care. Or, as is often the case in small churches, the pastors concentrate on pastoral care while slighting the mission-critical tasks of prayer, Bible study, and training the church to reach others for Christ.

Towns, Wagner, and Rainer state, “Many pastors have indeed chosen the path of pastoral care, which yields an abundance of affirmation.

ONAJITE AKEMU

But such a choice typically means that the church will grow only to the point that the pastor can give some level of personal attention to all the active members. And that level of growth is usually met in the lower range of attendance in the middle-sized church.”³

Barriers to church growth, then, originate in the pastors’ work schedules, which, if not done right, impact the effectiveness of the pastors. Barriers to church growth will be overcome only when pastors modify their scheduling and workloads.

No church can grow without giving attention and care to its parishioners, yet a church will remain small when the pastor is the major provider of pastoral care. In effect, a pastor’s overconcentration on pastoral care is a reason that a small church remains small.

The more other people are involved in pastoral care, the more the pastor can give to the mission-critical tasks of prayer, Bible study, and training the church to reach others for Christ. Then, and only then, can the church grow. The key is not to abolish or reduce pastoral care; it is, instead, to raise other persons to do that important task while the pastor concentrates on mission-critical assignments.

I now see that my major struggle as pastor of that small-membership church was in the area of “effective working.” I needed time to develop myself (through study and prayer) in the face of the multiple competing and pressing demands of pastoral care, while simultaneously navigating the challenges imposed by a shoestring budget.

Growth by design

Because managerial issues—personal effectiveness, division of labor, others’ degree of contribution to the work—create barriers to church growth, the challenge facing pastors becomes the redesign of work to ensure that every congregant or church leader does his or her share. In practical terms, this means that congregants and church leaders should carry most of the burden of pastoral care while senior pastors concentrate on mission-critical tasks. This kind of redesign produces growth.

Eugene Peterson stated, “The visible lines of pastoral work are preaching, teaching, and administration. The small angles of this ministry are prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction. . . . If we get the angles right it is a simple matter to draw in the lines. But if we are careless with or dismiss the angles, no matter how long or straight we draw the lines we will not have a triangle, a pastoral ministry.”⁴

The more other people are involved in pastoral care, the more the pastor can give to the mission-critical tasks of prayer, Bible study, and training the church to reach others for Christ.

In retrospect, my experience at the small church I pastored in the late 1990s (which is now a flourishing 1,000-member church) contains elements of the growth-by-design principle. What do I mean? It is pastored by a lead pastor and his assistant. Since, by design, the assistant pastor is mostly responsible for pastoral care, the lead pastor is able to concentrate on other mission-critical tasks. That design—coupled with the passionate involvement of many congregants in mission (evangelism and visitations)—has been a pivotal factor in surmounting barriers to growth.

Takeaway

The key takeaway in all this is that you design your own work in ways that simultaneously allow congregants to contribute their quota and also help you concentrate on the other work crucial for church growth.

It bears repeating: managerial issues are the root barriers to growth. Pastors can more easily overcome those barriers when they redesign the ways in which they work. Specifically, pastors of small-membership churches must do the counterintuitive: they must, in the face of seemingly unending demands of parishioners for pastoral care, *choose* to dedicate more of their time to prayer, Bible study, and encouraging (and training) congregants to be more involved in pastoral care. That informed choice is the first rung on the ladder to overcoming the 200 barrier.



- 1 Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 64.
- 2 Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1974), 44.
- 3 Towns, Wagner, and Rainer, *Everychurch Guide*, 78.
- 4 Eugene H. Petersen, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 5.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.



Mistake?

I received your magazine by mistake, according to man's standards, but I am sure it was purposefully according to God. I am currently a local licensed pastor in the United Methodist Church, but the January 2023 subscription I received in a former pastor's name has amazing articles that help me with my stance on biblical truth in our struggling denomination. Thank you all for your work in sharing His Word with His people.

—Eric Magner, email

Hey guys, I really love your new social media presence! Great posts, practical and relevant stuff. The articles keep getting better. I just subscribed to get the magazine now regularly—both digital and in print.

