

An Apostle or Elder?
The Critical Need to Define the Adventist Minister's Role

Blake Jones
blakejones123@gmail.com

Paper presented to the Adventist Theological Society
November 22, 2014

Introduction

Before his ascension Jesus commissioned his followers to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel” and to “make disciples.” (Mark 16:15, Matt. 28:19). This is the central mission of the Christian Church.¹ A survey of the New Testament (NT) finds that the early Church had a simple leadership model that facilitated the pursuit of this mission. The early Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church intentionally adopted a similar leadership model. But in the first half of the 20th century the SDA Church moved away from this model and gradually implemented a more traditional Protestant model that replaced the earlier New Testament based one.

This paper will give a brief sketch of the development of the NT Church’s leadership model; the North American SDA Church’s adoption of and then abandonment of this model²; and then propose why the SDA Church should return to the New Testament model and offer a simple and realistic plan on how this can be done successfully.

The Leadership Model of the New Testament Church

Apostles, Deacons and Elders

The first leaders appointed in the early church were the apostles. While the original 12 were appointed by Jesus (Luke 6:13, Acts 1:2) others were appointed by the Church after his ascension (Acts 1:26, Rom. 11:13, Gal. 1:19).³ As the church grew an administrative crisis led to the establishment of the office of deacon (Acts 6:1-7). And in Acts 11:30 and 14:23 we see the establishment of the office of elder. These three offices form the core of the New Testament leadership model and are the only offices in which the NT records the specific endorsement of the Church through ordination.⁴

Elder/Overseer/Pastor

Overseer⁵ (*episkopos*) and pastor/shepherd (*poimen*) are two other terms which are synonymous with the office of elder (*presbuteros*). A study of the New Testament usage of these terms demonstrates that they are not separate offices but three designations of the same office.

For example, Paul wrote to Titus:

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders (*presbuterous*) in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer (*episkopos*) must be above reproach as God’s steward...” (Titus 1:5-7, NASB)

Clearly in this passage the elder (*presbuterous*) and overseer (*episkopos*) are the same person and office.

When Paul was passing through Ephesus he, “called the elders (*presbuterous*) of the church to come to him.” (Acts 20:17, NASB). He then admonished them to, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*), to shepherd (*poimen*) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28, NASB) Here we see that the elders (*presbuterous*) were the overseers (*episkopos*) of the Ephesian church and their task was to shepherd/pastor (*poimen*) that church.

A similar interchangeability of these three terms is used in 1 Peter 5.

“Therefore, I exhort the elders (*presbuterous*) among you, as your fellow elder (*presbuterous*) and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (*poimen*) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (*episkopos*) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God...” (1 Peter 5:1-2, NASB).

Here once again the elders are the shepherds/pastors who exercise oversight of local churches.

Ephesians 4:11 contains the only NT usage of the noun *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) in reference to a church office.⁶

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors (*poimen*) and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-12, NASB).

Given this is the only NT usage of the noun *poimen* in reference to a church office it is necessary to look to its use as a verb to determine the function of the office of *poimen* mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. The NT uses the verb form of *poimen* twice to refer to the tasks of elders (Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2). There is no other NT leadership office that the verb *poimen* is connected with. *It would seem strange to have a stand alone, separate office, never before or after mentioned in the New Testament, whose job was to shepherd the church when the task of shepherding the church was elsewhere said to be the role of the elders.* It is therefore anachronistic to assume that the office of pastor (*poimen*) was a separate office than that of elder (*presbuteros*) when the NT data seems to conclusively demonstrate that elders were the pastors of the early church.⁷

