

What Every Church Should Know About Adventist Ministers

I. What every church should know about Adventist ministers is that ...

- A. Adventist Ministers are not to serve as settled pastors caring for churches.
- B. The primary calling of ministers is to take the four angels messages of Revelation to those who don't know it.
- C. Adventist ministers are called to visit the churches periodically to offer edification and guidance.

We're not following this counsel in the NAD

- 1. To the contrary we have become very pastor dependent
- 2. It has actually become a milestone marker of progress for new congregations
- 3. As we'll see, this is one of the most serious issues facing the denomination today, particularly because it is not generally recognized as a problem.

II. The Proper Role of Ministers

A. Early New Testament Church: A Case Study

- 1. Apostles spearheaded new work
 - a. Paul: Acts 9:15 (Various travels to preach)
 - b. Peter: 10:30-33
- 2. Apostles visited the established churches
 - a. Paul & Barnabas – Acts 15:36 & 41
 - b. Paul at Jerusalem – Acts 21:17-20
- 3. Apostles helped settle church debates –
 - a. Acts 15:1-2
 - b. Paul's Letters – 1 Cor. 1:11; 6:7-8

B. Early Adventist Church: Another Case Study

- 1. Ministers not settled pastors
 - a. Seventh-day Baptist article
 - b. Early rationale for lay-pastorate
- 2. Lay members cared for the church
 - a. Elder Starr interview
 - b. Quote about Canright – Burrill
- 3. Not just a question of resources:
 - a. Spirit of prophecy counsel doesn't give a single shred of evidence to lead us to believe that

- this should change as we would have more ministers available to serve the churches.
- b. More churches raised up than ministers on staff in North America (1920-1929) – 122/Church (1994)

C. Counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy

1. It is clear that Ellen White did not support the idea of ministers serving as what she called “Settled” pastors.
2. She made clear what ministers first calling was.
3. Heart of the Issue – A personal experience in righteousness by faith! This did not have to do with not having enough ministers to go around in our early days. Rather, it revolved around the affect upon the membership at large when there was a “Professional” to rely on.
 - a. E.G. White statements
 - b. A.G. Daniels’ statement
 - c. H.M.S. Richards statement

Seventh-day Baptist Article - “All Seventh-day Adventist clergymen are missionaries - not located pastors - and are busy preaching, teaching, and organizing churches the world over.” (Taken from an article in the Seventh-day Baptist *Sabbath Recorder* of December 28, 1908 and reprinted in the *Review and Herald* of January 14, 1909.)

Early Adventist Rationale for Lay Pastorate

“Elders. This office is also expressed by the words, bishop, pastor, and overseer. To show that these are interchangeable terms for the same thing we refer, first to Titus 1:5, 7: “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee; for a bishop must be blameless,” etc. The word elder in verse 5, is from presbuteros, and signifies, primarily, according to Robinson, “an elder person, a senior; as an officer of the church it signifies the elders of Christian churches, presbyters, to whom was committed the direction and government of individual churches; properly the same as episcopos – which see.” The word rendered bishop in verse 7 is from this word episcopos, and is defined by the same author as follows: “In the New Testament, spoken of officers of the primitive churches as overseer, superintendent. This was originally simply the common Greek name of office equivalent to presbuteros, which later was a Jewish term.” That elders and bishops are identical, is also shown from Acts 20:17, 28. The word elders in verse 17 is presbuteros, and the word overseers in verse 28 is from poimen, and signifies literally a herdsman, a shepherd, especially a pastor, a teacher, a spiritual guide of a particular church. The definition of this term shows that it signifies the same office as presbuteros (elder), and episcopos (bishop), a local office confined to a particular church.” J.N. Loughborough, *The Church: Its Organization, Order and Discipline* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1907), 129

“From what has been said, it will be seen that the officers of the church which are appointed solely by the church itself are reduced to two, namely, elders and deacons. From what then has arisen so much confusion upon the subject? It must be from the fact that the different names of elder, bishop, and pastor, are applied to the same office, and also from overlooking the principle that a person holding any one of the higher officers is qualified to officiate in any of the lower; and when performing the duties of such office is called by the title applying thereto. Thus Peter, though an apostle, calls himself an elder (1 Peter 5:1); and Paul, carrying the liberalities of the brethren up to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), might with equal propriety be called a deacon.... Evangelists, also, are called elders. Paul says to Timothy, “Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine.” 1 Tim. 5:17. Here were some laboring in word and doctrine who are called elders, but such labor shows them to be evangelists, it being especially their work; hence evangelists are sometimes called elders; but only, of course, when acting in that capacity.” Ibid, p. 130

Elder Starr Interview

THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

Some Facts and Figures Gathered from Elder Starr - How they have Grown in Forty Years - and What They Believe

“By what means have you carried forward your work so rapidly?”

