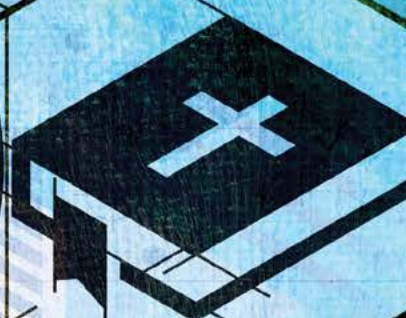




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INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS



Designed for mission:

Seventh-day Adventist Church
structure and operating procedures

PAGE 6

12

WHO'S THE BOSS—THE
PASTOR, CONGREGATION,
OR CONFERENCE?

16

PASTOR, ARE YOU ON
BOARD?

20

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06

Designed for mission: Seventh-day Adventist Church structure and operating procedures

LOWELL C. COOPER

How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church smoothly move forward in Christ's mission as a global organization? Learn about the skeleton of the church.

12

Who's the boss—the pastor, congregation, or conference?

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER

What is the relationship between the pastor, local congregation, and conference? The answer may surprise you.

16

Pastor, are you on board? Ethical and legal responsibilities of board members

KARNIK DOUKMETZIAN

We all serve on boards and generally know our responsibilities, but this in-depth look into boards and their members may be a lifesaver someday.

20

A bird's-eye view of leadership styles

CRAIG CARR AND JOSEPH KIDDER

A unique evaluation of leadership styles through the eyes of birds.

24

A leader's role in funding large-scale projects: Visiting three biblical examples

ANIEL BARBE

Large-scale projects are needed at times in our churches. How can the Bible's counsel help guide them?



EDITORIAL | 4
ERTON C. KÖHLER



PASTOR'S PASTOR | 11
RAMON J. CANALS



DATELINE | 28



RESOURCES | 29
JAELE VALIAME NOEL



PRACTICAL POINTERS | 30
AUDREY ANDERSSON

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

A divine gift

During a televised interview with the president of a large denomination in Brazil, I heard a remarkable comment: “The way the Seventh-day Adventist Church is organized is a model.” The speaker went on to explain how he studies the Seventh-day Adventist Church in detail and incorporates many of our procedures into his denomination. His admiration made me reflect: Do Adventist pastors truly appreciate and understand the gift we have in our church structure?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was not founded to fossilize over time. It is a prophetic and eschatological movement initiated by God. The church’s theology propels missions and demands effective organization. While our pioneers initially resisted the idea of formal structure, the complexities of growth and mission challenges led them to organize the church officially on May 21, 1863, after much prayer, discussion, and God-inspired advice. This step allowed the church to manage its properties, address theological issues, support itinerant preachers, and fulfill its mission more effectively.

Ellen White was emphatic in defending that decision and its impact on the future of Adventism. “Let none entertain the thought that we can dispense with organization. It has cost us much study and many prayers for wisdom, that we know God has answered, to erect this structure. It has been built up by His direction, through much sacrifice and conflict. Let none of our brethren be so deceived as to attempt to tear it down, for you will thus bring in a condition of

things that you do not dream of. In the name of the Lord I declare to you that it is to stand, strengthened, established, and settled.”¹

A movement with a mission

In a world increasingly skeptical of institutions, some argue that Jesus founded a movement, not an organization. Yet, it is said that “Jesus founded an organized movement.” The early Christian church relied on some form of organization to accomplish its mission, and the same is true for the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Without its structure, the Adventist Church could not have grown from 3,500 members in 1863 to nearing 23 million across 212 countries and territories today. History shows that other movements also emerged from Millerism. But lacking strong structures, they failed to develop in the same way.

The blessings of structure

The Adventist Church’s structure is a divine gift. It is comprehensive, balancing local and global needs while investing in the church’s wholistic development through various departments. This structure fosters unity, preventing local isolation and making the church stronger and more representative.

For pastors, one of the greatest advantages is the protection it offers to ministry. The church’s compensation plan eliminates financial disparities and ensures pastors are not dependent on generating their own income. It also safeguards properties and promotes financial transparency.

Additionally, our structure is representative, empowering local churches, involving different areas and people in its committees, and regularly evaluating leaders at every level.

More significantly, our structure strengthens fidelity to God's Word through an integrated care for theology and message. It also facilitates involvement in local and global missions, ensuring that we remain focused on catching fish, not consumed with caring for aquariums.

The challenges of structure

If misused, the benefits of our structure can become liabilities. Distraction is a common challenge, where priorities are inverted and bureaucracy, formalities, events, buildings, and business or personal interests become priorities. Secularization is another danger, where personal opinions and social acceptance take precedence over biblical truth. Finally, institutionalism—a shift from a living movement to a static monument—threatens to destroy the vitality of the church.

To mitigate these risks, our structure must remain dynamic, mission-focused, and firmly grounded in Scripture. Pastors play a crucial role in ensuring this balance.

Embracing unity

Unity is vital, especially in this challenging time. As Paul exhorted, we must move forward “united in thought and purpose” (1 Cor. 1:10, NLT). The allegory of the porcupines offers a valuable lesson in unity. During a harsh winter, a group of porcupines decided to get together for warmth but soon hurt each other with their quills. They moved apart, only to face the cold again. Ultimately, they chose to stay together, learning to live with the small wounds for a greater good. Similarly, as pastors and administrative leaders, we must embrace the minor challenges of working together under a unified structure for the sake of our mission.

The structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a divine gift. It equips us to face the complexities of modern ministry while remaining faithful to Scripture and mission. Let us not take this gift for granted. By understanding, appreciating, and utilizing its potential, we can ensure that our church continues to grow as a vibrant, prophetic movement, preparing the world for Christ's soon return.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 27.



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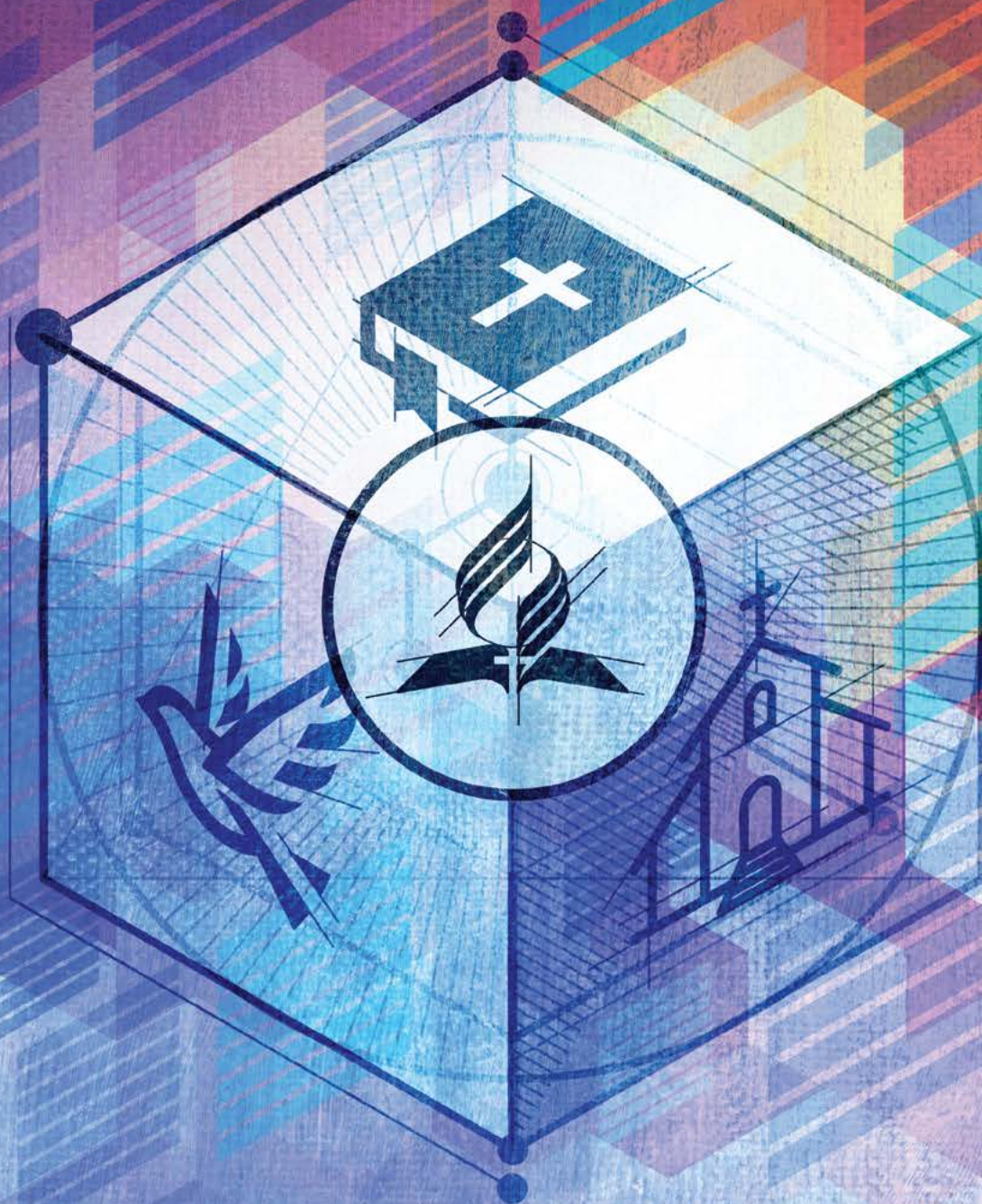
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Designed for mission:

Seventh-day Adventist Church structure and operating procedures



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

The New Testament uses several metaphors¹ to describe the nature of the church, its internal relationships, and its purpose in the mission of God. The apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, summarizes God's plan for the church: "that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10, NASB).

