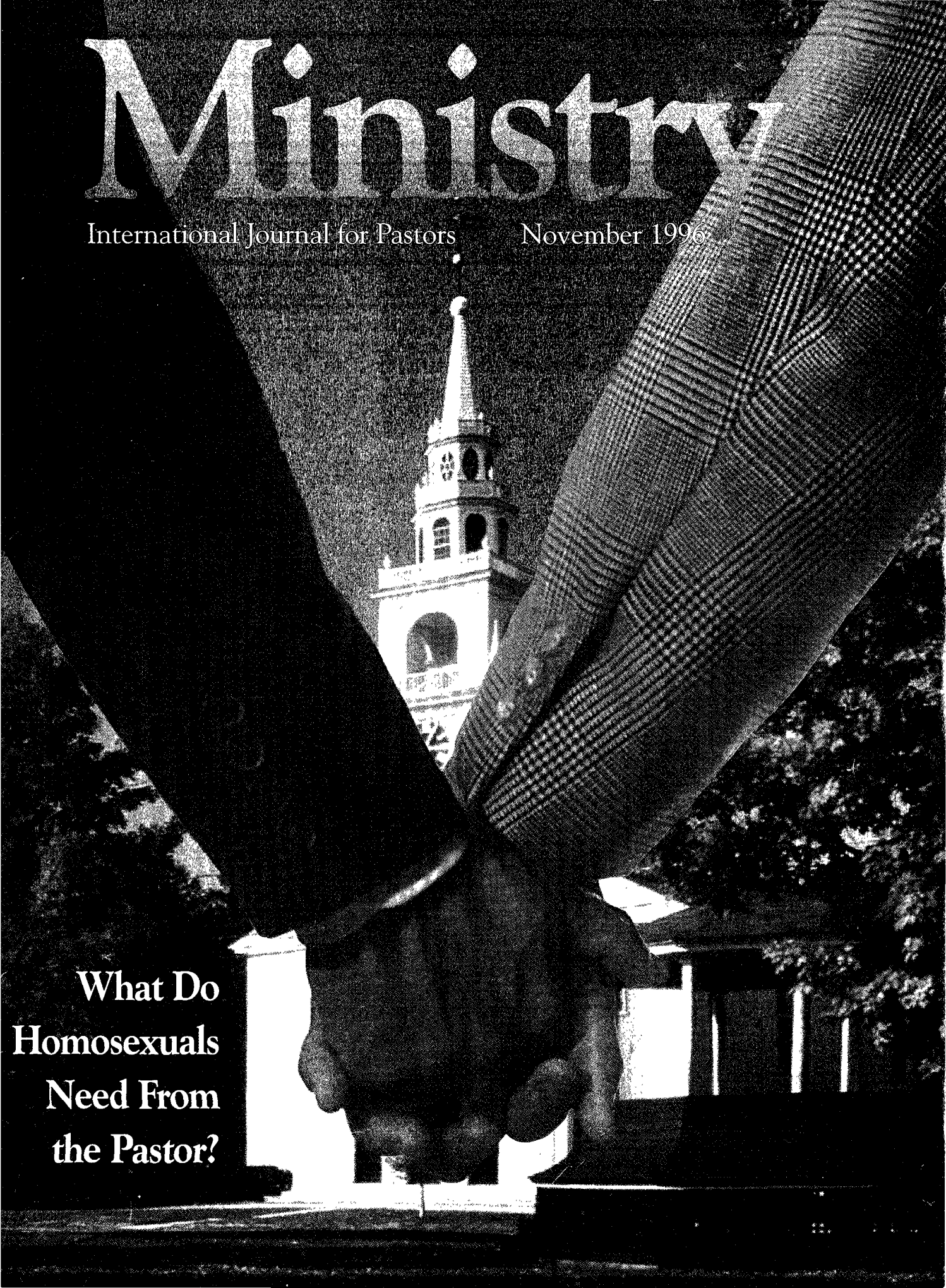


Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

November 1996

What Do
Homosexuals
Need From
the Pastor?



Parsonage allowance alert

I am happy to report that the problem outlined in the November 1995 issue has been solved. President Clinton recently signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which included a provision that the rental value of any parsonage or a parsonage allowance for a retired minister is not subject to self-employment (SECA) tax. While the Church Retirement Benefits Simplification Act of 1995 did not make it through Congress, we are pleased that this significant provision survived to be included in the '96 Act. Thank you to all of the clergy who responded to this call to write to their U.S. Senators and Representatives, urging a legislative solution to the problem.—Thomas E. Wetmore, Associate General Counsel, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

If at first you don't succeed—beg for mercy

In the August 1996 issue of *Ministry*, Jim Cress's article about failure thrilled me. You see, at Union College elementary school, Mrs. Moyers was merciful to me. She let me take the 6th grade Bible exam four times, until I finally passed!

Anna English, my 8th grade teacher, told my parents that I would have to repeat the 8th grade unless I significantly improved. My dad saw to it that I improved.

At Maplewood Academy, Mr. Ford called me into his office two months before graduation ('39) and informed me that I probably would not graduate, which scared me into enough midnight hours to eke through chemistry.

At Peabody College for Teachers (Vanderbilt) I failed my doctoral orals. When I retook them I passed—over the negative vote of the chairman.

Praise the Lord for mercy. . . .—Felix A. Lorenz, Jr., Northville, Michigan

June issue

The June 1996 issue of *Ministry* was a winner from cover to cover. Keep on being used by the Lord to provide rich

resources for those in the ministry.—J. Alfred Johnson II, Central States Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Kansas City, Kansas

Divine designs for dealing with ethical issues

Ron du Preez' article (September 1996) demands a challenge. One can agree that Acts 15 is a great place to find a model for dealing with church issues. Mr. du Preez has some very good points and insights into what happened at that first church council. But du Preez' article violates the central and obvious reality in the whole Acts 15 story. Indeed, it contradicts that reality! Du Preez asserts no less than nine times, in various ways and allusions, that the council at Jerusalem was following "scriptural" or "word of God" or "biblical basis," etc., in finding the solution to the circumcision issue in the early church. He tries to make the point that they found guidance for their conclusion to dispose of the requirement in Scripture. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The careful student of Scripture knows that not only is there no reference to Scripture as the basis of the decision they made, but all the Scripture was in favor of those who wanted to retain the circumcision standard. No one at the Jerusalem council used any scriptural argument whatsoever to justify the conclusion they came to. They just said, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." to dispose of the requirement.

In discarding circumcision, the Christian teachers in Jerusalem were clearly setting a different course from Moses.

The real message of Acts 15 is that the new pathways in which God chooses to lead His people cannot always be found in previous Scripture, and that sometimes the church has to move ahead on the basis of practical and redemptive considerations, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even when there is no previous paradigm to refer to.—Elder K. Walter, Springfield, Oregon.

Ron du Preez responds: A thoughtful reading of my article shows that only a small part deals with the question of a biblical basis. Just as in Acts 15, where the written Word of God is referred or alluded to twice as much as the work of the Holy Spirit, so I have the same balance in my article.

The point is that these early Christians did indeed go to the written Word of God (see Acts 15:15-17, etc.) in order to discover which ethical standards were to be followed by the believers. Obviously, by omitting any reference to circumcision, while mentioning other vital moral matters, they were indicating that they understood that this Old Testament ritual was not binding on Christians.

The careful Bible scholar recognizes that Christians were not required to maintain what Ellen White calls "the ceremonial distinction of circumcision" (*Acts of the Apostles*, 141, cf., 194, 195). Other theologians note that after the cross, this ritual was no longer needed (see Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, p. 620; Leon-Dufour's *Dictionary of Bible Theology*, p. 79). In other words, circumcision was actually part of the ceremonial law (in its broader sense) that was done away with at the cross.

Concerning Acts 15, Ellen White notes: "The Holy Ghost saw good not to impose the **ceremonial law** on the Gentile converts; and the apostles and elders, **after careful investigation** of the subject, saw the matter in the same light" (*Story of Redemption*, p. 307, [emphasis added]).

Thus, the actions of these early Christians did not contradict God's Word, but instead faithfully followed Scripture as they understood the wider scope and broader meaning of the ceremonial laws. In brief, Acts 15 teaches that as believers seek for guidance on ethical issues, they need to be sensitive, both to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as to the divinely-inspired Scriptures, neither of which will contradict the other.—Ron du Preez, Collegedale, Tennessee

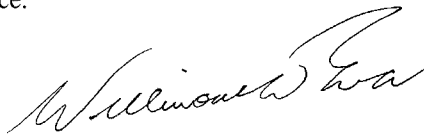
If you're receiving MINISTRY bimonthly without having paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 MINISTRY has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers, but we believe the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share with you our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help to you too. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead.

This month we take up the issue of homosexuality. Although there is some significant reflection in one or two of our theme articles on the source and "curability" of homosexuality, our primary focus is on the more general challenge of how to be pastors following Christ in our care of those who are homosexual.

In addressing this question, we must declare a foundational belief that along with some heterosexual behavior, the practice of all homosexual behavior is foreign to God's original design for human sexuality. Sexuality is not only to be experienced and celebrated within the bounds of heterosexual marriage as a beautiful "recreative" divine gift, but is also to be embraced, because of its inherent powers, as a "procreative" gift. It is this foundational procreative capability that homosexuality, by its innate physical design, is clearly unable to achieve and thus to authentically celebrate. This obvious and natural inadequacy in homosexual relationships demonstrates the foreignness of homosexuality to God's will and creative genius, and to what is essential in human sexuality and our very existence.

We believe it is critical to preserve the integrity of God's original design and craft of humanity. We believe also that this same humanity is jaded when one human being steps in to destructively judge the personal life of another. Thus we are contending for a christocentric, biblical, and decisive approach as we care for those with homosexual concerns.

We will not all agree with what we read in this issue, but whatever our thinking, it is always ours to exercise the spirit of Christian forbearance.



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Are you ready to quit?

Will Eva

Is this a day of trouble for you? Are you about ready to quit? Has your heart grown hard and cynical? Have you made mistakes that cause you to think you cannot survive? Are the armies of hell at your door? The Lord God is your hiding place! Jesus will not allow the evil one to destroy the good work He has begun in you. Ask Jesus to plant a new seed in your heart. Let go of all your distractions and read God's Word. Pour out your soul to Him in prayer."

These are the simple words of a letter I received the other day. It immediately made me think of our world family of pastors and their families and how, now and again, things seem to fall apart for us amid the battles of daily life and ministry.

For all of us there come times, and even extended periods, when we are shaky and vulnerable deep in our souls. Perhaps a personal crisis or family pressure, or a series of negative events, lead us, at first almost unaware, into darkness. Or perhaps we have come to see or feel that much of our struggle is a result of our own mistakes and failures, either personal or professional. At other times our days of trouble come when someone has said or done something that has hurt us deeply. At such times our troubles are especially potent if that someone has a high profile and the thing has been made public. Still we have had to carry on with the positive functions of everyday pastoring, despite the turmoil. And going on can be difficult indeed.

During these times I have found that it is amazingly easy for us to turn to every source of comfort, support, and strength that we can find, neglecting the

wonder of a Father who is all there for us. Perhaps it is in the name of practicality that we have come to a point at which we take His help for granted. Instead of dealing with Him directly, we turn to other intermediary agencies.

If this is a dark day for you, is it not at the heart of all that ministry is about to be able to say with potent assurance that there are those things, or there is that One who is of ultimate reality and who is a very present help in time of trouble? Familiar as it all may be, it is our privilege to hold up and to hold on to some of these basics here and now:

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1).^{*} Pressed from all sides, David knew where his strength was. He was clear on what he needed and wanted above everything else: "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" (verse 4).

David also knew why he wanted it: "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock" (verse 5). Isaiah says the same: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10).

I rediscovered another letter the other day. It was the last letter written by a very wise woman who knew her Lord and had seen and experienced all the rigors of life and ministry. Although this letter was written to a woman

friend, it speaks volumes to anyone pressed from every direction. Here are a few excerpts:

"His word to you is, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.' . . . He is waiting to take you into a harbor of gracious experience, and He bids you, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' You have had a time of unrest; but Jesus says to you, 'Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest.' . . . 'Then are they glad,' because they are privileged to rest in the arms of everlasting love. Put away your distrust of our heavenly Father. Instead of talking of your doubts, break away from them in the strength of Jesus, and let light shine into your soul by letting your voice express confidence and trust in God. Do not talk of your inefficiency and your defects. When despair would seem to be sweeping over your soul, look to Jesus, saying, He lives to make intercession for me. Forget the things that are behind, and believe the promise, 'I will come to you,' and 'abide with you.'"[†]

Is there anything more cleansing than an all-out encounter with God, a time of no-holds-barred confession, when we take up the Book of books to hear God's voice in our being, and when our souls break through to Christ Himself and we humbly claim the mercy, grace, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit? The times of pressure and darkness are the times that call us to just this! ■

^{*} All Scripture quotes are from The New King James Version.

[†] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), pp. 516, 517.



Without a smile

Walter Pearson

The image of Chelsey Thomas was enough to demand my attention, though I had intended only to browse the headlines on the evening news. She was only 8 years old. At first glance she seemed rather ordinary. Ordinary, that is, until she tried to smile. Chelsey was born without the muscles that make that simple facial gesture possible.

