

# **The World is My Parish**

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**(Milo Update)**

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# THE WORLD IS MY PARISH

*“All the World is My Parish”*

With these words<sup>1</sup> the great reformer, John Wesley, challenged his audience to consider a ministerial

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<sup>1</sup> “I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that His blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I, therefore, to be faithful in fulfilling the work He hath given me to do. His servant I am, and, as such, am employed according to the plain direction of His Word, ‘As I have opportunity, doing good unto all men’; and His providence clearly concurs with his Word; which has disengaged me from all things else, that I might singly attend on this very thing, ‘and go about doing good.’”  
*The Journal of John Wesley*, Ch. 3

model largely misunderstood in his day and perhaps equally misunderstood in our day as well. Wesley invited his listeners to conceptualize ministerial practice as exceeding and surpassing typical parish boundaries. Wesley's model broadened personal and local ministry to include more than one's immediate social context. It aimed at a much larger target, the great unconverted world itself.

What Wesley precisely meant by this statement could be diversely debated. He writes it in his journal in response to an associate who had charged that because Wesley did not have an assigned parish or district of his own, he had no direct permission to exhort and teach other fellow Christians. Especially, he was told, he had no authority to teach those religious adherents who belonged to other denominations or parishes. Though a religious practitioner, Wesley was faulted for religiously instructing those who sat under the authority of other clerics, or those who lived outside his own particular rural jurisdiction.

Regardless, the great Reformer John Wesley, saw his calling from God in a much broader light than did the typical cleric of his day. Though a lifetime member of the Anglican faith he saw all of Christendom as in dire need of revival and reformation. He saw also the dark world beyond that should be reached for Christ. His intention was to

help create religious change and spiritual reformation in his own church fellowship, of course, yet his sight saw far beyond this to all Christendom and to all the world.

This broad evangelistic goal of Wesley's got him into considerable trouble with his own denomination and others as well. Wesley became increasingly criticized for two principle results stemming from his tireless ministerial efforts. One was the practice of ordaining lay pastors to extend the scope of his labors, and the other was his perceived overstepping of parish boundaries in his quest to reach the masses.

Whatever Wesley meant in his famous statement and reply, all can be sure of one thing. Every Christian---pastor, parishioner, or otherwise, is divinely called to reach out and bless his world, both *locally* and *universally*. On this aim, most Christians will basically agree. It is the general aim of "gospel commission" briefly summarized in a nutshell.

The *entire* world is indeed the Christian's mission field. In a direct sense, Jesus himself, was both the author of and the living demonstration of this fundamental concept. While he ministered to many in solo fashion, to persons such as Nicodemus, his stated goal was always much broader than this. He consistently ministered to the multitude as well. The

parish target that Jesus recognized was not exclusively Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida, or even Palestine. It was the entire world.

This same enlarged concept was specifically addressed even to the one person audience, Nicodemus, in the most famous of Bible passages:

“For God so loved the WORLD, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”  
John 3:16. (cf. also to verse 17ff.). (KJV, emphasis supplied)

While it is commendable and right to believe one's mission field can be found in one's immediate surroundings, it is wrong to mentally and practically limit one's influence or spiritual responsibility to this tiny circle only. The entire world awaits the gospel message, not just the neighbor next door. It may start there, but it should eventually reach beyond.

John Wesley himself modeled a form of ministry that was counter-culture to the church forms of his own day. The church of his day was chiefly the state Church of England, a refined system of Anglicanism, which along with the existing Roman Catholic system, was universally inbred into Britain and respectively into the Holy Roman Empire of European civilization.

These established religious systems were largely built upon institutional values, and were comprised of churches and cathedrals, established orders of priests and ministers, elaborate organizations and various other church structures. All of these were linked with vast educational systems and extensive political realms, all under the general control of but a few chief dignitaries. For centuries every village and district had its own appointed archbishops, bishops, and priests to supervise their respective charges.

But Wesley like many of the reformers ended up, at least, working largely outside of the traditional church structures of his day. Wesley's early life was largely molded among the "reformist minorities" that arose during his own lifetime. In the end, Wesley is thought to have preached something like 40,000 sermons in his ministry, most of which were in the open air. He used Jesus' typical method to reach the masses. Wesley traveled thousands of miles upon horseback from place to place, sometimes preaching three or four times a day.

Wesley's personal home life was often in shambles, and was not helped by the fact that his ministry was largely mobile. Nonetheless, Wesley's ambitious itinerant ministry was carried out to such an extent that he (and others such as Whitefield) moved much

of England, and even Europe, into the sweeping spiritual reforms noted of that era. Wesley's reforms almost single-handedly led the way for the Great Awakening that gripped Europe and America in the early 1800's and culminated in the Adventist expectancy of Christ's coming.

Certain reformers and influential preachers such as Whitefield and Wesley refused to settle down into "local church districts." While they tried to at times, they were driven like Jabez of old, to "enlarge their borders," and view the totality of their ministries as surpassing their local, home congregations.

Jesus, himself the living, ultimate model of spiritual reform, likewise was often encouraged to stay in one place. The Gospels report that the people of certain places actually "implored" Jesus to stay with them and continue his life-giving ministry of healing and teaching (Luke 4:43). And who wouldn't do the same today? But to these Jesus consistently replied, "I have other towns to which I must preach and minister."

Jesus' ministry was clearly itinerant. Jesus "pastored" at Capernaum----but he refused to become "the pastor" of Capernaum. This, of course, was for a very good and obvious reason. As Savior of the World he had a large audience to reach.

This distinctive posture is nonetheless very significant. The question must be asked, does not *every* modern pastor, as well as each believer, have the same total audience he or she is ultimately aiming to reach? Are not Jesus' methods and his example to be replicated in current practice among ministers today?

A key question of interest then is: "What is the ideal role of the pastorate today---or what is the biblical role of typical minister today?" "What should his (or her) relationship to his/her local congregation look like?" How is ministerial labor to be carried out in this modern era? More particularly, as a pastoral participant in my own sub-culture, I, the author of this small treatise, would ask, "What is a Seventh-day Adventist minister supposed to be doing today?"

H.M.S. Richards, Sr., the respected Adventist preacher and writer of yesteryear, is often quoted as saying something like this: "The work will never be finished until all the pastors are put in prison!" The statement is an interesting one, and of course, has the typical Adventist "eschatological," "into all the world" overtones!

In another presentation this author personally remembers Richards adjuring a fresh group of newly-ordained ministers to please not "peter out

into conference presidents!” His aim was not at all to attack church administration, for the venue of administration is needed. His purpose was to warn against pure, precious “hands-on” ministry being ultimately lost, as it sometimes is, to relatively ineffective, inner focused, “figure-head,” administration.

What Richards ultimately meant by these statements is again debatable, but the statements certainly do “smack” of the idea that the laity of the church are somehow enjoined to “stand up” and do their prescribed part in giving the last day message. It is inferred also that the correct “inter-position” of the clergy is significantly relative to this whole endeavor.

Indeed, if it lies with the clergy to do “the work” alone, it will never succeed. Sometimes the clergy can even get “in the way.” While pastors and ministers may be essentially important to the function, health, and outreach of the church, they are, perhaps, not to be depended on to exclusively “finish the work.” It must rest upon the laity of the church, who are mentally and spiritually endowed with the concepts of “every believer a minister,” and with the missional mantra of the “priesthood of all believers,” for the fulfillment of the gospel commission to be ultimately successful.

This does not in anyway denigrate the role of pastors and administrators, or teach in any way that they are not needed. In their correct role they are perhaps needed more than ever. An ordained clergy is needed to (1) unify the organization of the church so that the purpose and message of the church is homogeneously and successfully *proclaimed*. The clergy is also needed to (2) guard the *purity* of the faith and to establish gospel order. In addition the clergy is needed in (3) teaching, training, and *equipping* the saints for the work of ministry. Pastoral ministry then is a necessary and superbly high and holy calling, indeed.

But practically speaking it does not appear that Adventist churches in North America, at least, are highly successful in the present configuration. While “the work” has grown exponentially in previous eras, it has not reached the same ideals in recent decades in America. In foreign countries, the case is often different. But in recent years some American churches are---instead of growing and prospering---declining and closing. There is a dearth of youth and young adults, and lasting evangelistic accessions are statistically rare.

Many attempts have been made to correct this trend, and almost none of them are without at least some legitimate merit. But as a whole they have not worked.

The reasons for the under achievements of the church body are complicated and varied. Russell Burrill in his book, *Revolution in the Church*, addresses the need for laity and clergy to come together and become working missional bases in their communities. But he really recommends nothing different than has been tried by pastors for years. The *Church Growth* movement, beginning two or three decades ago has contributed a lot to the knowledge as to why certain churches are successful. But in the end little has changed in the ways Adventist churches actually operate. *Lay Bible Ministry* and *Personal Evangelistic Training* have been carried on to an elaborate extent. Unfortunately, many church members have walls covered with graduation certificates from various soul-winning seminars, yet still have won no proselytes to the faith. While they are taught that *every believer is a minister*, it often doesn't practically work out that way. Church committees yearly nominate page after page of church officers to head their respective ministries, yet years go by without fervent revival, or even a baptism or accession as a result.

The search goes on as to why the Adventist church in North America is not more successful. The church does have many faithful, hard-working pastors. This we believe to be a fact. We also know

that the church has many dedicated and faithful laymen. While this small treatise will not pretend to try answer all of why this is, it does come apparent that **some** of the answer may lie within the working relationship found *between* pastors and laity, and the typical roles assumed by each.

To this issue of the role of pastors, and the laity (within Adventist circles), this small treatise is dedicated. Admittedly, some of the concepts expressed or suggestions made will be considered radical by some. But radical is good, if it can contribute to beneficial change. This document is not outward criticism---- but rather self-criticism (I am a working, struggling pastor myself) aimed toward a positive learning curve. The onward march of the church is at stake here, and the interest of God's cause is the motive behind the questions asked in this modest document. It is not our call or purpose to lay blame on anyone. May God's glorious church in *whatever form* or forms it finds itself, prosper, mature, and grow until the Lord does come! That is our sincere and fervent desire.



## THE “AXE” OF THE APOSTLES

The defined role of the ordained ministry today, this author sincerely believes, ought to be a central part of current church discussions. This important topic should be a subject investigated by church leaders and conference officials *now*, more than ever. It may be time to hear less about lay evangelism, small groups, worship styles, and doctrinal challenges, and hopefully more about this integral and necessary subject. Such an endeavor could aid and apply correction to these other important issues and bring extended blessings to God’s church.

Again, the reason these subjects should be considered is not here presented as an opportunity for negative criticism and fault-finding of our present church administration. Most conferences have excellent, well-trained administrators and pastors. The motives of church leaders and workers

are for certain not called into question. Workers, educators, pastors, and conference officials are for the most part all doing the best that they can, with the modalities and forms that seem to be functional today.

As well, there is some admissable amount of success apparent in the systems operative today. This should be recognized. This general success comes because of God's particular blessing to his modern church, because of the lessons of general experience in the past, and because of the providential and prophetic under-girding of our overall church system. At its worst, the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization is still one of the most secure, successful, and enviable church governments in all of Christendom.

