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Ramon J. Canals

ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL SECRETARIES

Jeffrey O. Brown, Aurora Canals, Robert Costa, Pavel Goia, Anthony Kent

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Winter. The end of the year in the northern hemisphere of the world. Some call it the epilogue. There is even a term, the dead of winter. But winter is not the end. Solomon said,

“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land” (Song of Solomon 2:10–12, ESV).

No wonder the poet Shelley cried, “O, Wind, If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” Winter is the time for investing in the next generation. We can rightly call it a springboard.

Overview
Let us summarize our seasons. Spring ministry (approximate ages 20–35) is characterized by five words of Jesus: “Give ye them to eat” (Luke 9:13, KJV). Spring zeal is epitomized in the words of the prophet, “Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8, KJV).

Summer ministry (approximate ages 35–50) is characterized by five words of Jesus: “How many loaves have ye?” (Mark 6:38, KJV). Confronted by the insufficiency of our resources, we choose the One who said, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9, NKJV).

Autumn ministry (approximate ages 50–65) is characterized by five words of Jesus: “Bring them hither to me” (Matt. 14:18, KJV). Leaves are falling and hopes are fading. We are not where we want to be. Take your broken pieces to Jesus.

Winter ministry (approximate ages 65+) is characterized by five words of Jesus: “Gather up the leftover fragments” (John 6:12, ESV). Do not let this experience go to waste. Church administrator, do not cast aside retired pastors. They have proved their value. Treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve. Winter pastor, there are a great many spring pastors just waiting for you to bless them with what God has blessed you. This keeps your heart beating with excitement and anticipation. The joy of winter is the hope of spring.

Christian author Joyce Landorf states, “Of all the multitude of tragedies in growing old, the forfeiting of a dream, the losing of hope, and the failure to look forward to spring are the greatest.” Be a part of a child’s life. Mentor a young pastor.
Pass on ministry and family life counsel to the next generation. Winter, far from being irrevocably tied with death, must be irresistibly linked to life. The story of Abraham and Sarah demonstrates that you can “still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psalm 92:14, KJV).

Go around again

On her way to the hospital for the birth of their first son, a lady in Bermuda told her husband to circle the roundabout. She refused to have her baby until she had seen Johnny Barnes give his signature Christian wave of love that assured her that all would go well. Like many in Bermuda, she was enamored by the heartwarming love this retiree exuded from his post at the roundabout outside of Bermuda’s capital city, Hamilton. When Johnny did not notice them the first time, she told her husband, “Go around again!”

Whatever you did or did not get right the first time around, winter allows you to go around again. Go out of your way. Help somebody. Surprise somebody. Bless somebody. Finish well. Author Miriam Wood said, “[I have an] overwhelming thankfulness for my life as the wife of a Seventh-day Adventist minister. I am firmly convinced that, for me, no other life could have been so meaningful, so rewarding, and so worthwhile. The doctrines of my church, the principles for which it stands, the hope that it holds for the future—all of these are more important to me each day I live. . . . I would like to go back to the beginning and live it all again.”

Let us go back to the beginning.

“While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22, NKJV).

In other words, go around again.

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Doing good to everyone
During Christianity’s early years, church structure and organization took a back seat to evangelism and the resulting explosive growth of the church. The early Christians not only believed that the return of Jesus was imminent but also were under constant threat of persecution from Jewish and Roman authorities. In the beginning, the church was under the direct supervision of the apostles, men who had been personally chosen by Jesus to lead His church. Given that most churches were relatively small, there was little need for them to have formal authority structures and governance policies.

However, things began to change over the decades. Thanks to dedicated missionary work, churches grew in size, and Christianity quickly spread throughout the Roman Empire. But the apostles who were still alive were growing old, and many others had been martyred. It also became increasingly obvious that Jesus might not return for some time. Christian leaders needed to plan long-term, and this meant implementing policies and procedures that would enable churches to survive.

**Guidelines from Paul**

This situation is why the last three letters—1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus—that the apostle Paul wrote focus on church governance. In these letters, Paul lays out the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9), emphasizes the importance of regular preaching (2 Tim. 4:1–5), and encourages churches to remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14–17).
Paul knew that his time was nearly up and that the churches would need a formal structure, along with procedures and regulations, to continue after he died. Today, nearly 2,000 years later, churches still rely on the qualifications outlined by Paul when assessing church leaders as they remain as relevant today as in the first century.

However, the longest and most detailed set of guidelines for churches gets little attention now. In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, Paul encourages churches to honor widows and provides detailed criteria to distinguish between those who should be and who should not be financially supported by the church. In order to qualify for financial support, widows had to have no immediate family members capable of supporting them, be at least 60 years old, and have a record of faithfulness to their husbands.

Paul is clear that young widows should not be enrolled in the church’s support program because they are able to work and support themselves. They also could remarry and have children who would support them in old age. Paul does not want churches to be burdened with supporting people who do not need support. Given the large number of needy people within the church, it was important to provide churches with guidelines that made it clear where financial aid should first be directed.

These guidelines, of course, made sense in the first century. Women had extremely limited rights in the first-century Roman Empire, and they were dependent on their husbands for financial support. At that time, there were no government social programs, and no one had life insurance. When a husband died, the wife lost her protector and provider. Unless she remarried or her children looked after her, the widow was likely to become destitute and dependent on church charity.

Challenges in creating a widows list

As sensible as these guidelines were then, they seem outdated now. In fact, does anyone know of a church that uses Paul’s criteria in deciding who deserves support? This section of Paul’s letter to Timothy tends to get little, if any, attention. Plenty of sermons address the biblical qualifications for church leadership, but precious few talk about the biblical qualifications for deciding who is truly a widow or in need of help.

But let us not be too quick to relegate Paul’s instructions to the dustbin of history. Obviously, our cultural context greatly differs from what the first-century church faced. Today, churches still support the poor, but more governmental support programs and nonprofit charities provide support now than 2,000 years ago.

Of course, it is good that becoming a widow today does not necessarily mean financial destitution. This is one area where we have definitely made progress. Certainly, in North America, it makes little sense for churches to try to literally follow Paul’s instructions to create an official list of widows to be financially supported by the church. This would not only be nearly impossible to administer but also undoubtedly lead to a lot of hurt feelings.

The principle behind the instructions

The Bible includes many commands that cannot be implemented literally today but still contain important lessons. For example, Paul commanded that the recipients of his letters must read them aloud in the churches (Col. 4:16). This command was important because few people could read, and books were not widely available. Hearing Paul’s letters read aloud was the only way most Christians could learn what Paul had said. But now that most people are literate and Bibles are widely available, we obey this command today by encouraging people to read their Bibles.