However, the New Testament offers limited information about the church as a global organization or its structure and procedures. One may find guidance concerning the structure and operations of a local church, along with insights about the networking of churches. Still, there is rather minimal information about a global system of organization. This article describes the Seventh-day Adventist (hereafter referred to as Adventist) Church structure and operating relationships among its over 100,000 local churches worldwide.

In the beginning

The Adventist Church grew from a very humble start in the nineteenth century. The idea of a formal organizational structure was, at first, resisted by some of the church pioneers. Their energy and emphasis focused on preaching about Christ's imminent return. However, with growth came the challenges of adopting a formal structure, selecting leaders, owning property, and distributing authority.

About 165 years after the initial steps to formal organization were made, the Adventist Church has grown to a presence in 212 countries and a worldwide membership nearing 23,000,000.²

The organization, governance, and operation of a Christian denomination is described by the term *church polity*. Three common patterns—*episcopal*, *presbyterian*, and *congregational*—fit many different church structures.

Adventist polity does not fit cleanly within any one of these models.³ Although no standard term has been formally adopted, the Adventist Church has been described as having *interdependent functions*. What does that mean?

Ecclesiastical unit nomenclature

The *local church* is the basic unit of the formal Adventist Church structure. A local church is a group of Adventist members who have been granted, by a supervisory level of the structure, status as an official part of the Adventist structure.

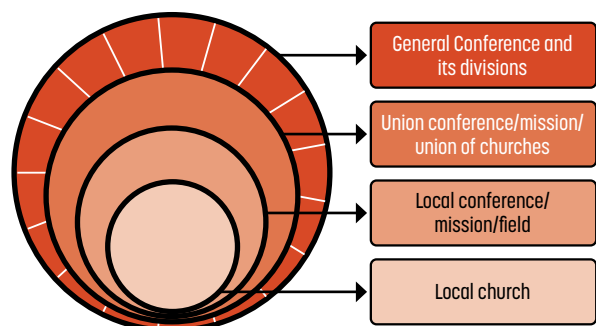
A *local conference* or *local mission/field*⁴ serves as the supervisory and coordinating body for a group of local churches within a defined geographical area. The conference/mission has been granted official status by a supervisory body as part of the denominational structure.

The supervisory and coordinating entity for several conferences within a defined geographical area is called a *union conference* or *union mission*. It also has been granted, by a supervisory body, official status as part of the denominational structure. In certain areas that have less need for both the local and union supervisory structures, this organizational unit may be identified as a *union of churches*.

The *General Conference* represents the largest unit of Adventist Church structure, providing overall supervisory and coordinating functions for unions. The General Conference consists of all the unions worldwide plus any other entities that have been directly attached to the General Conference for geopolitical reasons.

The General Conference has established *divisions* as regional administrative offices that act on behalf of, and in concert with, the General Conference in defined areas of the world.

A visual representation of Adventist Church organization reveals four layers of structure, with each succeeding layer embracing the units within its territory.



Adventist Church Infrastructure—2023

ECCLESIASTICAL		INSTITUTIONAL	
Divisions	13	Education (tertiary, training, secondary)	3,161
Union Conferences	63	Food industries	24
Union Missions	62	Hospitals/sanitariums	244
Union of Churches (Conference)	11	Care facilities (nursing, child, retiree)	151
Union of Churches (Mission)	3	Medical/Dental (clinic/dispensary)	1,840
Local Conferences	433	Media Centers	21
Local Missions	321	Publishing Houses (and branches)	57
GC-attached entities	4	Development/Relief Agency	1
Churches	100,760	Risk Management Agency	2

Special purpose entities

In addition, the Adventist Church structure embraces special purpose entities: schools, colleges, universities, food industries, hospitals, clinics, media centers, publishing houses, development and relief agencies, risk management organizations, corporations for property ownership and retirement fund management, and other specific needs. These organizations are separate from the Adventist Church for legal purposes, but they exist to advance the church's mission.

Key governance and operational principles

Within the Adventist Church structure are several governance and operational concepts that define basic functions and relationships. The principles outlined below illustrate and expand the interdependent model of organization mentioned earlier.

1. *A membership basis for organization.* Every unit of Adventist Church structure has a defined membership (generally referred to as the “constituency”). Local church membership comprises formally accepted members. Membership is not required to attend worship services and local church programs. However, membership, held in only one local church at a time, is required to participate in official decisions and/or to hold elected leadership roles in the local church.
 The membership composition of larger organizational units consists of entities rather than individuals. Local churches, rather than

individuals, form the membership of the local conference. Similarly, the members of a union organization are the entities in that union. The membership of the General Conference consists of unions around the world, plus any local conferences or missions/fields directly attached to the General Conference.

2. *Conferred rather than self-determined status.* Membership in the local church or any other organizational entity is never self-determined. Formal approval by the current members of that body is required to grant membership status to others.
 Membership is not automatically perpetual. Membership obligations, if neglected or contradicted, can lead to membership termination. Such a decision can be made only by the same level of organization that initially approved the membership.
3. *Representative form of governance.* The Adventist Church defines its internal governance as representative in form. Representation is accomplished by member units choosing delegates with voting power to attend constituency sessions for that organization. Governance between constituency sessions is entrusted to the entity's executive committee.
4. *Ultimate authority resides in a group rather than an individual.* Differing levels of authority are widely dispersed. Regardless of the leadership role that a person holds, the authority of an individual is ultimately accountable to a group. An executive committee may entrust authority to an individual, but that individual is always answerable to a group.

The interdependence of Adventist Church functioning is further highlighted by the distribution of authority throughout the organization. Every unit of organization depends on the functioning authority of other organizations. The authority distribution table illustrates examples of specific authority distributed in the Adventist structure.

identities do not mean isolation and independence. Belonging to Adventist Church structure elicits a consciousness of being simultaneously local and global.

Church governance documents

The representative nature of church governance and the distribution of authority

Examples of authority distribution in Adventist Church structure

ENTITY	AUTHORITY—illustrative, not comprehensive
Local church	Membership (admission, discipline, termination) Election of local church leaders and board
Local conference executive committee	Employment and placement of pastors
Union conference executive committee	Ordination of ministers in union territory
Division executive committee	Act on behalf of the General Conference Approve operating policy for missions/fields
General Conference session	Approval of fundamental beliefs Amendments to the <i>Church Manual</i>
General Conference Executive Committee	Adoption/amendment of <i>Working Policy</i>

5. *Shared rather than presidential administration.* Executive responsibility in Adventist ecclesiastical structure is shared among an officer team (generally three individuals: president, secretary, treasurer), with the president considered first among equals. A presidential model of administration may be more evident in church institutions.
6. *Unity of entities based on mission.* All Adventist Church entities see themselves as part of a much larger organization engaged in the mission of God. This mindset instills cooperation and collaboration among diverse branches of organization.
7. *Resource sharing.* The Adventist Church has adopted a system of resource-sharing (both human and financial) that enables individual members, as well as organizational units, to participate in supporting church mission activity far beyond their local boundaries.
8. *Separate identities but not independent.* Church structure recognizes a vast array of entities with separate identities for legal and administrative purposes. However, these separate

throughout the denominational structure are based on foundational governance documents. Of primary importance is the church's commitment to the Bible as its source of understanding in personal and communal life. There is no human authority that supersedes Scripture.

The Adventist Church has summarized its understanding of the Bible in 28 fundamental beliefs.⁵ These statements give definite shape to Adventist doctrine, teachings, and lifestyle while also stimulating further Bible study and fresh articulation of how the Bible is relevant to all times and places.

A third governance document is the General Conference *Working Policy*. The General Conference Executive Committee has been granted the authority to adopt/amend policy. Such policy then serves as "the authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world. . . The General Conference *Working Policy* shall be strictly adhered to by all organizations in every part of the world field."⁶

An updated edition of the General Conference *Working Policy* is published annually.

The Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* serves as a primary governance document for local churches. It addresses the structure and operations of the local church and its relation to the conference in which it holds membership. General Conference *Working Policy* pertains to the structure, operations, and relationships of all other entities.

Additions or amendments to the *Church Manual* can be approved only by a General Conference session. An updated edition of the *Church Manual* is published after each regular session.

Constitutions and bylaws represent the fourth governance document for denominational entities. The General Conference *Working Policy* contains model constitutions and bylaws for ecclesiastical entities (conferences and unions) and model operating policies for missions/fields.

What holds the church together?

With a highly developed global infrastructure that operates in many differing cultural, linguistic, and political environments, a question arises as to what holds the church together. Though precise definitions vary, unity is a primary value to Adventists. Infrastructure design and operating policies contribute significantly to the realization of unity. However, the glue that holds the worldwide Adventist Church together comes primarily from other lines of consideration.

First among these is a commitment to the Bible and the leadership, blessing, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This permits church entities to journey together toward growth, reform, and renewal in understanding, structures, and performance.

Secondly, a collective commitment to worldwide mission helps each person and entity recognize that they cannot accomplish the gospel commission on their own. “Together we can do more” has long served as an engaging invitation to think and act beyond local boundaries.

A third feature that helps bind the Adventist Church together is the long-standing practice of sharing resources—both human and financial. Self-denial on behalf of others is a defining characteristic in the life and ministry of Jesus. The principle of the strong supporting the weak has been a huge blessing to those areas of the world with lesser access to resources needed in church life and mission.

Finally, though the ideal of unity may be elusive, Christ’s followers are called to oneness. This is, ideally, one of the most significant ways that the gospel is portrayed with power to a fractured world. “You are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NASB).

