



50* lessons for ministry
in the 21st century

Pr. Roger Hernandez

*(Plus helpful tips and ideas you will never be able to implement where you are now)



Dedicated to:
All the ministers paid and unpaid that make the choice every day
to give their lives to the church we love.

My kids, who minister with me with gusto.

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✓ Bad Evangelism

Three things dying churches are great at

These who have erred need pity, they need help, they need sympathy. They suffer in their feelings and are frequently desponding and discouraged. Above everything else, they need **free forgiveness**.

3Tp.128

Based on the parable of the prodigal son, let's look at three things the **older brother did not do** to his younger family member that are common to dying churches:

1. He did not stop his brother from leaving.

Nowhere in the story do you see the younger brother pleading/talking/interceding with his younger sibling to get him to stay. He never calls him brother. Not once. He calls him names, he calls him "your son" but he never calls him brother. Dying churches have no problem letting people walk out. Here is a quote that should give us pause:

"In this century, the ratio of people lost versus new converts is 43 per 100."

<http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2013-11-19/at-first-retention-summit-leaders-look-at-reality-of-church-exodus/>

Thriving churches have the opposite attitude. They say: you may end up leaving, but you are someone I am willing to fight for.

2. He did not search for him while he was gone.

It is interesting that the older brother was pretty specific about the lifestyle that his brother was leading, which begs the question: How did he know?

It's so much easier to judge from afar, than it is to get in the pig pen and rescue the lost. Ministry is messy. People don't follow through; they let you down, make bad decisions and recant on their promises to you and God. In those cases, it is easier to judge than to engage in a recovery mission. Thriving churches understand that lost people matter to God and that it's pretty hard to embrace someone you are pointing at.

3. He did not rejoice when he came back.

Here is the clincher. The bible says that the older, holier brother "**came near**" to the house. Interesting terminology. What he did not realize is that he too was far from the house. He too needed grace. He needed to

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understand that maybe he wasn't "as bad", but he was "bad enough".

Let me illustrate:

Imagine Jesus shows up in and tells you that in order to go to heaven, you must swim from Florida to Portugal, a trip of around 4,000 miles. So, get in the water everyone. Some will swim one mile, and drown. Some will swim 100 miles and drown. Some will drown in 10 feet of water. At the end of the day, **all drown**. No one makes it to Portugal. Some are far, some are farther, some are furthest, but ALL are far enough to die. Therefore we need grace. We need someone to put us on a boat and take us there!

Grace is for all of us. For the one who has the intact marriage and the one who has failed. Twice. Grace is for the one who never tasted alcohol and for the one who can still feel its aftertaste after a rough night. For the one who is full of sin, and the one full of religion. The ditch on the right. The ditch on the left. They are different ditches, but ditches nevertheless. Grace is for them, AND us.

Three final questions for leaders:

1. Are we willing to fight for them?
2. Are we willing to get dirty to save them?
3. Are we willing to celebrate when they return?

✓ Killing the “Just Because” Programs

The church is full of programs. Programs that are good. Programs that are bad. Programs that are sacred vegi-cows. The one characteristic above all that programs MUST have is that they intentionally and specifically further the missional/evangelistic core value of the church. We don't need any **“just because programs”**. Just because programs are those we do **“just because”**. They were started with good intentions, and even worked well (sometimes extremely well) for a season. But now they must die.

Easier said than done.

People are invested emotionally in the programs. Even though they may not be reaching any lost people the desire to maintain them will supersede the desire to accomplish mission. That last sentence was hard to write. But it's true. Here are three suggestions that may help you. Sharpen your knife, please.

1. Have a compelling vision.

The clearer the vision, the clearer the programs that must be eliminated. If it's fuzzy in the leadership team it will be unreadable in the pews. I hear a lot of vision statements that sound nice and MEAN NOTHING to the people because they don't understand the implications. “We want to reach our city for Christ” (who doesn't) “To be a church that loves people and serves God” (how will you do that exactly?)

Unpack that please...for example: Did you know that reaching the city means that sinners from said city will be coming to YOUR church, sitting next to YOUR daughter, and going to YOUR church picnic with their earrings, cigarette smell (not Marlboro, either) and (gasp) real chicken? The truth is that many times “we are afraid of the people we claim we want to reach¹.”

Be clear.

2. Have the guts to lead.

Pr Myron Edmunds says: *“It is impossible to lead the church to the next level without attrition”*. Read that sentence again. One more time. Now ponder the implications. People will leave.

Sometimes the strongest leaders and the biggest givers will exit stage left. Volunteers will run short. Moral will be low. Giving will be lower. People will attack you, question you, call you the devil and call the conference, union, division and GC. They will even call your momma if it will make you stop. But if this is a God given vision, you must proceed. Make sure you are

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not changing doctrine, biblical principles, and the 10 commandments. We need churches that will say: “we’ll do anything short of sin to reach our community”². Fierce, determined, hurtful opposition is a given. The devil hates evangelism. You will see how much when you become missional.

Be strong.

3. Have the involvement necessary to bring alignment to the vision.

There can’t be competing visions. The pain of transitioning a church to an evangelistic church is intense, for a season. Once again, read these two words: Intense. For a season.

Leading a church and remaining in the status quo is like a nagging low level pain that NEVER goes away. Some leaders choose that. It’s not pleasant, but at least I’m not screaming, and I will be gone in 4 years to another church that hopefully has it all figured it out. A church that is full of “just because” programs will have competing visions, because the leaders of these programs think their vision is the right one, such as:

A “once a year” activities like deacons day.

Breakfasts that are attended by only us.

Anything that is attended by “only us”.

Sunday night evangelistic services that have no guests. (Spanish churches only)

This is FUBU church. For us, by us, and the end of the day, it’s just us. That’s not what God had in mind when he created the church and launched it. You bring people into alignment by explaining through the inspired writings that:

Familiar ≈ holy

Familiar ≈ better

Familiar ≈ productive

Be intentional.

I leave you with this quote to ponder. Too strong? Possibly. But something to think about:

“If a church is open and only church people are attending I question the validity of it remaining in existence”³.

¹ Williams, Zach (2013-12-04). Transitioning the Church: Leading the Established Church to Reach the Unchurched (Kindle Location 765). Rainer Publishing. Kindle Edition.

² Williams, Zach (2013-12-04). Transitioning the Church: Leading the Established Church to Reach the Unchurched (Kindle Location 765). Rainer Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³ Williams, Zach (2013-12-04). Transitioning the Church: Leading the Established Church to Reach the Unchurched (Kindle Location 765). Rainer Publishing. Kindle Edition.



Three Mistakes in Changing the Culture of an Organization

I often have conversations with leaders that are trying to improve/change their organizations, i/e churches. While encountering some opposition in the process is normal, here are some things you would want to consider, as you consider changing the culture of your church. Remember two key facts:

Culture- "how we do things here".

Culture >everything.

When you arrive at a church/organization/new assignment, we sometimes make the following wrong assumptions:

1. People want the church to grow.

Everyone says they want to grow. Until you start changing the status quo. Then, not so much. We erroneously assume that people mean what they say, when they say they want their church to grow. Growth means changing some of what you have been doing, because if you continue doing the same things you have always done, you will be getting the same results you have always gotten. Take into consideration the following preferences in you church:

Some prefer small. Power is addictive, and they fear that more people=less power.

Some prefer same. They are used to what is. Comfortable. Known. Familiar.

Some prefer previous. The previous pastor taught them his way, was the only way.

2. People want to follow you.

You may be the assigned leader, but you are not always the real leader. We assume that people will embrace your super visionary, earth shattering, demon destroying ideas, while members just want to have their Starbucks (decaf), sing some familiar songs & hear a sermon that will put them to sleep, not to work. You want to build a Home Depot. They are perfectly fine with a corner Mom & Pop store.

3. People understand the cost.

Change is hard. When Jesus calls us, he bids us to die. That's no fun! There is a high cost for excellence. It costs people their power, control, familiarity and predictability. Usually the leader lives, breathes and sleeps ministry. People in the congregation have something we call "lives". The cost for a church member to be "all in" is high. Spelling out the cost, and reassuring them of the kingdom's purpose, in great detail, is a must.

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To do:

Here is an assignment. If you have a board/team of any kind, ask these 2 questions and sit back and take notes. Resist the urge to correct, rebuke, fire, or get defensive with the answer. Just sit back and listen. (and take good notes). Here are the questions:

a. What would success **look like**, if we were to get there, in 3 years? Visualize for a moment what that looks like in: attendance, growth, worship, discipleship, children's ministry, youth involvement, finances. **(be as specific as you can in each area)**

b. What would success **feel like**, if we accomplish in 3 years what we have set out to do?



Five Things I Wish People Would Stop Saying From the Pulpit

I have been going to church for over 47 years if you count the nine months in my mom's belly. I have seen the good, the bad and the ugly. I understand that this is highly subjective, but I felt I needed to express it. Whether my desire to change comes true or not, is irrelevant. I'm in love with the church, even when it is less than perfect. But, could you please stop these five expressions from ever happening again?

1. "Good morning".

It goes something like this: "Good morning everyone. ("good morning" says the congregation) "I can't hear you, GOOD MORNING (louder and firmer)" The congregation increases the volume. This is usually enough to placate the person with the microphone, except when it doesn't, where the "good mornings" are followed by "didn't you eat breakfast this morning?" or the always nice "hasn't God been good to you". Here is a tip: Just say good morning, smile, say your part and sit back down. We love God. That is not measured by our volume.

2. "Now, as we begin..."

This usually happens after the initial song service, which begs the question: What were you doing for the past 15 minutes? The truth is, many times song service happens with no rhyme or reason, is a filler or something we do while people get there. I don't believe that practice honors God or inspires people. By the way, song leader, if you're going to ask for member's favorite songs, make sure you know more than 10 hymns!

3. "Wherever two or three are gathered".

This usually happens when few are in attendance (think Sabbath School, Prayer Meeting or the beginning of AY). What this communicates is pity, rather than power. It's a disastrous message to send to guests. Think about it. Who would like to join a group of people that feel so bad about themselves? God is present where there are 2 or 3, but the most common application this text is given is not really what the Bible writer intended to convey. We are not victims, and the "poor little ol' me" has no place in the house of the living God.

4. "We will sing this song twice".

Why? That's all. Why?

5. "Pray for me, I've lost my voice"

Again?

Let's work together to make the worship service a memorable experience for everyone.

Five MORE Things I Wish People Would Stop Saying From the Pulpit

There are phrases/expressions that could be chosen better by the person with the microphone in their hand. Here they are:

1. “The inspired pen”.

First of all, God inspires people not writing utensils. That is “insider” language that we understand but visitors do not. These and other popular “adventese” expressions are not limited to the one listed here. We use phrases like GC, AYS, ABC, GCC, Conference, Union, Division, and a host of others that if not explained can create a puzzled look in guests’ faces at the worship service. Speak English, Spanish, Korean, etc. No one likes to feel left out. Didn’t feel great in middle school. Still doesn’t.

2. “Lord, please hurry the steps of those who are on their way”.

What does that even mean? Are we down with teleportation now? One important fact we sometimes forget, is that just because a person is late, it does not mean they are less spiritual or don’t care about their relationship with God. There could be a host of reasons why people are late. I am an early arrival. That makes me prompt, not perfect. By the way, a smile and a hug for late arrivals communicates we are glad you are here. You are a greeter, not a judger.

3. “Without wasting any more time”.

This one is used a lot in Spanish churches. The person who is introducing the speaker, after taking all the time in the world, says “now, without wasting any more of your time, we will have our guest speaker preach”. The question I have is: how about all the other parts of the service? Was that a waste of time or just your part, the long drawn out introduction?

4. Can I get an amen?

Is this about Jesus, or is it about you and your insecurities as a public speaker?

5. “Now, for the main part of the service”.

See #3

6. “Spanish is the language of heaven”.

No it’s not. It’s Farsi. Please stop saying this. I want to jump off the third floor of the GC when I hear that.

These are small details, I know. But if our goal is excellence in everything we do, we must get better.

✓ Five (even more) Things I Wish We Would Stop Saying From the Pulpit

This is part three of our series on things we say from the pulpit that need to me modified, erased or deleted. It happens so much...but it can change!

Here is the next five:

1. This will be short.

Whether an announcement or a devotional thought, this is hardly ever the case. "Short announcement" is an oxymoron. When someone shows up to your event/program/worship service asking if they "can make a short announcement" look at them, tell them to hold on for a minute and run away. You can always ask for forgiveness later.

2. In conclusion.

Preaching a sermon is like flying a plane. The conclusion of the sermon is like landing a plane. You know what happens when you fly a plane in circles and do not land? It crashes and burns. Hence the smoke smell you perceive in your clothes after you preach. You know who you are. Land the plane!

3. As far as possible, kneel.

This one I heard this week from a colleague at the Union, it's one of his pet peeves with worship. He says: "I did not know you could go past the floor. What do you mean *as far as possible*?"

4. To make a long story short.

Too late. Usually by the time that statement is made, the story is already long. This phrase is a cousin of #1 (see above). This is especially disturbing when it's the fifth time you have heard that story. Spouses, I feel your pain.

5. Will the visitors please stand? You are the flowers of our church.

This phrase contains three crucial mistakes.

- a. **Visitors.** A better word is guest.
- b. **Stand.** No one likes that. Proven by data, surveys, science. No one.
- c. **Flowers:** Imagine a church with members from Mexico (or any other country). This one guy shows up as a guest with the belt, the hat and the boots. A man's man. A macho man. He was a recognized from the front. He was called a flower. He never returned.

Any others you can think of? Email me at rhernandez@southernunion.com

☑ To Be or Not To Be You

My dad's name is Pascual. I love him. His name? Not so much. When I was younger I used to stand at the door of the church next to him, greeting the people as they exited after the sermon. People would often refer to me as "Pascualito El Pastorcito". Yes, it had a rhyme to it, but I disliked that little poem. My name is Roger. For as much as I love my dad, admire and honor him, I believe God has called me to be the first Roger, not the second Pascual.

Here are my thoughts for those of you that are struggling between trying to be genuine to whom God made you to be and the expectations of others:

1. Avoid the extreme people.

I'm suspicious of two types of people: **those that say it can't be done and those that say it must be done my way.** Equally dangerous. Both are made from the same cloth and they lack one main ingredient: Faith in you. They demonstrate an inflated view of themselves which is prideful, which in turn sees other people either as peons that are disposable or inept humans to be ignored. Avoid prolonged exposure to them, they can damage your spirit.

2. People that try to change who you are, will never be satisfied.

Yes, you can repeat that again. Never. Ever. Nunca be satisfied. The insistence of people to make you fit into their mold demonstrated more of a flaw in their character than yours. It amazes me, however, how much we worry about what others think of us. I once had a member that would show up in my house unannounced to see what I was doing. Even though I was putting in 80+ hours of work a week, he seemed to come by on those 30 minutes that I would be taking a nap and comment on the easy life of a pastor. For some reason, I felt guilty about resting. Looking back, I should not have let it get to me, but he did. I got over it in time, but I share it so you know it affects more leaders than they let on.

3. Being yourself is exhausting enough.

Being someone else, is extremely exhausting and frustrating. One day, in the future, you will look back to this time in your life. Will you look back with regrets about what you could have tried, could have done, could have become, but did not because you were trying to fit a square peg into a round hole? People will talk either way. It makes more sense to go with who God made you to be. We don't need more Pascualito's. Or Rogersito's for that matter. Be you. It shows your recognition and appreciation to the God who made you that way.

You're the New Pastor? Thank God You're Here!

I was the brand new pastor. I had not even unpacked my 1,000 boxes, when the first invitation to dinner came. I readily agreed since I never miss out on an opportunity to eat. The food was great. The conversation? Not so much. All I heard for a couple of hours was how bad the church was, how evil the leaders were, how politics and backroom deals had messed up the church. But, "oh thank heaven, for Roger Hernandez. You will fix all of it." The worse tragedy that night was not the critical spirit I heard, but the fact that I believed a very common lie in ministry: "No one fear, the new pastor is here". I believed I was the fix-all. I wasn't.

Whether this is your first district or not, it's important you watch out for the following landmines:

1. Givers.

Be careful about people that give you things without even knowing you. Who does that? This is a good principle to follow: the earlier and more significant the gift, the higher the likelihood that gift will come from an unhealthy giver. It's true what they say. There are no free lunches. Especially in ministry. One thing you DON'T want to do in ministry is owe anyone anything. Because believe me, there will come a time where you will have to pay back. Now, to be fair, not all gifts are bad. Just be careful.

2. Talkers.

I don't know why, but usually the first person that invited me out to dinner always had some issues with the previous pastor or the present leadership. Whoever invites you to their house to talk about others, will eventually invite others to talk about you. This one is so dangerous, because it feeds our ego and reaffirms the reason why we became pastors in the first place: to help people and to fix things! One of my first declarations from the pulpit and in the board is that there will be no commenting on past administrations. We must move on. Living in the past, whether that past was good or bad, benefits no one.

3. Bodyguards.

I have found that those that are the most vocal early about their support for you, can eventually turn on you. Expressions like "I got your back" and "Pastor, I heard someone talking about you and they were saying such and such" are red flags. Whoever has a lot of information about the opposition usually belongs to it. You appreciate the sentiment, but don't use them as spies. Let God defend you. After all, you could be wrong.

Coming into a new district is a great experience. Enjoy it, with your eyes

✓ What to do when you are invited to speak

I was invited to speak for a camp meeting. It turned out to be an unforgettable experience. The person who picked me up introduced himself as the transportation coordinator. He showed up with a Toyota Yaris. After traveling for 8 hours on the plane I was starving. He said that we had to wait another 2 hours at the airport to pick up another presenter. After my insistence he took me to Subway at the food court in the mall. While I was ordering he went to the bathroom and timed his return right after I paid for the meal. After the 2 hours passed we traveled to the camp meeting location without a GPS. He got lost and ended up in a different state. After 5 hours in the car we finally arrived. I asked the person who had invited me when I was scheduled to speak to the youth. He called another person and asked him the same question. The other person replied, "He's not in the program".

I was lucky. The other couple the transportation coordinator picked up, had it even worse. He stopped on the side of the road to relieve himself. He got back in the car without washing his hands when a police cruiser drove u. He proceeded to drop them off at the wrong hotel. They had flown all night long. I believe most of these mishaps could be avoided if you follow the following suggestions.

When you're invited (Downloadable "Invitation Information Check sheet" available here)

http://www.slideshare.net/RogerHernandez6/speaker-bio-and-information-long-form?utm_source=ss&utm_medium=upload&utm_campaign=quick-view

<http://www.slideshare.net/RogerHernandez6/speaker-bio-and-information-short-form>

1. Be intentional

- Ask what the purpose of the event is and the audience you will be speaking to.
- Ask how many times you will be presenting and how much time you will have for each presentation.
- Specify what your AV needs are.
- If you plan on using handouts be clear as to who will be making the copies of those handouts.