Paul also urged the Corinthian church, specifically, to collect money for the church in Jerusalem because Christians in Jerusalem were in financial need (2 Cor. 9:1–5). Obviously, we do not take weekly offerings for the Jerusalem church today. Rather, we apply this principle by using offerings to help churches that need support—particularly those in poorer communities and in less developed nations.

Similarly, we should also look at the principle behind Paul’s instructions regarding the widows list. The key thing that Paul wanted was for the church to direct its financial support to people who are most in need while encouraging people who can support themselves to do so. In addition, Paul instructed churches to prioritize their own members when providing financial support, to do good to everyone but especially those in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Paul’s command was that church leaders must be responsible stewards of the money that they receive, and they should address local concerns before turning their focus elsewhere. There is nothing noble about sending money to overseas missions while ignoring needs at home.
Paul instructed churches to... do good to everyone but especially those in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). If your church has not had a serious conversation about how it supports the poor and needy, now would probably be a good time to have one.

Applying this principle

My home church in Steinbach has sought to carefully steward its offerings. This means showing discernment about which people and causes to support. For example, every year, my church conducts an annual Thanksgiving offering. Half of the funds raised go to the local church budget; the other half is split between two organizations—one from within the community and another that does relief work in other countries.

This decision is not made lightly. The church governing council not only meets to carefully review potential recipients but also presents the options at a congregational meeting so that members can make an informed decision about which organizations to support. Obviously, this means that church leaders spend significant time doing background research before the congregational meeting. This type of accountability is a great way of ensuring that all options are reviewed carefully.

Of course, this requires church members to participate as well—by both attending the congregational meeting and asking intelligent questions about the options presented. All members of a church should take an interest in the financial decisions being made by their leaders. While budget meetings might seem dry and tedious at times, ensuring that money is spent wisely is important.

Be well-organized

First Timothy 5:3–16 includes another principle, which is to ensure that churches are properly organized. Some Christians have the idea that it is not "spiritual" to worry about things like money, membership lists, building projects, and church meeting protocols. They suggest that we should trust the Holy Spirit to take care of organizational details. However, that is not how Paul says that God leads His churches. Yes, we need the Holy Spirit, but that does not mean we do not need to do the hard work of ensuring that churches are properly managed.

God is not pleased with disorderly meetings or financial irresponsibility, no matter how spiritual it sounds. Nor does it please God when churches hastily decide to send a donation to an organization that church leaders have not properly vetted. If first-century churches had to keep an official widows list, churches today need to be well organized and take care of the needy within their midst. Just as not all widows were worthy of support in the first-century church (vv. 11–14), not all charitable causes today are equally deserving of support.

Supporting the needy

How well is your church being managed? As Christians, we have a duty to ensure our churches are responsible stewards of the resources they are given. This means that we must select responsible people as elders, deacons, and deaconesses to make sure these important functions are carried out. To be clear, this does not mean that ordinary church members are off the hook. We are all accountable before God for our decisions and the way in which we use our resources. Let us remember to take this responsibility seriously.

We are not going to rush out and create a widows list in all our churches today. However, we must not lose sight of the principle behind Paul's detailed instructions. If your church has not had a serious conversation about how it supports the poor and needy, now would probably be a good time to have one.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.
Out the other side: 
The unique challenge of endings in ministry

Ministries end for a host of reasons. Some are positive, a clear, exciting call to a new ministry. Some are expected and well planned, such as retirement. But sadly, many endings are tinged with disappointment and frustration. We love to celebrate God’s call in new beginnings, but seeing God’s hand at work in the leaving can be harder. Some ministry endings are traumatic, like a sudden death, formal discipline, or subtle abuse. These are the hardest points in ministry journeys and threaten to derail ministry callings completely.

It is vital for our own well-being as ministers and for the health of our congregations that we learn to see God at work in endings as well as beginnings. This means attending to grief, the loss and all it means, and supporting one another through the hard times. This article identifies four reasons ministry transition can be uniquely challenging, together with four biblical themes that enable us to grow “out the other side” of endings.

Over the past three years, I have talked to people about endings and transitions, which formed into a book called Moving On: Grief in Ministry Transition. It began with my own healing after I resigned from a parish, but as my colleagues shared with me, God called me to continue this work and offer it to the church. Over 50 people contributed to Moving On, a rich cultural and theological diversity. Their stories ring with faith in Christ, crucified and risen, who leads us and walks with us, especially in the places where we struggle to recognize Him.
Multiple loss challenge

Why is ministry transition uniquely challenging? First, because of multiple losses. Ending a ministry involves many losses all at once: friends, a job, an income, and a role with status. When I left my parish, I grieved for my hopes and plans, the goals not yet accomplished, and the things that might fall over without me. Where housing is provided, leaving a position means losing the family home. It can mean changing towns and leaving friends and schools. But the main thing is the loss of our faith community and sense of belonging.

When a minister leaves a position, suddenly support systems such as supervision and ministers’ groups end. I found myself having to take total responsibility for my own recovery, a rapid lesson in self-reliance that would have been made easier by more recognition from my denomination of the challenges of post-ministry grief. There is little curiosity about the experience of ending. Ministers who resign are typically expected to keep silent about the reasons for their resignation. It is a lonely place.

Grief theory names multiple loss as a complicating factor in grief. Too much to deal with can overwhelm our ability to process well. The biblical theme that speaks to this is exile. God’s people knew what it was like to be cast out of their homes. Could they sing the Lord’s song in a strange land (Ps. 137)? John knew exile on Patmos, cut off from the church. But even there, Jesus met him, inspired him, and gave him a new phase of ministry.

The challenge of recovery is twofold: honesty and rest. Psalms and Lamentations invite us to pour out all the truth of how we feel before God. Hold nothing back. Yes, count your blessings, but also count the cost. What have you
lost? What have your spouse and your kids lost? Which relationships do you miss the most?

And rest. After a death, we know that people must rest, but after a ministry ends, we expect our leaders to rush straight into the next one. No wonder we feel tired. Take time, make time, somehow, to allow the Holy Spirit to heal and restore. Churches, give ministers a holiday between appointments.

**Relationship challenge**

The second challenge is a tricky one. According to grief theorist William Worden, “the type of relationship that most frequently hinders people from adequately grieving is the highly ambivalent one with unexpressed hostility.” The more complicated your relationship with the person who has died, the more complicated your grieving for them will be. The same applies to churches. On the face of it, leaving a conflicted ministry is a relief, but years later, pastors still struggle to forgive and be at peace.

