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MOUNTAIN VIEWS

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MOUNTAIN VIEWS

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RMC *Our mission is to lovingly support and empower every member in*
MISSION *our conference to know Christ and to make Him fully known through*
STATEMENT *education, outreach, and service, and by communicating hope and*
encouraging intimate connection with Christ and with each other.

HOW LEADERS LEAD

Recently, I returned to a book that I have read many times over the last twenty years and decided to order a copy for each of our pastors and everyone working in our Conference office.

The Way of the Shepherd by Dr. Kevin Leman and Bill Pentak is a small volume, but it contains very practical recommendations, and is an easy read. Many *Mountain Views* readers, especially those who are involved with various local church positions, would benefit from the valuable lessons it contains.

The authors share seven “secrets” to managing productive people and illustrate practical, logical management approaches for those who are leading people. Whether in the business world or the church, the principles found in this book apply.

Biblical principles of dealing with people are timeless. I find many business principles have their roots in the Bible and Christianity. For instance, lying and manipulating people is wrong in business and especially in the work of the church. As we read in the Gospels, and subsequently the Book of Acts, we recognize a number of principles shared by our First Shepherd who gave us practical principles of leadership. Leaders in the early church could organize the church as they were sheep first, led by a Master Teacher, and the Master Teacher had modeled this. *The Way of the Shepherd* expresses the secrets of leadership, connecting them to the contemporary needs seen and experienced in our faith community.

It’s the sheep that the book uses to illustrate what one needs to know when leading people. The seven secrets or principles go like this:

Know the Condition of Your Flock. You must know the people you are working with and leading. You must know what they do for their specific job. As a leader, you have to engage with them regularly and consistently.

Discover the Shape of Your Sheep. The people you pull into work or service in different areas in a church,

school, or business must be suited for the job. Be careful who you choose for different positions. Make sure that people are in the area they have a passion for.

Help Your Sheep Identify With You. Build trust by modeling honesty, authenticity, and compassion with your team. Communicate your values and goals and let people know the importance of the part they play. Remember leadership is personal.

Make Your Pasture a Safe Place. Keep your folks informed of what is going on. Change people out of positions who aren’t working. Let people know that they are critical in their area of expertise. Don’t let problems fester and get too big. Keep things fresh and safe.

The Staff of Direction. Know where you are going and stay in front as a leader to keep things moving. Set boundaries, but give people freedom to work in their area. When people get in trouble, be there to help them out of it. Let people know that mistakes happen.

The Rod of Correction. Stand in the gap and fight for your sheep. Correction needs to take place from time to time, but look at it as an opportunity for growth. Regularly check on your people and the projects moving forward.

The Heart of the Shepherd. Leadership is a lifestyle, not a technique. Be there for your people, and most of all, have a heart for your sheep.

Leadership is absolutely critical for our churches and schools to grow. Time after time, I have seen churches or schools that are falling apart and nothing is working to turn them around. Then, a new pastor or principal/lead teacher comes in and, in a short time, things are turned around and they are growing again. *The Way of the Shepherd* may just be a guidebook to turn things around wherever you are involved. **RMC**

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ON BECOMING TRULY *CHANGED*

When I was six years old, my mother started checking out of my life. As I recall, she would be gone for days, weeks, perhaps even months at a time for a period of two years. She would just come and go, and then one day she never returned. I have not seen my mother since I was eight years young.

About ten years ago, I related this story to a biblical, prayer-oriented counselor who prayed and asked God to show me anything I needed to know and understand about how that life circumstance had impacted me through the years. I vividly recall God giving me a clear picture of myself

as an eight-year-old saying, “If my mother really loved me, she wouldn’t have left me.” Now that makes perfect sense until I tell you that shortly after my sixth birthday, Mom was diagnosed with cancer. She spent the next two years in and out of hospitals for various periods of time and then shortly after my eighth birthday she lost the fight and died.

Knowing this new information, does it make any sense that I would tell myself that if she really loved me, she would not have left me? Is death by cancer a suicide or an intentional act? The obvious answer is no, yet I believed it and subconsciously continued to believe it for decades until God

showed up and revealed to me the truth of my situation.

Stay with me on this just for a moment. If your own mother did not love you—or if you simply believed she did not love you—how lovable could you possibly be? And that, I’m sorry to say, was my reality. As I look back over my life, I can see how this horrible thought drove me to try to get people to love me in hopes that their love might help me to feel lovable.

As your brother in Christ, may I offer a challenge to you to reflect back on your life and consider what lies you have believed that have impacted you in negative ways? For the purposes of this article, I want to focus on one particular lie that I know is common to many of us. You have likely had a thought in your mind that goes something like, “Who do you think you are to be telling others about Christ when you are such a hypocrite?” Or perhaps, “A real Christian would never have a thought like that—who do you think you’re fooling?”

Do these sound familiar? If so, it is because they come from the same source—our common enemy known as the devil or satan (he does not deserve capitalization). He has become very adept at getting us to think so lowly of ourselves that we hesitate to reach out to others in love and acceptance.

At the beginning of this year, I embarked on a 21-day

I have recently observed myself being so much more accepting of visitors who come to our church.

brain detox program developed by Dr. Caroline Leaf, a Christian neuroscientist. Over the course of the program, I countered the oft-occurring thought that I am not good enough or worthy to be called a Christian, and replaced it with the reality that I am at peace with God, therefore I can be at peace with myself, and since I am at peace with myself I can be at peace with others.

I have recently observed myself being so much more

accepting of visitors who come to our church looking different, or acting in a manner other than how I think a “real Christian” should look or act. As I encounter people in the course of my day, I find myself showing more appreciation and understanding than I ever have before.

What I am saying here should not be misapplied. This is not about how wonderful I am or have become. Like you, I am very much a work in progress, but I wonder what our churches would be like if everyone adopted a similar positive perspective for themselves and others?.

Here are a few questions to consider:

Might our churches become more loving, warmer, and welcoming to all who enter our doors?

Would visitors and members alike feel a greater sense of belonging and connection?

Might newly converted members be less likely to quickly exit as is unfortunately far too often the case?

Please understand this is not another version of self-help philosophy. It is more like what we read in Rom. 12:2 (NLT): “. . . let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think,” or “and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:32), or 2 Cor. 10:5 where we are admonished to take “every thought captive to the mind of Christ.”

For me, the challenge is to focus on replacing a negative thought about who I am with a more accurate Christ-focused acceptance of who and Whose I truly am. Be advised, however, that despite our best efforts, we cannot change ourselves. Only Christ, living in us, can change you and me fully. Let Him be in charge. Invite Him to show you the erroneous thoughts that have hindered your Christian experience and witness over the years. Seek His help in overcoming them to become the person He intended you to be in the first place. **RMC**

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READING THE BIBLE

LISTENING TO GOD'S VOICE IN 2018

How many Christian denominations are there in the world? Nobody knows exactly, but the number runs into the thousands. All have their peculiar beliefs and practices. How is this diversity to be explained, considering that they all take the Bible as their point of departure? And, looking at world-wide Adventism we cannot deny that there are different streams and different emphases. How can that be? Do we not all claim to follow the Bible?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently struggling with the issue of women's ordination. Those who feel that women pastors ought to be ordained base their view on the Bible. Likewise, those who oppose the ordination of female pastors are sure that the Bible supports their opinion.

Adventists clearly differ in the way they read the Bible. Some advocate a plain reading of Scripture and maintain that wherever possible the wording of the Bible must be taken literally. Many others reject that approach and believe that we must look for underlying principles as we read the Bible and look behind the historical and cultural background to find the application for the twenty-first century.

The Paradox of God's Word

The Christian faith confronts us with a number of paradoxes. A paradox is a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense, and yet is, somehow, true. The doctrine of the Trinity is a prime

example. God is one and yet God is three. The doctrine of Christ presents us with another paradox: Christ is fully divine and at the same time fully human.

Similarly, the church is not only a community of saints, but also a school of sinners. In all these cases it is not one or the other. Two elements, though seemingly contradictory, must be held together, even though they seem to exclude each other. If one aspect is overemphasized or toned down, the result is imbalance or even heresy!

We do not only meet a paradox when we contemplate the Living Word—the person of Christ—but also when we come

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind.” (*1 Selected Messages*, p. 21)

We must always start with the basic premise that in the Bible we may hear the voice of God.

to the Written Word. The Bible is God’s Word, but at the same time it is also a human product, as two key texts tell us:

“All Scripture is God-breathed!” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

“Prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, NIV).

If we only pay attention to the divine aspect of the Bible, we end up with a rigid concept of inspiration that creates all kinds of difficulties. On the other hand, if the human element is given too much emphasis at the expense of the divine origin, God’s Word loses its absolute authority.

Theologians have long debated the doctrine of inspiration. Two main theories stand out. Plenary or verbal inspiration is the view that every word in the Bible (in the original languages) was dictated by God to the Bible writers through His Spirit. Usually, those who defend this theory say that the Scriptures are inerrant (i.e., without any mistake or inconsistency).

This is not the official Seventh-day Adventist position. Adventists support the view of thought inspiration: God gave the thoughts to human authors, who then expressed these in their own words. Those Adventists who nonetheless adhere to the view of verbal inspiration would do well to remember that Ellen G. White disagreed with this and defended thought inspiration:

So, Where Do We Go?

The main problem with the plain reading of the Bible is that it tends to be very selective in what is taken literally or not. I suggest that we avoid getting caught up in a fruitless debate about terminology, and that we leave the term *plain reading* aside. When we wonder which approach to the reading of the Bible is correct, we must always start with the basic premise that in the Bible we may hear the voice of God. The Bible is more than a collection of devotional messages from ancient times that may encourage us and uplift us. In the Bible God reveals truth about Himself and His dealings with the world. Every other piece of writing is to be evaluated in the light of His Word.

Yet, paradoxically enough, we must be just as serious about the manner in which God allowed His Word to come to us. He used human beings as the vehicles for His revelation, who each used their own vocabulary and style. They used images and metaphors they were familiar with, and wrote against the background of their time and culture. They wrote in a world in which customs were different from what they are today—a world in which slavery was common and women were, as a rule, subservient to men.