The reason for this small treatise is then to aim at optimizing our current system, and not at all to denigrate it in its current manifestation. Yet the honest in heart should be willing to admit that there are some serious problems in the area of gospel success. Further, there are many within church ranks who believe totally in the mission and calling of God's last day church, yet who wish for change and that it be carried out in God's prescribed way. Therefore, it is in the interest of the overall success of the church that these subjects are here addressed. It is in the interest of making the "work" more

successful, that some believe and I with them, that ministerial roles together with those of the laity should in some respects be carefully re-evaluated and reformed.

## **The New Testament Church Structure— The Apostolic Paradigm**

The first question that might be asked is: “What made the New Testament church so successful?” “What lessons were learned by the early church that gave the Gospel such impetus as it spread across the Mediterranean world?” What “acts” made the apostles so effective? What do we find in God’s own Word?

Of interest is the fact that one of the first barriers encountered by the early church was the improper division of administrative responsibilities, and the compromised situation it created in the proclamation of the message. One barely gets into the book of Acts and the reader encounters circumstances of “compromised ministry.”

*Acts*, chapter 6 and 7, are the foundational church administration chapters of the Bible, at least when it comes to considering the subject at hand. In these passages we read where the “Greek” widows of the newly formed church were somehow neglected

when it came to their portion of sustenance and support. The burden of this subsequent conflict fell upon the chief of the apostles to correct and administrate. Time and energy were invested in handling the matter properly. Sidetracked, even in this good and necessary endeavor, they found that they were somehow no longer awarded the necessary time for prayer, and for the proclamation of the Word. The church was forced through the Spirit's intervention to address this inequity.

It was finally determined that men, subsequently called "deacons," were to be thus appointed to handle these administrative matters. The apostles and ministers were then ostensibly free to no longer "serve tables," at least exclusively, and directly return to their work of preaching, teaching, and healing.

It is in this context that we find permission to discuss the word "administration" itself. The term "administration" is made up of two words: "add," and "ministry." It addresses those matters which are an *addition* to ministry in the purest sense. It is not that they are not ministry matters at all, but that they are typically more of a secular or business nature.

The apostles, to be successful, determined that they must "axe," or separate themselves from some of the business concerns of church administration and

focus their work on the “acts” of prayer and the ministry of the word. When this was done it is immediately apparent that it was phenomenally successful. Even the book of *Acts* specifically reports that the church prospered and grew from this point forward. History testifies to the success of this wise plan of dividing up church responsibilities and assigning them according to the spiritual gifts resident in church leaders, administrative leaders, and especially from within the laity itself.

## **Old Testament Administration**

The “discovery” made by the early church was really nothing new. It seemed new, because the church they had always known, established Judaism, had by that time become an institutional, and even, at times, abusive machine. The Temple system was organized and administrated right down to the last mite. There were layers of political and administrative matters carefully guarded by the chief priests and ministers. The Temple was complete with even police, political assistants, lawyers, and cashiers.

Jesus objection at the cleansing of the Temple was not exclusively that general reverence had been lost at the Temple/Church. His major objection seems to have been that the entire system allowed too much

open interplay between religion and business. Jesus wanted the spiritual pursuits of offering, service, and prayer to be quietly and effectively separated from the “noisy” administration of self-interested churchmen.

It was Moses who first sought to administrate publicly on both spiritual matters and business matters. It was but a matter of weeks following the Exodus that he was fast approaching “burnout,” if not there already. His father-in-law, himself a leader and priest, through God's direction counseled Moses to adopt an administrative plan that referred mundane matters to levels below himself. There were rulers of thousands, hundreds, and tens. Only the most difficult matters were to reach Moses---he being a Supreme Court, as it were. A look at the subsequent accounts demonstrates that this plan largely succeeded. After this time Moses seems to be involved in larger and more directly sacred issues, issues regarding the priesthood, assignments made relative to the sanctuary complex, and trips to the mountain to pray.

It was not as a matter of pure hierarchical superiority that Moses was eventually freed of the smaller administrative matters. Moses was not “above” these matters. They were legitimate needs that needed attendance. Moses was a humble man, and Moses had not considered it “below” his station to

administrate them previously. Jesus later showed by example that leaders must be humble and willing to serve the least of their brethren. But these matters were simply too much for one man to handle. Moses' *spirit* was indeed “willing,” but “his flesh was weak.”

It then was not then a matter of superiority at all. It was a matter of *function*. A spiritual leader needs to remain spiritual. He must be protected from administrative overload so that he can pray, lead, and listen to God's voice. If he becomes everyone's king and judge, and becomes occupied with mundane or even sometimes difficult business matters, his ministry will inevitably be compromised, sidetracked, and perhaps even destroyed.

It is the distinct opinion of this author that the typical, modern Seventh-day Adventist minister, like Moses, is laden with far too much *administrivia* to effectively give optimal spiritual leadership to his congregation. It may not be going too far to say that as much as 80-90% of a pastor's docket is of such a nature, that when analyzed biblically, the pastor should not be doing it at all. Yet traditionally the pastor does these tasks, for the current expectations and demands of his congregation and superiors requires that he do them. To not do them could be detrimental for the pastor, either at the cost of his

employment or tenure, or at the very least, risk of losing his local popularity.

This never came any clearer to me than in one of my first districts where I, this author, was an associate pastor. As the elders and ministers gathered behind the platform for prayer before the service, our progress onto the platform (the *Introit* was playing) was impeded by a Mrs. L, who informed all of us, yet directed her remarks particularly to my senior pastor, that the ladies' room was out of tissue. Here was a real emergency! "What were we (the pastors, the possessors of *every* spiritual gift!) going to do about it?!" Quickly my senior pastor gave her his own master key from his pocket, reminded her where the tissue was, instructed her to get one of the deacons or deaconesses to help her, and we went onto the platform to the music of the doxology and with, of course, the highest sentiments of worship in our minds!

Were this an isolated instance, we could simply laugh, and go on. But it is not. All too often through a pastor's day he or she becomes involved with a multiplicity of "church" matters, few of which are "pure" ministry. These responsibilities are not below *anyone*, and they are things that do need attendance, but by nature they are incredibly and cumulatively compromising to the totality of the pastor's high calling and specific purpose.

Most observers of this instance (Mrs. L.) would suggest that the proper training of the congregation and the deacons, or whatever, would simply solve this particular issue. I vehemently contest that this is not entirely true, however. This was a well-trained church with 500-600 members. The senior pastor had a doctorate in church growth from Fuller Theological Seminary. The tell-tale circumstance is that while Mrs. L. knew all of this (she was a deaconess herself), she believed like many modern church members that she should go to the pastor anyway----because he is the church manager, and “if you want something done---you go straight to the manager.”

Likewise, if someone needs visited you must also go to the pastor and ask him to visit them, because its only “real” ministry if the pastor does it. Furthermore, most in my present church to this moment will not consider their own circumstance (sickness or hospital, or whatever) fulfilled unless a licensed minister visits them. While any servant of Christ will attempt to minister to anyone in need or crisis when and wherever he can, it is fundamentally wrong for a member to *expect* that he “should” receive a visit from the minister. This changes the visit from loving service (ministry), to almost a necessary compliance to a work order, if not “merchandise” in return for his tithe.

Rick Ezell in his book, *Hitting a Moving Target*, comments on the evolution of pastoral roles and particularly how it relates to the transient church audiences of today. His main point is that pastors have but a few potent arrows to expend in these modern settings, and they had best aim well and hit the mark (sermonically and otherwise) or they will lose the best chance of optimal ministry. But Ezell also observes that the ministry today is becoming diffused and confused in its effects, largely because *Pastoral Care* issues are absorbing much of the pastor's focus, leaving perhaps some of the most important endeavors of the pastor unattended or shortchanged. He believes it is an unfortunate misnomer that the "pastor" has ever been called a "shepherd." Doing so has trained the church to think of the pastor in a certain way, and to define their own role in a way that reduces the breadth of their own personal calling and responsibility.

I, the author of this pamphlet can only speak for myself, but I have to admit that a typical pastor's day in my parish usually rounds out to about 90% *administrivia*, versus about 10% *pure ministry*. Each day varies, of course. Sometimes, one has a funeral to perform. This is very direct personal ministry. Funeral plans, visits, services, dinners can sometime dominate much a week. But then there are weeks, where in one district I once served, it claimed nearly

an entire week out of every month to produce and mimeo the newsletter, the pastors particularly taking direct supervision and authorship of it. Further, we even published it and stapled it and mailed it.

It is my personal opinion that few if any souls at all have been won by a church newsletter. It is directed at the already “saved.” Yet hundreds if not thousands of my own pastoral hours have been directed toward it, and similar bulletin-like publications. Perhaps a newsletter has its place in rallying and unifying the church members, but it is certainly not something that is necessary for pastors to do entirely. It is an “ad-ministry” task. Jesus did not spend time writing one (Would he today? Personally, I wonder if he might prefer other more efficient ways of seeking the lost).

In any case, there are others who have communication gifts to whom this responsibility can be delegated. Even the pastor’s message (and the time it took him to write it) placed in the newsletter is largely wasted for few read it, so is even this endeavor one of his best? But this is but one small example and opinions on this very matter likely vary.

I, as a pastor, have spent countless hours on school and church boards where the principle agenda items were of a maintenance nature. We have discussed

everything (for hours) from the proper height to install a urinal, to whether or not it is permissible to serve grape juice on the fellowship hall carpet, to who should paint the parking lot lines, to endless discussion/debate on the proper size of a quorum. The list of these type of things is endless.

My first assignment in a large church to which I was sent was to help the deacon find where the light bulbs were, using my shiny new keys! This was followed by a search for the toilet seat covers. I am sure each pastor has a long list of similar stories. I am only beginning.

One fellow pastor, a Methodist clergyman in a town where I served received a call one day from a lady who asked him to find someone in his congregation to go and “administer” an enema. Finally, the pastor, wondering what to do said, “No, I'm sorry. We don't do enemas!” The lady was deeply upset that he and his church wouldn't help a person in need and hadn't formed this type of ministry yet!

Another pastor I know personally was asked how to spay a cat. When he confessed he didn't know how, and that he probably couldn't help them with particular instructions, he was likewise scolded and scorned for not knowing what every minister ought to know how to do! Shame on him! Its true! Our seminaries are failing us!

Beyond the things that are ancillary to direct ministry are matters which *are* direct ministry, yet are too frequent or time-consuming for the main pastor to completely address them all. Many pastors like myself have become nothing less than “ambulance chasers,” often making trips to distant cities to monitor threatening illnesses and crises. Again, any servant of the Lord will want to offer sympathy to those who are suffering. But at any given time, especially in large congregations there are more illnesses, hospitalizations, surgeries, accidents, and the like for any one (or two+) pastor(s) to cover. The devil, the author of disease and confusion, has such a very easy time keeping the pastor “busy” with these things alone!

In one church where I pastored we had a young mother turn her ankle while out walking one day. I received several calls from the church ladies pressing me into service to go visit the lady immediately. They didn't all go to see her, but I did. She didn't really require the visit herself, I knew that, but I knew if I didn't visit her I would never hear the end of it from the church ladies (Inappropriately named, in my experience, at least, “The Joybelles!”). I knew that also because in similar circumstances I had tried that type of option before! (In most churches the members “train” the pastor, and not the other way around). Sometimes there are too many

appointments or needs for a single man or woman to address.