—Anonymous, online

Help!

Dr. Jones' article (R. Clifford Jones, "Postpandemic Pastoral Ministry: What Now? What Next?," March 2023) was spot on . . . as far as it went! We absolutely have to shift gears and hopefully go back to being the church more in the likeness of Christ than in the "business as usual" prepandemic. So . . . does he have any suggestions? Or are we all still brainstorming in the dark?

Help us, Dr. Jones—you seem to be on the right track!

—Rev. Kim Isley-Selby, pastor, Kingsport, Tennessee, United States

PS: One of my predecessors received this magazine, and I thoroughly enjoy reading what other folks are doing. Thanks for your good work!

Response from the author

Thanks for the response! One point of the article is to get faith communities and religious leaders probing and talking about what they hope to create as they seek to grow God's church, expand God's kingdom on the earth, and hasten the return of God's Son, Jesus Christ, in this post-COVID era.

—R. Clifford Jones, Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama, United States

Editor's note

For practical ideas, see Wilona Karimabadi, "Manna From the Web," *Adventist Review*, April 23, 2023, 18–23.

Agree

Thank you for sharing the article by Derek Morris, "Sons and Daughters of Encouragement" (September 2022), which calls us to seek a Barnabas in our lives and to be a Barnabas to someone else. It opened my eyes to the impact Barnabas had upon Saul and Mark and how that is still needed today.

There are many thoughts that came to me while reading the article, like doing ministry together with members, seeking to give people a second chance in gospel work rather than giving up on them, and how much I can be helped and

encouraged by those I seek to mentor. Thank you.

—Yoane Sanchez, pastor, Kerman Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kerman, California, United States

Disagree

I can find no mention of St. Jerome in Felix H. Cortez's article "On the Authorship of Hebrews: The Case for Paul" (September 2022). . . . Jerome, writing in the fourth century, was so keen to get Hebrews accepted into the canon that, by stating it was by Paul, he believed that would settle the matter. . . . I take the view with most scholars that the same author could not have written both the statement in Hebrews 2:3 and those in Galatians 1:11f., 16f., which appear contradictory.

—Derald Barham, BD, London, United Kingdom

Félix H. Cortez has set himself a formidable task to reverse the strongly held opinion of modern scholarship by arguing for the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. . . .

He is obliged to appeal to various arguments to explain the clear differences between Paul's epistles and Hebrews; that is, it makes no claim of being by Paul; has many differences in style and language; and uses similar terms, such as *law* and *faith*, but with quite different meanings. Occam's razor should be applied to Cortez's multiple and subtle explanations to shave them away and expose the one simple solution for every difficulty: Paul did not write the letter to the Hebrews.

—Norman Young, PhD, Avondale University (retired), Cooranbong, Australia



eHuddle offers innovative methods for sharing Christ

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

In February 2023, more than 150 pastors and conference- and union-level leaders gathered at the eighth annual eHuddle, a visioning and leadership conference hosted by the North American Division's (NAD) Ministerial Department.

The event uncovered best practices within eHuddle's six actions of evangelism: love, serve, baptize, equip, plant, and revitalize. The mix of short presentations by practitioners, Q&A, roundtable discussions, and takeaway tips was a hit.

On day one, **Ivan Williams**, NAD Ministerial director, revealed there are more than 370 million people within the division, but "God specializes in the majority being reached by the minority."

This year's eHuddle examined the definition of a disciple: "A disciple is someone who loves Jesus, lives by His teachings, and leads others to Him." The event showed that churches with clarity on what *disciple* means thrive. At West Palm Beach Spanish Church, led by Pastor **Herbert Lopez**, members are asked to attend worship services, join a small group, and serve in a ministry. Since 2016, the church has expanded to include an English-speaking group and, through a volunteer lay pastor, planted a church.

Justin Khoe, YouTuber and church consultant, challenged attendees to turn their weekly sermons into one piece of daily gospel content for different platforms.

YouTuber and church consultant Justin Khoe (with microphone).



