

Have Adventists Abandoned the Biblical Model of Leadership for the Local Church?



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Have you wondered how major changes seem to occur overnight in a church? How has been possible that worship styles, music, and congregationalism have affected so many churches so quickly? Over the years I have reflected on this question and, having had the opportunity to study the rise and development of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, I have come to the conclusion that one of the major reasons for the recent changes in local congregations is due to significant changes that occurred in the leadership structure of the local church during the twentieth century.

Changes in the operational structure of the local church came in so gradually that few took note of them. Today, about 150 years after the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was officially organized, there is little left of the New Testament model of leadership that the pioneers originally adopted.

To fully understand this situation and its implications we will first discuss the New Testament model of leadership in the local church. Next we will see how the Adventist pioneers adopted this model. Then we will look at how Adventists have departed from

this model and its consequent impact on the local church. Finally we will consider the possibilities and advantages of restoring Christ's model of leadership to the local Adventist congregation.

In this chapter we will limit our study to the local church, not to leadership structure of conferences, unions, and General Conference. Information on that aspect of church organization can be found in literature on the 1901 General Conference that reveals providential leadings of the Holy Spirit in the development of an organizational structure that harmoniously unites the community of Seventh-Day Adventist churches worldwide.

A. The New Testament Model of Leadership

Church Organization in the New Testament

The New Testament provides us the information about the leadership structure of the Christian church. During His ministry on Earth, Jesus Christ established the organization and authority of His church. He ordained twelve of His followers to accompany Him on His travels and to prepare them to preach the Gospel and heal the sick (Mark 3:14, 15). He also called these twelve men apostles (Luke 6:13).

This event was the first step in “the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on Earth.” The calling of these twelve men was of enormous significance. “Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, and was second only to that of Christ Himself. . . . As in the Old Testament the twelve patriarchs stand as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles were to stand as representatives of the Gospel church.”

The Jerusalem Church a Model for Future Churches

The book of Acts reveals the next phase in the organizations of the church—the establishment of the New Testament model of church leadership. Soon after Christ's ascension the apostles became overwhelmed by the demands of the fast-growing church in Jerusalem. To cope with the challenges confronting them, the apostles divided the leadership responsibilities in the local church into two major areas. Seven men were chosen to “serve tables” while the apostles confined themselves “to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:2, 4). Both “the seven” and the apostles were involved in serving or ministering, but the manner of their respected involvement differed significantly. What each of these two areas of service entailed has been the subject of much speculation.

Ellen G. White's commentary on these events is very enlightening. She commented that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles began “to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church.”

What was this better plan of church organization? This plan established a twofold division of labor between those serving as the spiritual leaders and those taking care of specialized lines of work and the finances of the church. The apostles announced that the time had come “when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the Gospel.” The church accepted this counsel and ordained seven men as deacons. Mrs. White wrote that “by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons.” This action was an “important step in the perfecting of Gospel order in the church.”

The designation “deacons” for these men perfectly fitted their work, to “serve tables.” To them, Ellen White wrote, was delegated “the oversight of special lines of work” which included taking care of “individual needs,” the “general financial interest of the church,” and “looking after the needs of the poor.” This work, however, did not exclude them from “teaching the faith.” The deacons “were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.”

After stoning the deacon Stephen, the first great persecution of the Christian church broke out and believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). From this time onward the Gospel was proclaimed beyond the confines of Jerusalem.

In harmony with the leadership model of the Jerusalem church, the apostles appointed elders as a spiritual leaders in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). This practice explains why the apostles, when they left Jerusalem to preach the Gospel and evangelize the world, appointed elders in Jerusalem to fill their places instead of leaving a vacuum in this major center of the church at that time. It also explains the presence of elders in the Jerusalem church several years later to whom Barnabas and Saul handed their relief contributions for the needy believers in Judea (Acts 11:29, 30).

Mrs. White considered the Jerusalem church’s leadership structure, with its twofold division of labor, a model for the Christian church. She testified, “The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the Gospel.”

Spiritual Gifts

The next development of church organization took place after the church had rapidly expanded into many regions. Now the Holy Spirit bestowed special spiritual gifts on some of God’s people to improve the effective operation of the church. Said Ellen White:

Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained.

Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts—“first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:28). But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony.

Persons who received these gifts were not to replace the previously elected leadership of elders and deacons, but to work in cooperation with them so that the church would be more successful than ever.

Qualifications of Local Church Officers

Shortly before his death Paul, under divine inspirations, gave important instructions to safeguard the leadership structure of the local church.

In a letter to Timothy, Paul endorsed the application of the organizational model of the Jerusalem church to other churches in the world. He carefully spelled out the qualifications for those serving as spiritual leaders (elders) as well as those attending to the other church affairs (deacons) (I Timothy 3:1-13). In a similar manner Paul instructed Titus to establish order in the churches by appointing to the office of elder or bishop men who met the required qualifications (Titus 1:5-9).

In the New Testament, the terms “elder” and “bishop” were used interchangeably (Titus 1:5, 7; I Timothy 3:1, 2). Elder expressed the title and dignity of the office, while bishop indicated the officer’s function as “overseer” to feed, shepherd, or pastor the church (Acts 20:17, 28).

The qualifications outlined by Paul to Timothy for the office of an elder (bishop) were as follows: He must be

“blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” (I Timothy 3:2-7, NKJV)

These requirements make it plain that the Lord, as Head of the church (Ephesians 5:30), is interested in having His church under the leadership of elders or ministers who have high spiritual and ethical standards, a record of successfully governing their own home, and a good reputation among unbelievers. If the elder or minister is not successful as leader of his own family he is not qualified to lead a congregation. Said Paul, “If a man

does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (I Timothy 3:5, NKJV).

Relations Between Apostles and Elders

Were apostles and elders to have the same function? If not, how did they differ? One major difference was that apostles were itinerant spiritual leaders while elders were spiritual leaders of the local church. Apostles traveled from church to church, established new churches, and oversaw the operation of the churches. Elders, however, were connected to a local church and had no authority over other churches. Yet apostles and elders worked closely together in giving leadership to the church.

Their close cooperation was seen in a major controversy as to whether new Gentile believers must be circumcised. A council was called in Jerusalem to settle the conflict. Those deciding the issue were the spiritual leaders of the churches—both apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 6).

The intimate relationship between apostles and elders was also seen in the word used to describe the office of an apostle and that of an elder. When, for instance, after the death of Judas the apostles discussed a suitable replacement, Peter made an appeal, "Let another take his office" (Acts 1:20). The nature of the type of work this new apostle was to fulfill became clear from the Greek word translated in some Bible versions as "office" or *episkope*, referring to the role of "overseer." For this reason the King James Version translated the word as "bishoprick."

It is clear that from the very beginning the apostles served as overseers of the church. The apostle Paul implemented the Jerusalem leadership model in the newly established churches. He described the elder as "a bishop" (Greek *episkopos*) (Titus 1:5, 7). In his counsel to Timothy, Paul described the same position as the office of a bishop" (*episkope*), which in this context refers to the role of overseeing the church (I Timothy 3:1, KJV)

When Paul addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus, he again called them "overseers" whose task it was "to shepherd the church of God," to protect it against all kind of heresies that would come into the church to destroy it (Acts 20:28-30). This indicates that an important part of the role of the elders as pastors is to fortify the faith of the church members through the ministry of the Word. Paul gave Titus similar counsel, explaining that an elder must hold fast "the faithful Word as he has been taught, that may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Again we see the close parallel between the apostles and elders in their ministry and leadership roles.

Peter alluded to the close relationship between apostles and elders when he called himself "also and elder" (I Peter 5:1). This confirms that an apostle was also considered an elder,

but a traveling elder whose responsibility was not confined to a local church but who also served as an evangelist, raising up new churches he had established in Asia Minor on subsequent journeys.

The Abandonment of the Jerusalem Leadership Model

Throughout the first century of the Christian era, elders led the churches. However, soon after the death of the prophet and apostle John, the organizational structure of the local church began to change. The writings of the early Christian writer Ignatius of Antioch revealed the beginning of a different leadership structure in the early part of the second century.

Ignatius is the first representative of a new form of church government called “the episcopate.” His writings reveal that at this time the presiding elder had taken on the title of bishop. In the new church structure, the bishop stood at the center of church life, with the other elders, deacons, and laity subject to his authority.”

Ignatius described the relationship of the believers to the bishop in the following terms. “We should look upon the bishop even as we would look upon the Lord Himself, standing as he does, before the Lord.” “See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Christ Jesus does the Father...Let no man do anything connected with the church without the bishop.” “And say I, Honor thou God indeed, as the Author and Lord of all things, but the bishop as the high priest, who bears the image of God...Nor is there anyone in the church greater than the bishop, who ministers as a priest to God for the salvation of the whole world...He who honors the bishop shall be honoured of God, even as he that dishonors him shall be punished by God.”

This leadership model, which introduces an extra level of authority in the local church, is a departure from the Biblical model because it makes the bishop the head and center of the local congregation. This model of ministry has been described as the first phase of the episcopacy—a rulership of the church by the bishop. In time, this type of church organization came to its full fruition in the papacy.