Pastoral relationships can be complex and ambivalent. As a parish minister, I was a leader and friend, surrogate daughter, aunt, and celebrant at the same time. Like it or not, I represented God and the Presbyterian Church. No other professional role is so multilayered, which is a wonderful giving of ourselves, but it has a unique capacity for rejection that causes pain.

Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30) helps with this. “Let the weeds and the wheat grow together,” said the landowner (v. 30, ERV). Jesus had plenty of experience of both the good and the bad, the ambivalence of human relationships and the dark side of good intentions. This parable teaches me not to get too stressed about broken promises, divided loyalties, hard hearts, and refusal to change. We can let go of our expectations of how we “should” have been treated. We can and must forgive those who have hurt us. We might even come to see, as Jesus does, the weeds in ourselves as well as in others. In God’s hands, the brokenness of human life, including church life, will dissolve away, leaving only what endures: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13).

**The circumstances challenge**

The third factor is that the more stressful the ending of the ministry, the more time and energy is needed for recovery. Perhaps the most traumatic experience in ministry is “forced exit.” Some parishes close or can no longer afford a stipend. Ministers can violate ethical standards, and as a result, the church cuts the pastoral tie. Some ministers resign due to illness. And some pastors end up feeling as though they have no choice but to resign. Many have experienced bullying or abuse. To leave a ministry under circumstances not of your own choosing or of feeling mistreated leaves a strange intensity of grief for that ministry. It’s a wound in the soul.

The biblical word that powerfully resonates with trauma is *crushed*. In the Old Testament, *crushed* means total defeat, as in David’s song of victory in 2 Samuel 22:38 (NIV); the soldiers of Israel either are celebrating the crushing of their enemies or are themselves defeated. Crushing is also the process by which wheat becomes bread, olives become oil, and grain is offered as a sacrifice on God’s altar (Lev. 2:14). Isaiah prophesies the coming Messiah who will be “crushed for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5, NIV) but “will not . . . be crushed until He has established justice in the earth” (Isa. 42:4, NRSV). In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes himself and his friends as being crushed to the point of despair by an attack (2 Cor. 1:8), and yet he goes on to declare, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed” (2 Cor. 4:8, NRSV).

This paradox of being crushed and yet not crushed is central to the Christian experience of trauma. The metaphor of crushing reveals God’s process of transforming people, like grains of wheat become flour, which becomes bread, which becomes the body of Christ, which was broken for us in the greatest act of love. This is a circularity in which human pain is matched and held within Christ’s suffering. The work of grieving in the aftermath of trauma, informed by the Christian faith, is a work of willing sacrifice to unwelcome suffering, surrendered into a power made perfect in weakness.

**The call challenge**

Last but not least, ministry transition can involve a crisis of calling. When I was inducted into a parish, I felt strongly that I was called by God, there and then, to that place and those people. I was determined to be resilient and stay the course. To come to the point of resigning from a ministry confronts core assumptions of identity and trust in a God who saves, empowers, and protects. Feeling undermined and unwell is a faith crisis.

Grief theory describes this as an existential component of grieving. Psychologist Ronnie Janoff-Bulman highlights how our deep assumptions can be challenged by loss. Are we safe in the world? Is life meaningful? Is it fair?
She points out, “It is those with the most positive pre-existing assumptions whose core schema are most deeply violated.” The church claims to be a safe place of belonging, family, meaning, and justice. When our experience contradicts that, we experience profound grief.

Our theology of call may or may not serve us well. One of the contributors in Moving On: Grief in Ministry Transition describes months of struggling with “but I thought I was called.” Another contributor challenges pastors to allow their understanding of the call to break open and expand. My own experience was that, through this process, God both affirmed my call to ordained ministry and opened it in directions I could never have predicted.

The spiritual work of reevaluating calling and career leads us on a path of surrender and resurrection. We find ourselves walking the road to Emmaus while a stranger tells a story of suffering and healing. We recognize Jesus right beside us as, eventually, we find our place in His dynamic plan for the salvation of the world.

As ministers, our stories include the pain of ending and the joy of new beginnings. The space in-between can be an uncomfortable one, even traumatic, and is often walked alone. Coming “out the other side” of transition requires support, including professional help as well as rest and recovery. Prayer is vital to stay connected to God even when we are cut off from the faith community. Scripture overflows with resources to help us, for we learn that God’s people were in transition more than they were settled, and God met them there.

It is my prayer that those in ministry will find greater healing for past pain and fresh energy for the work of mission. I would love for ministry endings to be done with grace so that those who go and those who stay are blessed and able to “farewell” with peace.

1 Silvia Purdie, ed., Moving On: Grief in Ministry Transitions (Wellington, New Zealand: Philip Garside, 2022). The book discusses endings and transitions, with resources for prayer and liturgy as well as career counseling, supervision, and support.
I knew little about retirement until I was asked to write a book about preparing for it. At the time, I was in pastoral ministry but heading for retirement. I hesitated but finally accepted the challenge. Since publication, the doors have opened to help people as they think about retirement. What follows is designed to help you understand retirees in your congregation(s) in general terms. It also can help you plan and prepare wisely for your own retirement.

1. Personal finances

While writing this paragraph, I entered “biggest retirement planning mistakes” into my search engine and got 10.6 million results. Scanning the first few pages, I saw that the mistakes were obviously financial. And, perhaps fortunately for us, there were also 10 million or so solutions.

For retirees in your congregation, the financial side of retirement is important—and can be scary and embarrassing if they have not been able to build up their nest egg enough or if investments have failed them. Few will want to talk about their failures, and it can be a sensitive topic as they adjust and tighten their budget to the realities they face.

Most retirees are concerned about their money lasting longer than they will. Unfortunately, in attempting to work out their financial needs for retirement, they may use “fuzzy math and rosy assumptions.”

To help sort this out, find a registered financial adviser or planner for advice about your personal approach. Find a sound plan; the retired couple who sold their home to live on cruise ships permanently for “less than $43 a day” sounds risky—particularly in the long term.

2. The pleasure trap

Author Rodney MacReady states, “Our culture’s version of retirement comes with several unhelpful nuances” that include this line of thought: “You’ve looked after others—it’s time to look after yourself. You’ve disciplined yourself to get to this point—now it’s time to let your hair down and indulge yourself. You’ve denied yourself to save for retirement—now you get to spend your hard-earned wealth. You’re the boss now—do as you please. . . . You’re entitled to this.”

He adds that this kind of thinking often leads to mostly false expectations for retirement: extensive travel, leisure, hobbies, crafts, good food, exotic drinks, tours, social clubs, and a desire to “occupy time in interesting ways . . . lest they surrender to boredom.”

