



General Conference

Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

FEBRUARY 2018

Adventist leaders recently gathered from around the world for the 11th Annual Global Leadership Summit held in Lisbon, Portugal. While there, we reflected on the important topic of unity and church authority, and their potential impact on completing the Church's mission. Read a report on the summit [here](#).

One challenge recently leveled is that the Protestant concept of the "priesthood of all believers" negates church authority. In our lead article, David Trim, director of Archives, Statistics, and Research tackles this question and considers implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Throughout this newsletter you will find material tailored especially for those in leadership positions, which we believe you will find helpful. Topics such as how to build a healthy marriage while carrying many responsibilities, the importance of water for our health, and notices for General Conference Executive Committee members are included. You will also find an important news item featuring exciting religious liberty developments in the country of Uganda.

Most importantly, I invite you to carefully consider during your daily personal devotionals the important aspect of church unity in completing the mission that our Lord has entrusted to us; to pray earnestly for God's wisdom and discernment in order to fix our eyes on Christ (Heb.12:2); and to dedicate our efforts and talents to tell others about the amazing hope of redemption only in Him.

And let's remember the wonderful promise found in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, seen on page 4 of this publication.

May you be encouraged and strengthened as we move forward together in the work that God has given each of us to do in reaching 7.6 billion people of the world for Him!

—Guillermo "Billy" Biaggi
General Vice President



EDITORIAL



THINKSTOCK

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

and Its Implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church

BY DAVID TRIM, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF THE
OFFICE OF ARCHIVES, STATISTICS, AND RESEARCH

Last year's 500th anniversary of Luther's publication of his 95 Theses in 1517 naturally saw renewed attention to the key principles of the Protestant Reformation, which, even in the 21st century, often are still best known in Latin, the scholarly language of the 16th century. The most important of these principles are *sola gratia*, *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*: grace only, faith only, and the Bible only; but they also include *presbyterii fidelium*, a Latin term meaning "priesthood of the faithful." This doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" was historically a central one in all churches arising out of the Reformation.¹

In recent years, the doctrinal

gulf between Catholic and Protestant has narrowed as a result of ecumenical initiatives, but Adventists hold fast to traditional Protestant understandings of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. Yet is the same true of *presbyterii fidelium*?

The past 18 months have seen passionate discussions about church authority and the role of pastors, arising from the world-Church's 2013–2014 ordination study process and the 2015 General Conference Session action on ordination. These events, coinciding as they did with the Reformation's quincentenary, led some Adventist church members and leaders to wonder whether current Adventist understandings of the priesthood of all believers are consistent with the original teachings of Luther and the Reformers.

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This article shows that the Seventh-day Adventist Church's positions on pastoral ministry and church authority are essentially those of the Protestant Reformers. The priesthood of all believers is often misunderstood as being primarily about ecclesiology, when it had more to do with soteriology; it was never, for 16th-century Protestants, a shorthand for a pastorate of all believers, it was rather a claim of each believer's ability to be saved without human mediation.

The Old Testament

The concept that *all* of God's people were equivalent to priests was a radical innovation by the early Christian Church, one that was contrary to centuries of divinely ordained Jewish practice.

In the Old Testament, anyone—male or female, rich or poor—could pray to God and be answered.² But only priests and Levites had access to the sacred instruments and rituals. This was plain from the horrible fiery deaths of the 250 supporters of Korah who offered incense and fire in unsanctioned censers (Num. 16:16-18, 35). Only priests could legitimately offer the sin and guilt sacrifices; and only priests and judges or prophets (called by God) could make other sacrifices. If offered by others, sacrifices not only were unacceptable to God: they also resulted in divine condemnation of the one who had presumptuously offered the sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:13-14).

While any Hebrew could approach God through prayer, the priests, supported by the Levites, had sole control over sacred objects and rituals. To use a theologian's term, in the "sacred



Only priests and Levites had access to the sacred instruments and rituals.

economy" of the Israelites, the priest had a monopoly on the mechanics by which salvation was gained. The priest was indispensable, the mediator of salvation.

The New Testament

It is precisely this status that the Apostle Peter undermines with his memorable words about the privileged position of all who

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As a leader, are you leveraging the power of water in your life?