The culprit is a rare illness known as Moebius syndrome. It attacks early in fetal development and inhibits the development of the facial nerves. As a result, the muscles don't function. One in 2 million children are affected by the disorder. They have trouble sucking or swallowing, and their fingers may be stubby and webbed.

Chelsey Thomas's case brought attention to Moebius syndrome as none other before. The pictures of this Palmdale, California, schoolgirl also brought hope to others who might never have understood the reason for their plight. When her story first hit the airwaves, one side of Chelsey's face had already been surgically repaired. Dr. Ronald Kuker skillfully executed a procedure that gave her the ability to flex one cheek and lift that corner of her lips. Her heroic effort was touching.

Chelsey was eager to have the next operation. This one would enable her to control both sides of her face and generate a symmetrical smile. Her ultimate desire was to be able to express herself in a way that most people take for granted. She simply wanted to smile.

Without the ability to smile, people who suffer from Moebius syndrome are often perceived as stupid. They appear unaware of or unconcerned about people

or events that surround them. They are severely limited when it comes to forming relationships, because they seem arrogant or unkind. Evidently smiles are more important than we realize.

Under normal circumstances the effort to produce a smile barely seems worthy of prolonged discussion, but smiles are becoming more and more rare these days. The dangers that confront people who live in thickly populated urban centers practically demand the projection of a "city face." Conventional wisdom suggests that a hardened exterior tends to lessen one's vulnerability to scams or even physical attacks. Since television tends to present urban society as the norm, the city face is gaining ground. Society in general seems to be less cordial.

People probably have a right to expect Christians to be more pleasant than others. If one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy, an occasional smile is the least that a Christian should be willing to show the world. Nevertheless a long face worn to signify religious virtue has tended to outdistance the simple message in a smile.

The smile of Christ, though seldom mentioned, takes center stage in the following quotation: "I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes, but He drew near with a smile, and, laying His hand upon my head, said: 'Fear not.' The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with ineffable happiness, sank prostrate at His feet. . . . At length my strength returned, and I

arose. The loving eyes of Jesus were still upon me, and His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence filled me with holy reverence and an inexpressible love."¹

In view of our troubled times, some might think that it is time for Christians to trade in their pleasant countenances and adopt appropriately serious faces. After all, the trials that are foretold in the Bible cannot hope to inspire a joyful spirit. Could it be that even Christ would be challenged to appear happy in these times?

"It is often said that Jesus wept, but that He was never known to smile. Our Saviour was indeed a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief, for He opened His heart to all the woes of men. But though His life was self-denying and shadowed with pain and care, His spirit was not crushed. His countenance did not wear an expression of grief and repining, but ever one of peaceful serenity. His heart was a wellspring of life, and wherever He went He carried rest and peace, joy and gladness."²

We are called upon to reflect the "peaceful serenity" that marked Christ's visage despite the challenges that we must overcome. The capacity to be pleasant in spite of apparent difficulties is not really possible within our own strength. We must conscientiously rely on our dependable Source.

Prayerfully consider the gesture that means so much to Chelsey Thomas. Seek to be a channel of light for someone you meet, even if you only share a smile. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882), p. 80.

² ———, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 120.

Compassion—an alternative lifestyle

John C. Cress

A candid view of homosexuality suggesting courageous ways of pastoring homosexual people.



John C. Cress is the campus chaplain at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Don* was apprehensive about returning to church, having put a great deal of distance between himself and the spiritual tradition in which he had been raised. He was fearful that members of the local congregation would misunderstand and reject him because of who he was and where he had been. Throughout most of his adult life Don had actively pursued an openly gay lifestyle. By the time of his return to the church he had been diagnosed as a carrier of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and had begun a process of recovery from both chemical and sexual addictions.

There are not a few like Don. Many pastors and congregations have already grappled with the reality of having homosexuals in their membership or of having them seek it. In the near future many more will. This article suggests ways that churches and their leaders may positively respond to homosexual persons and the issues surrounding them, so that the witness of our congregations may be both prophetically clear and genuinely compassionate toward persons struggling with issues of moral consequence.

Turning down the stereotypes

Homosexuals are often assumed to look and act like certain exaggerated media portrayals—soft, effeminate males and “butch” or over-masculinized females. One pastor quickly discarded his stereotypes when a professional football linebacker attended his services and confided that he was homosexual. Beyond perpetuating gross inaccuracies, such caricatures diminish the humanity of homosexuals, encouraging some

people to treat them in ways that they might not otherwise treat individuals from whom they differ and with whom they disagree. Thoughtful Christians will avoid generalizations in favor of a more informed and realistic picture.

Choosing our words carefully

The term *homosexual* simply describes a sexual orientation. Despite the fact that the terms “gay” and “lesbian” are frequently used as virtual synonyms for the word “homosexual,” the terms gay and lesbian more precisely describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to the homosexual orientation, rather than the orientation itself. One may be homosexual but not gay or lesbian in the same way that one may be a “dry alcoholic”—having the inclination to drink but abstaining. Critics of this view point out that homosexual sounds too clinical and that popular culture assumes no semantic difference between gay and homosexual. Some pro-gay activists have embraced the term “queer,” seeking to disarm the pejorative label and its intimidating impact. For purposes of clarity and as a means of helping to illuminate God’s calling to individuals with same-sex attractions, I use the term *homosexual* to describe men and women with same-sex orientations but who may or may not be sexually active.

Who is homosexual?

The term *homosexuality* represents a broad spectrum of desires and behaviors ranging from incidental experiences of arousal or experimentation to lifelong preferences for same-sex intimacy. The seven-point heterosexuality/homosexuality scale presented by Alfred

Kinsey and his associates in their groundbreaking 1948 report on male sexuality in America describes the continuum of experiences for individuals who are exclusively heterosexual (0 on the scale) to those who are exclusively homosexual (6 on the scale).

Thoughtful pastors and churches will distinguish between a person's orientation and his or her choice to act on the basis of and in response to such desires in sexually intimate ways. They should no more condemn persons for their homosexual orientation than they would condemn a heterosexual for desires of an illicit nature. Both must be held to a biblical standard of behavior in spite of their strong inclinations.

Prevalence and problems

A summary of the most objective and thorough research available today suggests that Don was among the approximately 6 percent of the population who experience some type of same-sex relations during his or her lifetime and approximately 1 percent of the population who consistently desire same-sex practices.¹ These figures differ greatly from the popularly accepted myth (based on misinterpretations of skewed data in the Kinsey report) suggesting that 10 percent of the population is homosexual.² The 10 percent factor has been often cited to suggest a degree of normalcy for homosexuality. A corresponding leap in logic has allowed many people to conclude that normal equals natural and natural is the equivalent of morally acceptable.

An accurate understanding of the numbers may help the church understand that to the degree that it operates within the surrounding culture and reaches out evangelistically to draw hurting humanity to Christ, it must expect to find persons with homosexual inclinations within its fellowship.

Health problems associated with homosexuality go well beyond the much-publicized, global acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) crisis. Rates of alcohol consumption run twice as high for homosexual males and as much as seven times as high for

homosexual females, compared to the general population. Other chemical dependencies are dramatically higher for homosexuals, and a disproportionately high number of homosexuals experience depressive disorders and suicidal thoughts and actions. The incidents of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), as well as infections from a host of other pathogens and parasites, are dramatically higher among homosexuals, as are certain physiological traumas among males associated with insertive anal intercourse—rectal tearing, chronic incontinence, prostate damage, and hemorrhoids, ulcers, and fissures, which open the system to additional infections.³

Activists, seeking to propagate the “gay myth” that homosexuals are as happy and healthy as the rest of the population, minimize the well-documented negative health statistics. Outspoken individuals on the other end of the ideological spectrum, some Christians among them, often diminish their case by exaggerating and sensationalizing the data and vilifying the homosexual. Thoughtful Christians must steer clear of avoidance and naïveté on the one hand and the harsh judgmentalism of those on the other side of the “culture wars” over homosexual issues. They must create an informed and compassionate response in the face of the immense suffering experienced by many homosexual men and women.

What causes homosexuality?

From an early age Don knew intuitively that he was different from his peers. When he learned that there were words to describe who he was and how he felt, he discovered that such terms were frequently pejorative, punctuated with expressions of hatred, disgust, and fear. Despite his keen intellect, winsome personality, and many talents, Don encountered the indicators of rejection everywhere. His theology studies on a conservative Christian college campus only compounded his despair over the powerful inclinations within him that ran so diametrically counter to his strongly

held and closely examined moral convictions.

There are many theories about what causes homosexuality. A synthesis of the most comprehensive studies suggests that homosexuality results from a complex matrix of factors. Thomas E. Schmidt, in his informed treatment of homosexuality from an evangelical Christian perspective, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*, presents a multiple-variable model for homosexual identity formation.⁴ Biological factors as well as cultural and environmental influences combine with one's moral climate, personal choices, and behavioral experiences to form the basis of one's sexual identity, according to Schmidt.⁵

Don's experience was consistent with the large body of data indicating a close association between adult homosexuality and the child's experience of significant family dysfunction. Other contributing factors are the loss of a father to death or divorce before the age of 10⁶ and childhood sexual abuse. To date, no conclusive evidence exists to point to genetic factors of causation despite significant research efforts in that direction.

What should be clear is that the process of identifying possible causes of homosexuality in no way negates the necessity of moral responsibility on the part of the homosexual. As William Johnsson recently wrote, “Adventists distinguish between tendencies and practice: we all have inclinations in various directions, but what counts is how we respond to these drives by God's grace.”⁷

Can homosexuals change their orientation?

Successful “conversions” have been reported by secular therapists and religious “change ministries” using a variety of techniques.⁸ Because the evidence for “conversion” is often anecdotal and because definitions and methodologies differ so widely, it is irresponsible to suggest that all homosexuals may become heterosexual by

following a particular program. Some, however, have achieved a significant level of change.

"I prayed fervently for God to change me," Don told me. "I did not choose homosexuality. Why would I choose to be misunderstood and rejected? God can change my orientation, I am convinced of that, but for whatever reason He has not. What He has done for me, however, is just as miraculous," Don said with deep emotion in his voice. "He has delivered me from multiple addictions and has enabled me to remain sexually abstinent." In a talk he gave to students at his alma mater shortly before he died of AIDS, Don left no doubt about what he believed to be the gospel imperative for his life: "No sex with other people and no sex with myself."

Don believed his stance to be the only way for him to maintain biblical fidelity and moral integrity. It was not an easy choice. Not only did he feel continuing misunderstanding from the heterosexual majority, but because of his choice of celibacy he faced bitter opposition and rejection by homosexuals who had formerly been his friends, including some in the Kinship organization who had been instrumental in leading him back to Christ.

What does the Bible really say?

Despite attempts by revisionist theologians to suggest that the Bible affirms or condones intimate same-sex relationships, "only towering cynicism can pretend that there is any doubt about what the Scriptures say about homosexuality," states Michael Ukleja.⁹

Sherwin Bailey's word count study argues that the sin of the men in Genesis 19 who desired to "know" Lot's guests was merely a breach of hospitality. Bailey correctly notes that in only 12 of the 943 uses of the Hebrew word *yada* ("to know") in the Old Testament does the term refer to sexual intercourse.¹⁰ But what Bailey minimizes, of course, is the importance of context in determining the meaning of words. Lot's offering his own virgin daughters instead of his guests for the sexual satisfaction of his rude neighbors indicates that he knew exactly what the men wanted, and purposely tried to lead them in a different

direction not only for reasons of hospitality.

J. Boswell, and later L. William Countryman, presented studies suggesting that Romans 1:26, 27 declared same-sex relations cultically impure but not sinful. Schmidt responds by saying: "Paul's profound analysis of the human condition in Romans 1 finds in homosexuality an example of sexual sin that falsifies our identity as sexual beings, just as idolatry falsifies our identity as created beings. Homosexual behavior is 'revolting,' not because heterosexuals find it so—they have their own dirt to deal with (2:22)—but because it epitomizes in sexual terms the *revolt* against God. It is sinful because it violates the plan of God, present from the creation, for the union of male and female in marriage."¹¹

Same-sex relations are condemned by Scripture because they stand in opposition to God's created order and His plan revealed from the beginning. While it is true that the Creation stories do not present us with neatly packaged commands about sex, they do provide "*a basis for biblical commands and for subsequent reflection* on the part of those who wish to construct a sexual ethic to meet changing situations."¹²

The apostle James recognizes a distinction between orientation and behavior. Every person "is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14, 15, NIV). For all who possess human nature and wrestle with a host of temptations, this should come as welcome news. Only in the arena of moral choices and behavioral responses to one's inclinations is sin or the resistance of it possible by God's grace. Inclination alone does not constitute sin.

How shall we then respond?

We must be discerning, allowing our perspectives to be shaped more by the Word of God and refined by His Spirit than by the polemical winds of social opinion raging around us. Mature Christians will be informed and balanced, avoiding polarization and fully embracing

the truth that will set men and women free. The recognition of the difference between orientation and behavior is a beginning point for discernment on this issue.

We must be faithful to Scripture, affirming what its clear sense affirms, avoiding what it prohibits, and proclaiming boldly the good news of Jesus Christ, which brings salvation and wholeness to all. Novel and revisionist interpretations come and go, but God's Word has proved itself for centuries to stand firm and trustworthy in the midst of cultural chaos. Faithfulness to the Bible also means following Christ and exemplifying His attitudes in the way we deal with those doing battle with difficult "sins of the flesh."

