

Complete Executive Summary

Telephone Interviews of
Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

Interview Dates:
March 18, 1998 –
April 21, 1998

*Conducted by Curtis Rittenour
Resource Development
AdventSource*

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Pastoral Interviews

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Interview Dates: **March 18, 1997 – April 21, 1998**
Number of Calls in this Report: **50**
Number of Conferences Represented: **18**

THE QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Does your church sponsor (or co-sponsor) any “viable” Adventist community service program(s) such as a soup kitchen, remedial reading program, etc. (Viable meaning eligible to join United Way)?*

Thirty-three of 50 pastors say they have some sort of community service program in at least one of their churches. The interviewer did not always refer to the definition in the written question above (“viable”). By far, the most common program is a food and clothing bank. More than half spoke of this or some variation (some distributed only food and others only clothes though those were the minority).

Around a dozen of these pastors have ministries that directly affect the homeless. There were approximately nine ministries to feed the homeless, either through a soup kitchen or distributing food from a van (Loaves and Fishes). These ministries were often in the inner city (New York, Los Angeles, etc.) and were most often cooperative efforts with other church or social agencies outside of the Adventist church. Some churches served food from their premises, some rented a facility, and others worked from a facility owned by a community agency. Typically, members helped with these feeding programs once a week (and sometimes once a month). Two churches house the homeless at their church once a week in cooperation with area churches.

The remainder programs include a couple churches working with a van ministry that takes blood pressure, distributes food, clothing, or literature. A couple other churches are involved in disaster relief by providing “kits” with personal articles. One of these churches works in BC and cooperates with the government (Frank McMiller heads this up). Two churches referred to a tutorial program. One church provides computer classes to single moms. A couple pastors actively network with community agencies (lead a food drive, speaks to agencies and asks how the church can help them).

Question 2. What do you believe is the key factor in helping mobilize members toward sharing their faith in Jesus?

Responses to this question are grouped into three areas: Spiritual, Program, and Methodology. The latter two are similar, except I've separated out references to specific books, seminars, or other resources and called them "Program." Many pastors indicated that motivation for witnessing begins with a member's personal relationship with Jesus. Phrases used to describe this include: "Presence of the Holy Spirit in the life" and "Time spent in Bible study and prayer" and "Cannot share what you do not have" and "Build the faith of your members" and "Inspired urgency!", etc. The interviewer sometimes asks the same questions a number of times, and so more pastors may have referred to this "given" element, but may not have since examples were sometimes that related to methodology.

These pastors stated a variety of methodologies. The cluster of related methods most frequently spoken of were friendship evangelism, small groups, and one on one witnessing. In speaking of friendship evangelism, one phrase that came up twice (that I hadn't heard before) was compassionate witnessing. Another interesting term spoken of by one pastor was "psychogenetic witnessing". Sounds a bit like neurolinguistic programming! In another vein, four pastors spoke of "empowering members" for witnessing. What they meant was letting members discover their own unique ways (and gifts) for how to witness without shoving them into a program that doesn't match "them." Two of these pastors spoke of the Connections resource in helping members along this line. Also mentioned were creating a mission statement for the church (members were more excited to invite friends to a place with a clear mission and vision), health evangelism, and properly indoctrinating new members by teaching that witnessing is part of a healthy Christian lifestyle.

Programs and resources mentioned can be grouped by books, Bible study courses, seminars and other programs. Books mentioned on witnessing include Russell Burrill's, Paul Yonngi Cho, Philip Samaan, and Rick Warren. Bible study courses referred to were Tony Cirigliano's, Discover Bible School, and Quiet Hour tapes. Programs spoken of include Seeds, Friendship Evangelism, SALT, SWAT (Dr. Patrick, Florida Conference), Track Attack, Connections, Kindness Call (Pastor McCall in California), and Leo Schreven's training manual (Amazing Facts?). A pastor from Oklahoma uses the latter is really excited about the results (29 member church with 14 baptisms last year and 8 more on the way).

