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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST®

ELDER'S  
HANDBOOK

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST®  
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Prepared and Published by The Ministerial Association  
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References to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual are from the 19th edition revised in 2015.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work of elders is unique among church leaders. As overseers, they are responsible for everything that is related to the work of the church. As such, the training and directing of elders fall under the Ministerial Association. Because elders work closely with people in all aspects of the church, this handbook includes material from representatives of each department.

## THE MANUSCRIPT

To the elders in their ministry to the church, the General Conference Ministerial Association leadership and their counterparts in the world divisions present this updated edition of the 1997 Elder's Handbook. Because this handbook is to be used worldwide, it was sent to General Conference departmental directors, elders, pastors, and administrators for review, input, and suggestions. In consideration of elders in different parts of the world serving in congregations of varying sizes, these basic principles should be applied contextually and locally.

The principal writing was done by Gary Patterson, with the assistance of Rae Patterson. Erika Miike prepared the layout and design. The final approval was made by the in-house Ministerial Association staff at the General Conference office: Jonas Arrais, Robert Costa, Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, Willie E. Hucks, Anthony Kent, Derek Morris, Jerry Page, Janet Page, and Cathy Payne.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to these and many others who made this handbook possible.

# PREFACE

The work of elders in the Seventh-day Adventist church is extensive and varied. Some churches are large, requiring leadership over thousands of members. Other churches are small, serving a few members, who are sometimes scattered over a large area. In such churches, pastoral services are usually limited, and the elder provides not only leadership, but, in consultation with the pastor, also arranges for regular preaching responsibilities. This handbook has been prepared to assist elders in understanding their calling, and to train them in their leadership role in the church.

“Occasionally no one possesses the experience and qualifications to serve as an elder. Under such circumstances the church should elect a person to be known as ‘leader.’ In the absence of the pastor or a conference-assigned pastor, the leader is responsible for the services of the church, including business meetings. The leader must either conduct these or arrange for someone else to do so” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 77). This handbook is for their use as well.

Because the Adventist church is a worldwide organization of ethnic and cultural diversity, congregational practices vary. This handbook does not prescribe methods or procedures for all elders everywhere to follow. Rather, emphasis is given to the function of the elder according to biblical principles of organization and leadership, which may be adapted anywhere in the world.

This handbook is part of a set that includes the *Minister’s Handbook* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. These

should be considered companion volumes, and church elders should have access to all three. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, voted by the world church in General Conference Session, takes precedence over this or any other handbook prepared for use in the local congregation.

When referencing the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* in this handbook, the page numbers refer to the 2015 edition. While page numbers vary from one edition to another, topics are found in the index.

The terms “minister” and “pastor” are frequently used interchangeably. For clarity, the term “pastor” is used in this handbook except when quoting material from other sources.

Because the work of the church elder and pastor are inextricably entwined both in Scripture and in practice, this handbook closely parallels the *Minister’s Handbook*. The *Minister’s Handbook* would be helpful to the elder who seeks greater understanding of the topics addressed in this handbook.

It is intended that pastors and ministerial secretaries will use this handbook when training elders. Such training stems from a long line of ministry, beginning with the Apostle Paul’s instructions to the elders in Ephesus to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

General Conference Ministerial Association





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# CHAPTER 1

## THE CHURCH AND ITS ORGANIZATION

### THE EARLY CHURCH MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

**Elders in the Church.** Scripture calls for the service of elders. From the beginning of the New Testament church, leadership in the community of believers was accorded to “the apostles and elders” (Acts 15:22), and they appointed and ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). With this practice as a model, such structure has continued in various forms since the beginning of the Christian era.

At the outset, the disciples not only spread the gospel, but also oversaw the development of the Christian community. But soon, with hundreds—then thousands—of new believers, a structure was needed for the growing church. Deacons were appointed (Acts 6) to assist in the care of members; then elders were selected to give leadership to the ever-expanding church. And as the original apostles passed away, the elders assumed their leadership roles.

In this tradition of the early church, the *Elder’s Handbook* seeks to provide guidance and clarity to the role of elders in the Seventh-day Adventist community of believers. To do so, certain definitions need to be clarified—particularly the definition of “church” and “elder,” as they are understood and used in this handbook.

### DEFINITIONS

**Elders.** While the basic definition of “elder” refers to one’s age, in both New Testament usage and current understanding, the word has an additional meaning of “leader” or “ambassador.” Though elders

are generally mature and experienced, it does not mean that only older individuals can serve as elders. The instruction to “appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5) indicates that the oldest member is not necessarily the elder. Otherwise, the office would be filled automatically, thus rendering appointment unnecessary.

Even as a young man, Timothy was recognized as a leader in the early Christian community, and it was the Apostle Paul who said, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers” (1 Tim. 4:12). Indeed, elders are called to this kind of exemplary leadership—regardless of their age.

**Church.** Since the many uses of the word “church” come with much potential for misunderstanding, it is important to define its usage in this handbook. A church often refers to location, such as a building or property. It may also mean a company of believers or members, or may be used when referring to the divine worship hour. At times it is used to identify and differentiate between denominations, as in the name, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

These usages tend to see the church as something we establish, belong to, operate, or own. And while in this handbook we will primarily address the organization and operation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an institution, we always remember that God creates and calls the church into existence. A literal translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, from which the word “church” is translated, is “the called out.”

We do not form or own the church. The church is what occurs when individuals accept the gospel call—the good news of Christ’s saving grace—to be part of God’s kingdom and “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). It is not a call for a group of people to leave one organization and join another. It is a call for an individual to move from a lost

condition in a fallen world to salvation and righteousness in Christ. And those who accept it will naturally join together as part of God's people. We do not form the church by our individual or corporate will; we become the church by accepting the call of God.

Church is a New Testament concept. The word does not occur in the Old Testament. But this does not mean that people in Old Testament times were not part of God's kingdom: Israel was God's chosen nation, His people who were to receive His saving grace and share the knowledge of His love to all nations and people. Worship and fellowship practices found in the Old Testament significantly influenced the New Testament church. Yet the establishment of the New Testament church is unique in salvation history, and is not an extension of Judaism.

Scripture uses the word "church" in two ways. When used in the broad and general sense, it refers to God's people at all times and in all places. Though we may not be able to see or tally its number, the "invisible church" does exist. God alone knows those who are written in His "Book of Life" (Rev. 21:27). *Church* also refers to specific assemblies in cities such as Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), Galatia (Gal. 1:2), and the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 3-4). Both the broad and specific understandings of the church will be discussed in this handbook. However, since elders are first of all leaders in local Seventh-day Adventist congregations, the specific meaning of *church* will be most frequently intended.

**Purpose of the Church.** The purpose of the church is to enable its members to fulfill the gospel commission and "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Structure, policies, and institutions all have vital roles to play in the organization of the church, but they are not the church's mission. When the church becomes centered on the preservation of the institution, diverted by arguments about

policy and structure rather than focused on giving the good news of salvation, we know that we have lost the original intent of the organization. The church does not exist for the sake of itself as an institution, but for the sake of its people and its mission.

God is deeply committed to the success of His church, in spite of its imperfections. Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). Of this divine commitment to the church, Ellen White observes, “I testify to my brethren and sisters that the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard” (*Selected Messages, vol. 2*, p. 396). The church is an organism to which Christ Himself gives spiritual life. Therefore, it cannot be defined in merely human terms. Thus, it is very important to see the church as Christ-centered and people-oriented.

A disciplined Christian life grows from experiencing God’s saving grace. The church exists for the sake of people. Every doctrine must be presented not only on the basis of its truth, but also on the basis of how it helps people become Christlike. Thus truth and doctrine become significant and important as they help people grow in grace.

A church is not a museum of relics, but a workshop where ongoing development is in progress. In a museum, items finished long ago are lined up on display. But in a workshop, some items are in the beginning stages, some half-done, and some nearing completion. Changes are taking place. Things are happening. Likewise, it should be expected to see church members in every stage of Christian development.

Taking the mission of the church seriously places tension between the need to separate from the world and the responsibility to reach out to it. A church focusing on either one of these objectives to the exclusion of the other will be out of balance. While we are individually called to be separate from this sinful world, the mission of the church calls for us to reach out lovingly to serve and save the

world. The church must ever be “in the world, but not of the world” (John 17:14-16).

A church can easily become distracted from its mission by becoming absorbed in itself, its meetings, its committees, and its buildings. The mission-driven church, on the other hand, looks at everything it does from the perspective of reaching out to and befriending those in their community. Every church member is to be a minister. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV).

### **THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE**

The call of the gospel is an intensely personal and individual matter, yet it requires corporate responsibility and community. While we are not saved as a company of believers, we find strength and security in the fellowship of a Christian community. We are admonished to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:24, 25). We are intended to band together as Christians for the mutual benefit it provides. Clearly, the strength of what we can do together is greater than our individual efforts.

Christ said to his disciples, “Do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren . . . . But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:8, 11). The relationship between leaders and those being led is not that of master and servant, but co-workers in the Kingdom of God. Leadership is necessary and should be respected, but church leaders are to be servant leaders. There should be mutual respect in Christ’s church among those of different race, tribe, caste, or gender. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NIV).

In his treatise to the Corinthians on church organization and leadership, Paul describes spiritual gifts as being given to the church through its members: “There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Cor. 12:5-7). Gifts of the spirit that enable the leadership of elders are not given for the individual, but for the church through their service.

**Biblical models of organization.** This handbook specifically addresses the organizational and structural aspect of the church. Where God is at work, there is organization; and the church is no exception. “System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 26).

Israel’s organization as directed by God was precise and detailed. In their march through the wilderness, they went in “divisions” (Num. 10:28, NIV). There were twelve tribes with a prince over each and they were further divided into groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exod. 18:21, 22). Each tribe had its assigned position, both in the camp and when traveling.

One of the most helpful models of the church comes from Paul’s oft-repeated illustration of the body. The human body has a head, arms, legs, as well as vital internal organs (1 Cor. 12:12-28). Although these parts vary tremendously in appearance, placement, and function, the whole body is dependent on each part performing its task properly. The church is referred to as the body of Christ and it operates the same way.

Members from a multitude of racial and social backgrounds are very different from one another. But all become part of one body “for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free” (1 Cor. 12:13). Just as in the

human body, where the function of each part is vital to the health of the person, in the body of Christ the participation of members is essential to the health of the church. When every part functions well, the church thrives.

The head directs the body and the head of the church body is Christ (Col. 1:18). The body is an extension of His will; it does on earth what He would do if He were here. Through the Holy Spirit, He equips the church with spiritual gifts to do His work. These gifts are to be refined and developed in the service of the church body. Every member is called by the Holy Spirit to a particular ministry, and empowered by the Spirit to perform this ministry successfully.

The early church is an example of how an organization gradually grows and develops as needs arise. The first organizational group consisted of the apostle's council in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2). As the Christian community and its needs expanded, additional leaders were chosen to take responsibility for its developing work. Neighboring churches grouped together in similar fashion, as indicated in Paul's letter to "the churches in Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). The Seventh-day Adventist church has sought to pattern its organization after that of the New Testament church.

**Seventh-day Adventist organization.** The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church questioned the belief systems and structures of the denominations from which they had come and sought to bring reformation to these churches. And when their attempts were rebuffed, the idea to organize a new denomination was met with reluctance, lest it become like the ones they had left. But the necessity of organization soon outweighed the skepticism. "As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in

new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 26).

While the Gospel Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) is not the exclusive purview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have a unique responsibility to take the Three Angels' Message “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6). Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church must always maintain an emphasis on worldwide mission. Focusing only on local activities to the exclusion of world mission is contrary to the foundation and principles of the Church.

This worldview provides an organizational challenge to local elders and their churches. The task is enormous, so the organization must be efficient. The task is global, so there must be delegation of authority. The task is multi-national and multi-cultural, so the organization must be flexible.

**Forms of church governance.** Churches generally fall into four types of governance:

1. *Papal*, where the Pope has supreme authority and is regarded as the sole, infallible voice of authority on matters of doctrine and policy.
2. *Episcopal*, where the authority for process and theological interpretation rests with church bishops.
3. *Congregational*, where authority for all action and interpretation of scripture resides with the local congregation.
4. *Representative*, where basic authority rests with church members, but responsibility for doctrinal development, planning, and coordination of the world church is delegated to governance by constituent groups representing the constituents by whom they were appointed. Seventh-day Adventists follow this representative form of church governance.

The work of each constituent group is reviewed at periodic “sessions.” At these sessions, reports are given, leaders held accountable, and new leadership chosen when necessary. Delegates to these sessions are typically chosen by the entity at the level below the one being reviewed. For example, before a local conference session, each local church chooses delegates from its congregation to represent it at the session.

**Constituent organizations.** There are four types of constituent organizations in the Seventh-day Adventist church:

1. *The local church*, which is an organized body of individual believers. When a group of believers has grown in membership and spiritual maturity; demonstrates spiritual gifts sufficient to provide for its own nurture and witness in its community; and has sufficient finances to sustain itself, it may apply to the local mission or conference for status as an organized local church. Until then, the group, in counsel with the district pastor or representative of the conference/mission may form a company. When the local conference or mission is satisfied that such a company is ready to assume the status of an organized church, a conference or mission representative will call the company together and officiate the organization of a local church.
2. *The local conference/field/mission*, which is an organized body of churches within a given territory.
3. *The union conference/mission*, which is a body of conferences or fields within a larger territory.
4. *The General Conference*, which is the largest unit of organization, headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. The world church is organizationally broken up into divisions, which are designated geographical areas that serve in administrative and leadership capacities for the General Conference.

**Institutions.** From its beginning, denominational structure has been comprised of educational, health care, publishing, and other institutions, each organized separately, yet designed to play a significant part in fulfilling the church's mission.

*General Conference authority.* The General Conference in session and its executive committee between sessions, is the highest organization in the administration of the world church. "Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered" (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 260).

*Finance.* A global organization such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church must operate with an efficient financial system. Most of the church's income is received through the tithe of its members who return one-tenth of their income (Mal. 3:10). While the local conference uses a major portion of the tithe received to support ministry in its territory, an additional percentage of the tithe is sent to each level of church government for use in the worldwide mission of the church. This method of sharing funds given in the local church grows from the commitment of church members to the worldwide mission of the church. Further income is received through various other offerings from the local church.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH ELDER**

The term "elder" is used more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. Faithfully serving in their synagogues and among their communities, these elders guided God's people and helped keep alive His mission to the world.

**Old Testament elders.** The term “elder” in the Old Testament refers to those of official position such as heads of families or tribes. When Moses took upon himself the burden of leadership for the Children of Israel, God spoke to him through Jethro, his father-in-law: “The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself” (Exod. 18:17, 18). Through this experience early in Israel’s history, God teaches His people that leadership authority is to be delegated and responsibility is to be shared.

“So the Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone’” (Num. 11:16, 17).

“When choosing seventy elders to share with him the responsibilities of leadership, Moses was careful to select, as his helpers, men possessing dignity, sound judgment, and experience. In his charge to these elders at the time of their ordination, he outlined some of the qualifications that fit a man to be a wise ruler in the church. “Hear the causes between your brethren,” said Moses, “and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 94).

**New Testament elders.** In the New Testament, the words “elder,” “bishop,” and “overseer” are often used interchangeably (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The title refers to more than the age of the leader, but to a role as spiritual guardian of the congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-3). The

office of elder in the New Testament church was evidently suggested by the office of elder among the Jews, and was invested with similar authority.

Elders have served since the early days of the church. In 44 AD, they were already working in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). On his first missionary journey, Paul “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Elders were associated with the apostles in the governance of the church (Acts 16:4). They were the bishops or overseers (Acts 20:17, 28), providing spiritual care for the congregation, exercising rule, and giving instruction (Titus 1:9; James 5:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

There were two types of leadership in the New Testament church:

1. *Apostles*, generally itinerant workers, who cared for the overall teaching, planning, administration, and evangelism of the church.
2. *Lay elders*, who performed assigned leadership duties in their local congregations. Lay elders exercised their spiritual gift for leadership and provided a ministry that gave strength and direction to the local church.

**Seventh-day Adventist elders.** The work of the local elder has developed throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The earliest churches elected deacons, but not elders. In 1854 and 1855, Joseph Bates and J. B. Frisbie wrote of two kinds of church leaders—those who traveled from church to church and those who had pastoral care of one church. In 1861, J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, and M. E. Cornell were asked to study the biblical model of church organization. They concluded that the election and ordination of elders and deacons in local churches was clearly prescribed.

In 1874, G. I. Butler wrote that the elder was the principal officer in the church. The elder’s powers were limited, however, in that the body of the church was the deciding authority. By 1875, the church agreed

that elders should visit both active and inactive members, conduct the ordinances in the absence of the pastor, and call business meetings. In recent years, the world church has determined that where division committees approve and where a local congregation agrees, both men and women may serve as local elders.

“Elders must be recognized by the church as strong spiritual leaders and must have good reputations both in the church and community. In the absence of the pastor, elders are the spiritual leaders of the church and by precept and example must seek to lead the church into deeper and fuller Christian experience. Elders should be able to conduct the services of the church and minister in both word and doctrine when the pastor is unavailable” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 73). “In the absence of an ordained pastor, an elder shall request the conference president to arrange for the baptism of those desiring to unite with the church” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 75).

“As spiritual leaders, elders are responsible for encouraging members to develop a personal relationship with Jesus by strengthening their habits of personal Bible study and prayer. Elders should model a commitment to Bible study and prayer. An effective personal prayer life of every member, supporting all ministries and programs of the local church, will enhance the church’s mission” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 75).

The church is very dependent on its elders. On any given Sabbath in Seventh-day Adventist churches, there are more sermons that are preached and more worship services that are led by local elders than by pastors. Small churches usually share their pastor with sister congregations, and local elders preside in the pastor’s absence. Even when a church has a full-time pastor or is large enough to have a multi-pastoral staff, the needs of the church and its members go far beyond what pastors are able to accomplish by themselves. It is through the faithful ministry of church elders that churches thrive.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing rapidly, and many churches are under-staffed. In such situations, there may be large multi-church districts where a pastor is shared among several churches and is able to visit each church only once every two or three months. It is the faithful service of local elders that helps keep these churches strong and growing.

The Ministerial Associations at the various levels of church organization support and train local elders through print and electronic resources. The Association provides this assistance in cooperation with other specialized ministries in various departments of the church. The objective is to develop strong, committed, witness-oriented, and nurturing pastor-elder teams that will provide churches the spiritual leadership they need. The General Conference Ministerial Association may be contacted online at [www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com).

The Ministerial Association produces several publications, such as the *Elder's Digest*, to assist elders and other church leadership. Elders are encouraged to subscribe to the magazine, and conferences urged to provide free subscriptions to their elders. *Ministry Magazine* is an additional resource for the ministry of both pastors and elders, available by subscription or for free at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org). Additional material regarding ministry is available through the various levels of the Ministerial Association.

# CHAPTER 2

## THE ELDER'S CALL AND QUALIFICATIONS

### **CALLING, ELECTION, AND ORDINATION**

The call of God “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9) is a call out of one’s self-centered past and into service in God’s kingdom. It is a call into ministry in His church. Christians are part of a priesthood of believers called to serve people both inside and outside of the church. Elders, like all members of Christ’s body, are divinely called to their ministry. Thus there are two sources of an elder’s appointment:

1. They are called by God.
2. They are elected by their congregation.

**Called by God.** The call to be an elder is first and foremost a call from God. The church then recognizes the elders’ gifts for leadership and elects them to office. God provides the requisite gifts and creates the opportunity by guiding the church in its selection. Elders who realize that their calling comes first from God will most appreciate the importance and seriousness of their leadership responsibility.

**Election and ordination.** Those who have been ordained as elders have no official position or authority in the church unless they have also been elected by the congregation. Eldership should not be given to people who covet the position as a means of increasing their own personal influence and authority. Elders should not be elected because they already hold some position of importance in their community,

because they have been successful in business, or give large amounts of money to the church. Elders are chosen because the church recognizes their call from God and sees in them the necessary qualifications.

Elders are usually elected to serve a one-year or two-year term of office, depending on the length of service established by the church. The church may reelect them at the end of the term, but is under no obligation to do so. Elders formerly but not currently elected by the church have no authority in the congregation despite their previous position.

### **JOB DESCRIPTION**

There is a wide variety of functions that elders serve in various parts of the world, depending on the needs and size of the church. This makes the preparation of a single job description difficult. Elders serve in widely differing circumstances. An elder's job description is determined largely by five factors:

- The size of the congregation
- The availability of the pastor
- The pastor's plan for involving elders
- The elder's spiritual gifts
- The elder's willingness to serve

The common job description below addresses the responsibilities of elders in all church situations. This is followed by specific differences between elders in small and large churches.

**Common job description.** Scripture does not provide a detailed job description for elders. Further, it is not always clear what is meant by the word "elder" in passages describing New Testament church organization. Sometimes it means an older person. Sometimes it refers to one of the apostles (2 John 1:1). Sometimes it refers to local church leaders apart from the apostles (Acts 15:2, 4, 6). Combining

all the New Testament passages referring to elders provides a general understanding of the work of local elders:

1. Elders were appointed in every congregation (Acts 14:23).
2. They were highly respected (1 Tim. 5:17, 19).
3. They carried significant leadership and administrative responsibilities (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23).
4. They provided leadership in prayer ministry and in the anointing of the sick (James 5:14).
5. They served as shepherds, overseers, and examples to the church (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

An elder's job description should include the following:

*Spiritual leadership.* Elders should be respected by their congregations and able to speak well. While oratory skills and the ability to prepare a good sermon are assets to an elder, a consecrated life and the gift of spiritual leadership are far more important. An elder is to be “blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous” (1 Tim. 3:2, 3). This instruction should not be understood as a requirement that an elder must be married, especially since Paul himself was not married. It is a reference to the practice of polygamy, and says an elder should not have multiple wives.

*General oversight.* Elders in the early church were instructed to serve as “overseers,” to shepherd the Church of God (Acts 20:28). Overseers, by definition, are not meant to do all the work themselves. The term signifies that they must keep a watchful eye over all the members and activities of the church. Elders guide, encourage, and support other church officers.

As good overseers, elders do not dominate those they supervise. Instead, they include others in the decision-making process. Elders

involve church committees and church members in planning, staffing, training, and guiding the entire church program. Elders are committed to sharing the gospel, casting a challenging vision for the church, and implementing outreach initiatives both in their immediate community and in the world church. They share leadership responsibilities in the worship service and, at the request of the pastor or in his absence, serve as chairperson of board and business meetings.

*Nurturing.* As shepherds, elders nurture and care for their flock. In this role, they take interest in individual church members. They counsel, encourage, and pray for the sick, the discouraged, and those with unique problems. Elders are aware of the special needs of the congregation, such as providing Communion to shut-ins. Elders are involved in preparing new members for baptism and creating a nurturing environment of discipleship for new members.

*Job description of elders of smaller churches.* The responsibilities of elders in small churches vary from those in large churches, not so much because of church size, but because small churches typically have the services of a pastor on a limited basis.