Water makes up 60 to 70 percent of your body weight. Every system in your body depends on water. Water is needed to flush toxins out of vital organs, carry nutrients to your cells, and provide a moist environment for ear, nose, and throat tissues. It is estimated that a person can survive without food for a few weeks, but you can live without water for only a few days.

The ideal amount of water to drink will vary from person to person and with individual circumstances. Some may need more than this depending on their circumstances, such as activity level and the climate of the area. A general formula

WATER*

of how much to drink that differs from person to person is listed in the chart below.

Did you know that water is not only good for you to drink, but also has a number of beneficial external uses as well. Daily showers or baths will not only keep you clean but will also help to improve blood circulation.

"The mind and body are invigorated. The muscles become more flexible, the intellect is made brighter. The bath is a soother of the nerves. Bathing helps the bowels, the stomach, and the liver, giving health and energy to each, and it promotes digestion" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 276).

How Much Water Should I Drink?**

100 lbs./45 kg.		50 oz./1.48 liters (6-7 glasses)
130 lbs./59 kg.		65 oz./1.92 liters (8-9 glasses)
150 lbs./68 kg.		75 oz./2.21 liters (9-10 glasses)
180 lbs./81.6 kg.		90 oz./2.66 liters (11-12 glasses)
200 lbs./90.7 kg.		100 oz./2.95 liters (12+ glasses)

*From *Habits That Heal*, by Monica Fukuda with David K. Fukuda, M.D., p. 16. Available for purchase here.

**Calculated based on 8 fl. oz. (237 ml.) glasses

believe in Jesus. His ministry on earth, sacrificial death, and high priestly ministry in heaven, all ushered in a new and very different salvific economy.

Fundamental here is 1 Peter chapter 2, but often only verse 9 is quoted, whereas verse 5 is also important, with its assertion that “you also, like living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (NIV).

The key point of course is that the believer is able to offer spiritual sacrifices—previously the prerogative of the Aaronic priesthood. This is the foundation on which Peter then declares: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (2:9, NIV).

No caste or group, then, has a monopoly on access to salvation; no mediator is required other than Jesus. The author of Hebrews makes this plain, writing that, because “we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God,” not only do we have good reason to “hold fast our confession;” we can also “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14, 16 NKJV).

The intention of the early Church was, however, to be frustrated by developments in the later Roman Empire and the Middle Ages.

The Medieval Church

The Catholic Church perpetuated the division of God’s people into different categories. In medieval Catholic terminology, these were “spiritual” (or “religious”) and “secular” (not the modern meaning). Bible reading and unsupervised prayer by “secular” (lay) people was discouraged. The “religious” included friars, monks, nuns, and deacons. Those who were ordained, however, the priests, were more than men with a vocation. Ordination makes the priest ontologically distinct from other believers.

In Catholic soteriology, the sacraments are instruments of and vehicles for divine grace (whereas in Adventist theology, baptism and communion are signs). But only a priest may administer the sacraments. If a lay person presides over the eucharist or mass, Catholic theology holds that it is not efficacious (i.e., it does *not* impart grace), for only the priest can transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. After confession, in the final stage of the sacrament of penance, the priest absolves the sinner—and does so himself, historically with the Latin words “*ego te absolvo*” (“I absolve you”). And only a priest is able to offer this absolution.