Throughout the centuries various reform movements have tried to restore the New Testament model of church leadership. Through the working of Providence this Biblical model was adopted by the Adventist pioneers.

B. Adventist Pioneers Adopt the New Testament Model

During the formative years of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, its members included believers from many different churches who were united by a common expectation of the imminent return of Christ. They had left or were disfellowshipped by their churches when these organizations rejected the proclamation of the first angel’s message to prepare people for the Second Advent. These believers had no desire to establish another church.

Most Adventists opposed any form of organization because they thought it would lead them into a similar confusion as existed among the numerous Christian churches. However, after these Advent believers had discovered the significance of the three angels' messages that explained the Great Disappointment of 1844, they gradually saw that the New Testament taught the need for order and organization. If they were going to effectively proclaim the Gospel of the three angels' messages to the rest of the world, they must be organized. Now the question was, "How?"

Providential Intervention

In the early 1850's the Lord gave the small company of Adventists, who had accepted the truth on the sanctuary and the Sabbath, special insight that would lead them to adopt the New Testament model of church organization.

In 1850 the Lord gave Ellen G. White, the prophetess to the remnant church, a vision emphasizing "that everything in Heaven was in perfect order." The angel in the vision instructed her to follow order. "Said the angel, 'Look ye; Christ is the Head; move in order, move in order. Have a meaning to everything.' Said the angel, 'Behold ye, and know how perfect, how beautiful, the order in Heaven; follow it.'"

Two years later in 1852 the Lord gave her another vision on the importance of order in the Advent movement, impressing her with the need of adopting a plan that would organize Adventists for effective outreach. The vision showed her that "Gospel order had been too much feared and neglected." It revealed that order is part of God's kingdom. "There is order in Heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles." Order would be especially important during the closing days of Earth's history: "Now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith [since 1844], there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his evil angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it."

A major challenge to the fledgling movement was men entering the Gospel ministry whom God had not called. The vision showed that through Satan's influence, "men are hurried into the field who lack wisdom and judgment, perhaps not ruling well their own house, and not having order or government over the few that God has given them charge of at home; yet they feel capable of having charge of the flock." Others had an unholy lifestyle with theoretical knowledge of the truth, but lacking spirituality. Still others were confident that God had called them, yet "they lack sound judgment and patient reasoning, talk boastfully of themselves, and assert many things which they cannot prove from the Word." All such persons the vision described as "self-sent men."

The problem with these persons was that they felt that God had called them to the Gospel ministry. This led to more confusion because "those men who are not called of God are

generally the very ones that are the most confident that they are so called and that their labours are very important.” Some of these persons “have a measure of success, and this leads them and others to think that they are surely called of God.” Ellen White pointed out that because they had some success in leading God’s “honest children” to accept “the present truth” was no evidence that God had called them. “If self-sent men put themselves where God does not put them and profess to be teachers, and souls receive the truth by hearing them talk it, this is no evidence that they are called of God.”

The lack of organization among Adventists at this time was not something that could not be solved. The vision showed that the church was responsible to stop the confusion. Ellen White stated,

I saw that the church should feel their responsibility and should look carefully and attentively at the lives, qualifications, and general course of those who profess to be teachers. If unmistakable evidence is not given that God has called them, and that the “woe” is upon them if they heed not this call, it is the duty of the church to act and let it be known that these persons are not acknowledged as teachers by the church. This is the only course the church can take in order to be clear in this matter, for the burden lies upon them.

The vision showed Ellen White that the church in the days of the apostles was in danger of false teachers. To counteract this problem in the New Testament church, Paul, under inspiration, presented a list of qualifications so the church could safely select and appoint those truly called by God, distinguishing them from false teachers. Thus “the brethren chose men who had given good evidence that they were capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in their own families, and who could enlighten those who were in darkness.” In the New Testament a vital qualification for an elder was giving evidence of successful leadership in one’s home. Only these were approved of by the church and the Holy Ghost; only these were ordained “by the laying on of hands.”

Adventists were to follow the apostles’ example. Said she, “I saw that we are no more secure from false teachers now than they were in the apostles’ days; and, if we do no more, we should take as special measures as they did to secure the peace, harmony, and union of the flock. We have their example, and should follow it.”

Ellen White stressed the need to follow the Bible in determining whether God has called persons to the Gospel ministry. Only persons meeting Bible criteria should be ordained. She wrote, “Brethren of experience and of sound minds should assemble, and following the Word of God and the sanction of the Holy Spirit, should, with fervent prayer, lay hands upon those who have given full proof that they have received their commission of God, and set them apart to devote themselves entirely to His work. This act would show the sanction of the church on their going forth as messengers to carry the most solemn message ever given to men.”

In her counsel Ellen White fully endorsed for Adventists today the validity of the qualifications for leadership of elders or ministers listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Men should be successful leaders in the “church” in their homes before they should be appointed as caretakers of a church congregation. Throughout her ministry she stressed that Seventh-Day Adventists must follow these Bible qualifications.

James White Establishes a Bible-based Organization

Encouraged by the providential revelations of Ellen White, James White deplored the confusion and disorganized state among Sabbathkeeping Adventists and appealed for order and unity. As early as 1853, in a series of articles called “Gospel Order,” he showed his strong support for following the *Biblical model* of church organization and leadership.

Elder White wrote that the fundamentals of church organization or Gospel order, were spelled out in the Bible. He urged that “vigorous efforts should be put forth to restore as fast as possible the order of the Gospel.” He declared, “The divine order of the New Testament is sufficient to organize the church of Christ” and added significantly, “If more were needed, it would have been given by inspiration.”

Qualifications for Church Elders

In the New Testament model for church leadership Elder White recognized that it is the Lord Who calls a minister. The prospective minister must meet the “necessary qualifications” that “are plainly stated in the Word.” These qualifications Paul listed in his counsel to Timothy 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

On the requirements for the office of elder or minister, he commented,

Many seem to desire the office of a bishop, or elder, who fail in many points named here by the apostle. He must be “blameless,” “vigilant,” “sober,” “patient,” “not a brawler.” He must rule well his own house. How is it possible that the Holy Ghost should make a man an overseer of the precious flock, to rule over them [Hebrews 13:17], who knows not how, or neglects to govern his children at home?—Here the apostle appeals to our reason. And it seems the greatest absurdity that such a man should be called to rule the church. God does not call them. He will not trust souls to their care.

Elder White believed that church organization was clearly spelled out in Scripture and was just as applicable to Adventists as it was in the days of the apostles. The Bible was the Guidebook for the selection of church leaders.

Relations Between Local Elders and Ministers

In 1861 at the time when the first Seventh-Day Adventist conference was organized, James White published his address to the conference focusing on how to organize a church with its officers, their duties, and how to elect them.

Elder White pointed out that in the New Testament there were “the following classes of rulers and officers of the Christian church... Apostles, Evangelists, Elders, Bishops, Pastors, and Deacons.” He further divided the officers into two major classes, “Those who hold their office by virtue of an especial call from God, and those selected by the church: the former embracing apostles and evangelists; and the latter, elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons.”

Describing the first class of officers, he designated an apostle as “anyone especially sent out of God in any age to proclaim His truth.” This was “especially applicable to those who are called of God to lead out in any new truth or reform; such, for instance, as Luther, Melancthon, Wesley, and William Miller.” He described an evangelist as “a preacher of the Gospel, not fixed in any place, but traveling as a missionary to preach the Gospel, and establish churches. See Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5.”

The local church elected the second class of officers—elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons. He saw the office of elders as the equivalent of the words bishop, pastor, and overseer. The term pastor was identified as “literally a herdsman, a shepherd; specially a pastor, a teacher, a spiritual guide of a particular church.” The office of an elder (*presbuteros*) or bishop (*episkopos*) is “a local office confined to a particular church,” while its function involves supervising and pastoring the local church. Here the elder was also the pastor of the church.

The role of a deacon was that of a servant, waiter, or attendant who, in the New Testament church, “had charge of the alms and money of the church, an overseer of the sick and poor, an almoner (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Acts 6:1-6).” Women could function as female deacons, “who had charge of the female sick and poor (Roman 16:1).”

From this it is clear that “officers of the church which are appointed solely by the church itself are reduced to two, namely, elders and deacons.” The local church elected the elders and deacons based on the Biblical qualifications mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-10 and Titus 1:6-9. In accordance with the New Testament practice, ministers were to ordain them (Acts 6:6; Titus 1:5).

The business meetings of the local church were to be presided over by the highest officer of the local church: “The elder of a church should act as chairman in all its business meetings.”

The Function of a Minister

This New Testament model of church organization guided the Seventh-Day Adventist Church at the time of its official organization as a church in 1863, and Adventists followed it throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. During this time ministers were employed by the various conferences as administrators and evangelists, raising up churches, and visiting established churches that needed counsel. No conference-employed minister functioned as a resident or “settled” pastor of a local church, as was the practice in most Protestant churches. James White wrote, “It does not appear to have been the design of Christ that His ministers should become stationed, salaried preachers. Of his first ministers it is said, immediately after receiving their high commission, that ‘they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following’ (Mark 16:15-20).” He added that “Paul was not what is now called a ‘settled pastor.’”