Photo: Nick Wolff

Colby Maier, pastor of Bloom Church in Portland, Oregon, who reached 247K followers on Instagram, 321 K on TikTok, and 1.1 million on YouTube in one year, read a message from a 14-year-old who was contemplating suicide and begged God for a sign: "I went onto YouTube shorts and the first video I scrolled was ... of you praying for whoever's on the other side of that screen. I started sobbing. That video saved my life."

Plugging his church in his videos' comments section has also brought 50–100 people to the church in the past few months.

"If you want to take the gospel commission seriously, meet people where they are—online," Maier stated.

West Palm Beach English pastor **Giovanni Esposito**, who with copastors Herbert Lopez and volunteer lay pastor **Magdiel Gonzalez** (West Palm Beach Spanish Church), presented at eHuddle and left energized. "It was inspiring to hear stories of leaders who did not give up. We need to be bold for Jesus. God calls you and me for such a time as now!" [Christelle Agboka, NAD News]

Venezuelan migrants welcomed at House of Hope

PORTO VELHO, RONDÔNIA, BRAZIL

Orlando* is a professional cook. Due to the difficulties in Venezuela, he had to leave his country to search for a better life. "It wasn't an easy decision. It's just my wife and me. We had difficulties along the way, but in every place we passed through, we were well received," he said.

The couple had to leave their two children finishing high school, as well as other family members and the house they struggled to build. In the state of Rondônia in northern Brazil, Casa Esperança (House of Hope) staff welcomed and assisted them.

"The House has been helping since the first day we arrived," Orlando said. "We were greeted with welcome and smiles. They're always talking to us, supporting us, and encouraging us not to give up."

Located in the state capital of Porto Velho, House of Hope opened its doors in April 2022

as a direct result of the migration crisis that prompted people, mostly Venezuelan, to cross the border into Brazil. The initiative involves a partnership between the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Rondônia and the city's Office of Social Assistance.

With room for 40 migrants, the facilities have already welcomed temporary guests from several nations. House of Hope includes bedrooms, bathrooms, a kitchen, and an activities hall.

Migrants can stay at House of Hope for as long as they need to, project coordinators said. So far, more than 400 people have received assistance.

"The services offered at House of Hope are transforming many lives," local ADRA director **João Paulo Dias** said. "After staying with us, every migrant leaves with more hope than before."



Photo: ADRA Brazil

[Priscila Baracho, South American Division, and *Adventist Review*]

* Name changed to protect his identity.

Blood drive enhances evangelistic initiative across Thailand

KORAT, THAILAND

As part of their community outreach and nationwide evangelistic effort dubbed Christ for Thailand, a care group (#CareTeamKorat) in city of Nakhon Ratchasima (known as Korat) arranged a blood donation drive and community concert in collaboration with the Red Cross.

The blood drive was hosted in Korat's Terminal 21 mall, with the care group collaborating closely with the Red Cross to ensure that all required safety standards were followed. The goal of the drive was to collect blood for people in critical need of medical attention. The community's reaction was positive, with donors of all ages lining up to give blood and support the cause.

The care group's activities are part of the Christ for Thailand nationwide evangelism program, which strives to promote Christian values and disseminate the Word of God across the country.

"We think that our job is a manifestation of our faith, and we want

to show people God's love via our acts," team member **Nerman Bonanza** said.

Ultimately, the #CareTeamKorat events were a tremendous success, bringing together individuals from all walks of life who shared a common aim of giving back to the community, organizers said. "Their actions inspire others, reminding us of the significance of working together to make a difference for good in our communities." [Edward Rodriguez, Southern Asia-Pacific Division, and *Adventist Review*]



Photo: Southern Asia-Pacific Division



Kevin McDonald is a church planter and lead pastor of Landmark Church of the Nazarene in Phenix City, Alabama, United States.



Overcoming hurt in the church

I had been a Christian for about six months and could not wait to spend the rest of my life serving Christ. After many hours of prayer, long conversations with my wife, and examining the process of becoming ordained, I was ready to tell a pastor I respected that I felt God calling me into ministry. I told this pastor on the phone that the Lord was calling me into ministry. Silence.

"Are you there?" I asked.