Elders in small churches are responsible for nearly all the administration of the church, with only general guidance from the pastor. They either preach regularly or, in consultation with the pastor, arrange for guest speakers. Ministerial Association offices at various levels of the church organization provide material to assist elders in sermon preparation. Elders in small churches usually plan and lead out in worship services, including Communion. Their duties may include calling and chairing the church board or business meeting in the pastor's absence. They organize and participate in the visitation of members, especially those not in regular attendance. They oversee the evangelistic plans of the church. They help train the congregation in stewardship and give general oversight to local church finance. They take responsibility for functions of all church departments, and

share with the congregation plans of the church departments, the pastor, and the local conference or mission office. The authority and responsibilities of elders are broad, but should be carried out under the guidance of the pastor and in consultation with the church board.

*Job description of elders of large churches.* As congregations grow, they usually need the services of more than one elder. While elders in small churches are usually overburdened by the wide variety of challenges they face, elders in large churches often need clear direction about their specific assignments. A staff of elders in larger churches should be organized and structured to give oversight to all aspects and needs of the congregation.

*The elder team.* The office of elder is a working position, not an honorary one. Its purpose is service, not status or power. Elders serve as members of the church board, and may also be organized as a board of elders. The board of elders advises the pastor, serving as additional eyes and ears to discern the needs of the church and the direction it should take in its service to members and the community. The number of elders needed to serve the congregation depends on the size of the congregation and the number of specific tasks assigned to elders.

Each member of the elder team may be assigned to one or more planning groups, such as an evangelism council, worship committee, Sabbath School council, or youth ministry committee. Each should be involved in and assigned a task in the church's outreach ministry. One of the most important ministries of elders is to find ways to reclaim inactive members.

*The first elder.* When a church has more than one elder, one should be designated as "first" or "head" elder. Head elders are special assistants to the pastor. Under the pastor's guidance, they organize the team of elders and give other elders their specific assignments.

Serving as chairperson of the church board or business meeting is often, but not necessarily, the responsibility of the first elder.

## QUALIFICATIONS

The position of elder carries the responsibility of leadership as the first officer of the church administration. The spiritual life, personal life, and character of elders must be blameless (Titus 1:6). Their behavior must be sober-minded and temperate. They must exhibit an attitude of hospitality and a willingness to teach. An elder must be “not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous” (1 Tim. 3:2, 3).

**Committed to Christ.** Spirituality must have a private dimension before it can have a public influence. A significant part of the apostles’ success in ministry was their ability to say, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Likewise, that which elders share in their leadership and ministry to the church must come from a personal relationship with the Savior through prayer, the study of scripture, and the gifts of the Spirit. “You cannot exert an influence that will transform others until your own heart has been humbled and refined and made tender by the grace of Christ” (*Evangelism*, p. 459).

Without this spiritual dimension, the work of church leadership will function only at the level of implementing psychological techniques, organizational methods, and motivational skills. Not that such skills and knowledge are of no use, but unless they spring from the spirituality that comes from a personal encounter with Christ, they will not suffice to fulfill the call of the gospel.

Saul, who was acting on what he saw as religious fervor, was in actuality working counter to the call of God. Then he saw a vision of

Christ on the Damascus road that caused him to ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6). This experience led him to become a leader in the church, but only after totally committing himself to God.

*Daily commitment.* Commitment, deep spirituality, and strong moral character are necessary attributes of Christian leadership, but they do not come naturally or by accident; they result from a close, daily association with Jesus. This must be a continual process whereby the elder makes time for Bible study, meditation, and prayer. Christian leaders cannot expect to have the power to lead people in God’s way unless they themselves live a life in complete surrender to, and communion with, God.

Jesus experienced this same need to be with His Heavenly Father and renew His strength and direction. “In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). It was His custom to spend the early hours of the day in private devotions (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46). Jesus’ devotional life serves as a model for Christian leaders today.

*Time commitment.* Elders need to be available at all times. Besides projects and events, there are always challenges to overcome and opportunities for service. When accepting the position of an elder, one must be willing and able to commit several hours a week to the position. While it is impossible for elders to accomplish everything that needs to be done, their service must not compromise their families and their personal lives.

**Example to members.** Elders are chosen and ordained not only to do church work, but to also reveal the character of Christ. Jesus’ life reflected what he taught, and this made His teaching so effective. Church elders must be what they call others to be, believe what they

expect their members to believe, and love Christ the way they expect church members to love Christ. Elders must be able to say, like Paul, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). They are to be Christianity in human form. While they are not perfect, they are to be like Christ—persons of principle.

The Scripture sets high standards of living for church elders. Moses was counseled to choose “[God-fearing] men of truth, hating covetousness” (Exod. 18:21). Likewise, an elder in the early Christian church was to be “just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict” (Titus 1:6-9).

“Those who are appointed to guard the spiritual interests of the church should be careful to set a right example, giving no occasion for envy, jealousy or suspicion, ever manifesting that same spirit of love, respect, and courtesy which they desire to encourage in the brethren” (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 241).

*Support church doctrine.* “Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Elders must avoid undermining the faith of those they lead by publicly airing questions and doubts. If such questions arise, they should be discussed in private with the pastor or other dependable leaders. Elders are chosen to uphold the church and their teaching must be based on sound, Christ-centered doctrine.

*Maintain strong family relationships.* The elder should be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Tim. 3:4). While family members make their own choices regarding their relationship with God and the church, and elders cannot be held responsible for the choices of others, the influence of the leaders’ families on the church is significant.

Church elders must maintain an exemplary life in both their personal and church family. Those who lead their families into close and happy relationships with one another and with God are more likely

to be able to nurture the same kind of relationships within the church family. “The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well ordered, well disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart” (*Adventist Home*, p. 32).

*Be morally pure.* “Be an example . . . in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Elders must avoid moral indiscretions and inappropriate emotional attachments. They must be aware of their vulnerability to temptations and the effects their choices have on their families and personal lives. Elders are to exercise caution when counseling members on intimate matters, remaining spiritually strong and recognizing adultery as a sin not only against themselves and their families, but also against God.

*Overcome racial prejudice.* Christian love eliminates barriers such as racism and prejudice that separate people. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). If God is the Father of all, then everyone is considered members of the same family. And in God’s family, gender, color, caste, tribe, language, and nationality are irrelevant to a harmonious relationship.

*Be an exemplary giver.* Faithfulness in returning tithe and giving offerings encourages church members to be good stewards. Those who do not return a faithful tithe should not be elected as elders. It is unreasonable to expect church members to willingly tithe and financially support their local and the world church when the elders making the request do not do so themselves.

*Admit your mistakes.* Congregations are more inclined to be generous with and forgiving of leaders who are open and who honestly admit their mistakes. Confession is not designed to inform God of things He does not already know; it is for us to recognize our failures. And when we do so, His forgiveness is free and full. Likewise

with the church, congregations are much more open to forgive the mistakes that one recognizes and admits. This does not mean that every personal transgression is to be exposed, but issues that are relevant and public in the life of the church should be dealt with in an open and honest manner.

**Leader of members.** The gift of leadership is the ability to give direction and guidance to God's people for the purpose of working together to accomplish God's will for them. It is a gift especially needed by elders.

*Love the members.* When members do not have confidence in their leaders, it is almost impossible to lead them to love Christ. The importance to love all people is an easy concept to understand. However, certain people are just not easy to love. While elders must be able to see people as they are, they should not lose sight of what they can become by God's grace.

When Jesus saw the multitudes, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). To be compassionate like Jesus is to go beyond pity for their condition and to seek to alleviate their suffering. Thus, elders are to accept people's imperfections, while helping them grow spiritually. There will be those in the congregation who are, at times, unloving and unpleasant. But just as the ill are not out of place in the hospital where they go to be made well, unloving people are not out of place in the church. It is where they learn to love.

Church leaders are sometimes abused, criticized, misunderstood, or falsely accused. Christian love is being able to genuinely forgive those who have been abusive. Elders who extend hospitality not only to church members, but also to non-members and visitors, defuse many potentially explosive relationships.

*Work in unity.* Though our individuality inclines us to prefer doing things our own way, it is important to remember that others may have just as good, or even better, ways of doing things. More important than how the work gets done is that efforts and resources are not wasted. Helping members work together in unity is one of the most important leadership qualities of an elder.

*Consult with members.* A domineering leadership style often encounters resistance rather than cooperation. Church goals and objectives are easier to meet when they are shared and owned by the members.

*Follow your leader.* Elders unwilling to follow their leader will be unsuccessful in leading their followers. “Men who move in accordance with their own strong traits of character, refusing to yoke up with others who have had a long experience in the work of God, will become blinded by self-confidence, unable to discern between the false and the true. It is not safe for such ones to be chosen as leaders in the church; for they would follow their own judgment and plans, regardless of the judgment of their brethren” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 279).

*Enable Members.* The most important work in the world for any individual is whatever work God asks that person to do for Him. God calls all—every member of every congregation—to some ministry of service. Elders are to be coordinators and facilitators, helping church members to fully develop their spiritual gifts.

Besides helping members discover and understand their spiritual gifts, elders should train them to use those gifts. Elders who are gifted in teaching excel at this task. And if they do not sense this calling, they may employ others with the gift of organization to accomplish the task. Through this method of leadership, the church is organized to support ministries that use the gifts of all those in the congregation.

## ORDINATION

**Purpose of ordination.** The biblical background of ordination indicates that it “was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one’s authority in that office” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 162).

As the New Testament church expanded, individuals in the church were selected for different types of leadership roles. Apart from the appointment and ordination of the twelve apostles for their unique and unrepeatable role (Mark 3:13, 14; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296), the Scriptures distinguish three categories of ordained officers:

1. Ministers who are called to preach, teach, train, equip, administer the ordinances, and provide pastoral care for church members (2 Tim. 4:1-5).
2. Elders who are called to lead and minister to local congregations as overseers of all the affairs of their churches (Acts 20:17, 28).

3. Deacons who are called to care for the physical needs of the church and its members, giving special leadership in the benevolent work of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6).

Through ordination, individuals who fell under these categories were set aside for their special ministry. The Seventh-day Adventist Church follows the same practice today.

Elder ordination is a public recognition of:

1. God’s call of the individual to a specific ministry.
2. God’s enabling of the person for this ministry by providing the spiritual gifts needed.
3. The congregation’s recognition of God’s call and an expression of its willingness to follow that individual’s leadership.

Though ordination conveys no special powers upon the recipient, it does impose solemn responsibilities and is an opportunity for the congregation to unite in prayer, and ask for God’s blessing on the work of the elder. Accepting ordination means that, in a very special

sense, those ordained are God's agents through whom He seeks to lead His people. Thus, ordination should not be accepted or bestowed lightly, and the church should recognize the godly leadership and authority invested in its leaders.

Elders are expected to have exemplary characters. But remember, God asks nothing of us that He is not able to empower us to do. High standards, however, are a significant reason to not choose an elder prematurely. Ordination to eldership must be done carefully and prayerfully, and not in haste. "In some of our churches the work of organizing and of ordaining elders has been premature; the Bible rule has been disregarded, and consequently grievous trouble has been brought upon the church. There should not be so great haste in electing leaders as to ordain men who are in no way fitted for responsible work" (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 617).

**Prerequisites to ordination.** Prerequisites to the ordination of an elder include a call by God and election by a local church. Conference or mission approval is not required. Those who accept the call of God and the church to service should carefully and prayerfully examine their life and relationships with others and the Lord. Wrongs should be made right and a commitment to Christ and His church should be renewed. Elders should be persons of experience and chosen wisely. But once elected, ordination should not be unduly delayed.

"Election to the office of elder does not in itself qualify one as an elder. Ordination is required before an elder has authority to function" (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Chapter 8). Ordination gives new elders the full support of the church and publicly seeks the blessing of the Holy Spirit on their leadership. While it is good for new elders to receive special training for their work, ordination should not be dependent on training.

**The ordination service.** The ordination service of the elder is sacred and special. It should be kept simple. The service is to be performed by an ordained pastor, usually one with credentials from the local conference, and preferably by the pastor of the congregation. Ordained pastors and elders in the congregation may be invited to assist and take part in the service. The ordination is to be held in the presence of the congregation that the elder is to serve.

At an appropriate time, usually during the Sabbath morning service, the candidate is invited to come before the congregation. The pastor speaks briefly about the qualifications and work of an elder. Then, the pastor and the elder being ordained kneel along with others who are participating. The pastor prays for God's approval of the choice they have made, recognizing that the Holy Spirit has empowered the candidate for this office. The presiding pastor's hand is placed on the candidate's head during the prayer. Assisting pastors and elders may also do the same.

After the prayer, the participants share words of blessing and encouragement with the candidate. The newly ordained elder is often invited to remain on the platform for the rest of the service, signifying the new position of leadership.

**Authority granted.** Elders are authorized by their congregation to be overseers. The conference or mission also recognizes them as principal leaders in the local church. Their ordination is a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear the glad tidings of the gospel. Like Paul and Barnabas, elders have "already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one's authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God" (*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 161, 162).

Elders are authorized to officiate in all services of the church—communion services, child dedications, funeral services—except those requiring pastoral ordination such as marriages and baptisms. They may request the conference or mission to arrange for baptisms when the pastor is unavailable to perform the service. A pastor is usually sent to the church to perform the service, although elders may at times be authorized by the conference or mission president to administer this rite. Elders are not authorized to perform a marriage service, but they may assist in some parts of it.

All church services are to be done in cooperation with the church pastor who would normally perform the services, if available. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* designates procedures for conducting these services and the *Minister's Handbook* provides additional details.

Ordination is intended to be permanent. It is recognized for the rest of one's life, unless one is disqualified by apostasy or improper behavior. Elders need not be re-ordained when later accepting the same position in the same or another church. If later elected as deacons, they may act in that office without re-ordination.

“There are circumstances . . . where it is necessary for the conference to appoint a licensed minister to carry responsibility as a pastor or assistant pastor of a church or group of churches. In order to open the way for a licensed minister to perform certain pastoral functions, the church or group of churches being served must elect the pastor as a local elder” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 33).

**Limited authority.** The authority of elders is limited by the local church's election process. They function as elders only for as long as the church elects them into office. The office of elder is purposely limited to the local church:

- Only the local church can elect elders.
- Normally, the local church pastor ordains them.
- They are to be ordained in the presence of the congregation they serve.
- Their ordination authorizes them to serve only in the church that elects them, although under some circumstances they may serve in more than one church if other churches elect them as their elders.

The authority of elders is limited by their obligation to their pastor, church board, and church business meeting. They should see themselves as assistants to the pastor, and always work under the pastor's guidance. Major problems should be discussed with the pastor and, if needed, taken to the church board, rather than arbitrarily resolved by the elder. Important decisions, such as the acceptance or dismissal of members, can only be made by the church as a whole. Licensed ministers appointed by the conference to pastoral positions carry the full authorization to function in pastoral leadership roles in the church.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE WORSHIP SERVICE

**In the absence of the pastor**, the elder is responsible for leading the Sabbath worship service. This requires an understanding of corporate worship. Churches often retain the same order of service year after year, using the same songs and the same format. Worship leaders may recognize and respect differences in worship style that result from differences in cultures and locations, and yet be fearful of adapting the worship style to changes in society. As a result, the church may lose its influence because of its failure to change; but in other instances, it may also experience loss of membership when adopting changes without understanding and preserving the distinctive purposes of worship.

Corporate worship—coming together as the body of Christ—can be expressed in a variety of ways and is not confined to only one form, culture, or style of expression. However, it is not wise to force congregations to accept changes that they do not appreciate or that with which they are not comfortable. At the same time, it must also be recognized that refusal to adapt to change could have a similar effect on those seeking new options in worship such as choice of music, Bible translations used, and personal attire or decorum. For these and other reasons, options in style and format may be available at other nearby churches. But when there is only one church serving a given area, the church should be flexible and serve as many needs and tastes as possible.

## WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Worship is more than an activity. Before worship takes place on a congregational level, it must take place on a personal level. Paul, writing to the Romans, told them that they should offer their “bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God *this is your spiritual act of worship*” (Rom. 12:1, NIV, emphasis supplied). Believers should not relegate worship solely to the group experience. Worship should transpire within the life of the believer every day. No sooner than when the sun sets at the close of one Sabbath should the believer anticipate the next Sabbath day, focusing on preparing over the next six for another Sabbath worship.

Worship is, first and foremost, a lifestyle. Church leaders should promote worship primarily as a way of life and secondarily as an activity. When pastors, elders, and other church leaders display lives of worship and church members do the same, the result on Sabbath morning, during midweek services, and at all other times when congregations assemble, is that God receives total praise born from deep within the hearts of those who sincerely love and honor Him.

Because worship is an encounter with God, it must be approached thoughtfully and prayerfully. God, not the congregation, is the audience of a worship service. The forms and functions of the service are there to enable that connection for the worshipers.

“From the sacredness which was attached to the earthly sanctuary, Christians may learn how they should regard the place where the Lord meets with His people . . . . The house is the sanctuary for the family, and the closet or the grove the most retired place for individual worship; but the church is the sanctuary for the congregation. There should be rules in regard to the time, the place, and the manner of worshipping. Nothing that is sacred, nothing that pertains to the worship of God, should be treated with carelessness or indifference . . . . If when the people come into the house of worship, they have genuine reverence

for the Lord and bear in mind that they are in His presence, there will be a sweet eloquence in silence” (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 491, 492).

**Worship is adoration.** “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Worship, therefore, is concerned more with the attitude with which we approach it than with the form or order it takes. Portions of the worship period should be given for expressions of adoration to God and time to sense with awe His greatness and might (Ps. 95:3-5). Such adoration can be expressed through singing, prayer, and praise (Ps. 95:1, 2; 96:1-6). It affirms God’s goodness, recognizes His worthiness, seeks His grace, and recognizes His presence (Rev. 4:11). When Christ is at the center of worship, praise and thanksgiving will be the natural expression of the worshiper (Ps. 33:1-3; Rev. 15:2-4).

While unguarded emotions do not express true worship, passionless performance of ritual and ceremony suffocates the expression of joy and love the individual and congregation should be free to experience. It is proper to avoid extreme emotions. On the other hand, we must not be so afraid to express praise and thanksgiving that our worship becomes void of all emotion. Worship engages a sacred balance of praise, spirituality, truth and intellect “for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

**Worship is proclamation.** Corporate worship provides an occasion for the proclamation of God’s Word. It was the custom of Jesus on the Sabbath to enter the synagogue and read Scripture, followed by words of explanation (Luke 4:16-21). Likewise, Paul did the same in Thessalonica and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2, 3).

Proclamation includes the study of God’s word, resulting in love and joy from knowing Him more fully. It is a time to remember God’s

leading in the past (1 Cor. 10:11); to lift up the cross of Christ (John 12:32); and to experience a sense of destiny in knowing that through the Spirit's presence and through His gifts, we can glorify God in life, and service (Rom. 12:1).

**Worship is renewal.** Worship should result in renewal. It involves reflection, prayer, and meditation (Matt. 6:7-13). It is a time to make supplication for all the saints (Eph. 6:18). It is a time to repent and seek Christ's forgiveness (Isa. 57:15; Acts 2:38). It is a time to experience wholeness and peace in Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30). Worship's effectiveness is best demonstrated by dedication to service for others.

### **CORPORATE WORSHIP**

**Worship is fellowship.** While we may worship God privately as individuals, coming together as a church in corporate worship is vital to maintaining the strength of the body of Christ. The same God who accepts each of us individually as His child encourages us to unite with other believers in a community of worshippers which He calls the bride of Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

Sharing together in public worship gives strength to personal Christian development. Worshipers need the assurance of God's acceptance and love. This can be conveyed to them through the attitude of those leading out in the worship service. People also need the fellowship of other worshippers and a sense of belonging in the church family.

A cold, formal atmosphere in the church can deaden the influence of worship and drive people away. Choose members with the gift of

hospitality to serve as greeters to meet and welcome worshipers. Elders and other church leaders should watch for those who seem detached from other worshipers and encourage members to be outgoing in their acceptance of all who worship with them.

**Worship is participation.** The sense of community in your church can be enhanced by encouraging members to participate in the worship services. There are multiple opportunities for the members of the congregation—men, women, youth, and children—to participate in worship: singing, prayer, giving, responsive reading of scripture, and personal testimony. Children may be invited to come forward for a children’s story. Members with musical talent and interest may be encouraged to join choirs and other musical groups.

At their baptism, new members should be given a special public welcome into the church. Newly transferred members should also be welcomed. Remembering anniversaries, birthdays, and other special events are additional ways to show members that they are a valued part of the church family.

**Worship needs planning.** Meaningful worship services do not just happen. The worship service requires the coordination of activities and talents of many people. Prayerfully planned worship services with a well-outlined program make the participants and congregation feel at ease. Awkward pauses and disjointed programs create a tension that makes it difficult to experience the joy of worship. Since most people are accustomed to media programs that are precisely planned and meticulously organized, they may be uncomfortable and embarrassed by a church service that is not well organized.

Many churches have a worship committee that works with the pastor to plan and prepare the worship service. The committee ensures that all participants are notified of their duties and are given enough

time to prepare. The church pastor and elders should distribute a duty roster listing the responsibilities each person has during worship services. An order of service should also be given to each participant. This may be handled by the use of a church bulletin, which contains the order of service and information of interest to the congregation.

Planning includes the selection of appropriate preachers or leaders in the service. Individuals dismissed from church fellowship or pastors dropped from the ministry should not lead out in worship. In the absence of the pastor, it is the responsibility of the elder in charge to see that this is carried out.

### THE CHURCH SERVICE

“Our God is a tender, merciful Father. His service should not be looked upon as a heart-saddening, distressing exercise. It should be a pleasure to worship the Lord and to take part in His work” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 103). Both worship and worship leadership should be pleasant experiences. There is no set order or form for the Sabbath morning worship service. However, there are certain elements, in addition to the sermon, that contribute to meaningful worship and should be considered when planning the service. The following are explanations of these worship elements. They may take whatever order is considered appropriate:

**Music.** Music has a powerful influence in lifting the heart to God and “we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. The proper training of the voice is an important feature in education, and should not be neglected. Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer” (*Christian Education*, pp. 62, 63). The spiritual experiences of Christian song writers become the prayers of worshippers as they sing.

Wherever possible, the theme of the music should complement the sermon in a coordinated worship experience. If available, both vocal and instrumental music can be included. From the shared culture of the worshipers, musical instruments and voices assist in drawing participants into worship. Although some music may lead to worship by the playing of instruments alone, music with a spiritual message in the lyrics is particularly meaningful for the worship experience. Choirs are a tremendous blessing in worship, but they should not be a substitute for congregational singing. “The ability to sing is a talent of influence, which God desires all to cultivate and use to His name’s glory” (*Evangelism*, p. 504).

**Community life.** While not specifically an act of worship, the announcement period is a blessing when used properly. But it is easy for this to get out of hand, both in length and content. Its purpose is to create a sense of community life and prepare the congregation for the worship experience. It brings reports of prior events and information about future events and programs. While it is not a time for sales and fundraising, reports of the church’s tithe and offerings may be presented.