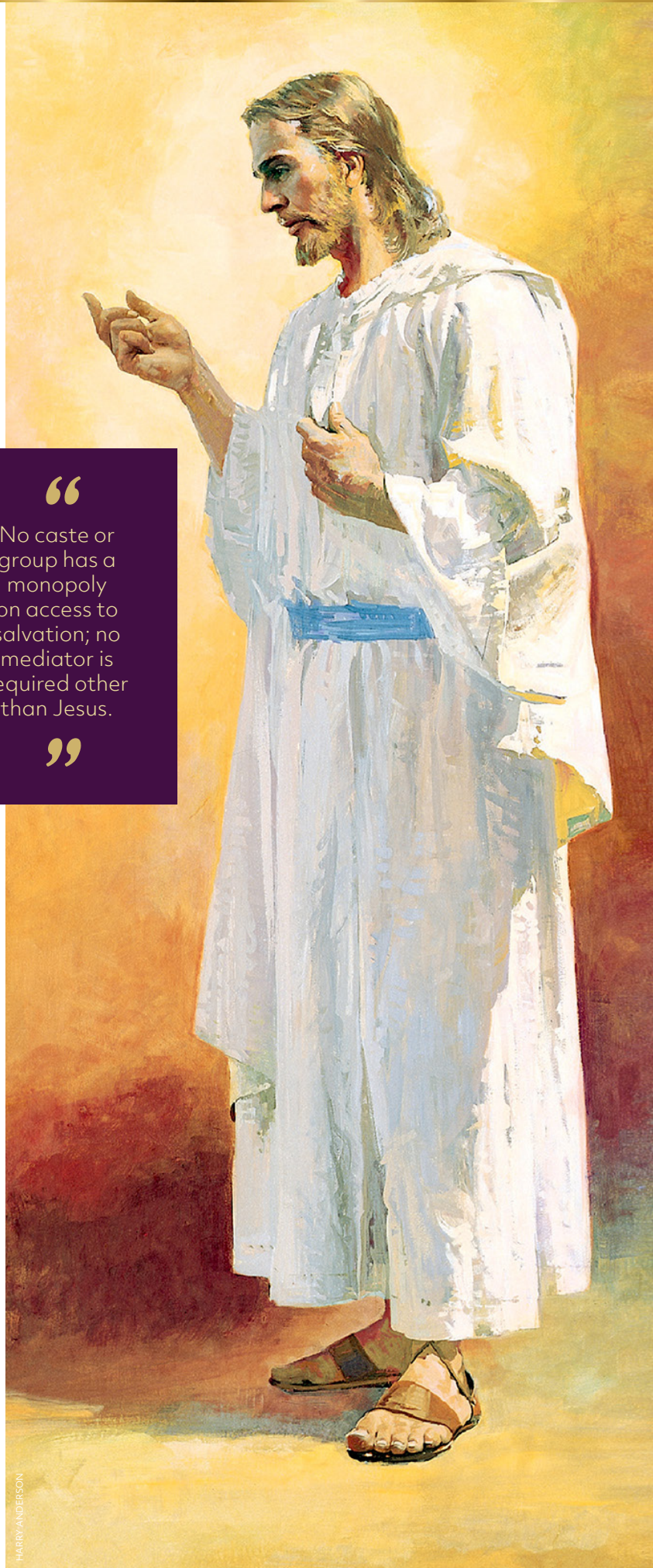
Thus, the Catholic religious economy recreates that of the Old Testament: priests make up a qualitatively different class of person. The priest is the indispensable mediator of God’s grace, without whom salvation is impossible.

Martin Luther

It was these claims that Luther was attacking in his assertion of *presbyterii fidelium*. In the face of a hierarchy whose claims divided the body of Christ, creating second-class citizens, Luther roundly declared in 1520:

“It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. . . . all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate.”³ In 1523, he posed and answered

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”



a rhetorical question: “I ask who are these who are called out of darkness into marvelous light? It is only the shorn and anointed [priests]? Is it not all Christians?”⁴

Luther is very clear, though, that there is still authority in the Church and still a place for a reformed priesthood, what Luther calls “the ministry.” Writing that the Roman hierarchs must be “forced to grant that all of us that have been baptized are equally priests,” he asserts nevertheless that “the ministry was committed” to the Church.⁵ For Luther, the true “priesthood is nothing but a ministry.”⁶

The continued existence of ministers did not imply an exalted status in God’s eyes. Instead, “Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests.” But while all believers have the same theoretical “power in respect to the Word and the sacraments,” crucially, Luther writes, “no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community.”⁷

Luther concludes “that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work,” but this, he makes it clear, he regards as having “a proper and useful place in the Christian community.”⁸ This is *exactly the Seventh-day Adventist approach*. Ordination does not transfer the pastor into a superior form of being; it is the recognition by the wider body of Christ of spiritual gifts that God has given, and it “confers representative authority upon individuals.”⁹ This representative authority may only be exercised “by the consent of the community,” as Luther put it. The Adventist understanding of pastoral ministry is, in essence, Luther’s understanding.

Implications for Adventists

In the past 18 months, some Adventists have expressed fears that we may be moving away from the principles of the Protestant Reformation because the General Conference has upheld church authority vested in pastors set apart by ordination.