And so, the perfect divine Word comes to us through imperfect human words, in the kind of language human beings can understand. Some forty different authors, with wide-ranging linguistic skills, put the message God inspired them with into Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. And through the centuries, faithful servants of God have done their utmost to faithfully translate the Bible from the original

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ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY, AND WALK HUMBLY,

In Mic. 6:8 we read: “He has told you, O man, what is good; What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!”

This is an extraordinary text that many regard as the pinnacle of religious and moral thought. The Talmud says

that this verse, “by virtue of its three principles of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God encapsulated the essence of all 613 commandments communicated to Moses.” A current biblical thinker describes it as “rightly celebrated as the supreme definition of ethical religion.”¹



In 1897, Charles W. Elliot, president of Harvard University, chose the second part of Mic. 6:8 to be inscribed above a statue symbolizing religion in the new Library of Congress building. In 1977, Jimmy Carter made it a focal point of his presidential inaugural address. So, one might ask, “What’s all the fuss? What does the Lord actually require from us?” Or, even more directly to God: “What do You want from us?”

You and I, “we mortals,” are reminded that God showed us what is good—what is “a better way,” what is truly moral, and what God requires in our life’s journey!

And we are given what one commentator calls “a trilogy of spiritual qualities that are as social as they are personal in

nature.”²² Ronald Hyman, a professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, suggested that this triplet’s conciseness and its emphasis on only three verbs—doing, loving, walking—connected to three basic moral values—justice, mercy, and humility—make it comprehensible and easy to remember. “The series of three pairs of ‘a verb tied to a moral value’ creates an appealing poetic rhythm. Together, they constitute a series that is a moral guideline for behavior among humans; a goal worth striving for.”²³

How will “acting justly” look in faith communities, and specifically in a Seventh-day Adventist community? Honestly, every one of us will have to wrestle with this question in the local community, the place where every “tire rubs the road.” Each of us has the responsibility to figure out how we will implement the notion of “doing acts of justice” and how we will fight for justice in a very unjust world. We seriously committed Christians are invited to ask ourselves how our

How will I become the voice for the voiceless and the power for the powerless?

world would look if acts of justice were being done for the underdogs and the marginalized, for the poorest of the poor, for the unarmed children in schools, for those who are defenseless and helpless. How will I become the voice for the voiceless and the power for the powerless (Prov. 31:3) in the world in which there are still more than 1.2 billion people who live in abject poverty in which 22,000 children still die each day from poverty and from diseases that we can prevent with drugs or health education? Three million children die from malnutrition every year.

How will we, as an alternative and remnant community, act justly when neo-Nazis and white supremacists start walking on our streets threatening to get rid of the Jews, or the blacks, or those who are by some other designation different, or marginal? But, of course, there will also be many others who will never come face to face with us—and yet,

doing justice will mean that we will need to advocate for them as well.

So, what is the first thing that God actually requires when He commands us to act justly (*mishpat*)? The Hebrew term *mishpat* is not a colorless word but is defined again and again. For example, Ps. 82:3 gives the word a shine: “Give justice to the weak, and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute.” Martha Moore-Keish (of Columbia Theological Seminary), put it this way: God calls us back to justice, “which means caring for the poor and needy, the widow, and orphan. . . . Provide for your neighbor, says the Lord through Micah. Stop offering sacrifices to me and start offering sustenance to those who need it most.”⁴

Please notice that the prophet does not say “admire justice,” or pay lip service in sermons or small group discussions, but *act justly*. The Bible is interested in the deeds, in the place where the rubber actually interacts with the road, in our practices and not only our theories. Let us not belittle deeds and practices which we employ in our faith-life. Our personal and professional lives are supposed to include a resolute resistance to the crying injustices in the world, and there are so many such sighs and cries that we hear daily in recent times.

“It is not enough to wish for justice or to complain because it is lacking. This is a dynamic concept that calls on God’s people to work for fairness and equality for all, particularly the weak and the powerless who are exploited by others” (*New Interpreter’s Commentary*). It is not even enough to come to worship on the right Sabbath day, as Amos and Isaiah explained to God’s people. (See, for example, Am. 5:18-24. and Isa. 58.) This is the first requirement.

There is a story about a lady who came to a professional photographer seeking to get special portrait photos taken. She said to him: “I demand that these photos do me justice.” The artist looked at her from several angles, and then looked once again and he replied, “Madam, you do not need as much justice as you need grace.”

Frederick Buechner suggested that “justice also does not preclude mercy. It makes mercy possible. Justice is the pitch of the roof and the structure of the walls. Mercy is the patter

of rain on the roof and the life sheltered by the walls. Justice is the grammar of things. Mercy is the poetry of things.”⁵

And this connection brings us to the second requirement, which says: love mercy. To love people is one thing and to love mercy or kindness is another. Please note that here love is not a noun but a verb. We are not aiming at love but we *love* kindness and mercy. The object of love, in Micah’s case, is to pursue *hesed*—another rich Hebrew term with deep and varied meaning that can hardly be conveyed by any single English word. It is usually rendered as “faithfulness,” “loyalty,” “charity,” “merciful treatment of others,” or “kindness to those we are in a relationship with.”

In the 17th century, Stephen Charnock explained it beautifully: “The justice and mercy of God are united in a joint applause. . . . An eternal marriage is made between mercy and justice; both shake hands, and not only acquiesce but rejoice, . . . both pleased and both gratified. . . .”⁶ The third part of this profound threefold guide to moral life that God desires is a culmination because the first two parts deal with human-to-human relationships and this final part reflects the human-to-divine relationship. We mortals are requested to walk humbly with our God.

Walking is a metaphor for a life journey. Being on the way is more important than arriving. Christians are followers of the Way and often we are told that there are two possible paths, the wider one that leads us astray (or even to death), and the narrower one that yields life. (Deut. 30:15-20 and Matt. 7:13-14) Micah’s passage summons us to the path of “justice” and “kindness.” So, how are we to walk on that journey? Humility has often been misrepresented. Over the centuries, humility was described as groveling self-abasement through fraudulent piety.⁷

Nothing, however, could be further from the intent here in Micah. Walking humbly is opposite to walking proudly and pompously, or strutting. Prov. 30:28-31 illustrates such macho images of self-exhibiting as strutting—like a lion, a rooster, a he-goat, and a king.

Walter Brueggemann writes about such posturing in the following way: (Please note that this was written and published before the most recent political climate.) “As we have seen recently with so many ‘self-righteous’ politicians

and ministers, such a strutting way often leads to embarrassment. . . . Such prideful strutting bespeaks arrogance, self-sufficiency, autonomy, the need to occupy center stage, the sense that I am the only one on the set.”⁸

Pride of the one who struts depends on self-enhancement and self-congratulations, which leads to narcissism. Walking with your own ego is the dreariest and ugliest kind of walk that leads to ultimate alienation. Notice that the God we walk humbly with is called “your” God. What do we know about our God? It begs the question if we know what God is really like. It seems that American Christianity has recently made Jesus in our image, and “the American Jesus,” as we have seen in the recent examples of lack of discernment in terrible alliances between evangelical Christian leaders and politicians, leads to the often totally

The Bible is interested in the deeds, in the place where the rubber actually interacts with the road, in our practices and not only our theories.

failed American Christianity. Our faith community needs to be warned, as the heirs of the radical Reformation, not to fall into this cultural trap and forget who may be Jesus Christ for us today, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned the German Christians 80 years ago.

There are so many biblically-unrecognizable Jesuses on offer today. But when you get to know the heart of the Jesus who cared, like every other prophet before Him, for the most vulnerable, the marginalized, the underdogs (yes, the widow, and orphan, and refuge-alien, and all those who are poor), you will not see the total eclipse of Christianity on offer today through the prosperity gospel and other utterly alien types of tamed and enculturated Christianity that side with corrupt practices, bigotry, and hate. Instead, what needs to happen is for Christians to take seriously again the call to

act justly, to love mercy, and to walk closely to the biblical God who in humility laid down His own life for the sinner, for the fallen, for the bad, and for the lost.

So we are going (walking) somewhere rather than aimlessly and passively standing still. This companionship and developing friendship will inform us about our attitude to “our” God, the God we are in a relationship with, the God that we journey with. The view we have of God, and whether God is indeed our journey’s companion, will determine our humility and inform our perspective so that in the humility of that walk, we do what He requires of us and what He actually does in relationship with the world—that is doing justice and loving and affirming kindness and embracing, even more so loving, mercy. After all, Jesus in His famous first sermon on the Mount of Blessings, reiterates Micah’s message in Matt. 5:6-8: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Consider a story told by Lowell Cooper, a former General Conference vice-president. In an article titled “Doing Justice, Loving Mercy” he tells of a woman in her mid-30s who arrived early at the departure gate for her flight and had time to relax and to read her book. Moments passed and she suddenly leapt to her feet, turned to the person sitting near her, and exclaimed: “I left my phone in the car!” She looked at her watch, threw her book and jacket on the chair, cried “I’ll be back,” and headed down the corridor. Cooper writes, “The determination of an Olympic athlete was on her face though her body lacked Olympic-athlete fitness. Through the corridor, past security and check-in counters, out the door, across the road and down the walk to the parking lot, she reached her car, grabbed the phone, slammed the door and began the return journey. Out of breath, she arrived at the security line—the place where one experiences eternity in the present. After what seemed like a century, she made it through security and raced (slowly now) for the departure gate. Other passengers had already boarded. Without breaking stride, she grabbed her coat, presented her boarding pass and headed on to the plane. Clutching her phone, she made it just in time—but

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EVERYONE WELCOME

Across the road from my office at our church publishing house in Warburton, Australia, is our local Adventist church—and its sign board with movable letters on which the message is changed most Tuesdays. This sign sometimes advertises upcoming events or quotes occasional Bible verses, but most often announces that week’s preacher and/or sermon title with an invitation to attend.

I am intrigued by the various expressions of welcome that the sign employs from time to time. There are those that seem a contrast with the sermon title—perhaps “Sinners Are Condemned/ All Welcome” or something similar—and seem likely to be an unsuccessful invitation. The most common formulation is probably “[INSERT SERMON TITLE HERE]/ Everyone Welcome.” But, having not contacted me for the week’s sermon title, my most recent preaching appointment at this church was billboarded in this way: “This Week’s Preacher: Nathan Brown/Anyone Welcome.”