Retirees do have more freedom and should take advantage of some expectations when they can, within reason. Within reason? Retirement could last quite some time—too long to merely attempt to avoid boredom.

The reality is that the best retirements are lived on purpose—with purpose.

What do I mean by that?

A few years back, I interviewed 13 retirees for a Hope Channel (South Pacific) television series. I saw purpose in Alan, who made quality banjos in his retirement. Nicky had recently retired early to paint Australian birds. She now runs her own studio and is recognized as one of Australia’s best bird artists. Ashley was the number three male tennis player in the world—in the 80–85 age group.

Each of them had a purpose. Of course, you will find retired people with purpose in your church and among its leadership. Appreciate them.

3. Being around for quite some time

I am reminded of this whenever Romney plays the organ or piano at our church. Music was his life and career. University-trained, he taught at various school levels, including tertiary.
Bruce Manners, PhD, is a retired editor and pastor residing in Kilsyth, Victoria, Australia.
Often, spontaneous applause erupts in our church when he plays the piano for the offertory—he is a good musician.

He’s also 98 years old!

In The 100-Year Life, British researchers Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott point out that there has been a dramatic increase in life expectancy in Western societies, and it is growing in other parts of the world. “Basically in every decade since 1840, life expectancy has increased by two to three years.”

To illustrate, those who reach 100 within the British Commonwealth (which includes several nations, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) receive a message from the king. A decade ago, one person cared for these messages. Now, it takes a team of seven people.

Those who retire at retirement age may be gifting themselves 8,000 days of retirement living—that is more than 20 years.

4. “No” can be the default response

Some retirees may automatically respond “No!” to requests to do things at church, be involved, and support projects—particularly in the early stage of retirement. Retirement often begins with a holiday or new experiences.

But keep in mind that, generally, baby boomers can be cantankerous at times (being one of them, I can say that!). Mostly, they do not like being told what to do, but they do love a challenge. Boomers “want to do something interesting and challenging. They are ready to jump into a worthwhile cause where they feel they can make a significant social impact.”

“Do we think that once people approach retirement age, they want to . . . slow down in their serving roles? Or do we challenge people to dream about a community need—such as orphaned children, homelessness, or the unemployed—and ways in which they might draw on their years of experience to make a difference for Christ?”

The challenge: “There is no greater mission for older adults to immerse themselves in than the mission of Christ to redeem and heal a broken world. But in some cases, the church is failing to provide older adults with these kinds of opportunities.”

Think big for them when they cannot think big themselves.

5. Retiring from church?

There is no concrete evidence that church members retire from church involvement—even from church attendance—when they retire from work.

However, a recent (2020) Australian survey found that the steepest fall in Christian affiliation was among the 15–44 age group, falling from 60.9 percent (2004) to 38.9 percent in 2020. In the same period, the 65-plus age group had fallen from 86.7 percent to 71.5 percent.

In the United States (US), the biggest decline among Christians—for the past three decades—has been among adults 55 and older.

In the US, “there was a time when pastors would look down from the pulpit at the grey-haired congregants sitting in the pews and consider them safe bets. These were the people whose faithfulness they didn’t worry about,” writes Adam Maclinnes. That is no longer the case.

One retiree who had left his church told his former pastor, “I love you. I love the people there.” . . . “But quite frankly, I’m getting everything I get at church in my soccer club.”

How can your church help retirees transition into a solid Christian-based retirement when one size does not fit all? That’s the challenge.

6. Strengthening Christian connections

“We are born to belong, we are created for connection, and whether we admit it to ourselves or not, we spend our whole lives trying to fit in, get in, and stay in. It almost doesn’t matter what ‘in’ is; we just want to belong somewhere.” For Christians, that sense of belonging should be found in their church.

Author and pastor Daniel Im refers to an in-depth study of the “state of discipleship” among Protestants by surveying 4,000 church attendees in North America—30 percent of them Canadians. One part of the research was to find behaviors that led to “an ever-increasing maturity in Christ.”

Four behaviors were needed:

1. Reading the Bible
2. Attending a worship service at your church
3. Attending small classes or groups for adults from church, such as Sunday School, Bible study, small groups, or adult Bible fellowships
4. Serving God and others

“When it comes to reading the Bible, hands down, this is the input goal that has a direct impact on the total score of all the output goals. . . . It’s important to understand here that this question was not measuring whether or not
an individual studied the Bible thoroughly or memorized Scripture. . . . We’re talking about the simple act of reading the Bible on a regular basis.”

Further, “individuals who attended church four times a month or more had a significantly higher score than those who never did or who did on a semi-regular basis. In other words, the more an individual did the input goal of attending a worship service, the higher they scored in the rest of the output goals.” “The research clearly shows that worship services matter and that the maturity level of a disciple is greatly influenced by the frequency that they attend worship services.”

Pastors need to experiment with ways to help strengthen their parishioners’ relationship with God at whatever stage of life, including retirees.

If they leave, please do not drop them from your weekly email list unless they request it. It is a reminder that you are still there and of what is happening in their church.

7. The legacy question
Speaker and consultant Amy Hanson tells of meeting a retiree serving in various ministries who had a “passion for life that was contagious.” She asked why he was serving in such a significant way in his retirement years.

He told of how, when his granddaughter was a little girl, he used to sing to her:

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
All good girls go to heaven.
When they get there, they will say,
“We love Jesus every day.”

One day, he overheard her singing the song in another room. She sang:

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
All good grandpas go to heaven.
When they get there, they will say,
“GOLF, GOLF, GOLF, GOLF, every day!”

. . . “Amy, in that moment, I saw myself through the eyes of my granddaughter. She saw what my passion was, and this is not the legacy I wanted to leave.”

The kind of legacy we leave is up to us. As a pastor, it is not out of order for you to ask a parishioner about life and death issues. You can ask, “How do you want to be remembered?” Or, better, “What do you want your legacy to be?”

Possibilities and drawbacks
Each retiree has his or her own set of circumstances; no one fits into the same mold. We have an obligation to our aging parishioners to open their eyes to both the possibilities and drawbacks of what they decide to do with their time and resources in retirement. Ultimately, make sure they have a firm relationship with God and are active in what He wants them to do, both in the church and out of it. Provide opportunities and guide them into being disciples of Him, especially on this new path of their lives.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.
Inmy senior year at Brazil Adventist College, I read a newsletter from the North Brazil Union reporting about two missionary boats needing pastors married to nurses to work as medical missionaries. Dulce, my young wife who was a nurse, and I, after much prayer, decided that if a call came to work on one of the boats, we would accept it. After encouragement, we shared with the union president our willingness to dedicate ourselves to the medical missionary ministry in the Brazilian state of Amazonas.