## **Training and Activating the Laity?**

The answer to this problem seems so obvious. It is a “no-brainer.” Other church members need to be involved in the visitation ministries and other ministries of the church. This is indeed where a large part of the answer lies, but yet it seldom succeeds to resolution.

Consequently, delegation and training is never a total answer, because while the pastor is “there,” the church members will always feel slighted if “the pastor” doesn’t come to visit them or serve them. I have run into this several times in the current week of this writing. My very presence in the district leads to numberless expectations.

Nor is the answer to general church stagnation to be found in tireless evangelistic hype, or in training or promotion that utilizes intentional evangelistic techniques (in my opinion, the false, or counterfeit form of evangelism). It goes beyond this.

Evangelism, the sharing of the gospel message, may be the desired end, but it is not where the church must begin. Message comes before mission. The

message of the gospel must first be internalized. People must be excited and interested in the message before they will desire to share it. They must “know” it and “love” it first in the experiential sense.

The only complete answer, I *suggest*, is perhaps to be found in re-educating the church on the **true pastoral role and the cultural and commissional role of each lay person as well**. Finally, pastors (and laymen) need to return to their New Testament job descriptions in carrying out their ministries.

Jack Hyles in the book, "Teaching or Preaching" writes that several years ago a poll was taken among preachers concerning the different duties of the ministry: (1) administration, (2) teaching, (3) preaching, (4) pastoring, (5) priestly work, and (6) church business. The question was asked to hundreds of preachers, "What do you think is the most important of these ministries?" Overwhelmingly the response was, "Preaching."

The second question was asked: "Which occupies most of your time?" To that question the answer was overwhelmingly, "Administration," -----and preaching was **last** on the list!

This sad result effectively summarizes the current situation in most districts today. Advising pastors to

re-prioritize their ministries will not change much, lest someone think so. Probably every pastor has tried to do this. But the present pastor is for the most part helplessly trapped in the present maelstrom. Largely as a matter of default he has become the “keeper of the aquarium,” rather than a “fisher of men.”

More aggressive education toward the laity, followed by practical and administrative change, is the only likely answer to this misdirection of efforts. It is important to so educate and train both ministry and laity, because the failure to address the current self-serving practices are in part responsible for the eternal loss of thousands, and maybe even millions, of souls. The church needs to recognize how serious this problem is. A great wrong is being committed---a hideous sin---in permanently locating pastors. Yet the church as a whole persists in carrying out this condemned and self-serving paradigm of ministry. It is doomed to failure in its present mode, for the current practice has the clear condemnation of heaven.

*The necessary philosophical “re-training” and “work” has in the larger sense not been entered upon, or even seriously addressed by most pastors, laymen, and administrators in the modern church era in North America.* The New Testament church however, under the direction of the Holy Spirit,

addressed this work immediately, and the Gospel went quickly to the then known world as a result.

It might be well to remember that in the New Testament descriptions of *pastors* as we know them virtually does not exist. The word “pastor” (thus used in Ephesians) shows up in a isolated instance or two, but these references are probably not referring to the “pastoral” position as we know it, but rather a particular “gift” of leadership ministry.

In the New Testament particular elders and deacons are mentioned. These passages are usually referring to local laymen, and not pastoral ministers as we know them. These are the “elders in every place,” that Paul and the apostles are talking about. This circumstance, if true, might be full of instruction for the church of today.

A great need exists for the church at all levels to return to the New Testament, or biblical model. Study should be given to the roles that each participant should play in these last days of this earth’s history. Prayer should be followed by bold steps and needed change must occur in this important area of church administrative reformation. So much depends upon it!

What modern prophetic counsel has been offered to address this searching need in the church today?

This will be investigated in the following chapter.

# **THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY ACCORDING TO ELLEN G. WHITE**

First a note of explanation precedes the presentation of Ellen White's counsel as pertaining to this subject of pastoral roles:

In addressing this topic at all this author has found he is entering upon a subject many are unwilling to consider honestly. In fact, this author has found personally that in some cases it has elicited resistance, hostility, and even anger. At the least it has created huge misunderstanding. Fellow church members, ministers, and church administrators seem typically reluctant to consider with candor the possibility of misdirection in nearly the entire North American ministerial force. Many minimize the problem, or even deny it entirely. And, naturally, the

“this is the way it has always been done” argument prevails.

Yet it seems to me that too many readily pass off the true import of the New Testament model, and particularly Ellen White's counsel. They relegate it all to "good advice," and see no need for actual or radical change. Many give a puzzled look when the suggestion is made that pastors may not be fulfilling their true calling in pastoring the many local districts in their respective conference locales. These folk are indoctrinated into the current and common practice that every church needs a pastor to take care of their local region. The loss or move of a pastor can even bring panic to certain districts. But is the current practice one that is to be continued indefinitely, according to Ellen White?

Here we are simply asking some basic questions, especially in light of Ellen White's (I believe, God's) counsel. Is it to be assumed that churches and pastors are to be linked like a horse and carriage? What is the ministry? What is a minister to do? What do the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy suggest that the minister is to do and what is he to be? Is what is traditional practice or has come to be in the last fifty years the healthiest and best approach for God's last day remnant church?

Having been a minister for several years I have

experienced a certain lack of fulfillment *in my ministerial duties*. It is not that the churches I worked for were necessarily unhappy, or even that I did not enjoy working for them. It seems they usually thought I was a successful pastor. I at times may have even felt successful. But something was never right. Many other ministers have encountered some of the same feelings. Some in fact have shared these with me.

Therefore, after reading the following counsel I arrived at a different conclusion about the typical ministerial role than I had originally had. I simply discovered that perhaps for many years many pastors have labored under what I suspect might be a partial delusion. This delusion is likewise propagated by church leaders, church growth experts, "caring church" enthusiasts, and the general church membership at large. This delusion resides in the partial truth that pastors are required to give great care and attention to our established churches in order to nurture and train them. In other words, successful congregations are thought to go hand in hand with strong pastoral leadership.

Believing that strong churches depend on strong pastoral leadership and that by pouring more and more attention upon my flock I would witness ever greater positive results, I tried to do more for them with each passing day, month, or year. I like so

many pastors have embarked on endless training programs and incentives.

Growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church I am sure I have experienced at least a sample of most any kind of motivational approach to witnessing, evangelism, education, and spiritual gifts training that exists. But I have never discovered these approaches have really worked. Still I felt I wasn't doing enough to equip our members for outreach and growth.

It never occurred to me that maybe it was possible to do too much, or that pastoral leadership can so easily get misdirected. Anyhow, as the fruit of increased activity and attention I found the results sometimes disappointing. Instead of increased productiveness there came more dissatisfaction, and greater expectations from the members. Thus I came to the subject of this short treatise.

Most feel the solution lies in a pastor PROPERLY training and activating the laity of the church to carry out its mission of mercy and evangelism. Though this is a "good" answer, and in many ways perhaps a correct one (theoretically), it does ignore the issue of whether the pastoral institution itself is to be examined and called into question. It is therefore an answer, but not a complete answer to the difficulty we face.

Many claim that if a pastor trains his congregation properly, to work and to grow, that his pastoral position is thus fulfilled and justified. But to return to reality, how often does that really happen? And how long does it take to train a church? When does it grow up to adulthood and no longer need a parent? 50 years? 100 years? And there is more than this.

What role, we ask, does Ellen White expect the pastor to play in relation to a local congregation of converted and established members, and even to those who are new or potential members? What is a pastor to do with his time? Is the calling of an Adventist pastor being realized in a typical church situation today? Here is only a part of what can be found. I portend that this counsel is largely being ignored by pastors and church leaders today. Yet I personally believe this counsel is God-sent and important.

## **ANALYZING PARTICULAR STATEMENTS**

To begin with, it is necessary to analyze the following quotes. The first statement provides a good summary of Ellen G. White's philosophy which we are considering now:

**Our people have received great light, yet**

much of the ministerial force has been spent on the churches, teaching those who should be teachers; enlightening those who should be "the light of the world;" watering those from whom should flow rivers of living water; enriching those who might be mines of precious truth; repeating the gospel invitation to those who, scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth, should be giving the message of heaven to those who have not heard; feeding those who should be in the highways and byways giving the call: "Come; for all things are now ready." 7T, p. 24

The same principle is consistent throughout all Ellen White's counsel: Those who have already received the light of the message are not primarily to be the subjects of ministerial labor. Period. Ministers are to be primarily evangelists, entering new fields, and not particularly settled in one place expending the chief part of their time on church members' or even community needs.

Christ intends that His ministers shall be educators of the church in gospel work. They are to teach the people how to seek and save the lost. But is this the work they are doing? Alas, how many are toiling to fan the spark of life in a church that is ready to die! How many churches are tended like sick lambs by those who ought to be seeking for the lost sheep. **And all the time millions upon millions without Christ are**

perishing. DA 825

Are there not Seventh-day Adventists who will do likewise? **Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth**, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: "Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields." 6T p. 30

God has not given His ministers the work of setting the churches right. No sooner is this work done, apparently, than it has to be done over again. **Church members that are thus looked after and labored for become religious weaklings**. If nine tenths of the effort that has been put forth for those who know the truth had been put forth for those who have never heard the truth, how much greater would have been the advancement made! **God has withheld His blessings because His people have not worked in harmony with His directions**. 7T 18

Should all the labor that has been expended on the churches during the past twenty years be again expended upon them, it would fail, as it

has failed in the past, of making the members self-denying, cross-bearing followers of Christ. Many have **been overfed with spiritual food**, while in the world thousands are perishing for the bread of life. Church members must work; **they must educate themselves**, striving to reach the high standard set before them. This the Lord will help them to reach it if they will co-operate with Him. If they keep their own souls in the love of the truth they will not hold the ministers back from presenting the truth in new fields. 9T 140

**To fasten a minister to one place** by giving him the oversight of business matters connected with the work of the church is not conducive to his spirituality. **To do this is not in accordance with the Bible plan as outlined in the sixth chapter of Acts.** Study this plan, for it is approved of God. Follow the word. 7T252

The people of God who have had light and knowledge have not carried out the high and holy purposes of God. They have not advanced from victory to victory, adding new territory, lifting up the standard in the cities and their suburbs. Great spiritual blindness has been shown by those who have had great light flashed upon them by the Lord, but who have not advanced in the light to greater and still greater light. Church members have not been encouraged to use spiritual nerve and muscle in

the work of advancement. They should be made to understand that ministers cannot work out their salvation by hovering over them. It is thus that they are made weaklings when they ought to be strong men. 9T 139

It weakens those who know the truth for our ministers to expend on them the time and talent that should be given to the unconverted. *In many of our churches in the cities the minister preaches Sabbath after Sabbath, and Sabbath after Sabbath the church members come to the house of God with no words to tell of blessings received because of blessings imparted. They have not worked during the week to carry out the instruction given them on the Sabbath. So long as church members make no effort to give to others the help given them, great spiritual feebleness must result.* 7T 18

## PRINCIPLES TO OBSERVE FROM PREVIOUS QUOTES:

1. Ministers perhaps should not be assigned permanently to *established* churches to nurture and "take care" and "lead" them.