I was left reflecting on the distinction between “Everyone Welcome” and “Anyone Welcome.” In this instance,

“everyone” and “anyone” can probably be used interchangeably, but “anyone” seems a lesser welcome and risks a negative connotation. Perhaps one way of expressing it would be to distinguish between welcoming anyone who chooses to come—on an individual basis—rather than extending the sense of welcome to everyone who happens to see the sign that week, whatever their response.

Perhaps the distinction is so fine that it is only “word nerds” like me who would even reflect on it. Of course, the most important welcome—for either long-time members or first-time guests—is not what is posted on a sign, but our expression and practice of welcome and inclusion in church and as church. These do have important shades of meaning.

In the Book of Acts, the church began with this statement by Jesus: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The progression Jesus set out became the pattern for the



remainder of the story, beginning in Jerusalem with ripples that spread further and further until we reach Paul in Rome, continuing to preach the good news about Jesus in the capital of the empire.

But this pattern also triggers a story of expanding inclusion in this newly inaugurated kingdom of God. Beginning with the Jews, these same ripples reach the Samaritans—of the “Good Samaritan” infamy—then Gentiles and ultimately peoples beyond Jewish imagination. In the process, so many others are caught up in this expanding reality, including women as disciples and leaders, eunuchs, and others outside acceptable understandings of holiness, persecutors and oppressors, soldiers and jailers, governors and kings.

Much of the tension among the early church leaders came from the fact that their theology could not keep pace with the expanding inclusivity of the kingdom of God and the action of God’s Spirit. Those who were coming to know God, both through their preaching or apart from it, challenged their Jewish assumptions and sensibilities.

In her provocative book *Pastrix*, Nadia Bolz-Weber points out that the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (see Acts 8:26–40) might be better understood as the conversion of Philip. Through this story, Philip is the one repeatedly described as being directed by the Holy Spirit and his appeal comes in the question from the eunuch, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” (v. 36). In Philip’s theology, there were good reasons why this man should not be baptised (see Deut. y 23:1). But God was doing something new and Philip responded to His leading.

This kind of scandalous inclusivity in the reach and response to the Gospel caused larger tensions, which came to a head in the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, which functions as a culmination of the first half of the Book of Acts. As well as Philip’s meeting with the Ethiopian, there had been Peter’s rooftop vision and subsequent ministry to Cornelius and his household, and the initial success of the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas. The church had grown rapidly from a small Jewish sect to an international, multi-cultural and majority-Gentile movement.

It is inherent in the nature of any human organisation or group that it will seek to define who is included and who is excluded. In a sense, this is what makes them a definable group. And, of course, particularly from some in Jerusalem, there were the calls that these new believers had to become Jewish—to become “like us”—to be fully recognized as members of this new community.

While the mission reports seemed compelling, James—one of the leaders in the church in Jerusalem and probably the brother of Jesus—resolved the debate by drawing on the Old Testament teaching in Isa. 45. He urged that Jesus’ followers should expect that God does new things and that the church of Jesus must grow deeper, broader and more inclusive. James expressed it succinctly: “My judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

Of course, there are core beliefs and practices that are what it means to be a community of Jesus—and the Jerusalem council wrote to the new churches to encourage their faithfulness in such matters—but the conclusion of the

council was that, no, we don't all have to worship, look, live, practice, or even believe exactly alike to be full members of the faithful community of Jesus. And that it should not be difficult to turn to God in the context and culture of our church communities. As author Rachel Held Evans has put it, "What makes the gospel offensive isn't who it keeps out, but who it lets in."

More than a billboard sign, the Gospel mandates that everyone must be welcome. The experience of the early church was that wherever they felt the boundaries were settled, the Holy Spirit pushed them further. First- and second-century commentators lampooned and criticised the

Christians for their scandalous inclusiveness. It was a marker of the reality of the work of God among them—and beyond them.

"Everyone Welcome" must not be merely a sign we put up; it must be a core practice of our faith in Jesus and our life together as His people today. If we are truly worshipping Jesus, anyone and everyone is always welcome to join us.^{RMC}

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PRACTICING WELCOME

1. Pray for open and compassionate hearts, attitudes, and actions, as well as for those who are and might be members of our church community: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Rom. 12:2).
2. Spend time studying and imagining the gospel stories of the unlikely welcome of Jesus: "I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you" (Rom. 12:1).
3. Understand that God has intentionally made us different from each other: "We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other" (Rom. 12:5).
4. Expect difference and diversity. We live in multi-everything communities, so our churches should reflect, model, seek, and celebrate this reality at its best.
5. Appreciate that someone coming to our church community from a different background, experience, or identification is doing something remarkably courageous. If we are at home in the church, they are more nervous than we are, despite whatever apprehension we might feel. If someone wants to be considered part of our church community, whomever they might be, we must recognize this as a gift—sometimes fragile—to be cared for and nurtured.
6. Recognize that the greatest miracle of the church is that the person who is most unlike me is also included. Recognize that this realization also works in the reverse.
7. As much and as often as possible, include different languages, cultures, food, and people in worship services and other church events: "Take delight in honoring each other" (Rom. 12:10).
8. Learn to share our lives in all their realities: "Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).
9. Practice humility: "Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!" (Rom. 12:16).
10. Like practicing a musical instrument, we get better at it by doing it repeatedly: "Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. . . . Love each other with genuine affection" (Rom. 12:9, 10).

BIBLE (continued from page 7)

languages into English, French, German, and thousands of other languages.

Bible Reading Needs the Spirit

Just as “God’s penmen” were dependent on the Holy Spirit when they wrote sections of the Bible, we need the same Spirit when we read their words. The Spirit must guide us, so that we can discover the underlying principles of what we read and gain the insights to apply these principles in our twenty-first century lives.

But what if serious readers, who ask for the guidance of the Spirit, come to different interpretations? Well, let us remember that we are all at different points in our spiritual journeys. And let us never forget that as long as we are in this world “we see only a reflection as in a mirror” (1 Cor. 13:12, NIV). But let us also be mindful of the fact that we have the privilege of belonging to a community of believers, in which we can learn from one another.

We can only prosper spiritually in this community if we are tolerant with one another and accept that others may not interpret every text in the same way as we do, and if we are prepared to adjust our thinking from time to time as we “grow in faith and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV). **RMC**

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ACT JUSTLY (continued from page 11)

she had forgotten her book on the chair.”⁹

Under the stress of thinking about one important thing (say, for example, worshipping on the right day or waiting for the soon coming of Christ) and concentrating our attention on the right doctrines, is there the danger of overlooking the other important aspects of what God might want from us? Is it possible that our single-minded thinking about the Advent might lead to an overriding attention to one aspect and the unintentional neglect of another issue, of “occupying while Jesus returns”? I hope we can get the phone and not forget the book at the departure gate.

Mic. 6:8: “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly” into the world of so many invisible injustices, the merciless and graceless world, and the world that is proud and trotting and lacking even a modest amount of humility. **RMC**

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A WORD TO MY FELLOW TENANTS

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.
—Malachi 3:10 (ESV)

Having grown up in agricultural areas, I am familiar with the term *tenant farming*. Under this system, a landowner will enter an agreement with a tenant who will work the farm. When the harvest is brought in, the landowner and the tenant share the profits. This system allows those who prefer farming as a way of life and labor, but can't yet afford to purchase the land, to still make a living off the land.

It's a common practice, and there are numerous

variations, but typically, a crop such as corn or soybeans will be split 50/50 between the landowner and the tenant. The market has determined that, depending on variables, that's a fair division.

If you were a tenant farmer, and had been managing successfully under such an arrangement, would you consider moving to a different farm if the owner there offered you a 10/90 split? You turn over 10 percent of the crop to the landowner, and the rest is yours to take to market and get your best price. There isn't a tenant farmer in the country who would turn down that offer!

That's how good you have it when you faithfully tithe. God owns it all, and there are so many scriptural references

to make that point that I don't even feel the need to scatter them through this article. You know them already, and can doubtless recite a half dozen right now, without the use of a concordance. But as owner, He sets terms that no landowner could possibly afford to offer, and no tenant could afford to refuse: return a tenth, and the rest you may use as you see fit.

Of course, you can get a better deal than that. Most people do get a better deal than that, at least on paper. In fact, the majority of the members on the books of your church are getting what they consider a better deal. They have entered into a partnership in which they own nothing, but use the property of another for their own profit, and return nothing to the Owner. They claim citizenship in His kingdom, but don't return a tithe.

I don't want 10 percent of my paycheck.

They convince themselves that this is a good deal. In fact, they may believe it is the only deal they can afford. On paper, it looks like a sure winner from their perspective.

Obviously they don't get to tap into the rich promises that are, once again, so common in the Bible that you can think of more than I have the space to mention. But they clearly believe that a 0/100 split with God in which the windows of heaven are shut is more profitable to them than a 10/90 split with the windows wide open (for those who are paying attention, that was an unmistakable reference to Mal. 3:10).

Well, I could easily talk about how you can't come out ahead by keeping the tenth that the Owner asks in return, but you've heard that before, too. You may even have heard it from me, and if you haven't yet you likely will, because I do make that point. But for now, I'm not going to go in that direction. I will just take it as fact that you already know the texts, you've heard the testimonies, and there might not be an angle on the formula you haven't had presented to you in some fashion. Hopefully you are enjoying the blessings of that 10/90 partnership and have some of your own stories.

So, here is what I *do* want to say about returning the

tenth to the owner: Even if I thought it was a better deal for me (which I don't), and even if I believed I could get away with it (which, in the long run, no one can really get away with it), I still don't want to keep the tenth.

Yes, you read that right. *I don't want 10 percent of my paycheck.*

To understand why, let's get back to the farm. If a person who had been laboring hard for decades under a 50/50 split were offered a position on a different farm under the terms of a 10/90 split, it would sound unbelievably good. If the tenant were then told by the new owner that while the deal is 10 percent in return for the use of the land, he or she would not be compelled to turn it over, I don't think the tenant would believe their ears. But I do suspect that anyone who got that kind of a deal would nevertheless turn in the 10 percent faithfully for the rest of their lives.

There are some solid reasons why they would do this. A sense of obligation. Fear of losing the deal. An increase in living standards so significant that the 10 percent wouldn't even be missed.

Or, most likely, simple gratitude. When the standard is 50/50, how can you begrudge a tenth to the One who gave you the opportunity of a lifetime?