The elder or elders were the elected leadership and they, with the support of the deacons and deaconesses, were to lead the church, which was basically a lay movement. The elders were responsible for the prosperity of the local church.

James White considered the work of Seventh-Day Adventist ministers similar to that of the early Christian ministers who entered a town, began preaching and teaching the Word, until they had formed a group of believers whom they organized into a church. “Then these ministers would pass on to a new field of labor. These churches were not carried upon the shoulders of their ministers, but were left to sustain the worship of God among themselves. Occasionally would they pass through and visit the brethren, to exhort, confirm, and comfort them.”

The best evidence of whether a Seventh-Day Adventist minister was called by God depended upon his ability to raise up a church. Said Elder White, “In no way can a preacher so well prove himself as in entering new fields. There he can see the fruits of his own labours. And if he be successful in raising up churches, and establishing them, so that they bear good fruits, he gives to his brethren the best proofs that he is sent of the Lord.” Failure to establish a new church would indicate that God had not called him and that he was not needed for the work. He wrote, if ministers “cannot raise up churches and friends to sustain them, then certainly the cause of truth has no need of them, and they have the best reasons for concluding that they made a sad mistake when they thought that God called them to teach the third angel’s message.”

1883 Church Manual Proposal

In 1878 or 1879 several church leaders expressed the desire to have a church manual. Reasons given for a manual were (1) its usefulness to assist “young ministers and church officers, etc;” (2) it would lead to “uniformity in all parts of the fields;” (3) it would help the “inexperienced;” and “be very convenient in many respects.”

At the 1882 General Conference three church leaders, W.H. Littlejohn, J.O. Corliss, and H.A. St. John, were appointed “to prepare a manual,” and submit it the following year for “approval or rejection.” The proposed manual was published in a series of installments in the *Review and Herald* (June 5 to October 9, 1883), and the editors solicited input and criticism from the readers. These articles gave a view of what many church leaders thought about church organization at that time.

Basic Structure of the Local Church

The proposed church manual upheld the New Testament leadership model for the local churches. Regarding the proper organization of a congregation, the manual read that there should be at least four officers; larger churches might increase this number according to their needs.

When fully organized, it consists of the body of the church, or laity, and the proper officers,—an elder, a deacon, a clerk, and a treasurer. Where the church is sufficiently large to render such a course necessary, it is customary to increase the number of elders and deacons sufficiently to meet the demands of the case. The offices of clerk and treasurer are not mentioned in the Scripture, but it is quite evident that something answering to them must have existed in the early church.

The Two Classes of Church Officers

The manual listed the officers in the New Testament church as “1. Apostles; 2. Prophets; 3. Evangelists; 4. Pastors; 5. Teachers; 6. Helps; 7. Elders; 8. Deacons; 9. Deaconesses.” It divided these officers into two classes.

The first class was called the “general” officers. Their “authority is to be recognized by the church everywhere,” and they were “qualified for their work by an endowment of the Holy Spirit in such large measure that they may be said to speak or act by inspiration.”

The second class was called “local officers.” They were made up of elders (bishops or presbyters), deacons, deaconesses, as well as church clerks and responsibility was limited to “the local districts or churches which have been placed under their charge.” These officers were guided by the Holy Spirit and “to a very large degree by their own unaided judgment.”

Qualifications of a Local Elder

To a significant degree the growth and prosperity of the local church depended on the qualifications of the officers. Therefore it was important that the membership fully understand these qualifications in order to intelligently select the proper persons for the positions.

Regarding the qualifications of an elder, the manual drew attention to the various titles the New Testament assigned to this position.

He is sometimes called an elder, sometimes a bishop, and sometimes a pastor. The original term for elder in the Greek is *prebuteros*..., that for bishop is *episkopos*..., while that for pastor is *poimen*. ...The first is applied to a person of advanced years; the second signifies an overseer or superintendent; the third, a shepherd or tender of sheep. These three terms taken together imply that the one to whom they are applied should be characterized by the dignity and wisdom of age, capabilities which fit him to act as an overseer or superintendent of the church, and that tender solicitude for the fold of Christ which was the Eastern shepherd manifests toward the flock of sheep over which he is placed in charge.

It is not necessary to infer from the ordinary signification of the term elder, that the office which it represents should be given only to aged persons. Anyone who possesses the sobriety and knowledge which are naturally the products of a long experience, can safely be intrusted with the eldership of a church, though he may not have passed the noon of life.

Besides the qualifications of an elder suggested by the considerations offered above, the following additional ones might be advanced: (a) An aptitude for teaching publicly and privately (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 5:17); (b) Strong faith in God, since the elder is expected to visit and pray for the recovery of the sick (James 5:14); (c) A generous hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8); (d) Experience in the Christian life (1 Timothy 3:6); (e) Blameless (1 Timothy 3:2); (f) Temperate (1 Timothy 3:3); (g) The ability to govern well his own house (1 Timothy 3:4).

In summarizing these qualifications, the manual concluded that “the elder of a church should exhibit those traits of character which imply wisdom, spiritual discernment, faith, liberality, activity, and great firmness tempered by a kindness of feeling such as a natural father entertains toward his children.”

Authority and Duties of a Local Elder

The manual presented extensive information about the authority and duties of an elder. It said, “He has a general oversight of everything which can affect the interests of his particular charge. By virtue of his office, he stands at the head, not only of the membership of the church proper, but he is also the superior of the other officers in the church.”

The manual considered the duties of an elder “greater than those of any other officer in a local church.” Again, we observe that the elder functioned as a pastor. About the tasks of an elder it commented,

A partial enumeration of the duties of a church elder would run somewhat as follows: 1. He should preside at all the business or religious meetings of the church; 2. Put all motions upon which votes are to be taken; 3. Present the names of candidates for church membership; 4. Apply for letters for those desiring the same; 5. Give out appointments for meetings; 6. Look after the weak and discouraged ones, and visit the sick; 7. Take the oversight of the officers of the church, to see to it that they discharge their duties faithfully; 8. He should examine the clerk's and treasurer's books in order to determine whether they are properly kept; 9. In the absence of a minister, he should administer baptism, and the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and feet-washing, in his own church; but it would never be proper for him to administer either of these in any other church than his own; 10. To exercise a general oversight over the life and conduct of the members of the church, with a view to see that none walk disorderly; 11. To settle all difficulties which may arise between members of the church, privately, if possible; otherwise, to bring offenders to the judgment of the church; 12. To see to it that the decisions of the church in all matters are properly executed; 13. To visit all the members of the church at their homes as often as circumstances will admit.

A Pragmatic Approach to Electing Elders

These standards for elders were high. How should a church go about finding a person who could function as an elder? The manual was quite practical in giving instructions on how to go about finding such a person. It said,

We would not wish to be understood as intimating that no one should be elected elder of a church, who does not meet all of these requirements. It is difficult to find a perfect church elder. Select the best man for the position in the church, cooperate with him to the fullest extent, and pray God that he may develop him into what he should be in the shortest time possible.

So even if the man did not possess all qualifications of elder, he might still be elected with the understanding that, with prayer and God's blessing, in time he would develop the traits he presently lacked. The manual pragmatically concluded, "It is better that a church should have an imperfect elder, than that they should be deprived of one altogether."

Ordination of Elders and Ministers

The manual defined ordination as "a public and solemn separation to the work of their respective offices of the individuals to whom it is administered." The ordination service involved the laying on of hands and of prayer. Ordination was to bring two things to a person. First, in answer to the united prayers of those involved in the work of ordination, it would bring "those gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit which will qualify him for the special work to which he separated. "Second, it was to bestow "the authorization of the individual...to discharge the duties of his office."

Three classes of persons were to be ordained: ministers, elders, and deacons. The ordination service of elders and deacons was similar to that of the minister. The differences concerned the place of ordination and sphere of ministry was limited to the local church. Ministers were ordained during a session of the General Conference or one of the state conferences, and they were “set apart by the authority of the church of Christ to the holy work of the Gospel ministry.” Their sphere of ministry was “largely evangelistic.”

The Work of a Minister

Until 1883 ministers were mostly involved in evangelism. The manual reported,

At the present date, the work of Seventh-Day Adventist ministers is largely evangelistic in its character. Just enough labor is bestowed upon the older churches to keep them in good running order, the balance of the time of being devoted to the proclamation of the present truth among those who have not yet heard the solemn message which relates to the near coming of Christ and the Judgment.

However, the manual suggested the possibility that conferences might employ ministers who were not able to do evangelistic work but who confined their ministry to existing churches. This remark indicated the beginning of a trend toward ministers being employed as “settled pastors,” a concept previously rejected by the Adventist pioneers.