We must be redemptive, seeking to heal and using our words to show Christ to others. Christians whose lives have been deeply touched by Christ will prefer straightforward, descriptive terminology to emotionally charged language, stereotyping, and name-calling. Zealots accused of being "homophobics" rarely soften their rhetoric. Branding gays and lesbians as "perverts" and "shameful sinners" only drives them further from the only One who can make a difference in their lives.

We must be fair and not create double standards for homosexuals. The sins of the practicing homosexual are no more or less serious than the sins of those who, with a member of the opposite gender, act independently of God's ideal of sexual intimacy within the relationship of heterosexual marriage.

We must be humble. "People who picture themselves as soggy sailors clinging to overturned boats are not apt to treat their fellow flotsam with contempt. . . . What is needed are unrighteous people who recognize the universal need to receive God's mercy and power for obedience, whatever one's particular distortion of God's intent for sexuality. The log must come out of the eye."¹³

We must be accountable to one another. Wisdom recognizes that to hold homosexuals and unmarried heterosexuals to an equal standard of sexual abstinence ensures their well-being in ways that other options cannot. Celi-

bacy, despite the popular protests to the contrary, need not assign one to relational loneliness, nor is sexual gratification the equivalent of life fulfillment, as so often seems to be represented in the popular media. Heterosexual Christians must be accountable for their own peculiar sexual aberrations as well as the tendency to hate those who are different.

We must create a new paradigm for ministry—a life model of Christian clarity and compassion. Christian compassion, exercised in informed, balanced, redemptive ways, is the real “alternative lifestyle” of our age. We must learn to understand, embrace, and bring healing to hurting homosexuals. We must risk our cherished reputations to reach out beyond our comfort zones. We must minister to AIDS sufferers in same the way Jesus touched the shunned lepers of His day. Jesus’ example underscores the point that we need not compromise our moral convictions in order to embrace a lifestyle of compassion toward sinners.

My friend Don will be looking for us on resurrection morning. He will also be looking for others who had similar orientations to his on this earth, and who, like him, will be there because Christians chose to reach out in life-transforming love through the grace of Jesus Christ. He will be looking for evidence among the assembled “great multitude” that more and more congregations came to embrace compassion as Christ’s alternative lifestyle while they awaited His return. ■

¹ T. W. Smith, “Adult Sexual Behavior in 1989: Number of Partners, Frequency of Intercourse and Risk of AIDS,” *Planning Perspectives* 23 (May/June 1991): 102-107. Smith’s data on the incidence of homosexuality are corroborated by recent comprehensive studies conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, as well as other studies compiled under Smith’s direction at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

² J. H. Court and J. G. Muir, eds., *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1990).

³ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 112-126.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

⁵ *Ibid.* See especially Schmidt’s diagram (figure 1 on page 152) for a visual representation of his causation model.

⁶ M. T. Saghir and E. Robins, *Male and Female Homosexuality: A Comprehensive Investigation* (Baltimore: Williams Wilkins, 1973), pp. 139, 296, 297.

⁷ William G. Johnsson, “Seven Deadly Delusions,” *Adventist Review*, July 25, 1996, p. 5.

⁸ See Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men and Women* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), for a comprehensive and practical guide for persons desiring change in their sexual orientation. Written from an evangelical perspective, it documents studies by believers and non-Christians alike, affirming the possibility of change, and describes a process by which change can occur. See also William E. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Homosexuality in Perspective* (New York: Bantam, 1979), pp. 400ff., for evidence from respected “secular” researchers that change is possible. They reported a success rate of nearly 72 percent for homosexuals seeking change at the end of their six-year period of inquiry.

⁹ P. Michael Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983): 259-266.

¹⁰ D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955). See also John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McNeill, 1976) for another example of a revisionist attempt to posit the Scriptures as condoning homosexuality.

¹¹ Schmidt, p. 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³ Schmidt, p. 55.

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Summer 1995



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A homosexual in my congregation?

Kate McLaughlin

How should a church extend its ministry to the homosexual in its midst?

Seven years ago we learned that our youngest son is a homosexual. At that point our ignorance and prejudice met head-on with our love for our son. I'm glad to say that love won out. Since that time we have learned a great deal about homosexuality. We have also come to realize how many people's lives are touched by this hidden pain. As I have become more able to open up about our son's homosexuality, and especially since I wrote a book about our family's experience (*My Son, Beloved Stranger*), I have been amazed to discover that nearly everyone I talk with about it has a friend or relative who is homosexual.

And my son? What happened to him? As a child, he was always sensitive to spiritual things. He gave his heart to God when he was 9 years old and was baptized a year later. His ambition was to be a missionary teacher. He told us he prayed all through his childhood and teens that God would change him. When that didn't happen, he turned his back on God near the end of his college years. He met another boy who was gay, and before long they were living together. Although he had decided he didn't believe in God, he and his friend loved music and sang in the choir of a church in his community. After a few years he found his way back to God, decided to follow a celibate lifestyle—and joined the church in which he had been singing.

Throughout all this, in spite of our pain and disappointment, we have maintained a close and loving relationship with our son, recognizing that God continues to love us even when we make mistakes. We see his coming back

to God, even though it is not through our church, and his decision to be celibate as an answer to prayer, because we have witnessed such a vibrant and joyful change in his life that we cannot doubt God's leading. The story isn't over yet.

What does the homosexual need from a pastor?

Understanding. I suspect that many church members, including pastors, still view homosexuality as we did before learning about our son—simply as a sexual perversion that people choose, probably for “kicks.” The truth is that people don't consciously choose sexual orientation. The homosexual's choice is whether or not to follow a homosexual lifestyle.

When you understand that, you begin to realize some of the difficulties homosexuals face, especially those who have been brought up in a religious home. Conditioned by the attitude of both society and the church toward homosexuals, yet recognizing this dread thing in themselves, they learn early to deny a part of their personality and to wear a protective mask around others. A crisis of faith often develops when their prayers for deliverance go unanswered. And when they finally come to terms with being homosexual, they often want to stop hiding and be open about it, but are prevented by their fear of rejection by church and society.

Education. The debate still rages, both in scientific and religious circles, over the cause of homosexuality. My personal conclusion, based on extensive reading and talking to a fair number of homosexuals and their families, is that

probably most are born with a homosexual orientation that, outside of a divine miracle, cannot be changed.

Others, I think, have a confused sexual identity because of childhood sexual abuse, and these *may possibly* be helped by therapy. Then there are those in the middle of the spectrum between homosexuality and heterosexuality, called bisexuals, who are attracted to both sexes. If strongly motivated by the desire to obey God, they can choose to limit their romantic attachments to the opposite sex. They, I believe, are the ones who can be helped by the "change" ministries of various denominations.

One common misconception that many people have is that it is a common practice for homosexuals to try to lure young boys into homosexuality. Much of the confusion in this arena results from confusing homosexuals with pedophiles, those who are sexually attracted to children.

Of course, I don't claim to be an expert. There are many different opinions, and I don't think anyone fully understands this complex problem. But if you really want to help homosexuals and their families, you owe it to them to become more knowledgeable about these complexities.*

Openness. The stigma attached to being homosexual breeds secrecy and shame. The church should provide a safe place where those with this orientation can be honest about their problem. They need a place where they can talk about their confusing emotions and their resulting spiritual problems, a place where others engaged in the battle against sin will pray with and for them.

As a pastor, once you have put aside your own ignorance and prejudice, you can help educate your church, too, and encourage them to face the fact that a significant minority of our members struggle with a homosexual orientation.

Support. To my knowledge, the only attempt the Seventh-day Adventist Church has made to provide help for homosexuals has been to unofficially back Homosexuals Anonymous, an organization that attempts to help

homosexuals change into heterosexuals. There have been moral problems in this organization in the past. And because of this and other considerations, I believe they hold out an unrealistic expectation for the person with a true homosexual orientation.

Another Adventist organization for homosexuals is Kinship. Because most of its members subscribe to an alternative interpretation of Scripture and believe that a monogamous homosexual relationship is acceptable for them, the Adventist Church does not officially recognize Kinship. Despite the drawbacks of Kinship, the organization does provide something our church does not offer—a loving, supportive atmosphere for those homosexuals who love their church, but find no escape from their orientation.

I believe there is a compelling need for our church to provide a publicly acknowledged support group for those homosexuals who desire to live a celibate lifestyle. They need to experience warm acceptance and support from other church members, who understand that, like anyone engaged in serious warfare against sin, they may not win every battle. We need to show them the same forgiveness and patience as we do someone who occasionally gives in to the temptation of pride, jealousy, or heterosexual deviation.

Love. The deepest and most basic emotional need of the human being is for love and companionship. Single heterosexuals can fill this need, to some extent, by sharing their lives with a roommate of the same sex, but even this is problematic and probably not possible for the homosexual. Thus theirs is often the loneliest of lives.

Recognizing this, the church ought to reach out to them in love, including them as cherished members of the church family in compensation for the normal desires for home and family which they must renounce.

The church itself will be well compensated for its efforts to encourage and retain its nonpracticing homosexual members. As a group, they are known to be highly blessed with gifts of an

artistic nature, which they can offer in God's service.

What do parents of a homosexual need from their pastor?

Understanding. As a pastor, you need to understand that when parents first learn their son or daughter is a homosexual, they usually fall into a state of shock. Even though they may have been aware that something about their child was different, they have probably never admitted to themselves the unthinkable possibility that it could have anything to do with homosexuality.

They may experience any of a whole range of emotions: anger, denial, grief, guilt, fear, or shame. Dreams of their child's future lie shattered about them. If, as frequently happens, they learn about their child's homosexuality and diagnosis of AIDS at the same time, their shock and grief are profoundly compounded. Husbands and wives often react in markedly different ways, and this is likely to put stress on their marriage.

Awareness. When their child "comes out of the closet," parents literally take his or her place in it. Feeling that they must somehow be responsible, they tend to take on the stigma the church and society has attached to homosexuality. Very few parents feel able to talk to anyone about it, yet talking is what they most need.

A pastor needs to be aware of any small indication parents may give of the emotional turmoil they are going through. This might be revealed in asking veiled questions about homosexuality or in an unexplained depression or other sudden mood change.

Utmost tact is needed in reaching out to these parents. Often they are longing for someone just to notice their distress and ask them what is the matter. Their hearts may be bursting with questions and emotions they need to express, but they are unable to bring the subject up themselves. You may be able to create an opening by simply asking "How have things been going lately?" or "I've

Continued on page 29

Homosexuality: establishing a Christian backdrop for pastoral care

Thomas E. Schmidt

What are some of the issues underlying care for the homosexual in your congregation?



Thomas E. Schmidt, Ph.D., a New Testament scholar, is the author of *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), widely acclaimed as the most helpful resource in support of a traditional moral stance on homosexuality.

The telephone rang at 2:00 a.m. Frank, a gay Christian, had just finished reading my book and wanted to thank me for encouraging him to reevaluate his lifestyle and to seek help. It was 5:00 a.m. in his time zone, and I must confess that my impulse was to extricate myself from having a conversation with someone who seemed long-winded and a possible wacko. However, as I listened I realized that this call might have been made by me, with only some details changed (the 2:00 a.m. part of it for one!).

Frank is a man who experiences sexual temptation. He is well aware that the small comfort supplied by sex does not replace the deeper comfort only God can supply, but he is driven by needs for human companionship and touch. Analysis of how he got this way, or exegesis of key biblical passages, do not help in the middle of the night.

And so I listened to Frank. Then I let him listen to me, and we became friends. Now we talk every few weeks (at reasonable times) and share the assurance that "He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us . . . as you also join in helping us by your prayers" (2 Cor 1:10, 11).⁷ We are two men with very different temptations, but with the same Lord, who wants to transform our fallen natures, making them like His perfect nature.

The emerging issue

My friendship with Frank is personal, but may have broad applications. As I have engaged audiences around the country and attempted to keep up on the literature produced by Christian advocates of homosexual practice, I have

observed that the emerging issue for pastoral response is not only theological or psychological. It is, rather, a matter of *personal experience* in moral decision-making. Increasingly, those who defend homosexual unions are setting aside the disputed biblical passages and scientific opinions, and claiming the positive experience of some as a guiding principle for all. Loving, monogamous same-sex unions, some advocates contend, provide a model for Christian homosexual practice. If we would only listen to their stories, some suggest, we might learn from their experience and thus let go of our prejudices.

At this point I could launch into a discourse on the growing impact of postmodernism, but pastors today need not study Foucault to recognize the spirit behind these words: "I'm not too sure what the Bible says, or what science says, but this seems right to me, so I'm going to do it." The notion is hardly new that without a clear locus of authority "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). What is new is that this attitude has invaded the church, and it will pervade the church if pastors respond to a new generation only with denunciations of relativism. When the passengers are already drowning in the water, it doesn't help to tell them they were better off in the boat. What we need are forward-looking strategies, ways to address the needs and attitudes of a postmodern culture. These strategies must express the way of our Lord, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

In this article I offer a few suggestions that I hope will stimulate further discussion and constructive action on the part of pastors and leaders. More specifically,

I will offer a series of amplified statements that address two issues: first, the role of experience in the current moral debate; and second, the advancement of a traditional moral stance by pastors and church leaders.