Soon afterward, we received an invitation to work on one of the Luzeiro boats. We were thrilled when we took over the first pastoral district in Maués, Amazonas, including pastoring the century-old farm where missionaries Leo and Jessie Halliwell had worked years earlier. The three years that we served on the boats Luzeiro IV, XIV, and V were unforgettable, with exciting stories of conversions, cures, and dangerous adventures. Those experiences confirmed that God was in charge of my calling to ministry.

Divine sovereignty

We began our first pastoral district with 32 churches and companies in the Maués region of Amazonas. Returning from one of the trips on the Luzeiro IV, we saw someone waving a white sheet in the distance on the riverbank. We immediately realized that the person was asking for help from the boat team. Exhausted after more than 20 days of sailing the rivers in the middle of the jungle, we wanted to get home before nightfall because the trip was hazardous after dark. We faced the risk of hitting giant trees that had fallen across the river channel. During the day, we could see the river channel better and keep in the deepest part where larger boats and ships sail. Additionally, for our very active two-year-old daughter, Roseane, being stuck in the vessel was a source of continual tension and fear.

As soon as Heraldo, the sailor who piloted the craft, pulled up on the bank, Dulce and I talked to the farmer waiting for us, anxious and greatly distressed. A surucucu, a huge and poisonous snake, had bitten one of her employees. The swelling of his leg had already reached his thigh, threatening to kill him. Dulce made a plaster of clay mixed with water and onion and placed it over the wounds left by the serpent’s fangs. As she wrapped the leg with a clean cloth, the farmer watched carefully to be able to continue the treatment. We instructed her to leave the plaster on for an hour and then wash it off. We also advised her not to feed the patient any meat or animal-derived food. We especially recommended the papayas and oranges available nearby as food. We told her how to prepare vegetables with low salt and fat and also told her to eliminate refined sugar during the treatment.

After reading the Bible with them, I prayed, gave that man’s life to the Lord, and pled for Him to perform a miracle on his leg. Three months later, I met that farmer. She was thankful to God, who had saved the employee’s life and completely restored him.

A church that rebelled

In the second year of my ministry on the Luzeiro XIV, we transferred to work with a church that had rebelled against the mission office. It had gone two years without a pastor. Since many of the church leaders rejected certain biblical doctrines, they refused to send their tithe to the conference office.

As soon as I arrived in town, as directed by the conference president and other experienced pastors, I visited all the members, reading the
Bible and praying with families. I also called on everyone to return to reading God’s Word daily and family worship. In addition, I provided Sabbath School lessons for all ages, emphasizing its importance for spiritual life.

Then, I held a week of spiritual revival, preaching at night and visiting all of the members during the day, especially some who faced spiritual problems and no longer attended church, to invite them to revival services. The week ended with a moving communion ceremony and an appeal for reconsecration. Shortly afterward, I conducted a 30-night evangelism series, visiting interested parties during the day, explaining the Bible, and urging them to accept Jesus. Many people attended the meetings, but no one accepted the call for baptism. Five teenagers, children of the church members, responded to the appeal, but they did not get baptized because of doubts and resistance from their parents.

Sad and lonely, far from the headquarters of the mission and facing pastoral challenges alone, I began to think that this would be the end of my ministry. “What would I report to the pastoral council?” I asked myself with a feeling of failure. After spending so much time, money, and energy, I had no results to show for it. What should I do now? In my moments of spiritual communion, I asked in anguish, “Lord, what do You want from me?” After I cried out for wisdom, God impressed me with an idea that revolutionized my life and ministry: reading the book Gospel Workers and dialoguing with God. I termed this first hour of my three-hour pastoral study each day as “talking to God about my ministry.”

Of the many ideas that I gained through it, God especially used one of them to transform that church forever. My wife and I decided to give home Bible studies. Dozens of homes began to open their doors to receive the Word of God. On Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, those who received the Bible studies in their homes now crowded the little church to hear Dulce speak about health. I prepared and presented a series on the life of Jesus, reinforcing the central biblical doctrines each night.

The Lord worked many miracles in that city. The president of the mission performed the first baptism of ten people. The following Sabbath, six more people were prepared for baptism. I baptized people each weekend. The new members tore down that little wooden hall they had been using and built a beautiful church. An Adventist school opened, and that rebel group became an organized church, a symbol of the role of divine sovereignty in a pastor’s ministry.

**From battles to baptism**

On one of the trips in the Amazon with the Luzeiro XIV, we arrived at a large village where there was a small Adventist group. I met with the members to arrange the health and evangelistic programs that we would conduct. A woman there named Taina was a witch who had an evil reputation. She mistreated children and fought a lot with her neighbors. When Dulce and I arrived on the missionary boat, the local members asked me to visit her and invite her to Dulce’s health talks during the day and the evangelistic meetings at night. Taina promised she would come.

As Dulce gave her health presentation, I saw Taina sitting in the front row, very attentive. Every night, I offered a Bible course that church members could teach to those whom desired it, and I noticed that Taina appeared very thoughtful. On the third night, when I handed out the application forms for the Bible course, she immediately filled one out and turned it in, stating that she wanted to study the Bible.

A spiritual revolution took place in her life. When we returned to that place on another trip, I had the joy of baptizing Taina in the muddy waters of the Solimões River to the honor and praise of God.

**Lessons learned**

All such experiences have made me reflect on divine sovereignty in ministry and that God guides His servants in many ways to fulfill His purpose. Pastors must have an intimate connection with the Lord to be able to discern the conviction that He seeks to instill in their minds. They need to be used to hearing God’s voice through daily Bible reading, meditation, prayer, and continual surrender of their lives to the Holy Spirit. God uses life situations, church needs, childhood memories, literature, and even a newsletter to signal the way He wants to lead us. The Lord’s sovereignty in the pastor’s ministry is amazing!

I also learned that the Lord knows each one of us well. He understands our emotions, motives, and thoughts. God understands what needs to be shaped, honed, or developed. To accomplish that, He permits or does not permit, grants or does not grant, and leads us along this or that path, preparing us for the task He has planned.

I realized that if pastors talk to God and spend time examining their hearts with Him, they will
understand with praise and gratitude the work of the heavenly Father in their character and ministry. With a heart on fire (Ps. 39:3), full of passion, and a sparkle in his or her eyes, the shepherd advances fearlessly, full of faith and submission like a boat sailing through a violent storm. It all results from the sovereignty of God in the pastor’s ministry.