This was, however, exactly the case in the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches that emerged after 1517. The doctrine of the *presbyterii fidelium*, as it emerged from the Reformation, does not mean a *pastorate* of

all believers. The priesthood of all believers was crucial in the early Christian Church and in the Protestant Reformation because, in both cases, it asserted, against the orthodoxy of the time, that *any* believer can come boldly to the throne of grace (a belief given new weight by the Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary, which stresses Christ’s high priestly role). It denies that human mediators have any place in salvation.

These are fundamental Adventist teachings. But Adventists have also always maintained other beliefs shared by Luther and the Swiss Reformers: that only some persons are divinely called to be pastors; that the body of believers has the right to set standards for pastors; and that it is the body that confers authority. In upholding these teachings along with the priesthood of all believers, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, now as in the past, continues the principles of the Protestant Reformation.

The priesthood of all believers . . . was never, for 16th-century Protestants, a shorthand for a *pastorate of all believers*.

Endnotes

¹For a useful summary of the most important Reformation principles see Ganoune Diop, “Reformation principles for an end-time ministry”, *Ministry*, vol. 89, no. 10 (October 2017), also available at <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/10/Reformation-principles-for-an-end-time-ministry>

² The story of Hannah illustrates this well: 1 Sam. 1:10-19.

³ *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society*, part I, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 127.

⁴ *Concerning the Ministry* (1523), trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 40, *Church and Ministry*, part II, ed. Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 21.

⁵ *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser and Frederick C. Ahrens, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament*, part II, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 113. Cf. *ibid.*, 116; *To the Christian Nobility*, 130; *Concerning the Ministry*, 21–22,

⁷ *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 116.

⁸ *To the Christian Nobility*, 128–29.

⁹ “Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination”, approved by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, 2013; and by Annual Council, 2013.

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THE MIGHTY GOD OF Israel is our God. In Him we may trust, and if we obey His requirements He will work for us in as signal a manner as He did for His ancient people. Everyone who seeks to follow the path of duty will at times be assailed by doubt and unbelief. The way will sometimes be so barred by obstacles, apparently insurmountable, as to dishearten those who will yield to discouragement; but God is saying to such, Go forward. Do your duty at any cost. The difficulties that seem so formidable, that fill your soul with dread, will vanish as you move forward in the path of obedience, humbly trusting in God.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 437

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UGANDA PRESIDENT MOVES TO ABOLISH SABBATH EXAMS

BY ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Responding to an appeal by the Seventh-day Adventist Church president to abolish Saturday exams, Uganda's leader announced that he would take steps to accommodate the convictions of Adventist students—and also those of Sunday-keeping Christians and Muslims.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni tweeted the announcement on February 17, a day after hosting church leader Ted N.C. Wilson for an official visit-turned-Bible study at his state residence in Entebbe outside the capital, Kampala.

"This is exciting! Many people have suffered," said Daniel Matte, president of the Ugandan Union, whose own son had to repeat a three-year state university course in agriculture after exams fell on Saturday.

"This is more than we desired," said Blasious Ruguri, president of the East-Central Africa Division. "Everybody is being blessed."

Museveni set aside the formality that usually dominates visits with foreign guests to warmly welcome Wilson; his wife, Nancy; Matte; Ruguri; and a delegation of leaders from other countries of the East-Central Africa Division on February 16, 2018.

Smiling and joking, the 73-year-old president greeted each member of the delegation and asked where they were from. He addressed many attendees in their own languages.

Immediately, Museveni asked about the origins of the Adventist Church, and Wilson offered a short history lesson, starting with the Protestant Reformation. Museveni seized on the fact that Adventists observe the Sabbath on Saturday, unlike other denominations that emerged from the Reformation, and inquired about "the mathematics" of counting the days of the week.

Praising the question, Wilson said Saturday has long been understood to be the seventh day and only more recently have some people started viewing Sunday as the seventh day. Museveni pressed for more information.

Wilson spoke about God blessing the seventh day at the end of Creation week in Genesis 2:2-3 and said Jesus kept the seventh-day Sabbath. He encouraged Museveni to study the issue further.

The conversation shifted to the church's work in Uganda, and Wilson expressed gratitude for the government's support of religious freedom. After that,

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he made a personal appeal for Adventist students to be allowed to reschedule Saturday exams at public schools.

"No problem, no problem," Museveni replied. "Why should we quarrel over days?"