Experience and moral authority

God's presence may be known where His preference is not. Have you ever known someone in your church who exhibited the fruits of the Spirit? Perhaps they even took part in church leadership. Then you discovered that for some time that person had been involved in wrongdoing of a financial or sexual nature? Did you conclude that the person was not a Christian or that the Spirit was not behind the good things he or she was doing? Or did you decide that the shady business deal or the adulterous affair was morally permissible because an otherwise remarkable person was involved?

The point here is not to deny the reality of experience or the ministry gifts of those who engage in same-sex relationships. Rather, the point is that experience and ministry gifts do not constitute an argument in favor of the morality of that behavior. If it is morally permissible, it must be so on grounds other than good experience or impressive giftedness.

Experience may dictate when all else fails, but all else hasn't failed. If, in fact, *Scripture* were silent about sexual ethics (and I mean not only the proscription texts but also the presumption of the normativeness of heterosexual marriage throughout the Bible); or if we had no *reason* on medical, psychological, or social grounds to question the behavior; or if we had no strong Christian *tradition* that spoke consistently to the issue, then we might want to give experience or giftedness a louder voice.

But the fact is, the voice of experience on this issue is a very recent voice, and the obvious suspicion is that it expresses Christian conformity to the surrounding culture rather than decisive leadership in the culture. What has the church gained since the sexual revolution of the sixties? What have *women* gained by our tacit compliance with the proliferation of

premarital sex, divorce, and primetime pornography? Unfortunately, it is true that the cutting edge of morality is often in actuality the edge of a cliff.

Rule by experience makes all rules questionable. The argument from experience attempts to shift the discussion from the question *Why is this right in view of scriptural teaching?* to *How can this be wrong in view of this life-enhancing experience?* Or more bluntly, *How dare you question what I experience as positive?* One problem I have with this shift is that it leaves little to say in response to virtually any traditionally proscribed behavior. Advocates of pedophilia, for example, argue along similar lines: They say *Scripture* is silent or ignorant of modern relationships of mutual consent and that the condition of pedophilia is immutable and perhaps genetically determined. People's opposition to pedophilia stems, they say, from unreasoning prejudice and so on. But if we object to pedophilia only because we feel more strongly against it than we do against homosexuality, why can't we experience new feelings later and become more tolerant? To make experience the rule is to invite moral chaos.

Liberation from guilt is more compelling than liberation from shame. Guilt is a recognition that I have done wrong; shame is a feeling imposed on me by others' disapproval. What I have observed in comparing the accounts of those who have experienced deliverance from homosexual practice (guilt) and those who have experienced deliverance from homophobia (shame) is that the stories of the former strike me as much closer to the New Testament message of salvation from sin. That is, those who leave the lifestyle do not spiritualize their victim status; rather, they experience the power of Christ to find new *behaviors* and even new *desires*. This makes sense to me as I think of my own heterosexual temptations: my transformation in Christ does not begin with self-validation, but with humility regarding my own fallen nature.

Advancing a more traditional stance

Noting the connection between

Genesis and Romans is crucial in countering the argument that when Paul speaks against homosexuality, he speaks only of pederasty. The most common "dust in the air" approach of revisionists is to discard Old Testament passages as irrelevant pre-Christian casuistic apprehensions, and to discount Romans 1:26, 27 (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 1 Tim. 1:10) as limited only to the man-boy relations prevalent in the New Testament pagan world. It is crucial to understand how Paul bridges the testaments by deriving his proscription in Romans from the Creation and Fall narratives of Genesis (including the Sodom story) and not simply from changing cultural mores. Paul's expression definitely reveals his reliance on underlying principles that are integrally connected to the biblical norm of heterosexual marriage. I can only summarize here what I develop in detail in my book, in which I enlarge on the meanings of the relevant biblical passages in light of modern revisionist treatments.


We are embodied souls. The notion that the human body can transcend its biological function and reproductive potential is Gnostic, not Christian. Unfortunately, the ongoing influence of the ancient Greek dichotomy between body and soul, coupled with the more recent influence of Eastern thought, has opened the door to extreme spiritualizations of sex. In the biblical view each of us is an embodied soul whose sexuality is rooted in a unified being with a potential reaching into eternity. How our bodies work and what we do with them matter greatly to a God who makes us His temples (1 Cor. 6:19).

Experience is a two-way street, and only ex-gays have walked both sides. Why do those who claim to represent tolerance not tolerate the voice of ex-gays? Instead, many of them level accusations of self-deception at ex-gays and promote negative anecdotal stories of ex-ex-gays. It seems to me, however, that those who have left the homosexual lifestyle (published accounts include Mario Bergner, Andy Comiskey, and Jerry Arterburn) possess an experience that includes that of practicing homosexuals

The church must expand the matter to forthrightly include other issues of sexuality. There should be no question of

Change occurs one person at a time. This seemingly harmless suggestion is perhaps the most controversial. I do not support the focus of some Christians on political and legal means to preserve traditional Christian standards of morality. Public policy debates easily become cold, issue-oriented, and seriously

Frankly, when it comes to homosexuality, I think that the so-called culture wars in politics, law, and education were lost some time ago. This is not said from a pessimistic perspective or to be discouraging. Rather, it is meant to be a call to us who are Christians to renounce all power except the power of the love of Christ. This is an energy that welcomes hurting people into a home. It offers healing. It celebrates the transformation of our natures, whether we are homosexual or heterosexual sinners, until we all come into the measure of Christ's full stature. ■



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Do you pray for gays?

Julia C. S. Vernon

When the prayer ended, tears welled up and overflowed. Softly he said, "No one ever did that for me before."



Julia C. S. Vernon is the director and founder of Pastoral Care Associates of Utah.

Of course I do," answered my ministerial colleague. "I pray for gays as a group. In addition, I pray for individuals I know who are gay."

"What kind of prayers do you pray?"

"Well, let's see. I pray for God to convict them that homosexuality is an abomination. I ask Him to rebuke the enemy who is working so hard to deceive people into accepting the gay lifestyle as normal. And I claim them for Jesus Christ."

"How do they react when you pray like that?"

"I don't know. I don't think there have ever been any gays around to hear my prayers."

"OK, but what if a gay person was there right beside you while you were praying? How would you pray then?"

"I wouldn't much. It's the truth, and I'm bound to say it. Maybe if they heard my prayer, it would do them some good."

A visit with grief

Our conversation faltered. Memory took me back to a hospital where I had once served as a chaplain. A dear friend lay limp and pale on the bed. Grief had wrung him cruelly during the years that he'd tended his friend dying of AIDS. Now, exhausted by his friend's death, he'd begun losing his own health.

We'd visited with each other nearly every day. Sometimes we talked about everyday topics, sometimes about his struggles with illness, sometimes about his spiritual journey and death. Yet we never prayed together. Whenever I asked if he wanted prayer, something would change in him. He seemed to

grow wary. Then he would smile and say, "Just put in a good word for me sometime today." Was he afraid of prayer because he thought it would be the kind of prayer my colleague described in our conversation?

One day I approached the subject differently. "Jon,* we've been talking about some pretty heavy things. I feel deeply moved that you've let me in to share them. What I'm going to ask is pretty personal, I know, and it's up to you. I'll respect whatever you say. Would it be OK for us to share a prayer together?"

He was silent for a long time, then looked up at me with a puzzled frown. "I think I'd like that, but I don't know how."

"How about if I say the words out loud, and you share them inside yourself?"

"OK, let's do that."

I offered Jon my hand, and slowly he took it. Together we closed our eyes. "Dear God, our Friend in heaven. Thank You for Jon. Thank You for bringing us together to share this time. Lord, I just want to lift my friend up and ask You to take good care of him. You know how alone and scared he feels sometimes. So please stay with him and be his friend. Please give him hope in his heart and comfort him. Lord, I entrust him to You because You are trustworthy and You care. Thank You for loving Jon. Amen."

When the prayer ended, Jon looked up with enormous, childlike eyes. Tears welled up and overflowed. Softly he said, "No one ever did that for me before." ■

* a pseudonym

Ministry through a sewing machine and a cookbook



As part of the ongoing program of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference during this quinquennium, the association is holding World Ministers' Councils in all of the world divisions of the church. In April 1996 Sharon Cress, Shepherdess International director, along with Dorothy Watts, Adly Campos, and Rae Lee Cooper, participated with the association in conducting three World Ministers' Councils in the Southern Asia Division.

During this month of meetings several hundred ministers' wives attended, and blessings were shared by presenters and attendees alike. The women leaders from the General Conference, who are also pastoral spouses, especially served the pastoral spouses in India.

During the General Conference session in Utrecht, Sharon Cress had announced the publication of her new Shepherdess International cookbook, *Seasoned With Love* (a collection of

favorite recipes provided by ministers' wives). The purpose of the worldwide sale of this cookbook is to provide funding for pastoral wives to share the love of Christ where they feel God is leading them to do so.

Here is where the inspiring story of Suman Khajekar comes in. Suman is the wife of a pastor working in a small town in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, and as such she attended the World Ministers' Council in Pune. For a long time Suman had possessed a burning desire to share Jesus' love with the less fortunate where she lives. Long before the Council in Pune she had asked herself, "Why not start a ministry for the women in my community?"

She had begun working with the poor, neglected, and abused women of her town. She wanted to give them dignity. She wanted them to use their hands and their minds to earn a living. She was led to the simple sewing machine, something a woman could use

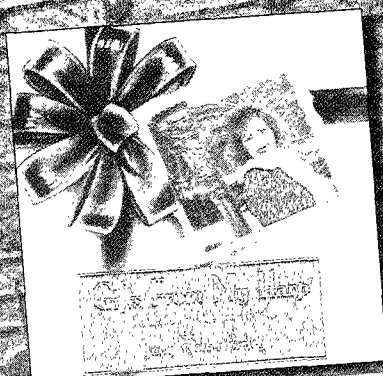
in her own home sewing blouses, dresses, or shirts. With the help of ADRA she organized a tailoring class in which Suman taught sewing and salvation. But she urgently needed more sewing machines, and besides that, she had no money for practice cloth, scissors, needles, and thread—the simple items required for her to continue conducting her classes.

Last April the *Seasoned With Love* cookbook profits were just becoming available. When Suman met Sharon Cress in Pune and presented her request, it was an answer to prayer for both women. Sharon had been praying for the Lord to show her the first pastor's wife who should receive a portion of these funds, and Suman was praying for a way to continue her ministry.

Through the combined ministries of these women, and especially because of Suman's long-term ministry in her hometown, 27 women have been baptized to date, with 13 of them becoming independent sewers as a direct result of Suman Khajekar's work and witness. ■



Celebrating the Season with Chapel Music



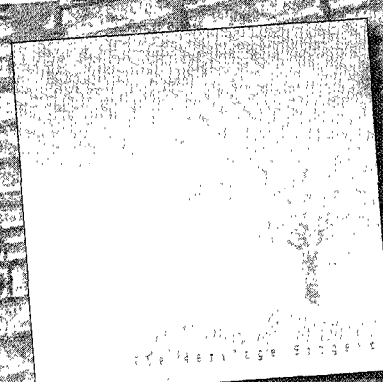
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Ten commandments for improving pastoral marriage counseling

My preparation lacked depth and substance. The ink was still wet on my seminary diploma as her tear-stained face taunted my feelings of inadequacy. Her marriage was floundering, and my efforts to resurrect principles memorized in seminary psychology class seemed futile. How could id, ego, and superego bring some semblance of sanity to her challenging circumstances?

"My husband is willing to come with me to counseling, Pastor," she whispered, only making me feel more desperate.

These feelings of desperation impelled me to pursue advanced studies in counseling and psychology. I thought an extended stint in the classroom would enable me to master the elusive discipline of counseling. My earnest quest kept me in school for many years, seeking for the secrets, digging for the nuggets of understanding that would help me save failing marriages.

Some of my well-meaning colleagues, more experienced and mature than I, suggested that my academic pilgrimage would lead only to broken cisterns. They asserted confidently that the key to strong marriages was simply to embrace solid biblical principles that were usually antithetical to the themes of secular psychology. They informed me that secular psychology had little to offer those who seek to build marriages on firm foundations. With stern countenances and prophetic intonations they reminded me of the perils of psychological seduction.

One of these friends gave me a book to read by Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon entitled *The Seduction of Christianity*. In that insightful book, statements leaped out to reinforce the notions propounded by my friends regarding the dangers of psychology. I read the following statement: "We must have counseling for one another. But it must be based on the Bible and not upon questionable psychological theories. Unfortunately in the area of psychology we have adopted beliefs and practices that have neither scientific nor biblical basis"¹

I was almost persuaded.

Years spent in the study of psychology on the graduate level, however, have convinced me that some assertions of secular

psychology reflect the light of biblical principles. For example, rational emotive psychological theory asserts that the root of psychopathology is illogical thinking. Marriages in trouble can therefore be helped by assisting spouses in learning to challenge illogical assumptions and substitute them with logical ones. The notion that distorted thinking can be problematic is reminiscent of the biblical statements "As a person thinks, so is he or she" (see Prov. 23:7) or "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

Perhaps both secular and religious theorists can help improve our pastoral marriage counseling strategies. We can use the results of their empirical research to assist couples in finding answers to marital difficulties. After all, if the labors of secular theorists have uncovered pharmacological solutions to bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, and other maladies, they may also have something valuable to say about marriage. Also, since religious theorists have assisted people in finding peace in a chaotic world, an inner serenity that the world can neither give nor take away, we must embrace their contributions also.