Strength and fragility

The Adventist Church is both strong and fragile. Its strength as a faith-based denomination comes from its dependence on divine resources to transform individuals and communities into practical demonstrations of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Its strength as an organization comes from the collective will to continually pursue best practices for efficiency and effectiveness in mission while being mindful of the interdependence among all entities. Its fragility derives from the ability of any leader, member, or organization to undermine its messaging, values, and code of conduct. A collective mindset and collaborative intent are essential in every member and leader for success in an organization designed for mission.



- 1 Church metaphors in the New Testament include sheep with a shepherd (John 10:14–16); the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22, 23), vine and branches (John 15:5), household of faith (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), family of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 6), children of God (Matt. 5:9; Rom. 9:26; 1 John 3:1–10), a building (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5), and the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7).
- 2 Seventh-day Adventist Church, *2024 Annual Statistical Report*, New Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2024), 106, 110, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2024.pdf>. Figures as of 2023.
- 3 See Denis Fortin, “Church Governance in Times of Conflict,” *Adventist Today*, October 4, 2023, <https://atoday.org/church-governance-in-times-of-conflict-2/>.
- 4 Conference status is the highest level of self-determination for an ecclesiastical entity. Conference status entitles the organization to elect its own leadership. This status also implies that the unit is a net contributor to financial resources outside its territory. Mission or field status connotes an organization with a more limited degree of self-determination.
- 5 The fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists may be accessed on the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) website at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/sdafundamentalbeliefs>.
- 6 *Working Policy* of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2024–2025 edition (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2024), B 15 05 and B 15 10.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to **ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org**.



Seven decisions that will help you live a joyful life

Have you ever had to make a split-second decision? As a pastor you are constantly faced with decisions. Some decisions shape our days, while others define our lives. At times we have the luxury of careful thought. Other times life demands split-second reactions, leaving us with little control over the outcome.

That is what happened as my wife, Aurora, and I drove down the highway headed to a friend's birthday celebration. A large van ahead of us suddenly swerved, revealing a stalled car right in front of us. Then, a woman stepped out from the stalled car, completely unaware of the danger. My heart pounded as I realized I had just a fraction of a second to act. Turning left was a death sentence—oncoming traffic would crush us. Turning right was not an option either—the woman was in the lane, and hitting her was unthinkable. My only shot was to slam on the brakes and pray. That's precisely what I did.

Whether you make a quick decision or one that is carefully considered, decisions shape our lives and determine our destinies. Here are seven decisions that can help you live a joyful life.

1. Decide who controls your life—you or God. If God is in control, then trust Him. As the Scripture says,

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight
(Prov. 3:5, 6).¹

Ellen G. White says, "Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief."²

2. Decide to be grateful every day. Find something for which you are grateful today. The Bible says, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). "Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of

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gratitude and praise."³ Can you think of one or two things for which you are thankful?

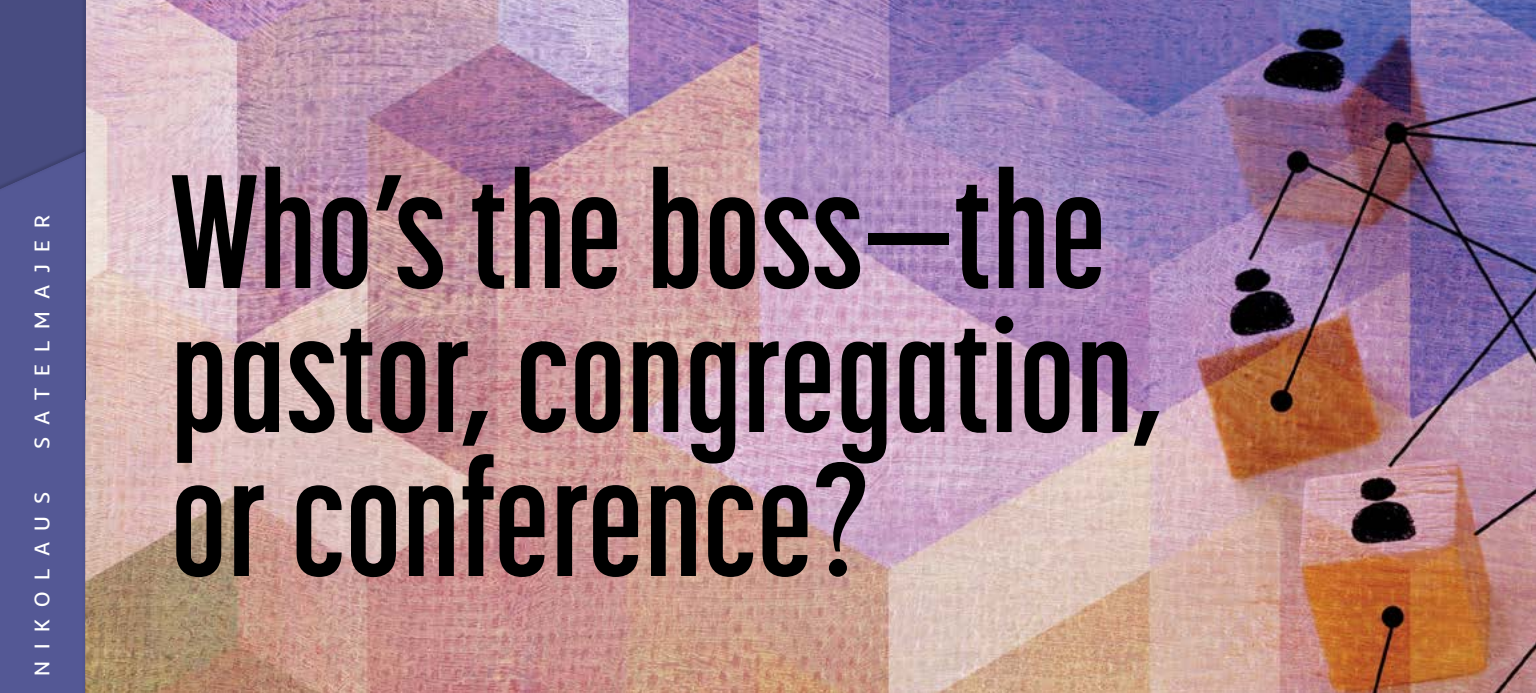
3. Decide to know your purpose and live with purpose. Know God's plan for you and resolve to follow it. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).
4. Decide to enjoy God's presence. Nothing brings more joy to the heart than the presence of God. "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Ps. 16:11).
5. Decide to live a life of service to others with love. The spirit of unselfish labor for others will bring joy. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). "The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character."⁴
6. Decide to practice constant forgiveness. If there is one thing that this world needs, it is more kindness. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).
7. Decide to rejoice in the hope of His second coming despite the circumstances. Knowing that Jesus will come soon to take us home will bring hopeful joy and happiness. "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).

Did I make the right split-second decision on that highway years ago? Our car was totaled, but no one was killed; praise the Lord!

Many years ago I made another decision: I decided to give my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the best decision anyone can make in this life. I invite you to choose to come to Jesus just as you are every day. He loves you and is waiting for you with open arms.



- 1 Scripture is from the New International Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 330.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 251.
- 4 Ellen G. White *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 80.

The background of the page features an abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes in shades of purple, blue, and orange. On the right side, there is a network diagram with black dots representing nodes and thin black lines representing connections between them. Some of these nodes are placed inside the orange and yellow geometric shapes.

Who's the boss—the pastor, congregation, or conference?

Relationships, whether between two individuals or two organizations, can be very complicated. But what about between *three* parties—for example, the pastor, the congregation, and the conference?

Can such a relationship work well in fulfilling the mission of the church, or is it a hindrance? Does it create a climate for tension that leads only to winners and losers?

To explore the relationship between the pastor, the congregation, and the conference, let us review four organizational models that exist in various church organizations.

The-pastor-is-the-boss model

In this model the pastor makes key decisions. Church members may have some input, but the final authority rests with the pastor. In congregations like this, lay members have only advisory input. Megachurches often follow such a model. The past fifty or so years have witnessed a significant increase of churches employing this structure. Such churches may thrive under the leadership of the founding pastor but then decline or disappear when the individual leaves or dies.

Two such examples are Crystal Cathedral in California, United States, established by Robert H. Schuller, and the Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, United States, made famous by Bill Hybels. Schuller tried to find a successor within his family, but eventually the organization filed for bankruptcy. The building is now a Roman Catholic Church known as Christ Cathedral. Accusations of misconduct surfaced against Hybels, and the

congregation has shrunk. Both illustrate what often happens in the model where the pastor is the boss once their founders leave or are forced out.

A similar model also exists in some denominations. I have met with leaders of denominations where it was obvious that each participant only said what would be in harmony with their head leader. Without question, that individual was in charge.


Episcopal model (or the bishop is in charge)

In the episcopal model, churches are led by bishops (or individuals with similar titles) who have the authority to appoint congregational pastors and make other decisions about the organization. The bishops are the final authority, and it is usually assumed that their authority derives from the New Testament apostles. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches are examples, although other denominations also have such leaders.

Historically bishops had charge of several churches, but now we see more instances in which the bishop has only one congregation. The title seems to be more important than the function.

Congregational model (or everyone is in charge)

In the congregational model, the local congregation controls the selection of the pastor, rate of pay, use of property—all aspects of the church. It may be independent or in theological affinity with other churches, but the congregation has final authority over everything. A pastor in such



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

a congregation once told me that each year he had to appear before the board and then the whole congregation to negotiate his salary. In the thirty-plus years he served, some years the congregation actually reduced his salary. Individual members who are major donors often make key decisions—they are in charge!

Representative model (or, Do I have to go to the meeting?)