While it may seem extreme to some to take the view that the established churches of our land should have

no permanent pastors; the statements clearly seem to indicate that the ideal is to have the established churches taking care of themselves, thus developing nerve and muscle, while the pastors are doing evangelistic work. This is not a new idea. Many pastors defend themselves in claiming this is what is happening in their churches. Those taking an honest reckoning, however, of most congregations in America today simply cannot claim that this is the case. If every pastor's time was scrutinized carefully there are but few who actually spend even a small percentage in pure evangelism. From experience I challenge anyone working in the current system to be in actuality giving an 100% priority on evangelism. *It cannot happen in the current configuration.*

As part B, it also seems that the idea of pastoral assignments, that is, fastening a pastor for several years in one place may not be a practice that is clearly recommended by the "Spirit of Prophecy." Yet this is assumed by the church at large, from the conference leadership right down to the member who once told me in an overwhelmed moment of my ministry, "I pay my tithe, you are the pastor, you have to visit my daughter."

**2. It is possible to "over-feed" church members. (Remember, this was said---even in an era where pastors were incredibly scarce as compared to**

**today).**

Contrary to the notion that what makes a church active and happy is strong pastoral leadership, solid nurture and training programs----the principle of "increased attention"---- the opposite can also be a problem---too much attention. This principle I have never heard advocated from a conference administrator, or church member! Rather, most ministers leave a worker's gathering overwhelmed by their under achievements, or "design-hyped" to rise to greater levels of production and accomplishment. (Often I have heard the "don't work harder, but work smarter" phrase---a lot---but never, "do less for your members so they will assume more work!")

### **3. It weakens church members to labor for them, except in direct, short-term missionary training.**

While I have repeatedly seen this principle proven, most ministers and leaders simply do not recognize it today. In many cases they may be, by their resident care, doing great harm while at the same time they are trying to do some good. This does not mean local church pastors are doing "bad" things by ministering to members, but it means they may be "stealing" from church members some of their specific calling and responsibility. They are "killing them with kindness." If then it weakens church

members to work for them, why in the world I ask, should we as pastors continue to do it, day after day, year after year, **contrary** to God's instruction and blessing?

**4. Ministers are primarily to work for the unconverted in the cities and in the dark places of the earth.**

This principle is emphatically clear in all the statements given here and in hundreds of others as well. The church is to be involved, of course, in this same mission. But in many places, especially "Adventist ghettos" and "colonies," this is not what occurs. In many of our university towns, for instance, we find large churches with sometimes four or five pastors (Not to mention the presence of scores of retired pastors also in the congregation) soaking up a tithe that might flood a continent with missionaries. Some churches are reluctant to let their pastor go to a foreign field for even one series of meetings. The ones that do are often blessed themselves. Yet even these see it as a an unusual variation, a mission project, and not what really should perhaps be the norm.

During one of my pastorates, while the Soviet Union was opening up, not even a one of my church members relished the idea the I or someone from our congregation should go and work there for a few

weeks. Who would do “the pastoring at home?” Nor did I suggest it further, or perhaps even want to any more, when I broached the idea and met with solid resistance.

One evangelist friend I know personally wanted to go back to Russia for a series, but was grounded by his local conference administration to do a series in some small, evangelistically dry, burned over, and remote agricultural town in Central Washington State. The series was the usual bust, of course. He was told that if he really wanted to go to Russia he would have to use his vacation to do it! (He did!) The results were infinitely more successful as well.

Naturally, the evangelist probably needed to honor the commitment made to the local district, but what a sad state of affairs exists when the church thus wastes its already meager evangelistic resources, for any reason. If administrative leaders mismanaged a secular endeavor the same way, (*Coca Cola* sales, for instance) they would be immediately removed from their positions for renting billboards in Siberia (Ice to Eskimos). But instead the church encourages such expensive and often wasteful endeavors on a regular basis. Pastors and administrators repeat the fiasco a thousand times over, and cleanse it, by euphemistically calling it “evangelism.” Money and means is spent where the gospel has already been given, or where there are no fish to be caught, or

where church members already live, and relatively ignore the dark parts of the earth.

But the question is, how much pastoral responsibility is to be directed to our local and established churches? The counsel seems to suggest very little.

In fact, Ellen White even seems to suggest that the pastor is not even ultimately responsible for evangelistic work in church districts! This too is the responsibility of the local church. The ministers are to labor for the dark parts of the earth, or for a short time build up a church so it can truly function as a missional center. Unfortunately, in many cases in North America this scenario has never been realized for perhaps a period of a hundred years or more. The churches are treated as if they are babies that have never matured, and pastor after pastor is sent to keep them growing, or possibly to stave off imminent death.

What about the role of the minister then? Is he not to visit in the homes of the congregation, at least encouraging and training them? Does he have no responsibility, according to Ellen White, to work at the local church level? Perhaps it is too radical to teach that this is the case. But the evidence is strangely lacking in the writings that blesses continual labor for indigenous church members.

In researching Ellen White's writings, looking for a definition of what a pastor is to do, I expected to find admonition that he is to visit his members, visit the sick, hold prayer services, etc. Yet in the technical sense, I have not been able to find one reference to these particular pastoral tasks, in so applying them to *church members*----tasks that I have done as a pastor for years. I found that whenever Ellen White refers to visiting families in their homes, praying with people at their firesides, ministering beside the bed of the sick, she is almost never talking primarily about church members---but rather about evangelistic interests, and how pastors are to use Jesus' methods in reaching the unconverted. In her mind, it seems, pastors, ministers, and evangelists are all one thing, primarily being evangelists.

Following are some additional quotes of the same nature. In them are contained common practices of ministry today that are nevertheless condemned by the Spirit of Prophecy writings:

### **ADDITIONAL QUOTES:**

Not a few ministers are neglecting the very work that they have been appointed to do. Why are those who are set apart for the work of the ministry placed on committees and boards? Why

are they called upon to attend so many business meetings, many times at great distance from their fields of labor? Why are not business matters placed in the hands of businessmen? The ministers have not been set apart to do this work. The finances of the cause are to be properly managed by men of ability, but ministers are set apart for another line of work. Let the management of financial matters rest on others than those ordained to the ministry. 7T 254,255

Ministers are not to be called hither and thither to attend board meetings for the purpose of deciding common business questions. Many of our ministers have done this work in the past, but it is not the work in which the Lord wishes them to engage. Too many financial burdens have been placed on them. When they try to carry these burdens, they neglect to fulfill the gospel commission. **God looks upon this as a dishonor to His name.**

The Lord's great vineyard demands from His servants that which it has not yet received--earnest, persevering labor for souls. The ministry is becoming weak and enfeebled, and under its tame service the churches also are becoming weak. As the result of their labors the ministers have but little to show in the conversion of souls. The truth is not carried into the barren places of the earth. These things are depriving God of the glory that belongs to Him. **He calls for workers who will be producers as well as consumers.**

The world is to be warned. **Ministers should work earnestly and devotedly, opening new fields and engaging in personal labor for souls, instead of hovering over the churches that already have great light and many advantages.** 7T 255

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Are the churches that have been organized in our cities doing that which is appointed them of God? How many cities in the United States and in other countries have not yet been entered, or if entered, have scarcely received what can be called missionary labor. The work that is done for those who know the truth, and yet who do not feed on Christ, would be better devoted to carrying the truth to the cities of our world. Who is willing to go to these cities, and, clothed in the meekness of Christ, work for the Master? Will any one presume to lay hands upon those who are willing to engage in house-to-house labor, and say, "You must not go unless we send you"? God is calling for workers, and the end of all things is at hand. If one tithe of the labor that has been expended upon our churches had been devoted to those who are perishing in ignorance, living in sin, many would have repented long ago.

*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*

6-11-95

"Go Ye Into All the World" #1

The greatest cause of our spiritual feebleness as a people is the lack of real faith in spiritual gifts. If they all received this kind of testimony in full faith, they would put from them those things which displease God, and would everywhere stand in union and in strength. And **three fourths** of the ministerial labor now expended to help the churches could then be spared to the work of raising up churches in new fields.-

Ellen - G. White, Volume 2, The Progressive Years 1862-1876  
pg. 239,240

When our powers are thus used to accomplish an evil work, they become a savor of death unto death. Never can corruption be so deadly in its influence as when connected with that which is pure and righteous. Pure rites and ordinances, when perverted to selfish purposes by the contaminating influence of worldly men, become instrumental in dishonoring Christ, and hurting the souls with whom he identifies his interest. As God's workmen, we have in the past devoted our efforts too largely to the churches. **The time and labor thus expended have done these churches much injury.** Our brethren and sisters should feel that now is the golden

opportunity to unite their influence in the home circle and in the church, to work for those who have never heard the truth. But they have learned to expect altogether too much labor for themselves. They have been treated to a great deal of food which they have not shared with souls who are starving for the bread of life. They have received an education that has made them selfish. Instead of giving truth to the unenlightened, they have done very little to qualify themselves for work as the servants of God.

-Advent Review and Sabbath Herald

1-19-97 -PR- 04

Our ministers are not to spend their time laboring for those who have already accepted the truth. With Christ's love burning in their hearts, they are to go forth to win sinners to the Saviour. Beside all waters they are to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches, and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields. 7T 19, 20

There are times when it is fitting for our ministers to give on the Sabbath, in our churches, **short discourses**, full of the life and love of Christ. But the church members are not to expect a sermon every Sabbath. 7T 19

The Lord's vineyard is a more extensive one than the present working force is able properly to cultivate. Therefore it is necessary that every one should labor to the full extent of his ability. Whosoever refuses to do this, dishonors the Lord of the vineyard, and if he continues inactive, the Lord will disown him. As the human agent endeavors to labor, God works in him and by him. When the Lord sees that little real effort for the conversion of souls is put forth in regions beyond, when he sees that golden opportunities are lost, and that the spiritual physician is devoting his energy and skill to those who are whole, neglecting the maladies of those who are ready to die, he is not pleased. He cannot pronounce the "well done" upon such work; for it is not hastening but hindering the progress of his cause, when rapid advancement is most necessary. Time and energy and means are devoted to those who know the truth, instead of being used to enlighten the ignorant. Our churches are being tended as though they were sick lambs by those who should be seeking for the lost sheep. If our people would minister to other souls who need their help, they would themselves be ministered unto by the Chief Shepherd, and thousands would be rejoicing in the fold who are now wandering in the desert. Instead of hovering over our people, let every soul go to work to seek and to save the lost. Let every soul labor, not in visiting among our churches, but in visiting the dark places of the

earth where there are no churches.

-----*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*

6-25-95

*Even So Send I You*

-PR- 06

And the minister's work does not end with the presentation of truth from the pulpit. He is to do earnest, personal, house-to-house work, studying the Scriptures with the people, and praying with them. Thus many will be brought to a knowledge of God. Souls ready to perish will be imbued with the Spirit of Christ. But this work has been neglected; and therefore the churches are lacking in power. There are many ordained ministers who have never yet exercised a shepherd's care over the flock of God, who have never watched for souls as they that must give an account. The Church, instead of developing, is left to be a weak, dependent, inefficient body. **The members of the Church, trained to rely upon preaching, do little for Christ. They bear no fruit, but rather increase in selfishness and unfaithfulness.** They put their hope in the preacher, depending on his efforts to keep alive their weak faith. Because the church-members have not been properly instructed by those whom God has placed as overseers, many are slothful servants, hiding their talents in the earth, and still complaining of the Lord's dealing toward them. They expect to be tended like sick children.