In churches where a bulletin is used, announcements can be printed in the bulletin, thereby avoiding a lengthy announcement period. If there is no bulletin or other printed material, the announcements may be written out in advance to control time. Where available, a video presentation may be displayed at the start of the service as the worshipers are gathering. This presentation may also appear on a church’s website. Announcements can create an atmosphere of warmth and fellowship when presented as a time to share community life, joys and concerns, or worship through service.

**Call to worship.** The purpose of the call to worship is to gather and focus the congregation in a worshipful attitude. Brief scriptural passages, concise words of invitation or an invocation may be used. When a choir is available, the invitation may be a short choral piece. The congregation may also sing this call to worship or join in a litany. Worship participants often enter and kneel before the congregation when a musical introit is used. The congregation may be invited to stand during the call to worship, thus alerting the worshiper that the service is beginning.

**Prayer.** Kneeling is generally the preferred posture for prayer. However, the attitude of the heart and mind is more important than the position of the body. Posture in prayer is symbolic. Public prayer should be carefully planned in advance to address the praise, concerns, and needs of the worshipers. There are several elements of public prayer that should go into the planning. However, not all the elements must be included in every prayer. Their order is significant, based on the idea that we show reverence for God and seek His grace, thanking Him for His loving care and provision before expressing our needs and desires to Him.

In planning the prayer, consider the following elements:

- *Address God.* His name is holy and should be addressed with respect and adoration.
- *Praise.* Thank Him for who He is and what He has done for His people.
- *Repentance.* Ask forgiveness for past sins and for failure to fully serve Him.
- *Dedication.* Ask for strength to serve Him more fully in the future, committing the congregation, both individually and corporately, to His service.
- *General intercession.* Intercede for God's work, world leaders,

and the congregation, giving attention to all who have invoiced special needs, such as financial problems, discouragement, or illness.

- *Specific supplication.* Address special prayer requests, the worship service, and the preacher.

*Conclusion.* Close in Jesus' name, through whom we have the right to come to God in prayer.

Prayers often tend to be long when they are not carefully planned. Having an outline in mind or writing the prayer out in advance will help avoid unnecessary wordiness. "One or two minutes is long enough for any ordinary prayer" (*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 581).

**Offering.** Giving is a basic part of worship. It is not just fundraising but a call to the giving of one's self. Brief and worshipful calls for the offering invite worshippers to take part in giving to God. "Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). Even though many in the congregation participate in giving outside of the worship hour, the focus on commitment at this time in worship encourages faithfulness to God in financial matters.

Even though specific needs of the church may be mentioned in the call for offering, serving God should be the focus. Guilt and embarrassment must never be employed in this sacred act of commitment. It is an opportunity to teach basic Christian concepts of giving.

**Ministry to children.** Children are as much a part of worship as are adults. Many churches provide a specific time for a children's story, usually presented at the front of the church where children are invited to sit while they listen. This serves a limited group, usually between the ages of two and eight. Older children usually don't feel

comfortable walking up to the front of the church for a story. Time set aside for this activity must be carefully guarded. Five minutes is usually adequate.

Older children are often overlooked when the emphasis is devoted exclusively to the younger. There are many ways to include older children in the worship service:

- Including specific illustrations in the sermon that appeal directly to them.
- Allocating the entire service to the interest of children on certain days, such as on Pathfinder Day or Christian Education Day.
- Featuring children's choirs and musical groups during the service.
- Inviting children to read Scripture and pray.

Such experiences equip them for leadership role in the future.

**Scriptural reading.** Passages of Scripture selected for reading should be relevant to the emphasis of the day. At times, the congregation may be invited to read aloud. In churches where Bibles are provided for congregational use, this activity is more effective when everyone reads from the same version. Where visual projection is available, the selected passages may be read from the screen. Passages may also be made available in the bulletin or on sheets distributed to the congregation.

Audience participation can be encouraged by the use of responsive readings. The church hymnal contains a wide variety of readings, but other readings may be specifically oriented to the theme of the day. Family involvement can be encouraged in this activity by inviting an entire family to alternately or responsively present the Scripture reading. Advance planning provides time for preparation, which is vital to well-presented Scripture.

**Public testimony.** Encourage members to share incidents in their lives when God led in a special way. Particularly helpful are testimonies of one church member being helped by the ministry of another member. Such testimonies are a public demonstration of God's power working within the church family. It may be wise to use an interview format to maintain control of the time and avoid lengthy recitations that lose the focus of the service.

**Congregational participation.** Worship is not a spectator event. The common notion of worship is that of the preacher as actor, God as prompter, and congregation as the audience. But true worship consists of the congregation as actor, the preacher as prompter, and God as the audience. "Much of the public worship of God consists of praise and prayer, and every follower of Christ should engage in this worship" (Ellen G. White, "*Signs of the Times*," June 24, 1886).

Worship is participatory. The service is to be planned with a significant amount of congregational participation at proper intervals. Participation should not be lumped together in one portion of worship, but spread throughout the service. "The prevailing monotony of the religious round of service in our churches needs to be disturbed. The leaven of activity needs to be introduced that our church members may work along new lines, and devise new methods. The Holy Spirit's power will move upon hearts when this dead, lifeless monotony is broken up, and many will begin to work in earnest who never before thought of being anything but idle spectators" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 204).

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

Corporate worship is not a collection of unrelated parts that happen to occur during a certain time. Planning the worship service involves coordinating every feature to be part of a whole, moving toward an

objective, and culminating in a response. It should be planned so that progress is made towards a commitment. There is no rigid format for worship, but services tend to have common structures.

**Sample worship formats.** The following are two sample formats that may be adapted to the needs of the congregation. Consult the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* for additional samples.

#### *Long Format*

<b>Prelude</b>	Instrumental music or congregational singing
<b>Welcome</b>	Community life and welcome
<b>Introit</b>	Music by choir, instrument, or congregation
<b>Call to worship</b>	Possible congregational participation
<b>Invocation</b>	Brief prayer, generally done while standing
<b>Scripture</b>	Possible responsive reading
<b>Hymn of praise</b>	Congregation singing
<b>Prayer</b>	Response by choir, instrument, or congregation.
<b>Offering</b>	Call and explanation of the use of offering funds
<b>Doxology</b>	Congregation standing, concludes with prayer of thanks
<b>Music</b>	Special music or a hymn leading into the sermon
<b>Sermon</b>	Focus of the overall theme of the worship service
<b>Hymn</b>	Commitment response
<b>Benediction</b>	Brief words of hope, promise, and encouragement
<b>Postlude</b>	Piano or organ music for departure, where available

*Short Format:*

<b>Welcome</b>	Community life and welcome
<b>Introit</b>	Congregation standing for silent prayer
<b>Hymn</b>	Congregation remains standing
<b>Prayer</b>	Includes invocation of God's presence
<b>Offering</b>	Call explains the use of offering funds
<b>Sermon</b>	Focus of the overall theme of the worship service
<b>Benediction</b>	Piano or organ music for departure, where available

**PREACHING**

Preaching is central to Seventh-day Adventist worship. The Adventist church grew out of proclamation of the Word. And while sermon content is not the only focus of worship, its centrality is based in Scripture and holds the church together in unity of doctrine and purpose. Not all elders preach on a regular basis and not all are gifted by the Spirit to preach. But for those who serve in a church where preaching is needed either regularly or occasionally, the following guidelines to preaching can be helpful.

**Preach from personal experience.** Without a personal commitment to God and service, preaching is futile and frustrating. Preaching flows from personal experience in the study of scripture and communion with God. Unless the preacher is filled with the Spirit, there will be nothing to give to others. Preaching is sometimes the sharing of personal experience in testimony.

**Preach biblically.** “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). Adventist preaching is Christ-centered and Scripture-based. Stories, sociology, and philosophy may serve to illustrate the message, making it clear

and relevant to the hearers. But material void of a biblical base will not feed the soul or produce commitment to Christ and His service. Scripture provides an inexhaustible supply of sermon material.

Biblical preaching is more than merely using many Bible texts. Likewise, it is not seeking a text that seems to agree with what is being said, often taking Scripture out of its context.

**Preach with relevance.** The principles of truth contained in the Bible are relevant to everyday living. Show how the Bible speaks to our present time, and how salvation applies to contemporary needs. Make the Word primary in your preaching. If available, see how Bible commentaries, Ellen White's commentaries, and other Christian authors apply your passage to practical Christian living. Use current events, nature, and experiences to make your sermon relevant to your listeners' lives.

**Preach positively.** People must recognize themselves as sinners before they seek salvation. However, the first calling is not to denounce sin, but to announce salvation. Successful preaching is hope-centered. The word "gospel" means good news. Failure to preach good news is to fail at preaching the gospel.

**Sermon preparation.** Good sermons do not come from hasty preparation. Prayer, Bible study, and reading in advance make sermon preparation easier and produce better results. The subject needs to soak into the mind of the presenter, giving time to find illustrations and practical applications that complement the message. Allow time for the material to wander through the mind, even while engaged in other pursuits. Start the process of sermon preparation early to ease the pressure and to increase creativity.

**Organize logically.** A logical sermon outline is organized into three main parts:

1. The introduction is designed to arouse the interest of the audience and to introduce the theme. The theme is the main message of the sermon with which the audience leaves.
2. The body of the sermon expands the theme by logically presenting the principal lessons of the sermon. Establish each lesson biblically, and include with it an illustration or practical application.
3. The conclusion summarizes the theme and lesson, while drawing the audience to make a personal commitment to Christ.

**Speak clearly.** In delivering the sermon, speak clearly so you can be heard and understood. “There are many who read and speak in so low or so rapid a manner that they cannot be readily understood. Some have a thick, indistinct utterance, others speak in a high key, in sharp, shrill tones that are painful to the hearers . . . . By diligent effort all may acquire the power to read intelligibly, and speak in a full, clear, round tone, in a distinct and impressive manner. By doing this we may greatly increase our efficiency as workers for Christ” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 335, 336).

**Plan in advance.** Plan a year, or at least a quarter, in advance, and develop a schedule of preaching and worship. Planning requires looking in both directions. Look at the topics that have been covered in the past and consider those that might have been neglected or overemphasized. Then, on the basis of the church and public calendar, and the needs of the congregation, select and schedule the speakers and topics.

Error and heresy don’t usually come from preaching what is false, but rather from an incomplete or imbalanced presentation of the gospel. It results from an overemphasis of one truth at the expense

of other truths. Careful planning produces balanced preaching which honors God and provides for the spiritual needs of the congregation. It is incumbent on the elder, in the absence of the pastor, to carefully guard the pulpit and not allow it to be taken over by those unauthorized to preach or who tend to divide or lead the congregation astray. A well-planned preaching schedule with known and approved speakers will help guard against this problem.

# CHAPTER 4

## LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

### THE PASTOR-ELDER TEAM

Pastors and elders are partners in ministry. Church pastors are the team leaders, giving spiritual help and direction to the local church. Elders are their assistants in leadership. Pastors are appointed by, and accountable to, the local conference or mission. Elders are appointed by, and accountable to, the local congregation. Both serve as leaders of the congregation by coordinating the activities of the church. Thus, the interests and work of the pastor and elder coincide. In districts with a large number of churches where the pastor cannot frequently meet with the church, the elder in charge serves as the representative of the pastor and maintains contact with the pastor regarding church issues.

Licensed ministers assigned by the conference or mission to be pastors in the local church, prior to being ordained as a pastor, are to be elected and ordained as local elders and are to bear full authority in the local church as its representatives. Elders should support the ministry of pastors as representatives of the conference sisterhood of churches even though they have not been ordained as a pastor.

**Pastor's role.** A significant responsibility of the pastor is to train elders in the practical setting of church work by delegating responsibilities and continually being in communication with them.

*Train.* Beyond equipping the entire membership for the work of ministry, pastors must train elders. Though elders may possess

spiritual gifts that qualify them for office, they may not have formal education in areas such as theology, sociology, leadership, and church administration, which generally are a part of pastoral training. Such training is important, especially to new elders. To aid in this process, materials and training events are available through the conference or mission office. Ministerial secretaries are responsible for making such programs and materials available to elders. Suggested areas of study and emphasis include the following:

- Church organization and administration
- Understanding and identifying spiritual gifts
- Church growth
- Care of new converts
- Worship leadership
- Preaching
- Visitation
- Function and leadership of committees
- Pastor-elder team

Resources for such training include this *Elder's Handbook* prepared by the General Conference Ministerial Association. This handbook serves as an outline for ongoing leadership workshops.

*Delegate.* The sharing and delegation of responsibility is an integral part of church structure and part of the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church. Anyone who seeks to retain all authority and responsibility is not only deluding themselves of their ability, but also impoverishing the church and impeding the work of the Spirit that is designed to flow through the hands and minds of many people. The primary duties of the pastor are the spiritual nurturing and training of those inside the church; evangelizing those outside; and sharing leadership responsibility for the church program with members—elders in particular. The more responsibility and authority shared, the more successful the church is in serving its purpose.

*Communicate.* Teams require good communication. Regularly scheduled elders' meetings are crucial to a well-working leadership team. In addition to pastor-elder communication, this meeting is an opportunity to train, encourage, and provide resources for elders. Some churches with several staff invite the head elder to be part of the staff meeting as well.

Elders' meetings are held regularly on a monthly or quarterly basis. In between regular meetings, additional meetings may be called to attend to urgent matters. Where there are several churches in a pastor's district and the distance between them is not too great for travel, elders from the entire district may be brought together to plan coordinated efforts with the pastor. This can be accomplished by combining all the churches for special Sabbath services, followed by an elders' meeting.

Items to consider when preparing the elders' meeting agenda include:

- Personal spiritual experience
- Reports on elders' assignments
- Schedules for preaching, including the topics to be addressed
- Congregational needs that require pastoral services
- Materials distribution
- Discussion of ideas and potential programs
- Evaluation of present programs

The elders' group is the pastor's sounding board about the needs and feelings of the congregation. Free discussion about the attitude and spiritual health of the church can guide future plans.

**Elder's role.** Elders carry significant responsibilities in this team. Often those chosen for this role are busy with other employment or duties, including family responsibilities. To find time to faithfully

administer their responsibilities in the church, elders must budget their time.

The skills required to administer the church are too varied for any one person to possess them all. Congregations need the expertise of a theologian, preacher, administrator, evangelist, trainer, counselor, and visitor.

The advantage of the team ministry of the pastor and elder is that they build on each other's gifts and abilities while compensating for each other's weaknesses. Careful analysis of precisely what each member can contribute to the team is a work that is done in the context of openly sharing the gifts of the Spirit, recognizing that "the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Generally, pastors and their families are not originally part of the congregation and community they serve and are not likely to remain with a congregation for more than a few years. They arrive as strangers and often find it challenging to integrate into their new community. Longtime members of the community may not realize the stress this places on the pastor and family, or recognize how important it is be supportive and make the pastor's family feel included in the church family.

Both initially and throughout the duration of a pastor's stay, elders should provide opportunities for pastors and their families to integrate with the church family. This effort will help advance the work of both the pastor and elders. Four responsibilities of the elder on the pastor-elder team include:

1. *Find time to work.* Elders usually have busy, successful lives. The time they have to spend in church work is limited by their full-time jobs, families, and health. But the work of an elder extends far beyond Sabbath morning responsibilities. Accepting the role of elder should be done in full awareness of the time and energy required to do a faithful work.

2. *Maximize pastor's strengths.* The skills required of pastoral leadership are too varied for any one person to possess them all. Elders should cooperate with their pastors to identify their strengths and help them organize the church to take advantage of those strengths, while providing service in areas where the pastor needs assistance.

3. *Compensate.* Unfortunately, congregations often tend to criticize a deficiency rather than compensate in areas where the pastor needs assistance. This may be one of the most natural and significant roles of elders. Where the pastor is lacking, the elder may be gifted in that particular area of service. This cooperative effort creates the ideal pastor-elder partnership.

4. *Nurture pastoral family.* Pastors and their families need elders who accept and appreciate them as they are, with neither awe nor an attitude of arrogance. Every congregation should have a program in place to support the pastoral family. This is one church activity where the pastor cannot give leadership; it is an elder's responsibility. Pastors may find counselors and spiritual mentors in a conference or mission ministerial secretary, fellow pastor, or someone else outside of the congregation. But primary support for the pastor should come from the local church, and be led by its elders.

It is not easy for most pastors to accept pastoral help from the people they minister. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Here are some ways elders can minister to their pastors.

*Accept their humanity.* Pastors appreciate the love expressed to them, but sometimes feel it is because of what they represent, not because of the persons they are. Let them know they can be imperfect and still be loved.

*Be a minister of encouragement.* Affirm them often and honestly. Share specific compliments. For example, tell them what point in the sermon helped you.

*Be a listener.* Listen with empathy if they choose to share problems. Keep such conversations strictly confidential.

*Support them.* If differences arise, settle them in private. In meetings, pastors and elders may disagree, but the final plans that go from there to the church board and business meetings should be plans that the elder can support. Give a testimony in church about something your pastor has done that changed your life. Let members know you will not tolerate criticism of the pastoral family in your presence. Pastors are directly responsible to their conference or mission, so it is very encouraging when you affirm them to their conference or mission leaders.

*Plan an annual pastor's day.* Recognize the ministry of the pastor and the pastor's family by celebrating their service to the church. Consider giving them a thoughtful gift such as a photo album filled with pictures of the church family and church life.

*Pray for the pastor.* Both your personal prayers and collective prayers with other leaders bring support and encouragement to the pastor.

*Resolve congregational conflict.* Elders are chosen because the congregation has confidence in them and their knowledge of the church. Congregational conflict is one of the worst pastoral stressors, especially if elders are part of the problem. Elders can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring people together, significantly reducing the pastor's stress in such situations.

*Encourage spiritual renewal.* In the process of meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation, the pastor may become drained and require time for recovery and renewal. Encourage pastors to take adequate time for personal devotions.

*Encourage family and recreation time.* If the pastor's family life is neglected, the pastor's work is compromised. Ensure that the responsibilities of the church do not keep them from taking time off for themselves.

*Encourage provision of anonymous counseling.* Pastors and their families sometimes need professional counseling but are reluctant to press for such privileges. The denomination, however, encourages every conference or mission to make such counseling available. Elders have great influence with conference or mission leaders and can request that such services be made available to their pastors.

*Encourage and affirm the pastor's family.* Members may expect the pastoral family to be perfect and the pastoral home to always be open. Elders should defend the right of a pastoral spouse to choose their own role in the congregation and use their own spiritual gifts rather than an idealized role.

Minister to the pastor's children, neither idolizing them when they are good nor criticizing them when they misbehave. They generally have more expected of them, which can cause problems with their peers. Empathize with hurting pastoral parents. All parents hurt when their children go astray, but perhaps more so with pastoral parents. They need support, not criticism.

Begin by understanding the grief process that follows the loss of a beloved pastor. In congregational grief, the church's loyalty to the former pastor may prejudice them against the new one. If the previous pastor was loved, members may feel anger toward the one usurping the previous pastor's place. If the previous pastor was not loved, members may vent their anger on the new pastor.

Give special attention to the new pastoral family. Recognize that they have just lost all their friends in their old church family and are suffering from the loss. They are moving to a new house, and their children are entering a new school where their reception as a pastor's child may be awkward. If the spouse is seeking employment, there is job hunting to be done, and they must find a whole new set of friends. Be sensitive to their grief and challenges.

Find ways for members to greet the new pastoral family and help them get settled. Perhaps their new home can be cleaned and a little food put in the cupboards. As soon as practical, have a well-planned welcome and installation service for the pastor and family. It is often easier for the new pastor to feel accepted than it is for the rest of the pastoral family. The induction service should be planned by the elder in cooperation with the conference or mission. Details for planning such an occasion are available in the final chapter of this handbook and in the *Minister's Handbook*.

## CHURCH PLANNING

**Plan biblically.** There is a tendency to think of the church primarily as an organization or institution, rather than as a fellowship or community of faith—the predominant meaning of “church” in the New Testament. It often appears that the role of church members is to help the professional pastors do their work, when in fact the biblical plan is that the principal function of pastors is to help the people do their work.

“The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers” (*Christian Service*, p. 68). In its work of evangelism, it is not so much how many come into the church to worship, but how many go out from the church to serve.

It is often easier to do a job yourself than to get someone else to do it. This idea might be valid if the primary business was getting church work done. But it is not. The first objective is the spiritual health of the members, and members who work for the Lord find the greatest joy in their spiritual life. The biblical plan is that everyone in the church be involved in the service of the Kingdom of God. Church planning must be centered around the following:

*Studying spiritual gifts.* Spiritual gifts must never be perceived by church leaders as merely a means to get members to work, but rather as a way to empower members by the Holy Spirit. Every member is a minister and each is commissioned for ministry through baptism by water and the Spirit. Everyone receiving the Holy Spirit receives these ministering gifts as the Spirit wills them to be used in the building up of the church.

“There is diversity of operation of gifts and all by the same Spirit. These diverse gifts are illustrated by the human body from the head to the feet. As there are different members with their different offices, yet all of the body, so the members of Christ’s body all center in the head, but have different gifts. This is in the economy of God to meet the varied organization and minds in the world. The strength of one servant of God may not be the strength of another” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 5).

No one person represents the body of Christ by himself. But each one represents a part. Only in the congregational body as a whole is Christ’s body represented. Thus, church leaders should be willing to admit their limitations and their need for help from the rest of the body.

*Identify spiritual gifts.* Many spiritual gift inventories have been developed and used in the church to assist in this discovery process. Such material may be available through the local conference or mission. If no inventory is available, list the needs of the church and ask members where they would like to serve. A similar evaluation process would then be applied.

*Organize the church around ministries using these apparent gifts.* In planning the church program, match the gifts available in the congregation with the needs of the church and community. Recognize abilities and plan the church program accordingly.

*Train members in their chosen ministry.* God has placed people with gifts of leadership in the church so that they might use those

gifts to prepare and train the rest of the church membership for effective ministry. “Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give Bible readings, how to conduct and teach Sabbath-school classes, how best to help the poor and to care for the sick, how to work for the unconverted. There should be schools of health, cooking schools, and classes in various lines of Christian help work. There should not only be teaching, but actual work under experienced instructors” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149).

Elders and church members can minister to other members of the church family. Some may feel they can only be ministered to by the pastor, but this perception is unrealistic. Particularly in large churches and large districts of multiple churches, the congregation should understand that ministry is not performed solely by the pastor. It is a result of the whole church community working together.

**Plan prayerfully.** Throughout the Bible, there are numerous examples illustrating the importance of prayerful planning. When the people consulted God and heeded His leading, their plans prospered. In 1 Samuel 23:1-14, David repeatedly sought God in his planning process and God responded on every occasion. David and his associates were blessed as a result of prayerful planning. Similarly in the New Testament, before Barnabas and Saul embarked as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3), there was considerable prayer during the planning process. As a result, Barnabas, Saul, and their ministries were blessed abundantly.

Likewise, the church today needs to immerse all of its plans in prayer during the planning process. It is a mistake to make plans and then ask heaven to bless plans that were contrived by people without divine guidance. The biblical model clearly illustrates the benefits and blessings of planning prayerfully.