Nearly a quarter century of practicing pastoral counseling has convinced me that a prudent blending of both sacred and select secular perspectives can contribute to making more effective and Spirit-filled marriage counselors. Some would argue that to speak of sacred and secular approaches to counseling is to erect a false dichotomy. After all, many so-called theorists are Christian believers. Perhaps from the themes of both spiritual and clinical research we can discover some commandments that may improve the pastor's ability to provide substantive intervention to married couples in crisis. These commandments have helped me in my quest to become a more effective pastoral marriage counselor.

Know the times

Effective pastoral marriage counselors should know the times and the environmental factors that affect marriages. Like the sons of Issachar, those who strive to maximize their counseling gift will "know the times and know what Israel is to do" (see 1 Chron. 12:32).

What essential knowledge of the times can help us facilitate

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marital improvements? Well, the days of *Ozzie and Harriet* are gone. Marked changes in styles of living have occurred in the past few decades. In many world cultures the *Leave It to Beaver* marriage paradigm is a thing of the past. Divorce no longer carries a terrible stigma, and the traditional, stable two-parent family is now only one of many acceptable models for relationships. People even discuss the ostensible viability of same-sex marriages.

Our times are characterized by increased mobility of individuals, making it more difficult to put down stable roots. The extended family support sources are fewer, and economic challenges add to the pressures placed on marriages, challenging the emotional security and the material stability people seek. Values and roles are less clearly defined, increasing the strains on relationships. In many cultures today both spouses work outside the home setting.

These factors make an impact on marriages. They produce a wear and tear that make some of the solutions offered in the past glib and inappropriate. Many of the people we counsel today will have lived together before getting married. This influences the nature of our counseling, both during premarriage and through the stages of marriage. A sensitivity to the myriad influences that affect contemporary marriage will make us more effective pastoral marriage counselors.

Maximize premarital counseling opportunities

You must “nip it in the bud,” said Barney Fife on the old *Andy Griffith Show*. When it comes to the possible pitfalls of any given marriage, this is particularly true. Many potential marriage problems can be identified during premarital counseling. Often the prelude to serious difficulties in child rearing, financial matters, spiritual concerns, communication problems, and in-law challenges can be seen, in embryo, during premarital counseling. Premarital relationships that border on the abusive rarely have a chance for later success, and the pastoral marriage counselor must have the courage to confront and speak the truth in love.

Regardless of one’s approach to premarital counseling, there should be at least three goals. First, the pastor should make some appraisal of the couple’s readiness for marriage. There are tests and other aids to help accomplish this. Other aspects of the couple’s readiness for marriage will usually surface during the counseling sessions. Second, the counselor, in most instances, should seek to use these sessions as an educational opportunity, filling in knowledge gaps and helping to inform and empower the prospective husband and wife. Third, the pastor should discuss the procedural details for the wedding ceremony. Often this is all that the couple wants from premarital counseling, but they should receive the complete package.

At one point in my ministry, nearly 10 percent of the people who attended my premarriage seminars decided either to postpone the wedding or to cancel it completely. That troubled me at first. I have since come to believe that perhaps a service of love was being performed for those couples who decided against immediate union. Far better to admit a mistake and extricate oneself than to complicate matters by forging ahead. Pastoral marriage counselors can save themselves much future, painful labor by doing a thorough job of premarital counseling.² Ensuring that marriages

get off to a strong start may be one of the most significant contributions the pastoral marriage counselor can make.

Hear both sides

Proverbs 18:17 reminds us that “the first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (NKJV). When the pastoral marriage counselor provides guidance for only one of the marriage partners, it is nearly impossible to provide successful intervention. Marriage involves mutual need satisfaction, making it imperative that the counselor hear from both partners.

I have found it helpful to begin counseling with both partners, even if eventually some separate sessions may be helpful. Usually it is a good idea to permit the one who appears the more reluctant about coming to counseling to be the first to speak. If the counselor has already spoken with the other spouse, it may be helpful to inform the spouse who was absent about what you as a counselor know from the preliminary interview.

In hearing both sides of the story, the counselor should maintain a spirit of helpful neutrality. Counselors are not referees. They should respond to what is said in the counseling sessions, pointing out from time to time what seems consistent with the Word of God and common sense. But counselors should not dominate the sessions with their verbiage. Counselors are there to listen, to hear, to facilitate, to explore, to enable. This process has a greater chance of success when counselors possess a sanctified objectivity that compels them to get the complete picture, to hear both sides of the story so that both spouses as individuals know they have been listened to and heard.

Refuse to play the blame game

Marriage counseling can easily degenerate into frenetic sessions in which the partners launch blame at each another. When marriages are in trouble, such attempts to establish blame are inevitable. Rarely does a husband or wife view their marital problems primarily from the perspective of what he or she has contributed when it comes to triggering difficulties. Interestingly, even when one spouse will admit to some misdeed, he or she may blame the other partner for making the destructive behavior necessary.

Spouses play the blame game for a variety of reasons. If it can be established that the marital problems are primarily the fault of the other partner, it probably provides an excuse for the “innocent” one not changing. This denial of personal responsibility can make one partner the scape goat for all that is bad in the marriage.

But wise pastoral therapists will refuse to tolerate the blame game, because this game makes it difficult to produce win/win solutions to serious problems. If counselors allow the couple to continue their blaming exchanges, an unending seesaw battle of attack and counterattack ensues. Usually by the time the couple reaches the pastoral counselor, they are already proficient in this form of combat.

Competent pastoral helpers refuse to reinforce blame game behavior. They will interrupt, intervene, teach, or redirect the interaction so that constructive changes can occur. I have found it helpful to encourage each partner not to focus on how bad the other spouse is, but rather to discuss calmly what behavior

has occurred that affected him or her negatively. I seek to teach them the difference between confrontation and assault. Confrontation identifies the behavior and its effects. Assault judges or evaluates the behavior to the detriment and diminishment of the other partner.

Understand the counseling process

Charles Stewart, in his book *The Minister as Marriage Counselor*, defines marriage counseling in this way: "Marriage counseling is a process in which a counselor helps persons, couples, or families to make plans and to solve problems in the area of courtship, marriage, and family relations. It is a phase of the general sphere of counseling; however, the problems dealt with are in the area of courtship, marriage, and family relations."³ Notice that the counselor doesn't solve the problems but serves as a facilitator.

In the same volume (pp. 82, 83) Charles Stewart gives five realistic goals of marriage counseling that provide us with insights into the counseling process:

- Marriage counseling is limited to current problems in relationships between marriage partners.
- The counselor helps the couple to begin to communicate feelings to one another again.
- The counselor helps the couple to adjust to certain situations in the marriage which cannot be changed, including each other's character traits.
- The counselor helps the couple to play down personal goals and to work toward ones which are mutually set.
- The counselor aids each partner to understand the other and his/her role in the marriage, such counseling giving him/her opportunity to adjust to what the mate and the marriage demands. Stewart concludes, "This is the nub of marriage counseling: the understanding of each other's role images and role relations."

The marriage process, therefore, involves a focus upon current challenges, enhancing communication and conflict resolution skills, facilitating a cooperative spirit, and assisting with a better understanding of marital roles. An understanding of this process is critical for those who seek to empower others to improve their marriages.

Master the discipline

Counseling has developed into a multifaceted discipline, and conscientious pastoral marriage counselors will acquaint themselves with the nuances of this field. Numerous research studies in the marriage and family area of psychology can inform pastoral counselors in their work.

For example, research has shown that nonverbal as well as verbal cues from counselors can facilitate the therapeutic process. The acronym SOLER is used to describe the way counselors' nonverbal communication can enhance the counseling experience:

- Squarely: Sit facing the counselee squarely.
- Open: Assume an open stance with uncrossed legs and arms.
- Lean: Lean forward.
- Eyes: Make eye contact.
- Reflect: Reflect the feelings you hear from the client.

The counselor serves as a sounding board, providing a

nonjudgmental counseling environment in which options can be explored with spiritual sensitivity and objectivity.

Focus on goals

Research has also shown the importance of goal-setting in counseling. Instead of focusing on marriage problems, most of the counseling encounter should involve proactively examining the direction the marriage should take and how to get on the right road. Michele Davis writes: "We believe that people know themselves best and that they are the experts on what needs to change, not the therapist. So when therapy begins, clients are asked, 'What is it that you would like to change?'" and this is the starting point in therapy. If couples complain of fighting about how time is spent, solutions to this complaint are sought. No underlying problem is assumed, no complicated meaning is attributed to the fighting. The goal as it is defined by the client is the goal for therapy."⁴ Focusing on goals also keeps the counseling experience from degenerating into the blame game; it accentuates the positive, overcoming evil with good (see Rom. 12:21).

Teach coping skills

Often the pastoral marriage counselor must educate people about how to accept the things they cannot change and how to cope when one's spouse will not change. This sometimes includes teaching people what not to do, as well as what to do. Learning to cope can mean developing more realistic expectations. Some people expect marriage to do too much; they want their spouse to change while they remain the same. This often involves more of a "control issue" than a genuine need.

Often a marriage characterized by challenging differences can be helped by improving the communications. Michele Davis recommends teaching couples how to communicate better through "the structured fight." Often communications break down in marriage because both parties attempt to talk at the same time and no one is listening. This habitual sparring style can be interrupted by the structured fight. The steps are very simple:⁵

1. Toss a coin to decide who talks first.
2. The winner gets to vent for 10 uninterrupted minutes.
3. Then the other person gets a 10-minute turn.
4. Then there needs to be 10 minutes of silence before another round is started with a coin toss.

This simple tactic and others like it, from the empirical research of counseling theory, can be used by the pastoral counselor to enhance marriages.

Learning to cope may involve teaching people to appreciate their differences. Differences that are not immoral, unbiblical, or unethical should be respected. When a person appreciates his or her spouse's differences, it is an affirmation of his or her loved one's significance.

Build a healing community

The pastoral marital counselor has an obligation to be proactive. A part of being proactive entails working to create a supportive and healing community that will nurture relationships. This may mean providing a substantive ministry to singles, helping to prepare them to make quality choices

regarding marriage. This may mean sponsoring marriage enrichment training that will improve relationships that are already doing well. This may mean training laypersons in counseling, so that people can help one another. We must not wait for the storm to strike and then react. We must diligently prepare people for inevitable challenges by building healing communities.

Strengthen the family

Proactive pastoral marriage counselors will also seek to strengthen families. Many marriage problems are exacerbated by family and parenting issues, and the same counselor who prepares people in the premarriage setting should be interested in the family. He or she should assiduously seek to improve and empower families, strengthening the cords between parents and children.

Some people think children help make a marriage stronger. This is often not the case. Often children can place additional strains on an already shaky marriage. Many couples who hoped having children would help make the marriage stronger discover that "bundles of joy" can add to the load.

In an effort to strengthen parents to bear that load, pastoral counselors can offer family life training, stressing assertive Christian parenting skills. Couples should be challenged to "walk the walk." Children learn about our real priorities more from our actions than from our words.

Pastoral marriage counselors can also encourage couples to make God's Word relevant to their children. Parents and children should read the Bible together. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 states: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on our heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (NASB).

These 10 commandments can provide a springboard for launching more effective approaches to pastoral marriage counseling. We must know the times as we seek to maximize premarital opportunities. Remember to hear both sides, while refusing to play the blame game. Continue to gain a deeper understanding of the counseling process, becoming a lifelong student of the discipline. Keep counseling focused on goals, while helping people to accept the things they cannot change. Strive to build a healing community that will include strong families. Like the Decalogue, the fulfillment of these commandments is love. ■

¹ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1985), pp. 187, 188.

² See Mary Bartusis' *Off to a Good Start* (New York: Donald Fine, Inc., 1991), a guide for engaged couples and newlyweds, written by a practicing psychiatrist for 32 years, with a specialty in marital and sex therapy.

³ Charles Stewart, *The Minister as Marriage Counselor* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), p. 21.

⁴ Michele Weiner-Davis, *Divorce Busting* (New York: Summit Books), pp. 87, 88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

CONTINUING EDUCATION EXERCISE

Ten commandments for improving pastoral marriage counseling

1. Self-administer the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis Test. This test allows husbands to describe their wives and wives their husbands. If you are married, ask your spouse to take the test as well and discuss your findings. This instrument is an excellent tool for premarital counseling.

2. Develop the schedule for a Marriage Enrichment weekend. Use as a resource for this project a book like Larry Hof and William R. Miller's *Marriage Enrichment, Philosophy, Process, and Program* (Bowie, Md.: Robert Brady Co., 1981). The schedule should include an arrival time, introductions, goal-setting activities, communication skills sessions, and enough activities to go from Friday at 7:00 p.m. to Sunday at 6:00 p.m. Please include some free time for the couples.

3. Remember your most challenging pastoral marriage counseling experience and outline the strengths and weaknesses of that intervention.

4. Read the prayer of Francis of Assisi ("Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.") and then write an essay on how this can be the counselor's prayer.