That's the kind of gratitude that makes me say I don't want 10 percent of my paycheck. Now if the check came to me 10 percent short, you can believe I'd make my way to the payroll office to straighten it out. I never said I wanted the 10 percent to be left out, and don't doubt for a minute that I absolutely do want it to be there. I want it in my hands, if only briefly, so I can have the joy that comes from placing it in the hands of the One who gave me the opportunity of a lifetime.

I'm happy for the blessings. I have many stories from my own experience, and thousands more that others have shared with me, of those heavenly windows pouring out. But I have a better reason to give than all the blessings. My reason is simple gratitude that in a world where the devil wouldn't even give a 50/50 split, God offers 10/90. **RMC**

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#ADVENTISTCHURCHTOO #AREWEASAFEPLACE?

I invite you to try an experiment with me and see what type of results you get. Ask your church board members during the next meeting if they think their church is a safe place for all. My guess is most will say “yes.” They do believe their church is a safe place.

Now, ask individuals within your church at different times if they feel comfortable bringing a friend or former member to church or inviting someone new to attend. My guess is they will say they are uncomfortable inviting others to attend because they don’t feel the church is a safe place to bring them.

How can this be? Why wouldn’t the church be a safe place? Well, there are many situations that lead people to feel unsafe in a church. Sometimes it is the opinionated person in Sabbath School who does all the talking and intimidates others by doing so. Sometimes it is the person who has no sense of social or personal boundaries who makes others feel uncomfortable in their presence. Sometimes it is the

gossip that is known around town as such and when people see her (or him) in church, they worry what gossip will be spread about them. Sometimes it is the “food police” who have to make sure everyone is eating and drinking what they are supposed to be eating and drinking and, if they aren’t, they will certainly tell them about it. Sometimes it is the person with a critical spirit who never has anything nice to say. Sometimes it is the person who simply has to be in control of everything and manipulates others in order to get their way. If they don’t get their way, then watch out—there will be a price to pay!

These and so many other scenarios are played out in our congregations Sabbath after Sabbath and they make people feel uncomfortable and unsafe. However, there is another very real reason people feel unsafe in a congregation. They feel unsafe when someone is abusive in some way, especially sexually. They feel unsafe when they see how little accountability and consequences there are for an offender. And they

feel unsafe when they see how little support (as is most often the case) the injured party receives.

Do you know one of the best things about church? It's the opportunity to come together in fellowship with like-minded believers who extend grace, forgiveness, love, trust, and respect to others.

Do you know one of the worst things about church? Coming together in fellowship with like-minded believers who extend grace, forgiveness, love, trust, and respect to those who have caused great harm to another—through sexual harassment and/or abuse.

Why would I say such a thing? Simply this—too often a predator in our congregational midst—whether in a paid position, such as a pastor or a lay person in a position of spiritual authority, such as an elder, teacher, deacon, youth group leader, etc., who commits the crime (yes, I said crime!) of sexually abusing someone under their care is the one who receives the sympathy, forgiveness, love, respect, trust, and grace in the aftermath of disclosure. Just take a look at the following quote to see what I mean:

“It's not unusual for ‘hard-core’ child molesters—with more sexual-offense convictions, more victims and younger victims—to be well-respected members of Christian congregations, and to be actively involved as church leaders, warns Victor Vieth, executive director emeritus of the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center in Winona, Minn.

“In one study, 93 percent of convicted sex offenders described themselves as ‘religious.’ Perhaps surprisingly, many sexual predators consider churches as ‘safe havens,’ Vieth said, with trusting, forgiving adults and easy access to children.

“Religious people can be ‘easier to fool’ than most people, say researchers, and, even when an accusation of child sexual abuse is made, will often stand with the offender, vouching for his good character and even showing up in courtrooms for support.”¹

What happens to the victim (or oftentimes multiple victims)? The victims are often shunned, blamed, ostracized, and occasionally banned from the congregation. Where is the grace, love, forgiveness, respect, and trust for the victim? It is generally nonexistent. That, my friends, is a very sad

statement; yet it is true. And it makes people feel unsafe in church.

As a church member, and even as a pastor's wife, there are churches where I would not feel safe enough to invite someone to attend with me. Friends, if our churches can't be safe places for the weary, the wounded, the vulnerable, the ones who need healing, the ostracized and marginalized, then why do we have churches? It's not the ministry of Jesus to cast out the very ones who need His love and grace the most—the ones who need His healing, tender touch in their lives. How are they to receive that love if we—the church—don't show it to them through our kindness and compassionate actions?

We must do better at this—it is required of us if we are to be like Jesus! Ps. 147:3 declares, “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” Yet, so often the response from otherwise well-meaning church members is to pour salt in the fresh wounds of abuse by blaming and shaming the victim. This has to stop!

Friends, forgiveness is vital. Grace is necessary. But don't forget what God has said in Mic. 6:8: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Justice . . . that is where we so often fail and that is what makes our churches so unsafe. We often get caught in the forgiveness stage because we want to be loving, forgiving, grace-filled Christians. But we too often forget that forgiveness does not erase consequences. Forgiveness does not always mean reconciled relationships and one big, happy family. Forgiveness does not overrule justice. When will we reach the point where we actually hold offenders accountable, in love, for their own salvation's sake? We don't want to love someone into hell, so to speak, by not allowing them to face the consequences of their actions, even if those consequences may include arrest, imprisonment, and registering as a sex offender. Justice and mercy must go together.

One without the other is not a whole or complete picture of Christ's love.

Let's start now to make our churches safer places for all.

Let's stop the gossip, the fault finding, the controlling

Continued on page 37.

WHY IS OUR PREACHING NOT WORKING?

Preaching has always been at the center of Christianity because it has as its foundation the Word of God and preaching is its exposition. Preaching is the most visible part of a pastor's ministry and it has a significant influence on the spiritual journey of a congregation. It regularly shows up on surveys as being one of the top two reasons an individual attends a church. But while it has been a driver in the Christian church and is today an element that draws the individual to attend church, according to a five-year-old Barna study, 46 percent of regular churchgoers see how the Bible is publicly presented each week and this results in no change in their lives.¹

The question begs itself: if preaching has been noted as such an important part of church, why is our preaching not working? "Our" includes both the one in the pulpit and the one in the pew. As any communication guru or counselor will remind us, communication is a two-person activity.

Much of what is considered when we reflect on the public presentation of the Word of God, or preaching, is actually the elements that are the least of what make it "powerful." Think of preaching as a house. The components of that structure that make it strong are not the factors that can be seen once it is finished. Things like the creative design, paint, wall hangings, or finish work are what make it nice. But that which makes a structure strong, or let's say powerful, is the foundation, groundwork, and framing or concrete work. It is no different for preaching. What compels preaching to be powerful and impacting are factors that cannot be seen. The wall-hangings and finish work of a sermon are nice, like illustrations, creative presentation style, stories, graphics, and such. But we'll leave those for another time. For now, let's talk about the foundation and framing of sermons, keeping in mind that these two parts are not visible, but we all feel it when they are not there.

Personal Preparedness

There is that time when the guards were sent to arrest Jesus in Jn. 7, remember? They return empty handed and when the now-angry commanders asked them where was the captive, they responded (verse 46) that they had never heard a man speak as that Man. Isn't that the style of preacher we want at our church? But the reason for this was that never man lived as He lived. Had His life been other than it was, He could not have spoken as He did.²

This often escapes our thinking, that the power of words come from one's personal, private life. Let me share with you a few lines from my favorite author on prayer and holy living—E.M. Bounds:

The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. . . . What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods [or better sermons], but men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. . . . Preaching is not the performance of an hour. It is the outflow of a life. The real sermon is made [or received] in the closet. The man—God's man—is made in the closet. . . . Prayer makes the man; prayer makes the preacher [listener]; prayer makes the pastor.³

Preachers, our lives must be in pursuit of the holiness of which we preach. Preaching is not personal performance. It is the overflow of the eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent God in you. Our prayer time, lingering in God's presence, must be long and passionate. Let's pause on that prayer word for a moment. Martin Luther is known to have said, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day." The picture we have of God is that if we bug Him too much, He will get annoyed like the parent who finally responds to the child's cry of "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" However, the Bible is repeti-

tious with narratives and instruction that continual and persistent prayer makes for miracles. God is not a “catch me if you can” god, but gave us the verbal, public proclamation of His word to make miracles happen.

Before you have the ah-ha moment and determine that your preacher must not be very holy or prayerful because the sermons lack inspiration, reread the parenthetical inserts above (which were my additions). Bound’s challenge is as much for the listener as it is for the preacher. One who spends no time learning the voice of God during the week will not recognize Him speaking in any public presentation. The sermon is made from the private and personal meeting with God by both the preacher and the listener.

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and so my ear naturally catches the news of wildfires. During the year 2017, they weren’t necessarily setting records, but the statistics are big. Since the beginning of this year, 46,951 fires have burned across 7,650,844 acres of the United States, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. You can’t help but reflect that each one of these massive landscape-changing fires started with a single flame. It’s the old campfire chorus, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going . . .” That personal, private, prayer time with God is the flame that can cause the forest-fire-burning we long for in our churches.

Theology of Preaching

The theology of preaching has at its foundation two elements. First, God has chosen to speak and His word is powerful, creative, and effective. Second, God calls humans to be surrogate voices in speaking His word to others. Because of the Holy Spirit, the latter can have the same result as the former.

Often preaching is thought of as being “about” the Word of God and not “the very Word of God.” This nuanced difference may have been or is being cultivated by poor preaching, but it doesn’t change what it is supposed to be.

Preaching through the span, from Noah to the third angel, includes a side of judgment and destruction. Not every time, but a significant number of times, preaching is what provides the opportunity for the individual or community to be saved from either physical harm or eternal destruction. God is love, and He is giving His all for the sal-

vation of mankind (Jn. 3:16). It is fair to conclude that God would only give His best effort to save all (1 Tim. 2:4), and according to the biblical account and command, preaching is one of God’s primary methods to such an extent that in Matt. 10, Jesus told the preachers He was sending them out so that communities would be held accountable in the judgment based on what they had heard preached (v. 15).