"The president graciously indicated that that should not be a problem. There are other days that can be used for exams," Wilson later said in an interview. "We are very grateful for this gesture of Sabbath observance accommodation for student exams, and we look forward to its fulfillment."

Also at the meeting, Wilson asked whether he could share a formula for leadership success from the Bible. When Museveni agreed, Wilson opened a small black Bible and read Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (NKJV).

Then Wilson offered a gift of a pen engraved with the name and emblem of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also presented Museveni with a leather Bible, Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*, and the pamphlet "Help in Daily Living."

An eight-member Adventist choir, which accompanied the church leaders, sang about Jesus' soon coming in English, and then two more Christian songs, ending with a heartfelt rendition of "It Is Well With My Soul" in Luganda, the local language. The visibly moved president inquired about the meaning of the words.

Wilson told the history of the song — it was written by U.S. lawyer Horatio Gates Spafford after his four children perished in an ocean storm in 1873 — and explained that "it is well with my soul" meant finding consolation in Jesus amid the storms of life.

Attendees described the one-hour meeting as a unique worship service that broke usual protocol with friendly, spiritual conversation, rather than the usual political speeches.

"He treated us like he was hosting friends, people he knows," said one participant, who is well acquainted with political meetings.

"We had an extremely gracious meeting," Wilson said. "He knows Adventists — in fact he was instructed as a very young school boy by Seventh-day Adventist teachers. He holds a warm spot in his heart for that and for what God is doing through His church in Uganda."

Marriage Success for Leaders¹

BY WILLIE OLIVER, PH.D., AND ELAINE OLIVER, M.A.

A quote we like to share from an unknown author says, “Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult.” This is true of every marriage and especially true of leader marriages that experience so many expectations from within and without.

While marriage was designed by God to bless the human family, Satan has tried everything to denigrate, depreciate, and defame this important institution. As such, expect your marriage to naturally move toward a state of alienation.

The Bible says in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”² This reminds us that there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. However, since God is more powerful than Satan, every marriage can thrive when the spouses are intentional about connecting with each other every day through the power and grace of God.

Expectations Surge

To be sure, expectations for Christian leaders surge from within because of the need to represent Jesus well. The concept may often be seen as the need to pretend to have a perfect marriage when you do not. Of course, the more couples feel compelled to present to the public an image that is not real, the less likely they are to accomplish that goal because of the stress generated internally, given the reality of our human frailties.

The pressure from without comes from others such as church members, family, friends, colleagues, and employing organizations.

To transcend these burdens, couples must spend much time in prayer, seeking a genuine relationship with God and with each other. In Romans 12:12 we read: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

Each day has only 24 hours in which leaders must have time alone with God, eat, exercise, have family worship, respond to email, carry out other work responsibilities, connect with relatives and friends, and sleep!

So how do couples create more time in the context of living in the third millennium in



we will need to see and do things differently to get a different result.

In contrast to other relationships which are constantly changing, marriage is meant to be permanent, and understanding that the responsibilities in marriage are not postponable will help us to make our marriage a high priority *each day*. This means scheduling meaningful time to spend with each other *each day*.

order to have the quality relationship that makes life really worth living?

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

The truth is, for this to happen, healthy boundaries must be established in order to survive and thrive. And healthy boundaries are found in the context of emotionally intelligent people, who have a high level of self-awareness, knowing what they want to accomplish in the process.

On this matter, Daniel Goleman suggests: “Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives. . . .

“[It] extends to a person’s understanding of his or her values and goals. Someone who is highly self-aware knows where he is headed and why. . . . The decisions of self-aware people mesh with their values.”³

This self-awareness and emotional intelligence does not just come because we have more education or are smarter than anyone else. It comes because of an intimate relationship with God and our desire to honor Him in our most intimate relationship with our spouse.

While we cannot add hours to our day, we can add order and priority to those hours so we maximize time with our spouse each day, week, month, and year to have the kind of relationship that will stand the test of time and give honor and glory to God.

A New Framework

For things to change, if this has not been a priority, we will need to develop a new and improved framework to live by. We will need to shift the paradigm of our lives. This means

Looking at the reality of marriage, we must be mindful that sometimes it is more difficult than it needs to be because we approach this highly spiritual work without the corresponding spiritual values that must be present for it to work.