Suggested reading

Billie Ables, *Therapy for Couples* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984). This book emphasizes a family approach to counseling that is extremely effective. It is based upon wonderful research and clearly explains the nature of marriage and the phases of couple therapy.

Michele Weiner-Davis, *Divorce Busting* (New York: Summit Books, 1991). This book is an excellent primer in a revolutionary and rapid program for marital intervention. It is based upon a cognitive approach to marriage counseling.

Frank M. Datilio and Arthur Freeman, eds., *Cognitive Behavioral Strategies in Crisis Intervention* (Robbinsdale, Minn.: Guilford Press, 1994). This book introduces the cognitive approach to counseling, which can be extremely helpful in the marriage counseling setting. Pastoral counselors can benefit from a knowledge of cognitive behavioral theory.

Timothy Foster, *Called to Counsel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986). This book provides a capsule course in counseling, discussing counseling do's and don'ts in an easily understandable format. Foster is a Ph.D. and licensed psychologist.

Larry Hof and William Miller, *Marriage Enrichment* (Bowie, Md.: Robert Brady Co., 1981). This book provides everything you may ever need to know about the marriage enrichment movement, discussing the philosophy, the process, the target population, and the research on marriage enrichment.

Christians and the homosexual

J. Grant Swank, Jr.

What do real Christians do when confronted with a spiritually fallen world?



J. Grant Swank, Jr., is the pastor of the Church of the Nazarene, Windham, Maine.

They're rude, lewd, and obscene!" a Christian friend said to me about the gay protesters marching down the city streets.

A parishioner handed me a videotape of gays staging scenes publicly in order to get attention for their goals.

A political leader asked me to assist in "cleaning up our society" of the "gay debris."

I visited a church in Texas recently. The bulletin said that the congregation was "inclusive" and championed "diversity"—two buzzwords indicating the uncritical welcome of homosexuals. I immediately understood the code language.

I read daily letters to the editor of our local paper. The war goes on: pro-homosexual letters versus con. Sometimes I think the page is going to catch fire.

A cousin of mine is dying today of AIDS. He contracted the disease through a blood transfusion, but some people clearly wonder if that is indeed how he was infected.

The dean of a cathedral in our city goes on television to endorse pro-gay agendas before the voters.

The all-gay chorus is invited to sing in a popular sanctuary nearby. A clergywoman will provide the invocation to the proceedings.

It puzzles me what all the fuss is about. I am a Christian. I can deal with this. I do not need a seminar to clarify my ethics. I do not need to listen to some speaker from California clean out my head on the subject. Nor do I need all those books from publishing houses setting forth moral positions. And I wondered . . .

I wondered: Does the religious community snarl with others with whom we disagree? Do we put up our dukes against the alcoholic, the promiscuous

teen, the thrice-divorced man five pews back? Do we cut on the kid with the ponytail or the man with tattoos all over his arms?

The Christian does not snub these people. Love is not "rude" (1 Cor. 13:5, RSV). Instead, the Christian puts out the carpet for the lost and the weary, the sinful and the wayward.

So why not the homosexual?

So when the newspaper blasted the religious community for its aloofness regarding gays, I immediately wrote that we were welcoming them. Why? Because we have an "alternative lifestyle" that they just might want to consider. Not all of them, after all, are totally convinced of "their way." Some of them are even embarrassed by the shenanigans put on in their name. And there are others who are just plain confused and lonely. They may even be quite tired.

The Christian cannot afford to put up fences or pass by on the other side of the road. He cannot simply play denial—"I don't see a homosexual; do you see a homosexual?" "Love is patient and kind" (verse 4, RSV).

Granted, there is sin on all sides—gossip, live-ins, bickering in churches, intemperance with food and alcohol, fornicating homosexuals and heterosexuals, meanness on church boards, pornography, and illicit sex on church-related campuses.

So what do real Christians always do when confronted with a spiritually fallen world? They put out the welcome sign: "Come on in, all you who are weary and burdened down. *There is another way.* Christ provides it. Jesus has come to reveal the way of light and love and peace and holiness."

Is that compromising the gospel message? I think not. ■

A cry from the valley of death

Bruce Moyer

**A young man
talks frankly about
what it means to
experience the
agonies of
homosexuality
and AIDS**



Bruce Moyer, STD, is the associate director of the Institute of World Mission, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. The name of the interviewee, "Ron," is a pseudonym.

Moyer: *Ron, were you brought up a Seventh-day Adventist?*

Ron: Yes, I was raised in an Adventist home. Both my parents were Adventists. I attended Adventist schools from first grade to college. The school experience was not a happy one for me, perhaps because of the secret consciousness of what was developing within me. Living in the Adventist school system was a very painful experience. In college I studied theology for the first three and a half years, and then dropped out. Later I completed nursing and worked as a nurse.

Moyer: *When did you discover that you were a homosexual? How did this make you feel?*

Ron: Well, when I was around 5 or 6 years old, I felt that I was different from others. I didn't have a name for it at first, but around 10 or 12 I realized what these differences meant. It was a very painful experience. It was not something I wanted. It was not something I had chosen. For years I tried to make it not so.

Moyer: *How did you deal with this realization?*

Ron: I couldn't speak to anyone about my feelings. I was convinced that if anyone knew, I would be subject to prejudice and hatred. I didn't know how common homosexuality was. I thought I was probably the only one in the world. So I lived in an atmosphere in which I always had to hide. I repressed my feelings. It was awful.

Moyer: *You had nobody with whom you could discuss your feelings?*

Ron: No. I certainly couldn't discuss it with my parents. The church? At that time my concept of the church was that it was not a safe place to discuss such an issue.

Moyer: *No pastor seemed safe enough?*

Ron: No. There was no one to go to.

Moyer: *Do you think homosexuality is fairly common in the Adventist Church?*

Ron: I'm no expert, but it seems that within the Adventist Church the ratio is about the same as in the general population, and that's about 1 in 10. Regardless of figures, the reality is that there are people within the church struggling with homosexual issues.

Moyer: *Is there any help for homosexuals in the Adventist Church?*

Ron: What do you mean by help?

Moyer: *Does the church today have any place in its structure or any place in its doctrinal understanding that a person with a homosexual orientation can go and say, "I need to deal with this"?*

Ron: Homosexuality doesn't seem to be a topic that the Adventist Church is comfortable discussing. The only option available to me was to stay in the church and pretend that I was "normal." Or else go way out there. Unfortunately I chose the latter. When I was in the system, there was no room to discuss sexual issues at all, let alone homosexual problems.

Moyer: *You've heard of the change ministries that claim that homosexuals can be changed into heterosexuals? What do you think of this claim?*

Ron: I don't know a lot about the change ministries. I have had some very bad experiences with people from change ministries. I don't feel comfortable with their focus, because I don't feel comfortable telling God what His will is. In my case the most eloquent thing I can do is to submit my sexuality to God and let Him tell me what's

appropriate, instead of me telling God what's appropriate and that He needs to change me into a heterosexual.

Moyer: *Do you know of any people who have actually ceased being homosexual and have become heterosexual?*

Ron: Not personally. I've heard of some, but I think the real question is a little more complex than that, because human sexuality is not so cut and dried. One can't say that someone is 100 percent homosexual or 100 percent heterosexual. There are people with all levels and mixtures of the two. And so it's difficult to say someone has been changed. Some may find it possible to live a heterosexual lifestyle, but that may not be true for all people. I don't really feel comfortable with a measuring stick that tells you when you've graduated from the school of healthy sexuality.

Moyer: *I understand that you've had some contact with an organization known as Kinship. What do you think of their work?*

Ron: Part of their work was very

good, and part of it was very painful. They are doing something that the Adventist Church is not doing, and that is to create a forum for those with homosexual issues. I don't agree with their conclusions on what's appropriate behavior. So my relationship with Kinship has been somewhat difficult.

Moyer: *Does Kinship promote a response of uniformity or variety?*

Ron: From my limited experience with Kinship I would say a variety of responses. Within Kinship there are those who feel that the best way to deal with homosexuality is celibacy. At the other end of the spectrum are people who feel that promiscuity and everything is healthy and OK. I have really felt uncomfortable with a lot of these positions.

Moyer: *You've recently been reconciled, I think that's the right term to use, with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

Ron: I came back to God through a 12-step recovery. I never expected to return to Adventism, and quite frankly I was not amused when God suggested

it. However, the reason I have come back to the church is that there are important issues that are unique to Adventism, such as observance of Sabbath and the health message, that are important to me. The Adventist Church has a tremendous amount of truth. I've not always been comfortable with how they have chosen to use this truth. So it's been kind of difficult for me to come back.

Moyer: *You are very open in your views about the church and homosexuality. In the light of this openness, how have you been received by Adventists?*

Ron: It depends upon which generation we're talking about and what area of the country. I've had a number of different responses, although people have never been unkind to me. By and large my parents' generation can't deal with it. What usually happens is that a wall goes up and they become very uncomfortable and run as fast as they can the other way. I've been very well received by college-age Adventists. They've been very supportive of me,

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and they can see the valuable me inside, even if they don't necessarily feel comfortable with all of my life experiences.

Moyer: Now, you have AIDS. When did you discover this?

Ron: In the fall of 1985 I found out that I was HIV positive. It is possible I was infected in the spring of 1984. And this was back when we hardly even knew about the disease.

Moyer: This sudden discovery that you had AIDS—how did you cope with this? How did this affect your daily life?

Ron: At first I lived in denial. Because AIDS is an unusual disease and remains dormant in the system for many, many years after one is infected with HIV, one tends to ignore the problem. When I first found out about my HIV infection, the opinion in the medical community was that probably only 3 to 10 percent of those who were infected would go on to have full-blown AIDS. So at the beginning it wasn't much of a threat to me. I just

kind of pushed the whole thing to the back of my mind. The reality, of course, was different: almost all who are infected with HIV eventually develop AIDS. That reality hit me harshly.

If I had not come back to God through recovery, I don't know how I would be dealing with it at this point. It is so devastating, emotionally and otherwise. The concept of dealing with one's death while in one's mid-30s is not a normal task. In addition, there is society's outlook on the disease and the way it judges AIDS patients. I've also had to deal with a lot of physical limitations and many changes in my life.

Moyer: As you struggled with the disease, what factors helped you the most?

Ron: The 12-step program has been most useful in dealing with the illness as well as recovering from sexual addiction. But I can't really separate 12-step from my Christian experience. An appropriate understanding of the

gospel has really helped me in dealing with my mortality.

Moyer: That's a beautiful statement. As you reflect on your experience, what should the church do for those who suffer as you do?

Ron: Officially, the church has not been very helpful to me. In fact, I haven't really sought any help from the church, again because I didn't feel it was a safe place. At the local church level, however, I found acceptance. I can openly talk about the issues of homosexuality and AIDS. As far as what the church "should" do, it's a tough question. It's hard for me to dictate what's appropriate behavior for someone else.

But perhaps there's something the church could do. We've always said that we are a loving people, and now it seems that we have a chance to prove that. Dealing with AIDS is a very difficult situation, and it raises all sorts of other issues, such as whether or not we feel comfortable with the concept

Continued on page 29

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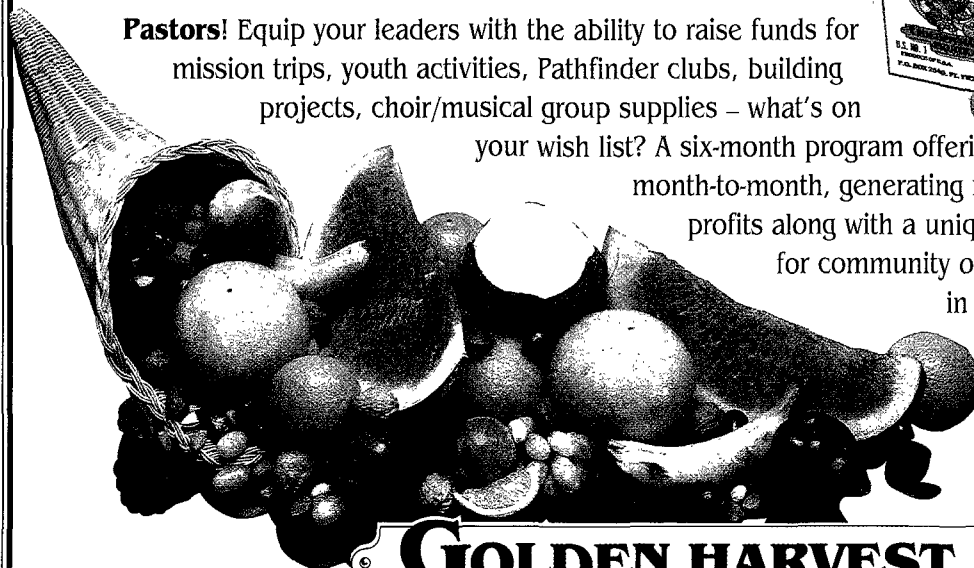
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An interpretive model of ordination from the New Testament data

Keith A. Burton

A recent article in the *Adventist Review* (May 1995) stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not possess a clear theology of ordination. If that is the case, then under what premise have we been ordaining over the past century and a half? I think that what the author meant to say was that the decision to ordain women as elders has obscured the theological basis under which we have conducted ordinations in the past. The semantics behind the charge notwithstanding, I do believe that it is time for the church to revisit systematically the relevant biblical passages that address the issue.