God’s Word brought everything in this universe into existence from nothing, but it is not just an historical event of the past, rather it is the breath that sustains and keeps creating life today. Could it be that same Word is what we today call preaching? The answer comes in Romans 10. The sequence described (vv. 13-16) is that those who are lost need to hear in order to believe. However, verse 17 summarizes with a parallel sequence: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The position the preacher occupies in the order presented in verses 13-16 is clarified in verse 17 as being the same position as the Word of God. In preaching then, the preacher and the Word of God become the same.

If preaching is the very Word of God, then how I relate to it as a preacher changes, and how I relate to it as a listener changes. Everything changes if preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God. As a preacher, I come with a holy, prayerful reverence, diligently studying, preparing and practicing the sermon in advance so that when I step into the pulpit, the word spoken is the Word. As a listener, I will come early (or on time), having lingered in prayer listening to His voice through Bible study, surrendering my heart and mind to Him, and petitioning Him for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the preacher and on me. Both reactions, from the preacher and the listener, are because God is about to speak.

And when God speaks, preaching does work. **RMC**

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MINISTERS CAN BE WINNERS

First, a personal story. How did I get to where I am today? As I backtrace the steps on my life road, I must admit there have been people along the way that God has used to help me. First and foremost would be my parents. They helped me get off to a tremendous start in life. After that would be my local Seventh-day Adventist pastor during a time when I was a rebellious teenager. Through his friendship and Christ-centered preaching, he helped me get on track spiritually. He helped me to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

The day of my baptism was the greatest day of my life. It was such a life-changing experience that an intense passion arose in my heart to serve in full-time ministry. Believing that passion was the calling of God, I enrolled in college to study to become a pastor. My goal was to learn to influence people for God just like my local pastor influenced me.

After graduating from Union College and then serving as a pastor for a few years, I began to realize that if I was going to really influence people for God, I needed to learn how to

become a better leader. Because of this, I set out on a quest to learn as much as I could about the subject of leadership. I read numerous books on leadership. I was especially blessed by the books and tapes produced by leadership coach John C. Maxwell. His quote, “Everything rises and falls on leadership,” was a real eye opener to me. It challenged me to not only grow myself as a leader, but to help those around me grow as well.

Initially, this meant developing the leaders in my church. But after a while, I became heavily convicted that I should expand my context and use my knowledge base of leadership to help pastoral leaders grow. Because I was already serving as a district superintendent for a group of conference pastors, I began sharing with them what I was learning and the response was so positive, I decided that for the rest of my ministry, I was going to take advantage of any opportunity that God made possible to invest in growing leaders.

One of the opportunities that God opened up for me was to train student pastors from Southern Adventist University

while I pastored a church nearby. For the last five years, I poured myself into each one of them with the hope that when they graduated, they would be better prepared to lead the churches they would serve.

After nearly three decades of full-time pastoral ministry, I can truly see how God has led in my journey. He has helped me influence many people for God, including those in leadership. It is my hope as I move forward that God will continue to allow me to have opportunities to make an impact for Him.

Win in Min

In my role at the Rocky Mountain Conference, I see myself as being the pastors' coach. My job is to assist each pastor to be a winner in ministry (Win in Min). Based on my personal 28 years of experience as a pastor, I believe that in order for pastors to win in ministry, they need to win in the following four areas:

Winning in Health

Spiritual—The most important appointment of each day for pastors is the time they spend with God. They must be “thick with the Almighty” in order to accomplish much for God.

Emotional—In order to be successful, pastors need what science journalist Daniel Goleman calls *emotional intelligence* (EQ). When the pastor is emotionally healthy, he or she can deal with the stress of ministry better and help their churches also become more emotionally healthy.

Physical—For energy and mental sharpness, the pastor needs to take care of his or her body. This would include sticking to a healthy diet, exercising on a regular basis, and making sure they are getting enough rest.

Winning in Relationships

Family and Friends—Those closest to a pastor determine his or her level of success. Because of this, the pastor must take time to invest in these relationships. The pastor's most important mission field is his or her family.

Church and Community—Members do not care how much a pastor knows until they know how much he or she cares. When members know their shepherd loves them, they are more apt to follow him or her.

Winning in Leadership

Developing the Leader Within—Since everything rises and falls on leadership, it is important for the pastor to grow in his or her leadership skills.

Developing the Leaders Around Them—Pastors can accomplish more when they build a team of leaders around them. When the pastor takes time to develop his or her team, it helps the team get better, which in turn helps the church get better. Growing leaders = a growing church.

Winning in Communication

Written—The pastor must take advantage of various forms of written communication in order to keep his or her church inspired and informed.

Oral—Teaching and preaching the Word in a relevant and practical manner gives the church and community the opportunity to connect with God and understand His plan for their life.

In order to make winning in ministry (Win in Min) not just a set of theories on paper, the following model for leadership development (created by the Center for Creative Leadership) can be used:

Assessment: *Question—How are you doing?* Using a periodic evaluation process, attempt to get an accurate picture of how things are going. Take time to celebrate the wins and then identify areas of growth.

Challenge: *Question—How can you change?* Develop a practical, strategic plan that can be followed in order to grow.

Support: *Question—How can others help you?* Once a plan of action is developed, find a small team of people who can provide accountability, encouragement, and prayer. **RMC**

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¹John C. Maxwell. *Developing the Leaders Around You*, Nelson Business, 2005, p. 6.

less than \$1,000 per year.³ And hitting close to home for those of us in the Rocky Mountain Conference, the underground sex trade in Denver, Colorado, is estimated to be generating an annual economy of \$39.9 million dollars. This market contributes heavily to the over 4,000 cases of sex trafficking that are reported in the U.S. every year with estimates of total trafficking in the U.S. putting the annual number in the hundreds of thousands.⁴

It's evident that people are divided, hurting and in desperate need.

In the meantime, we often concern ourselves with struggling, fighting, bickering, and having our feelings hurt over generational preferences, selfish desires, and a fair share of trivial matters. I could spend time producing a list of divisive issues that are holding us back instead of propelling us forward, but I'm sure that several issues, whether close to home or far away, will spring to mind for the reader with this simple prompting. As it relates to youth specifically, we tend to do a great deal of talking and listening but can never seem to come around to taking any action. We may pat ourselves on the back for "hearing the youth" or "listening to the church of now," but it seems that all that ever happens is that we set up another session of talking about change while we wonder, "Is this thing on?"

This year, the Youth Department is choosing to focus on identity. It is our belief that if we could become secure in who we are as children of the living God, the generational differences would melt away and the bickering over politics, doctrine, and equality would cease. Again, this call is to the young and to the old as well as to the progressive or conservative—sacrifice self in exchange for the identity God has for each of us. If we would only be able to make the challenging leap to give up pride and self in order to live by God's view of our identity, then truth, standards, ideals, love, and unity will follow.

Here are the simple facts of the Gospel regarding our identity:

- We are God's children and our identity is established by His love.
- We are valuable because God says so.
- Jesus became sin and died on the cross to cut lose Satan's

hold on our world.

- We are free from the power of sin.
- We are called, above all other things, to love one another.

As a faith community, our purpose is to embrace our identity, and live by connecting people with Jesus, the world's One true source of light. It is to inspire our communities to recognize the reality of the lives of darkness that people are living and respond with empathy, understanding, love, and guidance. Our purpose is to make it easy for people to know God. To make sure that they have the opportunity to surrender their broken "I am" for Jesus's perfect "I am." And to get about the work of loving our hurting and suffering world.

Our calling is to be a community of God, continually dying to self and filled with love.

Our world says: "I am hungry." Jesus says: "I am the bread of life" (Jn. 6:35). The people cry out from the darkness and Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12).

So let's not wait for another church or another person to make a difference. Let's not talk about our issues and fail to follow through with action. Instead, let us follow the call of Col. 3:10, setting our minds on heavenly things while throwing off the old self in proclamation that we *are* new men and new women in Christ. With confidence, we can claim our identity, internalize our value, sacrifice our selfish desires and live for the betterment of others. We may have all of the truth in the world, but it will be for nothing without love. This truly is the central force of our calling, that we love the Lord God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37 and 38). **RMC**

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LESSONS FROM *DRAKE*

When I first arrived at Boulder Church as a bright-eyed intern, I was given the title of “young adult pastor.” This, I thought, would be great for many reasons. First of all, I am a young adult! Secondly, I had just spent three years of my life working at Campus Ministries at Union College. Young adult ministry in Boulder would be a walk in the park.

It didn’t take long before I came to terms with the fact that young adult ministry on an Adventist campus and young adult ministry in the “real world” are drastically different. Life’s challenges complicate young adult community in the real world.

At Union College, everyone is roughly the same age,

faces the same basic life struggles (for example, trying to avoid buying overpriced textbooks and dreading a big final next Tuesday), lives within a ten-minute walk of one another, and receives worship credit for attending spiritual programs like Friday night vespers.

At Boulder, and likely at your church as well, many of the factors that make young adult ministry on a college campus work well are nonexistent. I realized that my ideas of how to connect people my own age to church and to Jesus would need to be reevaluated.

To begin my journey of reconstructing my definition of “young adult ministry,” I posed a question to a few of the

eighteen to twenty-somethings at church. “What do you guys want out of church?” I asked. The answer I received seemed too simple. “We would love to have potluck every week,” someone said, almost jokingly. Everyone laughed, but when I immediately agreed, the joke became a plan. Starting with the following Sabbath, the young adult group began to have lunch together every single week. Lunch together became a springboard into deeper community; leading to afternoon hikes, rock climbing trips, and days spent flying kites at the park, throwing frisbees, and drinking La Croix. On some Sabbaths, the afternoons together led to dinner. Dinners led to evenings spent playing board games and discussing life—its joys, sorrows, troubles, and triumphs.

Before we knew it, the young adult group not only began spending nearly all of every Saturday with each other, but began to grow. We began to connect on a deep level, getting to know about each others’ jobs, classes, families, friends, and hobbies. Time spent together outside of the physical church building connected us more than just two or three hours in the worship service and Sabbath classes ever could. Some of our deepest conversations about life and about God were had over lunch, during a board game, or while on a hike. Furthermore, anytime someone new visited our church, there was no doubt that we would have a way to connect. Lunch would be planned and ready. It was a given.

As the framework for this new definition of young adult ministry began to develop, I noticed that we weren’t cornering the market on an exclusive “young adult ministry;” we were just doing plain old ministry. At Union College, “ministry” almost exclusively meant programming. Relying on programming alone works well in the collegiate environment because socioeconomically similar people are already connected to one another. Students eat in the same cafeteria, attend the same classes, and live in the same dorms.