In this context the manual spoke of two classes of ministers. Regarding the first class, to which most of the ministers belonged, it said, “There is found in the Christian church in our age a class of ministers who, though particularly successful in raising up churches in new fields, are of but little use to those churches after they have once been fully indoctrinated.” About the second class it stated, “There are those who seem especially adapted to act the part of pastors of churches already brought into existence. The latter would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to succeed in that which might be called purely evangelistic work.” The manual recommended that conferences keep this distinction in mind so both classes of ministers might be used. “Those who have the oversight of conferences, therefore, would do well to recognize this distinction, as it would enable them to utilize the labor of both of these classes of preachers, by assigning to each his proper work.”

Elle White would strongly oppose this suggestion about “settled pastors.”

The General Conference Rejected the Church Manual

At the General Conference session in November 1883, the General Conference Executive Committee, joined by a committee of ten appointed by the session, considered the proposal to adopt the church manual that had been published in the *Review and Herald*.

At the end of the deliberations the committee unanimously rejected the proposed church manual. Mrs. White attended the committee meeting, but there is no written report in existence of what she told that committee, except that she “spoke well.” However, a closer look at the makeup of the committee members was her son W.C. White. As the committee decision was unanimous, he must have disapproved of the manual. Furthermore, his approval of his mother’s speech leads one to think that she also was not in favour of the manual but stressed the central authority of the Bible as the source for understanding church leadership and organization, instead of becoming dependent on a manual produced by uninspired men. Her views might very well be reflected in the committee’s reasons for the manual’s rejection and in the General Conference president’s article written to explain to the membership why we did not need a manual.

The committee gave the following reasons:

It is the unanimous judgment of the committee that it would not be advisable to have a church manual. We consider it unnecessary because we have already surmounted the greatest difficulties connected with church organization without one; and perfect harmony exists among us on this subject. It would seem to many like a step toward the formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination. If we had one, we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in religious matters, rather than to seek for it in the Bible, and from the leadings of the Spirit of God, which would tend to their hindrance in genuine religious experience and in knowledge of the mind of the Spirit. It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first began to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them? The committee feels, in short, that our tendency should be in the direction of simplicity and close conformity to the Bible, rather than in elaborately defining every point in church management and church ordinances.

At the same time, the General Conference in session voted to request its president to write an article for the *Review* explaining the action of the General Conference in rejecting the manual.

In this article the president praised the persons who had prepared the proposal for the church manual, commending them for having put together “much excellent matter.” The article explained that the reason for the manual’s rejection had to do with “the desirability of any manual whatever.” It encouraged ministers and church officers to look to the Bible for guidance in church work instead of a manual written by uninspired men.

The Bible “contains our creed and discipline. It thoroughly furnishes the man of God unto all good works.” What was not revealed in the Scriptures concerning “church organization and management” and detailed responsibilities of church officers and

ministers “should not be strictly defined and drawn out into minute specifications for the sake of uniformity, but rather be left to individual judgment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

If we had needed a “book of directions,” then “the Holy Spirit would have “left one on record with the stamp of inspiration on it. Man cannot safely supplement this matter with his weak judgment.” We ought to study God’s Word. “God requires us to study important principles which He reveals in His Word, but the minutiae in carrying them out He leaves to individual judgment, promising heavenly wisdom in the times of need.”

Ministers must depend more on God, instead of human beings. “His ministers are constantly placed where they must feel their helplessness, and their need of seeking God for light, rather than go to any church manual for specific directions, placed therein by other uninspired men.”

The article pointed out the dangerous impact of such a manual on ministers. “Minute, specific directions tend to weakness, rather than power. They lead to dependence rather than self-reliance.” It suggested that it is better to make some mistakes and learn from them “than to have our way all marked out for us by others.”

Although those who favored a manual did not intend that it would be a creed or have the authority to settle disputes, yet having it published under the “auspices of the General Conference, would at once carry with it much weight of authority, and would be consulted by most of our younger ministers.”

What would be the effect if the General Conference would issue a church manual? “It would gradually shape and mold the whole body: and those who did not follow it would be considered out of harmony with established principles of church order.” Instead of making our ministers broader and more self-reliant men with deeper spiritual experiences and a more reliable judgment, a manual would have a tendency to accomplish just the opposite.

In conclusion, the article pointed to lessons from history. All genuine reformations had to deal with the issue of publishing a church manual. After they reached a certain magnitude they felt the need of uniformity. To achieve this, church leaders prepared “directions to guide the inexperienced. These have grown in number and authority till, accepted by all, they really become authoritative. There seems to be no logical stopping place, when once started upon this road, till this result was reached. Their history is before us; we have no desire to follow it. Hence we stop without a church manual before we get started.” Union exists among believers, but it is not necessary to achieve uniformity.

From this article it becomes obvious that the committee’s recommendation was of the opinion that the Bible should remain the central source we ought to consult, and not a

manual written by uninspired men. Spelling out every detail of church organization and duties of church officers to achieve uniformity throughout the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was unnecessary. Our ministers should always feel their helplessness, which would force them to seek God and His Word for light so that their spiritual experiences become deeper, their judgments more reliable, than depending on a church manual.

Ellen White Opposes Ministers as “Settled Pastors”

Toward the end of the nineteenth century we observe more discussion over the role of the minister and his relation to the local church. In 1883 Mrs. White addressed the General Conference in session that was discussing the proposal of a church manual which suggested that conferences employ ministers who could work as pastors in local churches. In her sermon, she stressed the need for conference presidents to develop a practical experience in trusting and depending on God instead of confessing their problems to others, and subsequently to influence the ministers under them to develop the same dependence. Then they should educate the churches to deal with their own problems without the ministers to help them. Said she, “The president of a state conference is, by his manner of dealing, educating the ministers under him, and together they can so educate the churches that it will not be necessary to call the ministers of the conference from the field to settle difficulties and dissensions in the church.” This was indeed very timely advice from the prophetess, coming at a moment when a trend toward “settled pastors” was about to be incorporated into an official church manual. Undoubtedly, her influence led to defeat of the proposal.

Shortly after the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis, Ellen White warned believers against depending on ministers to work for their churches. Said she: “Do not depend on the ministers to do all the work in your church and neighbourhood.” The task of ministers is to “seek the lost sheep” while the members are to “help them.” The church members “must have light in themselves” so they can care for themselves.”

A few years later, around the turn of the century, Ellen White became increasingly vocal in her opposition against the tendency by some of the larger churches to request the care of ministers who would restrict their work exclusively to these churches. She foresaw the negative impact of this model of church organization on ministers, congregations, and the mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist movement in evangelizing the world. She drew attention to the cities in America and in other countries that had not been worked as they should have been, because many of our churches had separated themselves from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently they had lost their burden for soulwinning and now they were calling for ministers to do their work. She wrote: “Many churches, collectively and individually, have been so far removed from God, so separated from His Spirit, that they have left souls to perish all around them, while they have been calling for workers to labor in the church. This labor had been granted them, and the impenitent and the sinner have been robbed of the messages which the Lord would have given to them.”

Again she emphasized, “The Gospel is to go to every nation, tongue, and people, and ministers are not to devote their labors so entirely to the churches which know the truth. Both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor.”

The trend toward “settled pastors” seriously affected the conferences’ involvement in the mission of the church. It drained the available conference workforce for raising up churches in new territories. She said,

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; enriching those who might be veritable mines of precious truth; repeating the Gospel invitation to such as should be scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth, communicating the message of Heaven to many who have not had the privileges which they have enjoyed; feeding those who should be in the byways and highways heralding the invitation, “Come; for all things are now ready.” Come to the Gospel feast; come to the supper of the Lamb; “for all things are now ready.”

As this movement toward “settled pastors” continued, Ellen White in 1900 boldly informed church members that it was their duty to tell ministers to work for unbelievers while they, the members, would take care of the church services and souls within the neighbourhood. Said she,

Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the church say to these laborers: “Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields.”

The following year, Ellen White addressed the 1901 General Conference expressing her great concern about ministers hovering over the churches while there were so many places where the message had not yet been preached. With great unhappiness she exclaimed: “My heart has been filled with sadness as I have looked over the field and seen the barren places....Who feels a burden for the souls who cannot receive the truth till it is brought to them? Our ministers are hovering over the churches, as though the angel of mercy was not making efforts to save souls.” Then she appealed to the ministers to instruct newly established churches to not count on continual pastoral care by ministers, saying, “Establish your churches with the understanding that they need not expect the minister to wait upon them and to be continually feeding them. They have the truth; they know what truth is. They should have root in themselves. These should strike

down deeply, that they may reach up higher and still higher. They must be rooted and grounded in the faith.”

The churches needed to be educated to be able to function without a minister hovering over them. She went so far as to say that if they could not function by themselves, the members needed to be rebaptized and born again. She explained, “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. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them....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.”

Not only churches were at fault, but also ministers were to blame for the declining spiritual health of the church. Said she, “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.”

Again, one year later, she strongly protested the growing trend of churches to call for “settled pastors” to have control over their churches. This condition produced one-sided churches of which she disapproved: “There should not be a call to have settled pastors over our churches, but let the life-giving power of the truth impress the individual members to act, leading them to labor interestedly to carry on efficient missionary work in each locality. As the hand of God, the church is to be educated and trained to do effective service. Its members are to be the Lord’s devoted Christian workers. The church of today is too one-sided.”