Recent discussions have shown that there is a fundamental difference between ordination and "officiation." Most will agree, to some extent at least, on the universal applicability of ordination, but there is much disagreement concerning both the occupation of and the status assigned to certain offices. The problem is not only fueled by issues of gender, but also enlivened by the hierarchical question. In other words, are there really progressive ordinations for deacons, elders, and pastors? In this article I will attempt to address these issues and reevaluate our understanding of ordination in the light of officiation.

Biblical teaching on ordination

Ordination is a public recognition that a person possesses the spiritual gifts necessary for leadership ministry. The nature of the New Testament church

necessitates that we not interpret its organizational structure in the shadow of the Israelite priestly system that had its locus in the Temple. Rather, the early church was structured along the lines of the diasporic synagogues with its localized organizations.

In the early Christian congregations, members who demonstrated a spiritual ability to lead were so recognized by ordination. Jesus apparently commenced this practice when He selected the 12 disciples to assist Him. Later, as the apostles saw a need for further assistance, others were chosen (Acts 6:1-7). The routine nature of this practice is demonstrated with the ordination of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:2, and their practice of ordaining elders as they established and strengthened local churches (14:23).

One notices in the New Testament that ordination was reserved for those who had specific leadership gifts. Not every gift demanded an official recognition or installation into a church leadership position. From the wording of Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5, it appears that those who were ordained fell under the general category of *presbuteroi* ("elders"). The ordination was not to a specific leadership position such as teacher, apostle, pastor, or evangelist. This observation is further evident in the fact that the apostles Peter and John identify themselves as *presbuteroi* (1 Peter 5:1; 3 John 1). Thus we see that while the church leaders may have performed distinct functions, they all bore the generic designation "*presbuterios*."

Biblical teaching on officiation

Paul informs us of only two recog-

nized ecclesiastical offices in the early church: the episcopate (*episkopos*) and the diaconate (*diakonos*).¹ These positions are categorized as offices, and should not be confused with spiritual "functions" (prophesying, speaking in tongues, administration, evangelism, etc.). The rhetorical placement of *episkopos* ("bishop" or "overseer") before *diakonos* ("deacon" or "minister") in the passages where both offices are mentioned indicates that the episcopate was the highest position. This assertion is supported by the fact that the leader of the local church in the late first and early second centuries is referred to as the *episkopos*. While some may wish to equate the *episkopos* to the contemporary conference-appointed pastor, it is more correct to view this individual as the equivalent of our local church elder. The *diakonos*, on the other hand, was a support person—an assistant pastor or specialized minister.²

Selection of officers from among the ordained

Although the *episkopos* was the "pastor" of the congregation, the office was probably administered by the *presbuterios* ("presbytery" or "board of elders"), which was made up of congregational *presbuterios*. As mentioned above, the term *presbuterios* appears to be a general designation for church leaders, and not the title of a particular office. Since the qualifications for the person who is selected *presbuterios* is similar to that of the *episkopos*, it is safe to assume that the *episkopos* was chosen from among the *presbuterios* (see Titus 1:5-9).

The tendency to view *episkopos* and *presbuterios* as synonyms is probably

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a result of the assumption that both are references to church offices. However, this association is diminished if one accepts that the *presbiterios* comprised a body of people who demonstrated gifts for ministry, only a select number of whom were church officers.

The *presbiterios* were responsible for electing candidates into specific offices (1 Tim. 4:14), and its members were also involved in remunerated ministry (1 Tim. 5:17-22). Since *presbiterios* is a reference to a person, rather than an office, it is possible that the college of *presbiteroi* embodied in the *presbiterios* consisted of potential, current, and retired people who qualified for the offices of *episkopos* and *diakonos*.

An ordination model in the light of officiation

Having established an exegetical basis and the original context for Pauline practice, how shall we relate these words to our ecclesiastical situation as we move toward the twenty-first century?

The honest observer will immediately notice that the current model of ministry in the Adventist Church is considerably different from the biblical one. While our present model consists of a hierarchy that includes elder, deacon, and pastor, an organizational model based on the early church will contain only two levels: bishops and deacons. In fact, while apparently hierarchical, the levels themselves will be detached from the board of elders (presbytery), thus making it an "egalitarian hierarchy." The egalitarian nature of the organization stems from the fact that every member of the board of elders has received the *same* ordination. Further, the person elected to serve as bishop or deacon functions as a representative of the board, and not its ruler.

Additionally, the adoption of a biblical model will move the locus of authority from the administrative levels of the organization to the local church. In the early church, it was the local congregation that endorsed a person's leadership gifts. Similarly, in our time, every person who is elected to head a

department or a special ministry should automatically be ordained as an elder. After all, his or her election has been based on the recognition of certain spiritual gifts. With this change in perspective, what is now called the church board would be correctly defined as the "board of elders" (*presbiterios*).

It is also interesting to note that the New Testament church elected the pastor (*episkopos*) from among the *presbiteroi*. The local congregation was more aware of its own needs than any external committee of centralized bishops. Furthermore, it had the added advantage of assessing more accurately whether or not a certain person exemplified the characteristics of an *episkopos*.

As we move toward the twenty-first century, there is a need to reevaluate the role of the local church in both the ordination and the officiation processes. In fact, in two thirds of the world, the bulk of the pastoral work is already administered by laypeople, and the "head elder" functions as the "pastor." Rather than bemoan the undesirable "pastor-to-church" ratio in many non-Western sections of the church, we need to acknowledge the people's choice of pastor and develop more programs for the formal training of the first elder, who, in a technical sense, is the elected *episkopos* ("bishop in resident").

This is not to say that those who choose to enter the itinerant ministry do not have a place in the biblical organizational model. However, those of us who undergo formal seminary training should be aware of our positions. The elder who is assigned to a church by the conference should recognize that his or her role is that of *diakonos*—assistant to the *episkopos*. Only if the local *presbiterios* so chooses should the conference representative occupy the office of *episkopos*. As with the ministries of Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, and Peter, the task of the conference-appointed elder should be that of evangelist and equipper. This in no way diminishes the essential nature of the function, but it puts things back into a biblical perspective. All in all, the ordination of the conference "elder" is in no way superior to that of

the local elder, and does not automatically lead to installation into the office of *episkopos*.³

At issue: ecclesiology

In conclusion, I think I have established sufficient grounds to support my contention that a theology of ordination must operate vis-à-vis a theology of officiation. Of course, I have operated under the conviction that the administrative model outlined in the New Testament is somewhat paradigmatic for the church in consequent ages. While this conviction raises serious questions about our current organizational structure, it helps to clarify some of the ambiguities that have surrounded the discussion of ordination.

I have also argued that the fact that one possesses certain gifts for ministry does not necessitate that he or she be automatically channeled to the pastorate. The truth is that although all *presbiteroi* possessed the gifts and qualifications for ministry, every one did not serve in the office of *episkopos*. As teachers, evangelists, preachers, administrators, and counselors, their task was to support the work of the *episkopos*. The designation was not an indication of what they did, but who they were. As members of the *presbiterios*, men and women will exercise their spiritual gifts, whether in the official capacity of *diakonos* or *episkopos*, or otherwise.

At issue here is our ecclesiology. How are we to understand and interpret the roles of males and females who have been called to ministry? If indeed the Pauline admonition is to apply to the local congregation, then all who are graced by the Spirit with leadership gifts should be so recognized. The fact that they are called indicates their ordination from God, and the church has the responsibility to see to it that they invest their gifts in the nurturing of the body of Christ. Nonetheless, in affirming the gifts of our brothers and sisters, it is our responsibility to remain within biblical guidelines and not to adopt models that restrict the full ministerial potential of the total membership.

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Caring in the age of AIDS

James A. Cress

My friend and colleague, Eldon E. Carman, who directed the Adventist dental mission program for many years, recently discussed his postretirement ministry of counseling HIV-positive individuals.

Comparing HIV and its resulting AIDS pandemic to leprosy of biblical days, Carman shared his reasons for volunteering 20 hours per week counseling those who seek anonymous testing and who must then wait three weeks to determine whether they face a potential death sentence. "While traveling the world to establish dental clinics, I observed the devastating results of HIV. After my wife's death, I wanted to serve others. If I can help one individual, practically and spiritually, then my efforts will be worthwhile." Carman's work includes specific insights and actions that help churches to minister more effectively in the age of AIDS:

AIDS is not just a homosexual disease. Although the AIDS epidemic in North America spread first and most rapidly among male homosexuals, today the HIV situation mirrors the rest of the world and affects heterosexuals more significantly than we imagine. By the year 2000, more women than men are expected to be infected with HIV. Few congregations and virtually no extended families will remain without having a member infected with HIV.

Knowledge of risk does not prevent the consequences of foolish behavior. Many individuals who come to the dental clinics for HIV testing report that their contact was from a casual sexual encounter, often with their judgment impaired by alcohol. Now they want to

protect their spouse or potential partner from the consequences they fear they have brought upon themselves. Grief and embarrassment at their own foolishness are typical expressions of many heterosexuals. Denial and hopeless fatalism are the reaction of many homosexuals.

Innocent people can be infected with HIV by their irresponsible partners. Today there is little chance of being infected from blood transfusions in North America because of an aggressive campaign to protect the blood supply. But children born to drug users are at great risk, as is anyone who shares an injection needle.

Regardless of how they became infected, individuals with HIV need kindness and empathy. Jesus reached out to those of His day who were infected with leprosy. His followers express His ministry by serving those who suffer this plague. The church must talk about how to prevent HIV and how to minister to those infected. Not everyone with HIV will develop AIDS, but every individual with AIDS has previously contracted the HIV virus. Adults would be amazed at the ignorance of young people about basic facts of anatomy, bodily functions, and sexuality. The church should help parents find ways to teach their youngsters how to live chaste, informed, and responsible lives in a world saturated with temptation and opportunities for immorality.

Love, acceptance, and forgiveness must be communicated. Jesus is just as willing to forgive the sin of judgmentalism as He is the sins of sexual promiscuity. If the church will do Christ's

will, it must love the sinner though despising the sin. The church must provide a safe haven for those who have fallen victim to Satan's temptations and who desire a place to begin again. The followers of Jesus can be supportive of people with problems without condoning their actions. We must communicate the inseparable principles of Jesus that sinners are welcome here and to go and sin no more!

If the church fails to minister, who will communicate God's plan for restoration? Christians have historically provided leadership in health care and education. No less today, the community needs to know that believers are interested in every disease that sin inflicts and that Jesus is the true Balm of Gilead to heal sin-sick souls. One Adventist church participated in a community health fair by distributing HIV prevention pamphlets and drug prevention information.

Support groups offer opportunities to serve. Congregations can host recovery groups, education forums, blood drives, parenting classes, and other community services. Individual members can volunteer in schools, counseling centers, crisis lines, and hospices. AIDS patients are often isolated and lonely. They need food preparation and delivery, assistance with errands, transportation, and simple friendship. Simple actions will communicate Jesus' love. None should wonder whether the church cares about the wider community. The community will readily refer seekers to a church that expresses caring nurture for those in trauma.

Support can be extended to the families of those affected by AIDS.

Many are fearful of what has attacked their own reputation or standing in society as a result of a relative with HIV. Compassionate expressions of understanding friendship may help a frightened fellow member face the uncertain tomorrows for a family member they love. Offering a word of encouragement or sharing a prayer of support is real ministry.

Above all else, it is our privilege to offer hope! Hope for release from sin and abundant life now, and hope for restoration and eternal life at Jesus' return. Blessed hope! Blessed assurance! When the church communicates this hope, it is Christ's body at its best! ■

A homosexual in my congregation?

Continued from page 11

noticed that something seems to be troubling you. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?" It is also important to continue creating opportunities for them to talk; it may take some time before they feel safe enough to discuss what is really on their hearts.

Reassurance. Probably one of the first questions that occurs to Christian parents after discovering that their child is homosexual is Will my child be lost? Usually this is because they do not understand the difference between a homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior.

You can reassure them that God loves and wants to save everyone. He does not hold people responsible for a condition over which they have no choice—only for the way they choose to relate to it. And if they make the wrong choice, they can be led by the Holy Spirit to repent of that choice.

Education. You can help parents understand that the two most important things they can do for their son or daughter are to show the same unconditional love that God showed us while we were yet sinners, and to pray that

the Holy Spirit will work in the life of their child. Often things may get worse before they get better, but a parent's love, understanding, support, and acceptance can hasten their child's reconciliation with God. Many parents feel that unless they are continually reminding their child that what he or she is doing is wrong, they will be seen as condoning sinful behavior, but this only alienates them from their family as well as God. The Holy Spirit can accomplish what we cannot.

My prayer

I believe it will be a sign of our church's spiritual maturity when we recognize that this complex problem affects our church, when we are willing to bring it out into the open and discuss it with honesty and frankness, and when we offer sympathetic support to those who struggle with one of the most confusing and painful of sin's curses on the human race.

How wonderful it would be if our church could lead the way in showing caring, Christian compassion to homosexuals, neither ostracizing them for an orientation over which they have no ultimate control, nor encouraging them to accept something less than God's best for their lives, but instead supporting them with love and understanding as they seek to follow God's will. My prayer is that you, as a pastor, will help to make this happen. ■

*I would recommend starting with Barbara Johnson's *Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy*. If you can keep an open mind and overlook obvious theological differences, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* by Scanzoni and Mollenkott, presents a balanced overview of homosexuality.