**A continued commitment**

After 37 years of ministry in different regions of Brazil, my time of retirement approached. After a lifetime committed to ministry, I kept thinking, *What will I do when I retire?* I did not know what work I would dedicate myself to. Little by little, I discerned the Lord’s will at every step. As I talked with Him on the subject, a firm conviction filled me that I must use my retirement for the Lord.

First, I was impressed to devote myself to the activities I love most in pastoral ministry: visitation, discipleship, Bible studies, and holding small group meetings to strengthen active members and rescue former members who had left the church. Second, for part of the day, Dulce and I engage in canvassing, which we call the “printed-page evangelistic, pastoral ministry.” Third, she and I seek to be role models of dedicated, committed, and faithful members, the kind we have taught others to be during our pastoral ministry.

This new way of life has given us inexpressible satisfaction and has promoted our physical, mental, and spiritual health. We find constant comfort from the Lord in the words revealed to the psalmist: “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1, NIV).

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1 Name changed.

*Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org*
A minister with caleber
The word *caleber* in the title is not misspelled. It is written that way to refer to the excellent example of Caleb, as depicted in Joshua 14:6–14 and Numbers 13:30:14:6–9, which show that he is a leader of high caliber.

Referring to Caleb’s leadership training, mission specialist Travis Snedke states, “The mentoring of Caleb is not something that is directly described in the Bible but more implied. It is very possible that Moses groomed Caleb for leadership and inspired in him an unswerving faith in the Lord’s promises.” As Moses imparted wisdom to Caleb, so Caleb imparts wisdom to us.

**Caleb’s focus**

While 10 of the 12 spies focused on the challenges in the land, Caleb focused on God. The 12 spies, which included Caleb and Joshua, had been instructed by Moses to see whether the people in Canaan were strong or weak, few or many, lived in camps or strongholds, and whether the land was good or bad (Num. 13:17–20). When returning, 10 of the spies reported that “the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there” (v. 28). They continued, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us” (v. 31).

While his brethren made the people’s hearts melt with fear (Num. 14:4), Caleb’s report aimed to encourage them to pursue the land, “for God is with us.” Numbers 13:30 records, “Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ‘We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.’ ” Both Joshua and Caleb pointed the people to God instead of to the challenges, pleading, “Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them” (Num. 14:9). Caleb reminded them how God had led them in the past, which meant that He would be with them in the present and future. He encouraged them to trust in God.

Misplaced focus still affects people today. It is easy for ministers and leaders to focus on the challenges of ministry and not on who God is. For instance, due to the demands of the ministry—attending board meetings, visiting sick members, counseling your members regarding various problems—ministers tend to neglect prayer and the study of God’s Word. We lose our focus on God. When we do, we will face discouragement, which will impact our congregants as well. While the rest of the spies filled their hearts with fear of the people in the land, Caleb and Joshua filled their hearts with the fear of God. The assurance they found in resting in God had encouraged them to go and fight. Like Peter, ministers may sink when they see the strong winds and waves rather than focus on Jesus. A minister or leader with *caleber* has Caleb’s focus, which means they focus on God, not the challenges.

**Caleb’s faithfulness**

Caleb’s faithfulness is emphasized in Joshua 14:9, which could be translated as, “I filled myself up after the Lord, my God” or “I myself filled my heart with the Lord,
my God.” Compared to the ten spies who filled their hearts with fear of the giants, Caleb filled his heart with the Lord. This shows his loyalty and faithfulness to God.

In fact, in verse 9, referring to Caleb, Moses testified, “‘You filled yourself up with the Lord, my God’” (author’s translation). Caleb did not just keep his eyes and focus on God; rather, he filled his mind and heart with God to the degree that he knew God and wanted to obey and trust Him even in impossible circumstances. He remained faithful to God in spite of challenges.

Faithfulness is crucial in leadership. The kings of both Israel and Judah, as recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles, succeeded and fell depending on their relationship with God, their faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the Lord. The stories of Kings Ahab, Joash, Hezekiah, and David demonstrate how being faithful was foundational to the stability of Israel and Judah. Other characters of the Bible, such as Daniel, Joseph, and Job, exemplified faithfulness despite their life-threatening circumstances. Jeremiah was faithful to God despite persecution. These leaders demonstrated that they were called to be faithful, not to be successful.

Author Ellen White wrote, “Grave responsibilities rest upon the leaders and upon the departmental superintendents. I am instructed to warn you, my brethren, that your faithfulness or unfaithfulness will have a strong influence either in advancing or in hindering the work of God.”

For ministers, faithfulness is crucial. Ministers and leaders with caleb have Caleb’s faithfulness, filling themselves up with the Lord, knowing Him, obeying Him, and trusting in Him fully despite the challenges of life and ministry.

**Caleb’s fitness**

Caleb’s fitness is described in Joshua 14:10, 11. Caleb, 85 years old, was “the oldest man in Israel (along with Joshua).” He said, “I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in” (v. 11). And Caleb did not keep the secret of his fitness. He said that Yahweh “has kept me alive” (v. 10), using a verb meaning “cause to keep alive.”

Ministers have many challenges and responsibilities that can, and often do, challenge them spiritually, emotionally, and, yes, physically. Thus, they need to make sure that, besides their spiritual and emotional health, they take care of their physical health as well, for physical health can, and does, impact their emotional and spiritual health.

As God had caused Caleb to live and survive despite his own challenges, He will do it also to His ministers and leaders, just as long as they focus on God and are faithful to Him. He will keep them alive and preserve them. However, they have a responsibility to take care of their health. That is how God can “cause” us “to keep alive” too.

Caleb’s fitness reminds church leaders and ministers to take the health message seriously. Along with upholding the Ten Commandments, by precept and example, they need to promote healthy living. They need a well-balanced plant-based diet, regular exercise, water, fresh air, sunlight, and adequate rest. They also need to trust God with all their burdens. In short, they must take advantage of this health message that has been embraced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to have a better quality of life and reach others by example.

**Age no limit**

Ministers can be leaders with caleb despite the challenges they face. Snode concludes, “The spirit, the zeal, and the courage of Caleb were no doubt inspired by the example of Moses. Moses learned from him that it does not matter what age you are; God can still use you and do great things through you.” Pastors should emulate Caleb’s focus, faithfulness, and fitness. If they do, then, like Caleb, they can make a difference in the lives of the people they lead to the heavenly Promised Land.

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2 Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture in this article is from the New American Standard Bible.


4 Andrews Study Bible, commentary on Joshua 14:12 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 281.


6 Snode, “Mentoring in the Old Testament.”

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The 16 Undeniable Laws of Communication: Apply Them and Make the Most of Your Message


John Maxwell is no stranger to the world of leadership, communication, and pastorship. His 50-plus years of experience make this book a real gem to treasure, apply, and share. Maxwell often states that he is adding value to his listeners and readers. That is precisely what he has accomplished in this book.