-----*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*

*-DT- 01-21-02*

*-AT- Words to Ministers*

*-PR- 04*

The Lord has blessed Battle Creek again and again by pouring out His Spirit upon the church and the workers, but how few have cherished the influence of the Spirit. How few have expended their money as God has directed. Means has been expended in educating those who knew the truth, while fields that are wholly unenlightened have been neglected. Had ministers gone out as Christ has commissioned them, had they used the gifts entrusted them to carry the light to those in darkness, they would have obtained far more knowledge of God and of Christ than they have obtained by seeking additional education in our schools. 8T 151

## **CHRIST'S MODEL AND METHOD**

A question that needs to be asked as well is how to apply the example of Christ's ministry to present day ministry. The following quote summarizes well how this is to be done. Is Christ's example different from that expected of the modern minister, because he was Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God?

According to the following statement Ellen White sees little difference between how Christ operated and how the modern minister is to operate. Jesus was itinerant. Modern ministers, likewise, are not to be permanently located, or more accurately, permanently attached to a particular congregation. Nothing could be clearer:

**Often the inhabitants of a city where Christ labored wished Him to stay with them and continue to work among them. But He would tell them that He must go to cities that had not heard the truths that He had to present. After He had given the truth to those in one place, He left them to build upon what He had given them, while He went to another place. His methods of labor are to be followed today by those to whom He has left His work. We are to go from place to place, carrying the message. As soon as the truth has been proclaimed in one place, we are to go to warn others.--**

Ellen White was greatly disappointed in how ministerial attention had become too focused on Battle Creek, the institutional center of the church at the time. Trained ministers and informed believers were soaking up the gospel privileges at the expense of the larger needs in great gospel field:

There has been too much spiritual energy expended in the church at Battle Creek. Those who have listened to the precious truth that has been pouring forth in such a free manner as it has there, have generally failed to receive or to appreciate the light given. They have failed to communicate what they have received. The persons who have been attending the ministerial institutes, have had presented before them line upon line, and precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little. But they have failed to receive any great benefit, because they have not imparted the light to others. The great outlay caused by these institutes, which have been held so often, would have brought far better returns if expended in maintaining the ministers in some part of God's neglected vineyard where there are no Sabbath-keepers. If the large churches settled in some of our cities were scattered to the four quarters of the globe, they might reveal how much the truth they have appropriated has to do with the shaping of individual character, and many eyes would be opened to behold the light

of the truth. As they saw the great ignorance existing among the people, they would realize that there is work, solid, earnest work, for all in the neglected portions of the Lord's vineyard. If they were sons and daughters of God indeed, they would see that there is need of decided effort to reach the heathen in America as well as in heathen lands. The gospel is to go to every nation, tongue, and people, and ministers are not to devote their labors so entirely to the churches which know the truth. Both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor. It is by engaging in earnest work, by hard, painful experience, that we are enabled to reach the men and the women of our cities, to call them in from the highways and the byways of life. But many of our people are surfeited with the privileges they have enjoyed, and have lost the sense of the value of human souls.

*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*  
6-11-95

One can only conclude that this sad condition of things has only advanced in modern times---to the extreme. Adventist colonization often occurs at institutional centers, attracting scores of would-be missionary families and requiring ministerial coverage that greatly detracts from the successful achievement of global mission.

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

As one may see it creates some inner dissonance and a confused conscience for the author of this small treatise when he is repeatedly asked to consider going as a permanent pastor to certain districts in light of such statements as these. It ignores reality to say that one should simply go as pastor but train his flock to be missionaries. True, this may be the best a pastor can or should do, but this simply NOT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PASTOR IS PLACED IN A DISTRICT today! This author is willing to debate anyone on this issue. The clear evidence is all around us.

Some have enjoined, “Well, follow the counsel then, anyway.” But really, at this moment, how many conference presidents would recommend that the pastor he sends to a district dispense with the larger percentage of tasks everyone has seen and expected for last fifty years or more? It would be “employment suicide” for a pastor to attempt this without the conference’s or church’s understanding, support, and blessing.

Most pastors value or need their jobs. Because of the pastor's position and his mere presence, expectations are placed upon him for which he really

has little choice but to spend 80-90 % of his time doing: i.e. church newsletters and bulletins, sitting on committees, visiting church members (some who will complain bitterly, if he doesn't), conducting mid-week services (for the established flock), attending conference meetings, school devotionals, Pathfinder outings, writing reports, writing letters of recommendation, settling disputes, endless and extended marriage and family counseling, preaching (chiefly to those who have already heard), etc. , etc.

So, we ask simply, how can a pastor freely seek a permanent pastoral position when he understands that it could in *some* ways be harmful to his congregants and it is not the recommended thing to do? “First do no harm,” is the adage of the medical profession. How then, can pastors conscientiously enable or perpetuate something clearly contrary to God's plan in the *Book of Acts*, yet at the same time seek to honor their ordination or calling? The counsel clearly says, “Follow the Word.” The author of these words has been living in this crisis for a number of years. It is a miserable place to be. For him it is not merely a matter of opinion, it is a matter of conscience.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (One way this author has personally tried to embrace the counsel is by doing interims. At least one does not stay too long in one place this way, and often the church is needing the interim because a true crisis has developed and the church needs pastoral leadership (especially large

While it seems extreme even to this author that our established churches should not have a located pastor, it is hard to find any *light* which justifies that a church of this nature should. (At least 1/4 of the current ministerial force is recommended to take care of the local churches according to one statement, and sister churches are also to take care of weaker sister churches). Pastoral supervision could still be given without the pastors being totally localized.

The New Testament teaching is very similar to that of Ellen White, in what it says, and was written when the movement was young. One wonders what the divine plan for the ordained priesthood is when a church structure has completed its mission to the world. But this has never happened yet in history. **At least in Ellen White's writings it is clearly taught that when a congregation is organized, that at that point, the pastor is to immediately**

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ones) during its time of healing. But this has a not totally resolved the difficulty to any satisfying amount. It does make my wife and family more secure by having a job, and I am thankful for the employment, which I know my family needs. I also feel called to Seventh-day Adventist "ministry," which unfortunately is hopelessly "stuck" in the "located pastor" scenario, yet leaving my beloved denominational structure is not an option I ever aim to consider).

## **move on to a new and open field.**

Clearly, wisdom is justified of her children. In North America for instance, where it can be quite difficult to even to find a job as a pastor sometimes, where the pastor to laity ratio is the highest, the churches are the deadest, the souls won the fewest. Yet, in other parts of the world, where the laity are doing the bulk of the work, pastors being actually rare, the gospel is thriving and churches are growing. What might this say?

Some of the fastest growing denominations in the world today, such as *Latter Day Saints* and *Jehovah's Witnesses*, have no paid clergy at all at the local level. Why are they so successful? Is it partly because, perhaps, there are no pastors to get in the way? Or might it be because there are no ineffective pastors to absorb the funds that might be used for advancement?

When Ellen White speaks of pastors caring for the flock, she makes it clear that the "flock" or "sheep" that are the burden of the pastor's interest are the **lost**. Jesus' model presented in the parable is that the pastor is to leave the "ninety and nine" in the **fold** and go in search of the **one lost sheep**. Yet how many times is the percentage of effort reversed, with 99% church maintenance and 1% evangelism? I know that this ratio, despite my dedicated efforts

otherwise, is unfortunately, an accurate representation of many of my pastorates to date. I here openly confess my guilt.

Certain pastors are troubled when they cannot overcome the pressures of traditional expectations and move their churches into successful levels of involvement. After a while they reach a certain comfort level in the current system, and though it isn't optimal they find it too risky to attempt to implement the NT model and re-design their ministries through normal church channels.

In addition, a pastor may not naturally be a successful evangelistic worker (like myself), or he may not have training or abilities that are particularly effective. Therefore, he finds it much easier to survive by keeping the church members happy--- and the conference administration happy--- through the traditional pastoral roles and expectations, even though they might be aware there is a "better way" to do it.

This dysfunctional scenario likely leaves some modern Adventist pastors in a very miserable state. "Who shall deliver them from this body of death?!" ("I will go unto the King, and if I **parish**, I perish!") An appeal is made to churches and church administrators to please address how a pastor can relieve these administrative issues and yet fulfill his

pure calling. Failure by the church to properly address these same issues “killed” James White, and likely has laid to rest many other workers since.

Let us observe that the chief fault, if anyone is to be faulted, may not lie with conference administrations, however. The larger portion of the burden lies with the church members themselves who demand of the conference their own pastor to serve them and care for them. Conference officials in a desire to please them, and keep the tithe channels flowing, cave into the selfish demands of the churches.

There is a grand design and purpose for the Seventh-day Adventist ministry today. But that purpose does not seem to be that of guardians and managers of local churches. Particularly unjustified are those situations where pastors are sent into districts and stationed there for several years----these being places where other pastors have been pastoring back to back for now over a century or two.

If we read the counsel correctly, practitioners of this nature are rather to be pastor-evangelists who go to new fields, of which this world has many, raise up new congregations, set them on their feet, and as Jesus did, pass on to a new fields of labor (Instead we have a position trading, “round-robin”

arrangement<sup>3</sup>). The established churches are to largely take care of themselves, the absence of direct over-management making opportunity for growth and development. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

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<sup>3</sup> I, the author, have pastored mostly in the Northwestern part of the United States. One of my classmates, an excellent minister and man of Faith, is Elder Kevin Wilfley. Years ago I took a pastorate at Canyonville, Oregon, where Kevin had just pastored. He left to go to Hermiston, Oregon, where I had once had pastored. Later I went, to Albany, Oregon, where Kevin had once pastored, but he went to Spokane Linwood, WA, where I had once pastored. I am sure the trail crossings have not ended yet.

## **A PROPOSED MODEL OF REFORM**

Let us begin this final chapter by acknowledging a couple of things. Perhaps these are important admissions or observations to be made.

The first is that this author recognizes that not all of his fellow pastors alike share his assessment of current pastoral practice. Many pastors love their profession just as it is, and delight in the church's social climate and the comfortable sub-culture it affords. They don't mind being called by church members asking what time sundown is. This is no issue of conflict for them. They enjoy authoring newsletters, organizing committees, and visiting in the homes of members.

Some pastors I have talked to defend their typical pastoral roles (sitting on the local school board, making hospital visits to long-time members,

counseling marital situations, etc.) as being legitimate ministry, and are quite satisfied with things the way they are. Some seem quite satisfied that their ministries are not only fulfilling, but even claim they now have their churches working aggressively in evangelism (hmmmm....?). Their churches are growing or popular and they believe their work is justified.<sup>4</sup> Some, in short, are happy with the way it is.

It is not the opinion of this author, however, that we should be happy with the current configuration. In light of the counsel and the admonitions of Scripture there is great need of modification and change. Souls are being lost as a result. This should be motivation enough to address the modern challenges of true ministry.