Unfortunately, all too often our tendency is to simply pack up the collegiate model and roll it out at the local church or in the conference while disregarding the reality that it may not be the best model for reaching young people in the “real world.” We plan event after event for twenty-something-year-olds and are shocked when these events are not well attended, or when people come and go but never

really connect. I am not against good programming. In fact, in February 2018, a group of young adults from Boulder Church attended the final One project gathering in San Diego. However, I want to be clear that it was more than the stand-alone event that made the experience incredible. While the event included time to connect with Jesus and with each other, the young adults also traveled with one another, ate meals with new people in new places, and explored San Diego while experiencing life with one another. If you take away one thing at this juncture, take this: programs can be wonderful, but they are not effective on their own.

Chances are you’ve heard someone say, “There are no young people in our church. They’re all leaving!” Or, maybe you’ve said it yourself. The harsh reality is this: if all church is giving a young person is programming, they’re not missing out if they just livestream the service or vespers from home while in their PJs flipping pancakes and drinking coffee (take it from a young person who may or may not have done this a few times). We have more to offer as a church, young and old, than just a service or an evangelistic series. We have more to offer as a church than “young adult” or “youth” events. We have more and we can be more. By no means does this mean we stop any of these things, but it does mean that they don’t deserve 100 percent of our time, energy, and finances.

Recently, a popular rap artist by the name of Drake took his music video budget for “God’s Plan” (nearly one million dollars), and gave it all away. What if our church organization took Drake’s lead and used our finances to invest in people instead of in events? For Drake, what would have been just another good music video instead changed dozens of lives. For us, what would be just another decent event could instead be an investment into connections with dozens of our young adults. It’s time to reevaluate our method of ministry and revisit our budgets. We talk about the exodus of young people enough; let’s do something instead. I’ll say it one more time: our church shouldn’t cut programming or stop hosting events all together. We must simply understand that these things are only a small portion of a bigger picture.

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CONNECTING WITH NEIGHBORS

It is obvious that there more questions than answers. As you read on, the thoughts and ideas will likely spark a conversation and hopefully make an impact in each of our communities. During the last decade at LifeSource, we have learned, mostly through trial and error, what is necessary for a church to really make an impact in its local community. It is my intention to share this information with the hopes of creating a larger dialogue.

Is anyone paying attention? “If your church burned down, would anyone notice?” We’ve heard that question for years and, for the most part, the answer to the question is, “Yes.” Your members, who faithfully attend your church, would miss it. But would anyone else? This is a question that, as old as it is, should keep us awake at night and haunt us on a daily basis. Does anyone in your community really care whether your church survives, thrives, or dies?

If you were to take a poll of the immediate community

surrounding your church, what would they say about you? What can the neighbors of your church tell us about your faith community? If you’re having a hard time trying to figure out what your immediate community thinks about you or if they even know anything about you, then it’s time you begin to change the way you relate to that community.

But relating to your immediate community is not as easy as you would think. Our church has now been on this journey for about a decade, and I can honestly tell you that it gets more challenging to find ways of connecting with our neighbors with every passing year. LifeSource Adventist Fellowship began this journey to become an externally focused church years ago, and through that process, we’ve had the opportunity to make connections with our immediate community in ways we never imagined. However, this has not come without challenges and without questioning our approach.

What follows is an example of what we have done and currently do in our efforts to connect with our neighbors.

1. Wednesday Workout Night: We've hired a personal trainer to come in every Wednesday evening and teach a Boot Camp-style workout for anyone wanting to participate.
2. We've opened our campus for 9Health, a partnership with Denver Channel 9 television to bring affordable health screenings to the community.
3. We provide a Financial Peace University seminar every year for our church members as well as our community.
4. We are starting a Celebrate Recovery support group.
5. We are in the process of teaching an English as a Second Language (ESL) class for the Lakewood community.
6. We partner with the YMCA in providing a class and support group for people with diabetes.
7. Every summer, we throw a thank-you party for our neighborhood.
8. We are opening our campus this year for Community Conversations about mental health, suicide, racial reconciliation, and infant and child loss.
10. Every October, we provide a family-friendly trick or treat alternative for our neighbors.
11. We open our facility every morning for an organization called Camp Gladiator to hold their workouts in our reception hall.
12. We will be hiring photographers in November so that our neighbors can have family photos taken for Christmas.
13. We have a community garden where 20-30 of our neighbors are actively involved.
14. We partner with Colorado Feeding Kids and pack 30-50 thousand meals yearly, inviting our neighbors to join us.
15. We have an ongoing partnership with Urban Peak, a shelter for homeless teens.
16. We have a community event on Easter weekend.
17. Our facility is also used by the local HOA to hold their monthly meetings.
18. We hope to start a monthly cooking class so that

neighbors can learn how to make a variety of meals from different parts of the world.

A pretty exhausting list isn't it? But here's the reality—even that is not enough to really make the type of impact we need to make in our communities.

Practice vs. Presence

One of the challenges that our churches face when connecting to their communities is a geographic problem. Many of our members commute a long distance to attend church. This means that many are not as enthusiastic about investing a lot of time and energy in a community that is not “their” community. So a church can plan and execute a dozen contact points with their neighbors, but as long as there's a lack of “presence” from members of the faith community, the local impact will be minimal.

Before we started plotting our approach for connecting with the neighborhood, we spent considerable time studying the demographics of those who lived within a one-mile radius of the church. During this process, we found that our church members were not like our neighbors. Our neighbors were of a lower income bracket, immigrants with less education. So, how do you bridge the gap and create an environment where both of these groups can engage in meaningful interaction? That question is still an elusive one.

Relating to your immediate community is not as easy as you would think.

As Adventists, we share a great tradition and history that provides immediate context and familiarity with one another. It's a beautiful thing when we can go into any Adventist church and talk about haystacks without needing an explanation, but it can also be a curse. Our language can also be confusing, since a haystack is simply . . . a taco salad.

A recent conversation with one of our attendees who lives in the neighborhood shed incredible light on how difficult it can be to break through in an Adventist church.



After attending for more than a year, she suddenly stopped coming to church and this was her explanation for her absence: “I realized I would never truly be a part of this [faith] community because I didn’t attend their schools, their colleges/universities, I don’t live in their neighborhood, or work at their hospital.” These are harsh words for an organization trying to reach a community so vastly different than its own members.

I’m not blaming anyone for her decision to stop attending, but I’m also not excusing the fact that reaching out to the community around us will cause tension when and if those individuals begin to visit our churches. If the members of our faith community are hesitant to spend a considerable amount of time with people unlike us, then all of our efforts to reach our community might be in vain.

Real relationships are developed when we step out of our own comfort zone and step into someone else’s. Traditionally, churches have not been very good at putting this into practice. Think about it! Almost everything we do at church revolves around a two-and-a-half-hour period. We are asking people who don’t know anything about Adventism to come to our place, at a specific time, for a specific purpose without any knowledge of what to expect.

Years ago when I lived in Florida, I became part of a fly-fishing club and was soon invited to its monthly Happy Hour at a local bar. The first couple of months I declined, mostly because I was afraid of hanging out at a bar with people I didn’t know very well. After a few months, I decided I would embrace the challenge and go to the next Happy Hour. Thursday evening approached and I got in my car and drove to Happy Hour. I pulled into the parking lot

and just sat in my car. I could not find the courage to get out of my car and walk in. Why? I had questions. I’d grown up a good Adventist. I never drank, smoked, or gambled. I’d never gone to Happy Hour before. What would it be like in there? What will I talk about? Where do I do once I’m inside? Will I know anyone there? How should I act? What should I say? While I sat in the car, I realized it was no different than a visitor driving to our church and having to find the courage to get out of the car and walk into a place they’ve never been before.

You’ll be happy to know that I went in and had a great time drinking—cranberry juice! I met people who were so different and yet so similar to me. People who care about the world, who care about others, who love their families and want to see their communities prosper. That Happy Hour encounter led to doing weddings and funerals for people who never stepped foot in our church, but got a glimpse of Jesus. One of the greatest gifts Jesus gave to those around Him was the gift of “presence.” Is your presence in your community?

In vs. Out

One of the greatest challenge our churches face is striking a balance between keeping those we have versus reaching those we don’t. If we spend most of our time and energy trying to reach out to the margins of society and community, the insiders will have a tendency to disconnect and feel as if they are being ignored. But if we spend too much time with those on the inside, you’ll never be able to really make an impact in the lives of those on the outside. And when those on the inside grumble and stop giving of their time and resources, then our ability to reach the outsiders is minimized. What’s the answer? I don’t know that I have one that many people will like, but I *do* have one. This one comes straight from Jesus.

Jesus says, “Be irresponsible!” Well, actually, He didn’t say those exact words, but he alluded to that fact in Lk. 15:4: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?” Did you catch it? He left ninety-nine in the open country to fend for themselves while He went out after just one. That doesn’t seem

very responsible. If you're playing the numbers game, logic would tell you to protect the ninety-nine to make sure you didn't lose any more. Someone would be very angry if you left ninety-nine in the open country to chase after just one. The ninety-nine would stop grazing and look around and wonder, "Where did our shepherd go? How dare he leave us here and risk our safety? Does he not know it's only one that he lost? Does he not realize the sheep is most likely lost due to its own failures and behavior?"

So how do we keep the ninety-nine happy and healthy while still going after the one? You trust the ninety-nine will watch for one another and help each other stay safe and grow because the ninety-nine know, without a doubt, that it's not about them; it's about the lost. Or do they?

Cold and Hot vs. Safe

Most of us know the words spoken to the church of Laodicea: "I wish you were either hot or cold . . ." but instead you played it safe. As churches, what are we afraid of when we reach out to our neighbors and community? Are we more interested in not making a mistake than we are in making a difference? We can keep playing it safe and bury what our Master has given us, and when He returns, we can give it back to Him exactly as it was given to us and be proud that we didn't mess it up or lose it. We can be proud that we locked it up and protected it. What will you tell Jesus? "I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours." But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant!" (Matt. 25:25-26).