**Plan annually.** Planning annual objectives and setting goals through prayer and God's guidance is the work of the entire church. Preliminary planning with the pastor, the elders, and the church board provides a framework that can be reported to the church in a business meeting where the entire membership is invited. Resulting suggestions that are not acted upon can be taken back to the elders and church board for further consideration and refinement, and then brought to another business meeting for final approval. This process gives everyone ample opportunity for input.

**The planning agenda.** The agenda for the annual planning session of the business meeting should include the following items:

*Evaluation.* Before considering future plans for the church, there needs to be a review and evaluation of what the church has already done. Discuss past plans to determine if they were relevant in reaching the church's objectives. Determine if the congregation's unique spiritual gifts were maximized. After this analysis and review, the business meeting is ready to identify the objectives for the next year and work on a strategy to reach those objectives.

*Prayer ministry.* Plans for an effective prayer ministry in the church come from finding specific ways to encourage church members to have personal prayer and devotional time. Identify ways to support prayer meetings, prayer partners, and other group prayer initiatives. Include members to participate in prayer in all church activities.

*Evangelism.* Ensure that the church's evangelistic plans for the community address specific needs. Organize effective teams and team leaders within the church to target specific areas. Implement a strategic plan that is detailed in process and approach.

*Nurture.* Evaluate and implement programs that help members in their spiritual growth. These could include worship style, visitation, Sabbath School, etc.

*Children and youth.* Identify programs that cater to children and youth in all age groups.

*Facilities.* Ensure that church facilities are in good condition, both in terms of interior and exterior appearance and functionality. Pay attention to details such as accessibility and signage. Plan building projects based on capital improvement needs.

*Campaigns.* Prepare a schedule for promotional campaigns, making sure one doesn't overlap with another. Assign leadership to each campaign.

*Schedule.* Create and maintain a master calendar for the church's annual program and activities. It is important to share and vote it with the congregation.

*Financial implications.* While planning the church's schedule of events, be aware of the financial implications of the overall plan and provisions made to fund the program.

## CHURCH ELECTIONS

**Before the election.** Leaders of the various departments and programs of the local church are usually nominated to serve a one- or two-year term in their office and position, and are elected by the church at large. Details of the process for church elections, including a sample list of church leaders, are in the *Church Manual*.

The work of the nominating committee is to select church members to fulfill the various functions and ministries of the church. Therefore, the committee will need to address the specific needs of the church and the spiritual gifts present among its members.

People are not automatically chosen year after year to the same position. Each position is to be reviewed by the nominating committee and no one should be expected to be re-elected to a position simply because they did it well. Responsibility needs to be shared and new recruits for the position trained. Appointments should be made with

the intention of finding capable persons for the task and giving members opportunities to serve.

“Everyone involved in work with children must meet Church and legal standards and requirements, such as background checks or certification. Local church leaders should consult with the conference, which will ascertain and advise as to what background checks and certifications are available and/or required” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 88).

In order to adequately equip the officers of the church, the planning session should be finished before plans for the upcoming year are voted on and finalized by the church. By knowing in advance what the new year’s plans are, the church can wisely choose leaders to accomplish its mission. The nominating committee can work efficiently with the help of a list of leaders needed and job descriptions for all positions.

**The nominating committee.** “The nominating committee should be appointed early in the closing quarter of the church year and should report at least three weeks before the final Sabbath of the church year” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 110). The church year need not be aligned with the beginning of the calendar year, but rather fit the flow of church activity in the most judicious manner. In some areas, the church year is determined by the local conference or mission.

The church election process begins by choosing an organizing committee to elect members for the nominating committee. Then the church votes on these names. This can be done by the church-at-large, or the church can vote to add five to seven members to the church board, which then chooses the nominating committee (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, pp. 110, 111). The first method is usually preferable, as elections should be open to the

entire congregation. The local church determines the size of its nominating committee.

Those selected to serve on the nominating committee require mature judgment and a broad knowledge of the needs and membership of the church. “The pastor or district leader is an ex officio member and serves as chairperson of the nominating committee. Should the pastor or district leader choose not to serve as chairperson, or if a pastor or district leader has not been appointed to the church, the organizing committee shall recommend the name from the proposed nominating committee to serve as chairperson” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 111).

The nominating committee only nominates individuals who are members in regular standing of the local church. Before taking the report to the church, a committee member informs the nominated individuals and secures their consent to serve.

**The nominating committee report.** When the nominating committee has prepared its work, the pastor or elder arranges a time for the chairperson and secretary to bring the committee’s report to the church body, either when the announcements are made or at a special business meeting. Names of nominated leaders are presented before the congregation in print or it is read aloud.

At least one week is provided between this first reading of the report and the final vote of the congregation, allowing for valid observations on the report to be brought privately to the nominating committee. Any objection to the report will be considered and any necessary change will be made before the report is presented to the church body again for the election of new leaders. At this point, the nominating committee is usually dissolved, although larger churches may wish to continue an interim nominating committee to fill vacancies as they occur throughout the term of office. This

committee is considered a sub-committee of the church board with the responsibility of filling such vacancies.

## LEADERSHIP STYLES

**Spiritual leadership.** Elders are spiritual leaders. Leadership is more than maintenance, more than just preserving the status quo. Elders are dedicated to both spiritual and numerical growth in the congregation. They do not seek change merely for the sake of change, but are perpetually looking for better ways to do things. But leadership is only functional when there are those who follow. People and institutions tend to resist change. This is often more so in churches than in other organizations. People often look to their church for security, and change tends to threaten that sense of security. Even though change is needed in a given group, too much change, too fast, may cause rejection of that which is needed in the church.

Leadership style is the set of various methods that leaders use to influence and motivate their followers to accomplish goals. Personality and leadership style are so intimately connected that leaders seldom adopt a style of leadership that differs from their personality. However, it is more helpful to adapt leadership to the needs and style of the church being led. A church of professionals who are used to weighing in on issues and making important decisions may not need as directive a style of leadership as a congregation of people who work for others and are accustomed to following directions. Management process is important. But leadership techniques for the elder are not nearly as vital as the leadership spirit. Leadership attitude and spirituality is far more important than leadership mechanics.

**Unsuitable leadership styles.** Unfortunately, some leaders attempt to use a style that employs fear and threats of punishment to motivate

their followers. Similarly, others may use financial pressure or the authority of their position to force and manipulate people into action. Still others use anger and forceful language to exert their influence. These authoritarian and autocratic methods are not appropriate in the church. While the methods may produce some results, it is not true leadership. Actions produced by these methods arise out of wrong motives, produce little lasting effect, and undermine the ultimate objective.

Leaders who have adopted an authoritarian style of leadership often assume too much importance for themselves. Although they have the right motivation, they tend to run ahead of the church, making decisions and setting goals without others in the process. They seem to think that unless they are personally in control, things will not be done correctly. This style of leadership causes feelings of resentment and hostility toward the leader, and the progress of the church is impeded.

**New Testament leadership styles.** In the New Testament church style of leadership, every member is a minister, and pastors and elders become the servants of the church, working together to develop the potential of each church member. Christian leaders during New Testament times did not imitate the style of the autocratic overlords and government officials who bullied their subjects into obedience. Rather, they served with humility, using the authority of the love of Christ and motivating their followers by the example of a Spirit-filled life.

To the disciples vying to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you

desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Peter, who was part of that initial struggle for supremacy, passed on the lesson he had learned to the church leaders: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2, 3).

**The leader as servant.** Christian leadership is servant leadership. Paul, who in his early contact with the Christian movement had sought persecuting power, came to understand this principle of servant leadership: “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; . . . to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you” (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

**The leader as enabler.** Christian leadership is shared leadership. This means working in a style that shares and distributes the various roles and functions of leadership among all members of the group, according to each person’s abilities and willingness to participate. It is leadership that encourages, equips, and trains each of the group for the building up and development of the church into the functional body that God intends it to be.

## COMMITTEES

**The purpose of committees.** Committees are an integral part of institutional life. Though at times it may appear that committee function

may stand in the way of progress, input from the broader community is difficult to obtain without them. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically made significant use of the system of committees, boards, and councils as indicated in the *Church Manual*. This is not just because of tradition, but also because of theology. “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14). All of the church together is wiser than any one alone.

“In counseling for the advancement of the work, no one man is to be a controlling power, a voice for the whole. Proposed methods and plans are to be carefully considered so that all the brethren may weigh their relative merits and decide which should be followed” (*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 259).

“It is in the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another and pray earnestly for that wisdom which he alone can impart. Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less: much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 499).

To make committees efficient, decisions are to be made at the lowest level possible. Items that can be settled by the church board should not be taken to the church business meeting. Likewise, items that can be cared for by the Sabbath School Council do not need to go the board, and matters that can be handled by the Sabbath School superintendent do not need to take up time in the Sabbath School Council. This saves time and improves committee function, as committee members know that only significant items will be considered.

In reviewing the work of committees, several questions arise: *Is this particular committee necessary? Are the right personnel on it? Are they spending time in prayer? Is the committee the right size to*

*function effectively and allow for proper representation? What is the responsibility and authority of the committee and to whom does it report?* Some committees are large in number, and may find it helpful to divide into working groups of perhaps six to twelve members who will report back to the parent committee.

**Business meeting.** “The business meeting is the constituency meeting of the local church” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 128) and includes all members of the congregation in regular standing. It is called and chaired by the pastor or an elder designated by the pastor. This meeting may be held at intervals determined by the needs of the church. At business meetings, information regarding the overall operation of the church is reviewed and votes requiring the full body of the church are taken. At the close of the year, reports should be given covering the activities of the church for the entire year. “Business meetings shall be held at least once a year” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 128).

The most significant plans for the church should be discussed and approved at a business meeting where all members of the local church are given opportunity to be involved in the church’s decision-making process. Here, members are free to express their opinions and show their support or rejection by vote. Business meetings are to be publicly announced to give everyone the opportunity to attend. “Each church decides what the quorum will be for future meetings” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 128).

**Church board.** The church board is comprised of the principal officers and heads of departments in the church along with other members elected by a business meeting. The board is elected by the church membership at the time of the regular election of church officers or during the interim, by vote of the church, to fill vacancies

and make adjustments to representation. The pastor calls and chairs the board, unless the pastor delegates this authority to an elder. Most churches find it necessary for the board to meet on a monthly basis.

“Every church must have a functioning board whose members have been elected during a church business meeting” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 129). The church board is the principal administrative committee of the local church. It implements and oversees plans voted by the business meeting and is responsible to that group. The responsibilities of the board include spiritual nurturing; evangelism; maintenance of doctrinal purity; upholding Christian standards; recommending changes in church membership; church finances; protection and care of church properties; and coordination of church departments.

The church board addresses the needs and plans presented by the various units and departments of the church. It considers the church resources available to support these programs. It coordinates all programs so that the whole church moves ahead in an orderly manner. The board regularly calls for progress reports on programs to evaluate their usefulness. “Each church should determine at a business meeting the number of board members who must be present to constitute a quorum at future meetings” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 131).

**Other committees.** Many other committees may be appointed and assigned to assist the church board in the administration of the church. The *Church Manual* suggests additional committees that may be needed. The business meeting or board may designate additional committees as needed to implement specific church plans and programs. The pastor or one of the elders may be called upon to serve as an ex officio member of such committees.

**The committee member.** Committee members tend to function in predictable patterns which, when taken together, provide strength to committee work. A wise chairman will take advantage of these roles. Some of the roles needed, and usually included, in committee personnel are:

*Initiator.* The initiator continuously comes up with new ideas and processes to do the committee's work.

*Elaborator.* The elaborator is creative by nature and adds to the ideas of the initiator by analyzing the issue and suggesting arguments both for and against.

*Challenger.* The challenger is cautious to change. Challengers may seem threatening to the chairperson but are important to the process of balanced discussion.

*Appeaser.* The appeaser is uncomfortable with confrontation and seeks to find consensus by bringing differing viewpoints together.

*Energizer.* The energizer gives enthusiastic support to committee plans and is eager to move on with the action.

Understanding and utilizing each of these committee roles in a balanced way will help in the committee process. Seeking to build committees with a variety of input will make committees work more effectively and enjoyably. When chairing a committee where some of these roles are absent, the chair may purposefully seek to assume the missing roles in the decision-making process.

**The committee chairperson.** Elders chair committees on occasion. When preparing for the meeting, the agenda and responsibility of the committee should be clear. Those expected to provide reports or submit items for consideration at the meeting will need adequate time to prepare.

Church committee meetings usually open with a brief devotion, followed by prayer. This sets the spiritual tone for the meeting. For

a business or board meeting, the church clerk records and prepares minutes of the meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting should be made available to the committee for approval and acceptance by the committee.

The meeting will continue with the introduction of the agenda items. Opportunities should be provided for members to speak and express their opinions, but it is the duty of the chair to keep the meeting moving and to avoid any one person from dominating or manipulating other members. Those who have not participated in the discussion may be asked if they have an opinion they wish to share. The chairperson should clarify the issues under consideration, keep the discussion on the subject, summarize occasionally, and move the committee toward a decision. Respect for the committee process requires support of the decision made, even by those who disagree.

## **CHURCH STANDARDS AND DISCIPLINE**

**Church standards.** The church has set high standards of moral and social behavior that reflect the character of God. They are based on eternal and unchanging biblical principles. Those baptized into Christ and into church membership promise in their baptismal vows to live by these standards.

Unfortunately, because of human frailty, members may fail to live up to the standards that God and the Church have established. It is recognized that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Christians are in constant need of forgiveness for their failings and need to seek for strength to live as God designs.

**Discipline of a member.** When church members fall deeply into sin and seriously affect the lives of others in the church family and community, they bring reproach and shame on the name of God and

His church. In such matters, the church has responsibility to act, remembering that the primary objective of church discipline is the salvation and restoration of the erring one. The value of the soul can only be measured by Christ's sacrifice for our salvation.

God considers every person precious. Whether saved or unsaved, God's love is the same for all. God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). "Human beings are Christ's property, purchased by Him at an infinite price, bound to Him by a love that He and His Father have manifested for them. How careful, then, we should be in our dealing with one another" (*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 260).

**Seriousness of sin.** While gentleness, love, and mercy must be shown to members who have fallen into sin, the church has a responsibility to take action. Sin permitted to continue uncorrected in the church will affect the good that the church may do in its community. "He who covers his sins will not prosper" (Pro. 28:13). Sin cannot be ignored in the congregation. It is harmful to the well-being of the church, and leaders have a clear responsibility to see that sin is not permitted to continue its effect on the whole church.

**Christ's method.** Scripture gives clear counsel on how to deal with members who fall into sin. First, "if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matt. 18:15). As an elder, when it is clear that members have fallen into sin, first go to them, point them to God's forgiveness, and offer your assistance. Depending on the circumstances, it may be advisable for two elders to go together. The purpose is not to document and condemn sin, but to seek a return to God and a forsaking of the sin. Encourage and pray with them for God's power and forgiveness.

If this attempt proves unsuccessful in reclaiming fallen members, “take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). It may be that in the presence of two or three others, the erring members will recognize their wrong and ask for help and forgiveness.

If still unsuccessful after the second visit “and if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17). This is usually done at a church board meeting where the issue is discussed. If it is a serious matter and still unresolved, the church board may wish to seek additional counsel from conference or mission leadership and the church business meeting. At the counsel and vote of the business meeting, members in question may be placed under censure of the church to allow them a specified time to repent of their actions and find forgiveness.

In most cases, if members have been consistently visited and have been shown love and acceptance, they will be led to reinstatement with Christ and the church. If, however, the erring members still show no desire for repentance, even after a period of censure, then the counsel instructs, “if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen” (Matt. 18:17).

When the church has done all it can to reclaim erring members without success and the erring members have failed to respond to the church’s appeal for forgiveness, they have disqualified themselves from church membership. Thus, the church removes them from membership by disfellowship. Such members, however, are not removed from the love, prayers, and concern of the church. Diligent effort should be made to win them back to Jesus and the church.

Disfellowshipped persons should not be excluded from the services of the church should they wish to attend. However, they may no longer play an active part in the affairs of the church. If they wish to be members again, there must be evidence that they

have repented and made restitution for their wrongdoing before they seek rebaptism. Regardless of what they have done or whatever their present condition may be, their salvation is still precious in the sight of God.

### **RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONFERENCE/MISSION**

Local elders have no official authority outside their own church except when they are chosen by their congregations as delegates to constituency meetings. They may be chosen to serve on various boards and committees of other constituent groups of church structure, but this is not on the authority of eldership. The local church exists by vote of the sisterhood of churches in the local conference or mission, and the privilege of membership in this sisterhood is granted or withdrawn by the conference constituency in session.

**Support for conference/mission.** Church growth occurs in local churches. Church finance is generated almost exclusively in local congregations. Conferences and missions are responsible for all church work in their area, but their success is dependent on the cooperation of local church leadership in carrying out local, union, division, and General Conference plans. Communication and correspondence from the conference or mission office is important as it seeks to bind together the efforts of the sisterhood of churches.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* is the most significant policy book of the denomination. The standards and practices of the church are based upon the principles set forth in it. These principles are to be followed in matters pertaining to the administration of local churches, both within the church and in its relationship to the higher organizations. No attempt should be made to set up or abridge standards of membership, or to make, or attempt to enforce, rules or regulations for the church which have not been adopted by the

general body of believers and which are not set forth in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.

*The Manual* is approved by General Conference session and can be updated only at succeeding General Conference sessions. Thus it carries all the authority of the church in general session. “When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered” (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 260).

*The Manual* outlines the organization of the church and procedures to be practiced in all congregations so that unity is maintained in the world church. Details are in *The Manual* for the overall operation of the local church, including the selection, role, and duties of church officers. Elders should have access to a current edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. It is essential for Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders to be familiar with its contents and follow its prescribed procedures.

**Support from conference or mission.** The conference or mission supports the local church by providing its pastor. It also provides ministerial credentials that protect the local congregation from being deceived by someone not approved by the denomination. In each local conference or mission there are people especially equipped to provide training and resources to assist the local churches in their outreach. The church board can sponsor suitable people to attend these events, choosing those with the ability to pass on to others what they have learned.

This *Elder's Handbook* is written with the presupposition that elders have access to a *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and an overall knowledge of the ministry each department and church leader performs. Thus, the *Elder's Handbook* will not repeat in

detail the *Church Manual's* instructions to other church leaders and departments. However, the following chapter provides a brief sketch of these departments and their function.

# CHAPTER 5

## DEPARTMENTS IN THE CHURCH

**Elders play an important role in supporting and guiding church officers and leaders responsible for a variety of functions and departments of the church. To accomplish this task, it is important to understand the purpose and operation of these various functions.**

### **ADMINISTRATION**

**Elders.** This handbook is devoted in its entirety to the leadership function of elders. Therefore, the services and responsibilities of the elder are not listed here, other than to say that the elder, next to the pastor, is the chief authority in the church. This office, however, is in the spirit of servant leadership with the responsibility to guide the members and church leaders in mission and fellowship in the church, the “body of Christ.”

**Deacons and deaconesses.** Deacons and deaconesses have given significant support to the church since its beginnings. As the early Christian church grew, the apostles found themselves unable to do all the work. Therefore, seven deacons were chosen to assist in helping the poor and the sick, giving both physical and spiritual support (Acts 6:1-7). Several women are included in the list of those who served the church in similar capacities (Acts 9:36, 39; Rom. 16:12).

Deacons and deaconesses in the church today still provide the same caring, serving ministries. Through the spiritual gifts God

has given them, they regularly minister to many practical needs of church members and church property. They provide assistance and encouragement to the poor, sick, and discouraged. They visit hospitals and prisons. They share leadership in administering the ordinances of baptism and communion. Because they are close to the people, they are more sensitivity of the needs of the members. Their input and contribution is of great value.

**Church clerk.** Much of the efficient functioning of the church depends on the work of the clerk. Because of the specialized functions of this office, it is wise to choose a person willing to be reelected to this position multiple times, ensuring continuity of recordkeeping and reporting. The duties of the church clerk are outlined in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.

The clerk is chosen on the basis of reliability and faithfulness in clerical duties. The clerk attends church board and business meetings and keeps accurate records of actions taken. The minutes of the meeting include such details as the date and place of the meeting, the name of the chairperson, a record of attendance, participants, and items voted on. These minutes are permanently recorded in the official church records.

Church records also contain the names of all church members. It is essential that this list remain accurate and up-to-date. The membership roll is important to the elders of the church because it provides contact information of both past and present members.

When new members are added to the church through baptism, profession of faith, or transfer, their names are added to the church record. When members are lost from the church by death, disfellowship, or transfer, their names are also removed. The clerk handles the correspondence exchanged between churches when a member is transferring to or from the church. Such membership

transfers are to be completed before a new member is given leadership roles in the church. When inordinate delay occurs in the transfer procedure, a person may be elected to serve, subject to transfer.

The transfer of membership process is initiated by a request of the member to the clerk of the church being joined. The clerk sends the request to the church clerk where the membership is currently held. When the church currently holding the membership approves the transfer, the membership is passed on to the requesting church clerk who takes the transfer to the board. The board passes the approved transfer of the requesting member to the body of the church for a first reading and second reading. If there is no objection, usually the following week, action is taken by the congregation for final approval. At this point, the requesting member is accepted and welcomed into the new church. The clerk then sends a confirmation of acceptance to the clerk of the previous church for removal of the name from their records.

While this system is established to protect the church and its members, care should be taken to go through the process efficiently and in a timely manner, in consideration of the new, transferring member. New members may feel unwanted or neglected if months transpire between when they request membership transfer and the time they are voted in and welcomed. It is imperative that church clerks work together and act promptly.

No names are to be added or removed from church records without a vote of the church body. The clerk does not have authority to act independently on this matter except in the death of a member. When a member dies, the clerk records the date of death in the membership record.

The church record includes the names of members who no longer attend. Some may no longer profess or wish to be members

of the church. Others may have left the area. As much as possible, the church clerk should attempt to keep in touch with those who are away from the church by sending notices that keep them informed of the activities of the church, in an effort to be encouraging. From time to time, the clerk may also suggest a transfer to a church in their area. In addition, a pastor in the member's current location may be asked to contact the member with an invitation to fellowship with that congregation.

The clerk provides reports requested by the conference—some quarterly, some annually, and others on special occasions. The clerk, on authorization of the board, notifies the conference or mission of delegates elected to represent the church at a conference session. These reports generally have specific time requirements in order to provide accurate data for the conference or mission and other levels of church governance.

The clerk gathers information for these reports from the other officers and department leaders of the church. These reports assist elders in understanding the progress of both the local and world church. The elder oversees this activity, noting church trends and ensures that reporting is accurate and timely.

**Church treasurer.** The church treasurer receives, counts, receipts, deposits, disburses, keeps account of, and reports all funds that come into the church. Tithes and offerings, along with a financial report, are sent monthly to the conference or mission. Money given for the local church, money from the different entities within the church, and all other finances handled by the local congregation are distributed as directed by the church budget or by the church board or by a business meeting action. This includes the payment of accounts, insurance premiums, utilities, rents, departmental expenses, purchases, payment for services, maintenance, etc. The

treasurer periodically provides a financial report to the board and at business meetings. Most of the treasurer's work is not seen and recognized by the congregation, but is crucial to the operation of the church and worthy of careful oversight—not only to safeguard church funds, but also to protect the treasurer.