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- If you plan on selling any of your materials let them know and ask them to share what their policy is on that.
- Ask for a poster/promo and schedule for the event as early as possible.
- Ask the host three important questions.
 1. What do you hope to accomplish through this event?
 2. What information or background can you share with me that will help me in preparing my material?
 3. What action steps do you want people to take as a result of this event?
- Prayerfully tailor your information and tweak your PowerPoint so it reflects the event you're a part of.

2. Be flexible

- You're not the queen of England or the king of Pop. Things don't always happen the way we draw them out. Don't be a Diva. Be understanding and humble.
- The moment to express your displeasure and evaluate the activity is not while the activity is going on. The host doesn't need added pressure to what already is a difficult situation.

3. Be sensitive

- Nobody likes a speaker that leaves a mess when they're gone. Different churches have different styles. Do your job in a professional way and be sensitive about the local expectations, needs and present struggles.
- Ask what the dress code is.
- Be careful not to use your platform to fill your own personal agenda or vendetta.
- If they allow you to make your own travel arrangements (ex. Flight, hotel, etc...) ask them what their budget is. Be reasonable as you set up your travel plans. Please keep all receipts and give those to them for reimbursement purposes.

What to do when you are invited to speak

4. Be clear

- If the host doesn't mention it, ask them to inform you of what they will financially cover. Including the specific amount of the honorarium, airfare, hotel, per diem and car rental they have budgeted for. Some speakers have a specific honorarium amount and some don't. Whatever you do be clear on the expectations.
- Please submit all receipts as early as possible and request reimbursement before the event is over.

5. Be thankful

- Both publically and privately thank the host for his kindness and highlight specific positive things that happened during your time together.
- Write a short email to the direct supervisor of the person who invited you highlighting a specific strong area of the event. Copy your host.
- If they ask you for an evaluation use the sandwich method. Start out by mentioning something positive, continue with something that could improve and end with something positive.

Being invited is an honor and a privilege. Whenever your opportunity comes give your best and do your best. Any other ideas or thoughts that I missed? Let me know.

✓ What to do when you invite

Inviting someone to your church or event as a guest speaker is a common practice. Most of the invitations go well. But I have heard and experienced some horror stories that I believe could have been prevented if there was a clearer understanding beforehand.

When I was in seminary I was invited by a pastor to have a weekend retreat with his church. I bought my plane ticket, got a car and paid all my expenses to get to the event. I spoke several times that weekend and at the conclusion I got a “Thank you very much” and Goodbye”. I ended up paying for all my expenses because the expectations were not clarified in the beginning. Here are some practical suggestions for the ones who invite.

When you invite (Downloadable “Guest Speaker Information Form” available here)

<http://www.slideshare.net/RogerHernandez6/guest-speaker-information-form>

1. Be clear

- Explain what the purpose of the event is and the audience they will be speaking to.
- Specify how many times they are presenting and how much time they will have for each presentation.
- Send them a copy of any promotional materials and schedule that you have for the event.
- Estimate a realistic number of attendees. This is important especially if the presenter is going to be giving any resources or handouts to their audience.
- Explain your AV capabilities and ask for any AV needs.
- Ask if the person is expecting to sell his materials and share with them what your policy is on that.

2. Be reasonable

- Don't surprise the speaker with extra assignments. For example, don't schedule 6 messages in one day in two locations. This takes a toll on the presenter's voice and quality of presentation if they are overextended. One time I was speaking for a weekend event and after the Friday

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night presentation the person in charge asked me to participate in a 6am activity. I had flown several hours, was starting a cold and was scheduled to speak for six hours already the next day. Be reasonable! Trying to take advantage of your speaker will almost always guarantee that they'll never come back to your location.

3. Be transparent

- This is one that happens to me often. The person who invites builds up the event to be larger and better than what it actually turns out to be. We all know that sometimes projections don't pan out. But don't make up things just to land the speaker.
- Be careful of bringing speakers in to fill your own personal agenda or vendetta.

4. Be generous

- Ask them if they prefer to make their own travel arrangements (ex. Flight, hotel, etc...) or if they prefer for you to make it. If they choose to make their own arrangements, remind them to please keep all receipts and to give you a copy of them for reimbursement purposes.
- Tell them what you will cover financially. Including the specific amount of the honorarium, airfare, hotel, per diem and car rental you have budgeted for.
- One of the things that I really appreciate is when a church sends a little card or a gift card for my wife or kids. Being separated from your family while doing ministry is difficult. When you come home with a gift from your travels it makes your family feel they're important too.
- **Have the reimbursement/honorarium check waiting for the invitee.** If you are not going to have it ready because not all of their receipts have been turned in please let them know.
- A question might be asked, aren't denominational workers paid to do what you are inviting them to do. The answer is yes and no. A person that travels out of his district to do evangelism or weekend events will have **extra** expenses.

5. Be accommodating

✓ What to do when you invite

- Let me **bold**, underline, *italicize* and put this next phrase in a different font. **DO NOT buy the cheapest, 3 hour layover, nine hour flight you can find on Expedia.** Pay the extra \$50 or \$100. You want you presenter to be at their best. Traveling is not glamorous. It takes a lot out of you.
- Except for rare occasions don't put the guest in a members home or your own home.
- Ask if they have frequent flyer miles with a specific airline and purchase that ticket from that airline.
- Same goes for the hotel. We're not talking about the Ritz Carlton. A comfortable, nationally recognized chain is preferable. A 3 star rating is a good starting point.
- Once again ask they have points with a particular chain of hotels.
- If you choose not to rent a car for the speaker please be sure to have reliable transportation for them. Do not assign them a person who is overextended and not flexible to be their mode of transportation. Speaking can take a toll on you and a little down town in between is really appreciated.
- Be on time when picking up your guest at the airport. Make sure you have exchanged contact information beforehand. It's also helpful to exchange pictures so both you and they know who you're looking for.

My personal practice when I invited a guest to my church was to treat them well. Not just financially. We went all out to bless the man or woman of God so they knew their service for God was appreciated.

✓ The Case for Grace

Ephesians 2:8-9 *God saved you by his grace when you believed.*

And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. "Of all professed Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting CHRIST before the world". Gospel Workers, p.156

The first time I understood grace I was 25, sitting in a class on Romans in college. This seems strange, because I am a PK, 3rd generation Adventist that was studying theology. It is troubling that I did not understand the most basic Christian fundamental building block. I have two questions:

How can this happen?
Why is it still happening?

If we are honest with ourselves, we must recognize we could have done better in presenting grace in the right context.

I believe there are three points you should consider:

1. Grace acts as fear repellent.

"The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion...It is our privilege to have a calm, close, happy walk with Jesus every day we live." (E.G. White, Review and Herald, August 2, 1881)

This I believe. Fear changes outward behavior temporarily. Grace changes your heart, permanently. There are too many in our churches that fear the end times, fear the persecution, fear the judgment. Fear, fear, fear. The problem with living a Christian life based on fear that is fed with sensationalism is that fear is as addictive as heroin. People develop tolerance to it, until nothing scares them into right living and fear is replaced by apathy and in many cases rejection of all things religious. Christ-less eschatology is like sugar-free pudding. Sure, you could eat it, but why would you?

2. Grace is risky.

Someone has said that if you are preaching grace and no one complains about it, you are not really preaching grace. I have been in countless seminars, camp-meetings, and church gatherings where people complained,

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griped, wrote letters and were just mean to presenters that spoke about grace. I have hardly ever been at the same events, where a legalistic presentation was followed by complains about the need for more grace and balance. No wonder outsiders look in and say: Why bother? In some ways we have become like hospitals with sick employees that require only patients in perfect health to be admitted (or to at least cover the wound so we don't see it). This is not just an Adventist problem, as Billy Graham's grandson points out:

"It amazes me that you will hear great concern from inside the church about too much grace, but rarely will you ever hear great concern from inside the church about too many rules. Indeed, the absurdity of God's indiscriminate compassion always gets "religious" people up in arms. Why? Because we are, by nature, glory-hoarding, self-centered control freaks— God wannabes. That's why." Tullian Tchividjian One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World.

3. Grace from Ellen White.

It wasn't until I was older (over 25) that I discovered the balance, growth and grace in EGW writings. Be truthful now. If you grew up Adventist, when you heard the words "Ellen White says" what usually followed was a correction, a warning or a list. I must admit I had a hard time with her for a while. Then I started reading her for myself. I have found gem after gem that I have never been exposed to before. If grace is to be made central, we must get serious about not just using Ellen White as a hammer. Truth was given to us as a map, not a mallet. I hope to now share with you some beautiful, Christ-centered quotes that will leave you hungering for more of Christ's grace.

Here is one:

"There need to be far more lessons in the ministry of the Word of true conversion than of the arguments of the doctrines. For it is far easier and more natural for the heart that is not under the control of the Spirit of Christ to choose doctrinal subjects rather than the practical. There are many Christ-less discourses given no more acceptable to God than was the offering of Cain. They are not in harmony with God."{VSS - The Voice in Speech and Song pg. 342.3}

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Let's not push the mute button.

✓ Five signs of a Dysfunctional Church

(you might not have thought about)

We have all loved them, led them and left them. Here are five signs to look for:

1. Debate team.

Usually debate in churches are centered in three areas (they all start with D)

Dress

Drums

Diet

Dysfunctional churches pick one or more and make that the subject of conversation and attention. It seems that they want to be known for what they **are against**.

Ellen White on the subject of dress said this: (kind of long, but really good, so read it all!)

"There are many who try to correct the life of others by attacking what they consider are wrong habits. They go to those whom they think are in error, and point out their defects. They say, "You don't dress as you should." They try to pick off the ornaments, or whatever seems offensive, but they do not seek to fasten the mind to the truth. Those who seek to correct others should present the attractions of Jesus. They should talk of His love and compassion, present His example and sacrifice, reveal His Spirit, and they need not touch the subject of dress at all. There is no need to make the dress question the main point of your religion. There is something richer to speak of. Talk of Christ, and when the heart is converted, everything that is out of harmony with the Word of God will drop off. It is only labor in vain to pick leaves off a living tree. The leaves will reappear. The ax must be laid at the root of the tree, and then the leaves will fall off, never to return." Evangelism p. 172

2. You and your kin, can't. (Too many family members in the leadership team.)

I have seen this time after time. I don't pretend to know all the churches in the world, but I have NEVER seen a church that has a great percentage of family members in the leadership team be healthy. Two reasons:

a. Families fight. They bring their personal issues to board meetings and sometimes it spills over to ministry functions.

b. Families unite. The pastor presents a great idea, but the matriarch or patriarch or whomever hates it. Other family members hate it also. Not because it's a bad idea, but because its hated by their family, and if you like it, it would make for a very uncomfortable Thanksgiving.

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3. Perceptions of outsiders.

Outsiders (especially the ones with the gift of leadership) are seen as threats, not help. Many church members derive their identity from power in the local congregation. For some, the church is probably the ONE thing that is going right in their lives. I once knew a church that was upset at the pastor because the attendance jumped from 12 to 50 for Wednesday night prayer meeting, with the increase being non-members. Being outnumbered and outvoted was not in their plans. So they boycotted.

4. Preserve vs advance.

Some churches base their identity in preserving, rather than advancing the kingdom. Advancing includes taking risks, and engaging the enemy. That is risky. For some, familiar is equal to holy. New is equal to dangerous. We don't compromise our values. We also don't exchange our mission for complacency. I don't have time to build higher walls. When people say: the world is coming into the church, I think to myself: isn't that the point?

5. Conspiracy connections.

We have seen an increase of these lately. They usually have to do with the government, diet, the papacy, the Illuminati, or the papacy's Illuminati's diet. Some well-intentioned person told one of my family members that she should not eat pop-corn because it's full of radiation. Expressions like that make us look weird. We are to be different. Not weird. Let me dispel the rumors:

***The pope's brother/cousin/babysitter? Not Adventists.**

***(insert favorite Adventist leader here) is NOT a Jesuit. (several websites affirm this)**

***Popcorn can clog your arteries, but not with radiation.**

Let's pray, and work for healthy Adventist churches. We need one in every community. We need to plant more, grow more, serve more, win more.

✓ Lessons From the Cave

One of my worst experiences in ministry happened early on. I was planting a church and looking for innovative ways to communicate the gospel to people. Some in the leadership did not share my views, and war started. Secret meetings.

Calls to the conference. Pressure to maintain status quo. Some members left what was already a small congregation, and made the reason for their departure known. I remember feeling sick to my stomach constantly. Stress got so bad that food became my enemy and I suffered from several stomach ailments that I never had before or since.

Those were dark days. I refer to them as my days in the cave. I identify with David when he was in the cave of Adullam. Maybe you can identify with him too.

Here are three principles that have helped my ministry along the way, especially when having a cave experience:

1. Learn from it. Never waste a cave experience.

All of us will have a cave experience. For some it's early in life. For others it's later. But it happens to all of us. As I reflect on 22 years of ministry, I now see how those hard times helped shape who I am today. The preaching to 12 people week after week, helped to prepare me to preach to 120 and then to 1,200.

The backstabbing I experienced, the issues with leaders that preferred to maintain status quo rather than reach more people, the veiled threats, the hard conversations, all have prepared me one way or another for life in ministry. One of the most practical ways those experiences have prepared me is when I see people struggling with some of the same issues I went through, and being able to tell them: It's going to be alright. Never waste a cave experience. Grow from it. Learn from it. Help others after you are done with it.

2. Lead your way out. Never get comfortable in the cave.

David "became the leader" of about 400 people in the cave. He understood that he must lead the ones you have, not the ones you want to have. One of the temptations of leaders is to play the victim card, look around the people they have, and either give up or wait for things to improve. Leaders are thermostats. They set the temperature in the room. They do not let circumstances determine effort. They give their best, do their best, where they are.

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3. Look for people God sends your way. Never go at it alone.

Change is difficult. When you are in the midst of what I call the “chaos of change” God will always send someone to help you through it. Sometimes we are so focused on what’s going on that we ignore mentors and try to go at it alone. Mentors will give you perspective, encouragement and accountability. Not all change is good. The key is to know what to change at what time.

If you are going through a dark cave experience, and need prayer I would love to pray for you.

You're Preaching? Good. Here is What I Need

Hi my name is Janeth Doe, from your church in Anytown. I have had an interesting week, challenged on many fronts. It seems like my life is a like a rollercoaster. My faith, finances and family have been on my thoughts a lot lately. Now I'm here in church. Sorry for the late arrival, but it was crazy just getting here. It's your turn to preach.

These are the things that **I need** as you speak today:

1. I need you to preach the bible.

I understand you have opinions. That's good. They are probably very similar to some of mine. But I don't need your opinions today. I long to hear God's voice, not your opinions backed up by a couple of texts. I can tell when you have preached the Bible. It stays with me all week.

2. I need you to make it real.

I live in the real world. Real temptations, real sins, real family and racial issues. When you start speaking adventese, quoting the Greek every 10 minutes and dedicating more time to make sure the oratory flows rather than connecting the Bible with what I am going through, you lose me. It doesn't take long. Stop it with the long pointless introductions and extra announcements. I did not come to church to hear about the next Pathfinder car wash. I came to encounter Jesus. For announcements give me a bulletin. I can read. I have enough information. I need transformation.

3. I need you to say it in a new way.

Nothing worse than a cliché filled message. Saying it in a new way involves preparation and substantial time in study. I know you have a million things to do. Please don't cower under the pressure of those few terrorists that are holding our church back and want you to be all things to all people. Tell me the old story in way I've never heard before, with an application I've never thought of before.

4. I need you to keep it short.

The gospel is eternal, your sermons don't have to be. Stop chasing the rabbits. After the endless repetitions and rabbit chasing I wonder whether church must be endured or enjoyed. I'm not an expert in public speaking and I don't pretend to know a lot about your job, but at mine, when a person goes on and on it usually means they have not prepared well. Remember KISS? No, not the band. The principle for speaking in public.

5. I need you to get off your hobby horse.

What's up with that? Aren't there other topics you can preach about? You have beaten that dead horse so much, it came back to life, and you killed it

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again. Last pastor we had it was the final events. Prophecy is great, but it's not the only thing. Preach the whole Bible, not just the parts you like and are comfortable with.

6. I need you to get fresh illustrations.

The stories about your family every week are getting old. By the way, I've heard you repeat the same story at least three times. I remember. It keeps changing though, what's up with that? Read. Get off Facebook and Twitter for a bit (not completely) and read a good book. Or two. Give me some suggestions about books that you are reading that have blessed you. Illustrations are everywhere when you read.

7. I need you to be you.

You are not Jose Rojas, Dwight Nelson or E.E. Cleveland. I love you, because you are my pastor. You were there when my family member died. You were there when they took away our house. Don't try so hard. Not everybody likes you in this church, but many do. Stop changing your style because of the ones who don't. Be you. Christ-like. Loving. Real.

By the way, I thank you for the sermon you are about to preach today. I'm sure it will be a blessing.

If you want to connect with the Janets in your church, here are some resources for better presentations:

1. Slide:ology. Nancy Duarte
2. Presentation Secrets. Alexei Kapterev
3. Everybody speaks, few connect. John Maxwell

Five Dumb Things Smart Parents Do (to make youth ministry more difficult!)

From youth workers everywhere, to parents anywhere: We love you and appreciate you, but we sometimes want to strangle you! After working for 20 years alongside my wife (she is the expert, I just talk when I am told) in youth ministry, I have seen some things from parents I'd like to see corrected.

Here are five of the most common mistakes parents make:

1. Punishing their kids with church.

Yes, you heard it right. Johnny or Maria behaved badly; he can't go to Camporee or youth group. I believe there are 1,000,001 other ways you can punish your kids. Please find better ways. One day, you will want him/her to go and she won't want to. Why make that day come sooner? With all the opposition church gets these days, do we really need to add to that?

2. Make the youth worker work extra hard.

Many times the people that work in youth group have kids of their own and are volunteers that want to make a difference. They don't have much time, just like the rest of us. Some parents make the least effort possible to get their kids involved in youth activities. I had the following happen too many times: Parents that would not pick up or drop off kids. After a long drive after an outing they expected the youth leaders to drop them off at the house. Once, coming back from an activity, one of the teens in the car contacted her parents that said they could not pick her up. After midnight, we had to go and drop them off. We did not mind, but, really?

3. Never get involved, but make a big stink when you don't like

Write letters and complain because of hearsay or comments other parents made. Don't you just love it when parents that put no work in and have not attended any of the events all of a sudden write nasty emails because of one event or situation that did not go right? Honor your youth workers. They are not perfect, and need correction like all of us. Give them grace. They take care of your kids.