He finally spoke: "Kevin, God is not calling you into ministry. I do not think God has given you the gifts needed to be a pastor."

I started to cry. I was so certain God was calling me. The rest of the conversation left me hurt and angry. For days, months, and even years, I wrestled with what this pastor had said to me. I am still sometimes haunted by his words.

It has been over a decade now, and I have experienced a great deal of pain in the church. I have even been hurt by other pastors and church leaders since becoming a pastor. Through this process, I have learned that I am not alone in this.

Pastors are hurt through gossip, neglect, backstabbing, and unfaithfulness and in other ways. I believe that most of us in the church have been wounded by those in our congregations or local leadership at some point in our lives, even if we do not like to talk about it. In some cases, it can take years to recover from such pain, if recovery happens at all.

So, what do we do when we suffer pain inflicted at church? Here are some steps that I have found helpful.

1. Pray first. Remember that the church does not imitate Christ well at times. When we are hurt by the church, we should always go to the source of love: God Himself. God is not the one who has hurt us. Spend time following the instructions of 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."¹

2. Confront the offender. Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." Many divisions can be resolved by just approaching the person who has hurt you. Sometimes the person may not even know that he or she has hurt you. A wise

man once told me, "The only thing worse than confronting the person is what could happen if we don't confront." Address the issue head-on.

3. Forgive. I have had to learn to forgive one day at a time. For instance, I would wake up on Monday and forgive, but then Tuesday would roll around, and I was still wrestling with the hurt. I had to forgive day by day until I had completely forgiven the wrong. It is not optional for Christians. Matthew 6:15 says, "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Forgiven people forgive.

4. Confide in a faithful partner. If the situation is not resolved, then confide in a faithful friend privately—not as a point of gossip but to seek help. They may need to go with you to resolve the issue as Matthew 18:16 counsels: "But if they [the offender] will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"

5. Resolve your own past. When we address the pain others have caused us, we are often reminded of our need to address the hurt we have caused. Matthew 7:5 says, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Pain dealt to me allowed me to look at ways I have caused pain in others, and I knew I had to ask for forgiveness.

6. Always act in love. Since I have been hurt by some in the church, I am committed to helping the church be more loving. I want to be an example of 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, which says in part, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." I need to act in complete love moving forward in order to multiply the healing I have received.

7. Repeat the process. If you have been hurt by the church, remember that you will probably get hurt again. We are human and make mistakes. When hurt happens, do not run away from the church. Run toward the Lord and repeat the steps again. One day we will live in a place where there is no more hurt! Until then, let us commit to moving forward in love and forgiveness.



¹ Scripture is from the New International Version.

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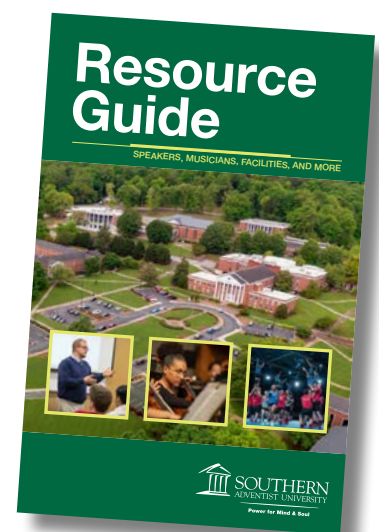
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July 19-31	San Salvador, El Salvador
July 26-Aug 7	Neiva, Colombia

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Aug 2-14	Cucuta, Colombia
Aug 2-14	Quibdo, Colombia
Aug 2-14	Totonicapan, Guatemala
Aug 2-14	Tuxpan, Mexico
Aug 9-21	Bogota, Colombia
Aug 9-21	Ica, Peru
Aug 16-28	Medellin, Colombia

Aug 23-Sep 4	Bogota, Colombia
Sep 13-25	San Salvador, El Salvador
Oct 4-16	Ciudad Juarez, Mexico
Oct 4-16	Mexicali, Mexico
Oct 4-16	San Pedro De Macoris, D.R.
Oct 18-30	Toluca, Mexico
Oct 25-Nov 6	Lima, Peru