Many readers are familiar with Maxwell’s classic work, The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. In this book, Maxwell takes a similar approach but focuses on 16 principles of communication. The book is divided into five sections that cover the who, what, how, when, and why of communication. Maxwell purposely leaves the “why” of communication to the very end of the book, believing that communication should be about “adding value” to others rather than serving self. It is necessary to know oneself and clarify the message before deciding on action points. More importantly, identifying how this communication would add value to the audience is an important insight to keep in mind while preparing and delivering messages.

Maxwell strives for clear, deep, and yet simple communication. In fact, simplicity is one of the principles he captures masterfully in this book. “Simple is deep and fast” and not shallow and fast (simplistic) or deep and slow (complex). Communicators must aim to make complex topics simple, memorable, and applicable. The main goal of communicators should be to move people into action and add value.

Verbal, on-stage communication is the trademark of this work. However, many of these principles are also applicable in written communications. Conversely, Maxwell is helping leaders and aspirant speakers improve their stage presence, deliver a clear message, and adapt to changing circumstances. He allows his readers to experience his speech preparation, delivery techniques, and—what he considers of primal importance—practices to connect with the audience. He states: “People will receive more from a communicator with average content who connects than they ever will from a speaker with great content who never connects” (128). In fact, he wrote a book on the topic of connection alone.¹

This book would be a great asset to pastors and lay leaders who have frequent speaking appointments. Even though the book is easy to read, engaging, and highly practical, this is not a “how-to” guide. It is not a book for beginners. It better serves leaders with previous public speaking knowledge.

Readers will not be disappointed by this latest work of John Maxwell. This book, like his previous writings, is highly inspirational and motivational. It is filled with practical tips ready to be implemented in real life, making, therefore, a great blend of tried and tested principles with experience from a great leader and communicator.

Words of encouragement: The impact of an experienced pastor’s words

Henry Frasca, a nine-year-old boy from Massachusetts, learned that a player from an opposing team was discouraged because he had fallen into a batting slump. Henry felt compelled to act when he observed that Davis was entrenched in a 0-for-54 hitless streak—the longest in Major League Baseball (MLB) history. In an interview, he said, “When someone’s hurting, I didn’t like it.” Motivated by empathy, he wrote a letter to the struggling first baseman.

Henry’s message to Davis was heartfelt and encouraging: “There are two things I want you to know. First, the way you play baseball has nothing to do with how good a person you are. Also, you are incredible. You play in the MLB. You’ve done it for a long time and everyone goes through a slump. Don’t give up. We’re rooting for you. Sincerely, Henry Frasca.”

In a twist of fate, on the day Henry’s letter reached Davis in April, the first baseman shattered his infamous record with a three-hit game, including two doubles. Davis revealed to the reporter that the letter had struck a chord with him. He carried it tucked inside his Bible throughout the season. “It definitely caught me off-guard,” he admitted. “But, it meant enough to me for me to carry it around the rest of the day. It was pretty cool. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t get a little choked up.” Reflecting on the significance of this act of kindness, Davis said, “People don’t really realize how they impact us.”

The ripple effect of words of kindness in sports and beyond

This heartwarming story serves as a poignant reminder of the profound influence of kindness and how our words and actions can offer powerful encouragement to those in need, no matter how small.

Have you ever been deeply moved by the words of a powerful preacher? Do you remember the words someone said to you that had profoundly impacted you? Let me share a personal experience that shows the immense power of words spoken on time.

Ellen G. White wrote, “What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil.”

As pastors, we must always recognize the significant impact attached to our words. Let
“At that moment in time, going through what I was going through, to get a letter that was that encouraging—especially from a 9-year-old—it was pretty special.”

us always choose them wisely, recognizing their power to shape destinies. Let our speech be a beacon of hope, grace, and love, echoing the divine purpose for which we have this gift.

In the pages of Scripture, we often encounter verses that underscore words' value: “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24, NIV). Words can heal, uplift, and bring hope. But just as they have the power to elevate, words also have the power to wound, diminish, and dishearten. Within the church, the voice of an experienced pastor plays a significant role in directing which of these paths the church takes.

An encouraging word can be an inspiration of hope during life’s storms. Experienced pastors, having weathered many such storms themselves, can offer solace that resonates, bringing peace and comfort to troubled souls. Would you allow the Holy Spirit to use you to speak words of encouragement to those in need?

2 Murphy.
3 Murphy.
4 Murphy.
5 Ellen G. White, Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 117.
Spiritual revival baptizes 3,000 in Philippines
DAVAO, PHILIPPINES

A tremendous spiritual awakening entitled “It Is Written: The Hour Has Come” occurred in northern Davao, Philippines, on October 6–21, 2023.

The Tagum Central Seventh-day Adventist Church hosted the gathering throughout 11 locations, playing a crucial role in igniting a profound spiritual reawakening throughout the district. Ely Magtanong, the US coordinator, oversaw the coordination of the It Is Written team’s operations. His tireless efforts ensured the event’s success and long-term influence.

The keynote speaker at the Tagum Central event was Miguel Crespo, president of the New York Conference. His spirit-filled teachings deeply impacted many people. The main speaker for the Cuambogan event was Charlotte Marriott from Oregon, USA. Pastor Carlos Aganio led the church in Santo Tomas Central. Jennifer Cardoza and the Field Two pastors led the church in Kapalong Central, and Cindy Torgesen delivered powerful message in Mabini.

The event culminated on October 21 at the bustling Panabo Sports Complex, where a large crowd assembled. The secretariat revealed that 3,246 baptisms had been registered since May, a stunning testament to the impact of diligent Bible studies and field preparations.

While this day was noteworthy, both speakers and organizers emphasized that it was only a stepping-stone. The mission would continue, faith would expand, and the congregation would always encourage and mentor the newly baptized. [Roxie Pido, SPUC Communication Department]

Pastor receives gold medal from Jamaica’s governor general
KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Seventh-day Adventist pastor Jermaine Johnson was one of 72 recipients of the Governor General Medal of Honor in Kingston, Jamaica, awarded for significant and exceptional contributions to their communities and the nation. The ceremony was held at King’s House on September 28, 2023.

Johnson, who pastors the Moneague District of churches in Saint Ann, is the author of the “I Believe Initiative” theme song titled “I Believe.” His Medal of Honor Gold Award was presented in the category of social program contributors.