It is the treasurer's duty to keep financial records confidential. Such information should neither be asked for nor provided without an official and specific need. Such information should not be shared with anyone except with those who have the authority to know this information. Occasionally, a pastor or designated elder may need to know about a member's faithfulness in returning tithe. An example of such an instance is when the church leaders needs to diplomatically lead the nominating committee away from choosing as officers those who are not faithful in tithe.

The handling of church funds is both a practical and sacred responsibility, for if members have cause to distrust their church leaders, they are denied the opportunity of faithfulness in giving to God. All funds are to be processed through the treasurer's records. When money is being counted, it is wise for someone such as a deacon or deaconess to assist the treasurer. This provides a check on the accuracy of the count and a witness to the integrity of the treasurer. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders should not request unauthorized money from the treasurer. Prudent treasurers will not provide it even if asked.

Whenever practical, money should be received in envelopes, with the amount and the donor's name included. These envelopes are to be saved by the treasurer as part of recordkeeping for possible audits. Money given to the church is God's money. Its misuse is a serious offense. As overseers of the church, elders must make sure these guidelines are followed.

## DEPARTMENTAL MINISTRIES

The various functions of the church operate under a system referred to as “departments.” These departments are, to a large extent, guided by departments in the other constituent bodies of the church that are to serve as resource and guidance entities for the local church. These departments do not function in a directive manner with authority over local church departments; rather they assist the church in developing a well-rounded program of service to its members and its community. Following are brief descriptions of the resources and assistance available to the church from these departments.

**Children’s Ministries.** Children’s Ministries is established to meet the needs of children from birth to age 14, a crucial period for spiritual development. In addition to providing teacher-training for children’s Sabbath School, it provides programs and activities that foster the spiritual growth of children outside of Sabbath services, and includes programs to evangelize to children in the broader community.

Children’s Ministries provides materials and resources to assist churches in the following specialized areas: Children’s Sabbath School and camp meeting programs for the beginner, kindergarten, primary, junior, and earliterate divisions; Vacation Bible Schools; Neighborhood Bible Clubs; materials for teaching children faith and morality; family and individual children’s workshops; home parenting support; children’s guides to stewardship; mission and outreach projects for children; children’s music; and religious instruction for schools and cross cultural programs for children.

More information may be found at [www.gcchildmin.org](http://www.gcchildmin.org). Churches are urged to appoint Children’s Ministries coordinators to oversee this important aspect of children’s work.

Elders share the responsibility of ensuring that the spiritual development of children is a priority in the church, creating ways to

provide activities that meet their needs. Attending children's programs and events not only encourages those who lead out, but also keeps the elder informed of the needs in these areas. Additionally, selecting leaders for this ministry is crucial. Filling other offices first and leaving children's needs to the last is a failure to look to the future of the church. The training of children for leadership in the church assures that the church has its future in view and its priorities in order.

“Church should be a safe place to bring our children. Everyone involved with children who are minors must meet all Church and legal standards and requirements. In order to safeguard our children, churches are encouraged to adopt policies that would provide a measure of safety and protection for children” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, pp. 174, 175).

**Communications.** The Communication Department of the General Conference serves as the voice of the world church body, communicating the goals, mission, and service of the church through all forms of media. Communicators and technicians provide television and print news, press releases, web and graphic design, and maintain social networks for the world church.

The Office of Global Software provides technology training and management of certain globally-used church software packages such as netAdventist. To learn more about using netAdventist to build a church web site, visit [www.netadventist.org](http://www.netadventist.org). The Communication Department and the Office of Global Software are resources for the world church, its divisions and unions. The communication team maintains the official website of the world church, [www.adventist.org](http://www.adventist.org), where you can do the following:

- Obtain the Church logo and find standards for logo use.
- Find official church statements and guidelines on current issues.

- Obtain the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.
- Obtain the complete Church Manual.
- Find membership statistics.
- Find links to departments and church entities.
- Contact a communication team member.
- Obtain updates on Twitter and Facebook.

Adventist News Network (ANN) is a product of the communication department. The ANN team provides weekly video news updates that are available for download. Complete transcripts are provided for translation purposes.

Visit [news.adventist.org](http://news.adventist.org) for:

- Print news available for reproduction and syndication on the their website or in church newsletters
- Media training and style guides
- Submission of local church news stories, video, and photographs
- ANN video downloads

An elder can think like a communicator by asking questions such as: *What is going on in the church that our community should know? What is going on that our members should know?* Then share the answers with the communication personnel. Local church communicators keep the message and activities of the church in the public eye by the means of news releases; activity announcements; social media accounts; creation and maintenance of church websites; photo coverage of church activities; and fostering relationships with the local media.

**Adventist Community Services.** Adventist Community Services (ACS) is a ministry and channel through which local Seventh-day Adventist churches minister to neighborhoods and cities. Inspired by the work of Dorcas in Acts 9, ACS began in 1874 as the Dorcas and

Benevolent Association, comprised of women who provided clothes, food, money, and services to needy families. In 1972, the Dorcas Society was renamed Adventist Community Services. However, in some parts of the world the name Dorcas is still used. The Adventist Men Organization also does community services. ACS has expanded to include all church members, men and women, young and old, who serve with a holistic approach to physical, social, and spiritual needs in the community, developing a trust relationship and seeking opportunities to share Jesus.

Because every community is unique, it is important to conduct community needs assessments. ACS can assist elders in engaging all church departments to meet these needs by providing education on subjects such as family, marriage, and parenting; financial seminars; health screenings, nutrition, and cooking schools; home nursing; community development and improvement; and homemaking. ACS Centers distribute food and clothing and offer services such as tutoring and mentoring; counseling; English as a Second Language; elder care and childcare; and homeless ministries and soup kitchens. ACS encourages young people to participate in ACS activities and learn the joy of helping others.

ACS Disaster Response provides relief supplies such as food and clothing as well as emotional and spiritual care for those affected by disaster. If disasters overwhelm local capabilities, conference, union, or division disaster coordinators provide additional assistance. In response to some disasters, ACS and ADRA partner to provide relief. ACS is available to assist elders and their churches in developing strategic plans that engage all church departments in outreach ministries that meet community needs and share the love of Jesus.

As an elder, find ways for every member to be involved in the church. There are community service options for people possessing

almost any spiritual gift. Such a ministry may also be an excellent opportunity for new members, as well as long-time members.

For comprehensive community service articles and resources go to [www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi](http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi). Click on “resources” for an ACS Handbook and a community services certification program (ACSI Certification Program) that includes details on completing community needs assessments. To order hard copies of ACS materials and supplies, go to [www.adventsource.org](http://www.adventsource.org). Additional resources may be found at [www.communityservices.org](http://www.communityservices.org).

**Family Ministries.** “Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 352). The family meets the needs of social contact, belonging, love, and intimacy and helps establish personal identity and self worth. In the family, lifelong values are instilled. To help meet the needs of families, appoint a Family Ministries leader to assess the needs of church families and provide pertinent information to the church pastor and elders. Working closely together, the pastor, elders, and the leader minister to families in difficulty, and present special family ministries programs to nurture all church families in the congregation.

**Health Ministries.** Health Ministries are an expression and extension of the healing ministry of Jesus. The stewardship of health is an act of praise and appreciation. Healthful living is a practical way to express appreciation for life, while being an example to the community of the blessings of a healthy life.

*Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White is a guide to the Adventist lifestyle. Participating in health outreach projects in the community promotes good health and clean living in the context of service. The advantages of this lifestyle are presented, not in a boastful manner,

but in a desire to bless others. Those who experience this health advantage will desire to share it with others.

Magazines on health are published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide advice on healthful living within a spiritual context. Community outreach services include cooking schools, diabetes education classes, stress control programs, stop smoking programs, etc. These programs help make friends and create relationships in the community that the church would not otherwise reach. Materials for health ministry programs are at [www.healthministries.com](http://www.healthministries.com).

**Personal Ministries/Lay Activities.** Every church member is called to minister. The Personal Ministries/Lay Activities leader encourages the development of spiritual gifts to win those outside the church, organizing members to implement witnessing and outreach programs. The Personal Ministries/Lay Activities leader works to inspire, motivate, and equip members to develop their God-given witnessing abilities and be missionaries in their communities.

Elders support this ministry by:

- Being personally involved in a church outreach program
- Providing Sabbath morning time to promote and support outreach programs
- Supporting soul-winning training in the local church
- Encouraging attendance at conference or mission outreach training programs
- Motivating and equipping members to be involved in witnessing and evangelism activities.

**Publishing Ministries.** The Publishing Ministries Department at all levels of the church organization coordinates the development, production, and distribution of Seventh-day Adventist literature. The mission of the Publishing Ministries Department is to evangelize and

nurture church members. “There are many places in which the voice of the minister cannot be heard, places which can be reached only by our publications—the books, papers, and tracts filled with the Bible truths that the people need” (*Christian Service*, p. 153). This is accomplished by selling and giving away these materials. Selling is done through literature evangelists. “God calls for workers from every church among us to enter His service as canvasser evangelists” (*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 20). Giving away is accomplished by church members. “Every believer is called upon to scatter and broadcast tracts, leaflets, and books containing the message for this time” (*Review and Herald*, November 5, 1914).

The Publishing Ministries Department works with the pastor and other departments to plan systematic ways to involve members in literature distribution. At least every other year, the local conference conducts a seminar or workshop for local church elders and literature ministry coordinators to update the church on new methods of evangelism through literature. Every year the General Conference and its divisions assign a specific book title for the “Missionary Book of the Year” program to be printed and circulated in mass by the world church membership. The department produces a quarterly issue of the *Literature Evangelist* magazine, containing inspirational material and sermon illustrations for church elders. Local churches can subscribe to this magazine. It is also available from the publishing website, along with other resource materials such as the monthly *Publishing Literature Seminary Training Manual* and materials on evangelism. Local church pastors and elders can support this ministry and encourage members to join the worldwide literature distribution by being a literature evangelist or through personal sharing. Further information is available at [www.publishing.gc.adventist.org](http://www.publishing.gc.adventist.org).

**Sabbath School.** The Sabbath School program is the discipleship heart of the local church. It “should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ” (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 10). Through its program of religious education, it provides spiritual growth through Bible study, small-group fellowship, outreach in service and witness, and engagement in world mission. Its aim is to win and train people of all ages as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Support of the Sabbath School includes faithful attendance. A Sabbath School class in which members are taught Adventist beliefs, heritage, and lifestyle is the church’s primary program to nurture members. It reinforces new believers in the church and strengthens fellowship in established members. Branch Sabbath Schools are part of the church growth program. The children and youth divisions nurture the next generation of the church. Sabbath School supplies are available for all age groups of the church family.

The General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department provides a complete Christ-centered, Bible-based religious education curriculum for all ages. These Bible study guides are available in multiple languages in print, online, or as part of phone/tablet apps. A wide array of support resources are also available for Sabbath School teachers, superintendents, and secretaries. To access them visit the website at [www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org](http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org).

**Stewardship.** Stewardship ministry focuses on the lordship of Jesus Christ in the whole life of the individual. It provides a theological framework for a lifestyle of service, sacrifice, and partnership with God. It encourages financial stewardship, which reminds members of their spiritual responsibility to return tithe and give offerings of gratitude to God. These acts of faithfulness are outward expressions of the work

God is doing in the believer's heart, and acknowledge God as creator, owner, and sustainer of life.

Elders promote stewardship by preaching Christ-centered messages; teaching biblical principles of stewardship; visiting and encouraging members in their homes; and by being an example of Christian stewardship in their own lives. Such programs may include the promotion of Bible readings, family devotions, and member participation in various ministries of the local congregation. The Stewardship leader may also develop and implement a yearly plan of tithe and offering promotions, as well as regular presentations of financial reports in conjunction with the local church treasurer.

While the treasurer and finance committee are largely responsible for the church budget, the Stewardship leader should be involved in budget planning as well. In developing the budget, focus should be directed toward the ministry and mission of the church. The leader assists the pastor and elders by encouraging members to support the budget and to make personal commitments to the financial life of the church.

Resources designed to help promote biblical stewardship, Christian generosity, and personal giving are available at the conference or mission office. One such resource is the Tithe and Offering Readings provided by the General Conference. These Sabbath morning readings promote the concept that giving is an act of worship. They are designed to be read before the collection of tithe and offerings. Additional stewardship resources may be found at [www.adventiststewardship.com](http://www.adventiststewardship.com).

**Women's Ministries.** The Women's Ministries department empowers and equips women for ministry within their church and community.

This department seeks to:

- *Nurture* women spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

- *Empower* women through training enabling them to be equipped and confident in fulfilling their God-given purpose.
- Encourage all women to be involved in *outreach* to others with love and compassion, helping them to see, experience, and know Jesus Christ for themselves.

There are six challenge issues that guide our purpose: women's health; abuse; poverty; women's workloads; lack of training, mentoring, and leadership opportunities; and illiteracy. These issues affect women of all cultures, social standing, and nationalities.

In addition, Women's Ministries promotes programs to mentor young women and encourages and supports young women academically through a scholarship program.

A handbook that explains the structure and function of this department is available for pastors, elders, and Women's Ministries leaders in the church. A Leadership Certification Program is also available for Women's Ministries leaders designed to empower their lives and ministry to women both spiritually and educationally. The Women's Ministries department has many resources that are available at [www.adventistwomensministries.org](http://www.adventistwomensministries.org).

**Youth Ministries.** Youth Ministries coordinates all youth activities in the church, ranging from Adventist Junior Youth (Adventurers, ages 6-9; Pathfinders, ages 10-15) to the Senior Youth/Young Adult Ministry (Ambassadors, ages 16-21; Young Adults, ages 22-31). The department integrates the youth of the church into the church community, working with leaders and other entities of the church in winning, training, retaining, and reclaiming its youth.

The mission of Youth Ministries is to lead young people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and help them embrace the call to discipleship. The three focus areas of ministry are discipleship, community, and mission. With the guidance of Adventist Youth leadership,

young people work together for the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of one another. “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world” (*Messages to Young People*, p. 196). A Bible-based foundation in the church will enable youth to develop a lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ and His church.

The objectives of these programs and activities are as follows:

- To work for the salvation of young people within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, helping them grow spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially.
- To provide fellowship for Seventh-day Adventist youth and organize them to work for the salvation of other young people.
- To train Seventh-day Adventist youth for leadership roles within the church and harness their energy for involvement in all church activities.

Local churches are encouraged to organize social clubs such as Pathfinders to address the needs of children in all age groups. The conference or mission can provide information about these ministries. Other resources are available at [www.gcyouthministries.org](http://www.gcyouthministries.org).

**Purpose of departments.** Church departments are devoted to enabling the church serve its members. They provide personnel, resources, ideas, and creativity to enrich the church. Wise leadership takes full advantage of their services.

The local church elder is responsible for fostering all departments and functions of the church. In large churches with more than one elder, the work should be divided by areas or departments among the elders, according to their experience and abilities. They should support the various departments assigned to them as counselors and mentors.

# CHAPTER 6

## EVANGELISM

Through evangelism, the church grows and spreads its influence in the community and around the world. Jesus declares that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations” (Matt. 24:14), and in the great commission to the disciples He instructs us to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Evangelism is more than a public declaration of doctrine or prophecy, significant as these may be. While the church has been blessed by evangelists gifted in public presentations of the gospel, care must be taken not to reduce evangelism to this specialized ministry alone. Evangelism involves all of Christ’s disciples to share, declare, and live as recipients of God’s grace. Through this ministry, the church calls people all around the world to join Christ’s redeemed.

### **WORLD CHURCH EVANGELISM**

The great commission calls for sharing the good news of the gospel. This charge does not instruct us to address governments or territories, but rather the individuals in them. Evangelism is not for specialists and institutions. Though the church is useful in fulfilling this mission, ultimately evangelism must enable one-on-one witnessing opportunities.

To evangelize is to share the gospel and lead others to accept Jesus as their personal Savior, embrace Him as their soon-coming Lord, and unite their lives with His church. The goal of evangelism is not just to increase membership. While church membership is a by-product of evangelism, the great commission envisions each believer becoming a mature, discipling minister. The task of evangelism will not be over until believers are nurtured, trained, deployed, and winning souls.

God has called the Seventh-day Adventist Church to proclaim His last day message of love and truth to the world (Rev. 14:6-12). The challenge of reaching the billions on earth with the end-time message seems overwhelming, and the rapid fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) appears unlikely from a human perspective. The New Testament church was also confronted with a seemingly impossible task. But empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church exploded in growth (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31). The early Christians shared their faith everywhere (Acts 5:42). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was only a prelude of what is to come. God has promised to pour out the Holy Spirit in abundance in the last days (Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1). The earth will be “illuminated with his glory” (Rev. 18:1) and the work of God on earth will be finished rapidly (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 9:28).

Only as the Holy Spirit gives life to plans and empowers actions will they be effective. “Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 362).

### **STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM**

The book of Acts reveals that the disciples’ success was based on five principles. By understanding them, elders and churches are more effective in winning souls for Christ. As these principles are

implemented in local congregations, the Holy Spirit works to produce growth for the kingdom of God. New groups will be organized, new companies will be formed, and new churches will be planted.

**Revival.** Churches grow when there is genuine spiritual revival in the members' lives. The New Testament Christian church grew because each member experienced a true personal relationship with Jesus (Acts 1:8; 4:20, 31, 33; 1 John 1:1-3). The disciples shared a Christ they knew. They proclaimed a Christ they experienced. They witnessed a Christ who changed them personally.

**Bible study.** Churches and individuals can experience a spiritual revival with renewed emphasis on Bible study (Acts 6:7; 2 Pet. 1:2-4; John 17:3). The Bible is powerful; it changes lives and transforms people. The Bible is God's agency for winning souls. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the writers of Scripture transforms the lives of those who read it. "The Word of God is our sanctification and righteousness, because it is spiritual food. To study it is to eat the leaves of the tree of life" (*Letter 17*, 1902).

**Prayer.** Individuals and churches are revived when there is a renewed emphasis on intercessory prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42; Col. 1:3; 9; Phil. 1:3-5). In the great controversy between good and evil, God has established basic ground rules: He does not violate freedom of choice; He does everything he can to save each individual; He sends the Holy Spirit to impress hearts; and He arranges circumstances in each life.

Intercessory prayer unleashes heaven's power for others. His life-giving love is poured out through us to them. Intercessory prayer is a channel for God's wisdom to flow through us to reach others. He provides the knowledge to share His love with others.

Through prayer, we speak to God about the sins in our lives that are a hindrance to successful soul winning (Ps. 51:10-12, 13). It deepens our desire concerning the object of our prayer (Matt. 26:39), and it puts us in touch with divine wisdom (James 1:5). Prayer invites God to work more powerfully than He could if we did not pray (Dan. 10:12; James 5:16).

Elders may lead the church in prayer ministry by establishing prayer partners, developing prayer lists, leading prayer walks, scheduling vigils, etc. Prayer develops a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading. In order to reach people for Christ, we must understand how best to approach them, how to answer their questions, and how to appeal to them. Through prayer, God will lead us to those with whom we will be most effective. "Begin to pray for souls; come near to Christ, close to His bleeding side. Let a meek and quiet spirit adorn your lives, and let your earnest, broken, and humble petitions ascend to Him for wisdom that you may have success in saving not only your own soul, but the souls of others" (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 513).

**Witnessing.** Individuals and churches are revived when there is a renewed emphasis on witnessing. As the disciples shared their faith, their faith grew. As they testified to their personal commitment to Christ, they became powerful proclaimers (Acts 1:8; 2:32; 9:15; 22:14, 15). "If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 80).

**Equipping and training.** Jesus trained and equipped His disciples. In the book of acts they followed the lessons Jesus taught them. Churches also grow when its members are equipped and trained

for service. The Lord instructed His disciples to follow Him, saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Then Jesus spent three and a half years training and preparing His disciples to go out into the world and meet the physical and spiritual needs of people (Eph. 4:11, 12).

“Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give Bible readings, how to conduct and teach Sabbath School classes, how best to help the poor and to care for the sick, and how to work for the unconverted. There should be schools of health, cooking schools and classes in various lines of Christian help work” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 149).

“One worker who has been trained and educated for the work, who is controlled by the Spirit of Christ, will accomplish far more than ten laborers who go out deficient in knowledge and weak in the faith” (*Evangelism*, p. 474).

In every church, members should be engaged as witnesses in some form of service. When church members are equipped to serve as witnesses to reach their community with Bible-based ministries, the church will have an explosion of growth.

### **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Churches grow when there is a planned process of community outreach to meet the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of people—just as the disciples did (Acts 3:6, Acts 6:1-4).

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

If the church closed its doors or disappeared, would the community notice? Just like Jesus who met the physical, intellectual, emotional,

and spiritual needs, His people must do the same. Growing churches have a variety of programs that meet the needs of different groups of people. In the natural world as well as in the spiritual world, there are laws of harvest. The most basic requirement to harvest a crop is to plant seeds. No farmer expects God to work a miracle and germinate a seed that has not been sown.

**Reaping.** Churches grow when God's word is shared through biblical preaching and public evangelism. The disciples were powerful evangelists and the New Testament church gave priority to this ministry. Full of confidence and anticipation of the blessing of the Spirit, they shared the Word of God (Acts 4:31; 5:42; 8:4). "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9).

God is preparing an unusually large and final harvest that will surprise us. This could take place in homes through small groups; in churches through evangelistic sermons; through satellite series using mass media; or in public evangelism and seminars. Jesus invites us to participate with Him in reaping the largest harvest of souls in the history of the world. In the first century, the disciples were looking forward to a future harvest. The harvest was ready. It was right before their eyes and they did not see it. The Samaritans were open to receiving the gospel (John 4:35). Once again, in our day, the harvest is ripe (Joel 3:13-14).

Baptism is the symbol of entrance into the family of God and the fellowship of His church. It symbolizes acceptance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for sin; death to the old sinful life; and resurrection to a new life in Christ. Preparation for baptism includes a time of "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). In the Seventh-day Adventist

Church, this instruction is summarized in the Fundamental Beliefs and the Baptismal Vow (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, pp. 45-47). Those seeking membership in the church need to know the Christ-centered principles for which it stands. They should not be asked to commit themselves to membership without knowing what they are committing to.

**Follow up and nurture.** Churches grow when new converts are nurtured and taught to testify. “When men and women accept the truth, we are not to go away and leave them and have no further burden for them. They are to be looked after” (*Evangelism*, p. 345). “After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing, — watchful attention, help and encouragement. They should not be left alone, a prey to Satan’s most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, and to be visited and prayed with. These souls need the meat apportioned to every man in due season” (*Evangelism*, p. 351).

Baptism is the beginning of a new life in Christ and the fellowship of His church. It is not a panacea to solve all spiritual problems. Often, immediately after baptism, new believers are faced with some of their most serious challenges. New believers need to be nurtured in order to grow and become mature Christians.