4. Use kids at pawns.

Some church members use kids for political games. Boycotting events and asking leading questions that came from an adult are destructive ways of damaging your teen's faith. This generation thinks the church is shallow. They see church people not acting very churchy. Fight your own battles. Kids are not your pawns, messengers or political allies.

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5. Attending the youth ministry event and forgetting IT'S FOR YOUTH!

Some of these mistakes include taking over the lesson and not letting the teens speak, criticizing the music, dress, and content of the program. It's not for you! Don't show up for camp and demand quiet at 10pm. Ask God for patience and a higher level of tolerance. You will need it.

I pray for all youth workers out there today. We honor your service and dedication.

✓ Epic Fail. Epic Lesson - Part #1

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Everybody fails. That's a fact. What makes a difference is how you react to your failures. Let's take a look at three common reactions to failure. Today will be part one of a three part series.

Reaction #1 — Quit

Failure causes pain, and since most of us don't like pain, an easy solution is to get away as fast as possible from the person or situation that is causing that pain. It may seem easier, but is it the right approach?

A common response is that when the going gets rough, the tough get going as far away from the rough as possible! The following principle helped me understand better the age-old question of why a good God allows pain to exist:

God's main objective is not to make me happy but to save me.

Let that truth sink in for a moment. If you believe that's God primary purpose is for you to be happy, then when bad things happen, you might question God's plan or, even worse, His existence. On the other hand, if you believe that God's primary desire is to save you, then everything that happens, good or bad, fits into His divine purpose for your life. This creates hope instead of despair and brings meaning instead of apathy. You will always have some questions as to why things happen, but expecting trouble helps you deal with it more effectively. Every time pain shows up in your life, you are confronted with two choices: run to or away from God. Which direction are you running these days?

✓ Epic Fail. Epic Lesson - Part #2

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Everybody fails. That's a fact. What makes a difference is how you react to your failures. Let's take a look at three common reactions to failure. Today will be part two of a three part series.

Reaction #2 — Blame

It's easier to blame others for our predicament. To be fair, there are times when other people cause us pain and suffering. An abusive parent, a sketchy business partner, an unfaithful spouse are but a few examples of real pain caused by people other than yourself. That might well be your case, and we don't want real victims to assume that they are responsible for damage inflicted on them by others. That being said, there are many instances of lives derailed by self-inflicted wounds.

In almost two decades of ministry, I've had counseled with hundreds of couples. I don't recall many times when the husband looked at me and said, "You know, pastor, I am the problem here. I am making a mess in our relationship. I need to change. I need to put down the remote and take my wife out on a date. If you want to know who the problem is, you are looking at it. It's me!" Instead, most couples blame their spouse, Hollywood, culture, their parents, their in-laws, Steven Seagal—anything but themselves. The truth is, we can only change and control ourselves, so let's start there. Leave the rest up to God.

✓ Epic Fail. Epic Lesson - Part #3

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Everybody fails. That's a fact. What makes a difference is how you react to your failures. Let's take a look at three common reactions to failure. Today will be part three of a three part series.

Reaction #3 — Grow

Just because you have failed, doesn't mean you are a failure. Failure can teach you, but it does not have to define you. A phrase that I have heard from people contains the word "feel". For example:

"I don't feel like I can win."

"I don't feel that I could fall in love again."

"I don't feel I can overcome that sin."

"I feel it's impossible."

It's dangerous to live your life based on feelings and not biblical principles. Let the following story illustrate my point.

Before I tell the story, I want to let you know that my wife is the most awesome, incredible, absolutely fabulous cook in the world, the galaxy and maybe the universe.

One night, I was coming home late, and hungry. Recently married, I was not expecting my wife to be up, but she was. A feeling of happiness began stirring up inside of me. Maybe she will cook something for me. I did not have to ask. She volunteered to prepare anything I wanted. I asked for fried plantains, beans, and sour cream. (Don't judge me, I was hungry!) As she cooked, that loving feeling grew to gargantuan proportions. After what seemed to be an eternity, she came out of the kitchen, a celestial vision like no man had ever seen. Angels were singing the Hallelujah chorus and her hair moved in the wind (the fan was on) as she made her way toward me. My heart was going to explode from all these feelings of appreciation and love.

She gave me the food. I prayed a short prayer, the one hungry people do. Then I proceeded to put the first spoonful of beans in my mouth. You see, there are two recipes for preparing beans. One is beans with a little bit of salt. The second, lesser known one is salt with a little bit of beans. Guess

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which one my celestial vision used that night? If you guessed option number two, you are correct! I like sugar, but I'm not a fan of salt. The beans were so salty that the Dead Sea took a bite and said, "Wow, that's too much."

I learned a couple of lessons about feelings that night. It was amazing how fast the adoration was replaced by discomfort. All the time it took for the "loving feeling" to disappear was the time it takes a spoonful of beans to travel from the plate to the mouth. Feelings are tricky. If you make decisions based on them, you are treading on dangerous ground. There is, however, a better alternative. You can learn from your failures, and use those lessons to grow. It's a decision you can make today. Will you? Everybody fails? Yes. But, can everyone grow? Absolutely!

Volunteers - Get them. Grow them. Keep them

One of the toughest jobs any pastor or leader can have is to recruit and keep volunteers. It sure was for me when I started out and I made my share of mistakes along the way. Here are two:

John and Martha (not their real name) were my Family Life leaders in a church plant. As with most church plants, volunteers were not easy to come by, so we ignored a past that was littered with red flags. Everything was going great, until John came home one day and found Martha had packed her bags and left. No bueno.

Maria was my Sabbath school director. She was excited when she received the position, and said yes immediately. The year that followed wasn't so great. It seemed that she would quit every week only to be talked back into the position by me. She got hurt easily when someone disagreed with her, or when her program did not turn out the way she wanted.

These are maybe extreme cases but they show how imprecise the art of volunteer recruitment is at the local church. I want to share with you some practical advice, taken from years of learning the hard way, good literature and leadership experts.

I. How to attract them

There are five things you can do:

1. Limit time of service.

No one likes to hear "until Jesus comes" as a response to the question "how long will this assignment last?" In his book **Connect: How to Double Your Number of Volunteers** Nelson Searcy a pastor in New York says it this way: "Encourage the involvement of new people by always putting a time limit on serving. In other words, never allow anyone to step into a ministry position without putting time boundaries on his service. If you provide no time limits, two things will happen: Your volunteers will burn out. You will lose invaluable opportunities to mobilize new servers." He adds (interesting angle!) "God was putting this principle to work when he mandated that we observe the **Sabbath**. We would do well to embrace its power in every area."

I remember small group leaders asking me if we could meet three weeks a month instead of four and me rejecting the idea of doing it every week. My fear was that if people stopped coming for a week, or took a break in the summer they would not be inclined to return. The exact opposite is true. A Sabbath restores, refreshes, recharges.

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2. Shadow service.

Your best recruiters are the people that are already serving and love it! Searcy states: "Plan a shadow day. Put a shadow day on your calendar, and invite every person who is currently serving to bring a friend to shadow them that day." The best way of knowing what your gifts are is not taking a 40 question test, is actually serving for a short time to see if it's a good fit. Give people an opportunity to try our multiple positions until one sticks.

3. Ministry fair.

Hold a ministry/volunteer fair. This will, according to Searcy, "make people aware of all of the serving opportunities available to them." This works best if you advertise it well in advance, have specific and clear instructions as well as guidelines on what the jobs entail. Make it easier for them to follow through after the event by having a sign up and flyer. Don't put all your eggs in a ministry fair, but it can be very helpful. Don't hold these in times of the year where people are out like summer or Easter. Early fall, or spring are the best times.

4. Multiple teams.

This might be a challenge to smaller churches, but if I have seen over and over God honoring the faith of pastors that decided to trust Him for an increase. Searcy encourages us to dream bigger. "Let me challenge you to let go of that scarcity mentality. God has droves of people whom he wants to plug into your ministries— for your church's benefit and for their own. Let's not let our limited thinking limit his plans. The principle of spiritual readiness says we must prepare and plan for the harvest before God will send it to us."

5. Special Occasions.

Mother's day. Father's day. Christmas. Education day. Youth day. Women's ministry day. The possibilities are endless. Never waste a special day.

II. How to grow them

One of the greatest temptations of a leader is **to do** the work yourself and neglect empowering your volunteers. An old saying describes many leaders: If you want it done right, do it yourself. One of the best known examples in the Bible is Moses. After a morning of observation, his father in law had a talk with him about his work habits. (I'm sure he loved that!) He tells Moses: Exodus 18:17 "**This is not good!**" Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. ¹⁸ "You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself."

☑ Volunteers - Get them. Grow them. Keep them

If you are going to grow the volunteers you attract, you must empower them. Here are three principles on the benefits of empowering volunteers:

1. Empowerment, not delegation. One of the most frustrating feelings a volunteer can have, is to have *responsibility without authority*. Delegation merely says, “here, do this”. Empowerment gives the assignment, the instructions and the power to change, adapt and improve it. It takes longer, but in the end, its results are better. I once sat in a church, waiting for the service to start. The pastor was sitting next to me in a back room. Volunteers would continually stream in, and ask the pastor a myriad of questions, from water level in the baptistery, parking arrangements, to service participants. It was obvious the pastor felt good about everything having to run through him. I only wondered what would happen if the pastor had to be out for an extended period of time.

2. Empowerment creates ownership. The easiest way, one that both leaders and many followers prefer, is for the leader to give a list of assignments. We love to-do lists. What should I do? What decision should I make? What would you do in my place? An important part of empowerment is to ask good questions. When we ask questions instead of just giving advice, we teach people to think for themselves, empowering them. Pastors especially, find it very tempting to spend their lives giving advice, which is faster, than to let people reflect on the choices, and process information for themselves.

3. Empowerment leaves a legacy. Because our ego is involved in most everything we do, it feels good when we are absent from our responsibility and people tell us how terrible it was when we were gone. An empowering leader is one that will leave a post and things won't fall apart. This means, that sometimes things have to go terribly wrong, in order for people to step up and rectify. When a leader continually steps in and takes upon himself/herself the responsibilities, instead of empowering volunteers, it produces mediocre results. If you are the leader, and continually step in, your people will never grow. I see pastors opening the doors of the church, getting the heat going, working the sound system, etc. Nothing wrong with doing that, but I am pretty sure other people can be a part of the team and grow into their assignment, instead of you doing everything yourself.

III. How to keep them

One word: Gratitude. Be thankful. Show your thanks. Say how thankful you are. Find a million ways to declare those two words volunteers love to hear: Thank you. Patrick Lencioni points this out in his book *“The Advantage”*. I want to share with you three quotes that are golden:

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“What leaders need to understand is that the vast majority of employees, at all levels of an organization, see financial rewards as a satisfier, not a driver.” (pp. 167-168)

“In fact, gratitude, recognition, increased responsibilities, and other forms of genuine appreciation are drivers. That means an employee can never really get enough of those and will always welcome more.” (p. 168)

“The lesson for leaders is...the healthiest organizations in the world are not necessarily the highest-paying ones and that throwing money at a problem that would be better solved through improved management is a true waste of resources. What is more, unsatisfied employees who receive greater financial compensation as an incentive to stay in an unhealthy organization feel cheapened by the gesture.” (p. 169)

In conclusion, I'd like to leave you with something to think about: The way you treat volunteers will depend on how intertwined your ego is in what you are trying to accomplish.

Ask yourself three questions and filter your attitudes and actions towards volunteers through them:

1. Am I building my kingdom or God's? The less pride you have, the less it will bother you when a volunteer fails. Remember, whatever God builds, he sustains.
2. Am I sacrificing my family by forcing them to volunteer just to make me look good? (See question #1)
3. Am I interested every day when I wake up in adding value to my volunteers, or are they just disposable peons that I'm using to achieve my goals?

Whatever God produces, he provides for. May you join God in what He already is doing in your community.

Holy Interruption!

Isaiah 41:4 "I am the only God and I keep under control everything that happens in this world. I have existed from the beginning, and will exist until the end." (NLT)

I was very engaged with an article that I was writing. Words were flowing, thoughts were coming. I was "in the zone". Then it happened. My son came into the room and asked me if we could play some basketball. What would you do? What do you do, when "interruptions happen?"

Most of us see interruptions as negative occurrences that come to disturb our carefully crafted calendar, but it need not be so. Jesus performed most of his miracles after an interruption. Here are three principles to make interruptions your ally:

1. They may seem like interruptions to you, but they were on God's calendar.

We define interruptions as "an encounter or event that was not planned." If we look at the life of Jesus as an example, we can see his reaction to interruptions.

*The first miracle. Jesus went to a party to celebrate a wedding, ended up providing wine for everyone.

*The encounter with the woman with an issue of blood. He was on his way to Jairus' house to perform one miracle, ended the day by doing two of them.

There are many more examples. Jesus blessed children, resurrected the dead, healed the sick, all outside of the programmed schedule for that day. That interruption you are experiencing might be God's chance to perform a miracle.

2. Submit your calendar to God, which involves surrendering control of yours.

Someone said that if you want to make God smile tell him your final/definite plans. There are two types of personalities. Systematic and spontaneous. The systematic has problems when plans change. If you struggle with change, begin each day with the realization that being organized is good, but not to the point that organization resists divine interruption. Submit your calendar to God. You're not in the driver's seat, and Jesus is not your co-pilot. Expect interruptions to come into your life today. Remember what the prophet Isaiah said:

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Isaiah 41:4 "I am the only God and I keep under control everything that happens in this world. I have existed from the beginning, and will exist until the end." (NLT)

3. Instead of thinking how the interruption affects you, think about how it helps others.

Analyzing personalities again, there is one that we know as "Type A". This personality is focused on achieving goals, doing things, or completing an aggressive agenda. It's easy for this type of personality to move ahead like a tractor trying to achieve goals. God is calling you to pause for a moment today, and instead of seeing the interruption like a stone in your shoe, think about how your help will be a blessing to the person who does not even have shoes. We don't use people to achieve our dreams, we help others discover theirs and help them to become reality.

Think about it-What interruptions frustrate you? How have you allowed interruptions to be a pest, rather than a blessing? Let God direct your calendar today.

✓ Attack of the Living Saints

“Living in heaven, with saints we don’t know, oh that will be glory.
Living on earth with saints we do know, well, that’s another story”

Nobody likes to be attacked. Especially by people that profess loving Christ, while at the same time destroying another person’s reputation. My friend Dave K. put it this way: *Some people are not only willing to die for the truth; they are willing to kill for it.*

Whether you are a pastor, church leader or church member, you will eventually deal with antagonists. Here are three things you should remember (based on Daniel 3):

1. Those you helped yesterday might betray you tomorrow. Nobody “owes” you anything.

In Daniel 2-3 we find a very familiar story. Three Hebrew boys betrayed by the same people that a short time earlier had been saved by Daniel from sure destruction. Instead of gratefulness, they chose spitefulness. Instead of returning the favor, they returned evil for good. Such is life.

- a. Kids you poured your life into in youth group steal from you. (happened to me several times)
- b. Members you helped out of sticky situation write letters to the conference for your dismissal (or at the very least, a transfer)
- c. Marriages you helped save; now spread false rumors about your intentions.

Ministry is messy. Love, lead and live owing God everything and expecting nothing in return. A good counsel to follow is to love everyone, but trust a few. The Bible encourages, even commands us to love everyone. It also warns us about putting our expectations and trust in humans.

2. Engaging the enemy is a waste of time.

The three Hebrew boys spoke several times in the chapter. Not once was their conversation directed to their betrayers. They showed no resentment or ill will. They made no threats neither did they lament the fact that they were ungrateful. Engaging the enemies gives them power they don’t have. Keep the conversation about God, and keep the actions purposeful and spiritual. Let God take care of the enemies. Don’t negotiate with terrorist.

A friend of mine put it this way:

Engaging haters is like wrestling with a pig. You both get dirty, and the pig likes it.

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3. God's reward supersedes man's resentment. The stronger and more public the attack, the greater the reward.

There are two constant themes in the book of Daniel: resentment follows reward and reward follows obedience. Your job is to be faithful. God's job is to take care of the rest. I have seen person after person, in situation after situation, stay faithful despite the attacks and be promoted, blessed and prospered by God. That is not our motivation, yet many times it is a reality. Even if in this life the blessings do not arrive, our attitude towards our accusers will impact the lives of other people we will see in heaven.

Maybe today some of you are dealing with difficulties like I have mentioned. I would love to pray for you.

☑ Navigating Conflict without Losing Your Lunch

Living in heaven with saints we don't know, oh that will be glory.
Living on earth with saints we do know, well, that's another story...

Most church "fights" I experienced as a pastor had nothing to do with preservation of doctrinal purity, or concern for missional direction. Instead, it was caused by such earth shattering problems such as:

- *Who had the keys to the kitchen.
- *Who used the kitchen and left it dirty.
- *Who could use the kitchen in the first place (notice a trend here?)

Problems arose because of facility issues, personal worship preferences and leadership infighting. Thom Rainier lists 10 issues that cause conflict in a church. Here are three of the ten: **(for complete list, see power point, it's included for free here <http://www.slideshare.net/RogerHernandez6/things-we-fight-about>)**

1. **Worship wars**- One or more factions in the church want the music just the way they like it. Any deviation is met with anger and demands for change. The order of service must remain constant. Certain instrumentation is required while others are prohibited.

2. **Facility focus**- Facility focus. The church facilities develop iconic status. One of the highest priorities in the church is the protection and preservation of rooms, furniture, and other visible parts of the church's buildings and grounds.

3. Evangelistic **apathy**- Very few members share their faith on a regular basis. More are concerned about their own needs rather than the greatest eternal needs of the world and community in which they live. *Thom Rainer: I Am a Church Member* (p. 38).

Here are three suggestions to navigate church conflict:

1. The objective is unity, not peace (or absence of conflict).

Read these words slowly: *Conflict. Is. Inevitable.* It will happen. The objective is not to be conflict-free, but to fight fair, when we do fight. In the Bible, peace is a by-product of something else, not a goal in itself. CS Lewis calls this the "law of the first things". He says, search for the primary, receive

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the secondary for free. Search for the secondary, you lose the primary AND secondary. This is the goal:

*"Healthy conflict is the ability to disagree with you,
without letting go of your hand"*

2. Take practical steps in resolving it.

Three tips for conflict resolution:

1. Ask, don't interpret, assume or take for granted. Don't read into it, or guess. Ask.

2. Pray before. (We end fights like we start them.) Prayer in the beginning defuses and acts as a wet blanket on a fire that's about to get bigger.

3. Concentrate. Stick to the real problem and stick to one problem at a time. Resist the temptation to try and solve other problems. This requires discipline. Also, many times what you think is the problem is not really the problem. Peel the layers and go to the root.