“In all my twenty-four years in the church, this is the first pastor I have ever seen to be so passionate about the mission of the church, and he has only been with the district since May 7, 2022,” said Earl Waysome, a church elder at the Moneague church and the congregation’s personal ministries director. “He has been networking with various government and nongovernment agencies to effect social intervention programs that have not only benefited the church but also the communities of Moneague and its adjoining communities,” Waysome said.

“I look forward to continuing to serve and contribute to my country’s growth and prosperity,“ Johnson said. Jamaica’s governor general, Sir Patrick Allen (right), pins Jermaine Johnson (left) with a Medal of Honor Gold Award.
Unveiling a hidden legacy
WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES

At the Women in Seventh-day Adventist History Conference, held October 12–14, 2023, on the Washington Adventist University campus, attendees learned of the hidden legacy of women serving alongside men to build the church. Hosted by the North American Division (NAD) Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, directed by Michael Campbell, the event attracted roughly 150 attendees, both men and women, from across North America, South America, Europe, and Africa.

This conference had its genesis two years ago as Jim Wibberding, professor of applied theology and biblical studies at Pacific Union College, started uncovering “little snippets” of untold stories while developing a class on women in Adventist history. He conferred with Campbell, who also found women’s stories “hidden in plain sight” in photo albums or letters. Campbell subsequently decided to host the conference “not to try to assert [a] political agenda but to tell the church’s history more accurately and paint a broader backdrop of the wealth of women’s contributions.” He and Wibberding see the conference as a starting point, a catalyst for further research and publications.

Campbell also wanted to demonstrate that there are “a whole host of ways to serve the Lord and expand the work of the church.” Thus, the fields represented encompassed pastoral ministry, Bible work, education, healthcare, publishing and editing, finance, and the arts. The conference also affirmed unsung heroes such as secretaries and stenographers who formed the “information bureau” of the General Conference office, helping steer committees away from duplicate or conflicting actions.

Another ongoing theme was men and women being stronger together, particularly in a church and world where women form the majority. Attendee Ardis Stenbakken, retired GC Women’s Ministries director, reflected, “We make decisions now based on our history and understanding our history. And we need women involved. Women think differently. Women act differently. And we need the strength and the ideas and the creativity of everybody.”

During her Sabbath message titled “Hidden Figures,” retired General Conference Vice President Ella Simmons—who in 2005 became the first woman elected to the role—asserted that just like in Nehemiah’s time, when God used men and women to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, “now it’s our responsibility to build a wall of the complete and accurate history of this church.”

On the conference’s final day, two panels facilitated by Celeste Ryan Blyden, the Columbia Union Conference’s first woman executive secretary, showcased “living legends,” including directors, vice presidents, and other administrators at different church levels. These panels offered inspiration as the women spoke of divine guidance, unexpected opportunities, and mentorship from male and female colleagues along their journeys. Their stories celebrated women’s achievements despite barriers and continued the theme of rewriting history. [Christelle Agboka, North American Division News]
Well, it is really over. My career has come to an end. I am retired. If I may be absolutely truthful with you, I never saw this coming. I am sure I am like a lot of you who thought Jesus would return long before retirement came. I always thought I would have a pulpit to thunder behind just prior to my Lord Jesus’ return. But now, that pulpit is in the hands of others.

People say, “Pastors never really retire.” I beg to differ; they really do. Oh, some carry on ministries during their retirement years, and others may choose to be associate pastors somewhere. But the lion’s share of us pastors are now no longer employed by the church we gave our lives to. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? That is entirely up to the individual.

Rediscovering a first love

In the seven weeks since I retired, I have done a lot of soul searching. I have come to realize that I love and have always loved the Scriptures. God’s Word has been preeminent in my life for many years. But after reflection and prayer, I recognized that in my working years, I somehow neglected my personal study of the Bible. I should have studied a lot more.

I am so excited to have the time to search out the Scriptures with the Holy Spirit and seek answers to questions that I have had or others have raised to me. I read for hours, and then, when I get weary, I listen to God’s Word being read to me.

I have begun to mark up my Bible again. Instead of seeking sermonic material, which has been my life for decades, I am seeking for myself and my individual growth and advancement. I want to be a better Christian; in these years I have left, I want to grow into the man God called me to be. I know God is not done working on me, and I am welcoming the challenges He brings before me in His Word. I love being retired for this reason.

Rediscovering a second love

Another reason I love being retired is time with my wife. Continuing in my reflection, I have come to realize that I neglected spending time with her many times, and she never complained. I should have paid more attention to my wife and family. I gave ministry everything I had every day. My mind never shut down from ministry; I stayed illustration-conscious with everything I read, watched, and heard. I am kind of ashamed to admit this to you, but it is the truth.

My wife served as my secretary while I pastored and when I went into departmental work. My wife said on more than one occasion, “It’s a good thing we work together because I’d never see you otherwise.”

But now, because of the gift of time, my wife and I have really connected again. During my reading of Scripture and study, my dear wife joins me. We raise questions from our reading and then search together for answers. It is like going back years in time to when we started this walk with Jesus and took the time to grow together. It has brought love to a new height in our relationship.

God brings us together, but time not used efficiently and carefully can cause a divide we never even knew was there.

What now?

What now? I can answer that: now, I have time for the real priorities in my life. The time that rushed by in ministry, I have now rediscovered in retirement. For that, I shall be forever grateful.
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2024 trip schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 20-Apr 1</td>
<td>Liberia, Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 10-22</td>
<td>Totonicapán, Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1-13</td>
<td>Jinotepe, Nicaragua</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22-June 3</td>
<td>San Salvador, El Salvador</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19-July 1</td>
<td>Santa Ana, El Salvador</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 26-July 8</td>
<td>Choluteca, Honduras</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 10-22</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, D.R.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 17-29</td>
<td>TBA, Brazil</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 31-Aug 12</td>
<td>Guápiles, Costa Rica</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 31-Aug 12</td>
<td>Panama City, Panama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 14-26</td>
<td>Bogotá, Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 14-26</td>
<td>La Chorrera, Panama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 28-Sep 9</td>
<td>Quibdó, Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 11-23</td>
<td>Havana, Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 18-30</td>
<td>Cusco, Peru</td>
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<td>Sep 18-30</td>
<td>Juliaca, Peru</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 18-30</td>
<td>Quito, Ecuador</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 2-14</td>
<td>Chinandega, Nicaragua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 9-21</td>
<td>Holguín, Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 23-Nov 4</td>
<td>San Juan de la Maguana, D.R.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“I’m thrilled to see the young adults I brought taking active leadership roles in our church.”
—Pr. Ramon Verduzco, Nevada-Utah Conf.

“Sharing the gospel in Peru inspired one of my young adults to commit to full-time ministry.”
—Pr. James Kwon, Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conf.