Here are some principles that anchor new believers in the faith:

- A meaningful devotional life
- Being equipped to serve
- Involvement in ministering to others
- Sharing the Word of God with others
- Developing a network of friends in the church

New believers become strong in their faith when they are actively involved in sharing their faith. It is not advisable to appoint new members too quickly to leadership responsibilities. The focus should be on spiritual life and witnessing at the beginning. Here are some ways to nurture and disciple new believers:

- Design a program that reinforces doctrinal understanding.
- Teach principles of continued spiritual growth.
- Encourage a personal devotional life and regular family worship.
- Tolerate mistakes and errors of judgment made by the new member.
- Schedule regular visits.
- Integrate them into the social network of the church.
- Instruct on Seventh-day Adventist Christian lifestyle.
- Involve them in witnessing and service outreach.

**Personal devotional life.** Provide new believers with the yearly devotional book, and read the first few chapters with them to help them get started. Share ways of how they can experience a meaningful devotional life. Involve them in Bible study groups at home or at the church. Emphasize the blessings of sharing personal testimonies; and suggest the ACTS prayer model:

- A – Adoration and Praise
- C – Confession and Repentance
- T – Thanksgiving and Gratitude
- S – Supplication

**Home visits.** In the New Testament, spiritual and social needs were met in small groups as they shared a common meal and prayed together (Acts 2:42). Visitation is vital for new members to feel at home in the church. It is possible for a new convert to be doctrinally

convinced, yet not socially integrated into the church. Although baptized, they may still feel like outsiders and uncomfortable in their new community. But the more contacts and friends they have in the church, the less likely they are to drop out. Love and care for new believers can be demonstrated through home visits.

Brief, casual phone calls between visits help solidify new believers in the church. Send a note of encouragement saying you are praying for them. When they miss church, send them a copy of the bulletin and a copy of the sermon if available. If they continue to miss church, give them a call. The longer they are away, the more difficult it will be to bring them back.

**Adapting to Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle.** In your interactions with new believers, include education on lifestyle issues through healthy cooking, homemade bread-making, developing a balanced menu, etc. Help them understand the guidelines on systematic benevolence and spiritual gifts seminars.

The reading of Scripture and Christian literature strengthens the spiritual life. “Patriarchs and Prophets and The Great Controversy are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth . . . in The Desire of Ages, Patriarchs and Prophets, Great Controversy and Daniel and the Revelation, there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people” (*Letter 229*, 1903).

**Spiritual guardianship plan.** Assign an established church member as a spiritual guardian to a new believer. Once new believers are established in the church, they can become spiritual guardians too.

The primary objective of the spiritual guardian is to be a friend. Therefore, try to ensure that the two of them have similar interests

and backgrounds. The spiritual guardian is not a policeman or judge. New believers need someone to care and show concern for their well-being—to help them grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and socially.

**Socialization.** New believers also grow in their spiritual experience as they come to God's house each Sabbath. In the early church, spiritual and social needs were met through worship, preaching, and praise (Acts 2:42-47). Encourage new believers to join a post-baptismal Sabbath School class. Invite them home to dinner to get acquainted with them on a personal level. Include them in church events such as picnics, camping trips, or fellowship gathering.

**Involvement and witness.** In the early church, new believers grew spiritually as they were actively involved in witnessing and faith-sharing. Soul winning strengthens faith, leading to prayer and dependence on Scripture.

When new believers are equipped to be witnesses and disciples, they feel more comfortable and confident in sharing their new faith with their family and friends who may be unfamiliar with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When they are well-equipped to minister to others, they will want to become involved in activities such as prayer ministry, literature ministry, Bible study ministry, home Bible seminar ministry, health ministry, children's ministry, etc.

**Reclaiming missing members.** In the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15), Jesus illustrates the concern we should have for lost members of the church family. In these stories, the cause of the loss and the methods of rescue vary, but the end result is the same in each: There is rejoicing in the church family and in heaven. Reclaiming missing members is a fruitful ministry

in which elders should engage. If visited lovingly and listened to sympathetically, many of these people can be reclaimed for Christ and His church.

A program to reclaim former or inactive members takes planning. Begin by collecting names from the church roll, church members, and relatives of the missing. Work in tandem with active members in the congregation who work in areas that involve frequent contact with the public—such as literature evangelists, medical personnel, and business people. Because of the delicate nature of this ministry, people chosen to visit missing members should be carefully selected and prepared for this work. When visiting missing members, it is important to approach them in a friendly, open, non-condemning manner.

*Be tactful.* To help them feel at ease, ask questions that will get them talking about themselves. Ask about their family or their work, and comment kindly about their children, their house, or their hobby. Gently move on to their past association with the church by asking about the pastor who baptized them or where and when they first attended church. Ask them if they have ever thought about returning, or if there is anything that is preventing their return.

*Be attentive.* Listen carefully and prayerfully to their responses, paying attention to the feelings behind their answers. When they begin to talk freely, encourage their conversation by listening attentively. Do not interrupt them or get defensive. They may express hurt feelings that go back to when they stopped attending church. If they get angry as they speak, allow them to continue talking. Their painful experiences need to be expressed. People often feel better once they have expressed their feelings.

*Encourage confidence in God's love.* While visiting inactive members, remain neutral in the conversation, without taking sides. The purpose of the visit is to give them an opportunity to overcome

and work through the issue that caused them to stop attending church. Regardless of the issue, assure them of God's unfailing faithfulness, and try to build their confidence in His love and forgiveness.

*Respect confidences.* All conversations with inactive members should be kept confidential. This is especially needed if the reason behind their leaving involved an incident that brought shame upon them. When they share things of a personal nature with you, they do so in trust; do not betray that trust by discussing the incident with others. Assure them that their sin is not too great for Jesus to forgive. Assist them in laying their sin at His feet and claiming His promise of cleansing (1 John 1:9).

*Pray for them.* Before leaving the home, pray for them, asking God's blessing on their home. Personalize your prayer by mentioning each family member by name. Also ask fellow church officers and members to pray for their restoration.

*Invite them back to church.* Assure inactive members that they are welcome back at church whenever they are ready to return. They may not come immediately and may require several more contacts before they return. The important message to leave with them is that the church cares about them and wants them back. When the time comes for them to return, make the road back easy. Offer to personally accompany them to the church. Prepare church members for the reunion and welcome. Pave the way for a smooth and joyful return to church attendance.

*Love them.* It is important to assure inactive members that they are loved. While visiting, your attitude can make the difference between their returning to church or their continuing to stay away. Avoid shaming them or making them feel guilty. Remember, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Display an understanding and accepting spirit. Respect their point of view.

Show genuine concern for their distress. Help them talk out their pain. Apologize on behalf of the church for the hurt they feel. Try to listen more and talk less. Avoid giving advice. Be understanding and patient, building a relationship of trust.

“We should not burden them with unnecessary censure but should let the love of Christ constrain us to be very compassionate and tender, that we can weep over the erring and those who have backslidden from God. The soul is of infinite value. Its worth can be estimated only by the price paid to ransom it” (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 188).

Implement these principles in the church, and the Holy Spirit will help you grow strong disciples for Christ. New converts will mature into solid Christians. Some will become leaders in the church and many will actively share their faith with their relatives and friends. For more ideas on how to develop and implement a yearly plan of comprehensive evangelism in the local church, visit [www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com).

# CHAPTER 7

## CHURCH NURTURE

The good news of the Gospel is that God is love. This news was in stark contrast to the pagan appeasement religions of Jesus' time, as well as to legalistic misrepresentations of God. Even today, while many know the good news of Christ's abundant grace, there remains a distorted image of God as a demanding tyrant and judge. The message of Jesus is—and was—that God is love, His law is love, and His grace is love. In recognition of this attribute of God's character, the church experiences a revival of godliness. We do what we do not to earn God's favor by merit, but because He has bestowed it upon us already.

Love and unity are the foundation of Christianity. “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14). “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Unity empowers the church. Now “when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). “When there is harmonious action among the individual members of the church, when there is love and confidence manifested brother to brother, there will be proportionate force and power in our work for the salvation of men” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 188).

Christian love produces unity despite differences. “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Peter 4:8). The fire of Christian love dissolves class

conflict, racial hatred, social ruptures, and theological controversies. But love and unity are not accidental; such behavior must be nurtured in the church. Preaching, worship, and public church gatherings can advance these traits both personally and corporately, but they are not enough. Loving one another extends beyond sitting in the same pew on Sabbath. Contact and relationship outside the weekly worship hour is vital to Christian community. “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another” (Heb. 10:24, 25).

### PRAYER MINISTRY

Jesus instructed the disciples to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit before doing anything else. Prayer is our most powerful tool in the Great Controversy.

**Priority of prayer.** Most dynamic, growing churches emphasize the ministry of prayer. Praying with members struggling to keep their faith can help them maintain a close relationship with God. People with needs in the local community often respond well to offers of prayer. “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work . . . . A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer” (*Selected Messages*, vol. 1, 121).

Intercessory prayer was central to Jesus’ ministry. It was His custom to spend many hours asking His Father’s help for those to whom He ministered (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). Scripture records His prayers on behalf of others as models for us (Matt. 6:9-12; John 17:6-26). The apostle Paul also exercised a ministry of intercessory prayer (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Col. 1:3). To the apostles, prayer was as important as preaching. They sought to choose deacons

who were willing to give themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

In private and in people’s homes, elders must pray on behalf of the church and its members for God’s blessing, strength, healing, forgiveness, wisdom, and enlightenment. There is power in the church that is praying together. When members join in prayer for others and see their prayers answered, new strength and vitality will be experienced in the church family.

The book of Acts indicates that when the believers united together in prayer, the Word of God spread and the church grew (Acts 1:14, 15; 2:42,47; 4:18-33; 8:15-25; 10:9-48; 12:1-25). Church leaders need to guide their members into spending time together seeking the Lord—praying for one another, planning, and nurturing the fruit He gives. “The promise is made (Matt. 18:19,20) on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another.” (*Letter 32*, 1903).

We often pray to open or close a meeting, but fail to spend time praying for wisdom and changed hearts so that our ministries can be most effective. Help members develop prayer partnerships and establish times for group prayer beyond the weekly prayer meeting. Some of these partnerships can be accomplished online or by telephone. Satan knows the power of God’s people praying together and “at the sound of fervent prayer, [His] whole host trembles” (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 346).

Valuable resources to help members enjoy an effective prayer life and ministry can be found online at [www.ministerialassociation.com](http://www.ministerialassociation.com) and [www.revivalandreformation.org](http://www.revivalandreformation.org).

## PRAYER MEETING

Prayer meetings are a focal point for praise and fellowship in the church. “Those who are really seeking for communion with God will be seen in the prayer meeting” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 98). There are many ways to strengthen prayer meetings, but the central emphasis should be prayer. The meeting should be scheduled at convenient times and places, occur in small groups or corporately, and focus on a prayer list or prayer box. However, regardless of time, venue or structure, prayer meetings are for praying. The program may vary from week to week for interest, but four basic ingredients are essential to its success:

**Plan.** “Wisdom should be sought of God, and plans should be laid to conduct the meetings so that they will be interesting and attractive. The people hunger for the bread of life. If they find it at the prayer meeting they will go there to receive it” (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 70). It is the responsibility of the pastor and elders to prepare and coordinate the prayer meeting. This can be an excellent opportunity for an elder with the appropriate spiritual gifts to lead out in place of the pastor. Choose an appropriate room. A small group in a large room reduces intimacy, dampens fellowship, and infers defeat. Start at the scheduled time; do not wait for everyone to arrive.

Consider having a church night during the week where different programs are conducted at the same time or one after the other. This format works well for programs such as prayer meeting, Pathfinders, committee meetings, and choir practice. Begin a fellowship hour early in the evening by sharing a light meal together.

Rather than gathering at the church for the prayer meeting, some may prefer meeting in homes as small groups. There are some advantages to meeting this way since a small group provides a more personal atmosphere than the church building. This can assist in

bonding the group into a close-knit community. Members of the group are able to participate more freely in the informal surroundings of the home prayer group.

**Study.** Prayer meeting normally includes time for Bible study. This meeting is more for teaching than preaching, and presentations should usually be 20 minutes or less. Examples are studies on Seventh-day Adventist beliefs; a chapter, or a book from the Bible; or a biblical character.

**Share.** Prayer meeting generally includes time for personal testimonies, reflections, and sharing. It is important to give people the opportunity to share how God has been answering their prayers. This evidence of God's leading and power strengthens faith and brings encouragement to the group.

Such opportunities are of value to the congregation, but must be carefully guarded. "Long, prosy talks and prayers are out of place anywhere, and especially in the social meeting. Those who are forward and ever ready to speak are allowed to crowd out the testimony of the timid and retiring. Those who are most superficial generally have the most to say" (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 70, 71).

Testimonies are to be short and current. Ask questions such as: *What has the Lord done for you? What prayer has been answered? What soul-winning experience have you had?* Testimony topics may be assigned in advance (favorite Bible text, how you became a Christian, etc.). Sometimes it is wise to ask one or two members beforehand to speak about a recent answer to prayer.

**Pray.** Prayer meeting is for prayer and not for those who dominate the time with long and tiresome recitations. "Their prayers are long and mechanical. They weary the angels and the people who listen to

them. Our prayers should be short and right to the point. Let the long, tiresome petitions be left for the closet, if any have such to offer. Let the Spirit of God into your hearts, and it will sweep away all dry formality” (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 71).

When it is time for prayer, direct the group to focus on specific requests mingled with praise and the claiming of promises. Encourage members to pray for others rather than focusing on personal requests. Tactfully suggest that the prayers be brief and not be used to preach a sermon or present personal grievances. Building a prayer list that includes people or projects becomes a reminder of what God is doing for His people.

Methods used in praying can vary from meeting to meeting.

- The entire group could pray together as one or divide into smaller groups.
- Attendees could pray around a circle, or be left free to pray as they feel ready to.
- Conversational prayer may be opened by an appointed leader, followed by brief additions of a sentence or two by various participants. As the Spirit leads, participants may wish to pray more than once when the topic of prayer shifts to other issues. This allows for prayer requests, ministry to one another other as needed, and an enjoyable, interactive type of prayer that keeps minds alert for a longer period of time. After an appropriate time the prayer is brought to a close by the leader.
- Prayers could follow a theme such as praise, thankfulness, forgiveness, etc. or be based on a portion of scripture.

There is no set pattern for prayer. The more open and natural the prayers, the more meaningful they may become. “As we seek to win others to Christ, bearing the burden of souls in our prayers, our own hearts will throb with the quickening influence of God’s grace; our own affections will grow with more divine fervor; our whole

Christian life will be more of a reality, more earnest, more prayerful” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 354). For additional information on how to conduct group prayer sessions, see the handbook on prayer at [www.revivalandreformation.org](http://www.revivalandreformation.org).

## VISITATION

Visiting members is vital to spiritual nurture and growth, a practice central to the early Christian church. “Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). “. . . taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). New Testament church leaders balanced their personal and public ministries.

Elders mingle with the congregation before and after church service to seek out those in need of encouragement and prayer. Be early for services, and linger a while afterward. Do not just socialize with friends; but look for those who are struggling. Give a friendly greeting and, if needed, a listening ear. Personal ministries can also take place over the telephone. Calling someone and sharing Scripture and prayer is a powerful ministry. Prayer partnership can be established and maintained by such contact.

But the most effective personal ministry takes place in the home. It is important to see and understand people beyond the bounds of the church, in the setting where they live their daily lives.

Planning for home visitation should be a regular part of the elders’ meeting. Visitation can be assigned to leading church members gifted and trained in this particular ministry. Such programs are often called a parish or under shepherd plan, where membership is usually organized into geographical zones. An elder, assisted by a deacon and deaconess, could be in charge of a parish zone. The pastor and elder lead out in the visitation plan and other programs that build spiritual strength in the group.

Visitation of the newly baptized and newly transferred members provides immediate contact and personal welcome to the church. Visiting the homes of newly baptized children makes an impact on the child and parents. They will remember that a church leader cared enough to visit.

As much as possible, visits should be scheduled to save time and accommodate the family's personal appointments and plans.

It is advisable that visits be made by two people, rather than by just one person. Married couples make good visiting teams. An elder and a trainee is another good example.

Following are seven suggestions to make visitations a blessing:

**Prepare.** Pray that God will guide your words to be a blessing to the home. Select a short passage of Scripture to share. Choose promise passages such as Psalm 46; Psalm 103:1-5; Psalm 121; Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:1-3; and Revelation 21:1-7.

**Befriend.** Be sociable and include everyone in the family in the conversation—as much as they are willing to participate. Comment positively about the family, home, garden, etc. Listen with undivided attention as they speak of their interests.

**Read.** After a few minutes, when a natural opening occurs in the conversation, move toward a spiritual direction. If it seems like an appropriate and comfortable time, read or comment on a biblical passage. Comments should last no more than one or two minutes.

**Ask.** Asking for prayer requests allows them to share concerns and interests. Scriptures that particularly address their concerns may be helpful at this time. However, keep in mind that the purpose of the visit is to show concern, rather than provide answers.

**Pray.** Kneel if appropriate, and invite everyone to join you in prayer. Pray specifically for the requests and concerns just expressed, remembering those mentioned by name. In your prayer, mention absent family members and bless the home.

**Leave.** Leave promptly while the spiritual tone of the prayer is still felt. In most settings, 30 minutes or less is adequate time for a visitation.

**Write.** After the visit, prepare a written summary of the visit, including the names of those involved. Record the family's concerns and your impressions. Recollecting these details at later visits reflects genuine interest in the family.

### SMALL GROUPS

“The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers also” (*Evangelism*, p. 115).

Moses organized Israel into groups of 10 (Exod. 18). The inner core of Jesus' disciples was a group of 12 with whom He spent most of His ministry. He often taught in private homes (Matt. 13:36, 17:25; Mark 9:33, 10:10) and the New Testament church centered its activities through small groups in study, sharing, praying, and fellowship (Acts 2:42, 46). Meeting as groups and in homes was partly because the church did not yet own property specifically devoted to the church congregation. However, some elements of this model of church fellowship are still applicable, especially for very large churches where congregational gatherings are not enough to nurture spiritual growth and fellowship. They foster and encourage

members to form small groups, fellowshiping together in various areas of shared interest and service.

A Christian small group is generally made up of 5 to 15 who meet in a church or home to share in fellowship, Bible study, prayer, service, recreation, and socialization. Examples of small groups that meet in the church include Sabbath School classes, outreach groups, home Bible study groups, cottage prayer meetings, the church choir, and various activities of shared interest. Meeting times and locations are determined by group consensus. These gatherings are flexible in style and more informal than regular church services.

People attend a church more for its Christian support system than for its doctrines. Conversely, most people stop attending church not because they disbelieve the church's doctrines, but because they no longer find support and fellowship. The atmosphere of small groups is more conducive to fellowship than regular church services. Those who are not ready to identify with a church may feel comfortable joining a small group that is more comfortable and less threatening.

The informal atmosphere of home groups makes these gatherings ones to which members can easily invite friends and families. They are an outreach vehicle for the church and are not designed to serve church members exclusively. Home groups typically aim to revive members and attract non-members with Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and outreach ministry. They also provide a means to reclaim inactive members.

Home group meetings typically last about an hour to an hour and a half and include four basic parts:

**Sharing.** Most home groups have their sharing time at the beginning of each meeting. The sharing of joys, blessings, and disappointments is a natural way to begin a meeting. It relieves tensions, provides affirmation, and creates a warm group spirit. Encourage dialogue and keep any one person from dominating the meeting.

**Study.** The group may choose a book or passage from the Bible that they study in advance. The leader then initiates a discussion with questions such as *What does God say to you through this passage?*

**Prayer.** The group usually maintains a prayer list. Members of the group are asked to pray for one another by name in their private devotions and have prayer partner relationships that provide day-to-day contact between partners by telephone or electronic media when face-to-face contact is impractical.

**Ministry/outreach.** The group intentionally seeks to invite and include non-members into the small group.

Small groups can also meet at the church. For example:

*Sabbath School groups.* Weekly Sabbath School classes have the potential for much greater service and fellowship when they are extensions of small groups. This environment fosters witnessing, service, and social programs outside the regular Sabbath School program. The General Conference Sabbath School Department refers to such Sabbath School classes as action units and has resources available on their website.

*Seminar groups.* People usually experience an increased interest in attending church during times of transition such as marriage, birth of a child, change of residence, divorce, death of a loved one, etc. To meet these needs, the church could sponsor a regular program of family life seminars, parenting classes, coping seminars, Bible study classes, and other such programs that address physical, mental, and spiritual health.

*Support groups.* Support groups center around people with similar needs and concerns. These may include physical needs, marriage and

family issues, play groups for parents of young children, singles, women, men, senior citizens, and grief recovery.

**Organizing small groups.** To be successful, small groups need planning and organization. Begin by identifying needs and shared interests in the church community. Next, decide what kind of small groups best meets those needs. For example, there may be the need for a new member support group, a church officers' prayer group, a mid-week Bible study group for students in the local school, or an outreach group to build relationships with friends outside the church.

Once the needs and groups are identified, select and train suitable leaders for each group. Group leaders typically recruit members by personal invitation. Information about the groups should also be made public to the congregation, thereby giving everyone an opportunity to join a specific group that suits their needs. Leaders must meet regularly to review how their groups are progressing and to support and encourage one another.

Give members the opportunity to make a commitment to the group. This might include an agreement to:

- Meet weekly for a given number of weeks.
- Attend meetings of the group as far as possible.
- Prepare for each meeting by studying the assigned material.
- Protect confidences.
- Invite others into the group.

**Resources for small groups.** A wide variety of resources on running small groups and training their leaders are available. These usually also contain relational Bible study outlines and topics for discussion. Through careful preparation and organization, small groups can help develop the spiritual life of the church and connect with the local community.

**Social Activities.** Social activities in the church aid in the balanced development of the spiritual, mental, physical, and social aspects of church members. When people do not find opportunities to socialize and fellowship within the church, they will look for it elsewhere. Those who are socially removed from the church family will likely experience spiritual separation as well. Members need to feel accepted, involved, and useful in their church. Therefore, the church must provide activities and programs that foster a sense of belonging and bond members together.

Social activities also bring the young and the older generations together. They may not always be attracted to the same events, but some creative planning can bring the generations together for an evening of fellowship. When people socialize, they create shared memories and experiences that bind them together.

Social and recreational events help people get to know one another. They offer a greater opportunity to interact than one gets in the formal setting of worship services. Social events attract families and friends of members to church functions as well.

A social committee plans and conducts social events. These activities may include picnics, games, meals, hiking, weekend camping, church retreats, etc. Such events bring together the church family in a friendly, relaxed environment where people get to know each other and where friendships develop.

While some members are quiet and reserved, others have outgoing personalities with spiritual gifts suitable to organize the social activities of the church.

## **COUNSELING**

Members sometimes face crises that require assistance. These crises may be spiritual, relational, or behavioral, and may result from personal loss or grief. It is natural for the Christian to desire to help

those in need. When Jesus saw people in need, “He was moved with compassion for them” (Matt. 14:14). Elders need to be effective and kind listeners and provide wise counsel from Scripture.