A long time ago, I made the decision that when I get to heaven, I want to look Jesus in the eyes and say, "I tried everything!" **RMC**

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LESSONS (continued from page 27)

Our young people are not dead, disappearing, or on Mars. Our young people are not giving up on Jesus or on church. The simple truth is that our young people have graduated from college and are finding themselves in a new phase of the journey, that's all. They're juggling work, relationships, families, and taxes. The simple truth is that we are not adapting our ministry to their needs.

Let's not continue to give them *only* program after program to juggle and fit into their calendars. Let's give them churches that are warm, empathetic, and meaningful wherein they feel welcomed and know that they can connect on a weekly basis. Let's give them friendships that flood into their day-to-day lives. Let's give them Sabbath classes that look deeply into Scripture and are relevant to their lives. Let's give them challenges to live their faith every day and in every situation. Let's give them Jesus. Remember Him? The guy who who walked, traveled, ate, and celebrated with people. Let's give them the Jesus who lived life and was life.

It's been almost three years now that I've been at Boulder Church. My job description has changed from young adults to kids and teens. I haven't organized a single "young adult" event in ages, but I have seen measurable growth in my church. One recent Saturday, I spent all day with a group of young adults from Boulder processing the Sabbath's sermon over enchiladas, dreaming up ministry ideas over board games, and discussing current events after a movie. We need to remind ourselves that young adult ministry, or any ministry for that matter, can sometimes be, quite literally, a walk in the park. **RMC**

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JUMPING OFF THE BRIDGE CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH

“To show a liberal, self-denying spirit for the success of foreign missions is a sure way to advance home missionary work; for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off” (Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 465, 466).

Mission is the bridge between God’s plans and my plans. However, mission is often confused with activities in far-away countries filled with pagans or only at my local church. Wrong answers! Mission works interdependently and involves every person in the world in every location of the world. Jumping off the bridge can be hazardous to your health!

The operation of a world church is a complex process. Church happens in all but 17 of the world’s 206 countries,

with more than 150,000 groups/churches, nearly 8,000 schools, nearly 1,000 hospitals/clinics and health care facilities, 62 publishing houses, 22 food factories, and scores of programs and methods—the tasks and parts of governance are nearly beyond comprehension. From leadership training through the critical steps of strategic planning and organizational governance, there is only one purpose for the church. The church has been organized for the purpose of mission.

Every church leader, and particularly pastors and members, is largely concerned with mission as defined by the Lord Himself—giving hope to the world through Christ and making disciples in Christ (Matt. 28: 19, 20). I have often heard the question, “How can growth take place in my church?” Jumping off the bridge can be hazardous to your health!



Jumping off the bridge can be hazardous to your health!

Shrinking pains begin with the narrowing of a church's vision and mission. The voices begin in the hallways and progress to the boardroom. "Foreign mission? Who needs it? It has nothing to do with us. Cancel the mission report. We have no time to show Mission 360. Global Mission's church planting? We have other uses for our money." We have all seen it. The talk goes on and on until finally mission is defined as internal entertainment and the critically important human, time and financial sacrifice required to operate a church school, Pathfinders, Center of Influence—Community Services, evangelism, etc., is considered an outrageous intrusion to church life and the budget. Children's story—"Where have all the children gone?" Jumping off the bridge can be hazardous to your health!

Is the mission of the church going forward? Absolutely! Globally, 2016 and 2017 were both record-setting years for church planting. The church's Global Mission Initiative, empowered by the Holy Spirit, continues to dynamically deliver hope in Christ to the non-Christian world. Church growth is alive and thriving in the North American Division, Mid-America Union, and the Rocky Mountain Conference. Look at the data! However, only changed people, not changed data, register in heaven. Every day, people without hope find Christ. I have met them—business executives, plumbers, refugees, abused children, prostitutes, Animists,

Mission is often confused with activities in far-away countries filled with pagans.

murderers, the homeless, the wealthy, the poor—all finding eternal hope in Christ, from desperate to being cuddled in God's grace.

It is easy to comfort myself saying, "The bruised, sick and destitute of the world live somewhere else, not in my city." True, these people do live somewhere else, but it's a sure bet that when I help them, God will open my eyes and use me as an instrument of hope to heal the bruised, the

At the conclusion of a mission conference, an elderly lady from the eastern United States handed me \$2,500 to start a new church in northwest India. When she handed me the money, she said, "Take the money; our church of seven members is dead." We talked for about 30 minutes. I told her that her sacrificial gift could very possibly be their church's first plank on the great mission bridge of hope. Shortly thereafter, seven members, inspired by the Holy Spirit and claiming the "reflex influence," employed the most simple, humble methods, and watched for the "reflex." Two years later, I spoke at the new church in India—42 grace-filled members all chiseled from the bedrock of a hopeless world religion. A few weeks after that, I spoke at the seven-member church. Seventy-one people present—all chiseled from the bedrock of faith.

Continued on page 37.



Seventh-day Adventist® Church

THE STORY BEHIND THE CHURCH LOGO

The year 1996 was historic for the church's public identity with the adoption of a worldwide church identity plan. This included a church logo symbol and a branding approach based on the global church communication strategy referred to as the Hope Strategy.

As a global church body, we had no logo before 1996. A variety of symbols were used in different administrative areas of the church with varied identification logos.

Creativity in entity identifiers, which you could see on the church office stationary, the signage of local churches and administrative offices, as well names of church institutions, was confusing and did not reflect a unified organization—not to mention adding to confusion about how the church's name was expressed.

There is a history for how the Seventh-day Adventist Corporate Identity (CI) was developed and voted by the General Conference Executive Committee. I recall a conversation with Pastor R. S. Folkenberg, then the world church president, where I passionately expressed the view that it was high time we supported our interests in the unity of the global church and protected our church from abuses of the independent use of the church's name. "The logos used by the various church entities are all over the place," I argued. "Do we care enough about our own brand and ethos as a faith community to make our identity visible in a consistent manner?"

The issue of a corporate identity and its graphic expression was not new to either of us. "Others have tried to get this done and they failed," Folkenberg responded. "But if you want to have a go at it, go ahead."

"If I were to get a crack at it, would you have my back?" I asked. His affirmative response meant that we would achieve change in the church's public presence.

After establishing a committee to oversee design parameters of the church's logo, its applications and graphics standards, a proposal was ready for a policy route through appropriate channels. Placed with the Communication Department, the group was composed of public relations professionals, a designer, and representatives of the administration. Known in church circles as a designer and graphic artist, Bryan Gray was invited to present a proposal for a design and work also on branding applications and a graphic standards manual.

In consultation with the Office of the General Conference President, one critical approach was undertaken—a recommendation to include the full name of our church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It aimed at establishing a trademark and legal right for the use of the church's full name, thus preventing unauthorised use of the church's identity and protecting the proprietary interests of the church's name.

Also, in order to expedite the process to have the corporate identity established, it was recommended that, after the General Conference's top three officers approved the design proposal and application, it would be directly presented to the Executive Committee of the world church.

It was in October of 1996 that the Annual Council met in San Juan, Costa Rica, and a two-thirds majority of the Executive Committee voted to establish a unified, global church logo—a graphic and the church's full name—the denomination's first. Prior to 1996, the church never had a global church logo used by church entities in all World Divisions, unions, conferences, local churches and institutions owned or licensed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It is important to note that when we established a graphic standards manual, “the ultimate goal [was] to ensure that the Church is identified consistently and clearly in a positive manner that will communicate our mission and spirit for many years to come,” wrote Bryan Gray. Naturally, communicators and most of the church leaders in nearly all unions welcomed establishing a unified CI. As one church leader from Central America put it, we “feel that we are one, no matter where you see our logo.” Now, over twenty years later, wherever you see the logo, you know you can feel at home as part of a global family of Seventh-day Adventists.

My early months and years as a “logo cop,” after rolling out the usage and signage of the logo, saw a change of heart by those who initially were not so sure about dropping their attachment to logos developed by their Unions and became the CI's biggest supporters. Such was the case with South America in particular. Rolling out the logo throughout the region, the CI was merged with the Communication Strategy, known as the Communication of Hope.

Logo—What Is Its Meaning?

The logo reflects the core values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its foundation is the Bible, the Word of God, shown open because its message should be read and put into practice. Central to that biblical message is the cross, which is also a central feature of the logo. Above the cross and the open Bible is a burning flame that represents

the Holy Spirit, the messenger of truth.

The Second Coming. The lines at the top of the design suggest upward momentum symbolizing the resurrection and ascension to heaven at Christ's Second Coming, the ultimate focus of our faith.

The Flame. This is the shape formed by three lines encircling an implied sphere. The lines represent the three angels of Rev. 14 circling the globe and our commission to take the Gospel to the entire world. The overall shape forms a flame symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

The Cross. The symbol of the cross, representing the Gospel of salvation, is positioned in the center of the design to emphasize Christ's sacrifice, which is the central theme of the Adventist faith.

The Open Bible. The Bible forms the base of the design and represents the biblical foundation of our beliefs. It is portrayed in a fully open position suggesting a full acceptance of God's word.

Some people have complained that the abandonment of the “old” logo represents a departure from what we believe in, among other accusations. Nothing could be further from the truth. We don't reflect our logo; our logo reflects us, and if we are true to what we believe, that is what the logo will come to stand for.

As a matter of fact, the new logo more fully symbolizes the breadth of what we believe, as stated above, but is worth repeating. It starts with the foundation of the Word, centered on the Cross, the path to our salvation; it shows three flames encircling an implied globe, representing both the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and also the Three Angels' Message to all the world. And all of this is shown in a simple, yet elegant and contemporary style, all the things you ask for in a great logo.

What's in the Name?

There is only one correct usage of the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” The correct spelling of the church name includes a hyphen between “Seventh” and “day” with the “d” for “day” being lower case. There are two identifying beliefs in our name. We are believers in the second advent of Jesus Christ and keep the seventh-day (Saturday) as

Sabbath, the biblical day of worship.

Alongside the CI meaning and application, it was also established that the official abbreviation for the full name of the church is “Adventist.” This establishes the use the full name or the abbreviation “Adventist” when referring to the church. Many local churches, leaders and members got accustomed to the abbreviation “SDA.”* In practice, this actually hides the meaning of who we, as Seventh-day Adventist members, are. It is also important to note that besides the legal application of our corporate identity, there is a public relations aspect of the way we identify ourselves. Though there will be those who would wish to debate it, in my public relations view, the use of the initials “SDA” is incorrect, as those letters can stand for a variety of organizations.