3. The less we share, the more we fight.

The amount of unhealthy conflict in a church is inversely proportional to the mission focus of said church. Usually the ones that do the least, demand the most. The goal, then, should not be for the leader to continually play the "fireman or firewoman" role, but to keep the church's mission constantly before the people. The more people are involved in the purpose of the church, the less petty arguments and crazy fights will occur.

✓ Crucial Confrontations

I hate confrontations. Dislike them a lot. Don't care for them. If truth be told, I'd rather have my teeth pulled; while a nurse with a Redskin jacket is drawing blood with a needle from my arm, than go through a confrontation, with the tension, misunderstandings, and anxiety that they tend to bring out.

Since this is an area I need to grow in I read two books that were recommended for developing confrontational skills:

Crucial Confrontations http://www.amazon.com/Crucial-Accountability-Resolving-Expectations-Commitments/dp/0071829318/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1365560054&sr=8-1&keywords=crucial+confrontations

Fierce Conversations http://www.amazon.com/Fierce-Conversations-Achieving-Success-Conversation/dp/0425193373/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1365560124&sr=1-1&keywords=fierce+conversations

Here are three important points:

1. Have hard conversations early.

If you are honest with yourself, there is probably a crucial confrontation that you need to have with someone, right now. Most people put off those conversations as long as possible, which is not healthy or helpful. Putting off confrontations is like discovering that you have some rotten meat in your fridge, taking it out, letting it sit on you counter for 3 days, and then tasting it, expecting it to be better. The longer you wait, the worse it gets. Do it now.

2. When people show you who they are, believe them.

We want to give people the benefit of the doubt. That's good. The problem comes, when we see people repeat the same patterns of destructive behavior, while we sit on the sideline watching and wishing things will change on their own. They seldom do. You are in charge. Be intentional about correcting behavior before it becomes a pattern and brings down moral. Correct it now.

3. Use the three pronged approach to confrontations.

This short 2 minute video describes this proven process in great detail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4f-74WbnsU>

You know who you need to talk to. Do it.

✓ Developing the Writer in You

I thank Dr. Miguel Angel Nunez, for the majority of the content in this post. He wrote a very good article, that I translated and added some content. His blog in spanish can be accessed here:

<http://escritoresadventistas.blogspot.com/2012/04/claves-para-escribir-un-articulo-de.html>

Here are 5 tips:

1. Organize your ideas.

Before writing decide what you will write about and how you will do it. A good suggestion is to write a draft containing:

- In one sentence, a synthesis of the central idea that you aim to present in the article.
- In one sentence, the goal you have as you write the article.
- In a few words, the audience you want to reach.
- Subtitles or sections. Where possible, no more than four.

The human mind works better in order. An outline of what you will write will help guide you.

2. Write.

It seems an obvious suggestion, but it is not. Many people get stuck thinking about how to write or want to, but do not start writing. You can only correct something that is already written. So write. What is not written simply does not exist. No matter how great your idea, if its not put on paper, its worthless.

3. Start in an abrupt manner.

Do not ask permission to write, when you start saying, for example: "If I may, I will ..." gives a sign that the writer is not sure what to write. Start with:

- A catchy quote.
- A impactful statement.
- A short story.

You must catch them from the first line. If you can't captivate the reader, they do not continue to read what you have written, however important you consider it to be.

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4. It is always better to be brief.

In most Adventist periodicals, the limit is 2,500 words, and most prefer 450-650 words. Writing short articles is much more difficult than a long one. It requires more concentration and attention to detail. That involves taking out adjectives and other gadgets that adorn the text, but in the end just take up space.

5. Write an article not a lecture.

A popular article is not a homily. The language of exhortation or appeal in this case is useless. The reader is not required to read it, for that reason, you have to be persuasive without being preachy. When the text has a homiletic character, most readers leave it unfinished.

✓ Let's Talk About Sex

Five differences between husbands and wives

According to research from the Barna Group, young adults that left the church said that sexuality discussions in their local congregations were either non-existent or had a “just say no” attitude. Most of the discussions on sex I had growing up in church went something like this: “Whatever the question, the answer is NO!” I want to share some helpful information today in this area, that can make it all God intended it to be. **A power point is available. Let me know if you would like it: rhernandez@southernunion.com.**

There **are** differences between men and women regarding attitudes, expressions and performance in sex. The better you know your spouse and yourself the better those **2.4 times** a week most married couples have sex can become, instead of the *“Social Security Sex: A little bit each month, but not enough to live on.”*

Here are five areas in which we differ. Thanks to **Family Life’s Weekend to Remember** for the information, which I now share with you.

1. Attitude towards sex:

a. Men- their emphasis is on the **physical** aspect of sex. Men view sex in a “compartmentalized” way. What that simply means is, that most men, can have a big fight, lose their job, miss the last shot that would have won the game, and be **ready for sex** that same day.

b. Women- women have a more relational view of sex. For them, sex is holistic, which can be illustrated this way: Think of a chest with six drawers. One drawer is work, another is motherhood, another finances, another conflict, and another sex. For a woman to enjoy sex completely, all drawers must be closed, except for the sex drawer. For men, is different. They have a one drawer chest. It’s called sex. It’s always open.

2. Stimulation during sex.

a. Men are body centered. For them visual stimulation is key, as well as fragrance and actions in the bedroom.

b. Women are person centered. Key factors are touch, attitudes during love making that include the words that are spoken. It is good for husbands to remember that **your wife is like a harp not a drum.**

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3. Needs during sex.

a. Men put a high value on respect. They aspire to be physically needed, and physical expression is highly regarded. Remember, wives, that sex is probably the **ONE** thing you can do to your husband that no other woman can do, without it being a sin. Another woman can wash his clothes, cook him a meal, etc. Intimacy is the **ONLY** interaction that is yours only. Do it well.

b. Women need security. They need that drawer to be closed shut. They aspire to be emotionally needed, and intimacy arrives when that happens. It takes sex to another level when the woman feels not only wanted for the physical pleasure she can bring, but for her whole being to be connected with her husband. Men, practice something called “non-sexual touching” during the day, where you let your wife know she is loved for who she is, not just for what she does for you in bed.

4. Sexual response.

a. Men are acyclical, which simply means, they can be ready now. They are compared to a helicopter, in that quick excitement is normative. They are like a laser beam, once locked in, very difficult to distract.

b. Women- Women are cyclical (because of the period). This means that men need to develop sensitivity in this area. The speaker for the weekend, a wife of 33 years, and her husband kept a calendar, that showed “fun days” on it, and helped her husband understand her cycle better. Women take longer to achieve excitement, more like a 757 airplane than a helicopter and are easily distracted (specially by children moving around in the house), some say that “Killer sex makes kids, but kids kill sex.”

5. Achieving orgasm.

a. Men have shorter more intense orgasm that many times take less time to achieve. They tend to be more physically oriented, and the recovery time takes longer.

b. Women have longer, more in depth orgasms that are more emotionally oriented and it's easier to repeat than men.

Sex is important. Hopefully we can have mature, biblical conversations about the topic to help a generation that lives in tough times.

✓ This Church Is Mine!

I was invited to present to a select group of administrators (I just wrote that so it sounds important) on the topic of reaching and engaging young adults. As I pondered my assignment, I came to the realization that most attempts to engage that generation, are trying to address symptoms and not causes.

At the root of the problem, are different perspectives on three basic questions:

1. **What is the church?**
2. **Who is the church for?**
3. **Who does the church belong to?**

If those core, foundational questions are not answered correctly, our progress can be delayed and our efforts severely hampered.

Let's take a look at them:

1. What is the church? There are two approaches to doing church. One is "come and see". The other is "go and tell". These two need not be in opposition to each other. Clarifying what the church is, and more importantly, what it is **not**, is step one.

In Hispanic churches for example, the main fight in many boards has been the preservation of the Spanish language in the Sabbath school classes. People get animated when the topic comes up, but the truth is that sometimes we have decided to put culture over kids, and preservation of a language over salvation of the lost.

When thinking church, think body, not building. Think innovation, not stagnation. Think growth, not status quo. Let the bible determine what church is, not personal preference or tradition.

2. Who is the church for? If the church is primarily for **believers**, church people and long-time members, then non-christians risk the chance of becoming an afterthought.

Believers put up with a lot. They sit through boring sermons, adapt their noses to intense smells, step over clutter and avoid sitting by the drafty window. They know that 7pm is really "whenever people get there" and they have learned to speak adventese (although sometimes with an accent).

If, and that's a big IF with capital letters, church is primarily for people that are far from God, then that is a game changer. What we do **in** church, when we **do** church, matters. It matters that the sermons are true **and** relevant. It matters that whatever style of music you chose, is done with excellence. It matters that we start and end on time. It matters that the church smells, looks, and feels good.

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One quick example. I visited a church not too long ago in the town of _____. The carpet was orange. The fabric in the back of the pews was orange. Orange everywhere. When the church was constructed, that carpet said: yea, we're cool! That carpet now says: so this is how the 70's looked! If the 70's ever came back, that church would be ready for it. People attend there. They love their church. They put up with the ugly colors. They shouldn't have to, and neither should the non-christians. Extreme example? Maybe. But it happens so much...

This is my defining principle: every barrier that precludes a person from becoming a Christian, without going outside clear biblical boundaries, should be eliminated. Immediately.

3. Who does the church belong to? There are two ways of looking at church governance and participation. In many churches, the older crowd is responsible for leadership, without any desire to pass the baton or share the ball. That results in younger Christians sitting on the sidelines, unasked and uninvolved. There are two options:

*Option #1-The church is about the older generation teaching the younger generation and making sure they continue the status quo.

*Option #2- The church is a partnership of generations that are fulfilling God's plans and purposes in this time.

God didn't create you to live on the cutting edge of the status quo. Take time to go through the three questions. Wrestle with them. Look for answers in God's Word. Before you reach them...

✓ Drama-less Worship Teams

A great worship service can inspire people, help them connect with God in meaningful ways, and teach them great truths of the bible. A good worship team, can enhance the worship experience. Disaster in that area can ruin the rest of the service.

As a pastor, I tried to pick people for my worship team, that had the following 3 characteristics:

1. Committed to growing spiritually. That means listening to the sermon, and participating in the **rest** of the worship service, (like Sabbath School!) Pastors sometimes fail at this too, as I have seen some that don't sing while that part is going on. Worship teams: listen to the sermon! I have had worship teams finish their part, and walk out of the church to go to the bathroom, hang outside for a while and not really engage in the rest of the service. I've even had some start picking up their instruments, packing, and doing tear down WHILE I speak! Your part is ONE part. It's not the only part.

2. Committed to unity. Musicians and worship team members can be a magnet for drama. I don't know why, but I have never had a worship team where drama was NOT involved. Something we must always remember as we participate in the worship service is that **it's not about us**. Stop it with the drama. Stop giving dirty looks to the sound engineer. Stop making faces because you can't hear your voice above everyone else. Stop hating on new people that want to join. Stop it. Stop threatening to leave the worship team. Stop complaining. Not about you!

3. Committed to excellence. This means not singing the same songs over and over. This means correcting the lyrics that appear in the screen beforehand. It's called "spellcheck," people. Means teaching a new hymn, or praise song on a consistent basis. It means practicing. It means believing you have not arrived, you can get better, and you must. It means believing that excellence inspires people and honors God. It means not winging it, and not saying after a song service: "Now, to start the service..." So, what was that you just did? A filler? A time killer? Remember, it's not about you.

Does your praise team have: Connection? Competence? Commitment? Chemistry? What are some other suggestions you have on improving the worship team in your church?

✓ Superman is Dead. Superwoman is on Re-runs

Stop Trying to do Everything.

One of the greatest temptations of a leader is **to do**, and neglect empowering. An old saying describes many leaders: If you want it done right, do it yourself. One of the best known examples in the Bible is Moses. After a morning of observation, his father in law had a talk with him about his work habits. (I'm sure he loved that!) He tells Moses:

Exodus 18:17 **"This is not good!"** Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. ¹⁸ "You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself."

Here are three principles on the benefits of empowering others:

1. Empowerment is not delegation. One of the most frustrating feelings a follower can have, is to have *responsibility without authority*. Delegation merely says, "here, do this". Empowerment gives the assignment, the instructions and the power to change, adapt and improve it. It takes longer, but in the end, its results are better. I once sat in a church, waiting for the service to start. The pastor was sitting next to me in a back room. People would continually stream in, and ask the pastor a myriad of questions, from water level in the baptistery, parking, and service participants. It was obvious the pastor felt good about everything having to run through him. I only wondered what would happen if the pastor, like Christopher Reeve (superman) fell of a horse and had to be out for an extended period of time.

2. Empowerment creates ownership. The easiest way, one that both leaders and many followers prefer, is for the leader to give a list of assignments. We love to-do lists. What should I do? What decision should I make? What would you do in my place? An important part of empowerment is to ask good questions. When we ask questions instead of just giving advice, we teach people to think for themselves, empowering them. Pastors especially, find it very tempting to spend their lives giving advice, which is faster, than to let people reflect on the choices, and process information for themselves.

3. Empowerment leaves a legacy. Because our ego is involved in most everything we do, it feels good when we are absent from our responsibility and people tell us how terrible it was when we were gone. An empowering leader, is one that will leave a post and things won't fall apart. This means, that sometimes things have to go terribly wrong, in order for people to step up and rectify. When a leader continually steps in and takes upon himself/herself responsibilities, instead of empowering followers, the end product

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will always be mediocre. If you continually step in, your people will never grow. I see pastors opening the doors of the church, getting the heat going, working the sound system, etc. Nothing wrong with doing that, but I am pretty sure other people can be a part of the team and grow into their assignment, instead of you doing everything yourself.

There are no super heroes, with super powers. Just empowering leaders, who bring the best in others, and help them go further than even they thought was possible.

✓ Three Changes God Might Be Calling You To Make

Change. Different. Not the same. Other. Those are words that we speak about but don't really like. Change is hard. Especially when WE are involved!

Jonah was an interesting character. He was doing his thing, in a small town. Solid guy. Faithful. Constant. Then God (as he usually does) messed his whole life up. He called him to change three things:

Jonah 1:1 The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: ²“Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.”³ But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish.

1. Change in location. Jonah was a good small parish pastor. He had family in town. He was well liked. He knew the people and the people knew him. Then God “ruins” his best laid plans. He told him to go where no one knew, liked, respected or was related to him, at great peril to his life. What if God did that to you? Would you go? I believe with some of you, he has been telling you: *“Don’t get comfortable. You won’t be here much longer”.*

2. Change in his ministry objective. God told Jonah to change his target. He went from a small town prophet to a mission to the big city. A large city that needed to hear from God. A city that had been abandoned. Much like Jonah’s contemporaries, we have also abandoned the cities. Instead of leaving the city, we must be loving the city. God gave him two reasons to go:

- a. It is a large city. (potential for great impact)
- b. It is wicked. (great need for God)

That call hasn’t changed. Large cities are not to be left alone. We must give the last warning.

3. Change in strategy. God told Jonah to “get up and go”. That was strange. The people of Israel didn’t “go”. Others came. Others were invited in. You come to us, not us to you, was the *modus operandi*. God calls him to a paradigm shift. To a different strategy. He wanted Jonah to understand that our job is not so much to bring people to church, but to take church to the people. Is God calling you to use a different strategy? Are you afraid? Please don’t do like Jonah, who “bought a ticket” to go a different way. Many of our people are paying NOT to do what God told them to, which is to share Jesus. If you need me to pray for a life or career change, leave your request in the comment section. Remember: *Don’t get comfortable. You won’t be here much longer”.*

✓ Reflections on Race

When CNN reported the first day of the Boston Bombing, Wolf Blitzer and another reporter shared “breaking news” about the suspect.

He was arrested.

He was a man.

He was a “dark skin” man.

Other news agencies jumped on the bandwagon and repeated the same thing, all from credible sources. One problem. It was not confirmed. CNN spent the rest of the afternoon backtracking. Which leads me to my point. Why is it so easy to “go there”? While we have made great progress in race relations, there are still mountains to climb.

What lessons can we learn for our church? Here are three pictures of the church, which depict three very different attitudes. Let’s use a food imagery to convey the message:

1. Different menus.

In many places, different churches are like people going out to eat at different restaurants. Some serve soul food, while others serve tacos, and yet another serves a casserole with potatoes. They believe it’s preferable to have very distinct and specific racial components, and in many places, Sabbath morning continues to be the most segregated time in the week.

2. Melting pot.

Another group believes that the success is becoming a melting pot, where all ingredients lose their individuality and distinctiveness. The code word is uniformity. We all look, think, act and speak alike. Let’s throw them all the pot, and cook them until we have nothing remotely close to what we began with.

3. Salad bowl.

A better way, I believe (and I credit my friend Pr. Allan Machado for this) is a salad bowl approach. In a salad, every ingredient is tossed together, yet each preserves their uniqueness. When combined with the rest on the ingredients, it provides a succulent gastronomic delight.

The best way to confront racism in all its forms is with the gospel. What we don’t confront we condone. What message are you sending people through you lack of confrontation? There is no such thing as an “accidental racist.”

Enjoy your salad.

✓ Death by Public Speaking

Most people are afraid of public speaking. So much so, that in a significant percentage of Americans, **death is feared less** than getting up in front of people and speaking.

If you want to improve your public speaking skills, here are three questions to ask yourself:

1. What's my goal?

Is it to impress or to impact? Is it to inform or transform? Some speakers are so deep, their audience drowns in their words. Alejandro Bullon tells a story about an old man who told him: "I didn't like your sermon this morning". The reason? "I understood everything". We sometimes believe that the more complicated the message, the better. Nothing could be further from the truth. The objective of the speaker is to take a complicated, difficult passage or problem and break it into digestible, chewable pieces that the audience can benefit from. The best way to do this is to keep it real. Be real. John Maxwell says that "if you want to impress people, talk about your successes, if you want to impact them, talk about your failures."

2. Who is this about?

Right off the bat, it's important to know, who **THIS** is **not** about. It's not about you. Preachers that are reading this can maybe recall a time they delivered a message that fell short (in their eyes at least) of expectations, yet people commented afterwards how much of a blessing it was. It's not about you. Not about your ability. Not about your delivery. Not about your proficiency with the thesaurus. It's about Jesus. About the cause. About the church. About the people who are listening. At the end of the day, if you make it about you, you will be left with you. No one likes self-centered speakers. Not even their spouses...

3. What message I'm I communicating?

For some reason unknown to me, some people think that beating people up produces change. That in order to change people's behavior, you must forever hammer them on their sin. Preaching that is centered on sin, produces sinners. Preaching that is centered on Christ, produces Christians. You choose. **A fear based presentation changes people's outward behavior temporarily, but a grace centered approach changes people's hearts permanently.** This doesn't mean we shy away from hard topics, or present a watered down version of the gospel. It means you inspire people to reach higher, live better lives, you challenge them to aspire to rise above their present situation.