We now come to the model of governance that the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres to. The key element in its structure is the “conference” (often referred to as the “local” conference). Seventh-day Adventists have hundreds of conferences around the world. The denomination also has “union conferences” that consist of several local conferences. Union conferences make up the General Conference, which is the worldwide organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹

Such a model works best when the elected representatives fulfill their roles because, here, the conference is central in the life of the denomination.

What is a conference?

A conference is an organization made up of congregations in a designated geographic area. Without the churches the conference simply would not exist. The conference is much more than an office staffed with individuals elected to various positions.

It is tempting to take the position that “they” in the conference will do what they want to do.

Such a view is detrimental to the denomination because it simply does not reflect the Seventh-day Adventist structure. *Every* member in the conference territory has a part in the function of the conference. For example, a delegate to a conference session determines who the next leaders will be. Even if, for example, that delegate is not a member of the nominating committee, he or she has the responsibility of voting on the list of candidates recommended by the nominating committee. Even those who are not delegates to the conference session have the privilege and responsibility of voting for those who will represent their congregation. In other words, every church member has input in the process of electing conference leaders and management.

The conference, thus, is not “them”; it is “us.” Without church members the conference would not exist. It is vital that church members realize the crucial role they fulfill as members of a congregation and in sending delegates to conference sessions.

In this model the final authority rests with the constituency, and the majority of the constituency consists of church members who are not employees of the denomination. Pastors, teachers, and other denominational employees do not, as a group, elect the conference president and other leaders. They participate in the election process, but the majority of delegates are not employees. The president (and other elected leaders) is ultimately accountable to the constituency, and between conference sessions, accountability is to the conference executive

committee. The executive committee has defined authority as specified in the conference constitution and by-laws. It is also ultimately responsible to the conference constituency.

It is important to realize that the conference is an organization of individual churches. Churches are member groups that have asked to be both organized as a church and members of a conference.² Delegates from the existing congregations in the conference, by vote, accept new groups as organized churches. The newly organized church has the same privileges and responsibilities as the other ones in the conference. In other words, the conference is one body with many parts. The parts are congregations and other entities (schools, camps, etc.) that then make up the entire conference.

Such a structure has enabled the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be a truly worldwide movement. It is one of the few denominations that accepts the entire world as its mission field.

Tithing

What is it that makes such a worldwide approach to mission possible? At times I have noticed in congregational bulletins a statement like this: "All tithe goes to the conference." Technically that statement is correct, but functionally it is not. The implication is that the congregation does not benefit from the tithe returned by members. Actually the tithing system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is foundational to the mission of the church. By pooling the tithe of all the churches in a conference, we are able to fulfill a worldwide mission. Without the tithe-sharing system we would not be the denomination that we are.

In a conference where I worked, out of the eighty-some churches, two of the churches were responsible for about 20 percent of the tithe in the *entire* conference. Our system of tithe sharing meant that small congregations in that conference had pastoral leadership because of the large amounts of tithe from two congregations. Furthermore our tithe-sharing system not only spreads the tithe within a conference but also shares it worldwide.

Such a system has provided stability and fairness in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It enables pastors to receive the same salary regardless of the size of the congregation.³ Very few other denominations have such a system. In some denominations or independent congregations, some pastors receive less than a living wage, while others get huge salaries.

That disparity does not exist in the Seventh-day Adventist system.

The pastor and the conference

In the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, the pastor is an employee of the conference assigned to a particular church or multichurch district.⁴

The *Church Manual* states, "Because the pastor is appointed to the position in the church by the conference, the pastor serves the church as a conference employee, is responsible to the conference executive committee, and maintains a sympathetic and cooperative relation to and works in harmony with all the plans and policies of the local church."⁵

While the conference executive committee appoints pastors, the conference leaders may seek input from the congregation needing a pastor.⁶ The pastor works under the supervision of the conference president. Conference presidents usually have other individuals who assist them in the fulfillment of various responsibilities, but the president is the chief elected leader.

During my years as a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I found it helpful to have planned meetings with the conference president once or twice a year. It opened channels of communication and helped me in fulfilling my role as pastor. Also it kept the conference president informed about the congregation to which I was assigned.

The pastor and the congregation

The pastor is a church's conference-appointed leader. As outlined in the *Church Manual*, the congregation elects various church leaders from its membership. It is important to realize that the pastor is accountable to the conference, with specific responsibility for a congregation or congregations. What, then, is the relationship of the pastor to the congregation? The pastor, along with elected congregational leaders, makes plans and implements programs in the territory of the congregation. In other words, the congregation, under the leadership of the pastor, fulfills the gospel commission in its territory.

One of the ways the pastor fulfills the role of congregational leader is by serving as the chair of the church board. In certain situations a pastor may desire to be relieved of that responsibility. In that instance the pastor may ask an elder to serve "as chairperson in cooperation with the pastor."⁷

While the pastor leads a congregation, the conference president continues to have responsibilities for each congregation and has ongoing

access to them. The *Church Manual* states, “He [the conference president] has access to all churches and their services, business meetings, and boards, without vote unless by the church, or unless he is a member of that congregation. He may, by virtue of his office, preside over any meeting of any church when necessary. He has access to all church records.”⁸

Such access is not for the purpose of control. The dynamic relationship between conference leadership and the congregations seeks for all churches in a designated area to be united in purpose and mission.

Why does it matter?

The organizational system in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not meant to control the congregations and members. Rather, it exists for the purpose of faithfulness to the Word of God, safeguarding the assets of the church, and fulfilling the church's mission. The conference is not some separate organization—it is the sisterhood of congregations. The organizational system

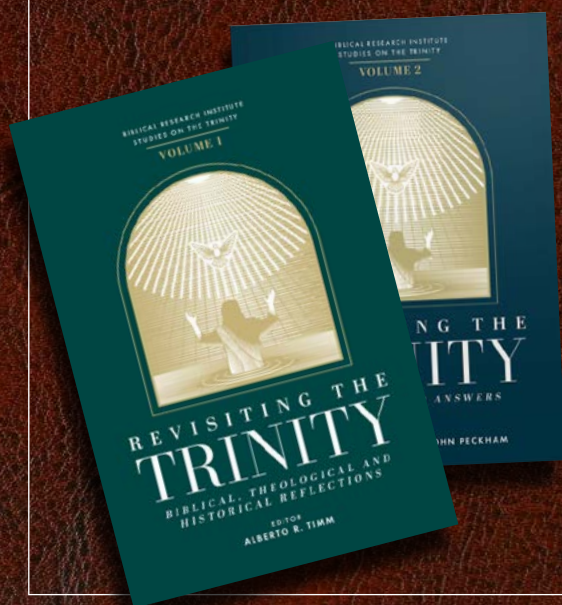
we have gives us the opportunity to faithfully proclaim God's message throughout the world. It is all about mission!



- 1 Divisions of the General Conference are “divisions of the General Conference.” They do not have a constituency.
- 2 The intermediate step for such a group is known as a company.
- 3 Travel budget may vary, depending on the number of churches, membership, etc.
- 4 Even though most pastors have more than one congregation, from hereon, for the sake of easier reading I will just refer to “church.”
- 5 Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022), 79.
- 6 The practice of asking the congregation for input varies from conference to conference but is usually welcomed by the congregation and potential pastor.
- 7 *Church Manual*, 33, 79.
- 8 *Church Manual*, 32.

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Pastor, are you on board?

Ethical and legal
responsibilities
of board
members

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Many of us, as pastors or administrators, belong to a variety of institutional boards. Therefore it is vital we understand the important roles and functions we serve on them, including our fiduciary responsibilities. Some of us have not been adequately informed about whose interests we represent as we sit on these boards. This article will attempt to outline some of those key responsibilities so that our service will be both constructive and ethical.¹

Early denominational leaders conceived the Seventh-day Adventist Church's organizational structure to follow a unique governance arrangement and constituent element that allowed for the greatest degree of membership participation. Involving church members in the church's governance process was something that those church leaders coming from Methodist backgrounds particularly subscribed to. The model settled on by those early pioneers was a representative form of church governance.

Representative governance

The Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* states: "The Seventh-day Adventist form of governance is representative, which recognizes that authority rests in the membership and is expressed through duly elected representatives at each level of organization, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the Church at each separate level. The *Church Manual* applies this principle of representation to the operations of the local congregation. Issues of representation in organizations with mission status are defined by operating policies and in organizations with conference status by their constitution and bylaws."²

Whether we speak of the local church or school board, conference or union executive committee, or even the General Conference Executive Committee, the same responsibilities and obligations apply to all persons, whether elected or appointed.

Unfortunately some individuals elected to serve as board members at any level of church administrative organization may look at such service as an imposition, something they have to do because they hold a particular position or church office, or as an extension of their fiefdom. Others consider it their contribution of time, experience, and expertise to their church. However, with any such service, all board members undertake legal, ethical, and fiduciary responsibilities when they accept such appointments.

The role of the board

The fundamental role of any board is to represent and act as the link between the constituency or membership that appointed them and the organization. It is their primary function to incorporate the interests of the congregation, constituency, or membership in their decision-making.

When we speak of the local church, it has certain levels of authority and responsibility on behalf of the conference to function in its designated area. The local pastor assigned to that congregation as the official agent or employee of the conference represents both the interests of the conference to that congregation and the interests of the local church to the conference. The *Church Manual* outlines the role of the local church and the function of a church board. It states that "the local church operates within defined roles in Seventh-day Adventist Church structure. Within the context of those roles, the business meeting is the constituency meeting of the local church."³

Board members must always bear in mind that they represent the interests of the constituency or membership rather than just their own interests. Good and effective governance at every level starts with the actions of the board. The board's role is to ensure that the church, school, or conference operates in such a way as to fulfill its assigned mission.