Some have attempted to address the need for reform in terms of *church planting*. Unfortunately, I have noticed, many pastoral proponents of church planting seem to end up being removed from being conference pastors. Perhaps these pastors have the

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<sup>4</sup> (Generally it appears that senior pastors of large churches are the happiest in their pastoral roles, while pastors of mid-sized congregations are maybe a little more frustrated and overwhelmed with being involved with so many branches of church administration and service with no one to delegate it to).

right concept but take the wrong approach in bringing it about. Certainly not every place is commodious to a church plant, and just because someone thinks there should be a new church planted somewhere does not necessarily mean it is appropriate to do so. It seems the local conference leadership should be the ones deciding when a new church should be planted and not the church planting enthusiasts themselves. The church plant needs the full support and blessing of the supervising organization.

The typical approach to reform usually comes in the undying promotion of *public evangelism*. Church officials and local laymen charge that the reason there is apathy in the church is because of the lack of evangelistic effort. “Just drum up more evangelistic effort and everything will be alright,” they often seem to say. The common song is that evangelism makes everything else successful.

The drawback with this solution, for some, is that “intentional” evangelism by “hype” is not that effective. The “ism” in “evangelism” is the problem. Marketed Christianity doesn’t ring true. God is not inclined to bless “false, fake, and contrived” evangelism, neither are most potential converts impressed with it. Literally thousands, if not millions, of dollars are wasted on public meetings in burned over districts, yielding pathetic

results. These paltry results are trumpeted as “God’s blessing,” and zealous proponents boast, as we have aforementioned, that “evangelism works,” when often the opposite is really the case.<sup>5</sup> One or two years later the few accessions have largely evaporated, yet no one is held accountable for the money, the mismanagement of God’s funds, and the effort that is wasted. Instead such evangelistic enthusiasts are rewarded with accolades and promotions for *trying* to sell “ice to Eskimos,” instead of sending it to the needy fields of this world.

Those who might object to this “mismanagement” of God’s resources are called “crabs.” “But if these meager results are the results of the Holy Spirit’s work,” one might ask, “why do other religions and cults using similar methods have the same or even more success than we do----and logically *without* the blessing of the Holy Spirit?”

Public meetings are perhaps appropriate in an area where sufficient interest demands that people be addressed corporately (actually a very rare circumstance in the U.S.). But to “hold” meetings to *generate* interest generally seems to “put the cart before the horse.” It is “backwards evangelism.”

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<sup>5</sup> If it were typically successful then these words would never need to be said.

And it is usually “something cheap--- that *has* to be advertised.”

It makes more sense to begin by equipping every church member for personal evangelism by letting them grow and work through their own experience. Then they are not like the runners in the Old Testament who “ran” prematurely, and thus “ran without a message.” If church laymen are truly blessed by God’s Spirit, they will “be a witness” by nature. They will not have to be prodded and pushed into evangelistic activity. Their witness will be instead disinterested, passive, and transparent, and in every way genuine. God will bless this kind of witness a hundred fold over the other kinds. And like the evangelism of Christ, it will essentially cost but little in the way of money. Indeed, souls cannot be bought.

Still others recognize the need for reform in lay and pastoral roles, as approached in this small book, but observe that it can never happen. When confronted with the evidence they simply say that in seeking to bring things into line with biblical standards and with the Spirit of Prophecy recommendations one is only talking of the ideal. “It would nice,” they say, “to reform both the roles of both pastors and laity, but realistically and functionally nothing is likely to be accomplished at this juncture in history. The die is cast, and we would best work with the present

system as best we can.” Perhaps they are right. At least, the *die* part.

Another observation is also important to make at this point. This is, that in describing the need for reform, we are not passing judgment on those who have served or who are currently serving under the present system. We are not saying that they consciously *are* or *were* ministering in the wrong way, or that they have not accomplished great good.

My own spiritual life has been greatly impacted by dedicated ministers and laymen who have influenced many of my own life decisions, who have offered exceptional counsel, given comfort in bereavement and illness, and who have inspired and mentored my own career in ministry. I love my church, with everything I am! God bless them all, they are giants in their time, they are greatly beloved, and they will have stars in their crowns.

What we are exploring, however, is if there has been a slow and calculated slide over the years into institutional staleness, and that the established norms could eventually if not sooner lead to detrimental results in the Lord's cause. The counsel seems to offer that even years ago reform was greatly needed to make the church institution all that it can be. Especially in North America, it seems that the roles of pastor and laity have degenerated to the point that

the church languishes in a Laodicean malaise, and maybe partly because of these confused practical roles. The Servant of Lord distinctly states that God “has withheld his blessing” because of this very condition of things and that the current practice is an affront to His name. Is this not sufficient reason to call for reformation?

One painful observation that might be made is that part of the problem (not all, of course) is that the Seventh-day Adventist church system in America is becoming more and more like the Roman or Papal system that was partially responsible for bringing the apostasy and darkness upon the European world for centuries.

The Papal system was not built overnight. When New Testament Christianity was first formed, there were but few clergy, in fact, virtually no “pastors” as we know them today. Paul and the apostles appointed elders in every city to carry on the work in the local districts. The apostles and experienced elders passed through and strengthened the churches from time to time, but seldom did they settle in any respective community for long. There were always new evangelistic horizons before them in taking the gospel to the then known world, so they moved constantly on to new districts. As Paul observed to the Romans, “I will go to Spain.” (16:24). In fact, in the same chapter, Romans 16, Paul writes that he

made it standard practice to always enter new territory and never settle into “parish” ministry. He says: “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, **not where Christ was named**, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation.” (16:20)

But as the centuries passed and the church organized more completely it became customary for each town and village to have its own bishop. At first a bishop and an elder were the same thing, for the Greek and Latin words mean the same thing. But with time the elder became *the* BISHOP, or pastor, with particular authority over that district. *The Person* became THE PARSON. Since the bishops had the benefit of the most education, and were trained and appointed by the mother church, they eventually became more prominent and controlling in their church government positions.

Soon the gap widened between the laity and the clergy. In fact the whole idea of clerics and laity as separate entities was invented by this circumstance. The word “cleros” indicates knowledge and authority, thus, “the called;” where the word laity, which comes from “laos,” “the people” and indicates something “common” or “inferior.” The maturation of this whole process ended in the abuses of the Middle Ages, where the Bible was chained to the pulpit, and the people were subsequently taught that they could only access God through a priest or

minister. The *Person*, or the *Parson* became the local authority, even despite his character, the one and only avenue to God.

This preposterous doctrine, that a priest was necessary for man's access to God---and its demonic fruit---was what finally called for the Protestant Reformation. It was not so much Luther's books, or his advocacy of the Bible, or his view of prophecy that really caused the greatest stir. The most dangerous teaching endorsed by Luther, to the Mother Church, at least, was that every man could be his own priest. What made Luther's teaching and theology so controversial is that it struck at the foundation of the Roman Catholic system and the control it held over all of Christendom. The norm was that in regards to all sacred and church matters the minister or priest was necessary as an intermediary between the common man and God. To this day members often "hang their burdens upon the minister" because they see him as a visible avenue to God. This tragic concept pervades Christendom to its own detriment. This ought not to be.

While it is greatly important and necessary to have pastors or priests, their role should be one of spiritual admonition and service, but never one that ever places their own mortality between the believer and his God.

The popular idea that every church should have its own resident pastor is an indicative remnant of the Dark Ages and the Papal system. Protestantism while it made some breaks from the old system, still clings to many of the same forms. Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and other mainline denominations have carried on the practice of resident clergy, clergyman being symbolically responsible for their assigned districts, conferences, or dioceses, and in turn responsible to the executive church government. In many respects the institutional form of the church hasn't ended up *all pretty*. Remnants of it may still exist in even Adventist churches where a member desires a pastor to come pray for him and visit him, not some ordinary laymen. The inference is that the pastor's prayer might be more effective, because he has more direct access with God. He is the "holy man," after all.

At the base of the problem is the popular sentiment adopted by many laymen in their local districts that ultimately leads them to "lean" on a paid professional to carry the spiritual burdens of the people. This sentiment is not unlike the people of the Old Testament era who asked for a king. They wanted a king over them, so that they could be like the other nations. God was not pleased with this arrangement but allowed it. Old Testament history

is a testimony to the dangers of so administrating spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is necessary, but such leadership should not be autocratic, but rather theocratic.

Adventists are part of the Protestant heritage. It appears that much of the reason Adventists seem to be adopting the notion of “a pastor in every place” is that they are likewise mimicking the governmental system of the typical mainline churches, churches which incidentally are also fast declining member-wise in their current ecclesiastical form.

However, from the previous chapters it would appear that this is not the recommended configuration given the church from the early Adventist pioneers and from the Spirit of Prophecy. And indeed when the Adventist church was first formed in the mid-1800's, pastors were few and far between, and really functioned as circuit riding evangelists and not as resident pastors anyway. Even fifty years ago it was not unknown for an Adventist pastor--- even if he was somewhat localized--- to have seven or eight churches. The pastor was then seen as a spiritual consultant or as traveling evangelist, baptizing and raising up new congregations. Like early Methodism and Wesley, and like Christ and the New Testament church, the church practitioner was largely and necessarily itinerant.

In North America, at least, this has greatly changed. The focus of the church has turned *inward* at the same commensurate pace that pastors have now begun to become stationary phenomena. Pastors have become immersed in “nurture,” “pastoral care” and other “administrative issues.” And as graphically predicted by Ellen White, the churches have in many cases become enfeebled, weak, lazy, and in certain ways cantankerous. It does not seem that by increasing the pastor to people ratio, or that by placing pastors in permanent locations, has most significantly helped the forward march of the church. It seems it is time for church administrators and local churches to get real about these apparent facts.

### **A Reformed System?**

Perhaps here we can embark on a short discussion concerning the respective merits or pitfalls of the present system versus the merits or pitfalls of a reformed system.

#### **Advantages of Permanent Pastoral Assignments:**

- a) Continuity of Mission

One of the first objections raised when the idea of short-term or itinerant assignments is discussed is the issue of “continuity” in a pastoral or church program. One church where this author was scheduled to be sent as an interim eventually refused to have him come, the reason given being that they felt that a few months was not an adequate time for a pastor to become engaged in the community. As a result the church spent most of the next year trying to find a pastor, and in the meantime had no pastor at all! (Then when he finally came he lasted a shorter time than an interim would have! Oh well!) This approach still does not make much sense to me! But the community involvement issue is a valid one.

The question we might ask is this. *Is it the pastor's first responsibility to become involved in the community?*

Who actually is it who lives and works in the community and has contact with the people in the community? Is it not the indigenous church members themselves and not the pastor who is somewhat temporary anyway? Who has the broadest influence? The hundreds of members who work and live in the various neighborhoods, and who corporately have circles of friends and work associates in multitudinous people webs----or the lonely pastor, one person, who comes as a stranger to town to begin with, and is often treated as a

“leper” because he has the title of “pastor,” and who the townspeople might actually hope to avoid lest he try to “convert” them?

It seems the church members who have been in the community for many years have the best connections in the community anyway and thus this responsibility lies chiefly with them. At least the burden should be a shared one.

Now reader, don't take me wrong. I think that a local pastor should do all he can to be involved in his community. I have done this whenever I could. I have joined the local ministerial associations and have attempted to meet the town leaders. I have helped with scores of community service endeavors. But this is a question whether or not the civil community is the pastor's chief responsibility.