Hope your next presentation is a great one. Let me know what are some presentation secrets you have found to be helpful.

☒ Joel Osteen Quits Christianity (or did he?)

I was informed one morning of some interesting news. A mega-church pastor, probably one of the most recognizable figures in Christianity, had resigned, citing lack of trust in the bible, and having lost his faith in God. <http://joelosteenministries.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/joel-osteen-resigns-cites-lack-of-faith-leaves-christianity/>

The news link had the right wording and graphics. Several things went through my mind. First one was about the impact this news would have in Christianity as a whole, especially in the faith of many I know that use his books and messages as spiritual encouragement.

After processing the news for a bit, I did a Google search and found partial confirmation in a Baptist website: <http://www.baptistboard.com/showthread.php?p=1968849> among others.

A little more searching led me to the truth. **It had been a hoax.** Just like Daddy Yankee being gay. Or Eddie Murphy dying in a skiing accident. Or you getting a free IPAD. Hoaxes all.

This is what I learned:

1. Who is my faith in? My faith is not in Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, Alejandro Bullon, Mark Finley, or any other human. My faith is in God and His word. Many times we allow the cult of personality to overshadow our personal walk with God. My faith is not even in my faith. My faith is in God. God is not a grandpa, and while it's easier to eat spiritual food that's already been harvested, chewed, and even partially digested, it's probably not good for you.

2. Why did it surprise me? The Bible, Spirit of prophecy and Christian history has enough examples of spiritual giants that fell like Goliath. Sometimes it's a moral fall. Sometimes its pride. Sometimes is a messiah complex. Sometimes is doctrine. It has happened before, it will happen again. You should expect it, but it shouldn't affect you.

3. The movement is bigger than any one individual. Christianity won't die if Joel leaves. When are we going to understand that "it's not about us". We sometimes use testimonies of people to point others to the fact that faith works. What happens if those same people end up leaving? Did faith fail? Faith is solid enough on its own. It does not need my works to prop it up. I believe the bible, its teachings and its promises, primarily not because it saved Johnny and Susie, but because its truth saved me.

One last note. This episode taught me how vicious the attacks can be from other Christians, even from news that can't be confirmed. But that is a topic for another time.

✓ Judas and Me

What Ellen White said about Judas...could it be said about me?

Joined the disciples when multitudes were following Christ.

The Savior's teaching **moved** his heart"

He **witnessed** the Savior's mighty works

He **felt** in his own person the evidence of Christ's power.

He **loved** the Great Teacher, and **desired** to be with Him.

He **trusted** him to do the work of an evangelist. He endowed him with power to **heal** the sick and to **cast** out devils.

Was highly regarded by the disciples, and had great influence over them.
(DA 716-718)

**But Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ.
(DA 718)**

In Their Shoes

Making the experience for guests the best it can be

I went to a church a while back, on a rare Sabbath I wasn't preaching. I sat with my family, and as the church service progressed, the time for offering came. I felt the need to give and decided to give \$300 to a special project they had. I looked around for a tithe envelope. None in my pew. Looked backwards and forward. None there either. I asked my son to go out to the lobby, to look for one. We struck out again. I asked the lady next to me, a member of the church, about the lack of tithe envelopes. She said the deacons take them away, because the children draw on them during service. Which made me think: How many other \$300 donations has the church lost, because they were concerned about 10 tithe envelopes being destroyed on Sabbath? More on this later...

I visit many churches. Churches of all sizes. Churches of all languages. Churches in major cities and churches in the country. Churches of all styles. Here are three recommendations for creating a better experience for guests that attend your church.

Pay attention to what guests experience in these areas:

1. What they hear.

Do you keep the service positive? Is the Sabbath school director happy about the ones that are there, or is complaining about the ones that aren't? Are you prone to speaking adventese or can guests clearly discern and understand "the words that are coming out of my mouth"? (sorry couldn't help myself)

When offering time comes, does it paint a picture of vision and progress or is it a list of complaints about bills, past dues and lack of commitment from members? People give, are attracted to, and inspired by a positive vision, not a litany of complaints.

2. What they see. This is a problem in many churches (I would say most, but I don't want to sound negative). As I was saying, in most churches there is no clear signage. You know where bathrooms, children's classrooms, the sanctuary and the fellowship hall are. Do they? No!

Another thing they see is clutter. The longer you are in a church the less you see the broken window held with duct tape, the ceiling that has water spots, the year old bulletins in the classrooms, the boxes, hymnals out of place, broken things in the parking lot and rusty chairs. The message that sends is this: We don't care about our church. Neither should you. Please don't come here. Were good.

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3. What they smell. 9.99 out of 10 bathrooms I use in churches smell bad, look bad, and would never be acceptable in any of the members' homes. Churches with musty smells, that reek of unattractive odors, send the message: today's service is to be endured, not enjoyed. Andy Stanley in his book *Deep & Wide*, says it best: "the physical environment does more than leave an impression; it sends a message." In many churches the message is: "We aren't expecting guests. What we are doing here is not all that important. We expect somebody to clean up after us. We don't take pride in our church."

What changes can you make? Who can be a set of fresh eyes you could invite to take a look at your church and point out some areas of growth?

¹And please, please have some tithe envelopes ready, available and visible. Aren't they free?

¹ Stanley, Andy (2012-09-25). *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Kindle Locations 1693-1695). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

✓ Does your Church Speak Unchurched?

My wife, daughter and sister in law were driving cross country, from Virginia to Oregon. On Sabbath, they had to stop in the state of _____ and decided to attend church there. They pulled in with their U-Haul truck, with a car in tow. Nothing says “I’m from somewhere that is **not** here” like a U-Haul! They were lukewarmly greeted at the door, skated down the aisle, endured worship by themselves in the pew, and left without being invited to lunch. This was a medium size church, next to an academy, a church that seemed healthy. I wonder how many times that lack of intentionality is repeated in churches across the land every week.

No one believes they have an anti-visitor church. Very few people describe their congregation as cold. I can’t imagine that church members purposefully want to send an anti-social message to newcomers. Yet it happens all the time. Here are 3 things you can do, to become a visitor friendly church:

1. Connect with people at times *other than* in the regularly scheduled opportunities.

There are three times people usually get greeted:

- a. When they come in.
- b. At the “welcome” portion of the service.
- c. As they leave.

It’s what you do the rest of the time that sends a message whether you are a friendly church or not. In the three times I mentioned, you are **required** to be friendly. When you make an effort to connect outside those, the chances of guests returning increase. It’s a sin for a guest to sit by themselves. That’s right, I said it. A sin.

2. Be sensitive in the “welcome” portion of the service.

Who likes to stand up, and remain standing, while 200 eyeballs are on them? The answer is...**nobody!** In a survey with visitors, this practice is what they despised the most. To complicate matters even further, (at least in Hispanic churches) sometimes they call visitors the “flowers” of the congregation that day. That sends two wrong messages:

- a. The members are the thorns. Maybe accurate, but no need to rub it in.
- b. Pancho, the hard drinking macho man, does not like being called a delicate flower!

This practice is done more for *us* than for them. Stop it.

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3. Assume people know stuff, or overload them with information.

Both extremes are equally annoying. Visitors don't speak *Adventese*. They don't know what words like *camp meeting*, *ABC*, *AY*, *elders*, or *Conference* mean. Please speak English, with a smile. Keep announcements *short*. I have made my case before, that next to Chinese water torture, announcements were probably created by people that loved to bore people. They must have been. Please: this is not 1812. People can read. Give them a bulletin and maybe an announcement or two BEFORE the service is over.

Hoping that these suggestions can improve our visitor retention. What are other ways you purposefully connect with newcomers?

Sexual Abuse

Most of the problems people had, in the churches I pastored, could be traced back to the misuse of sex. Abuse was one of the mayor culprits. *Avance: A Vision for a New Manana*, a book that came out several years ago on Hispanic Adventists in North America, stated that 67% of Hispanic Adventists had been abused. Think about that statistic for a moment. If you were a Hispanic pastor that stood up to preach in church last Sabbath, you can safely assume that almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people staring at you, have gone or are going through an abusive situation be it mental, physical or sexual.

I believe this statistic is not very different from other skin colors or nations of origin. While all abuse is damaging, I am thinking especially of sexual abuse as I write today. Here are three recommendations for leaders:

1. Silence is not working.

Its mind boggling to me the deafening silence in many congregations of such a pervasive malady. If tomorrow I told you that $\frac{3}{4}$ of you congregation had contracted a disease, any disease, the action would be swift and intentional. Why is there so much silence in this topic? Honest, frequent conversations need to happen, from pulpit and classroom about it. The devil loves silence, secrecy and cover-up. Silence is the petri dish where dysfunction is cultured.

2. Anyone can be an abuser. Anyone can be a victim.

Many victims and predators looked like perfectly normal, even outstanding, members of the community and church. The truth is, that usually, predators don't look the part, only play it. I learned long ago, not to assume anything, discount anything or believe anyone is above being a victim or a perpetrator. Experts in the field tell us, one of the most common mistakes people make is not believing the victim, because the perpetrator is such an outstanding member of society.

3. There is healing in Jesus. There is help available. There is hope for you.

In the last church I pastored, I once preached on the very difficult passage of Tamar and her brother, a story that highlights the pain and consequences of abuse. We offered prayer and help for people in the congregation that had experienced abuse in their lives, following the service in a private section of the church. I thought a handful of folks would search out the professional counselor and ministry staff that would intercede and guide the process. Truth is I was surprised. Men and women. Young and old. Leaders and newcomers.

We prayed for them into the night. The healing that took place was not instantaneous, nor was it only a spiritual component to it, yet the fact that the pastor mentioned and started the conversation, helped people begin

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to deal with an issue long repressed. Referrals were made. Lives, I believe, were saved.

Before my wife and I got married, we went to a Christian counselor to deal with painful childhood experiences that would have threatened our union, had they been left unchecked. The healing that took place, combined with our faith in God and our desire to grow from that experience, made a huge difference. Repression, avoidance, ignoring, didn't work. Identifying, working through it, and moving past it in a healthy way did.

What can your church do? What places, times and venues can foster discussion on this topic? What practical suggestions can you give concerning this topic?

Secret Monsters

The sad news of two well-known Adventist figures had me thinking, reflecting and grieving.

First, a youth leader of has a well-publicized moral fall. A strong, conservative voice in the church, his decisions send ripples far and wide. The news of the fall, reveal his struggle with secret monsters.

Then, we get news of the self-inflicted death of a former pastor/evangelist. I have never met him, but good friends of mine have, and had him in their churches when he did evangelism, at which he was very good. He left official Adventist ministry for a new approach. He also was dealing with secret monsters, in his case a mental health issue that compounded the situation.

Having only met them through media and common friends, I reflected on my own ministry and decided to write this for all you leaders out there serving God while struggling with inner problems:

1. We grieve for all affected by these tragedies. Regardless of your particular views on church governance, approach to ministry, stance on women's ordination and music, we never rejoice with the fall of a leader. We grieve and we take time to take stock of our own lives, for we dare not spend one minute pointing fingers that could be spent on own knees.

2. As leaders, anything we don't face, trace and erase, with God's grace, can come back to haunt us. All of us carry baggage, have weaknesses, face hurts, trials and may even have health issues that we would rather not think about. Suppressing and not addressing those Secret Monsters, can be downright deadly.

3. It seemed to me, (this can be my own perception, and I could be wrong) that the emphasis of our ministry and life can reflect our unaddressed weakness. I remember several marriage counselors/speakers that had mayor issues in that area, one particular couple that was fighting back stage before the husband spoke about marriage to the congregation.

I have to analyze my ministry and my life and ask myself:

What are the mayor themes of my preaching?

What topics seem to pop up over and over in my interactions with people?

I'm I projecting a personal deficiency upon others by overemphasizing an area?

Tragedies like these are avoidable. But it's up to me to make the changes, seek the help, admit my imperfections, live based on reality and not an image. I have to address the Secret Monsters, before they destroy me. I have to make a decision, **to choose being healthy rather than admired.**

What do you need to deal with, immediately? What areas are troubling you right now?

✓ 2nd Gen Ministry

"We have always been treated as foreigners in our own countryside-exiles who never left home." (Daniel A. Rodriguez. A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations)

The 2nd Generation has always been of interested to me. Then I had teenagers. That made it even more real. I believe, that outside of death, one of the worst things that can happen to a parent is to see his/her child decide to leave the faith. Since my kids are 2nd Generation, and I want to see them in heaven, I want to do everything I can to show them Jesus, not the exit sign.

2nd Gen is a term mostly used for young people that are born in this country of immigrant parents. It is commonly used for people of Hispanic descent, but, as I am finding out, the 2nd generation struggles/challenges are similar to the sons and daughters of West Indies, Russian, Korean, and African parents.

Here are three challenges to this demographic, as it relates to their spiritual journey:

1. Exiles in their own country- this is a term used by Samuel Rodriguez in a great book called *A Future for the Latino Church*. They are not accepted in their ancestors churches because they don't speak the language very well (among other things) and they don't fit well in an Anglo church, because they feel outnumbered and out of place. Many attend, but don't belong, so they say "so long".

2. Culture vs gospel- There is no biblical basis or spirit of prophecy support for what has become reality in churches that have 2nd Generation members: Culture trumping the gospel. The fights in many boards, sends a subtle (or not so subtle) message to the 2nd Generation: Culture is more important than people. Preserving language is paramount. The result is, we have kept our language, and lost many of our kids. "If our effort to maintain our culture in a foreign country makes our children leave the church, we have gained nothing." (Daniel A. Rodriguez. *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations*)

3. Leadership opportunities- For many of the 2nd Generation, their native tongue has become an "oral language only", which they can understand fairly well, but struggle with communicating back with a high degree of proficiency. This cuts down on the level of involvement they can have at the local congregation, without the people getting frustrated with their accent, having to translate, and the nuances of both languages being lost in translation. Leadership positions are usually reserved for people that can dominate the native tongue and can express ideas and exhort the people forward. It might be a generalization, but the 2nd Generation has better access to education, higher paying jobs, and upwardly mobile opportunities. When their leadership skills are not used at their local congregations, sitting on the sidelines results in them leaving the game altogether.

✓ The Future is NOW

I hate the Redskins. On Sundays in the fall, I root for the Cowboys and whomever the Redskins are playing. Needless to say, this year has not been a great one for us Cowboy fans.

Yet, there are some lessons to be learned about youth involvement even from division rivals. The main lesson I want to leave with you in regard to youth involvement, is this: (I stole this phrase from Jose Cortes Jr.)

The future is now.

RGIII. Andrew Luck. Russell Wilson. All first year players. All doing exceptionally well. All have taken their teams to the playoffs in their rookie year. Gone are the days, that rookie QB's had to sit patiently behind the incumbent, for 3-4 years, holding a clipboard. Now they hold the title: Starter.

A while back, I had the chance to sit down with several young adults, and listen to their thoughts on the church. It was a very candid conversation. Some are faithful in attendance. Some are not. Some have rejected the church of their youth altogether. All wanted to talk. From the conversation, I gathered the following three lessons.

1. Give them a chance, now. One young adult, that left the church around 10 years ago, asked me a pointed question: **“Do you have young people in place in management positions at all levels of the church?”**

I answered truthfully (and painfully), and then thought to myself: Why don't we? Maybe the reason is that we have equated youth with inexperience and think that age translates into effectiveness. Truth is, your age doesn't automatically mean you're able. Or mature. Or effective. Talent is ageless.

2. Frustration is real. It can be a double-edge sword. The frustration in the room was palpable. Frustration about inflexibility. Frustration about mayoring in minors. Frustration about red tape, even at the local church level. Frustration pushed some of them to join other local Adventist churches, to leave the church, to become passive members in the church they attend, or to a select few, to start a brand new church. The question is, what outlets are in place in your congregation to deal with the frustration? They don't need you pity or condescension. They need your attention.

3. Listen. I did. It was hard to not get defensive. I had to bite my tongue a couple of times. But one mayor problem we have is that we talk too much. Young people have information overload. But no one listens to them. I invite you to set up times, appointments, events that will have the express intention of listening. Listen first. Then guide. Let's keep doing all we can for this generation. Ask for their clipboard. Give them your support.

✓ Effective Young Adult Ministry

It is no secret that youth and young adults are missing in many of our churches. Across the land, there are 1,000 Adventist churches with none of them present in church. This past weekend I had the privilege of visiting one church* that is intentionally reaching them. I want to share with you three things they are doing. The church is not perfect. They don't have all the answers. Yet, whenever we see a church of 95 years have 80 teens on a Friday night program (**FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS** with Pr. John A. Coaxum), and several young adults in their leadership team, you know they are doing something right. Even though I will share some program ideas, it would be well to understand that behind the strategy is a passion to connect, involve and develop young adults in church.

1. Connect- As I sat down for lunch, the pastor pointed out several young adults in attendance there that used to be disconnected from church, but now were active participants. This church is **intentional** in connecting with young adults. Visitation, invitation to participate, events geared towards them. They connect very well personally and through media. If you want to take a closer look, check them out here:

Website- www.gvillesda.org

Church's twitter account- @glenvillesda

Pastor Myron Edmunds Twitter- @itsmyronlive

Praisevision- www.praisevision.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=475&Itemid=383

One of the sad realities expressed in the book about young adults that left the church, "You Lost Me", is 47% never had a significant connection with an adult in their church. This church is intentional in doing this.

2. Involve- there were young adults in the praise team, the media team, the leadership team. If there was a team, there were young adults in it. The church is considering purchasing property across the street from the church, to further impact the community. Here are a couple of examples of involvement:

*I sat with a young adult who leads a Community Development Organization, who is using his gifts to increase community involvement in the church.

*A business manager, who is wondering how he can leverage his associations with a real estate tycoon to further the church's mission in the community.

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*A young adult that spent the sermon hour tweeting the sermon's most important ideas.

*A block party for the community where over 1,000 book bags were distributed, and several community members started to attend the church.

Another reality expressed in the book about young adults that left the church, "You Lost Me", is that they never learned how to connect what they did for a living with their Christianity. This church is also intentional in doing this.

*Young Adult friendly evangelism- they are passionate about evangelism. Not just going after new people, but also reclaiming those that left. See evangelism sermons here: <http://www.gvillesda.org/media.php?pageID=16>

3. Develop- they have an ongoing **Leadership Academy**, where several young adults attend regularly. It's an opportunity for the pastor on a regular basis, to develop the next generation of leaders. Leadership development is an important tool in identifying and deploying leaders that have the ability and the tools to minister effectively in ministry in the 21st Century.

A particular program caught my attention. It is called **FORTY 4 FAMILY**. A call to family worship. A call to personal revival that starts in the home. This idea has developed into a resource (**40 Days 2 Life Changing Family Worship**) that will be available soon. Guest speakers come for 40 days to present on various topics related to family, and the emphasis is returning the emphasis of true spirituality and spiritual development where it should be: the home. Please pray for this church and their ministry. Drop them a line of encouragement. Connect with their leadership team to interchange ideas. We can, with God's help, turn this around.