As we have stated elsewhere, “There is no other way to survive and thrive in such a close and intimate relationship such as marriage, without adopting a perspective that includes the feelings and opinions of others, at the very least the feelings and opinions of the person we have chosen as our spouse.”⁴

As you commit to nurturing your marriage today and in the future, we encourage you to remember Paul’s admonition in 1 Cor. 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

May your relationship with God grant you the patience and kindness needed to give honor and glory to God though your marital relationship.

Endnotes

¹Adapted from “Pastoral marriages: A contemporary challenge” by Willie and Elaine Oliver, first published in the May 2017 issue of *Ministry*,[®] International Journal for Pastors, and can be read in its entirety at www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/05/Pastoral-marriages. Used by permission.

²All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

³Daniel Goleman, *What Makes a Leader: Why Emotional Intelligence Matters* (Florence, MA: More Than Sound, 2013), 10, 11.

⁴Willie and Elaine Oliver, “The Beauty of Marriage” in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, ed. Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), p. 6.

THE BACK PAGE



1 Missionaries and workers throughout Asia will attend the Northern Asia-Pacific Division's International Mission Congress August 8-11, 2018, at the KINTEXT Convention Center in Goyang, **Korea**. More information and registration available [here](#).

2 The Seventh-day Adventist Church in **Nicaragua** recently inaugurated a new facility for its Adventist Hospital in Estelí, Nicaragua. The facility becomes the only private hospital in the city. Read more [here](#).

3 In what is believed to be a world first for a Pathfinder

camporee—the entire event was held on water. A specially-constructed pontoon, afloat on the Sepik River in **Papua New Guinea**, was the site for the week-long camporee. The structure accommodated 350 Pathfinders, staff, and 47 tents. On the third day a thunderstorm struck and broke ropes and bamboo posts holding the pontoon, causing it to drift about 300m. Two outboard canoes pushed the pontoon back. By the end of the week 47 Pathfinders had been baptized in a baptismal pool in the center of the pontoon. Read the entire story [here](#).

4 Natalia Tatarczuch of **Poland** was baptized as a direct result of watching the film “Hacksaw Ridge.” Natalia had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists but was so inspired by the faith and courage of Desmond Doss that she went to see the film twice before searching out the Krakow Adventist church. The rest of the story available [here](#).

5 The 11th Annual Global Leadership

Summit in Lisbon, **Portugal**, emphasized that unity is needed to finish the church's mission of spreading the gospel and overwhelmingly endorsed the unity described by Jesus in John 17. Pastor Mark Finley described Jesus' prayer as the theological foundation for unity in the Adventist Church. “All unity has to be based on a theological foundation,” he said. Read the full report [here](#).

6 The Adventist Church in **Argentina** mourns the death of eight members of the educational community of River Plate Adventist University who died in two separate car crashes February 10-11, 2018. More details available [here](#).

7 Following the February 14, 2018, deadly shooting at a Florida high school in the **United States**, Adventist

Community Services Disaster Response teams set up a help center at the Pompano Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church. For more, click [here](#).

**2018
SPRING MEETING
REGISTRATION**

NOW OPEN

Click [here](#) to register by March 22.

February 2018

REPORT FROM THE UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The process of gathering qualitative and quantitative data from the world church is currently underway. Last month, surveys were sent to all division and union presidents, and to the president of the attached field. Of the 150 surveys sent out, 144 were already returned by mid-February. The deadline for submission is March 15. Each recipient received the survey in his native language. The survey was designed by

the world church's Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), and is being administered by them.

Dialogue meetings with world division leaders are currently taking place. During these personal visits, division leaders talk with various members of the Unity Oversight Committee and are asked to offer written suggestions to the committee on how to address the issue of compliance with voted actions of General Conference

Sessions and of the General Conference Executive Committee. In addition, Division leaders are invited to submit any other suggestions or comments they might have.

Dialogue meetings have already taken place with SUD, ESD, and SID, and others have been scheduled and will soon take place.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data will be used in helping to craft a document that will be brought to the 2018 Annual Council for approval.

The latest GC *Working Policy* is available on the Executive Committee website. To view, members must enter their password as required by the Office of General Counsel. Others may obtain a hard-copy by contacting the office of the GC Secretariat.

The GC Secretariat now has a new website: secretariat.adventist.org. Check it out!