As to continuity in the church and its programs, it is true that it can take a pastor several years to get his church on the move in a positive direction. One conference official observed to me that he believed it usually takes a pastor about eight years before he can make significant headway in setting a church on a positive forward path. Therefore he advocates long pastoral tenures. And this is the general thinking of the church growth movement and of the natural church development models popular today. This is the philosophical model driving most local

conferences at the present time. And I will admit that *successful churches are always successful!* But what is success?

But there is a downside to extended tenures also, in that it can create pastor dependent churches, or that it could posture churches in such a way that they fail to learn that they ought to be autonomous, and successful, regardless of the presence of a pastor or not. I have also personally noticed that when serving in a district for a number of years, certain ones begin to tune out the pastor and agenda, after awhile feeling they have him “figured him out” and they are not willing to go any further. Also there is such a thing as pastoral fatigue from the member's perspective, or in the pastor as well. But we will address the negatives, later.

#### b) Depth of Relationships

Another objection to itinerant ministry is that it makes it much more difficult for the pastor and the interests or flock he works for to have a lasting depth to their relationships. For some, it is in knowing someone for some time, working through challenges and issues, that eventually leads to life changing decisions.

The downside to this, however, is that the Lord is

about to come. There isn't time to build a few long-lasting friendships only. The world is waiting for the Gospel. All eternity awaits those who wish to deepen their relationships. But they have to get there first.

### c) Family Stability and Relocation Challenges

It is extremely difficult for a pastor's family to be itinerant in modern times. Leases and property exchanges are very expensive and problematic. Moving costs are high, and families are traumatized by constant movement.

Sacrifices will continually have to be made by pastoral families in this regard, even in the present system. However, if the Lord's light were followed in totality, it is possible that a pastoral family would have to move less. (More comment on this later)

## **Disadvantages of Located Pastors:**

### a) “Sitting Duck” Vulnerability

The first observation on this side of the equation is that located pastors by virtue of their accessibility and visibility can more easily become targets of the many distractions aimed their way. A “sitting duck” is usually in a dangerous position.

In an effort to be accessible, I have always kept office hours at the church. This comes at great cost, however. Instead of being there for those who sincerely need help, the pastor can become an easy target for Satan to send distractions to. These come in a variety of ways.

About two out of three telephone calls turn out to be telemarketers, *kooks*, or even church members who have an irrelevant agenda that they want pushed. Incredible time is wasted that could better be spent in preparation or evangelistic effort. I could easily spend a chapter discussing how much of my workload has come upon me, simply because I am there to catch it. If any pastor hasn't discovered what I mean I would suggest that he go down to his local church during the week, hang around, and just see what happens!

The week of this writing is no exception. One request given me by a church member is that there is a nice lady they know who is having a hard time obtaining a valid birth certificate for social security issues. The member thinks it would be good if I would take time and help this lady do this (since apparently I have so much! I have had this *type* of call a number of times---all pastors have---here it is again!). Another member wants to know whether women should wear head coverings in church (I Cor.

11--research the issue in the Greek for him. At least it's a biblical question, this time!) These requests have come onto my plate largely because "I'm here." "I'm the pastor." I know this because these exact tasks/opportunities didn't come to me during the months before I arrived in the present district as "the" pastor.

Simply getting someone else to do these tasks is often an inadequate solution, inasmuch as it is much harder and time consuming to find someone to do them than it is to do it yourself. The circumstance of "Sitting Duck Vulnerability" invites such things to descend upon a stationary target.

In too many cases located pastors end up in extra-marital affairs partly because long-term counseling challenges are coupled with pastoral fatigue. These extended circumstances can set a pastor up for infidelity. While this still could happen in short-term assignments, statistically they would probably occur less when pastors would serve in situations where long-term personal relationships are not so encouraged.

It seems that by staying in one place for extended periods makes the pastor start to look like he's wearing a large target, with concentric colored circles, that says "Here I am, Come Shoot at Me." It makes the Devil's job incredibly easy. Evangelistic

and itinerant pastors, on the other hand, have more control of their schedule, and can more easily dodge distraction to their single purpose.

### b) Inequitable Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

The next observation, a large one, is the inequitable distribution of spiritual gifts that comes as a result of long-term pastorates. There are pastors in my own conference, for instance, that have particular skills and gifts that need to be shared in a broader circle than where they are. The sad thing is that their unique spiritual gift will only be enjoyed by a half-dozen small churches, a few hundred people, maybe even a few dozen people perhaps, in their *entire* lifetime! This is great for those churches where they pastor, but it is a dreadful tragedy to the rest of the conference, or world. No one person has all the spiritual gifts to round out the needs of a given church. If pastors were more itinerant, every church could benefit from the gifts which God has given each pastor to a much greater degree.

Another inequity exists in the caliber of minister that serves a particular district. It often becomes the case that the pastors with superior talents end up ministering to the large city churches (they win the

“election” at search committee time), while those of lesser talents are often sent to the smaller districts. Are the people in a small church, because of their smallness, entitled to less quality in a pastor? Is this the gospel standard? We think not.

Now this isn't always true, of course. Adventist pastors are paid equally which levels the field to an extent. This is good. Professional pastors are sent to even the small churches. But in a general sense there is an gross inequity in this part of the current system, even though it is fairer within Adventism than many church systems.

Another phenomenon that occurs with located pastors is the “Gadventist” phenomenon. People tend to follow their favorite pastor or attend the church that has their preferred pastor or pastors. This keeps them from taking hold in a church that might be a great school for their own personal experience. But instead they shop, not for the church they need, or for the messenger they perhaps need, but for the one they like. Many attend church far away from their community.

This problem might be largely limited if pastors were assigned to super-districts rather than to individual churches. This way every church has the very same pastors and it would not matter so much to them which church they attended—pastor wise. It

would also blend the churches in brotherhood, instead of the enabling the exclusive attitude often exercised between churches close in proximity to each other. These churches, along with their pastors, sometimes compete for members and popularity, rather than mutually building each other up in impacting their communities.

c) “Excusable Presence”---the Lifeguard Model---

The greatest count against resident pastors, I believe, is what we might call “excusable presence.” This is the circumstance that comes when a capable pastor is resident in the church, and ordinary church members hesitate to flex their muscles or try their wings because a talented professional is there “who can do it better.” The presence of the trained pastor seems to give the member an EXCUSE for not exercising the gifts that God gave him or her.

Why would a lowly member attempt to give a Bible study to his neighbor when the pastor knows ten times as much and can do a better job? Plus the member might “blow it” anyway. “Just let the pastor do it.”

Now this is not God's plan at all. Every one knows that. Each member is to exercise his own spiritual gifts. But practically, this excuse wins the day,

because after all the pastor **is there**. It is the opinion of this author that pastors can train army after army, until they are *blue in the face*, yet the individual soldiers will never fight their own battles *while the well equipped and armored pastor is standing next to them!* It is only when the pastor is called to another front that the individual soldier will step up to the ranks and engage. Why? Because that soldier is then the only one there to fight in that very place on the battlefield.

An illustration I have often used in my mind is that of a lifeguard. Now first it must be stated that I, myself, am not a trained lifeguard. In fact, I really don't even know how to swim. Its a long story, but simply, to my regret, I never learned to swim well. I can swim a little bit, but most people can swim better than I can. I have often wondered whether I am able to swim well enough to save someone (or myself) who was drowning, but I'm not sure I could. I like to think, at least, that I might be able to save someone if I HAD too!

Now let's go to the local pool. There is a lifeguard. He or she has all kinds of certifications in swimming and lifesaving. Like many pastors, the lifeguard spends most of his or her time enforcing the pool rules, and watching for people that need saving. But in this story I'm not a pastor, I'm just a *would-be* swimmer.

Now let's suppose someone actually begins to drown at the pool. Even though the lifeguard is busy enforcing the pool rules at the moment, what am I going to do about the person that appears to be drowning? I'll tell you exactly what I will do. I'll take a chance even on that person drowning in the meantime, to run to the lifeguard and enlist his or her services. They are there, after all; that's their job, after all; and they can swim better than I can, after all. They are even licensed and certified.

So far so good, but here is the problem. What if there are several people who are drowning at the same time? Or what if the lifeguard steps away at the moment? What then would happen to my reticence to save a life---myself?

I believe, I don't really know, but I assume, that I would find some way to swim out, or get a pole, and save some or all of those people if I possibly could. I believe this because this has happened to other people in the circumstances of someone drowning. People have found a way to swim, even when they thought they didn't know how to swim or save a life. They were able to save someone when the day before they might have deemed it impossible.

I think this is what the churches need today. I think they need to discover they are needed, gifted, and

capable. And perhaps the only way to discover this is for “the pastors to be put in prison,” as H.M.S. Richards so aptly stated.

This never means that the pastors are totally out of the picture. They are to be busy evangelizing, training life guarding skills, and baptizing people (in the pool?!). But somewhere pastors need to step away long enough for people to actually “get wet” in gospel work. This will never happen with pastors constantly hovering over the churches. I promise, along with H.M.S., that it will not!

#### d) Community vs. World Focus

Another reason that it seems the counsel recommends itinerant ministry for pastors is that it would change the focus from the local church to the church at large. The sharing of pastoral skills would educate the churches about the needs elsewhere, and it would inform the churches elsewhere of a particular church’s needs. Together the churches would rally in a “barn raising” effort to spread the gospel to the surrounding districts (cf. Paul and the NT churches of Judea and Asia Minor). “The World is My Parish.” It is OUR parish. Indeed! The focus should never be the church, but rather the world.

#### e) Pastoral and Congregational Fatigue, vs.

## a Broader Spiritual Diet

Another final advantage to itinerant pastoral ministry is that the church would not tire of one particular pastor so easily. Churches that have a pastor, for instance, that is a good public speaker are happy to keep him or her. But what about the ones that don't? It seems fairest that any church not receive too much of any one pastor. If the pastor is such a good pastor, then other churches should benefit from him or her also. If the pastor is not so good, and needs opportunity to learn and grow, then the churches need to equally share this circumstance as well.

We hear of cases where pastors reside in a district for eight, ten, fourteen, nineteen, years—and more! It depends on the place, it may be necessary, but in a number of cases such scenarios are not only regrettable, but *immoral*! Such a circumstance should not only keep the Servant of the Lord (read below) awake at night, but you, the reader, as well!

No pastor is safe enough to leave any flock under his charge and under his stamp forever. Such a situation sounds more like a cult, than a church. Long

tenures<sup>6</sup> are a perilous and dangerous configuration, to say the least, and should probably almost never be endured except in extremely remote and solitary locations. In my opinion, a year and half should be about the limit to a stay in a particular church. This seems to be the longest Paul, the apostle stayed in any one place<sup>7</sup>. But this is but a guess. The Holy

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Manuscript Releases - Volume Nine [Nos. 664-770] (1990),  
page 9, paragraph 2

**Chapter Title: MR No. 668 - Counsel Regarding the Moving of  
Workers**

I have not been able to sleep after one o'clock. Through the night season the light has been given me **that it is not wise to keep ministers in the same locality year after year**, that it is not right to keep the president of the conference in one place through a succession of years. His position as president should be carefully considered, and changed as soon as God shall open the way for another to take his place. It is not justice to have the burdens that must come upon the president of any conference placed upon one man year after year, for a condition of things will come into existence that will not be for his good, or for the good of the conference. It is in this way that one man's mind and judgment comes to be thought infallible. The work is in the Lord's hands, and He will signify to us when He has a man prepared for the place. Until then we may let our minds rest.--  
Letter 87, 1898, p. 1. (To N. D. Faulkhead, October 20, 1898.)