*(Church info- 95 year old, inner city church, primarily African American.)

✓ Increasing the Giving in Your Church

A friend of mine said: “Grace is free, but ministry takes money”. Although God is not limited by our lack of resources, the church is able to minister more effectively in the community when not strapped for cash to pay the light bill. The end of the year is a great time to help people understand where we have been, how their giving has impacted and changed lives, and what hopes and dreams the church has for next year. In order to be successful at increasing the level of giving in your congregation, remember three words:

Inform

Invite

Inspire

Here are some practical ideas you can use this year:

1. Inform.

People give more to vision than to need. One church is doing it this way, this year:

- a. On Sabbath morning, they will ask everyone to please stay home that afternoon.
- b. The elders and the pastoral staff, will visit the members that afternoon.
- c. They take with them a short questionnaire that has three components:
 1. What’s ONE thing we are doing **right**?
 2. What’s ONE thing we **must** improve in this year?
 3. They then share 3 specific, measurable, reachable, clear goals for this year.

2. Invite.

The above mentioned church continues the process this way. At the end of the visit, they hand the family the paper with the goals for this year, as well as an envelope, and invite them to prayerfully consider how they will participate in the vision of the church, which includes giving.

Some pastors feel a little reservation about this. I believe if it’s done tastefully and not with a high-pressure attitude, it can be very successfully.

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I've personally done it in two different churches, with positive results.

3. Inspire

People want to be a part of something meaningful, life-changing, and greater than themselves. It's your job, pastor, to paint that picture to your congregation about how your church will do that next year. Crying about money, using guilt trips or spiritual coercion doesn't work. Be specific with your dreams. Have testimonies of life-change in your congregation. Paint a picture of what could be, tell them how the story of redemption is been played out in your church. That is done through the worship services, especially the sermon. Once again, inspire them by:

Being specific

Setting a goal

Using stories more than numbers

Extra tip:

Make the year-end offering a month long affair. If you make the offering a **ONE** Sabbath affair, you might miss 30% of your people. The closest to Christmas that you do it, the more possibility that people are away. **DO THIS INSTEAD-** Start on the first Sabbath of December and share the total the first Sabbath of January. **SET** a goal.

We Are Not the Same and It's OK

The following events, I experienced myself:

*I was asked whether it is ok to baptize someone that is living in the USA without working documents.

*I overheard a conversation where a family was sharing that they will not vote for an African American candidate for president, based solely on his skin color.

*Someone tells one of the Hispanic pastors that he should tell all his undocumented members to go back to their country. Immediately.

*A 1st generation Hispanic church member tells a 2nd generation youth to please attend an English speaking church, making fun of his Spanish pronunciation and sending the clear message that his kind are not welcome there.

These all happened in the last 10 years.

11 o'clock on Sabbath morning is still the most segregated hour in Adventism in America. On order for our churches to become what God intended them to be, we must take the lead in reconciliation. Being reconciled with God means being reconciled with my brother. God intends his church to become a house of prayer *for all people*.

As we seek to become a house of prayer for all people, we must intentionally seek to develop relationships and make our churches a welcome place for the following types of people.

1. People that don't look like me. One of my good friends, Pr. Harold is planting a congregation in Oregon. Originally, the church started as a 2nd Generation Hispanic Church. What he soon discovered, is that 2nd Generation Hispanics marry and have friends of different cultures. One time, a person that was attending asked why they called the church a "church for 2nd Generation Hispanics". In his attempts to become more inclusive and to reach out to a neglected segment, he was in fact being the opposite of inclusive. The church is now called Mosaic, a Multicultural church in the west side of Portland. His church includes African Americans, Koreans, as well as people from Hawaii, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, among others.

The fact is that the younger the person, the more tolerant he is of different races. The browning of America is happening, whether we like it or not.

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2. People that don't think like me. In the church that I grew up with, questions were not often welcomed. You did what you were told, and that was final. With this generation, such methods hardly work. In order to reach them, we must allow them to express their opinions, value their input and respond with solid evidence, not just a "because I say so".

I still remember the answer our youth leaders gave us when we asked why we could not go to the movies. First of all, your guardian angel stays outside when you go into a movie theater. Secondly, Ellen White condemned movie theaters. Thirdly, because we told you not to. Not a word was mentioned about content of the movies, being able to select better entertainment or allowing us to question why the same people that condemned the theater watched the same movie in their home. When we pointed out that there were no movie theaters in EGW days, we were met with accusations of rebellion and not conforming to the truth. It's incongruences like this that helped some of my friends to reject orders completely when they went to the movies and saw that the place was no different than the local mall.

What I see happening all too often in our churches, is the labeling and demonizing of people that hold other viewpoints. Liberal, extremist, contemporary, conservative. These are just some of the labels thrown out there. It has been said, that when fishermen don't fish, they fight. I wonder if the millions of people down the street that are on their way to an eternity really care whether we sing two more praise songs or if the prayer comes before the welcome. (actual fights in church boards).

What if we used those energies and the time we spend in countless committees, to minister to the community that surrounds us? What if we helped people to realize God is madly in love with them?

I don't have to compromise my values to connect with you. I don't have to change my mind about doctrine to open my arms and love you. I don't have to leave my brain at the door, just my prejudice.

✓ Why Do You Want, To Plant?

A seldom discussed aspect of starting a church is the motivation behind the desire, the reasons behind the decisions. Let's be clear on something. We are all sinners, and we all have issues, so none of us come to the table with completely perfect motives and lives. Yet, the chances the church plant doesn't crash and burn increase with a healthy approach to life, spirituality and relationships. Anything less than God inspired motives can cause issues. There are a million reasons why we should plant a church. Here are 5 reasons you should wait:

1. You want to "show them" at (insert denominational institution, church, or person's name here) how it's really supposed to be done. You have an ax to grind or a wrong to be avenged. It's starting a church for what you are against, instead of what you are for. We should carry something on our shoulders, a cross, not a chip.
2. You just want to be the boss. To be in charge. To do things your way. No longer the associate, I am now the "man". It will be great to remember who you are: you are neither "the man", "the messiah", or "the manager". You are a servant leader. In that order. The fastest path to failure is inability to admit you don't know everything. One thing you will quickly realize, being "the man" is not as glamorous as it seems!
3. You think it would be nice to "try this". Great for a new restaurant. Not so much for a new church. There are millions that have tried church planting before. There are resources available. Get them. There are proven methods in place to help you. Use them. Before you jump in with both feet, make sure you are jumping in the right pool.
4. Your spiritual life has been down for a while. This seems like the adventure you need. Church planting is not remedial spirituality. It will take everything you have, and then more to see it through. Sometimes when things are stale, we think a change of scenery is exactly what we need. Maybe, the change needs to happen inside first, instead of letting your surroundings determine your spirituality.
5. Your personal/family life is strained at the moment. Church planting increases stress. Its highs are usually higher and its lows are usually lower. A strong family unit will help you through those hard times that are sure to come. Invest time in strengthening your primary core group (and by core I mean family).

God may be calling you to plant. Or He may not. Pray to know the difference.

Reality Check: Top 5 lessons I learned as a church planter

1. Church planting never has universal support.

I've personally planted six and supervised another 15 church plants. I've never had complete and absolute support. Usually there is organized and vocal opposition. Phrases like these are common:

- * "We don't need another church".
- * "Let's strengthen the ones we already have."
- * "We will lose our best members."
- * "We will be weakened by a new church plant".
- * "We will lose pastoral care, if we open another church".

Those comments are usually based on fear and not facts. The facts are that church planting is the best evangelistic tool we can have. It is growth by multiplication rather than addition.

This article brings out some interesting facts:

"17.7% of the US population attends church. This breaks down into 9% evangelical, 5.5% Catholic and 3.1% Mainline denominations. The rate of those who attend church is declining. In the West, there is a -1.2% decrease in the population of who attends church in the 1994-2004 timeframe.

Nationwide, to just to keep up with population growth, we would need to plant 51,826 more churches than we did in this period. Including churches that were planted, this means we would have needed to plant over 100,000 churches! The greatest increase and conversion occurs in church plants."

<http://www.goodmanson.com/church/the-state-of-the-american-church-why-church-planting-is-critical-to-the-future-of-american-christianity/>

2. Church planting can attract some unwelcomed company.

One of the most disturbing similarities that most church planting initiatives have, is how a new church can attract dysfunctional people. The day you open your doors, they show up. Here are five types of people to watch out for:

- **Predatory:** Sexual or spiritual, they have similar objectives: gratify self and inflict major pain. Be less concerned about hurting them by screening them out than hurting others by ignoring them. Discernment is a spiritual gift. Ask for it daily.
- **Large and in charge:** They say they want to "be a part of the team". What they are really saying is "I want to be the boss," and think a new church gives them the chance.

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- **Against:** They come because they are *against* their old church. They make comments like “My old church was so _____. I’m so glad this church is not like that!” When they realize you’re not perfect, and neither is the church, they will leave.
- **Needy:** These people could monopolize all of your time and energy. The people in their old church are probably jumping for joy that they left! The only jumping you will do is off of an imaginary bridge when you respond for the fifth time in three hours to an “urgent” text message about “why Sister Janet doesn’t like me.”
- **Transient:** They’re here just to check it out. They’ll go back to the mother church when they realize that here they are actually expected to work. It takes 110% commitment to plant a church and they just don’t have it.

Four recommendations:

- **Have a clear vision.** Unclear vision leads to wasted time resolving side issues that should have been settled in the beginning.
- **Have a specific, written, membership covenant and have the people that will join the church read, agree, and sign it.** Mosaic SDA Church in Hillsboro, Oregon has one of the best that I have seen. It will save you a lot of grief later, when conflict arises.
- **Provide continual reminders of the vision.** Vision leaks. Just because you presented it, don’t assume people heard it, understood it, or remember it.
- **Have patience.** You don’t just want more people, you want the right people.

3. In church planting, motivation matters.

A seldom discussed aspect of starting a church is the motivation behind the desire, the reasons behind the actions. Let’s be clear on something. We are all sinners, and we all have issues, so none of us come to the table with completely perfect motives and lives. Yet, the chances the church plant doesn’t crash and burn increase with a healthy approach to life, and God inspired motives. There are a million reasons why we should plant a church. Then again, there are some reasons why you should not. Examine your motives and heart first.

Reality Check: Top 5 lessons I learned as a church planter

4. Church planting is the best evangelistic method.

Like I mentioned before, it's growth my multiplication. It's the way the church has grown more effectively throughout the ages. Denominations that plant churches grow. Churches that plant churches, grow. Pastors that plant churches grow. People that plant churches grow. The key word? Growth! No wonder the devil hates it, wants to discourage it, and attacks it.

Effective church planting, is the opportunity to create a church without an expiration date.

For real facts about church planting, contact my friend Tom Evans at NADEI. (tevans@andrews.edu)

5. Church planting is a spiritual adventure.

Planting a church on human strength and talent alone guarantees failure. Church is a spiritual organization - with the emphasis on spiritual. While resources, conferences, training and mentoring can be of great help, we must remember what we are doing. We are planting a church. It's not a business. It's a spiritual organization.

In closing, let me remind you that the blessings of church planting far outweigh its challenges. It attracts frontline warriors, reaches un-churched people, it brings back life and purpose to Adventists who have lost their identity and passion, it is a great way to re-focus churches to mission, helps people to get involved, (all hands on deck), it is a better way than fighting your way to change an existing church, and the pastor receives the blessing of a new challenge, which can bring revival in passion and purpose of ministry

Ready? Let's plant!

Books, Resources, Conferences to grow:

Books:

Planting Missional Churches <http://www.amazon.com/Planting-Missional-Churches-Ed-Stetzer/dp/0805443703>

Church Planter http://www.amazon.com/Church-Planter-Man-Message-Mission/dp/1433515768/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1347298379&sr=1-1&keywords=Church+Planter

Launch http://www.amazon.com/Launch-Starting-New-Church-Scratch/dp/0830743103/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1347298338&sr=8-

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2&keywords=Launch

On the Verge http://www.amazon.com/On-Verge-Journey-Apostolic-Exponential/dp/0310331005/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1347298696&sr=8-1&keywords=on+the+verge

Conferences to attend:

Exponential Church Planter's Conference

<http://www.exponential.org/shop/exponential-2013/>

Church Planting Conference

NADEI Church Planter's Coaching

<http://www.nadei.org/article/331/coaching/church-plant-coaching-certification>

Here is a quote we know very well: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” (Ministry of Healing 143-144)

Here is quote that don’t often share. (hint- it follows the previous one!)

“There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The **poor** are to be relieved, the **sick** cared for, the **sorrowing** and the bereaved comforted, the **ignorant** instructed, the **inexperienced** counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, **this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.**” (Ministry of Healing 143-144)

This quote bundles evangelism and service. Here are some principles to remember:

a. A service lifestyle is part of a divine expectation. It would be helpful to understand that when standing before our maker, instead of asking us to recite the eschatological timeline, God asks “what did you do about my children that needed help?” Mathew 25:34-36

b. A service lifestyle takes us out of our comfort zone. It’s more than outreach, its reaching out. Even to those who don’t look, believe, speak, or act like us. That includes our enemies! Mathew 5:46-48

c. A service lifestyle breaks down barriers. It’s all about love, and love can indeed “conquer all”. When we express love, we break down preconceived concepts about the church and God. Most people, when they think about church, associate it more with asking for things than giving you things. Service goes a long way to change that perception.

Remember, there are **37** recorded miracles of Jesus in the New Testament. There is **one** written sermon of Jesus (Mat. 5-7). Remember the initial quote? “If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen”. (Ministry of Healing, 143)

Questions to ponder with your church leaders:

1. What are some creative ways your church is reaching the community?
2. If money was no object, what would you do? What project would you

✓ To Be With Him

Mark 3:15-16 Jesus went up on a mountainside. He called for certain people to come to him, and they came. ¹⁴ He appointed 12 of them and called them apostles. From that time on they would be with him. He would also send them out to preach. ¹⁵ They would have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ So Jesus appointed the Twelve.

In this text, we find 3 important principles for growing leaders of growing churches.

A. Recognize **who** called you.

The **Person** who calls you is important! Jesus called his disciples two thousand years ago, and he calls his disciples still. Growing churches are clear on their call, mission, and history. They understand that in order to get where you are going you need to know where you come from. A sense of call is especially important during difficult times, because sometimes *all* you have is your call. When there is no visible manifestation of success, your call will sustain you. It will sustain you through:

- a. Periods of hard economic times.
- b. People who are hard to deal with. (You know who I'm talking about)
- c. Volunteers who won't.
- d. Staff who can't.
- e. Members who shouldn't, but do.

Remember, God is at work even when we don't see it. He did not call you to fail.

B. Recognize **why** He called you.

The **Purpose** why He called you is important. Notice the three things that the disciples were able to do, after their call.

- *Cast out demons
- *Preach
- *Heal

Sometimes, in the modern statistic driven Christianity, the real purpose why Jesus called us gets lost. He called us to be with Him! We are to *be*, before we *do*. From the time of creation God's heart is fueled by a deep desire to be with the human race. In case you forgot, God is madly in love with you. The whole purpose of your creation was not just that you spend time doing work *for* Him, but that you spend time *with* Him. You remember how it felt

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to spend time with someone you were head over heels about? Remember the anticipation? The expectation? The satisfaction when your time was over?

Are we too busy trying to preach impressive sermons about Him, bring healing to many homes for Him, even working to cast out the evil in society in His name, yet our personal relationship with God is lacking? These three things have been helpful to me in my own journey:

1. Choose the important over the urgent.
2. Choose the best over the good.
3. Choose the permanent over the temporary

C. Recognize that he called **others** too.

The **Personality** of those he called with you is important. A close look at the personality of the disciples reveals anything else but uniformity. They were different, and that was a good thing. Different backgrounds. Different social status. Different politics. Different jobs. Blue collar and white collar. A Hebrew revolutionary and a roman sympathizer. One that had a questioning mind , one that spoke too soon, and one that hardly spoke. Some that were more interested in position than preaching, and one was constantly taking a piece of the pie for himself. What message was Jesus trying to send us through the picking of the disciples? A simple one. If Jesus was able to transform and use them, he can do the same with me. Evangelism was their common denominator.

I want to be with *that* Jesus.

✓ Re: Vision

Romans 4:17 ...This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

Next year, my wife and I will be celebrating our 20th wedding anniversary. As I pondered about what gift to give to her on this momentous occasion, it dawned on me. I decided to give her less of me. I would go on a diet and exercise regimen, start P90x, and by the time our anniversary date came around, she would be able to see the difference. After years of inactivity, promising myself that I would exercise “soon”, I began the journey after a post on Facebook. Progress has been good. I have lost some weight, and am on my way to my goal of losing twenty pounds. My vision of a healthier life is coming true. Finally.

This is an article on vision. Vision, simply defined, is to ability to “*see it before you see it.*” What does vision have to do with weight loss? Or an exercise regimen? My journey to better health began with a personal vision of what *could* be. I *could* get in shape. I *could* feel better. It *was* possible.

Before every great invention, before every great accomplishment, before every transformational idea, someone had a vision. Someone “saw it, before he/she saw it”. Visionaries share similar characteristics. I would like to share four of them with you. We will illustrate these qualities through the story of a biblical visionary and his armor bearer. There is a compelling story of vision implementation that has some practical applications for leaders everywhere.

Israel was in bad shape. Their constant enemies, the philistines, had them on their heels. The people were demoralized. The king was distracted. The enemies were destroying them. In that failure-ridden climate, God raises a leader. His name is Jonathan. The story is found in 1 Samuel 14. Jonathan had several characteristics that visionaries have in common.

1. Careful who he/she shares the vision with.

1 Samuel 14:1

One day Jonathan said to his armor bearer, “Come on, let’s go over to where the Philistines have their outpost.” But Jonathan **did not tell** his father what he was doing.

Suppose for a moment, that you are Jonathan. If you had a plan to attack

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the enemy, wouldn't the logical choice for sharing that valuable bellic information be the king, who was also your father? Yet, Jonathan chose not to share his plan. Visionary leaders are careful who they share their vision with.

Why careful?

1. Some will get upset. They don't like the fact that it wasn't their idea.
2. Some will oppose it. They don't like the fact that it wasn't them who was chosen.
3. Some will laugh at it. They see silliness where you see success.
4. Some will question it. They say "You sure?", not "how can I help you?"

Here is some practical advice. Once you are convinced that God has in fact given you a vision, when someone comes to give you the all the reasons why it won't work, you can take criticism in stride. Don't discount criticism altogether, it can be the sandpaper that can polish the work of art God and you are building. At the same time, don't let criticism stop progress. Whatever God blesses the devil attacks.