She spoke about the importance of conference workers leaving the churches alone and concentrating on unbelievers in new fields, stating that “as a general rule, the conference laborers should go out from the churches into new fields, using their God-given ability to a purpose in seeking and saving the lost.”

Some conference leaders may have defended the role of a “settled pastor” to solve conflicts in the various congregations. Ellen White, however, argued that it was futile and would ultimately weaken the churches.

God has not given His ministers the work of setting the churches right. No sooner is this work done, apparently, than it has to be done over again. Church members that are thus looked after and labored for become religious weaklings. If nine-tenths of the effort that has been put forth for those who know the truth had been put forth for those who have never heard the truth, how much greater would have been the advancement made! God has withheld His blessings because His people have not worked in harmony with His directions.

Ellen White further predicted that ministers giving time and talent to members instead of the unconverted would produce weak churches. Said she, “It weakens those who know the truth for our ministers to expend on them the time and talent that should be given to the unconverted. . . . So long as church members make no effort to give to others the help given them, great spiritual feebleness must result.”

Members should be taught to work for God and depend on Him, not ministers. Said she, “The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers. . . . There are times when it is fitting for our ministers to give on the Sabbath, in our churches, short discourses, full of the life and love of Christ. But the church members are not to expect a sermon every Sabbath.” Instead of spending time on believers, ministers ought to evangelize new areas, raise up churches, and then move to other territories.

She instructed ministers “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.”

After organizing a new church, the minister is to set its members at work, teaching them how to begin to work successfully.

Just as soon as a church is organized, let the minister set the members at work. They will need to be taught how to labor successfully. Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching. Let him teach the people how to give to others the knowledge they have received. While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put the minister in the place of God. Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities. Christ is the One to Whom we are to look for guidance.

It is obvious, especially during the latter part of her life, that Ellen White, with her prophetic authority, instructed ministers, as stewards, to no longer hover over established churches but to be involved in aggressive evangelism in unentered areas. “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. . . . They will find that nothing is so encouraging as doing evangelistic work in new fields.”

1907 Book on Church Organization

A few years after Ellen White’s testimonies against the trends of ministers taking control of local churches, the Review and Herald published *The Church, Its Organization, Order,*

and Discipline, authored by J.H. Loughborough. Although it was not issued by the General Conference, it functioned as a church manual for local churches for years.

The book contained an abundance of Spirit of Prophecy counsels and fully supported the position of Ellen White on the evangelistic nature of the work of the minister. It also incorporated James White's view of the New Testament model of church organization, the leadership of local elders, and their ministry as pastors, teachers, and spiritual guides. Consequently the book does not mention the function of the minister as "settled pastor" of a congregation.

The elder was seen as the officer "in charge of a local church" and he "should act as chairman in all its business meetings."

Ellen White Upholds Leadership Role of Church Elders

During her prophetic ministry Ellen White gave detailed counsel on what the Lord expected of elders. Their responsibilities in the local church involved five major areas: as undershepherds, assisting members with their gifts, ascertaining faithfulness in financial stewardship, dealing with erring members, and upholding the church's standards and policies. Her counsels to elders below delineate what the Lord expects from elders. If followed, churches could fully operate without a "settled pastor."

Responsibilities as an Undershepherd

Mrs. White revealed that local elders, as undershepherds of Christ's flock, have a threefold duty. They are to nurture and oversee (supervise) the members of the church and provide them an example of the Seventh-Day Adventist lifestyle. In their leadership they should avoid showing any partiality to anyone in their treatment of believers. They are not to drive them but with great wisdom feed them unselfishly with spiritual food. They are not to be dictators but should be an encouragement to members. Ministering to the sick is part of their responsibilities. In their leadership they need to display Christlike humility.

Their work is not only to the church members, but they should also labor two by two in evangelistic work, reaching out to unbelievers.

Responsibility to Educate Members to Use Their Gifts

Elders should lay plans for educating church member to use their God-given talents. Their duty is to get everyone to take part in the mission and operation of the church. Said Ellen White, "They should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life, but that all may accomplish what they can according to their several ability." They are responsible to "give every member of the church a share in active work for the salvation of souls." This is of vital importance because it is "the only way in which the church can be preserved in a healthy, thriving condition."

Responsibilities to Ensure Faithful Stewardship

Elders are responsible for instructing the membership in “the necessity of faithfulness in the payment of pledges, tithes, and offerings.” They should appoint church officers “who will attend to the work of gathering in the tithe.” If they neglect this important work, involving a blessing or a curse to the church, they ought to be relieved of their responsibilities and others should be selected to do this work. This is such a crucial task that even conference presidents should make sure that the elders are taking care of this responsibility.

However, if others fail to collect the tithe, it is the elders’ duty to visit members who have not turned in the tithe by the end of the calendar year. Ellen White appealed, “Elders of churches, do your duty. Labor from home to home, that the flock of God shall not be remiss in this great matter, which involves such a blessing or such a curse.”

Responsibilities to Deal With Erring Members

Elders have the duty to deal with sin in the church in an impartial way, no matter how uncomfortable this is. Failure to act makes them responsible for the damage that comes to the church. She said, “Sin should be rebuked. Whatever opposition and trial might come to the elder of the church because of his faithfulness, he should not swerve from true principles. Sins should not, because of unsanctified preferences and sympathy, be lightly regarded in one man which would be condemned in another. This matter is one of great importance.” If the elder should fail to deal with sin, and sanctions errors in the lives of church members, “God will hold him responsible for his brother’s unfaithfulness in office, and for the harm which will result to the church.”

Elders have great responsibility to guard the spirituality of the members, and need to curb the increase of sinful behavior and influences. They are not to adopt an attitude of tolerance to the inroads of the world, because this is no sign of love for the sinner. Ellen White stated,

Especially the elders of the church...must not carelessly allow the members to be irregular in conduct and thus let evil and sin strengthen in the church, thinking this is the way to show love for one another. God requires faithfulness in watchcare. You must take hold of God with one hand while with the other hand, in love, you lay hold upon the erring and the sinner and draw them to Jesus. Pray with them, weep with them, feel for their souls, love them, and never let go of them. This is the love Jesus has expressed for you. You must ever strive for unity and forbearance and love.

Although local elders, in cooperation with deacons, are responsible for the prosperity of the congregation, elders do not have the authority to disfellowship members. They have to do this in consultation with the conference. However, they need to deal patiently with

erring members. Ellen White counselled, “In the fear of God, with much humility and sorrow for the erring, who are the purchase of the blood of Christ, with earnest, humble prayer the proper officers should deal with the offenders.”

In this work the local elders were closely to cooperate with “traveling elders,” who were itinerant ministers employed by the conference. Mrs. White commented, “Elders, local and traveling, are appointed by the church and by the Lord to oversee the church, to reprove, exhort, and rebuke the unruly and to comfort the feebleminded. There is no higher tribunal upon Earth than the church of God. And if the members of the church will not submit to the decision of the church, and will not be counselled and advised by it, they cannot be helped.”

Responsibilities to Uphold Church Standards and Policies

It is the duty of the elders to present to positive attitude in the church. They should refuse to lend undue sympathy to doubters and complainers, or to present trials in an exaggerated light; otherwise they open the door to Satan’s suggestions and temptations. In their work they should be prepared to face persons who are critical of the leadership of the church.

At all times elders are to uphold the standards of the church and to draw nourishment from Christ as the Living Vine so they are full of Christ and Christlikeness. If their heart is not transformed by grace, “the churches would do far better without such elders and ministers.”

Elders should never become self-exalted, but should remember that only humility makes them worthy of the honor of the office of an elder. “Let him remember that office does not make the man, but that before angels and before men he is to honor his office.”

An important task of the elders is to bring unity among the believers so that the members “care for each other, to advise with and counsel each other.” In supervising the affairs of the church, to prevent confusion elders need “to reprove, exhort, and rebuke the unruly and to comfort the feebleminded,” showing the need of members to respect and to accept the decisions of the church.

Finally Ellen White warned elders to affirm the standards of the church, and in no way to use their influence in leading “the church into the world rather than from it.”

C. Adventists Abandon the New Testament Model of Leadership

As we have seen earlier, soon after the death of the prophet John, many early Christians abandoned the New Testament leadership model of elders having the oversight of the local church, to a church leadership that centered on the bishop as the head of the congregation while elders functioned as his assistants. Similarly, shortly after the death of

the prophetess and messenger to the remnant church, Ellen White, Seventh-Day Adventists replaced the leadership of the local elders with a minister- or pastor-centered leadership structure in which elders functioned as his assistants.

We will now discover the reasons for this leadership transition. First we will investigate the failure of elders and members to take their responsibilities seriously, then consider the acceptance of the practice of “settled pastors,” and finally note the institutionalizing of the leadership position of the minister in the local church with the proportional decline of the authority of the elders.