<sup>7</sup> The one exception may be Ephesus, perhaps about three years. This was demanded by the circumstances we can be sure, some of which demanded he work for his own

Spirit should decide the tenure. Certain settings, such as a college or academy campus might be a notable exception to a short tenure model. In their case the audience is largely itinerant.

If a short-term ministry model is followed, the congregations are assured of a broader and more balanced diet of sermons and instruction. No one wants to eat corn chowder for fourteen years straight. Even if they do, they won't be healthy in the end. Pastors, therefore, would have fresher and newer fields to cultivate and share their gifts, and perhaps even less preparation time would be required for their presentations.

## **A Reform Model**

What the ultimate solution to the administrative inequities found in pastoral and lay ministry across North America and elsewhere might be, is a matter of complex concern. This small treatise does not pretend to be able to solve the riddle. But it does seem that dedicated study and practical re-

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living. The typical tenure was much less. Even while in Ephesus there is evidence that Paul was constantly visiting outlying churches and groups of believers while "living" at Ephesus. He was in the practice of continually building new "foundations."

alignment models need to be built and tested to correct the system that in some ways has gone awry. An appeal is made to those in positions of responsibility to give honest and prayerful consideration to the concepts exposed in the preceding pages. The life of the American church and the world, not to mention the lives of thousands of waiting souls, depends upon it!

The writer and prophetess Ellen White suggested that at least three fourths of the ministerial labor then expended on the churches should be turned toward the *parish* of this earth. That was then. Why can't this be done now, in degrees, at least?

If pastors were organized into “super-districts” (called “conferences<sup>8</sup>”) and were located near their centers and were not assigned to a particular church but to a number of churches, this model could be followed quite easily. Others would be sent to cities, dark counties, and foreign countries. No pastor would lose his job. The churches would be nurtured and governed, but the churches themselves would be released to do more of their own local work. Pastors thus situated might have to move their families less,

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<sup>8</sup> Originally this is what the conferences were. The presidents were pastoral leaders. Now conferences have become sprawling megaplexes too large to work the ideal model.

and not more. Gifts would be equally shared with thousands of members and greater and larger goals could be accomplished.<sup>9</sup>

Not only would every church be blessed by a plethora of pastoral leaders with their unique gifts, but transitional gaps could be not only minimized but in a sense effectually eliminated. A solid majority of the pastors would then be freed up to enter new fields, even new countries of the world.

Today, the care of the churches is crushing many ministers, and burnout is a real problem. A reformed and broadened model might save many ministers to the work, giving them purpose and regular change. The world could be his parish, not just his lonely district. Pastors and laymen would not be marginalized along with their gifts. They would not be filed away into districts. Especially those who have a reform message to give to the church at large, could have greater influence, reaching more than just a few here and there. Thus the tithe, better invested, might have a global and missional effect, and not just a local one.

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<sup>9</sup> If the pastor is located at the heart of a super-district, of say, ten churches, he could potentially live in the same household for many years. It would take fifty years to the equal the same time exposure in all the churches that is experienced in a normal five-year tenure in one church.



## Conclusion

A challenge goes forth to the church to seek the Lord in the matter of how we should administrate our church work locally in North America and across the globe. It is the opinion of this writer that the counsel found both in the Book of Books and in the Prophetic Writings demands that some adjustments need to be made, perhaps even radical change in some respects.

As writer of this modest document I don't claim or pretend to see everything in it's proper light or to understand how all of this should come together. Some suggestions and observations have been made. But they are just that. They may not work. They are simply verbalized to stimulate interest and discussion on this important subject.

What really needs to happen is for churches and church leaders to come together to prayerfully consider how to finish the church's mission to this world. A design needs to be adopted that frees pastors from unnecessary burdens and that equally distributes spiritual gifts broadly, including administrators, pastors, and laymen. And may the reform embraced not be a complicated "program" given a "name," but rather a simple submission and return to the New Testament model of ministry, a concept owned and prayerfully understood by all of

God's people!

The world is our parish. ALL of it! It includes the local parish, but it also includes the most remote corner as well, regions shrouded in darkness waiting for the light. The task is before us. No man can do it alone. The church must work together as one vast army, organized, efficient, and unselfish. The Holy Spirit of God must lead the way.

May God so direct his church to fulfill its full, divine destiny. May the living church come completely out of the Ages of Darkness and into the Age of Light. May the work of God soon be done. May God's glory and his precious messages resound across the whole inhabited globe. May Jesus soon come! "Rise up, O church of God!"

# Appendix

## **Further EGW statements of note for those interested:**

(highlights and emphasis supplied)

### **Ellen G. White Estate**

**Manuscript Releases - Volume Nine [Nos. 664-770] (1990),  
page 9, paragraph 2**

**Chapter Title: MR No. 668 - Counsel Regarding the Moving  
of Workers**

I have not been able to sleep after one o'clock. Through the night season the light has been given me that it is not wise to keep ministers in the same locality year after year, that it is not right to keep the president of the conference in one place through a succession of years. His position as president should be carefully considered, and changed as soon as God shall open the way for another to take his place. It is not justice to have the burdens that must come upon the president of any conference placed upon one man year after year, for a condition of things will come into existence that will not be for his good, or for the good of the conference. It is in this way that one man's mind and judgment comes to be thought infallible. The work is in the Lord's hands, and He will signify to us when He has a man

prepared for the place. Until then we may let our minds rest.--  
Letter 87, 1898, p. 1. (To N. D. Faulkhead, October 20, 1898.

### **Ellen G. White Estate**

#### **Gospel Workers (1892), page 240, paragraph 1**

#### **Chapter Title: Conference Presidents.[A SERMON DELIVERED AT THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1883]**

#### **Removing to New Fields**

The question is asked me if it is not a mistake to remove the president of a State Conference to a new field when many of the people in his present charge are unwilling to give him up. The Lord has been pleased to give me light on this question. I have been shown that ministers should not be retained in the same district year after year, nor should the same man long preside over a Conference. A change of gifts is for the good of our Conferences and churches. Ministers have sometimes felt unwilling to change their field of labor; but if they understood all the reasons for making changes, they would not draw back. Some have pleaded to remain one year longer in the same field, and frequently the request has been respected. They have claimed to have plans for accomplishing a greater work than heretofore. But at the close of the year there was a worse state of things than before. If a minister has been unfaithful in his work, it is not likely that he will mend the matter by remaining. The churches become accustomed to the management of the one man, and think they must look to him instead of looking to God. His ideas and plans have a controlling power in the Conference. The people may see that he errs in judgment, and because of this they learn to place a low estimate upon the ministry. If they would look to God, and depend upon heavenly wisdom, they would be gaining an experience of the highest value, and would themselves be able, in many respects at least, to supply what is

lacking in him who is the overseer of the flock. But too often things are left to drift as they will, the president being held responsible for the healthful condition of the churches in the Conference, while the church members settle down, indifferent, lukewarm, doing nothing to bring things into order.

### **Ellen G. White Estate**

**The Signs of the Times , January 27, 1890, paragraph 9**

**Article Title: The Most Effective Agent for God.-By Mrs. E. G. White.-**

The success of a church does not depend on the efforts and labor of the living preacher, but it depends upon the piety of the individual members. When the members depend upon the minister as their source of power and efficiency, they will be utterly powerless. They will imbibe his impulses, and be stimulated by his ideas, but when he leaves them, they will find themselves in a more hopeless condition than before they had his labors. I hope that none of the churches in our land will depend upon a minister for support in spiritual things; for this is dangerous. When God gives you light, you should praise him for it. If you extol the messenger, you will be left to barrenness of soul. Just as soon as the members of a church call for the labors of a certain minister, and feel that he must remain with them, it is time that he was removed to another field, that they may learn to exercise the ability which God has given them. Let the people go to work. Let them thank God for the encouragement they have received, and then make it manifest that it has wrought in them a good work. Let each member of the church be a living, active agent for God, both in the church and out of it. We must all be educated to be independent, not helpless and useless. Let it be seen that Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church. The members of the body of Christ have a part to act, and they will not be accounted faithful unless they do act their part. Let a

divine work be wrought in every soul, until Christ shall behold his image reflected in his followers.

**Ellen G. White Estate**

**The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials (1987), page 1752, paragraph 6,7**

**Chapter Title: An Appeal to our Ministers.**

My heart has been filled with sadness as I have looked over the field and seen the barren places. What does this mean? Who are standing as representatives of Jesus Christ? Who feels a burden for the souls who can not receive the truth till it is brought to them. Our ministers are hovering over the churches, as though the angel of mercy was not making efforts to save souls.

God holds these ministers responsible for the souls of those who are in darkness. He does not call you to go into fields that need no physician. Establish your churches with the understanding that they need not expect the minister to wait upon them and to be continually feeding them. They have the truth; they know what truth is. They should have root in themselves. These should strike down deeply, that they may reach up higher and still higher. They must be rooted and grounded in the faith.

**Ellen G. White Estate**

**The Review and Herald, October 12, 1886, paragraph 9**

**Article Title: An Appeal.-By Mrs. E. G. White.-**

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he committed his work on earth to those who had received the light of the gospel. They were to carry the work forward to completion. He has provided no other agency for the promulgation of his truth. "Go ye into all the

world, and preach the gospel to every creature." "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This solemn commission reaches us in this age. God leaves with his church the responsibility of receiving or rejecting it. Many seem to rest perfectly easy, as if heavenly messengers were to come to this earth, to proclaim with an audible voice the message of warning; but while angels have their work to do, we are to do ours in opening the Bible truth to those who are in darkness. Is your interest selfishly shut up in your own family, to your church? God pity your narrowness! You should have that undying zeal, that far-reaching love, which encircles the world. Those who are not called to go to foreign countries have a work to do in their own borders, to keep up the interest in their churches by well-directed effort, that they may be spiritual and self-sacrificing, and by their means and earnest prayers may aid those who enter new and difficult fields. Ministers should not do work that belongs to the laymen, thus wearying themselves, and preventing others from doing their duty. They should teach the members how to work in the church and community, to build up the church, to make the prayer-meeting interesting, and to train for missionaries youth of ability. The members of the church should co-operate actively with the ministers, making the section of country around them their field of missionary labor. Churches that are weak or few in numbers, should be looked after by sister churches.

**Ellen G. White Estate**

**Manuscript Releases Volume Six [Nos. 347-418] (1990), page 65, paragraph 1**

**Chapter Title: MR No. 347 - Manuscript Materials Requested by The 1973 Seminary Prophetic Guidance Class**

The churches that have not life in themselves, that have lost their spiritual discernment, call for ministers to come to their

help, to bring them the breath of life. But the ministers have other work to do. They must carry the message of truth to those who know it not. Those ministers who hover about the churches, who have not a clear cut message, which, like a sharp, two-edged sword, cuts both ways, will do the churches harm. They will not work for the salvation of souls that are in great peril because they know not the truth, and they will die spiritually themselves, and trouble and discourage those who try to help them. . . .

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