“Well, in the first place,” replied the Elder, “we have no settled pastors. Our churches are taught largely to take care of themselves, while nearly all of our ministers work as evangelists in new fields. In the winter they go out into the churches, halls, or school house and raise up believers. In the summer we use tents, pitching them in the cities and villages where we teach the people these doctrines. This year

we shall run about 100 tents in this way. Besides these, we send out large numbers of colporters with our tracts and books, who visit the families and teach them the Bible. Last year we employed about 125 in this manner. Bible reading is another class of work. The workers go from house to house holding Bible readings with from one to twenty individuals. Last year they gave 10,000 of such Bible readings. At the same time we had employed about 300 canvassers, constantly canvassing the country and selling our larger works. In addition to this every church has a missionary society. Last year these numbered 10,500 members. Every one of these members does more or less missionary work, such as selling books, loaning or giving away tracts, obtaining subscriptions to our periodicals, visiting families, looking after the poor, aiding the sick, etc.. Last year they made 102,000 visits, wrote 40,000 letters, obtained 38,700 subscriptions to our periodicals, distributed 15,500,000 pages of reading matter and 1,600,000 periodicals.”

Interview with G.B. Starr during a series of evangelistic meetings, in the Wabash, Indiana *Plain Dealer*, October 1, 1886, (p. 5)

CANRIGHT:

“In the quotation taken from the Kalamazoo Telegraph, we find this statement: “At the time he dissolved his connection with them, he had the charge of eighteen churches in Michigan.” The facts in this case are these: Seventh-day Adventists churches maintain their regular worship without the assistance of any located pastors, leaving our entire ministry free to act as evangelists in new fields. As a consequence, many of our churches pass long periods without any preaching, and consequently conference committees aim to arrange the labor in the State so that ministers will occasionally be at liberty to visit the churches, to help and encourage them in the Christian life by a few meetings.” GI Butler RH, 1888, 1895

E.G. White & Settled Pastors

Ministerial Forces Exhausted on Established Churches.--Our people have had great light, and yet much of our ministerial force is exhausted on the churches, in teaching those who should be teachers; enlightening those who should be “the light of the world”; watering those from whom should flow springs of living water; . . . *Evangelism*, 382.5

Too Much Labor Devoted to Churches - Altogether too much labor is devoted to the churches. God’s people are not to depend on others to do their work for them. Let the Lord’s messengers carry the triumphs of the cross into the regions beyond, . . . *Review & Herald*, December 1, 1896

Ministers Not to Even Hover over Languishing Churches.--The churches that have not life in themselves, that have lost their spiritual discernment, call for ministers to come to their help, to bring them the breath of life. But the ministers have other work to do. They must carry the message of truth to those who know it not. 6MR 65.

Churches Not to Be Under a Ministers Special Care - Our ministers are not to hover over the churches, regarding the churches in some particular place as their special care. And our churches should not feel jealous and neglected if they do not receive ministerial labor. They should themselves take up the burden, and labor most earnestly for souls. Believers are to have root in themselves, striking firm root in Christ, that they may bear fruit to His glory. {AUCR, August 1, 1902 par. 7}

People Need To Have Light in Themselves - Do not, my ministering brethren, allow yourselves to be kept at home to serve tables; and do not hover around the churches, preaching to those who are already fully established in the faith. Teach the people to have light in themselves, and not to depend upon the ministers. They should have Christ as their helper, and should educate themselves to help one another, so that the minister can be free to enter new fields. {HS 139.1}

Not Sermonizing in Established Churches - Our ministers are not to be encouraged to hover about the churches to repeat to the believers week after week the same truths. We have a truth that is saving and precious. The Word of God must be planted in many hearts; the bread of life must be dealt out to many hungering souls. . . . It is a blessed work to lift up Christ before the world. {UL 264.3}

Give Up This Idea! - The idea that our ministers must hover over the churches might just as well be given up now as later. The members of the churches must be taught to keep themselves at work, showing the intelligence and spirituality God requires in those who claim to be members of His church. 2SAT 156-157 – Talk given in the Review chapel in 1901