Early Seventh-day Adventists also saw the NT offices of *presbuteros* (elder), *episkopos* (overseer) and *poimen* (pastor) as different designations of the same office. J.N. Loughborough wrote in his 1907 book *The Church: Its Organization, Order and Discipline*, “The term pastor is from *poimen*, and...it signifies the same office as *presbuteros* (elder), and *episcopos* (bishop), a local office confined to a particular church.” (*italics mine*).⁸ An 1883 proposal for a church manual⁹ stated, “The qualifications which an elder should possess are shadowed forth by the titles applied to him in the Scriptures. He is sometimes called an elder, sometimes a bishop, and sometimes a pastor.”¹⁰ Like Loughborough, the authors of the proposed manual listed elder and pastor as the same office and the office holders as laymen in a local church. The manual even listed the duties of an elder/pastor (such as chairing meetings, visitation, resolving conflicts and conducting baptisms “in the absence of a minister”¹¹) which are essentially the same activities of most SDA ministers today.

It is important to note that nowhere in the New Testament do we find the modern practice of sending a full time, paid outsider to pastor/shepherd a local church. We also do not find the modern practice of having one person pastor/shepherd a church. There isn't a single example in the New Testament of one elder leading a church. In the New Testament *presbuteros* is always used in its plural form when referring to elders of specific churches. For example in Acts 20:17 Paul called for the *elders* of the church in Ephesus; in Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed *elders* in the churches they had established; Paul tells Titus to "appoint *elders* in every town." (*italics mine*) (Titus 1:5). This not to say that there was never a case where there was a single elder in a single church, but if it did occur it is not recorded in the New Testament. This seems to indicate that the pattern was a plurality of elders/pastors in each church and these elders/pastors were local laypersons and not outside professionals.

As previously noted, the ordained leadership offices established in the New Testament era Church were apostles, elders and deacons. All three offices had important and distinct functions that were designed to ensure that the missional, pastoral and administrative needs of the Church were met by qualified leaders. Apostles provided high level leadership and spearheaded the Church's mission into new areas, local elders provided pastoral care and oversight once those churches were established, and deacons cared for the administrative needs of the newly planted churches.¹²

Early SDA Adoption of the New Testament Leadership Model

Early Seventh-day Adventist leaders intentionally adopted the New Testament leadership model.¹³ This had ordained ministers functioning in essentially the same role as New Testament apostles.¹⁴ As the ministers would establish churches they would ordain an elder and a deacon who were to serve the church's pastoral and administrative needs.¹⁵ This model allowed the ministers to continue sharing the gospel in new territories and raising up new churches.

Some early SDA ministers credited the Church's rapid growth to this ministry model. In 1886, Elder G.B. Starr was interviewed by a newspaper and asked, "By what means have you carried forward your work so rapidly?" His reply was, "Well, in the first place we have no settled

pastors. Our churches are taught largely to take care of themselves, while nearly all of our ministers work as evangelists in new fields.”¹⁶

Speaking to a ministerial institute in 1912 General Conference President A.G. Daniels stated:

“We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work, and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and to lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized and our work will be on a retreat.”¹⁷

Ellen White’s Advocacy of the New Testament Leadership Model

Recommendations to establish a class of ministers to serve as settled pastors first began in the 1880s.¹⁸ Ellen White strongly opposed this and would for the remainder of her life counsel against SDA ministers functioning as settled pastors.

In 1889 she wrote:

“We cannot expect that ministers will be permanently located in settled churches, as they are located in other denominations; but each church member must individually learn to bear responsibility, and become a worker, making the advance of the cause of truth the first and highest interest of his life.”¹⁹

Early SDA ministers, like NT apostles, functioned in a dual role that included establishing churches in new areas and periodically visiting existing churches. But it seems that many ministers preferred visiting churches over aggressive evangelistic work. This led to

frequent rebukes by Ellen White to ministers who were “hovering over churches.” She uses that phrase (or some variation of it) at least 37 times to rebuke ministers (and twice lay people) for spending too much time laboring with the churches instead of conducting evangelistic work with non-Adventists.²⁰

This is a subject she is very passionate about which can be seen in the how frequently she writes about it and the emotional language she employs. For example, she writes:

“My heart has been filled with sadness as I have looked over the field and seen the barren places...Our ministers are hovering over the churches, as though the angel of mercy was not making efforts to save souls.”²¹ (Italics mine)

And again:

“We feel pained beyond measure to see some of our ministers hovering about the churches...”²² (Italics mine)

In a 1901 address to ministers she stated, “God holds these ministers responsible for the souls of those who are in darkness. He does not call you to go into fields that need no physician. 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.”²³

But despite such passionate and frequent appeals by Ellen White as well as firm convictions by SDA leaders the Church’s ministry model would dramatically change in the 20th century.