Boards should not involve themselves in the day-to-day management of organizations. Their role is to monitor, guide, and enable good management; establish strategy and direction;

and represent the interests of the constituency. Effective boards accomplish this by ensuring that the organization stays focused on its mission and provides adequate allocation of financial resources while at the same time maintaining the organization's unique Seventh-day Adventist identity and mission.

Some board members may attempt to operate or direct as if it were their own business or enterprise, forgetting that they were elected by the constituency or membership to represent its interests. Board members are merely representatives on behalf of the "owners": the local church(es) and, through it, the local conference.

The *Church Manual* provides guidance to local church boards on the role they are to play. They, as the church's primary committee, are to have as their "chief concern . . . an active discipleship plan in place, which includes both the spiritual nurture of the church and the work of planning and fostering evangelism."⁴ Recognizing the relationship between the local congregation and the conference, the *Church Manual* states that "the conference-appointed pastor" is to serve as "the chairperson of the board."⁵

All board members have numerous legal and fiduciary duties and obligations imposed on them in order to effectively carry out their responsibilities. The three most critical standards or duties are the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience.

Whether serving on a local church board or conference committee, all board members act in a fiduciary role. A *fiduciary* is defined as someone who acts for and on behalf of another in a relationship of trust. In this case the board members are both fiduciaries of the constituencies that appointed them and also of the conference. As such, it requires that any action or decision that board members take is for the sole benefit and interest of those who placed that trust in them.

Duties of board members

The first major duty for board members, that of care, deals with the way a board makes decisions and oversees the governance of the organization. It expects a certain level of skill, carefulness, and prudence in the decision-making process. The legal requirement is that each board member act in good faith and in a manner he or she reasonably believes to be in the best interests of the organization. The legal standard asks what a reasonable person would do in the same or similar circumstances. In most instances courts

will not hold a board member liable for errors or mistakes in judgment as long as their actions meet the legal standards and requirements.

Board members must show that they were unbiased and impartial, made prudent decisions, acted in good faith, attended meetings when called, and have been reasonably diligent in informing themselves of the facts and issues involved. At a minimum it requires board members to attend and actively participate in board meetings, stay informed, and be financially accountable.

Board meetings are not social gatherings but business sessions involving obligations and responsibilities for which its members are fully accountable. It is this duty that makes some reluctant to serve on boards. If board members cannot effectively carry out their fiduciary responsibilities, they should decline the appointment.

The second major duty for board members is that of loyalty. It calls for them to exercise their powers in the best interests of the organization and to be faithful to its mission. An individual should not be motivated by personal, business, or private concerns but by what is in the best interests of the organization. Positions on the board should not be used for personal or familial benefit or advantage.

Breaches of this duty usually arise in the form of unreported or undocumented conflicts of interest when a board member "has such a substantial personal interest in a transaction that it reasonably might affect their judgment."⁶ One must not profit from a board position at the expense of the organization. That may include engaging in activities that compromise or undermine the needs of the organization, employing organizational assets to develop personal business opportunities, or using one's position to personally benefit by selling, endorsing, or promoting a product, contact, or transaction.

For example, a church is in the process of remodeling or building an addition to the structure. A church board member, who is a general contractor, offers a proposal to the pastor after having found out about the project. No other proposals or bids are obtained. When the proposal is presented, the board then proceeds to discuss it in the member's presence, and he does not excuse himself or declare that he has a conflict. In fact he promotes himself as the best option and the cheapest alternative. No provision is made to ensure that the price quoted is fair, nor is the project submitted for competitive tender. The board member or his company will personally benefit from the granting

of the contract. Also, because the discussion on whether to grant the contract occurred in his presence, the rest of the board placed themselves in a compromised position.

When conflicts of interest arise, steps must be taken to protect the board ethically and legally. Board members who have a conflict of interest or a potential conflict should disclose it in writing, remove themselves from the meeting during the discussion, and refrain from voting on the matter.⁷ Board members should also be aware of the North American Division *Working Policy* requirements on conflict of interest and abide by them. They must always be mindful that even though they are not prohibited from engaging in economic or commercial activity with the church, such transactions will be considered to be self-dealing unless they follow the proper conflict-of-interest protocols.

Another essential characteristic of the duty of loyalty is the responsibility of maintaining the confidentiality of communications occurring at board meetings. At times boards will have to deal with disciplinary issues of members or employees, personnel issues, or other legally protected conversations. The board member has a legal obligation to maintain the confidentiality of such discussions and not disclose such matters outside of the board meeting. While our human tendency is to share that “juicy gossip,” revealing such information exposes the board member and the church to potential legal liability.

The third major duty that falls on board members is the duty of obedience. In carrying out its governance functions, the board collectively must ensure that it remains faithful to the church’s, school’s, or conference’s stated mission. That means that boards should function in accordance with their constitution and bylaws; the policies of the conference, union, division, and General Conference; and local, state/provincial, or federal laws and regulations. Any action taken by the board must fulfill its commitments to the constituency, community, and government and, most importantly, its commitment to function as a Seventh-day Adventist organization.

Constituencies and church members count on effective and functioning boards to oversee the operations of each organization. The success of the mission depends on the ability of the board to function in an orderly and efficient manner in performing their governance functions. Board members must always remember that the legal and fiduciary responsibilities imposed on them

The success of the mission depends on the ability of the board to function in an orderly and efficient manner in performing their governance functions.

require that, at a minimum, they make prudent decisions and be fully informed, involved, and compliant with denominational and governmental laws and regulations.

Failure of an organization in its stated mission results from the way it is managed, and at the very top of that management function is its board. Countless examples show that the ineffective functioning of some boards is the consequence of weaknesses and mistakes that begin from inadequate attention to board responsibilities and processes. When we serve on boards, we must always be mindful of our ethical and fiduciary responsibilities and, most importantly, that the pursuit of excellence in such matters is proper and worthwhile—God’s work deserves such from each of us.

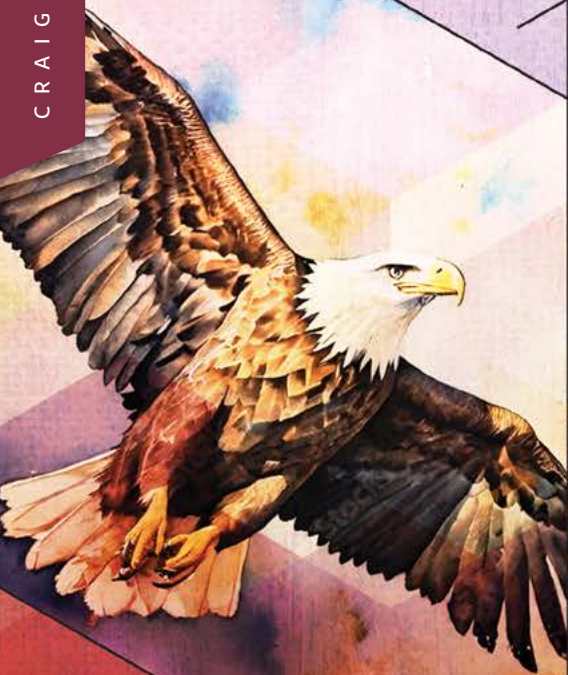


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- 2 Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual*, 20th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Secretariat, 2022), 28.
- 3 *Church Manual*, 134.
- 4 *Church Manual*, 134, 135.
- 5 *Church Manual*, 137. A more complete description of the church board’s work and its responsibilities appears on pages 135–138 of the *Church Manual*.
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A bird's-eye view of leadership styles

CRAIG CARR AND JOSEPH KIDDER



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Thousands of books on leadership cover many subjects, such as styles, approaches, systems, and theories. Though most pastors want to be successful, the greater need is to bring meaningful change to their church. They want to be transformational leaders.

In this article we examine leadership styles illustrated by a variety of birds and their behavior.

The eagle: The charismatic leader

When thinking of eagles, we are attracted to the leadership traits resembled by their qualities, such as nobility, vision, and appeal. Yet eagles also tend to be unapproachable, selfish, and lonely. Though well-equipped as a skilled hunter, the eagle often feeds on carrion it did not have to catch.¹

With a wingspan of up to seven feet, the eagle can soar to more than five miles in altitude, providing an unparalleled view of the earth below. Eagles can see an ant on the ground while it is sitting on the roof of a ten-story building. Their field of vision wraps 270 degrees around them (compared with 180 degrees for humans). Items right in front of them are magnified and displayed in brightly colored hues.² Eagles see what humans cannot see. Effective leaders, too, see what others cannot yet see.

This super-vision, however great for catching prey or for finding carrion, is beneficial for individual gain but not for empowering anyone else. Empowerment requires trust and interest in others. "Empowerment is not merely a one-way transaction of authority; it's a two-way process of trust and accountability."³ The eagle is commonly found in a single nest. Its sense of team is limited to its immediate family, without much concern for a wider community.

Additionally, swooping down by surprise is one of the eagle's best tactics for catching prey. For the well-intentioned pastor, implementing a vision too quickly can appear like swooping in by surprise. Some pastors resemble the eagle because of their vision, but their lack of building a team around the vision puts them at risk of finding themselves flying solo.

Charismatic leaders can appeal to the emotions of others, convincing them to buy into their big dream. However, as the leader's ego is elevated above the objectives of the group, their single-minded ambition can minimize the team's value and contribution. When the leader's vision becomes more important than people are, he or she will be flying solo. Pastor "Eagle" needs to be conscious of how these aggressive tendencies affect others and diminish their collective ability to fulfill the vision.⁴ Though vision and charisma are important, building and motivating a team are essential to the vision's fulfillment.