Effective counseling requires good judgment and perception, and the ability to discern the difference between spiritual and pathological needs. Elders should not address issues that require professional counseling, as this may make the situation worse and may result in cause for liability for being involved in a clinical situation that required the attention of a trained or licensed professional. However, there are ways in which members in crisis may be encouraged and assisted. The following guidelines will assist the elder in knowing when and how to engage in counseling, and when to avoid involvement:

**Learn to listen.** It is not the purpose of counseling to solve people’s problems for them. The first purpose is to show care. Listening demonstrates to counselees that they are important. The second purpose is to help counselees rationally address their problems from emotional reactions to logical thought processes.

It is best not to be quick in giving advice. It is better to lead people to identify for themselves the main issues of their problem rather than to give them a solution or your opinion. Be supportive as they deal with those issues and listen attentively. Concentrating too much on finding answers may lead to misunderstanding the questions. It is helpful to summarize and clarify the problem by occasionally reflecting back on some of the main points of the conversation.

Listen to both sides of relational problems. Never assume that one side is completely accurate or that the person is deliberately providing false information. Do not presume to understand before hearing both sides.

A counselor does not ignore or overlook sin, but is non-judgmental just as Jesus was toward the woman accused of adultery. Information

revealed in a counseling setting is to be kept confidential. However, if there are criminal matters involved, the counselee should be informed that such issues need to be handled by the proper authorities.

**Concentrate on a resolution.** The purpose of counseling is to find resolution rather than revisiting problems and placing blame. While it is important to hear the matter out in a patient, kind, and caring manner, helping people move toward forgiveness and solutions is the goal. Accepting responsibility for one's own actions is a vital step in recovery.

It may not be possible to resolve problems of interpersonal relationships if one of the parties is unwilling to work toward solutions. In such situations, just helping the people involved find Christlike ways to deal with broken relationships is a valuable pursuit in counseling.

**Choosing a plan.** There may be many ways to address a problem and those seeking counsel will appreciate help in deciding which seems best. Encourage them to implement their own decision. If counselees do not make a serious attempt to follow through on their plan, it is not wise to continue spending additional time with them on the matter.

**Pray.** Prayer is an important part of good counsel. It demonstrates the elder's concern for the counselees' spiritual condition and encourages them to adopt a serious and consistent prayer life. Prayer at the close of the counseling session points to God as the most lasting source of help.

**Know when to refer.** Counseling in areas that require expertise, certification, or licensure beyond the elder's skills or ability is not

only harmful to the counselee, but may lead to legal difficulties for the counselor and the church. Sharing the wisdom of experience and giving encouragement and spiritual support is within the purview of the elder. But matters of psychotic and neurotic affliction require professional help. Do not get involved in such situations; instead seek guidance from the pastor on how to proceed. It is wise to be aware of resources available in the community that can be recommended for such cases.

Caution should be used when counseling someone of the opposite sex, recognizing that there are elements of significant danger for misrepresentation of counseling sessions and for the potential of being drawn into inappropriate personal relationships. Do not counsel with the opposite sex in total privacy. Some privacy is needed to ensure confidentiality, but do not allow inappropriate intimacy. Using a room with an open door or a window may be wise.

To assist in the church's counseling program, support groups can be made available where people with similar needs not only share and seek solutions to their problems, but pray for and support one another. A resource center with books, pamphlets and electronic media may offer practical information and guidance on how to cope with crises.

# CHAPTER 8

## SPECIAL SERVICES

**Special services of the church** are generally conducted by pastors. However, when the pastor is not available to perform these services, the responsibility falls on the elder. The following guidelines will assist in leading out when the pastor is absent or when the pastor seeks the assistance of the elder. This chapter resembles the *Minister's Handbook*, as the same guidelines apply whether conducted by the pastor or elder.

### **BAPTISM**

Baptism is a symbol of death to the old life and the beginning of a new life in Jesus. It indicates a person's desire to become a member of God's family, receive the Holy Spirit, and to use His gifts in ministry to others.

Elders often visit, encourage, and give Bible studies to candidates in preparation for baptism. On the day of baptism, elders may organize, direct, and give support throughout the service. Under certain conditions, elders may be called to perform baptisms. "In the absence of an ordained pastor, an elder shall request the conference president to arrange for the baptism of those desiring to unite with the church" (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 75). The president may respond by arranging for an ordained pastor to perform the service or by authorizing an elder to do so.

Should you as the elder receive special authorization from the conference president to perform the baptism, follow these guidelines:

**Place of baptism.** Baptisms may be conducted indoors or outdoors, in a church baptistry or in an open body of water. On occasion, baptisms are performed in water tanks, bathtubs, swimming pools, and barrels.

**Preparation for baptism.** When possible, announce in advance the time and place of the baptism, so church members may attend to encourage, support, and welcome the new church member. Give clear instructions to those assisting in the baptism. Coordinate with the deacons and deaconesses to ensure that the baptistry is ready and all the needed supplies are in place.

**Dressing for baptism.** Where baptismal robes are available, candidates need only bring clothing to replace what they wear under the robe. Keep in mind that dark colors and heavy material serve better when wet, as clothing may float up while entering the water or cling tightly to the body and become more transparent when leaving the water. Robes with weights attached to the hem help alleviate these problems. If towels are not provided for the service, ask candidates to bring their own.

Provide proper facilities where baptismal candidates can change their clothes, keeping in mind gender and age issues. When a candidate is elderly, sick, physically disabled, or exceptionally large, have an elder or deacon provide assistance during the baptism.

**Acceptance at baptism.** Baptism focuses on the candidate's confession of faith and the welcome and acceptance into the Seventh-day Adventist Church by its members. Remarks made during the service should specifically address these points. There is no set order of service for a baptism, but some basic elements are generally included.

Candidates are given an opportunity to express their commitment both to Christ and the church by signifying their acceptance of His grace in forgiveness and His power to save and transform their lives. This may be a simple affirmative response to the baptismal vow, followed by a prayer of blessing and dedication. Either after the confession of faith or following the baptism, the church officially welcomes the newly baptized into membership. In the welcome, include the presentation of the baptismal certificate, certifying membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In some countries, this certificate serves as a legal form of identification.

**Performing the baptism.** As the candidate approaches you (the officiating elder in the absence of the pastor) in the body of water, speak a few words about how they came to accept Jesus. You may share their favorite verse of Scripture or their testimony.

Ensure that you have a solid grasp on the candidate and that they have a firm grasp on your arm. This provides a sense of security, particularly for those with a fear of water. Raise your hand upward and say a statement of baptism similar to this: “(Name of candidate), because of your love for Jesus, and your desire to give your life to Him and His church and as a symbol of the forgiveness of your sins and the beginning of your new life in Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Next, place a cloth over nose and mouth to help keep water from running into the candidate’s nose and mouth while submerged. Then lower the candidate gently into the water. Having candidates bend their knees just a little while being immersed makes the process go smoothly. Supporting them firmly, raise them back to a standing position. Have a deacon or deaconess assist the candidates as they walk out of the water, cover them with a large towel or blanket to keep them warm, and usher them to a place to change into dry clothes.

**Logistical concerns at baptism.** Take precautionary steps and action to ensure that both you and the baptismal candidates are safe. Here are some things to keep in mind:

If the baptism is to take place in flowing water, baptize candidates with their heads upstream, or in the direction from which waves are coming. This way the water will not pull candidates away, but will assist in supporting their weight, and water will not be forced into a candidate's nose or mouth. Avoid going too deep into rapid current or far into the ocean where waves are high.

Be aware that some people have a fear of water. Address their fears in advance and speak to them with reassurance during the baptism.

Transport the elderly or disabled candidates into the water in a chair or by some other means that addresses their needs. Coordinate with elders or deacons to assist in this process.

Do not use a microphone or other electric equipment while in the water. The resulting shock can be fatal. Battery-operated microphones, which are not connected by wire to a power source, do not present this danger. However, to be safe, do not touch items that may be connected to electricity.

**Welcome after baptism.** After all the candidates are baptized, make a congregational appeal for rededication, announce plans for the next baptism, and invite anyone who desires to be baptized to see you or another elder after the service. This appeal may be followed by a prayer of dedication for the new members and for all in attendance.

At the close of the service, it is customary for those baptized to stand with their family and spiritual guardians in a location where the members can wish them well and welcome them into the church family.

## COMMUNION

Instituted by Christ at His last supper with the disciples, the communion service is an occasion to remember Christ's sacrifice. The solemnity of the occasion and the fellowship it engenders brings encouragement and spiritual renewal for the congregation.

Conducting the communion service is one of the most sacred duties of a pastor or elder. "Everything connected with it should suggest as perfect a preparation as possible" (*Evangelism*, p. 277). The observance of this sacred service varies from location to location, and while these traditions may not necessarily have a biblical basis or mandate, it is wise to conduct the service in a manner that is comfortable to the participants.

**Frequency.** It is customary in Adventist churches to hold Communion during the worship service once a quarter, usually on the last Sabbath of the quarter or on the first Sabbath of the new quarter. However, these are not rigidly set times. Scripture does not determine the frequency or timing of this service, and merely states, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

In addition to the quarterly services, Communion may be observed at other occasions such as at a New Year's service or at the end of a Week of Prayer. The communion service should be included in the annual church calendar and announced well in advance to give church leaders adequate time for preparation.

**Officers.** Ordained pastors and elders are authorized to conduct the communion service. Deacons and deaconesses handle and distribute the emblems and arrange for the supplies needed for the ordinance of humility.

**Participants.** Seventh-day Adventists practice open Communion, where all who have committed their lives to Christ may participate. “Christ’s example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord’s Supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. For who can read the heart” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 656). Individual conscience is the guide for participation and there is no authority to impose other restrictions. According to Paul, “whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27).

No specific age is established at which children may participate in the communion service. “The Church practices open communion. All who have committed their lives to the Savior may participate. Children learn the significance of the service by observing others participating. After receiving formal instruction in baptismal classes and making their commitment to Jesus in baptism, they are thereby prepared to partake in the service themselves” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 126).

**The sermon.** The regular order of worship, including the sermon, may be shortened to fit the additional elements of a Communion Sabbath worship service. This is particularly important in churches with multiple worship services that require careful timing. The Communion sermon is usually given just before participating in the ordinance of humility. Total sermon time should be about 10 minutes. Since the communion service is not primarily about preaching, some pastors choose to use the preceding Sabbath to preach on the topic of communion.

**The ordinance of humility.** The narrative of the foot washing, reported in the Gospel of John, is an integral part of the last supper.

Jesus “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:4, 5). Having completed this task, He returned to the table and said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14, 15).

Conducting this activity in the middle of the worship service follows the original setting of the Lord’s Supper, which occurred in the middle of the evening. In this ordinance of offering one’s feet for washing, or kneeling and washing the feet of another, we learn humility and service.

Make provisions for men and women to participate in this ordinance separately if they so choose. “In places where it is socially acceptable and where clothing is such that there would be no immodesty, separate arrangements may be made for husband and wife or parents and baptized children to share with each other in the foot-washing ceremony” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 182). Special accommodations should be made for those with physical limitations.

Deacons and deaconesses are responsible for providing basins, water, and towels for the service. A hand washing basin, soap, and towels should also be available so participants may wash their hands after the ceremony. Participants are to return to the sanctuary when finished with the foot washing. Arrange for a story time for the children who are not participating in the foot washing.

**The Lord’s Supper.** Arrange for the singing of Communion-themed hymns or appropriate instrumental music to create an atmosphere of quiet contemplation as the service leaders take their place at the

communion table. Emblems on the table should be covered before and after the service. The officiant uncovers the bread and reads an appropriate text, such as 1 Corinthians 11: 24. The congregation remains seated with bowed heads and those at the table kneel as the officiant asks God's blessing on the bread.

Rising from their knees, the officiant symbolically breaks a portion of the bread, most of which has already been broken before the service. As an indication of care in sanitation, a bowl of water and a towel may be placed on the table to wash hands before breaking the bread. The serving trays are then given to the deacons, who distribute the bread to the congregation. When the deacons return, the officiant serves the participating elders at the table who serve the deacons. The officiant then repeats an appropriate phrase, such as the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:26, and leads the congregation in partaking of the bread, followed by silent prayer.

Next, the officiant covers the bread, uncovers the wine, and reads a text such as 1 Corinthians 11:25. An elder offers a prayer of blessing on the wine, and the distribution process is repeated. The officiant repeats an appropriate phrase, such as the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:27, and leads the congregation in partaking of the wine, followed by silent prayer. If cup racks are provided in the pews, participants place the used cups there. If not available, the deacons return to the congregation with trays to collect the cups, and then return the trays to the Communion table to be covered.

Some Communion serving utensils allow the simultaneous serving of bread and wine. In such instances, the service continues as stated above with the prayer of blessing pronounced on both emblems prior to the distribution, at which time the participants take both the bread and wine at once and wait for the officiant to partake of the emblems at the appropriate time. It is recommended that individual communion cups be used, allowing the entire

congregation to partake in unison and protecting against the health hazard of using a common cup.

Following the partaking of the emblems, it is the custom of some to provide a time for testimonies. Given that Communion often takes more time than regular church service, it is wise to carefully control the testimony time.

A hymn is sung in closing, following the pattern of the Lord's Supper when the disciples sang a hymn and went out. This may be one stanza of a well-known hymn, sung unaccompanied for more spontaneity. An offering for the poor is often taken as the congregation leaves.

**Post communion activity.** Leftover communion emblems are to be disposed of in a respectful manner. There is no biblical instruction or injunction for this process. Elders, deacons, and deaconesses are responsible for serving Communion to those physically unable to attend the service. When available, pastors may join in this service. Foot washing need not be included if circumstances indicate it to be unwise.

**Emblem preparation.** Unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice is to be used in the Lord's Supper. Where it is impossible to obtain grapes or grape juice, the juice of raisins may be used. In isolated areas where none of these are readily available, the conference or mission will advise a suitable substitute.

**Communion bread recipe.** Congregations may have a preferred Communion bread recipe, but the basic recipe is as follows:

- 1 cup flour (preferably whole grain)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1/4 cup olive or vegetable oil

Sift flour and salt together. Pour the water into the oil, but do not stir. Add this to the dry ingredients and mix with a fork until all the flour is dampened. Roll out to a thickness of approximately 1/8 inch or 3 mm. Place on an ungreased, floured baking sheet, and score into bite-size squares. Bake at 450 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Watch carefully during the last few minutes to avoid burning the bread. Serves 50 persons.

## WEDDINGS

Weddings are among the most joyful celebrations of the church and a delightful responsibility. It is an opportunity to minister to the couple, their families, and friends. “The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing whenever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 18).

**Premarital counseling.** Though logistics may make it difficult to schedule premarital counseling, this vital step in marriage preparation should not be overlooked. Weddings are usually scheduled well enough in advance to provide ample opportunity for counseling. “Worship of God, Sabbathkeeping, recreation, association, use of financial resources, and training of children are responsible components of happy family relationships. Because differences in these areas can often lead to a deterioration of these relationships, to discouragement, and even to a complete loss of Christian experience, an adequate preparation for marriage should include premarital pastoral counseling in these areas” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, chapter 13).

With the widespread practice of premarital sex, sexually transmitted diseases are rampant worldwide. If either partner has been sexually

active, full honesty and careful medical examination should be advised prior to marriage.

**Legal requirements.** The officiant at a wedding should be informed regarding marriage laws and requirements in the jurisdiction where the marriage is to occur. Where a pastor is not authorized to perform the legal ceremony, the couple may follow the legal ceremony with a religious service provided by the pastor.

**Denominational requirements.** “In a marriage ceremony the charge, vows, and declaration of marriage are given only by an ordained pastor except in those areas where division committees have approved that selected licensed or commissioned pastors who have been ordained as local elders may perform the ceremony” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 75).

**Inadvisable marriage.** “Marriages are more likely to endure, and family life to fulfill the divine plan, if husband and wife are united and are bound together by common spiritual values and lifestyles. For these reasons, the Church strongly discourages marriage between a Seventh-day Adventist and a member of another religion, and strongly urges its pastors not to perform such marriages” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 154).

“The happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of the parties; but between the believer and the unbeliever there is a radical difference of tastes, inclinations, and purposes. They are serving two masters, between whom there can be no concord. However pure and correct one’s principles may be, the influence of an unbelieving companion will have a tendency to lead away from God” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 174).

**Inappropriate remarriage.** Chapter 13 of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* addresses marriage, divorce, and remarriage, listing ten qualifications regarding the propriety of remarriage after divorce. Following these qualifications, the statement is made that “no pastor has the right to officiate at the remarriage of any person who, under the stipulation of the preceding paragraphs, has no scriptural right to remarry.”

**Inappropriate ceremony.** A church wedding involves a legal contract and a spiritual commitment. A ceremony in which the secular overshadows the spiritual is inappropriate for the church.

**Wedding ceremony guidelines.** The church must establish guidelines for the use of its facilities and make these available to those requesting the use of the church for a wedding. These guidelines may vary, but should include issues such as:

- Who may use the church facilities for a wedding ceremony.
- Who may officiate at a wedding ceremony.
- What decorations are appropriate.
- What music is appropriate.
- What constitutes appropriate dress standards.
- Photography guidelines.
- Reception guidelines if held in the church.
- Usage fees.
- Equipment and services available.

**Participants.** Weddings may involve people who are not members of the church. As long as their participation meets the standards of the church, there should be no restrictions placed on this activity.

## WEDDING PLANNING

**Simplicity.** While the pastor or elder should not control the details and planning of a wedding ceremony, simplicity and economy should be encouraged. “Let every step toward a marriage alliance be characterized by modesty, simplicity, sincerity, and an earnest purpose to please and honor God” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 359).

**Advance planning.** In the planning stage of the wedding, details of the ceremony should be reviewed with the couple. Some churches provide a wedding coordinator who advises on matters such as the placement of families in the audience, position of the platform participants, and other details of the service.

**Rehearsal.** Most of the wedding participants are not accustomed to being in front of an audience, and may be insecure and nervous. The rehearsal can lessen these tensions and bring a level of assurance to the wedding party.

**Order of service.** Adventists have no prescribed nuptial liturgy. Wedding ceremony customs vary widely with cultural traditions. Home weddings are typically much simpler than ceremonies that are conducted in churches. Ceremonies also differ depending on personal preferences. Attendance at home weddings is usually by invitation, while attendance at church weddings may be open to anyone.

## CHILD DEDICATION

While not a specific ordinance of the church, the dedication of children to God is a practice established in Scripture and in the tradition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Different from the practice of infant baptism, the dedication of children follows the biblical example of Mary and Joseph’s dedication of the infant Jesus (Luke 2:22).

From the occasion of Jesus blessing the children, a further example of this practice is given in Mark 10:14. “And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). “Let ministers of the gospel take the little children in their arms, and bless them in the name of Jesus. Let words of tenderest love be spoken to the little ones; for Jesus took the lambs of the flock in His arms, and blessed them” (*Evangelism*, pp. 349, 350). This service gives thanks to God for the miracle of birth, covenants the parents in raising the child in the love of Christ, commits the congregation to provide support for the parents in their responsibility, and dedicates the child to God’s service. While this service centers around family participation, take care not to make single parents feel awkward or excluded.

**Planning the service.** Dedications may take place in the home or other settings. However, it is usually held in the church as part of the Sabbath morning worship service. Although pastors usually lead this service, it is acceptable for elders to officiate as well. To commemorate the occasion, child dedication certificates should be prepared in advance and presented to the parents at the dedication. These certificates are usually available at Adventist book centers or other Christian supply stores.

**Scheduling.** Child dedication services are usually initiated by a request from the family. When scheduling the service, enough time should be given for the parents to plan for the occasion and for family and friends to travel to attend the dedication.

**Age.** While most children are dedicated before they are toddlers, there is no specific age by when they should be dedicated. This decision is entirely up to the parents.

**Conducting the service.** Parents are invited to come before the congregation with the child to be dedicated. Depending on the space available and the number of children being dedicated, additional family members and friends may accompany the parents. As the families come forward, the congregation may sing an appropriate hymn. This event should be short, recognizing that the child may grow impatient or distressed. Recognition and special welcome should be extended to guests. Those guests who may not be members or may not be acquainted with dedication services may ask that their children be dedicated too. This is an acceptable request, and perhaps through this service they may be brought into fellowship with the congregation.

**Homily.** A brief homily should emphasize the parents' covenant and the congregation's commitment to bring up the child "in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4). Possible Scripture includes:

- Deuteronomy 6:4-7
- Psalm 127:3-5
- Proverbs 22:6
- Isaiah 8:18
- Matthew 18:2-6, 10
- Matthew 19:13-15
- Mark 10:13-16
- Luke 2:22-38
- Luke 18:15-17

At the close of the homily, a statement of commitment such as the following may be used: "In dedicating this child, you are accepting a sacred responsibility. By this symbolic act, you seek to express your belief that this child is not only yours, but God's. The congregation joins you in dedicating this child and pledges to assist you in working toward the day when this act of dedication shall be followed by

baptism, and a full entering of this child into membership in the church family. You, therefore, must promise to do all in your power to bring this child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Do you so covenant with God?”

**Prayer.** The pastor may wish to hold the child during the prayer of dedication. But with children who are frightened of strangers, it would be best for the parents to hold the child as the pastor places a hand on the child's head in dedication. When there are multiple children being dedicated, the pastor and elders assisting in the service may place their hands on the heads of the children. It is important that the dedication is personalized for each child and family. Mentioning of the child's name in the prayer adds a personal touch.

**Dedication certificates.** After the prayer, certificates of dedication are given to the parents, and expressions of love and support are offered to the family. Children's Sabbath School division leaders may also be involved in this expression.

### **PRAYER FOR THE SICK**

A church leader should pray for healing—physical, emotional, and spiritual. “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14,15).

The anointing service should not be employed for every frivolous complaint, but neither is it exclusively a last rite. It should be reserved for significant sickness or weakness, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Anointing is not designed to bless the dying, but to bring a

healing blessing to the living. It is a time to meet a serious problem by putting our trust wholly in God. It is a time of serious reflection and commitment to the will of God and it is in the prayer of faith that His restoring power and grace are given. There is no mystical power in the oil itself. James and the early church were well aware that they were placing themselves in the hands of God, trusting that His will would be accomplished in their lives. It is in this sense that the church continues to practice this sacred rite.

Early Adventist leaders frequently engaged in anointment. Ellen White and her family were anointed multiple times for various ailments.

**Requesting anointing.** The request for an anointing is usually initiated by the sick or by the family. The request may also come from a church member. It is not the position of the pastor to judge the worthiness of the individual or the request, but to do as Scripture instructs in praying for the sick.

The anointing service is an intensely personal event, addressing the specific needs of one individual. It is not designed for mass audiences and healing services. Using it as an appeal to attract large audiences is a distortion of its purpose. However, it is appropriate to conduct this service in the presence of the church family, if this is the wish of the one being anointed.