Denominational Change in the 20th Century

In the 1920’s the local pastorate was developing in the SDA church which alarmed some administrators.²⁴ In 1925 an editorial appeared in the Review and Herald which hinted at these concerns:

“The tables need to be served, the poor must not be neglected, and the machinery of the church must be kept in operation, but we cannot believe that any modern way of preaching the gospel will be found superior to that ordained by our Lord and worked out by His apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. May God save us from a divided ministry; and may He save us from a diverted ministry.”²⁵

“There is a great danger that those who have been set apart to sacred ministry in connection with this movement, will be diverted from their grand objective, a danger that they will leave the ministry of the word and serve tables.”²⁶

“But somehow we cannot repress the conviction that we have gotten away from the simplicity of the gospel plan.”²⁷

The trend of settling ministers over existing churches would continue until it would soon be the standard practice.²⁸ Accompanying this trend was the growth of the number of ministers in relation to the number of churches. From 1870 to 1916 the SDA church in North America had maintained a ratio of ordained ministers to churches that was consistently about 4 churches for every ordained minister. This period was also characterized by rapid growth in the number of new churches and the hiring of new ministers. In the 1920s the ratio dropped to be just over 2.5 churches for every ordained minister. By the 1940s the ratio had dropped further to be less than 2 churches for every ordained minister. By the 1950s the ratio dropped further to be around 1.3 churches for every ordained minister. Since then the ratio of ordained ministers to churches in North America has consistently stayed below 1.5.²⁹

This equalizing in the ratio of ministers to churches was not caused by an increase in the hiring of ministers. In fact, prior to the 1920's the SDA Church in North America hired ministers at significantly higher rates than afterwards. What caused the equalization in the ratio of ordained ministers to churches was the slowing down of church planting. From 1890 to 1920 the SDA Church's number of ordained ministers grew by 258% and then slowed down from 1920 to 1950 to 160%. Because the ministers from 1890-1920 were engaged largely in evangelism and church

planting the number of SDA churches grew in that period by 138% (or 4.5% annually). In contrast from 1920 to 1950, when the SDA ministry began functioning as settled pastors, the number of churches grew by only 30% (less than 1% annually).³⁰ This dramatic drop in the establishment of new churches is directly attributable to the change in function of the SDA minister. Once ministers began functioning as head elders instead of apostles Adventism ceased being a dynamic church planting church movement and began to function like other Protestant churches.

Ellen White consistently warns of three negative outcomes if ministers focus their labor on existing churches. One, she says it will harm ministers by making them spiritually weak.³¹ Two, she warns that this will greatly impede the Church's mission of saving the lost and sharing the SDA message.³² And three, she warns that it will harm the churches themselves by making them spiritually weak and overly dependent on ministers.³³ It is interesting to note that the latter is by far the most common reason she gives for not having ministers settled in churches. I have found that a common concern raised in discussion of the implementation of the New Testament leadership model is that the churches will not be healthy if a conference appointed minister is not with them regularly. Ellen White diametrically opposes this idea. For example she writes:

“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.”³⁴

“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.”³⁵

“The time that has been used in preaching to our churches has not strengthened them, but has made them weak and helpless, to be fed with milk and not with meat.”³⁶

“The churches that have not life in themselves, that have lost their spiritual discernment, call for ministers to come to their help, to bring them the breath of life. But the ministers have other work to do. They must carry the message of truth to those who know it not. Those ministers who hover about the churches, who have not a clear cut message, which, like a sharp, two-edged sword, cuts both ways, will do the churches harm.”³⁷

“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.”³⁸

If the Seventh-day Adventist Church truly believes that “the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested”³⁹ and that Ellen White’s writings are a “continuing and authoritative source of truth”⁴⁰ then changes must be made. The question is, how to do it?