Failure of Elders and Members

God’s plan for local church leadership was not successfully implemented. Elders and church officers failed to get members involved in the mission of the church. In exploring this problem, Ellen White asked herself the question,

What is the matter that the church elders and officers do not arouse and seek with earnest prayer and determined effort to set the people in the church to work? Are elders in these churches carrying any burden? Do they feel any care for the souls of the sheep of God’s pasture? Do they humble their heart before God and by faith lay hold on the grace of Christ and put away their sins and believe their devotion to God? Will the elders of the church, the officers of the church, draw nigh to God, will they now in probationary time learn the lessons of Jesus Christ and practice them until they shall ascend the high places of faith and command a clearer, more spiritual view of the situation?

She bemoaned the fact that elders and other officers had not been successful in providing opportunities for every member to get involved. She said that it “has not been done in the past, and there are but few who realize how much has been lost on this account.”

Another area where elders failed was in firmly grounding members in the Advent message. Ellen White asked the probing question, “Have the elders and deacons of the church looked after the weak and straying ones? And have they realized that the wavering are in danger of losing their souls? Have you tried both by precept and example to plant the feet of the straying on the eternal Rock?” To rectify this situation she called for “a decided need of reformation in every branch of the work.”

When looking at the failures of the local church leadership, we need to realize that the enthusiasm and burden for lost souls that inspired the early pioneers had largely disappeared. A Laodicean condition had arisen among the membership that had such an impact on the church that Ellen White blamed them for delaying the Second Advent. Toward the end of her life she even charged members with repeating the “insubordination” of ancient Israel. She wrote, “We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel.”

This both the failure of local church leaders as well as membership apathy created a climate that was responsible for a change of the leadership structure in the church.

A Church in Transition

As long as the prophetic voice of Ellen White was heard, most Seventh-Day Adventist leaders followed the New Testament leadership model she had endorsed. This meant that the local elder or elders were responsible for leading the local church. The congregation elected them for a period of one year. These elders were accountable to the local church for its prosperity. Every year their performance was reviewed and evaluated. If the members were pleased with their leadership, they would be elected for another year; if they were not pleased with their performance they were not reelected.

From time to time “traveling elders”—ministers—visited these churches and provided assistance with the training of church members. These traveling elders worked in close cooperation with the local elders but were not “settled pastors” hovering over a congregation, except in some of the largest churches. The local elder presided over meetings dealing with the business of the church.

As we have seen, Ellen White strongly opposed the trend toward “settled pastors,” a model of church organization which existed among most Protestant churches. Seventh-Day Adventists were not to follow their example, for Adventists were the remnant church of Bible prophecy—a prophetic movement whose mission mandate was to prepare the whole world for the soon return of Christ. They were not just another Protestant church that focused on nurturing its members and maintaining its presence in the community. After the death of the prophetess, the voice that spoke most strongly against the ministers taking control or hovering over local congregations was silent. As a result of the failure of elders and members to live up to their responsibilities in the local church, a gradual change began to take place in which the New Testament leadership model was abandoned and replaced by the “settled pastor” model. By having a paid “settled pastor” in charge of a church or several churches, church officials seemed to feel that this would be more beneficial than having ineffective elders in charge of the congregation.

The appointment of “settled pastors” had a dramatic impact on the leadership role of the elders in the congregation. With the minister as the most important leader in the organizational structure of the local church, the church board, after the minister, became the decisive leadership voice responsible for the direction of the local church. Now the influence of the elder was generally reduced to leading out in platform responsibilities, breaking bread at Communion, giving advice to the church board, visiting members, and assisting the local minister. Nearly twenty years after Mrs. White’s death, this change of the elders’ authority became institutionalized with the official adoption of the first Seventh-Day Adventist *Church Manual* in 1932.

The First Church Manual (1932)

Transfer of the Elder's Authority to That of the "Settled Pastor"

The *Manual* gave its blessings on the position of the "settled pastor," a concept so strongly opposed by Ellen White, and incorporated it into the organizational structure of the local Adventist church. Now the minister, assigned by the conference to the local church, took over the elder's authority and became the pastor and leader of that local church. The elder was still recognized as the highest official and religious leader in a local church where there was no "settled pastor." The *Manual* reads, "In the work and organization of the church, except where a local pastor has been provided by the conference, the office of elder stands out as the highest and most important." "The local church elder, in the absence of the pastor, is the religious leader of the church."

The elder or elders of the local church now became assistants to the local minister. The *Church Manual* declared, "In cases where the conference committee assigns an ordained minister to labor with a church, he should be considered as the ranking officer, and the local elder as his assistant."

It is of interest that the minister as the highest officer in the local church was not at all accountable to the local congregation but to the conference. The *Manual* stated, "The minister is responsible to the conference committee, and serves the church as a conference worker." By contrast, the local elder continued to remain "responsible to the church and the church board."

The church board now became the important body for the governance of the church. The elder was no longer its chairman; instead, the local minister was. The *Manual* stated, "The minister serving the church regularly as pastor, usually acts as the chairman of the church board." The church board consisted of the "pastor; the elder or elders, the deacons; the clerk; the treasurer; the missionary leader, if only than the elder; the church missionary secretary; the Sabbath School superintendent; and the Missionary Volunteer leader; and where it seems advisable, two or three other members chosen by the church."

The composition of the board showed that the leadership authority of the elder was substantially reduced. However, the presence of the ordained leadership on the church board was still substantial because all elders and deacons were still members.

Regarding the nominating committee, the *Manual* stated that this committee had no *ex officio* members. "The minister in charge of the church may be chosen as a member of this committee, as his appointment to the church does not rest upon any action by the nominating committee." However, if the church did not elect him to the nominating committee, "his counsel should be sought by the committee."

The local church was still to elect the elder(s) but not the minister. A distinction between elders and ministers was made on the basis of the special gifts that the Lord gives to His church Ephesians 4. Quoting the Spirit of Prophecy, the *Manual* read,

God has a church, and she has a divinely appointed ministry. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ....”

The conference committee called and appointed ministers, who, in turn, were accountable to the conference. Because ministers received their credentials from the conference, they “are responsible to the conference, and not to any local church in the conference.”

The *Manual* clearly spelled out the authority of the minister in the local church: “On assignment to a local church as a worker or pastor, the ordained minister takes rank above the local elder or elders, and these latter serve as his assistants.”

Regarding the minister’s role in the local church the *Manual* read,

By virtue of his ordination to the ministry he is qualified to function in all church rites and ceremonies, and should have charge of such services. He should be the spiritual leader and advisor of the church. He should instruct the church officers in their duties, and counsel them in carrying, and in helping them to plan for all lines of church work and activity. By virtue of his appointment as pastor he is a member of the church board, and serves as chairman.

Again the Manual emphasized, “Pastors or assistant pastors are not nominated or elected to such positions by the church. Their connection with the church is by the appointment of the conference committee, and such appointments may be cancelled at any time.”

Since the first *Church Manual* was issued, further changes have taken place that show an increasing influence of local ministers and the declining authority of elder(s), as well will see in the most recent Church Manual.

The 2000 Church Manual

The current *Church Manual*, issued about 70 years after the first, shows an increase of the minister’s authority in the local church in comparison to the 1932 *Manual*.

The minister serving the local church as a pastor continues to be the highest authority, while the elders are his assistants. The minister serves also as the chairman of the church board, unless he requests the elder to function temporarily in this capacity.

In addition to presiding over the church board, the minister's influence on the church's nominating committee has expanded. He now serves *ex officio* as the chairperson of the nominating committee. Here his influence in the selection process of the new officers can be substantial.

The current Manual mentions the existence of a "board of elders" which is described as a committee appointed by the church board. The authority of the elder(s) is reduced to that of an advisory role. When a church has a board of elders, the pastor generally functions also as the chairman of the board of elders.

All these changes indicate that since the death of the prophetic voice among Seventh-Day Adventists, the minister has significantly increased his influence in the local church by functioning as the chairman of the church board, the board of elders, the nominating committee, and, generally, the chairman of the committee to select the nominating committee. Simultaneously, the authority of the elder(s) has drastically declined.

Presently the *Manual* recommends that the church board consists of the following members: Elder(s), Head Deacon, Head Deaconess, Treasurer, Clerk, Personal Ministries Leader, Personal Ministries Secretary, Community Services and/or Dorcas Leader, Sabbath School Superintendent, Family Ministries Leader, Women's Ministries Leader, Children's Ministries Coordinator, Education Secretary, Home and School Association Leader, Adventist Youth Society Leader, Pathfinder Club Director, Adventurer Club Director, Interest Coordinator, Communication Committee Chairperson or Communication Secretary, Health Ministries Leader, Stewardship Leader, and Religious Liberty Leader.

In comparison with the 1932 *Manual*, the presence of the ordained officers has declined on the church board. In 1932 all ordained deacons and elders were part of the board; now only the elder(s) and head deacon are board members. Furthermore, as a result of the expansion of the church board to a presence of about twenty nonordained members, the influence of the elders on the church board has further weakened. If we keep in mind that each board member has one vote, the voice of ordained elders has been so much reduced that motions can easily be voted over the objections of the elders. This situation has had significant and serious consequences, especially when controversial issues are introduced that affect worship style, standards, and spirituality of congregations.