A cry from the valley of death

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of homosexuality. The church has no healthy forum where young people can discuss this issue. But we can't wait for an official stance—those of

us who feel compelled to love because of who God is and because of our relationship to Him should be able to work through this issue and find our own ways to reach out to the AIDS community.

Moyer: *As one having AIDS, what do you really expect the church to do?*

Ron: First, the church should be clear about what God says about homosexuality. I do not believe anymore that homosexuality is a healthy lifestyle. Many Adventist churches are not willing to address the issue. There are other churches that are willing. But we aren't willing to talk about the issue at all. I need to belong to a church that's clear about what God's will is in this area, at least what my perception of God's will is in this area.

Second, I need to belong to a group of people who can recognize that there's a valuable person inside here, one whom God loves very deeply. I'm tired of dealing with rejection. It's painful. ■

This interview was adapted from a taped conversation. Since then, Ron has died. We have used a pseudonym to protect "Ron" and his family.

A practical theology of ordination

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¹ See 1 Tim. 3:1ff.; Titus 1:5-9; and Phil. 1:1. See also Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p. 50, who recognize that in 1 Timothy, "the existence of the episcopate and diaconate is presupposed."

² See article by H. W. Beyer, "diakonos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 81-93.

³ Having said this, I am well aware that in light of the wording of Acts 1:14ff., some see the apostles as *episkopoi* (see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* [Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm, 1995], pp. 56f. If this was indeed the case, then the apostles' role would be something like that of a conference president who serves as the general overseer of a certain constituency. However, an examination of the territory covered by the apostles renders it unlikely that their constituency was restricted by geographical boundaries.

1997 Seminary extension courses for North America

Benjamin D. Schoun

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary offers extension courses every year in each union in the U.S. for pastors and church leaders. These courses can be used toward the M.A. in pastoral ministry, the D.Min., or for continuing education. The courses are offered as intensives lasting one week, with some assignments to be completed before, and others after, the class begins.

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intensive on time. 7. Complete the postintensive requirements and send them to your instructor. For further inquiries, call 800-253-2874 and ask for extension 3544, or call 616-471-3544; E-mail: higginsj@andrews.edu; fax: 616-471-6202. For updates on the schedule below, check the CompuServe Adventists On-line Library, section "Schools/Education." ■

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M.A.Min.	Jan. 5-9	CHMN534 Youth Leadership	R. Wisbey
M.A.Min.	May 25-29	CHMN527 Church Leadership and Administration	B. Schoun
M.A.Min.	June 1-5	CHIS674 Development of SDA Theology	G. Knight
Hispanic M.A.Min.	Jan. 5-9	OTST564 Pentateuch	A. Dupertuis
Hispanic M.A.Min.	May 11-15	NTST657 Theology of Hebrews	A. Valenzuela
Hispanic M.A.Min.	May 18-22	MSSN560 Mission to the World	Staff
D.Min.	Jan. 5-9	CHMN720 Current Issues in Youth Ministry	R. Wisbey
D.Min.	May 25-29	CHMN727 Leadership in Church Organizations	B. Schoun
D.Min.	June 1-5	CHMN638 Seminar in Leadership	B. Schoun

Canadian Union—Participants attend the nearest location in the U.S.

Columbia Union—Columbia Union College

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Mar. 16-20	NTST646 New Testament Exegesis: Parables	R. Johnston
M.A.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN524 Introduction to Religion and Society	M. Kis
M.A.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept 4	THST670 Principles of Christian Ethics	M. Kis
Hispanic M.A.Min.	Mar. 16-20	THST619 Principles and Methods of Theology	A. Dupertuis
Hispanic M.A.Min.	Aug. 24-28	GSEM534 Writings of E. G. White	Viera
Hispanic M.A.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept 4	THST627 Roman Catholic Theology	A. Dupertuis
D.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN755 Church and Society	F. Canale
D.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept. 4	CHMN756 Demographics and Urban Studies	B. Moyer

Lake Union—Andrews University, Theological Seminary

M.A.Min.	Feb. 23-27	NTST605 Gospel of John	J. Paulien
M.A.Min.	Sept. 7-11	CHMN524 Introduction to Religion and Society	M. Kis
M.A.Min.	Sept. 14-18	THST670 Principles of Christian Ethics	D. Fortin
Hispanic M.A.Min.	June 16-26	CHIS674 Development of SDA Theology	Staff
Hispanic M.A.Min.	June 30-July 10	CHMN600 Preaching From the NT	A. Valenzuela
Hispanic M.A.Min.	July 14-24	MSSN560 Miss to the World	Staff
D.Min.	Feb. 3-6	CHMN622 Seminar in Personal Evangelism	R. Norton
D.Min.	Feb. 10-13	GSEM790 D.Min. Dissertation Proposal Seminar	A. Valenzuela
D.Min.	Feb. 17-20	THST705 Theology and Practice of Ministry	F. Canale
D.Min.	June 16-19	GSEM790 D.Min. Dissertation Proposal Seminar	R. Wisbey
D.Min.	June 23-26	CHMN735 Strategies for Church Growth	R. Norton
D.Min.	June 30-July 3	CHMN638 Seminar in Leadership	Staff
D.Min.	June 30-July 3	CHMN621 Preaching in Public Evangelism	J. Fowler
D.Min.	July 7-10	CHMN640 Seminar in Pastoral Counseling	Staff

Mid-America Union—Union College

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Mar. 16-20	OTST510 Archaeology and the Bible	D. Merling
M.A.Min.	Aug. 17-21	MSSN606 Church Growth in World Mission	B. Bauer
M.A.Min.	Aug. 24-28	THST678 Science and Religion	J. Baldwin
D.Min.	Aug. 17-21	CHMN667 Health Evangelism	S. Proctor
D.Min.	Aug. 24-28	MSSN735 Strategies for Church Growth	B. Bauer

North Pacific Union—Walla Walla College

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Jan. 12-16	CHMN622 Seminar in Personal Evangelism	R. Norton
M.A.Min.	Aug. 17-21	CHMN505 Biblical Preaching	K. Stout
M.A.Min.	Aug. 24-28	OTST520 Theology of the Old Testament	R. Davidson
D.Min.	Aug. 17-21	CHMN730 Advanced Sermon Design	K. Stout
D.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN710 Seminar in Worship	K. Stout

Pacific Union—Pacific Union College (March), SE California Conference Office (August), Andrews University (Hispanic M.A.Min. Residency courses in June-July)

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Mar. 16-20	CHMN606 Techniques of Church Planting	D. Kilcher
M.A.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN555 Pastoral Counseling	J. North
M.A.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept 4	CHIS688 Contemporary Trends	W. Douglas
Hispanic M.A.Min. at AU	June 16-26	CHIS674 Development of SDA Theology	Staff
Hispanic M.A.Min. at AU	June 30-July 10	CHIS567 Hispanic-American Church History	C. Sepulveda
Hispanic M.A.Min. at AU	July 14-24	MSSN569 Mission to the World	Staff
D.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN665 Advanced Pastoral Counseling	J. North
D.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept 4	CHMN640 Seminar in Pastoral Counseling	J. North

Southern Union—Southern College

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Mar. 9-13	THST629 Ecumenical Trends	D. Fortin
M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Aug. 24-28	CHMN610 Teaching Ministry	R. Moon
M.A.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept. 4	GSEM610 Doctrine of the Sanctuary	R. Gane
Hispanic M.A.Min.	Jan. 19-23	CHMN555 Pastoral Counseling	A. Valenzuela
Hispanic M.A.Min.	May 4-8	THST674 Christian Personal Ethics	A. Dupertuis
Hispanic M.A.Min.	May 11-15	THST605 Doctrine of Christ	A. Dupertuis
D.Min.	Aug. 31-Sept. 4	CHMN623 Innovative Evangelism	D. Newman

Southwestern Union—Southwestern Adventist College

M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Jan. 19-23	THST636 Doctrine of Righteousness by Faith	P. van Bemmelen
M.A.Min. and D.Min.	Aug. 3-7	CHMN610 Teaching Ministry	W. Ferris
M.A.Min.	Aug. 10-14	NTST667 New Testament Theology: Ecclesiology	R. Johnston
D.Min.	Aug. 10-14	CHMN623 Innovative Evangelism	N. Satelmajer

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Pointers for guest preachers

You're invited to preach at a local church. It's your first time there. You know very few if any of the congregation. The make up, the history, the peculiarities of this congregation are not familiar to you.

Here are a few suggestions which will help to prepare you for your appointment.

Before the appointment, communicate adequately with the pastor, head elder, or church secretary as to your sermon title, Scripture reading, and possible appropriate hymns.

1. Be on time. Arrive at the church early enough to become acquainted with the physical layout (just in case the building catches on fire from your preaching) and to meet and greet people. Remember, they're part of your family!

2. Pick up a bulletin. Read it thoroughly. Note the order of service. Find out whether you are to offer the invocation or benediction. Talk it over with the pastor, or elder in charge. Don't try to wing it. Do others stay on the platform during the sermon? How do you close? How do you exit the rostrum?

3. Bring an offering.

4. Always assume non-SDAs will be sprinkled throughout your audience. Speak so they will understand everything.

5. Prepare your message with sections which could be included or excluded in case of a time factor adjustment or glitch in schedule. Don't go on and on after 12:00 when people are used to getting out at noon. Ask the

question beforehand, When do I close?

6. If you quote the Spirit of Prophecy, identify the author. Use a variety of identification phrases such as, "An early SDA pioneer, Ellen White, noted, . . ." or "The author of a popular Adventist book on the life of Christ entitled *Desire of Ages* stated . . ."

7. Do not chastise the church.

8. If you plan to make an altar call or ask for some kind of physical response, let the pastor know before the service.

9. Do not utilize illustrations which might elicit great pain (e.g., suicide stories).

10. Focus on encouragement. Remember when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch in Pisidia and went into the synagogue?

The elders said, "Brothers, we want you to speak to the people if you have a message of encouragement for them" (Acts 13:15, TEV). Elders still seek such.

11. Choose terminology known by nonmembers. Delete SDA buzzwords such as Ingathering, Spirit of Prophecy, The Third Angel, The Three Angels' Messages, Dorcas Society, Sister White, The Red Books, etc.

12. Be sparing of giving too much advice, as if you have all the answers. Remember, a short message is much more palatable than one that is unending.

13. If you have a real dramatic sermon, leave it home. Present Jesus, lift Him up, affirm, encourage. Present hope. Give your testimony of how grateful

you are for Jesus Christ and His salvation, His forgiveness, His love. You'll be appreciated and you'll be invited back.—Charles Mitchell, pastor, Palm Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church, Palm Springs, California.

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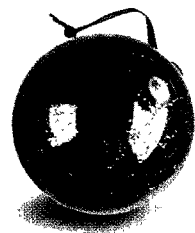
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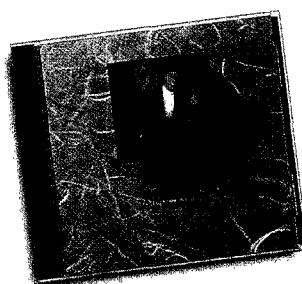
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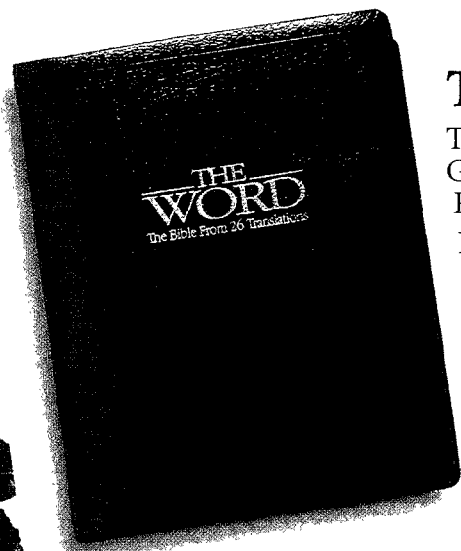
At The Cross
O Glorious Love
Jesus Died For Me
Will You Be Ready
I'd Rather Have Jesus
He Hideth My Soul
The Old Rugged Cross
I Choose Him Today
The Word Is Alive
Just A Closer Walk
...and more!
(1993)



You'll Never Walk Alone
O Magnify The Lord
Because He Lives
My Jesus I Love Thee
Beyond The Rainbow
You'll Never Walk Alone
It Is Well With My Soul
Morning Has Broken
There Is A Fountain
Abide With Me
...and more!
(1991)



We Shall Behold Him
People Need The Lord
My Great Desire
Flee As A Bird
At Eventime
Via Dolorosa
Far Beyond The Sun
The Love Of God
We Shall Behold Him
The Holy City
...and more!
(1990)

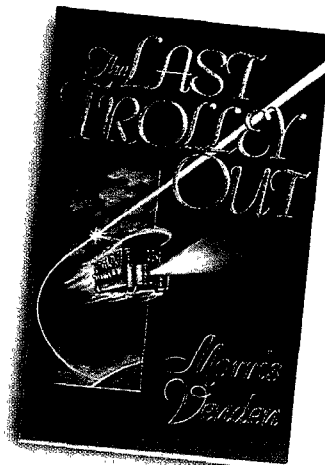


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