Besides, the names “Seventh-day Adventist” and “Adventist” are the registered trademarks of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists), which is recognized as the legal entity controlling the use of that name. The term “Adventist”

is a generic term, which can be used and applied by any group professing belief in the second advent of Christ. When used in the context of the full name of the church, the term “Adventist” is generally understood to mean Seventh-day Adventist.

Twenty years after the church took a step to establish a unified church logo, the General Conference reviewed the more contemporary needs of how we apply the logo in the era of changing technology and media. The logo received a graphic refresher without changing its graphic, but making the logotype easier to use across the globe and in different languages. A new web page application is being given a new look. Making it more in line with local cultures and design needs, each world division is working on their versions. It is our intent to release a new “web face” in the Rocky Mountain Conference in sync with the North American Division. **RMC**

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*The acronym SDA has also been legally determined to be proprietary to the Church and is a protected usage when referring to the Seventh-day Adventist Church (although the Church does not encourage the use of that acronym to identify itself). The use of these names is reserved for non-commercial use by Church organizations, as listed in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. All others may only use these names with approval specific approval, as outlined under General Conference Working Policy. Additional information may be obtained by contacting the Office of General Counsel at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



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SAFE PLACE (continued from page 17)

actions, the boundary pushing, and all that is unlike our Lord.

Let's stop the sexual predators in our midst—no matter who they are or what positions they may hold.

Let's forgive and love the offender as they bear the consequences of their actions for the sake of their ultimate salvation.

Let's love the victim and stop blaming him or her for the downfall of the “admired, loved, well-respected leader.” The downfall is a result of the offender's actions; it is not a result of a victim telling about the actions of the offender toward them.

Rather than provide a “how-to” list for this article, which you can find in the additional resources below, I chose to appeal to your heart. It's time for a major shift in our congregations. If we truly believe our Lord is coming soon, then we need to start acting like Him now and showing others His great love for them. That love means doing no harm. That love means standing up for victims. That love means holding people accountable for sinful and criminal actions.

Do you really want your church to be a safe place? Then pray for God to fill your heart with His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His justice. **RMC**

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Reference

¹Paula Schlueter-Ross, “Most Child Molesters ‘Religious,’ Often Target Church Members.” <https://blogs.lcms.org/2015/most-child-molesters-religious>

Additional Resources

http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/how_should_church_respond.php
http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/making_church_safe.php

BRIDGE (continued from page 19)

sick and the destitute not only in my city but in my home.

While global church growth is on my list of concerns, it is not the first question that should rock my world. If faith and sacrifice are to walk hand in hand, I must hear the roaring question, “What's the condition of my mission bridge? Is my mission bridge robust or sporting just one thin plank? Am I bold enough, responsible enough, to shake and rattle my priorities until my mission bridge repeatedly transports the “reflex influence”—Christ to the world?”

Many years ago when my father was a colporteur, had five children in church school, and was part of a new church plant, I watched as Mom and Dad pledged \$500 for the purchase of a property on which now stands the Gladstone, Missouri, church. I was old enough to know that Dad needed a newer car, paint and shingles for our old house, and all of us could use a few new clothes. On the way home, I asked Dad where he was going to get the money for the church. Driving home in the dim of the evening, I could just make out the look of peace on Dad's face. With one hand on the steering wheel, he put his other hand on my shoulder and said, “The work of the church will be finished in the spirit of sacrifice, but never forget, faith and sacrifice walk hand in hand.” I knew intuitively that he was paraphrasing from Ellen White.

Over the next two years, I watched Mom and Dad, little by little, pay that \$500. I also helped paint the old house and put shingles on the roof, and that year I got socks, a sweater, and a new shirt for Christmas. The next generation is watching. Jumping off the bridge can be hazardous to your health! **RMC**

Mike Ryan is a former vice president of the General Conference and coordinated the church's Global Mission initiative. He and his wife Jeanie live near Montrose, Colorado.



DENVER LIFE-CHANGING *STORIES*

Like the American Revolution, the Revelation Speaks Peace (RSP) seminar, held at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House during the month of January in downtown Denver, is history. There's no more preparation, no more organization. The long months of groundwork and execution are past, yet there is still work to do.

According to Eric Nelson, RMC vice president for administration, each Denver-metro church has as many as 600 interests to disciple which involves continued Bible studies, building friendships, invitations to church and other events; in other words, continued evangelism. The 200 requests for baptism made during the series are expected

to rise as more are mentored.

Looking back at 2017, we see Denver-metro churches reaching out to community members by dozens of church members sharing Bible truths, fanning out across the Denver-metro area making contact, making friends, studying and praying with the hundreds who responded to the Voice of Prophecy mailings offering Bible studies. Lives were changed and baptisms took place even before the seminar began.

The harvest continued during the event and, by its end, it was evident the series would persist in impacting lives as members maintain Bible studies and connect with RSP visitors.

Numerous guests came to the Revelation Speaks Peace meetings for varied reasons and needs. One found an RSP handbill in a trashcan. Another came after being released from prison. Some were battling disease, gang involvement, alcohol, drug use, and homelessness. Many were searching for a deeper understanding of Scripture. Not every story is known, but the cross-section of those who shared their stories point to a populace hungry for meaning.

The first night of the month-long meetings, January 5, saw 1,340 attendees which swelled to 1,672 one Sabbath later in the month. Some weeknights saw as few as 500, yet weekends always brought the crowds again. As the seminar continued through the month of January, the numbers shifted from a majority of guests to a majority of church members.

Although some young people attended, it became obvious that the timing of the event was not convenient for the younger crowd who face nightly homework. The offering of music at the event would not necessarily appeal to today's

Many members, and even pastors, who no longer believe in the efficacy of public evangelism were moved by the response.

young crowd.

"I thought the music fit very well into the opera setting," commented Vivien Vasquez, a volunteer greeter at the meetings. But, while the music may have been somewhat old-fashioned, there were many who appreciated the music style and the message expressed in its lyrics.

Denver-metro pastors from 30 churches, involved from the beginning, continued throughout the meetings connecting Bible study interests with Bible study teachers, meeting with VOP leaders for planning sessions, opening the meetings with and making themselves available for prayer, and filling volunteer positions as greeters, Discover Bible Study Guide coordinators, ushers, and prayer warriors. During their final wrap-up meeting following the series, pastors

expressed a desire to continue evangelism as a team each year, or at least every other year.

Many members, and even pastors, who no longer believe in the efficacy of public evangelism were moved by the response they saw to messages given from the platform during Revelation Speaks Peace.

Ushers who work for the Ellie Caulkins Opera House facility were frequently seen inside the auditorium listening to the messages, some even requesting prayer from pastors. These ushers expressed their appreciation for the meetings and wanted them to be a yearly event, one even saying, "I'm going to cry when you leave."

The Newday Parker church plant in downtown Denver, which opened just before RSP began, had hoped to attract people from the meetings and give them a place to worship. They were disappointed that this hope did not prove true. Even so, they are involved in numerous outreach ventures aimed at blessing marginalized people in their area.

Myriad stories could be told of those in attendance. Christian Martin, pastor of Denver South Church, shared the story of Angel who is in his early 20s and paralyzed from the waist down. It was while Angel was hospitalized and waiting for an ultrasound that he prayed asking God why this had happened to him. In the middle of the prayer, Denver South Church member and ultrasound technician, Kevin, entered. There followed a spiritual conversation, which ended with prayer and a promise to stay in touch. The following week when the Discover Bible School initiative was launched, Kevin offered to study with Angel who was definitely interested, as were his mother, his brother, and his brother's girlfriend. When the Revelation Speaks Peace seminar neared, Angel asked Kevin to take him to the meetings. This is just one story among many that could be shared.

"Some of the stories developing moved me deeply," said RSP speaker Shawn Boonstra. "Based on past experience, I expect we may see as many as two or three hundred decisions when the dust settles." **RMC**

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Making a pledge is an obvious step to take. We do this before January 1 each year, or on a birthday. We do this looking into a mirror, limiting our gaze only to our face. We then create a list of promises to work on, and the usual journey takes us downhill. As they say, promises are easily broken.

Admittedly, my promises are created to transform into feelings of guilt when the good intentions falter. My guilt, and not the fulfillment of promises, has an easier start and finish in my daily life. One day, a week, or a month quickly turns into another, and so on, with promises cast aside.

An experience from a few years ago comes to mind.

We had a good friend who lived in Sedona, Arizona. Mary Schnack passed away a few years ago, but apart from professional interests and collaborations, what remains in Grazyna's and my memories are many a moment we spent trekking the red-rock trails of "God's country" as Mary called it.

She lived just under the Coffee Pot Rock landmark, and a short distance from St. John Vianney Church. By chance, I observed an after-Christmas service there once.

What's vivid in my memory is the sound of a nearly empty church, its silence broken by the hard-hitting steps of a minister walking from the back of the church nave. The sound meant he knew his destination.

My eyes were drawn to the space associated with the language of the steps, revealing well-worn cowboy boots with a hint of jeans showing slightly below his vestments.

It was not so much what I saw, but what this short, bearded man in his forties shared in his equally short homily that made a difference. Later, I learned that many Sedonians referred to

him as J.C., and his presence was felt outside the walls of his church. He was something of a fixture in the local lore.

A memory of what I heard that morning jumped at me on that chilly morning. J.C. told a story about a good-for-nothing seminary mate of his who phoned him wondering if J.C. lives by what he preaches. All of a sudden I was confronted by a lot of stuff the preacher told the congregation. "What pillow do you have under your head? It's soft, isn't it? And what's your duvet like? Warm, right?"

Whatever was said next, it was set against the importance of *being* rather than *having*, all seasoned with personal honesty. My nagging thought that morning was this: Make yourself useful in the lives of those who will cross your path today. That's what Jesus will help you with.

An invitation ended that short reflection by J.C. "Look outside. The sun is shining brightly. Like the sun, I wish the love of Jesus Christ goes with you. Go, and be love to others. Live love," he said.

This memory lingers on with a daily challenge: Instead of waiting for someone else to be love I am inviting myself to make the world better by getting out of my shell in order to become more responsive to the disenfranchised and the needy.

That's the challenge I am throwing at myself again.

And if a wish is in order, may your authentic life be spiced with love. May it be infectious through the love of Jesus. Daily. **RMC**

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