Remember, *they* are not supposed to understand it, it's not *their* vision to begin with. Not everyone is happy, thankful or supportive about *your* vision. Opposition does not mean your vision is not worth pursuing. While you don't want to be reckless and irresponsible with your decisions going forward, you do want to step out in faith. Most great inventions, as well as almost every great accomplishment had two things in common:

1. Was conceived by a visionary.
2. Was opposed or dismissed by many.

When I declared in Facebook, that I wanted to start P90x to lose the weight I thought the support would be universal. Yet, it wasn't. Here are some of the comments:

"You are crazy"
"You won't do it"
"I started, but quit"

✓ Re: Vision

Maybe you identify with me. We have all been there. You show up with a fist full of dreams like balloons, and someone greets you with a hand full of bobby pins. In order to lead many, sometimes you must listen to just a few.

2. Gets going while others talk, plan, rest, and complain.

1 Samuel 14:2

Meanwhile, Saul and his **600 men** were **camped** on the outskirts of Gibeah, around the pomegranate tree at Migron.³ Among Saul's men was Ahijah the priest, who was wearing the ephod, the priestly vest. Ahijah was the son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the Lord who had served at Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.

A cursory look at the previous text reveals three groups of people that were camping under the pomegranate tree:

Camping Saul- he was the king, who should have received the vision.

Camping Soldiers- the followers, who should have implemented the vision.

Camping Ahijah - the religious leader, who should have confirmed the vision.

Should have, would have, could have, but didn't! Jonathan, instead, preferred death to inactivity. He decided it was better to attempt something and fail, than to do something and succeed. The greatest enemy of the church these days is not worldliness, is laziness. One of my favorite quotes encapsulates my point:

"I've searched all the parks in all the cities and found no **statues** of committees." *CK Chesterton*

God's calls us to do something! More important than discussion, charts, ideas, opinions, words and desires, is action. One key part of the text must not be overlooked. While the demoralized people camped and complained about how bad their situation was, Jonathan, a young person, was active. The sad part reads like this: "*no one was aware that Jonathan had left*". That should hit us right between the eyes. Are we so worried about the *previous* defeats that we neglect the *next* generation? Some commentators argue that armor bearers were usually young people, probably because they were the only ones who were that crazy!

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What you say is not as important as what you do. Opinionologism (a word I coined meaning *to share with others the opinions no one else is asking you for*), is not a spiritual gift. When I was pastoring a church, I always liked to have a soccer team from the church. It built community, (except when they punched each other, which thankfully was not every week) and was great exercise. Other than the occasional laying of hands on the opposite team, we had a good time. Since I was the pastor, I always got to play. As the game got going, so did the crowd. Everyone had an opinion on the game. It was interesting to hear some misguided soul yell "take the pastor out, he's horrible!". At halftime, people from the crowd would come into our huddle, and offer unsolicited advice, strategy and ideas. Not only were they very straightforward about what we should be doing, they became upset if we did not do it the way they prescribed. Sounds a lot like church. Many watching, complaining and planning, few actually working. According to church growth experts, usually 20% of the congregation does 80% of the work, the same ratio applies to giving.

God does not expect us to do everything, yet he does expect us to do something. Maybe you are reading this article in your computer, the same one who contains the blueprint of the next big idea for your organization. My question for you is this: What is stopping you? Instead of waiting around for circumstances to change, you be the change. They might not build a statue in your name, but it will make your creator smile. Action inspires your followers, develops your strengths, and catches God's attention. Do something!

3. Acts, regardless of fear.

1 Samuel 14:6 "Let's go across to the outpost of those pagans," Jonathan said to his armor bearer. "**Perhaps** the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!"

The third characteristic of a visionary is the ability to attempt great things, regardless of fear. There are two important principles I would like to share concerning fear and leadership:

1. As a leader, I would venture to say that if before you act on a vision from God, you are not even a tiny bit apprehensive, then that vision is probably not from God. Ask yourself, If you already knew you could do it, why do you need God for? If you wait for the fear to subside before attempting something great, you probably never will.

✓ Re: Vision

2. The process God uses to increase the leader's faith is detailed in this verse.
 - a. Faith cares- "lets go..."
 - b. Faith crisis- "perhaps"
 - c. Faith conquers- "He can win"

Another way of saying it is: Promise, Problem, Provision. As part of His plan, God sometimes allows us to experience trepidation before triumph. Why? Maybe because we must understand that at the end of the day, it's not about us.

Early in my ministry I read a quote that impacted the way I operated. It went something like this: "what are you doing, that if God is not completely involved, and comes through in a big way, it will absolutely and utterly fail?". If you think about it, many of the things we do, we could do without divine intervention. What have you attempted in the last year that took you out, way out, of your comfort zone? What risk, without being reckless, have you proposed to the people you lead? What innovative, daring, out of the box idea have you implemented? God did not call you to the ministry of beige. Yes, I said it. Beige. Safe. Familiar. Known. Beige. When was the last time you came home excited to tell your family about the beige building you saw? I encourage you to use God's paintbrush and repaint with vivid colors. Go spend a weekend in the mountain and rediscover His passion for your life. You were meant for bold passion. Definitely, not beige. (I apologize in advance to the beige lovers of the world. All three of you. Sorry. Email me and I will send you a bright red bumper sticker that says: my other car is beige) Do something!

4. Understands the power of two.

1 Samuel 14:7 "Do what you think is best," the armor bearer replied. **"I'm with you** completely, whatever you decide."

Unity multiplies impact. That is another key lesson visionaries have learned. Jonathan understood that while it's easier to do it alone, it's more effective when we involve others. There is a small word, with big power, and that word is: *and*. It's one thing to say, it's me. Another thing to say, it's me *and* my church. Unity multiplies impact. What we sometimes fail to understand

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in this polarized society, is that we need each other. We can grow as we learn from each other.

God created us for community. God is emphatic about giving the vision to the leader first, but not exclusively. A right vision, shared with the right people, at the right time, for the right reason, will accomplish more, in less time. I believe every leader should connect on a regular basis to the following three people:

Mentors. These are wise people whom you can *listen* to. They have probably gone through similar experiences to yours and can point out some specific ways you can deal with your present situation.

Friends. These are caring people you can lean on. They might not have all the answers, but just the fact that you know that they are there for you makes a huge difference.

Students. These are the less-experienced people who can learn from you, similar in this story to the armor bearer.

Every experience you have had is a lesson that can be shared to encourage, inspire, or warn others.

Unity, multiplies impact. In order to finish the work God has entrusted to us we need everybody.

*Traditional *and* contemporary

*Men *and* women.

*Public *and* personal evangelism.

*Youth *and* adults.

*1st *and* 2nd generation.

*Educational institutions *and* self-supporting ministries.

✓ Re: Vision

*Lay members *and* paid denominational employees.

*Administrators *and* normal people.

We are one church. When we attack each other it creates confusion in our youth, discouragement in our members, and delay in our progress.

Let God's word, his principles, and his vision be your guide. I pray that God will help you **discover** and **develop** His vision, for your life, today.

Romans 4:17 ...This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

✓ LEAD

Michael Hyatt, former CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishing, says that in order to be successful in today's world you need two things:

- a. A compelling *product*.
- b. A meaningful *platform*.

I believe we as Adventists are good at the first one. Our message is powerful. Our beginning was providential. Our emphasis is prophetic. From a handful of disappointed North Americans, we have become a worldwide, multicultural movement that seeks to point people back to scripture. We can make a compelling argument directly from the Word, and we seek to inspire people to return to a more biblical approach to Christianity.

Yet, more than 50% of people in the United States do not know who we are, many others confuse us with Jehovah's Witness or Mormons, and yet others identify us only by our diet and what we don't do.

As a ministerial director, I seek to help leaders to grow together in 4 areas that can help us become more effective in "*platform building*". The word to remember is **LEAD**.

It's an acronym for:

Leadership

Evangelism

Accountability

Diversity

Let's take the first one, leadership. John Maxwell loves to say: "if you are leading and no one is following, you are only taking a walk". I grew up in a church where leadership wasn't taught, explained, modeled, mentored, preached, or practiced much. It got a little better in my formal education, but most of the leadership concepts I learned came about in two ways:

1. Personal **interest** in the subject.
2. Personal **mistakes** that taught me leadership lessons.

I remember arriving at my first church (some might identify with what I am about to share), and having my first board meeting. I was coming in with all

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these plans, dreams, and was absolutely sure who the leader was. Me! After all, I was the pastor! That lasted about 30 minutes. My plans and ideas went out the window faster than you can say "I'm in charge". I remember feeling very discouraged. I survived, but noticed immediately my very present need to grow in the area of leadership. It took me a while to understand that I am none of these three things:

*I am not the **man**. In other words, I can't make ministry be about me, because it isn't.

*I am nor the **messiah**. I am not indispensable. There is only one Messiah and his name is not Roger.

*I am not the **manager**. I am not called to just maintain the status quo, to just run programs and keep everyone happy. I was called to lead, not manage.

As a ministerial director, I do this in three ways:

1. I screen all my invitations through the LEAD concept. It's impossible to preach, teach, and present everywhere we are invited to. So, when invited to attend an event, present a seminar or preach at a church, I ask myself how that event fits in the overall mission and vision. That helps me stay focused, on track and on point.
2. I use multiple avenues to communicate the LEAD message. Twitter, blog, Facebook, email, articles in the union paper (or like this one). Every time I send an email, it's an opportunity to further the brand, and instill the values.
3. I seek to develop leaders, not just train members. Training is important, but it's not enough. Through LEAD Conferences, LEAD Resources, and other avenues, I am interested in leadership development. I measure my success by how many leaders have grown as a result of the conferences and resources, not how many attended an event. It's growth by multiplication, not addition.

May God help you, to LEAD today.

✓ Sex in Ministry

Someone once said that if you want to silence a room, talk about sex or death. We will leave death for another time. In this occasion, sex is on the menu. Ministers have sex too. They enjoy it, have issues with it and are tempted by it at the same rate as the people in the pews. Pretending this topic does not exist or is best saved for private conversations is helping **no one**. Since the misuse of the gift has caused more than one great servant of God to fall and lose his/her authority and ministry, I want to share some thoughts about sex and the minister.

These are 3 principles that I have found personally helpful:

1. Sex is the **one** thing.

Think about this for a moment. If you are married, sex is probably one of the **only** things a person of the opposite sex can do for/with you and it **not** be a sin. Someone can wash your clothes, clean your house, have dinner, cook your meal, have a conversation...the list goes on. Since sex is that **one** thing, do it well. Take a trip to see Vicky (for those over 50, Vicky is short for Victoria Secret. It's where you buy clothing that is newer than that gown from 1973 with 3 holes, that smells like Bengay and looks like it needs to function as kindle)

Go on a date that ends well. Get a babysitter. Enlist church members or grandma to watch the kids. Goo all out.

Do it well. Like everything, your sex life can get in a rut. What kills marriages more than anything else is: ROUTINE.

Do it well.

2. Be specially mindful **after** mountain-top experiences.

Usually the devil leaves you alone while you are in the mountain. Retreats, days of fasting and prayer, high Sabbaths, baptisms after a crusade are all examples of mountain top adventures. It's the next day when the real battle starts. The combination of emotional exhaustion and a neglect of the spiritual disciplines (after all, there should be some spiritual carryover from yesterday!) can be deadly. In North America, the day more people watch porn is Sunday. High spiritual days can be followed by intense spiritual attacks.

Watch and pray.

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3. Take stock of **your** own family history.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. When we make a call for baptisms, we don't believe that people can come forward that have some type of physical challenge such as a broken leg, and after they receive Jesus in their heart go back to their seats with assurance in their hearts, but no limp. Why is it so hard to understand that the challenges of our family of origin remain with us at a level we seldom acknowledge and persist in pretending does not exist? Usually what we repress we encourage. Sometimes the hurts have been so profound and the wounds so deep, we will preach with a limp the rest of our lives. Being mindful of your past and aware of your weakness will help you, not hurt you.

Hopefully this will help you in the journey to enjoy the wonderful, godly gift of sex. We need pastors/leaders to grow in this area and stay close to Jesus.

Bonus Section

Clergy appreciation month resources

October is Clergy Appreciation Month Worksheet. Ideas. Articles.

October is set aside to express appreciation for the time, service and prayers your pastor (s) and their families give for your church, but to really show appreciation to your pastor (s) and their leadership, find ways to affirm them all year long. God has entrusted them to one of the most important assignments.....the care of His flock.

There are three resources in this document:

- 1. Pastor worksheet that will help you know your pastor better, so you can appreciate him better. (do this first!) p. 2**
- 2. Ideas on how to show appreciation, plan and execute the best clergy appreciation month. p.3**
- 3. Links for two good articles on pastors with insight into their lives, fears, joys and challenges. p.9**

Clergy Appreciation Day *is always* the second Sabbath in October but you can choose to celebrate it any Sabbath in October. The NAD, UNION and CONFERENCE Ministerial Departments thanks you for your efforts to give encouragement, affirmation and support which will enable your pastor(s) and their families to further serve the Lord in ministry. Pastors are givers; seemingly always investing in the lives of others. Many churchgoers are receivers; most often having the mindset they are to “get” rather than “give” when it comes to the pastor and/or the church. Healthy relationships involve giving and receiving between pastors and their church members. This idea flyer is meant to inspire with helpful ideas and creative suggestions for you and your church to use to show appreciation for your pastor(s). Several ideas can be used for individual pastors or for group expressions of appreciation. Some suggestions are for a corporate event with the entire church participating. We hope both happen for your pastor(s) and their families! It is our passion in the Ministerial Department to support and care for pastors, their families, and churches in the North American Division. We sincerely thank the NAD Ministerial Department for much of this resource!

☒ PART 1: Pastor Worksheet

October is Pastor Appreciation Month. As you look for ways to express appreciation to these faithful servants, ask your pastor and/or ministry staff to complete this worksheet. You may choose to have a spouse fill in the worksheet as well.

What is your favorite ...

Candy/Candy Bar? _____

Clothing store(s)? _____

Sports team or event? _____

Where do you like to eat out? _____

What resources you would like to have?

Bible Commentaries _____

Books/Authors _____

What is your hobby? _____

What gift cards do you use to purchase clothing, music, books, audio books, etc.?

___ ABC

___ iTunes

___ WalMart

___ Amazon

___ Redbox

___ Barnes & Noble

___ LifeWay

___ _____

___ _____

✓ Part II: IDEAS/PLANS/EXECUTION

A. IDEAS FOR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Words of Affirmation & Appreciation

The first six months of a pastor's ministry, often described as the "Honeymoon Stage", after this stage pastors hear more complaints than anything else. In October, you can balance out what your pastor(s) hears! Take time to write down words of positive affirmation and appreciation. Mention sermons you recall, an example set you won't forget, and the benefits you have received as a result of his or her ministry.

Acts of Service

Church members come from many varied backgrounds and often possess many different skills and abilities. Based on those skills, your church could offer to baby sit, help mow their lawn or rake leaves, paint a room in their house, change the oil in their car, help with spring cleaning, sew new curtains for the room of their choice, upgrade or repair their computer, or cater a meal, etc.

Gifts

It is appropriate for churchgoers to give the pastor(s) and their families gifts to demonstrate love and appreciation. Here is a list to help to inspire your creativity:

1. Gift Cards – almost every business offers gift cards, so the options abound with this idea.

A gift card can provide practical help buying groceries, filling up the gas tank, or paying a bill that month (if you give a general Visa card). Gift cards can also provide opportunities for wanted books, music (store or iTunes), car washes, massages, or the popular option of eating out!

2. Subscriptions – to magazines like Christianity Today, Answers in Genesis, World Magazine, etc. Rev Magazine (Rev.org) and Outreach Magazine.Com (Outreach.Com) A Bi-monthly magazine exclusively for pastors and church leaders can provide an added tool for insight and help with the pastor's ministry or a subscription to his/her favorite magazine.

(Please Do NOT give your pastor a bible unless s/he asks for one; she/he likely already has a whole bookcase full of bibles and songbooks).

3. Tickets - Give tickets to activities especially enjoyed by your pastor(s) and their families, such as sporting events, the symphony, a home show or

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gardening show, an antique auction or antique car show, or to a local theme park like Disney World, depending on the desire of the pastor etc. Give a date night and include baby-sitting, a week-end getaway, fully paid or a spa day or free massage.

4. Electronics – pastors and their families also enjoy technology, but many not are able to afford it regularly. Providing an iPad, iPhone, Tablet, or laptop computer may bless your pastor more than you would realize. To include the entire family, you might consider a giving a Wii Game Console that promotes family interaction and even exercise.

5. Memberships – to a local gym can help the pastor(s) work out some stress and maintain physical fitness. A membership to an inspirational site like SermonCentral.com or SermonSpice.com can help inspire your pastor(s) to greater heights in preaching.

B. IDEAS FOR CHURCHES AS A GROUP

1. Pizza, Punch and Pastoral Props

If you want to do a collective event with your church, but you want to make it informal, then a Pizza, Pop and Pastoral Props event is a great option! Gather lots of people, pizza, and punch and have an informal time of sharing and caring directed to your pastor(s) and their families. After everyone grabs some pizza and punch encourage them to give the pastor(s) some props (credit and respect due) for the character, word, and benefits that positively affect others for the Lord.

2. Flash Mob the Pastor (A *flash mob* is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a place, perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time, then disperse ...)

Before Clergy Appreciation Sabbath or Week event, prepare some short statements of appreciation, and then select some willing people to shout them out during the service the day of the event. Plan creative times for these selected members to shout out, "We love you pastor!" like during the welcome. Or when the members rise to collect the offering, have them all walk onto the platform and give the pastor a great, big, collective hug. The youth group could all wear T-shirts that say, "Our pastor is awesome" and at the beginning of the sermon they could all stand together and shout it out!

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3. Put It In Writing

Provide blank “Thank You” cards for church members the week before. Hand them out as they exit the service, or distribute them in small groups, etc. with a note asking them to write some words of appreciation to the pastor(s) and bring it back next Sabbath. They could be collected as they come into the service and presented later, or they could all be brought forward and placed on the pulpit as a public demonstration of appreciation.

4. Plaster Your Pastor

Find a centrally located wall in the church and plaster pictures and information about your pastor(s) and their families all over it. Include important events that have taken place in the life of the church as a result of their ministry. Also plaster some expressions of gratitude on the wall, with words of encouragement to keep serving the Lord and making a positive difference. If your church really wants to go big, then rent a billboard in the community and plaster your appreciation for your pastor(s) for everyone to see!

5. Wear Your Appreciation

Make a visible statement to your pastor(s) by ordering the specially designed T-shirts for this special Sabbath and wear them to the service for the event. Your appreciation will be inescapable to your pastor and to everyone else. Throughout the entirety of the service, your pastor(s) will see your appreciation and feel blessed!