A pastor from Inter America reflected on the cultural employment differences between North America and Inter America. He said his members had far more time and flexibility in their schedules in Inter America for witnessing and church programs because most all of them were self-employed. His members in North America are far more consumed in their work than in Inter America and this impacts witnessing, he believes.

Question 3. *Do you have an associate/assistant pastor? If you could have a paid, full-time assistant, what would be that person's primary job?*

Nine of 50 pastors have some sort of paid assistant helping them in ministry. Three of these nine are Bible workers (two are full-time, one is part-time). What type of paid, assistant would most pastors like? Twenty-three pastors said a Bible worker (or interest coordinator). For purposes of the interview, these are clumped together. The term "Bible Worker" is old school in some parts of the country. Many pastors said, "I'd like someone to coordinate interests and do Bible studies" but they didn't call this person a Bible Worker.

In other categories that ranked high: 13 pastors would like a Youth Minister, 8 would like a General Associate (for lack of a better term, I chose this to describe the "catch all" type associate), 7 would like an Administrative Pastor (to deal with all the office details that bog me down...), and 2 would like a pastor to focus on training and equipping members. Other jobs that were only mentioned once include: Public relations pastor, Minister of music, Worship leader, Church planter, Research assistant (collect information for Senior Pastor to use for sermons and prayer meetings), and Secular campus minister. One pastor said, "If I could have someone full-time to work with, I'd want a Senior Pastor! I think right now I'd make a better Associate."

A final interesting point was observed by the interviewer that generally divides these responses into two groups. There are pastors who want someone to "do as I do" and there are pastors who want an assistant to "NOT do as I do." Some pastors simply see an assistant as extension of themselves rather than an unique individual providing different services to the church.

Question 4. *Who at the conference level (no names, just title/position) is most supportive of your local ministry work? What are key factors that make them supportive?*

Because of the numerous titles used in conferences for various officers, a modest attempt was made to group some of the positions together. More could be grouped, but for purposes of an environmental scan, here is a listing of responses:

- 11-Ministerial Secretary (Director)
- 9-President
- 8-Conference Secretary
- 6-Personal Ministries Secretary (Church Ministries)
- 5-None of the officers
- 4-Youth Director
- 3-Ethnic Coordinator
- 2-Sabbath School Director
- 2-Treasurer
- 2-All officers

1-Stewardship Director
1-Assistant Communications Director
1-Vice-President for Church Growth
1-Health and Temperance Director

What does it mean to most pastors by “supportive”? Primarily four areas were mentioned: Program/Resource Help, Personal Interest, Professional/Management Help, and Communications. Most pastors spoke about personable officers who listened and took an interest in them. Phrases used to describe these responses were: “Calls me”, “Assessable”, “Good listener”, “Interested in my success”, “Cares about my spiritual life”, “Honest and open with me”, “In touch with my ministry”, “Treats me as an equal”, “Is willing to chat”, and “Affirming.” One female pastor said, “I simply wanted to be treated kindly.” Another pastor really appreciated the officer who regularly called on his cell phone when passing through his area simply to ask, “How are you doing? Is everything going OK?”

Program help was next most frequently mentioned. That means help by an officer with conducting a local church seminar, offering to cover the pulpit, helping to train members, funding programs or Bible workers, and keeping pastors up to date on resources. In a similar vein, but perhaps more “management” oriented, pastors also spoke of officers using a Shared Vision, providing quick and accurate answers to questions, help with problematic members/situations, and being willing to incorporate change. And, along the lines of communication, pastors referred to a weekly newsletter, regular email from the conference, resource news, etc.

Some pastors did not feel support from their conference at all. They spoke of promises of contact or help that never came through. Others felt that some officers were “generally supportive” but in the areas of pushing programs, but provided no personal interest in them as an individual or pastor. One pastor has asked more than once to permit pastors to dialogue with the conference officers on creative planning for campmeeting events (for example) but this has never happened.