Effects of the Current Leadership Model on Local Elders

Over the years, quite a few Adventist ministers have visited and observed successful Protestant megachurches. Several of these ministers have tried to pattern our worship forms after these megachurches in the hope that their churches would experience strong growth, attract more non-Adventists, and keep our youth from leaving the church.

In many Adventist churches these drastic changes have met with resistance, especially on the part of the elder(s). However, with the declining authority of elders, these changes could be introduced without much difficulty, despite opposition from the elders. Except in large churches that have many elders on their church boards, in most churches the elders have a minority voice on the church board. One elder's vote is just as influential as the vote of an interest coordinator or a religious liberty leader. If the pastor would like to make substantial changes in the church, and he has the support of most of the church board, the ordained elders have no way to prevent these changes. Today, elders function simply as advisers, not as leaders, because they lack the authority. This leadership situation in which the majority of the church board determines the direction of the local church is far removed from the New Testament model of leadership.

In some large churches the local ministers have used strategies to reduce the number of elders on the church board so that elders are no longer able to oppose controversial changes in worship styles. In one large church the minister introduced the members to a proposal to make the church board more "manageable" by eliminating "deadwood." This was done by restricting the elders who were allowed to vote on the board from 28 to 5, a more than 80% reduction. Without even discussing the proposal with every one of the elders or obtaining their consent or input, the proposal was quickly introduced and approved by a ballot vote on Sabbath morning between Sabbath School and church. At the next elder's meeting, after having extensively discussed this action from a Biblical perspective, the elders unanimously protested. They realized that taking away elders' rights to vote on the church board was not in harmony with their leadership position in the church as brought out in the Bible and the *Church Manual*. But there was nothing the elders could do because the church had already "officially" approved it.

When the elders related their arguments to the minister, he did not address the Biblical arguments but referred to the *Church Manual* to justify this action. He pointed out that the *Manual* only stated that "elder(s)" were to be included on the church board but it did not spell out how many elders should be included. To him this meant that the church had the right to limit the voting power of the elders on the church board. This is an example of how a local church dispute was decided by using the *Church Manual*, without consulting what the Bible teaches about the role of elders.

When some of the elders contacted the conference, they discovered that this change in the leadership structure had received prior conference approval. Such an incident is evidence of the lack of understanding of the New Testament leadership role of the local elders. These are a few examples of the powerful impact of the current leadership structure of the local church on the authority of the elders. When the minister is in charge of the local church, he is the one who is most influential in determining the direction of the church. This power has been used to benefit the church as well as to push agendas and dreams that did not take into consideration the voices of local elders, thus introducing

controversy and tensions that have deeply divided churches and negatively affected their growth.

D. Challenges of Returning to the Biblical Model

The present leadership model described in the Church Manual is so deeply entrenched in the minds of believers that it would not be easy to return to the Biblical model. Very few believers are aware that during the twentieth century Adventists have departed from Jesus' model of local leadership. Let us now consider some of the possible obstacles to a return to the New Testament model of leadership structure in the local church.

The Congregation

Each church wants its own minister and doesn't really want to share with other churches. Congregations that share ministers with two, three, four, or more churches generally look forward to the time when they will be large enough to have their own full-time minister who can devote all his time to their own church's needs. Then they would feel they have gotten something worthwhile for all the tithe they have submitted to the conference.

Many members also look forward to having a minister who regularly pays them personal visits. They also expect their minister to be responsible for a steady growth of their church so that in the future they may expand their church facilities and build a larger church equipped with the latest technology and user-friendly sanctuary architecture.

Churches that already have a full-time pastor generally feel disappointed when the conference announces that they have to share a pastor with another church. This means less pastoral attention.

The Local Elder(s)

Today, in general, church elders are so used to having a local minister that most elders have come to depend on ministers to do most of the work in the church. They consider the minister a full-time worker who should do much of the work of keeping the church in smooth running condition. Less pastoral attention would mean that the elders would have to devote more time to the operation of the church. Being so used to ministers doing so much for the church, elders have frequently developed a lifestyle that is so involved with their own jobs, projects, and plans that there is hardly any time left for church work. This may be a major factor in the low attendance of many elders at the elder's meetings and church boards. The other factor may be a general lack of interest in church proceedings.

Ministers who have tried to implement an elders' visitation program have learned from experience that this is generally ineffective because many elders just do not have the time in their schedules for this type of work. And elders who have time often feel that the minister is much more qualified to do this job, and they defer the visitation to the pastor—after all he is paid to do the job.

The Ministers

Many ministers enjoy being in charge of just one church. They do not relish being responsible for several churches. Young ministers being placed in a district with several churches see it as the ultimate in pastoring when they are assigned to one church. They feel that in having one church they can really accomplish something great, without being distracted by caring for all the other small churches.

In the past, ministers stayed in their churches only a few years. The rationale given for moving ministers more frequently was that each has strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it was thought, moving pastors every few years would be good for churches. The next minister would bring different strengths to the church than the previous minister, which would contribute to a more balanced church development.

However, for some time now, through the influence of non-Seventh-day Adventist concepts about pastoral ministry, the idea has caught on that it is better for the pastor to stay in a congregation for a much longer period to give stability to the congregation and the minister's family and allow him to better execute his long-term plans for the church. Today, some ministers have succeeded in staying 10,15, or even 20 years in one church. To return to the practices of the Adventist pioneers who were committed to the New Testament leadership model that has no "settled pastors," may not be welcome news for most ministers.

The Conferences

The current leadership model of "settled pastors" has advantages for conference leaders, one of the most significant advantages being that the conference has more direct influence over the local church because the minister answers to the conference, not to the church.

Since the 1863 organization of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the local church properties have belonged to the conference. Today, not only does the conference own the church building, but because the minister is a conference employee, the conference is ultimately in charge of the local church. Which conference would be willing to give up this control? There may be a few conference leaders who might be interested in exploring options about returning to the days of the Adventist pioneers and the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy, but most likely it may not appeal to the majority of the conferences.

In addition, conferences may fear that a return to a model of churches being under the authority of local elders may increase a trend toward congregationalism. In recent years several churches have left the Seventh-Day Adventist Church organizational structure and have become independent churches.

I would not deny that there might be some church members who might see the return to the New Testament leadership model as an opportunity to leave the Conference's family of churches and become a freestanding independent congregation. However, such a situation would be a remote possibility if the elders of these churches had proper training in the Spirit of Prophecy concepts of church leadership.

We must ask ourselves, Who was primarily responsible for inspiring these churches to adopt a congregational model of organization and to break with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church? It was not so much the church members, but charismatic Adventist ministers, who, deeply influenced by non-Biblical models of church leadership and church growth philosophies of the megachurches, spearheaded the break with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. These ministers, who were conference employees, effectively influenced a large portion of the membership, and, with its support, organized themselves into independent "community churches," and eventually adopted Sunday worship celebration services.

Lack of Credibility of the Testimonies of the Spirit of Prophecy

One of the most significant obstacles to a return to the New Testament leadership model of church organization has to do with the perceived credibility of the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Adventist Church. Many may question the validity of the inspired admonitions given over 100 years ago. No Seventh-Day Adventist would doubt their applicability to the nineteenth century. But who would presume to advocate these testimonies are still very much applicable to a church that struggles to adapt itself to a postmodern world?

Before taking any action, some leaders may be inclined to pass an opinion survey around and see what others may think about the relevance of these testimonies today, but that would not be helpful. What we need more than ever is a careful study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to see what we can learn from these counsels in the light of our past experience. We need to keep in mind that at the end of time very few will have confidence in these messages. "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God....Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony." We should also remember the tragic consequences of such a deception for "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

E. Advantages of Restoring Jesus' Model of Leadership

Aim for the Most Effective Model of Leadership

Many church members and leaders may seem satisfied with the organizational structure of the local Adventist church as it is today. They may admit that the way we do church at this time has its weaknesses, but so do other leadership models. They might say, "Why should we tamper with the present situation? Let us keep doing things as we are. We are

too close to the Lord's return. Going back to the New Testament model would require such a large-scale and time-consuming plan of reeducation of the membership, ministers, and conferences, that it is not worth the effort."

Today, when we hear so much about the need of good leadership and leadership training, it becomes very obvious that Seventh-Day Adventists ought to study God's plan of leadership and investigate what He has revealed in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy regarding the most efficient leadership structure for His remnant during the closing years of Earth's history.

In this search for the best leadership model it is not necessary to look to non-Adventist church organizations to discover the best insights on church leadership. Adventists have had experience in church leadership and organization for more than 160 years, and it behoves us to reflect on how His Spirit has led us until this day. A century ago the prophetess to the remnant wrote, "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."

This experience should be our experience as well after we have observed how the Holy Spirit has guided our church toward the Biblical model of local church organization and leadership. We as a church need to have the best model and not settle for anything less than the best. In doing so we will receive the abundant blessing of the Lord and count on His continual guidance. Both church leadership and members should reflect on what is the best and most effective leadership and members should reflect on what is the best and most effective leadership structure for the church. Only when we are willing to prayerfully engage in this investigation, will we be able to see the true value in Jesus' model of leadership that He revealed to His apostles in the New Testament.