Returning to the New Testament Model

As with all true reforms, change comes from the study of and proclamation of God’s word. Therefore the first step in implementing a Biblical ecclesiology of local church leadership is to advance an understanding of the New Testament leadership model. As we’ve seen this model had apostles, elders and deacons functioning in distinct but complementary roles. Apostles were financially supported by the Church (1 Corinthians 9:1-14) and led out in evangelistic work and church planting. Elders were laymen and provided spiritual oversight, teaching and pastoral care of churches. And deacons were local administrators and servants.

The good news is the SDA Church still has this model in its DNA. Due to its world wide usage the SDA Church Manual is designed to empower local churches to function without a settled pastor. The Church Manual gives the churches a nominating committee process that empowers them to choose leaders.⁴¹ Those leaders then serve on the board (which governs the church)⁴² and elders preach and provide spiritual leadership.⁴³ Wherever this model is followed

Adventist churches grow faster and are healthier than in the developed world where a traditional settled pastor model is used.⁴⁴

To implement this is not as difficult as it may initially seem. The Adventist Church was originally designed to function this way. Conferences were established to be the repository of finances from the local churches to support ministers in evangelism and church planting. And contrary to other Christian churches, Adventist churches were structured to be able to function without settled pastors.⁴⁵ All of these structures (both conference and local) still exist today. They just are not being used for what they were originally designed for.⁴⁶

Since conferences were established to facilitate the advancement of the Adventist work in a territory the only way to truly reform the ministry model is through initiative at the conference level. God's work, done God's way, will always bring God's blessing. And in sharing the Three Angels' Messages (Revelation 14:6-12) we are doing God's work, we just need to do it God's way. God's blessing brings success and success always breeds imitation. Therefore if one conference were to truly implement the Biblical model of ministry, success and imitation would surely follow. It will just require conference leadership with courage, clarity and conviction to move forward.

This model is not complicated and is based more on principles than an absolute template. Nevertheless, some basic elements should be incorporated to successfully bring about a transition. They are:

1. Education and buy-in of the biblical model of ministry.
2. Redistricting to establish larger districts of churches.
3. Allocation of financial resources to the harvest field.

Step one, education and buy-in, must begin with ministers and then extend to laity. Most SDA ministers value the Bible and the writings of Ellen White and want to be more effective in ministry. Therefore with the proper education I believe most ministers would be supportive of the biblical model. Most seminary trained ministers have already been exposed to similar ideas through the teaching of Dr. Russell Burrill⁴⁷ so they will not find them very shocking.

When education and buy-in of ministers is established it will then be necessary to educate churches. This can be done by giving ministers material to share with them (literature, videos, sermon material, etc.) and by having regional town hall style meetings with conference leadership. Some are skeptical that churches will accept this model. But I've implemented these principles for years in churches and have found that the data from the Bible and the writings of Ellen White is so clear and overwhelming that once educated, very few people will have strident objections. In fact, I have never had a single elder object to this and the vast majority of church members have responded enthusiastically.

With sufficient buy-in from ministers and members districts of churches can then be redrawn to be larger. The conference should set a measurable goal with benchmarks concerning what percentage of its ministerial labor force it wants to be involved in pastoral ministry and evangelistic ministry. For example, if a 50/50 split in five years were established as a goal, then the conference would aim to have half of its ministerial capitol used in evangelistic/church planting work within that time period. That would mean that existing churches (including new ones that had been planted in those five years) would be given oversight by equipping ministers who felt called to that role as opposed to evangelism/church planting.⁴⁸

As districts are redrawn and fewer ministers are serving in traditional pastoral roles (and those remaining ministers are by necessity functioning more as equippers and trainers of lay elders) more conference resources will be available for outreach. Those resources can then be used to support evangelistic ministers and Bible workers in establishing new churches. And once these churches are established and trained to function without pastoral dependency the team can move on to establish new groups of believers. This was the model of the early Church and the early SDA Church. It worked well for them and it will work well for us too.