6. Call in a Guest Speaker

Give your pastor(s) a Sabbath off from speaking and invite a guest speaker who will affirm the office of pastor and honor your pastor(s) and their families for serving.

7. Plaster your Pastor #2

The week prior to the event, have all the children and youth in the church or school make personal works of art showing the pastor in action, Scriptures affirming the office of pastor, or expressing love and appreciation toward the pastoral family....then, wallpaper the pastor’s office with the artwork!

8. Flood Your Pastor(s) With a Tidal Wave of Text Messages

The day of the event, could be during the Appreciation Week, and have

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members with cell phones send text messages of love and appreciation to the Pastor (s). If your church is under 150, members could send a few through the day. If your church is larger, one text from each family should be more than sufficient. **(Someone should check first to ensure the pastor can receive unlimited text messages without extra charges, or else this expression of love could literally cost the pastor!)**

9. Have a “Pastor’s Choice” Worship Service

Pastors are always trying to provide services with worship elements the people enjoy. Pastor’s appreciation Sabbath, why not let the pastor have his preferences? Have a public declaration the Sabbath before the event thanking your pastor(s) for making the effort to assist others in worship, and let them know that on Clergy Appreciation Sabbath, the order of service, the Scripture reading, and all the music will be at the pastor’s full preferential discretion.

10. Break Out the Greenbacks

The Scriptures tell us that those who serve well as pastors, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching the Word of God, deserve double honor (1Timothy 5:17). In the very next verse, the Apostle Paul relates this double honor to wages needed. Too often pastors are not appreciated financially and bless your pastor(s) and families with a financial gift. Pass the offering plate or give out envelopes to be filled and returned for your event and put on a gift tree or out together in a large card or basket and presented to the pastor.

11. Be a Pastor Hugging Tree Planter

There is a place for taking care of God’s planet, and planting trees is one way that can be accomplished. However, planting a tree in honor of your pastor(s) legacy of growth can also be a visible demonstration of appreciation. During Pastor Appreciation Week, plant a tree to honor the leadership legacy your pastor(s) is building.

12. Hang Your Pastor

Have a special plaque made for your pastor(s), emphasizing character, accomplishments, and the positive nature of their ministry. Be sure to have the pastor’s name highlighted, and then present the plaque to the pastor during the Pastor’s Appreciation Service. Afterwards, hang your pastor on the wall, via the plaque.

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13. Bring in the Dignitaries

Invite local dignitaries to participate in your church's Pastor's Appreciation Event, and ask them to provide a word of testimony about your church's influence in the community and express gratitude to your pastor(s). If they cannot attend, ask them to write a note that could be read to the pastor and congregation during the event. Consider doing the same with denominational or associational leaders connected to your church. Your invitation to these leaders will esteem your pastor to them, and in turn, they will esteem your pastor.

14. Set Up a Giving Tree

One creative way to make a visible and tangible expression of appreciation is to set up a giving tree that has no leaves to begin with. Ask church members to write their intended gift along with their name and place these coming gifts on the tree as leaves. Some examples of gifts members could give are listed in the 'Ideas for Individuals' area above. As members arrive for the special event, they would place their gifts on the tree. The tree could be a leafless branch cut from a tree and spray painted or a drawing on a large piece of cardboard, wood or foam board or borrow a silk tree from a Sabbath School dept and change the leaves to a fruit etc.

15. Roll Out the Royal Treatment

Plan a special banquet and make your pastor(s) and their families the guests of honor. Put a program in place with testimonies from church leaders and laypersons that will publicly thank the pastor(s) for their ministry using specific examples of how they have been blessed. Invite a musical group to put on a concert during the banquet. Of course, having a great meal will enhance the event for everyone!.

16. Send Your Pastor Away

Provide your pastor(s) and their families a trip away for some rest and renewal. There are some wonderful places which could provide needed downtime and focused spiritual renewal for pastoral families.

C. PUT YOUR IDEA IN ACTION

SEVEN STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

Step One

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Determine to have the event. Nothing will happen without first committing to have an event that will engage the entire church in honoring the pastor(s) and their families.

Step Two

Gather some dedicated help. Designate a leader. Every successful church-wide event takes a group of dedicated people to make it happen. Gather a variety of people, from various groups within the church, with differing ages and abilities for the greatest success. Include at least one staff member, or highly involved church member, so that everyone is on the same page throughout the process through the event.

Step Three

Get Organized. Now that you've gathered dedicated people to help, get them to meet so responsibilities can be assigned and shared. At this meeting, be sure to put in writing the overarching purpose of the event, and some specific details of what you want to happen. Then, set some follow up dates for meetings to ensure progress is being made toward the intended goal.

Step Four

Get Busy. Time flies, especially when a deadline is approaching. The sooner things are set in motion the better. Encourage your dedicated group to enlist the help of other congregants to lighten the load of responsibility, and to encourage maximum participation.

Step Five

Communicate, communicate, communicate! You must tell everyone you can (except the pastor(s) what is planned and how he or she can participate. Then tell them again...and again...and again...and after you think everyone knows what's happening, tell them again. When the majority of people start telling you they already know, it is then you will know you've begun to communicate. Then, communicate some more.

Step Six

Follow through on assignments. Someone once wisely said, "*People do not do what you expect; they do what you inspect.*" Everyone needs a little loving inspection; ask about progress being made and remind them

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of deadlines. If they cannot accomplish the task necessary, seek some additional dedicated help.

Step Seven

Follow up with gratitude. Make sure that each person who helped plan, promote, decorate, serve, lead, speak, entertain, present, entertain, etc. is thanked. They need to know their contribution was significant and recognized; especially if you hope to have their participation again next year!

Other ways to honor your pastor:

Submit to local press an article on how you appreciate your pastor.
Help arrange for/her a sabbatical (1-12 month) for personal or professional pursuits
A certificate and/or plaque honoring their years of service
A building/ room named after the pastor (e.g. Miller chapel, Jackson Hall, Smith Library)
Love offering

Wordage Ideas for Homemade Appreciation Cards

*A life spent in loving service to the Lord brings many hearts closer to Him and smiles to His face. Thank you for all you do, the ways you serve, your dedication to the Lord, and most of all, for who you are— you are appreciated so much.

*Your heart for the Lord and love for others are appreciated so much.

*If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. I John 4:12 KJV

*Praying God will continue to bless you as you faithfully serve Him.

*Your willingness to use the gifts God has given you to serve is a wonderful blessing.

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. I Peter 4:10 NIV

*Your ministry is a blessing in so many ways. Your care for people and your faith in God are wonderful reminders of what is really important in life

*Well done, good and faithful servant! Matthew 25:21 NIV

*I will bless you...and you will be a blessing. Genesis 12:2 NIV

✓ PART III: Articles

1. Dave Gemmell from NAD Ministerial on 10 Things Your Pastor Needs.
<http://www.nadministerial.org/article/670/for-nad-pastors/nad-ministerial-articles/10-things-pastors-wish-their-congregations-would-do>
2. Roger Hernandez from SU Ministerial on Pastors are People Too.
<http://www.slideshare.net/RogerHernandez6/article-for-tidings-sept-on-pastors>

✓ Another Bonus

Small Church. Big Dreams: Pastoring a small church effectively.

Small Church. Big Dreams.

When I showed up to the small country church on my first Sabbath, they had 6 people in attendance. The church was composed of one family (that seemed to make all decisions), one visitor, another member that would come and go depending on the harvest and the Sabbath school director that would do the welcome, sit down, do the mission story, sit down, do the special music, sit down. I don't know if she wanted to give the illusion that more people were present, but it did not work!

In America, bigger seems to equate better, especially when it deals with churches. We hear about large churches in other parts of our state with hundreds (even thousands) flocking to experience the worship service, where pathfinders are counted by the dozens and there are Sabbath School classes (in plural, as in more than one). The reality, however, is different for many congregations. Many of our churches are small with less than 75 in attendance. That poses some real challenges and opportunities. If you belong to a small church, here are 10 questions to keep in mind as you are faithful to the call to evangelize the community that surrounds you.

1. Who are we? You are not a large church. Don't try to be one! Pick one thing, and do it with excellence. Be known in the community for that one thing. Promote it. Talk about it. Encourage it. Take pride in it.
2. Is our focus health or growth? Healthy organisms grow. Many times a church won't grow not because it can't, but because it won't. Internal strife and general unhealthiness is keeping us stuck in neutral. People in the community are already messed up, they don't need any extra drama in their life. When a person joins a dysfunctional church and see all the unhealthiness they can become inoculated for life against Christianity. Get healthy. You will grow.
3. How do we treat guests? One extreme is to smother guests. They are few and far between, so when they do show up people want them to join immediately and smother them with information (sometimes some extreme information like the evils of milk). Please don't. Jesus didn't die so you would stop eating cheese. There sure are more primary things we could start the conversation with newcomers. Welcome them. Love on them. The other extreme is to see guests as intrusions. We may not verbalize this, but our lack of attention to them, sends a strong message: "Thanks for coming, but we are good here."

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4. Are we doing what we do with excellence? Small doesn't need to equal mediocre. Excellence honors God and inspires people. Sometimes the temptation when part of a small church with few helping hands is to give less than the best and let the circumstances determine the effort. Think to yourself: If God would bring us 50 guests today, what would they experience when they show up?

5. How is your attitude? A consistent problem I run into are small churches that constantly complain about the pastor, the conference forgetting they exist, the surrounding area that is experiencing "young flight" and a host of others maladies. If you are not careful, that attitude can become visible, permanent and act as repellent to the people you are trying to attract. Keep a smile on your face. Life isn't fair. God rewards faithfulness, not sour grapes. Think about it: who would want to stay in a church that is always talking about how bad things are?

6. What is wrong with being small? Nothing! Small doesn't equal bad. Some of the best restaurants I have ever eaten at were holes in the wall. There are people out there that are specifically looking for a small church. They believe big churches are impersonal and they want to make a bigger difference. There are things a small church can offer than a big church never could, and vice-versa. That's ok. We need churches of all sizes. If you are a small church, be the best small church you can be.

7. How is your faith, hope and love? If the church is the key instrument that God uses to share the good news with the world then we must never lose three things: faith in the God who founded it, hope in its success and love for the community it serves. Meet every week with expectation that regardless of the past God is about to do a new work. Prepare to receive the blessing that although delayed, is not denied.

8. How are your leaders? Leadership makes the difference. One word of caution. Since in a small church, leaders are at a premium, the temptation for the existing ones is to take on too many responsibilities. That can either burn you out, or can send the message to new potential leaders that they are not needed. Continually advertise the availability of leadership positions and look at newcomers as contributors not threats.

9. Who is your church for? If your church is for the frozen chosen, for the founding members, for the people that already know the good news, then let's put up with clutter, drafty windows, smelly bathrooms and a lifeless worship service. But if church is for people that are far from God, a keen interest should be taken so the environment sends the message: We care

✓ small Church. Big Dreams.

about our church because we care about the lost people God will bring to it. A building that doesn't smell is a great start. Throw away the ingathering materials, it's not coming back. Paint it. Fix it. Make it look good. It's all for them.

10. When are you doing evangelism? People in your community need Jesus. Don't give up on evangelism. Expand it, don't eliminate it. Do it in many forms, many ways. I once had a church that had 25 people. We did a crusade. Baptized 0. Did another one. Baptized 0 again. Did another. Baptized 2. That church has now become a company, and has regular baptisms. Don't give up.

The church I mentioned in the beginning of the article grew to around 50 with an emphasis on sustained intercessory prayer, outreach and small groups, and 2 yearly reaping crusades. If God can do that in a one traffic light town in the middle of apple orchards with six people, he can surely bless you where you are. Thanks for your service to God and faithfulness to His work. Thanks for keeping the light on. Thanks for keeping hope, faith and love alive in your small church.

Want this article in a power point presentation to present to your church? Any ideas that have worked for you? Questions on how to expand God's kingdom in your small church? Write to me at rhernandez@southernunion.com

✓ One More Bonus Section

(how many of these are there anyway?)

When your mission gets in the way of your marriage

For the first ten years of my ministry, I was a terrific pastor and a terrible husband. I neglected my wife. I passed on the responsibility of raising my kids to baby sitters. I led a church well and it grew at a rate of one hundred people per year, yet I was not present as a leader in my own home. This was my story. Too bad is repeated constantly. My “mission” got in the way of my marriage. It can happen to you too.

I remember a rainy Friday night, around 10pm, when my daughter was just five years old. My wife had left to take some teens home after a small group that took place in my house. A church elder was scheduled to pick me up and take me to a church retreat. When he arrived, my wife was not home yet. He asked me to go, because people were waiting for me. I was *needed* at the camp. So, I had a decision to make. I could wait for my wife to get home or leave my daughter by herself for a short while. I chose wrong. I gave Vanessa her blankie, put on a VCR tape of Veggie-Tales, kissed her and left. Shortly after, a thunderstorm stuck. Trees moving, wind howling, sideways rain hitting the windows. Lighting. Thunder. My wife was stuck in a road with a fallen tree in front of her for an hour. My daughter was at home alone. To complicate matters, the lights went out. Instead of being held by her father, and told everything would be ok, she was alone in a big, empty, scary house. Meanwhile, her father was fulfilling his mission.

My daughter has never forgotten. Sometimes when she asks me for money to go to the mall, and I say that I don't have any, she simply says: “Dad, remember when I was five years old...” Works every time.

Ministry is hard enough, with the added stress of issues at home. Many leaders and pastors have real trouble in their families that gets ignored, relegated or forgotten. Private problems almost always come back to affect public performance, usually in the worst possible moment. Secret monsters damage public ministry. Here are three practical solutions that have helped me, just some suggestions that could also benefit you:

1. Don't force.

One of the mistakes I made was using my family to achieve personal ministry goals. It was more about me, than them. Now, I believe in involving the family in ministry, according to **their** gifts. My wife doesn't play the piano. My son doesn't preach. My daughter does. I had to learn to be encouraging

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without being demanding. Plug in your family according to their gifts, not your personal hobby horse. Respect the “no’s”. If you have more than one church, keep your family in the best possible church.

Stop hauling your family like nomads from church to church, forcing them to be the only pathfinders, just so you can say you have a club. Let them develop relationships. People will criticize you for that and accuse you of preferring one church over another. Let them. Ask your family where they feel the most comfortable. Leave them there. Your job is not to look good, but to get your family into heaven.

2. Don't forget.

My family **IS** my ministry. That doesn't mean I become lazy, or forget that I also have a job. But in the rare case that I have to choose, I chose my family. I have missed meetings to go see my daughter or son play, (even though the teams they were on were terrible). Next year, my kids will go to boarding school. My wife and I will drive the 1.5 hours to Calhoun, GA to see them play. They are with us for a short time. So we **will** make the sacrifice. I have found that if you chose the important, God takes care of the urgent. Important fact: the moment I decided to be a real father and husband, my church grew more. Interesting...

One particular story is appropriate to share here. My daughter was playing a two day basketball tournament, on a Sunday and Monday. Since their teams almost never win, I scheduled a meeting for Monday at 7pm in a church. Problem was, they started to win. They won on Sunday. They won on Monday morning, and Monday at noon. Now they were scheduled to play for the championship at 4pm. I had a dilemma. If I stayed for that game I would be late for my meeting. I was an hour from my house, where I needed to change, shave and shower, then drive another hour to the church in rush hour traffic. When my daughter asked me at noon, whether I would stay I said yes, but the internal struggle begun. So, I ran the questions of whether I should stay or go through the filter I have become accustomed to using:

Is this important or urgent?

Is this good or best?

Is this permanent or temporary?

I stayed. The deciding factor was the question I asked myself: in 20 years, will my daughter remember her dad attending her game or will I feel regret for leaving her, again, and attending a meeting I don't even remember? I stayed. They won. I drove. I showered. I changed. I broke the speed limit law.

✓ When your mission gets in the way of your marriage

I arrived with 15 minutes to spare. Lesson learned.

My wife told me about a month ago: "Honey, we are always doing these family weekend retreats, and preaching messages about families, why don't we go to a retreat, not to preach, but to learn and grow". Great idea. I booked a weekend in a Family Life Weekend to Remember. No kids. No responsibilities. No sermon prep. Nothing to fix, present, or prepare for. Just 72 hours of marriage enrichment. Pastor, below is the link. It's free! Church leader, it's not free for you, but still affordable. They do these all over the country. Take some time for you.

Don't forget what is really important. After the kids have gone, and after the church work has ended, you will still have your spouse. Work on your marriage first. <http://www.familylife.com/weekend>

3. Don't fake:

The sad, recent news of two well-known Adventist figures had me thinking, reflecting and grieving.

First, a leader of a youth ministry has a well-publicized moral fall. A strong voice in the conservative wing of the church, his decisions send ripples far and wide. The news of the fall, reveal his struggle with something I'd like to call "Secret Monsters".

Then, we get news of the self-inflicted death of a former pastor/evangelist. I have never met him, but good friends of mine have, and had him in their churches when he did evangelism, at which he was very good. He left official Adventist ministry for a new approach. He also was dealing with secret monsters, in his case a mental health issue that compounded the situation. Having only met them through media and common friends, I reflected on my own ministry, and my willingness to be open about my areas of struggle. I end this article with three final thoughts:

1. We grieve for all affected by these tragedies. Regardless of your particular views on church governance, approach to ministry, stance on women's ordination and music, we never rejoice with the fall of a leader. We grieve and we take time to take stock of our own lives, for we dare not spend one minute pointing fingers that could be spent on own knees.
2. As leaders, anything we don't face, trace and erase, with God's grace, can come back to haunt us. All of us carry baggage, have weaknesses, face hurts, trials and may even have health issues that we would rather not think about. Suppressing and not addressing those Secret Monsters, can be downright deadly.

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3. It seemed to me, (this can be my own perception, and I could be wrong) that the emphasis of our ministry and life can reflect our unaddressed weakness. I remember several marriage counselors/speakers that had mayor issues in that area, one particular couple that was fighting back stage before the husband spoke about marriage to the congregation!

I have to analyze my ministry and my life and ask myself:

What are the mayor themes of my preaching?

What topics seem to pop up over and over in my interactions with people?

I'm I projecting a personal deficiency upon others by overemphasizing an area?

Tragedies like these are avoidable. But it's up to me to make the changes, seek the help, admit my imperfections, live based on reality and not an image. I have to address the Secret Monsters, before they destroy me. I have to make a decision, **to choose being healthy rather than admired.**

I need to be real with myself, God, other. I need to be healthy in my ministry and marriage. It's my hope you can too.

Look for Volume 2 of the series Min-IS-Try! coming soon...

For prayer requests, recommendations for topics, and resources, please contact me @: rhernandez@southernunion.com

We have several resources available.