Here are words that Pastor "Eagle" needs to heed: "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2, 3, ESV).

The penguin: The happy-go-lucky leader

Whether dancing in conga lines on land, swirling in the water, or winning hearts on the big screen, the flamboyant penguin is a bird that can "do practically anything—except fly."⁵ Always in flocks, penguins appear to enjoy the company of others. As extremely social creatures, penguins typically stick with family members until reaching maturity, around age four. They do not have to search very far to find a lifelong companion because they hang out in large colonies with many potential mates.⁶

Though awkward on land, penguins are pure grace underwater; ill-equipped to fly, they are masterfully equipped to swim.

Penguins excel in building alliances for survival's sake. As they huddle in herds for protection from the elements, the ones on the outside rotate to the interior, thus taking turns providing warmth and shelter to one another. Their vision is limited to surviving and making the best of the moment.

Pastor "Penguin" is excellent at building a crowd that happily huddles together, but because of his or her lack of vision, nothing significant is accomplished beyond survival. Interest is limited to the joy of the moment. Dominated by social tendencies, he or she is happy to waddle and splash around with many friends but never accomplishes a real goal. Their survival is the greatest testimony of their success.

A colony of contented penguins could represent an inwardly focused church where the members stick to themselves, experiencing only minimal growth. Their focus is mainly on creating an environment of fun, community, and contentment. The pastor wants everyone happy and safe, but the group will never go anywhere, and the idea of an authentically growing biblical community that impacts the broader community is beyond them.

While the penguin is surrounded by others, there is little sense of teamwork. Because there is no vision, little will be accomplished—but no one will care. For Pastor "Penguin" to grow the kingdom of God, there must be a clear vision that reaches beyond these social club tendencies. With so much focus on maintaining the happy huddle, all else is easily overlooked, leading to a lack of leadership that ignores the personal growth and discipleship that would lead to evangelism. This overly cautious style of leadership also tends to avoid conflict at the expense of vision, even dodging current problems and challenges, which can only stunt growth.

The book of Acts describes church community from a social aspect that includes caring for one another and sharing meals together. Furthermore the early church spent much time in activities focused on spiritual growth, such as praise and worship, Scripture reading, and prayer, which led to additional disciples joining them: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46, 47, NKJV).

The parrot: The copycat leader

With its beautiful array of colorful feathers and a unique ability to talk, the parrot is one of nature's most charming entertainers and a great companion. Parrots are vocal learners that are quickly able to grasp and imitate sounds.⁷ The African grey parrot can listen to people talk, discern the proper context and situation, and even hold a reasonable conversation; well, reasonable within the context of being a bird.⁸

Have you ever wondered why parrots copy human speech? The answer is its desire to be accepted and gain attention. "Plop a parrot into a human household, and it will 'try to integrate itself into the situation as though the people were its flock.'"⁹ With little (or no) understanding of its well-articulated words, the parrot is the consummate copycat.

Likewise, Pastor "Parrot" has the temptation of mechanically repeating what others are doing but with little personal reflection or understanding. This becomes obvious when returning from the most recent leadership seminar and trying to "drag and drop" the latest and greatest strategies and programs. This approach rarely works.

Pastors should learn as much as they can from growing churches and gather as many leadership principles as possible, and then individualize them to their specific context.¹⁰ Simply repeating what others have done, rather than going through the difficult task of sensing God's calling and leading, results in little success and a great deal of frustration and conflict.

Pastor "Parrot" is only capable of reflecting someone else's vision, repeating what others are doing but neglecting the process that leads to God's unique vision for the local context. True success is found in the pastor's personal struggle with God, a struggle that leads to the right principles needed for his or her immediate context. God has promised, " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

The goose: The transformational leader

Wherever we see geese, these birds of a feather flock together. Flocks of geese demonstrate the value of cooperation as they fly in a formation that enables them to travel up to 70 percent farther compared to being alone. These results are achieved as each goose creates lift for the goose immediately behind it. The lead goose works most diligently as the other geese "honk"

their encouragement. When the lead goose tires, it rotates to the rear, where it's easier to fly. Geese demonstrate shared leadership by distributing the responsibility to each member of the flock. Their cooperation and encouragement enable the flock to achieve their desired destination with less individual effort, and their success is attributed to the group.¹¹

In like manner, Pastor "Goose" needs to apply the principles of shared leadership, working in unity and achieving a better future (vision) together as a congregation. "Unity is the state of many acting as one. It is an attribute of highly effective teams, whether in marriage, business, church, or government. Without it, progress stops."¹² The transformational leader identifies the needed change, creates a vision, and executes the change with the commitment of the group. They have a vision; they work together; the leader is cheered on by the rest; collaboration is their greatest asset. These leaders empathize with members of their team, building personal relationships and trust.

Transformational leadership creates a system in which the functions of all "followers" are continually developing into "leaders," and everyone contributes to the health and success of the group. "Transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers that inspires them; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so the leader can align followers with tasks that optimize their performance."¹³ To paraphrase philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, no pastor will be a great leader if he or she wants to do it all by himself or herself—or to receive all the credit for doing it.¹⁴

The transformational pastor must demonstrate a level of commitment that says, "I will be the first to go forward," thus inspiring the rest of the congregation to do the same.

The synergy created by each team member leading out in significant ways for the benefit of the whole is a reminder of Paul describing the diversity and unity of the church as a body. "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12, NKJV). Pastor "Goose" ensures the various parts of the body are performing at optimum levels, according to their gifts and callings.

Best model

Each style of leadership has strengths and weaknesses. However, geese best model transformational leadership in which a shared vision involves everyone working together. When a transformational leader casts a vision, it is no longer simply their own personal vision; rather, it causes others to say, "This is our church." A shared vision encourages and allows people to work together. It says that if you want to go where we are going, then climb on board—let us go together. We need each other if anything significant is going to happen for Christ.

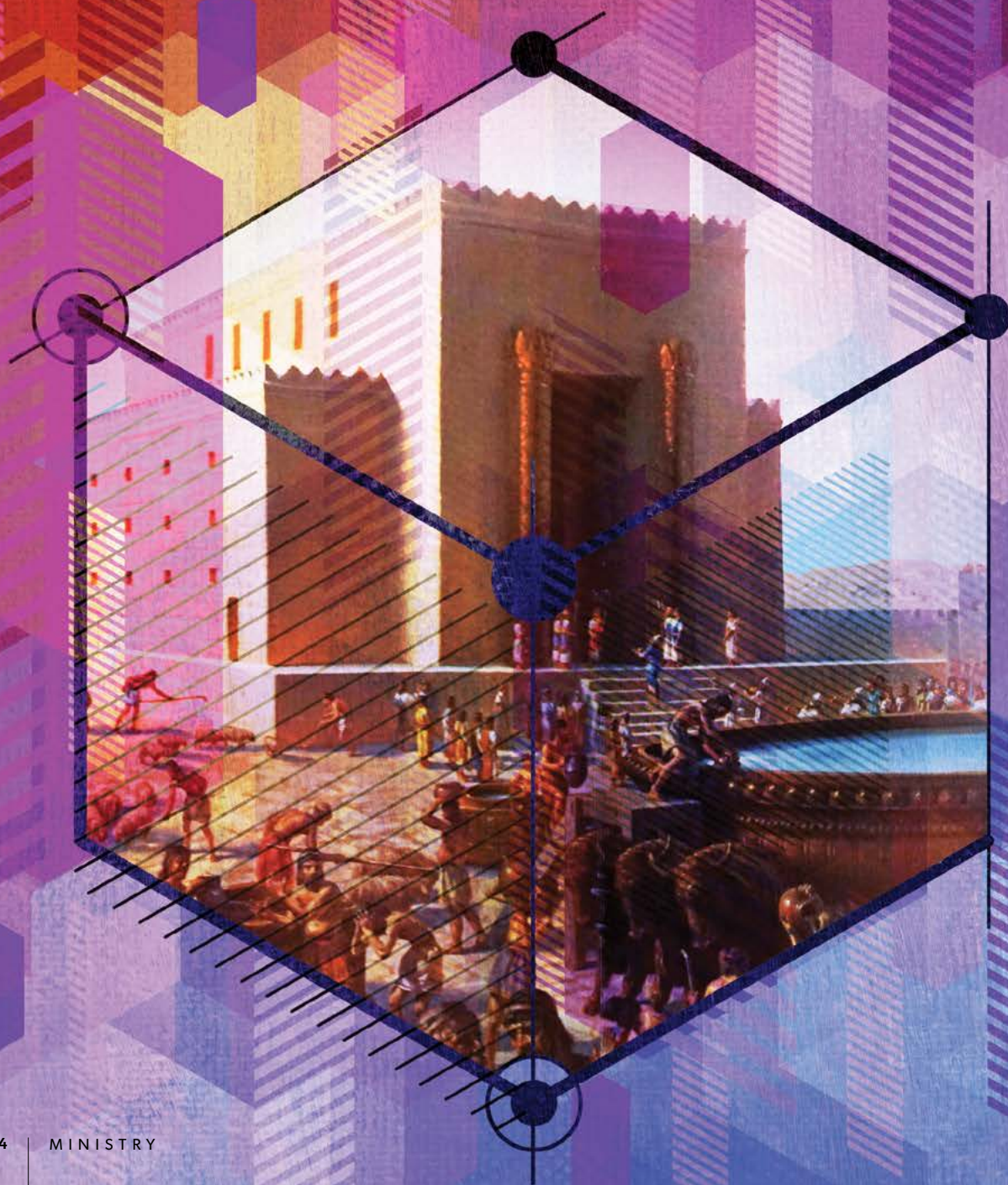


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A leader's role in funding large-scale projects:

Visiting three biblical examples



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

After the publication of a *Dynamic Steward* magazine issue on systematic giving,¹ a local church pastor pointed out the need to train church leaders on how to finance their large projects.² Systematic giving might not cover local projects requiring substantial resources.