**Officiating.** Church elders may officiate an anointing service in the absence of a pastor, but should do so with the pastor's knowledge. Ideally, a pastor leads out, assisted by elders. The leaders should be seriously committed to Christ, believe firmly in divine healing, and have prepared their hearts for the occasion.

**Location.** Anointing services may be held in a church, home, hospital, nursing facility, or wherever the need may arise. If conducted

in a hospital, ensure that you are not an interference to the medical care being provided. The length and formality of the service depend on the place it is held and the condition of the recipient.

**Participants.** In addition to the pastor and elders, the recipient may wish to invite friends and family members. Generally those present will be Christian; however, those who are not should be welcomed to stay if they so desire.

**Recipient.** The one being anointed may not wish to reveal details of the illness. This reticence should be respected. The sick should be encouraged to examine their life before the anointing and be assured of the love, grace, and forgiveness of God. In preparation for the service, it may be helpful to read chapter 16, “Prayer for the Sick,” from *The Ministry of Healing*. Be careful of what is said in the presence of the sick, particularly when they are presumed to be unconscious and unable to hear the conversation. Though there may be no signs of recognition, they may be able to hear and understand what is being said in the room.

**Order of service.** The leader opens with an explanation of the anointing and how it takes place. Offer the assurance that prayer for healing is always granted to those who believe—either immediately, over a period of time, or in the final restoration of all things at the Second Coming of Christ. The recipient may wish to comment on their request for anointing and testify of their faith in God.

**Scripture reading.** Before the act of anointing, selected Scriptures may be read such as:

- James 5:14-16
- Psalm 103:1-5; 107:19, 20
- Mark 16:15-20

**The anointing prayer.** Kneeling for prayer is often appropriate, but may be impractical around a hospital bed. If the one being anointed wishes to pray, allow them to pray first, followed by any others in the group who are asked to pray. The pastor or lead elder should pray last. At the conclusion of the prayer, use two or three fingers to place the anointing oil on the recipient's forehead, symbolizing the touch of the Holy Spirit. Olive oil is usually used, but this is not mandatory.

### **DELIVERANCE MINISTRY**

Scripture addresses possession by demonic powers. “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). While this struggle is not manifested in the same way in all places, there are occasions when demonic power is clearly evident.

Demonic possession manifests in a variety of ways. Early in His ministry, Jesus was confronted by a man possessed with a demon who recognized Him as “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:23-26). With a simple declaration commanding the demon to “be quiet, and come out of him!” the man was healed. Later that same evening, “they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed . . . . Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons” (Mark 1:32, 34).

The demoniac at Gadara was possessed by a “legion” of demons (Mark 5:1-20), and Luke reports the casting out of a demon that was mute (Luke 11:14). In all these cases, the pattern is the same. Jesus simply commanded them to come out, and they obeyed His word. The disciples continued the same ministry as “He called [them] together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases” (Luke 9:1). “Like the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples whom Christ sent forth later received supernatural endowments as a

seal of their mission. When their work was completed, they returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name’” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 94).

This ministry continued in the early church. New believers brought “sick people, and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed” (Acts 5:16). In response to the preaching of Philip, “unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed” (Acts 8:7). In its current manifestations, demon possession should be dealt with in the same straightforward command to come out in the name of Jesus. (For a fuller discussion of demon possession, see the additional note on Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Mark in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol 5., p. 575.)

**Spiritual preparation.** Before approaching the scene of action, make sure that all known sins have been confessed to God. Appeal to God without a troubled conscience. Remember that a living faith in the Author of the Word, Jesus Christ, provides victory. Even if those participating may have committed mistakes and in themselves feel unworthy, a humble recognition of their error can empower them to place their trust in Him.

“In such cases of affliction, where Satan has control of the mind, before engaging in prayer there should be the closest self-examination to discover if there are not sins which need to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken. Deep humility of soul before God is necessary, and firm, humble reliance upon the merits of the blood of Christ alone. Fasting and prayer will accomplish nothing while the heart is estranged from God by a wrong course of action” (*Counsels on Health*, pp. 605, 606). Read Isaiah 58:6, 7, 9-11 for further guidance.

**Intervention time.** First, evaluate the case to confirm that possession is suspected. Then, the team performing the deliverance

should, if possible, surround the victim. Next, pray with an open Bible in hand, petitioning God to deliver and save the victim. It is acceptable for every elder or pastor present to offer a prayer. “The earnest prayers of His faithful followers” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 299) are necessary. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

Remember that it is not the prayer that has power, but the One being prayed to. It is also imperative that those praying do not enter into a discussion or debate with the demons. Earnest prayers are used to bring the forces of heaven to war with the evil forces of earth. Therefore, all intercession and communication should be with heaven. Bring to your aid the sure promises of God found in Scripture.

Hymns such as There’s Power In The Blood, What A Friend We Have In Jesus, Abide With Me, The Old Rugged Cross, and Rock of Ages may be sung in between prayers.

Here are some Bible promises that you may use during the intercession:

- Psalm 91; 34:7; 37:40; 121:2-7; 6:4; 25:16-21; 31:1-4; 40:11-14; 50:14, 15; 70:1, 2; 71:1-5; 72:12-14; 143:9-11
- 2 King 6:16
- Isaiah 41:10
- 1 John 4:4
- Nahum 1:7
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Jeremiah 1:19; 15:20, 21
- Matthew 6:9-13
- Romans 7:24, 25

The intercession must continue until it is clearly evident that the person is delivered. The praying team must not allow any manifestations to distract them from the goal. If persistent, the person will be delivered. The Lord provided this promise: “These

signs will follow those who believe; in My name shall they will cast out demons” (Mark 16:17).

## FUNERALS

Contrary to the nature of God as Creator and life giver, death is an intrusion to the perfection of Eden, brought on by sin. It is the enemy of all that is good and disrupts life’s joys and plans. Yet, even this difficult and dreaded responsibility of ministry provides an opportunity to honor the memory of a loved one and comfort the bereaved in their loss. It is to focus on the Second Coming when “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).

**Tradition and culture.** While ministry to the bereaved calls for respect of traditions and culture, always do so in the context of Christian principles and a biblical understanding of death. Churches may also have their unique customs for funerals, which likewise need to be respected and observed. Some deliver food to the homes of the bereaved, while others provide a meal at the church after the funeral. Some conduct funerals at the church, while others prefer to use funeral parlors. Some schedule a viewing of the body with the family at a wake, while others do this at the beginning or close of the funeral service. Some prefer no viewing at all. It is important to know the funeral traditions of the congregation prior to planning the service. Because cultures and congregations vary so widely, only basic guidelines are given here. You may adapt them to fit local situations.

**Visiting the family.** When you learn of the death, contact and visit the family as soon as possible. This is a time for encouraging words of comfort, Scripture, and prayer—not theological discourse. While in shock and grief, mourners may not respond to your words at that

moment, but they may later remember the care demonstrated by your supportive presence.

**Offer the assistance of the church.** Offer the church's assistance in notifying relatives and friends; answering the phone; arranging for childcare; providing food; or preparing the house for guests.

**Offer pastoral and elder assistance.** Since only few in church leadership may have experience in planning a funeral service, it may be difficult for the bereaved to clearly consider their options. The choice of who will conduct the funeral service may be influenced by familial attachments. It should not be a personal affront to the pastors or elder if someone else is chosen for this service. Assistance may be needed in contacting those called upon to serve as pallbearers, provide music, and assist in the service.

**Officiating at funerals.** An ordained pastor is not required for funeral services. In the absence of a pastor, or at the request of the family, an elder or church leader may officiate the service. A friend or family member may assist in the service by giving the obituary, Scripture, prayer, or eulogy. Generally, the mortician caring for the body of the deceased will care for the details of proper burial and legal documentation needed.

**Viewing the body.** Cultural practices should be respected in viewing the body. In some settings, family and friends are invited to the funeral parlor for viewing. In other settings, the body is kept at home where a wake is held. Sometimes services are held around the casket in the evening until the day of the funeral. In whatever way the viewing is practiced, it serves a useful purpose. Death needs be confronted before recovery can begin.

At the funeral service the body may be displayed so that people pay their respects as they enter. The casket is then closed for the funeral service, focusing on hope and assurance. Other cultures and congregations prefer to have a viewing at the end of the service, prior to closing the casket and departing to the gravesite.

**Conducting the funeral.** When the service is conducted in a funeral parlor, the funeral director is in charge of funeral arrangements, while the pastor or elder is in charge of the religious part of the service. The funeral is conducted as a team between the pastor or elder and the funeral director. Promptness and planning is vital. Delay or indecision increases tension in what is already a difficult situation.

**Ministering to the bereaved.** The bereaved are typically brought together in an adjoining room before being ushered to their seats in the funeral parlor or church. This is not an occasion to say much, but a few words of encouragement, a prayer, and the mutual support of the group helps brace them for the finality of the service.

**Order of service.** The order of service for a funeral should be straightforward and simple. Following is a suggested order of service that may be adapted or expanded as fits the situation:

- Family is seated.
- Participants enter and are seated.
- Scripture reading and prayer. The prayer should include thanks for the life that was lived, comfort for those who mourn, and the hope of eternal life through Christ.
- Sermons based on biblical passages similar to these:
  1. Job 14:1, 2, 14, 15 – You shall call, and I will answer you.
  2. Psalm 23 – Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

3. Psalm 27 – Wait on the Lord; be of good courage.
4. Psalm 46 – God is our refuge and strength.
5. Psalm 90 – Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
6. Psalm 91:1, 2, 11, 12 – I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress.'
7. Psalm 121 – My help comes from the Lord.
8. Isaiah 33:15-17, 24 – The inhabitant will not say, 'I am sick.'
9. Isaiah 35:3-10 – Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
10. Isa. 40:28-31 – Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.
11. Isaiah 43:1, 2 – When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
12. John 14:1-6 – I will come again and receive you to Myself.
13. Romans 8:14-39 – All things work together for good to those who love God.
14. 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 – Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 – The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
16. 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 – This mortal must put on immortality.
17. Philippians 3:20, 21 – For our citizenship is in heaven.
18. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.
19. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 – Whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
20. Hebrews 4:14-16 – For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize.
21. 2 Peter 3:8-14 – Not willing that any should perish.
22. Revelation 7:15-17 – They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore.

- 23. Revelation 14:13 – Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.
- 24. Revelation 21:1-4 – And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
- 25. Revelation 22:1-5 – They shall see His face.

### **Funeral of child**

- 26. 2 Samuel 12:16-23 – David's grief.
- 27. Mark 10:13-16 – He took them up in His arms.

### **Funeral of youth**

- 28. Ecclesiastes 11:6-10 – Rejoice, O young man, in your youth.
- 29. Ecclesiastes 12 – Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth.
- 30. Luke 7:11-15 – Nain widow's son.

### **Funeral of godly woman**

- 31. Proverbs 31:10-31 – Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.
- 32. Matthew 26:10-13 – What this woman has done will also be told as a memorial
- 33. Acts 9:36-42 – Dorcas.

### **Funeral of elderly**

- 34. Genesis 15:15 – You shall be buried at a good old age.
- 35. Matthew 11:28 – I will give you rest.
- 36. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

*Song of comfort.* Special music performed by a guest is generally preferable to congregational singing, which often does not work well when emotions could interfere with singing.

*Eulogy and Obituary.* The eulogy and obituary is designed to bring honor to the life of the deceased and may be combined or read separately. A eulogy is a longer remembrance of the life of the deceased, while an obituary primarily addresses the factual data such as dates of birth and death, names of survivors, and a few notable events from the life of the deceased. A balance of memories, joy, and even humor, in these readings helps ease the tension of the occasion.

*Testimonials.* Some find it comforting to give or hear testimonials from those in attendance at the funeral. While this may be helpful in some settings, these need to be brief without being overly personal or overly emotional.

*Sermon.* The funeral sermon should be realistic about death and hopeful for the resurrection. It should recognize the contributions of the deceased and the loss the death brings to the family, the community, and to God. The use of poetry may be fitting at the close of the sermon.

*Prayer.* The sermon closes with a prayer of faith and hope for the future, and strength for those who remain.

If there is a viewing at this point in the service, it is customary for the officiant to move to the head of the casket and remain there until everyone has walked by. The officiant then leads the pallbearers, carrying the casket, to the hearse where the casket is placed for the journey to the gravesite. The officiant rides either in the hearse or follows directly behind it.

**The graveside service.** While leading the casket to the grave, it is proper and courteous to avoid walking on other graves. At the gravesite, it is customary for the officiant to stand at the head of the deceased, facing the family. The use of music at the graveside is determined by local custom and family wishes, but generally it only

lengthens the most painful part of the day. If the graveside service includes the military or other organizations, planning and coordination with them will be required. Inclement weather will make it even more important to keep the graveside service short.

*Informal committal.* A simple, informal committal may consist of the reading of Scripture and a prayer. Passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 are appropriate. Follow it by a prayer of faith and hope in the resurrection.

*Formal committal.* If a formal committal is used, it fits well between the Scripture and the prayer. Interment customs vary. In some settings the pastor drops a handful of earth or flower petals on the casket as the committal is read. In other settings, such actions are a harsh reminder of human frailty that is best not depicted so graphically.

*Sample committal for a Christian:* Forasmuch as God in His infinite love and wisdom has permitted our dear (brother/sister) to fall asleep in Christ, we do tenderly commit (his/her) body to the ground, in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection when our Lord shall return in glory. Then this body of our humiliation shall be changed and made like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

*Sample committal for one not known to be a Christian:* Forasmuch as God in His goodness and the outworking of His providence has permitted our friend (brother/sister) to lay down the burdens of this life, we do lovingly commit (his/her) body to the ground, remembering, as we do, that all the issues of life are in the hands of the everlasting Father of love and compassion, and that He has promised eternal life to those who love Him.

*After the service.* After the service, the family may be greeted briefly. It is wise to remain until those in attendance have left the gravesite.

**Interment before funeral.** On occasion, the interment may have occurred prior to the funeral service, perhaps as a private service for the family. From the graveside, the family then goes to the church, where the public service is held. In such a setting, the service concentrates more on the celebration of a life rather than the mourning of a death.

**Cremation.** Cremation is an alternate way of handling the dead. Adventists take no theological stand against cremation, believing that God will be no more dependent on preexisting matter at the resurrection than He was at Creation. Local culture and the sensibilities of the family may influence the acceptance of this practice.

**Ministering to the grieving.** Expect that the bereaved will continue to suffer from their loss long after the funeral is over. After the immediate crisis is over and family and friends have left, loneliness sets in. Ministering to the grieving only begins with the funeral and should continue for many months after. The church should provide support as an ongoing ministry to the grieving.

Be patient. The process of grieving takes time. Sleeplessness, anxiety, fear, anger, and a preoccupation with sad thoughts may continue on and off for a year or more. Unrealistic expectations of the bereaved to “snap out of it” may leave them feeling anxious and guilty and make the process of grieving more difficult. Some may express anger at God, which should be treated kindly without judgmental comments while the bereaved are brought again to trust and faith.

Talking and sharing are effective ways to release emotions and begin healing. The bereaved usually enjoy talking about their loved ones and recalling precious and important memories. However, people must say goodbye to the past before they can enjoy the present or

look forward to the future. Be sensitive to indications of denial such as refusal to talk about the death, unwillingness to part with the deceased's personal effects, or the ongoing use of medication to mask depression.

As soon as possible, the grieving ones should be encouraged to commit themselves to some regular activity that is of benefit to others. Becoming active in a grief support group may be helpful.

### **HOUSE BLESSING**

The practice of house blessing varies according to culture and the wishes of each individual family. The world church does not have any regular tradition for such services. This service may be requested when a new home is built, purchased, or leased, or when the mortgage is paid. Typically, the house blessing is conducted after the house is completed, or when the occupants first move in. Such a service provides an opportunity to invite neighbors and friends for the occasion, and to establish the home as a Christian witness in the neighborhood. Attendees often include neighbors of various religious backgrounds as well as those with no religious affiliation.

Differentiation should be made between a house blessing and a church dedication. A house may be set aside to be of spiritual service to its family and neighborhood, but the church is set aside specifically for the worship of God. The distinction to remember is that a house is blessed, whereas a church is dedicated. House blessing sets the building apart for nurturing the love, unity, and spiritual growth of the family living there as witnesses of the saving love of Jesus.

**Officiant.** No license or ordination is required to officiate a house blessing service. An elder may perform the service, but should do so with the knowledge and cooperation of the pastor.

**Order of service.** Guests typically gather in one area of the house. The service should be brief, usually less than 30 minutes in length. The following order of service is suggested:

- *Congregational singing.* Singing as a group should be considered optional, depending on the situation.
- *Opening prayer.* This prayer seeks God’s presence in the home. Since there are three prayers in this service, the first and last should be brief and not repeat the prayer of blessing.
- *History of house.* Given by a family member, perhaps the head of the household, this is a brief review of how this house came to be the family’s home.
- *Homily.* The address should open with Scripture and refer to biblical themes of establishing homes, families, and communities according to the plan and laws of God. The need for interdependence and support of one another and on God should be emphasized. Suggested scriptural references are listed below.
- *Candle ceremony.* The message may close with the lighting of a candle in the window to symbolize the light of Jesus present in this home and the purpose of the home to let that light shine throughout the neighborhood.
- *Prayer of blessing.* The family joins hands with the guests as the officiant prays for the blessing and protection of God over the house, the family, and the community.
- *Benediction.* This prayer should be brief and not repeat the prayer of blessing. A scriptural benediction, such as this, may be appropriate: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26).
- *House tour.* The host may wish to invite guests to tour the house. Refreshments are optional.

*Suggested scriptural passages:*

- Genesis 24:67 – Home, a place to find love and comfort.
- 2 Samuel 23:15 – Home, a precious place of refreshing.
- Psalm 127 – The Lord should build the house.
- Isaiah 65:21-24 – They shall build houses and inhabit them.
- Micah 4:4 – Everyone shall sit under his vine.
- Luke 10:38-42 – The place of work and worship in the home.

*Suggested Litany*

Leader: Eternal God, for this home committed to Your service and offered to Your honor and glory,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: For Your presence whenever two or three have gathered in Your name,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: For making us Your children through Jesus Christ our Savior,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: For giving us families in which to love and to be loved,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: For providing shelter, and food, and friends,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: For Your promise to dwell with us in peace,

**People: We thank You, Lord.**

Leader: Everything in heaven and on earth is Yours,

**All Together: And we exalt your name above all. Amen.**

*Alternate litany.* The family may be addressed directly, either informally or in a written litany, giving answers and commitment to questions such as:

*Do you pledge to make this house a place of prayer, where God is revered?*

*Do you pledge to make this house a place of family love and unity?*

*Do you pledge to make this house a light to the community?*

### **PASTORAL INSTALLATION**

Pastoral transition is an integral part of ministry. Terms of service for a pastor tend to be three to six years on average, with some as short as a year or two, and rarely longer than ten or fifteen years. It is an occupational expectation in ministry and church life, but not unique to it. Those in military service, politics, the entertainment industry, or professional sports also live with the expectation that changes in location and leadership will be part of their lives.

Such transitions can be both an opportunity and a hardship on the pastoral family. Generally speaking, moving to a new location is an emotional, physical, and financial stress for a family. Conferences and churches have a responsibility to help alleviate these stresses for the pastoral family.

The transition can also be stressful for the church. The departure of a loved and faithful pastor creates insecurity and disruption in the fellowship of the church. Yet it also opens the way for new ideas, which can bring renewed vision to the church. No one individual, no matter how gifted and loved, can have all the ideas and abilities needed for the ongoing life of the congregation.

**Installation service.** Conferences and congregations provide the installation service for the new pastor as an important symbolic act, publicly establishing a new pastorate. Pastors cannot plan their own installation. Church leaders, elders, and conference officials must take the initiative to prepare this event. The installation should be part of the Sabbath worship service, when most members are present. The service should emphasize the introduction of the entire

pastoral family, with respect given to their level of comfort in public recognition.

**Introduction of conference representatives.** Since the conference representatives may not be known to the congregation, the elder in charge should introduce them and express appreciation for the conference's work in selecting and providing leadership for the church.

**Conference representative's remarks.** A conference representative explains the process by which the new pastor was selected and how this appointment serves the needs of the congregation and community. This is followed by a brief biographical sketch of the pastoral family.

**Welcome by elder.** The elder in charge speaks for the congregation in welcoming the pastor. The entire pastoral family may be invited to the platform if they are comfortable doing so. If there are children in the pastor's family, a word of welcome may be given by a Sabbath School teacher, church school teacher, youth or Pathfinder leader, or children of similar age from the church. A small gift may be given as well.

**Litany.** The following litany is a suggestion that may be used and adapted as needed to fit the installation service:

### HEARING THE WORD

Elder: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

**Congregation: Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of**

**Him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly the faith we profess.**

Conference leader: Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him.

**Congregation: How can they call on One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?**

#### **ACKNOWLEDGING THE CALL**

Pastor: I heard the voice of the Lord saying “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn. And provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

#### **JOINING THE SERVICE**

Deacon: Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke?

Deaconess: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?

Deacon: When you see the naked to clothe him and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?

**Congregation:** Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear. Your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

### KNOWING THE MISSION

**Pastor:** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations,

**Congregation:** And then the end will come.

**Singing** – Choose an appropriate song or hymn to sing together.

### CATCHING THE VISION

**Conference leader:** In the last days, God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” What is your vision for ministry in this congregation in word, worship, fellowship, and service?

**Pastor:** I see the Church as God's redemptive and unified community, presenting to the world a seeking church, open to God's self disclosure in His word and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit; a spiritual church that worships God as Creator and knows Christ as Savior, Friend, and soon-coming Lord; a mission-oriented church that proclaims the gospel in ways relevant to people everywhere; a united church that values the richness of diversity within the body of Christ; and a discipling church that equips believers for service and leadership.

### POSSIBLE INSTALLATION PRAYER

**Conference leader:** Before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name, I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may

have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

(Scriptures in this litany include the following: Deuteronomy 8:13, Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah 58:6-8, Isaiah 61:1-3, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 25:31-40, Matthew 28:19, 20, Acts 2:17, 18, Romans 10:11-17, Ephesians 3:14-21, Ephesians 5:27, Hebrews 4:12-14.)

**Installation prayer.** The pastor kneels (the family may be included), facing the congregation, with the conference representative on one side and the elder in charge on the other. Other elders and church leaders may be invited to join the prayer as well. The elder prays, inviting the congregation’s commitment in supporting the new pastor. Next, the conference representative prays, officially installing the pastor as congregational leader. The conference representative then leads the elders and church leaders in welcoming the new pastoral family.

**Church welcome.** After the close of the worship service, members of the congregation may greet and welcome the pastor as they leave the sanctuary. Additional opportunity for welcoming may be provided in a fellowship dinner.

# CONCLUSION

The ministry of elders is vital to the ongoing growth and development of the church. Elders today stand in a long line of dedicated servants of the church from its earliest days. For the most part, elders serve in a fellowship that goes unnoticed because the honor of this position is in service, not recognition. Through unique leadership gifts from the Holy Spirit, elders bless the church and make it the active and effective people of God.

“The elders who are among you I exhort, . . . Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).



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