Advantages of the Biblical Leadership Model

In the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy we have discovered that having a "settled pastor" is not the best for the local congregation, the ministers, and the conference. We will briefly consider the advantages of the adoption of the Biblical leadership model on each of these three entities.

For the congregation...

It becomes self-sufficient.

With a local minister in charge of the church, the church members have the tendency to "become religious weaklings," display a lack of the burden for soulwinning, and are unable to take care of themselves. Indeed, "both ministers and people lose much by the following this method of labor."

For the best interest of the congregation, therefore, the minister should devote part of his time to train the church members. This training should not be limited to soulwinning. He should give proper training to elders and deacons in how to give appropriate leadership in their respective areas of responsibility. In addition, he should educate the other church officers about how to take care of various ministries of the church. With proper training in all the areas of church work, church leaders and members will be able to function without the constant care of a minister. When the minister leaves the local church, the congregation would be “obliged to bear responsibilities.” This would result in members having to use their talents, which will improve through use in keeping the church functioning. Instead of calling for pastoral help, church members should let “the life-giving power of the truth” impress each member to do missionary work for the Lord in their own neighbourhood.

It is no longer pastor-centered

Church members know from experience what happens to a church when there is a change of pastoral leadership. In this transition period most congregations are kept in a holding pattern; not knowing what the next minister will do, they simply take a wait-and-see attitude. They plan no major evangelistic efforts. And while the elders are trying to keep the church functioning, everyone is looking forward to what plans and programs the next minister will introduce. This is the general pattern of pastor-led churches. Everything revolves around the local minister, and without his permission or initiative very little goes on in the church.

With proper training of the congregation, this period of stagnation would not happen. There would not be the needless interruption of the church programs and the evangelistic thrust. The leadership of the local elder(s) in close cooperation with the other church officers would continue the church’s activities.

Instead of calling for a minister to devote more time to their church, members should encourage the minister to go and do evangelistic work while the elders take care of their own church needs and its worship services.

It brings greater stability now and in the future.

With a properly trained leadership of elders and deacons, the church would be able to embark on a stable and successful course. These elders and deacons have roots in the community that provide stability for years to come.

Building a strong elder leadership in the local church is not only important for the growth and stability of the church today, but it is the best way to prepare churches for the difficult days ahead when many will be faced with persecution, while participating in the loud-cry message of Revelation 18. In the event that the communication lines with the local conference should be interrupted, the local churches would still be able to continue their witness without being seriously affected.

Churches led by well-trained local leadership that is accountable to their congregations makes them stronger than having a minister in charge who is not at all accountable to the local church constituency that he is leading.

Finally, a properly trained and stable elder's team will protect the congregation against radical changes by incoming ministers in worship style, music, and congregationalism—all of which have affected so many churches. Only when proposed changes have the approval of the majority of the board of elders should they be allowed.

For the minister...

He trains the congregation to be self-sufficient.

A minister is to be a trainer of the congregation. While “settled pastors” may be able to do a good work in training members to be soulwinners, that is not all the training for which a minister is responsible. Effective training includes training the ordained leadership for the church—elders and deacons—to function as God intends, so they will be able to operate their church with success. The minister ought to train these leaders to teach the congregation to function without a “settled” minister or pastor.

Unfortunately, this is a goal that very few ministers have in mind. A minister who leads a church year after year without training members to operate their church in his absence has failed in his responsibilities. Inspired counsel notes that “unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew.”

Ministers themselves are also to blame for weak congregations by being overly protective. With the proper training, elders, deacons, other officers and members should be encouraged to carry out their responsibilities. Then ministers can simply fade into the background, leaving the church alone to handle its problems while he goes on to evangelize new areas. This way the members will have to carry out their own responsibilities. This would result in members having to use their talents, which will improve through use in keeping the church functioning.

He is to raise up new congregations.

When the minister has trained and fully equipped the local church, he will no longer be vital to the maintenance of a church. He will then be able to spend his time in soulwinning and establishing new congregations. These congregations in turn will have to be trained to exist without continued pastoral care, because the elders will do the nurturing and grounding of the members into the truth.

As the Spirit of Prophecy has so eminently brought out, the task of ministers should first and foremost be in the evangelistic mission of sharing the three angels' messages with nonmembers. Second, in their remaining time they may train church members to efficiently run their own church and be engaged in its mission. This means that ministers

need to train the local church leadership in how to give sound leadership to the congregation in the absence of a “settled minister.”

For the conference...

It becomes the source for church planting and evangelism.

Well-trained churches are a great advantage to the conference. They will not demand from the conference a permanent minister. Having an understanding of God’s leadership plan for the local church, congregations would encourage ministers to do evangelistic work while they would take care of their own church and its worship services.

A congregation requiring a local pastor to hover over the church robs the conference of a valuable worker who would otherwise be available for doing evangelistic work in unentered areas to establish a church.

Any minister following the New Testament leadership plan will be a great advantage to the local church and conference. Local churches will become strong and able to take care of themselves, while conferences will get more of their employees to be involved in soulwinning and raising up new churches in unreached areas.

It becomes a resource service and training center.

With local ministers training the churches to be able to take care of themselves, the conference will have a growing pool of qualified workers who be able to focus on evangelism and raising up new churches. Whenever a local church needs help, elders will be able to call upon this large pool of workers to teach them how to deal with the challenges they are facing. Consequently, the conference becomes a powerful and indispensable resource service and training center for church growth and for developing strong and mature churches.

Implementation

The implementation of the New Testament leadership structure would only be successful through a thorough process of reeducation of the conference leadership, its ministers, and the church membership with its elders, deacons, and church officers.

Conferences interested in adopting the Biblical model must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, find out which churches would be interested in making the transition, and which ministers are willing to have their ministry shared between training churches and being involved in evangelism. Then a pilot program could be organized with an annual evaluation of the accomplishments. This pilot program would give the conference the experience in how to improve future implementation in other churches.

Every year more and more churches would be able to participate in the adoption of the Biblical model until the whole conference has returned to God’s plan for ministry in the remnant church.

The adoption of this leadership model will have a profound impact on conference hiring policies. The model would demand that conferences employ ministers who are able to function in training church members and working in evangelism. Conferences may develop ministerial training teams to work with the local churches, as well as soulwinning institutes where church members can receive specialized training by attending training seminars or workshops in which the participants can be involved in a hands-on experience.

This kind of ministry would also demand a new model for ministerial training that is not patterned after the seminaries of other churches, but would be based on the mission-driven model of the New Testament, which follows Christ's ministry; and the training He gave to His disciples, which focused on proclaiming the Gospel through teaching, preaching, and healing (Matthew 4:23; 10:1, 7, 8; Luke 10:1, 9)

At the level of the local church, every congregation should have a board of elders made up of all local elders and chaired by the first elder, who is a first among equals, working in close cooperation with the other elders. Furthermore, the first elder should be the chairman of the church board unless he feels uncomfortable with this role. In that case, he would ask another elder to function as chairman in his place.

All church board actions affecting the spirituality of the congregation should have the approval of the majority of the board of elders. Without their approval, these church board actions should not be implemented. If a congregation does not approve of the performance of the elders, the members can hold them accountable at the church business meeting. If members continue to be dissatisfied, they can express their disapproval at the next annual election of church officers by refusing to reelect the elders, and electing others in their place. In this way the Biblical model of leadership will be fully maintained—one that assigns to elder(s) chosen by the church members the spiritual leadership of the local congregation.

The implementation of this model becomes especially valuable in times of uncertainty and tight economical resources. A study of church growth in developing nations shows great success in areas where ministers function as itinerant preachers over 10, 15, 20, or more churches. They have no time to hover over these churches, but are busy training the leaders of the local churches as well as being engaged in evangelism.

Conclusion

Our study began with describing the New Testament organization of the local churches. The Jerusalem model of leadership that divided the responsibilities between elders and deacons, with elders having the oversight over the church, was to be the organizational model for new churches to be established.

The Adventist pioneers adopted the New Testament model. Local elders had the oversight of congregations and functioned as their pastors. Throughout the nineteenth century this model was maintained, with full support of the Spirit of Prophecy. After the death of Ellen White the model was abandoned, and the “settled minister” took the local church leadership function of the elder, who then became the minister’s assistant. With the introduction of a *Church Manual* in 1932 this new leadership model became institutionalized. Subsequent manuals showed an increase of the influence of the minister over the congregation.

In the last part of our study we compared the New Testament leadership model with the current model recommended in the *Church Manual*, and discovered that there are substantial advantages to returning to the New Testament leadership model so strongly endorsed during the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. It is still possible to restore the Biblical model of leadership in the church today, when we take time to understand the beauty and wisdom of God’s plan of leadership.

Undoubtedly, churches that go by the Bible value the testimony of Jesus through the Biblical gift of prophecy. They should be interested in studying how they might restore the leadership model Christ so providentially gave to His remnant church. A reformation of the leadership of the local church may be a powerful catalyst to encourage a mission-driven lay movement that would contribute to the coming great worldwide revival of Revelation 18.

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