Does the Bible say something about funding large-scale church projects? To explore the subject, I focused on three biblical accounts:

- Building the tabernacle in the wilderness
- Construction of Solomon's temple
- Restoring the temple under King Joash

I concluded that the God who instructs His children in systematic giving also provides unique guidelines for financing large-scale or special projects.

This article explores key themes related to how leadership can approach the funding of contemporary large-scale projects. It also reveals an interesting intersection between project funding and systematic giving.

From God

God communicated the vision for building the tabernacle in the desert during Moses' extended encounter with Him on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:18–25:9). Likewise David sought God's guidance on how to proceed with the construction of the Jerusalem temple, even amending his initial plan after God's response (1 Chron. 22:8, 9). Similarly instructions from the high priest of Joash's time guided the king's actions (2 Kings 12:2). In each case, leadership was firmly convinced—and communicated their conviction to the people—that the project was God's will. As a result others saw participation in the project as an opportunity to be part of God's work.

Executing large-scale projects can create great pressure and stress on congregations. However, the assurance of God's leading will enable them

to navigate such an often-turbulent period. Additionally, when church members are conscious that they are not simply paying the bills but are involved in something much bigger than themselves, such as God's mission, it increases their motivation to give.³

For God

The instruction given to Moses about collecting materials for the tabernacle first emphasized God as the Recipient before focusing on the structure itself. God's command was for the "Israelites to bring me an offering" (Exod. 25:2, NIV), after which God specified that they were to use it to "make a sanctuary for me" (Exod. 25:8, NIV). The focus was clearly on God.

Similarly David's reason for mobilizing resources for the majestic temple was to honor the Lord before all nations (1 Chron. 22:1, 5). The project was an expression of worship, reinforced in David's description of his gifts as an act of devotion (1 Chron. 29:3) and by his appeal to the other leaders and people of Israel: "'Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?' " (1 Chron. 29:5, NIV). So David was not simply raising funds; he was raising the spiritual devotion of God's people.

Without minimizing the technical aspects of raising funds, it is critical not to lose sight of the fact that obtaining money for religious purposes is primarily a spiritual endeavor. Three key incentives to giving are "God's grace," "God as the Giver and Forgiver," and God as "the Source of all blessings," according to Alain Corallie, an Adventist scholar whose work focuses on worship. Giving and worship, he adds, have an intrinsic connection: "Truly, worship is giving, and giving is worship."⁴

Through God

When the Israelites received the appeal to give to God for the tabernacle, they had just emerged from several centuries of slavery without

any regular income. Yet, according to the Bible, they could give because God had miraculously provided them with articles of silver, gold, and clothing (Exod. 12:35, 36). God had preceded them in giving. King David, who made substantial donations, acknowledged that “we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chron. 29:14, NIV).

We see an important lesson here: God has already provided His children with the resources needed for large-scale projects. Our role is to encourage them to channel the funding in the right direction. When church leaders uphold the conviction that a project is God’s design and aimed at His glory, they can proceed with the unshakable assurance of God’s provision.

Invitation: Simple and noncoercive

Leadership played an explicit role in inviting people to give for the construction of the tabernacle and the temple (Exod. 25:2; Exod. 35:4–9; 1 Chron. 29:1–5). This contrasts with two common assumptions among Christians. First is the belief that people can recognize existing needs for themselves and respond accordingly, meaning there is no need for formal appeals. Second is the idea that once people are spiritually converted, they will give automatically. While such assumptions may occasionally be valid, they are usually incorrect. Both Moses and David chose not to take that risk. Researchers Patricia Snell Herzog and Heather E. Price found that the lowest levels of participation occur among those not exposed to any appeal to give.⁵

Two striking features of both Moses’ and David’s appeals were their simplicity and non-coercive nature. First, they did not use any fancy strategies. While it is essential to carefully plan giving campaigns, the aim is to communicate clearly and not add unnecessary complexity. Church leadership should be cautious about investing disproportionate energy and resources in raising funds.

Some activities to boost giving are strongly condemned by Ellen G. White: “Moses made no grand feast. He did not invite the people to scenes of gaiety, dancing, and general amusement. Neither did he institute lotteries or anything of this profane order to obtain means to erect the tabernacle of God in the wilderness.”⁶ Nevertheless both Moses and David achieved resounding success.

The second characteristic of Moses’ and David’s appeals is that they did not use compulsion.

In contemporary fundraising practices, it is common to determine the cost of a project and then invite each potential donor to contribute a specific amount. While this method is mathematically sound and provides a clear path to the completion of the project, it may not respect people’s unique circumstances. Neither Moses nor David pursued this route. Instead they allowed each person or family the freedom to offer what they felt impressed to give. Two key expressions characterized the process: “heart prompts” and “freewill offerings” (Exod. 25:2; 35:29). The leaders trusted that God’s Spirit was active in convincing people to support His projects.

Big project . . . no special appeal

Interestingly Joash adopted a different approach than either Moses or David. Instead of a special appeal for gifts and donations, he decided to use the accumulated regular offerings dedicated to the maintenance of the temple to fund the major restoration project (2 Kings 12:4; 2 Chron. 24:6). Scripture specifies three types of offerings: “the money collected in the census, the money received from personal vows and the money brought voluntarily to the temple” (2 Kings 12:4, NIV). The temple administration had a permanent fund set aside to maintain the place of worship, one consistently replenished by the census offering—a defined minimum annual contribution of half a shekel for every male twenty years old and older (Exod. 30:14–16). The other two offerings were voluntary.

Despite observing a delay in the repairs, Joash did not resort to special appeals. Rather, he insisted on closely monitoring the use of the three specified offerings. It illustrates how a special project can, in some cases, be funded through accumulating regular offerings without the need for special appeals.

A study of United States congregations has shown that regular giving usually results in a higher volume of contributions than special one-time donations.⁷ Therefore it may be wise for local churches to emphasize and prioritize systematic giving. A portion of regular offerings could be consistently allocated to capital or reserve funds within the church budget. The understanding is that such funds will only go to support special projects when needed. However, if—for practical reasons, emergencies, or unique opportunities—the church requires additional resources beyond what it has saved, it can still make special appeals.

A word of caution, however. Utilizing regular offerings toward repairs or other projects has some restrictions. The priests could not redirect all types of offerings for the repairs of the temple during Josiah's time. The Bible explicitly mentions offerings that could not be used: "The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings was not brought into the temple of the LORD; it belonged to the priests" (2 Kings 12:16, NIV). Their natural role in supporting the priests forbade their diversion to repairs.

While it is best not to draw a principle from a single passage, the restriction on some categories of offerings for financing certain projects is well documented. Another such offering is the tithe, which went exclusively to pay the Levites (Num. 18:21–28).

Writing to a church wondering about employing tithe money to service debt because they were facing the risk of foreclosure, Ellen G. White said: "Every soul who is honored in being a steward of God is to carefully guard the tithe money. This is sacred means. The Lord will not sanction your borrowing this money for any other work. It will create evils you cannot now discern."⁸ When initiating large-scale projects, church leaders must, early in the process, clarify the restrictive nature of some funds to avoid misunderstanding and tension among the members.

Creating waves of generosity

As leaders demonstrate sacrificial giving, they inspire others. David's gifts for the building of the temple are described as "a large amount" in 1 Chronicles 22:3. It was neither an exaggeration nor hyperbole. Some have estimated the contemporary value of his gift to be around \$20 billion. Was he giving from the surplus of his royal wealth? No. He testified to the sacrificial nature of his donations by saying, "I have taken great pains to provide" (v. 14).

As a result of his lavish and sacrificial gift, David gained the moral authority to challenge Solomon, saying, "You may add to them" (v. 14). Continuing with the leaders and expanding to the people, a contagious wave of generosity and support swept across the nation (1 Chron. 29:6–9). This story demonstrates the power of role modeling in spiritual leadership.

Leaders can create a ripple effect of generosity when they exemplify giving. While this can be the most challenging aspect of raising funds, it is also one of the most effective. Ellen G. White reminds us, "It is only through the grace of God that we

can make a right use of this endowment. There is nothing in us of ourselves by which we can influence others for good."⁹

God softens hearts

While each biblical project was distinct and happened at different times, leadership shared the conviction that the project was from God, for God, and made possible through God. God must be the center of all decisions. Effective appeals for large-scale projects must be both explicit and noncoercive, avoiding marketing gimmicks that conflict with biblical and ethical values. We must trust in God's ability to soften hearts.

Systematic giving offers a reliable source of income. Careful planning and monitoring of church expenses are essential. Finally, local church leaders hold a unique advantage over external or professional fundraisers. They can demonstrate the project's value through their personal giving, a critical factor in motivating others.



- 1 For articles on systematic giving, see "The Art of Systematic Giving" issue *Dynamic Steward* 27, no. 3 (July–September 2024), <https://stewardship.adventist.org/article-archive?issue=2024-27-3>.
- 2 A version of this article first appeared in *Dynamic Steward* 27, no. 4 (October–December 2024).
- 3 Petr Cincala, René Drumm, and Duane McBride, *Mission Offering: Giving in the North American Division* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Church Ministry and Institute for Prevention of Addictions, 2016), <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Resources/MissionOfferingGivingIntheNorthAmericanDivisionMarch2016.pdf>.
- 4 Alain Corallie, "Giving and Worship: An Inseparable Package," *Dynamic Steward*, January–March 2020, 5, <https://stewardship.adventist.org/giving-and-worship>.
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- 7 Peter Munday, David P. King, and Brad R. Fulton, "The Economic Practices of US Congregations: A Review of Current Research and Future Opportunities," *Social Compass* 66, no. 3 (2019): 400–417, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768619852230>.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 185.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 341.

