

ELDER

A MINISTRY DESCRIPTION FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS

Introduction

God asks the church to be a community of people sharing a common purpose and fellowship, continually growing in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. Paul describes the church as “. . . his body, the fullness of him who filleth every thing in every way” (Eph.1:22).

God calls us into His body for the purpose of establishing a saving relationship with Him and community with one another. The Holy Spirit convicts our minds, leads us to repentance, and plants us within the church.

The symbol of water baptism marks our entrance into the body of Christ and also marks the baptism of the Holy Spirit experienced by a new disciple. “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of the water and the Spirit, He cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit is the vital life force of the church. When you come to Christ, you are prepared by the Holy Spirit, who has already led you to repentance, for service.

When a church serves the world it is an expression of the love of Christ to the world. It is the body of Christ serving the world’s needs and being used by the Spirit as an agency of salvation. Thus, the church is a servant body. It was created for service. It serves the Lord in praise, serves one another in love, and serves the world in humility. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

God calls every member of the church into ministry. The church is a kingdom of priests set free to minister for Christ. Our priesthood is to each other within the church and to the world. An elder, like any other church officer, is a ministering servant of God. Every Christian believer is called to ministry, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and in baptism ordained for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12).

It was during the middle ages that the clergy became distinct from other members as a superior element in the church. The biblical concept of laity includes all believers as ministers in the body. In actuality, the church today still has a great distance to go before effectively applying this concept. You should view the work of an elder as a ministry to which God calls people; it is His will operating in their lives.

Duties of the Elder

The ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes an elder can best be described in the following ways:

1. *Visitation.* Nurture develops on a horizontal level in the church, with members offering encouragement and spiritual counsel to one another. In such a caring community, even the pastor is nurtured through the membership of the church. An elder can be a vital element in this kind of caring church. The elder can actively visit members in their homes, encourage others to do so, and assist in the training of prospective members.
2. *Commitment.* It is especially important for the local elder to be committed to the outreach of the church. The congregation needs to know that its leaders have a clear vision of the mission of the church. It has been said that church growth is “caught” rather than taught. When an elder enthusiastically models a commitment of his or her time to outreach ministry, others catch the same spirit and commit themselves to the mission of the church. An elder should schedule time for ministering to the unsaved.
3. *Worship leadership.* The involvement and leadership of an elder can make a tremendous difference in the weekly worship celebration service of the church. Quality leadership and participation can transform a dull, lifeless worship service into meaningful celebration and praise. Skills in worship leadership, such as the reading of scripture, offering public prayers, planning the order of service, and in smaller churches at least, delivering the sermon, should be developed.
4. *A spiritual mentor.* The spiritual life of an elder should constantly lead members of the church to seek a deeper spiritual experience for themselves. I Timothy, chapter 3, describes the Christian life of an elder in these words: “. . . above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious,

but gentle. . .” An elder should model, by his or her devotional life, Christian personality and spiritual interest, a higher ideal for each member to reach. The elder should reflect the fruits of the Spirit in his or her relationship with others: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

5. *Church Administration*. An elder should always attempt to make a positive contribution to the organization and progress of the church. While doing this, he or she should not try to dominate or control but rather enable others to participate in decision-making in the church and ministry. An elder often serves in an advisory capacity to various departments, committees, and projects. In doing this, the elder provides unity among the various programs of the church, communicates progress to the church board and encourages a unified mission.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

Adventist Heritage Series, by George Knight. Series includes *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (especially good for new members), *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (how our doctrines were developed), and *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure*.

Community of Faith, by Russell Staples. The author explores the biblical and theological background for our understanding of the church and its role in today’s world.

Expect Great Things: How to Be a Happy, Growing Christian, by Richard O’Ffill. A template for successful Christian living, with the goal of being like Jesus.

Experiencing the Power of His Word, by David Marshall. The author examines the central purpose of the Bible, looks at its human authors, discusses biblical inspiration and God’s role in the Bible’s authorship, describes how the books of the Bible were gathered together, and tells the exciting story of how manuscript discoveries in the last 150 years demonstrate the authenticity and accuracy of the Book of Books.

Follow Me: How to Walk With Jesus, by Miraslov Kis. With sensitive sketches of people whose lives were transformed when they met Jesus, the author gives us new eyes, and then explores the implications of following Jesus.

Heralds of God’s Word, by Mike Strickland. A lay preaching seminar.

Lifestyles of the Remnant, by Keavin Hayden. The author takes another look at church standards, taking them out of the context of legalism or orthodoxy—presents much needed principles.

Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches, by Russell Burrill. The author explores what it takes to produce church members who want to be participants, not spectators, and proposes a major change in how to “do evangelism.”

Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement, by Russell Burrill. The author supplies the nuts and bolts of planting new churches and issues an urgent call to recapture that same passion for the lost that Christ has.

Revolution in the Church, by Russell Burrill. Believing that both pastors and laity have strayed far from their biblically assigned roles, the author proposes a radical change in how Adventists “do church.”

Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century, by Russell Burrill. Experience the explosive power of a church built on relationships.

So You’ve Been Asked to Speak. A practical guide to public speaking.

The Sounds of Grace in our Churches, by V. Bailey Gillespie provides 100 creative ideas to enrich your church.

They Had a World to Win, by Adriel Chilson. This collection of short biographies of church leaders provides a wealth of sermon illustrations.

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.