SDA’s Not to Function Like Other Denominations - We cannot expect that ministers will be permanently located in settled charges, as they are located in other denominations; but each church member must individually learn to bear responsibility, and become a worker, making the advance of the cause of truth the first and highest interest of his life. {RH, October 22, 1889 par. 2}

Those Dependant Upon Ministers Need to Be Reconverted and Rebaptized! - The ministers are hovering over the churches, which know the truth, while thousands are perishing out of Christ. If the proper instruction were given, if the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again. General Conference Bulletin, April 12, 1901, p. 204

Minister's First Calling:

People Need To Have Light in Themselves - Teach the people to have light in themselves, and not to depend upon the ministers. They should have Christ as their helper, and should educate themselves to help one another, so that the minister can be free to enter new fields. *HS 139.1*

The Object of Our Work - The great object of our work is to carry the light to those who are in darkness. Our work is world-wide. God's delegated messengers are not to hover about the people who have been long in the truth. Altogether too much labor is devoted to the churches. God's people are not to depend on others to do their work for them. Let the Lord's messengers carry the triumphs of the cross into the regions beyond, calling upon the members of the church to send their prayers as sharp sickles into the harvest-field. {RH, December 1, 1896}

Work In New Fields - I have been for a long time pressed under the burden of the fact that we are not elevating the standard as we should. New fields are continually opening, and the third angel's message must be proclaimed to all kindreds, nations, tongues, and peoples. We must not feel that we are compelled to hover over churches that have received the truth. We must not encourage the people to depend upon ministerial labor in order to preserve spiritual life. Everyone who has received the truth must go to God for his individual self, and decide to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Those who have embraced the third angel's message must not make man their trust, and depend upon the ministers to make their experience for them. {HM, December 1, 1894 par. 14}

Press Into New Territory - There are important fields to be worked. We shall not hover over the churches but press into new territory and raise the standard in places where the message has not been proclaimed.--Letter 139, 1899.

Sow Beside All Waters - Oh, what a work there is before us! Our ministers are not to hover over those who have received the message. With Christ's love burning in their hearts, they are to go forth to win sinners to the Saviour. Beside all waters God's messengers are to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches, and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields. Mrs. E. G. White. {PUR, April 24, 1902}

Aggressive Work Called For.--Our ministers should plan wisely, as faithful stewards. They should feel that it is not their duty to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work, preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth. . . . --Letter 169, 1904. {Ev 382.3}

Ministerial Forces Exhausted on Established Churches.--Our people have had great light, and yet much of our ministerial force is exhausted on the churches, in teaching those who should be teachers; enlightening those who should be "the light of the world". . . . {Ev 382.5}

Labor For Unbelievers - Who will now carry this burden? In view of the great needs all about us, who can be content to hover over our own churches. . . . {RH, July 16, 1908 par. 16}

Ministers to "Get out of the way"! --If the ministers would get out of the way, if they would go forth into new fields, the members would be obliged to bear responsibilities, and their capabilities would increase by use.--Letter 56, 1901. {Ev 382.4}

The Underlying Principle: Don't Make Man Your Trust! --We must not encourage the people to depend on ministerial help and labor to preserve spiritual life. Everyone who has received the truth must go to God for his individual self, and decide to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, and do true service for God. Those who have embraced the third angel's message must not make man their trust, depending upon the ministers to make their experience for them. They are to secure an individual experience by looking to God for themselves. {1NL 127.3} MS. 21, 1894

A.G. Daniells Statement

Not Settled Our Ministers - We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and to lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized and our work will be on a retreat. A.G. Daniells in an address to a ministerial institute in Los Angeles, California, in March, 1912.

H.M.S. Richards Statement

“The Time of too many of our preachers, instead of being occupied with carrying the message into new fields, is taken up in settling church difficulties and laboring for men and women who should be towers of strength instead of subjects for labor. When I was baptized, and later became a young preacher, we looked upon churches that had to have settled pastors over every flock as being decadent. Most of our preachers were out on the firing line, holding meetings, winning men to Christ, and raising up new churches. Then every few months they would come around and visit the churches that had already been established. This seemed to be according to our view of it, the plan of the apostolic church.” From a lecture given in 1957 at Washington Missionary College and the SDA Seminary. Written in: Feed My Sheep (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 156

III. Conclusion: What happens when we follow God’s plans?

- A. The Ark
- B. Crossing the Red Sea
- C. Jericho