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Author of *The Clear Word* Bible paraphrase dies

COLLEGEDALE, TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES

Jack J. Blanco, former dean of the Southern Adventist University School of Religion, professor emeritus, and author of *The Clear Word* Bible paraphrase, died peacefully on Sabbath, January 11, 2025. He was 95.

At age 20 Blanco was drafted into the United States Air Force during the Korean War. Witnessing poor values among his peers, Blanco wondered whom he could model his life after. He was prompted to consider Jesus after hearing a voice say to him: “He was true, honest, kind, and compassionate—everything you want to be!”

This led Blanco to a base library, where he found *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, mislabeled simply as “Bible.” While stationed in Guam, he was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Later, Blanco became a pastor, serving in the United States, the Philippines, and several countries in Africa.



Photo: Southern Adventist University

In 1983 Blanco started working at Southern Adventist University and began paraphrasing the New Testament during his devotions. Starting with Mark, he worked prayerfully for three years, producing a paraphrase of all 27 New Testament books. Friends and family encouraged him to continue, and seven years later, he completed the Old Testament.

The resulting *Clear Word*, published in 1994, has touched countless lives. Reflecting on its impact, Blanco had said, “When people thank me for what *The Clear Word* has done for them, I always tell them to give the glory to God. That is my goal in life.” [NAD Office of Communication / SAU Marketing and University Relations / Angela Baerg]

Over 500 baptized at new Adventist training center in the Philippines

MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

On the first Sabbath of 2025, more than 500 individuals publicly committed to Christ through baptism in Southern Mindanao, Philippines. This was a significant spiritual milestone for the region. The T'boli people, an indigenous group known for their cultural heritage, music, intricate beadwork, and the handwoven *T'nalak* fabric, joined together with members of the Manobo and B'laan tribes, among others, for this event. Despite being deeply rooted in their traditions, these communities have shown an openness to the gospel, paving the way for transformative encounters with Christ.

“This moment is a testament to the power of God’s love,” said **Roger Caderma**, Southern Asia-Pacific Division president. “Seeing individuals from diverse backgrounds and traditions—including the T'boli, Manobos, and B'laans—united in faith reminds us that the gospel transcends all boundaries. It reflects our church’s unwavering mission to bring the message of salvation to everyone.” [Edward Rodriguez, Southern Asia-Pacific Division]



Photo: Southern Asia-Pacific Division



Jesus' Dream Team: Work as a Team in Your Community to Fulfill the Great Commission

by Andrés Peralta. Lincoln, NE:
AdventSource, 2023.

Jesus' dream team. Three impactful words that could have the potential to become the next blockbuster. At the book's core stands Jesus, the Master of Excellence, who serves as the ultimate example in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The goal is clear: to spread the gospel in the best tactical way possible. Drawing from his extensive experience as a youth leader and army chaplain, Andrés Peralta emphasizes teamwork as a common thread throughout the book.

Written in two movements, the book explores, on the one hand, the theme of teamwork in the Bible, focusing on the New Testament and Christ's missionary example. The methodology offers a detailed study of the biblical text to better draw from the original languages, the pedagogical essence for building a missionary team for the kingdom of God. Patience, intention, dedication, guided collaboration, support, friendship, and team spirit are the keys to success.


On the other hand, it conveys with a sense of urgency that the challenges today's young people face encourage them to do mission work in their cities. Leaders must nurture team fellowship to achieve their goal, understanding that the transformative power of teamwork, in both leaders and team members, can bring hope and inspiration to the mission.

Peralta strategically placed stories in the book that are powerful tools to help readers relate to and deepen their

understanding of the biblical teachings on teamwork and leadership. These stories come from well-known and lesser-known facts and from Peralta's personal experiences. The author also refers to historical facts that have marked the lives of men who stood out for their ability to manage by promoting collective well-being, facing obstacles, and making a difference. These men, such as Henry Ford, valued motivation and intentional relationships in the working environment, inspiring and motivating those around them (17).

Written in an engaging and easy-to-read style, the book is accessible to a lay audience. The *Jesus' Dream Team* theme is itself a metaphor. The ideal team comprises a leader who, like Jesus, loves his team members and seeks to develop a close mentorship relationship with them (99–104). This leader plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity to achieve goals and objectives. Moreover, like the disciples, the participants must be ready to commit their whole hearts to genuine conversion and a willingness to learn. Together, leaders and participants sharing common values and purpose will form a team prepared to have missional strategies that will nurture a sense of growth and usefulness in their communities.

The last chapter provides practical guidance and tools to engage youth and accompany them in their personal growth. The author states, "In summary, three elements that make up teamwork: work, co-operation, and empowerment. When Jesus chose His disciples to announce the kingdom of God, this was work. He desired them to accompany Him to share experiences that would bring them together. Like the interrelation within Christ's team, this component lays the foundation for every solid and cohesive team. Any team that feels empowered will undoubtedly do a good job" (19).

Ultimately, this book invites you and me to embark on a journey that will convince anyone of their vital role in Jesus' mission to save souls. 

Jaelle Valiame Noel is Youth Ministries director for the French Antilles-Guiana Union Conference, Fort-de-France, Martinique, and a DMin candidate at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.





Sharpening our focus

Suddenly everything was out of focus. I rubbed my eyes, but it did not help. Then I closed one eye—I could see clearly. I closed the other eye, and everything was blurred again. I had lost a contact lens and, with it, my ability to see clearly.

Sometimes we lose our ability to see clearly in ministry, affecting not only our short-term but also our longer-term service to God and the church. We need something to restore our focus.

Careful policies, caring processes

We live in an age of hurry. Everything must be done now, preferably yesterday! Reading policies and following all the steps in the Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* may seem unnecessary—until things go wrong. Here is an example:

Robert sat facing the conference president, treasurer, and ministerial secretary. The growing silence was overwhelming as they waited for an explanation. He did not know what to say. Nothing, he realized, would justify his actions or make things right.

The local church had grown under his leadership to the extent that they needed to expand their building. He had talked in general terms with the conference president and treasurer. When the church board voted to take out a \$2 million loan, he negotiated a good interest rate with the bank. Unfortunately the church went ahead without further conversations with the conference. Now they were over budget, and the church was disunited. The main backers had not redeemed their pledges, and given the conflict, it seemed unlikely they would. It was a mess, one that could easily have been avoided. If only . . .

Ignore policy, expect confusion

We all follow rules—rules of the road when we drive, rules when we join any club or association. So why is there a reluctance to follow the church “rules” set out in the *Church Manual*? Developed over years, taking best practices from around the globe, it provides a standard for the local church wherever you are. It provides consistency and clarity.

These standards are important. Issues can arise when pastors and churches approach

a problem using personal perspectives. For example, a young couple is not living up to the church’s moral standards. After discussions, the church board decides they have no option but to remove them from membership. However, a neighboring congregation invites them to be members. The result is confusion over standards and hurt to the individuals and their families and friends.

In addition, administrators have *Working Policy* manuals tailored to every church level, from mission to General Conference. They, too, are designed to safeguard administrators and the organization.

Ignoring policies and processes results in inconsistencies, creating hurt, confusion, and damage, not least to you as the pastor. Some aspects can be especially damaging, especially in the area of pastoral moral integrity.

Man’s fall, God’s grace

When news of a high-profile moral fall breaks, a common response among pastors is a sense of relief if it is not their denomination in the headlines and perhaps, for some, a sense of “there but by the grace of God go I.”¹ It is all too easy to take the moral high ground and think it could never happen to me.

The reality that even pastors are susceptible to temptation is reflected in policies relating to pastoral discipline.² The greater the responsibility that we are called to, the greater the challenges we will face. Following the *Church Manual*, church policies, and church processes protects both the pastor and members. Furthermore, looking to Jesus, studying His example, and bringing our challenges to Him provide clarity and consistency as we face our own shortcomings and the realities of ministry in a sin-tarnished world.

Audrey Andersson, MA in pastoral ministry, is a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



1 Gateway Church Board of Elders, “Statements to the Congregation,” Gateway Church, June 21, 2024–November 2, 2024, <https://gatewaypeople.com/statement-to-the-congregation>.

2 See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, chapter 8 on discipline and the reasons for discipline (67, 68). The General Conference *Working Policy* defines reasons for disciplining a pastor in policy L60 20.

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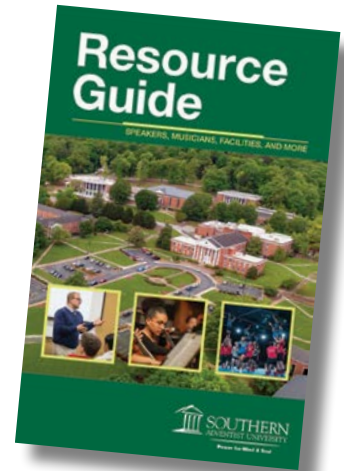
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Aug 6-18	La Vega, Dominican Republic
Aug 13-25	Cancún, Mexico
Aug 13-25	Nagua, Dominican Republic
Aug 20-Sep 1	Belize City, Belize
Sep 10-22	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Sep 24-Oct 6	Santa Cruz, Bolivia
Oct 8-20	Pucallpa, Peru
Oct 15-27	Viña del Mar, Chile
Oct 22-Nov 3	Quito, Ecuador
Oct 29-Nov 10	Holguín, Cuba