Conclusion

Peter tells us that the reason Jesus delays his coming is that some would not be ready (2 Peter 2:9). The church's mission of carrying the gospel to the world is still not completed (Matthew 24:14). Nearly every good thing that the church does now it can do in heaven. We can worship, fellowship, serve, study, and keep the Sabbath in heaven. *But there is one thing the*

church can do now that it will never have an opportunity to do after Jesus comes and that is to seek and save the lost. That is the reason why we are still here.

It is imperative that the Seventh-day Adventist Church do everything it can to share the gospel with the world as rapidly as possible. The model proposed in this paper is the same one the early Church and the SDA pioneers followed because they had a consuming passion to share the gospel with the world. I believe that if that passion consumes us as well we will be willing to unshackle ourselves from unbiblical ecclesiological traditions and embrace a more effective and biblical way.

Acts 6:1-7 records a time when the apostles were pressured to get distracted doing work that was not their calling. They resisted that pressure and suggested a plan that would resolve the issue and reserve them for their appointed work. And the result was: “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly.” (Acts 6:7). If we desire the word of God to spread and disciples to multiply then we too must allow our ministers to say, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables...But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2,4).

“Success has less to do with what we can get ourselves to do and more to do with keeping ourselves from doing what we shouldn’t.” Kenneth Cole, Entrepreneur

¹ “The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.” Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pg. 1.

² The focus on of this paper is on the North American SDA Church's ecclesiastical practices. Thus when “SDA Church” appears in this paper the reference is to the North American SDA Church.

³ Some churches believe some gifts and offices (such as prophet and apostle) ended at the close of the NT era. The SDA Church believes that the New Testament gifts and offices (including apostle) are ongoing in every age, including the present. (See SDA Fundamental Belief #17, Spiritual Gifts and Ministries at <http://www.adventistarchives.org/fundamental-beliefs-of-seventh-day-adventists.pdf>).

⁴ The “Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination” (TOSC, voted July 23, 2013) states “Aside from the unique role of the apostles, the New Testament identifies the following categories of ordained leaders: the elder/supervising elder (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:2-7; 4:14; 2 Tim 4:1-5; 1Pet 5:1) and the deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-10).” <http://www.adventistarchives.org/consensus-statement-on-a-seventh-day-adventist-theology-of-ordination.pdf>.

⁵ In some older translations, most notably the King James Version, *episkopos* is translated as “bishop.” But since the word “bishop” today has a different meaning than is implied by *episkopos* modern translations usually render the word “overseer.”

⁶ In all other NT uses of the noun *poimen* the reference is either to literal shepherds, (for example the shepherds the angels appeared to in the Christmas story in Luke 2:8-20) or to Jesus (for example, “I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11)

⁷ Numerous commentaries (including the the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary), note that the structure of the phrase “pastors and teachers” in Ephesians 4:11 suggests that Paul is referring to two phases of one office. Thus the pastors/shepherds mentioned in this passage would have a primary responsibility to teach. The ability to teach is mentioned in both of Paul's qualification lists of elders/overseers (1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9). Since elders were the local leadership office specifically tasked with teaching this adds further support to the view that the office of pastor in Ephesians 4:11 is the same office as elder and overseer found elsewhere in the New Testament.

⁸ J.N. Loughborough, *The Church: Its Organization, Order and Discipline* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1907), pg. 129.

⁹ At the 1882 General Conference Session a committee was appointed to write a church manual. The proposed manual was published in several subsequent editions of the Review and Herald (June 5 to October 9 1883) with requests for feedback and criticism. The manual was later rejected, even though the content was generally approved of, because church leaders thought a church manual could tend to usurpation of the Bible as the standard for SDA practices. (See P.G. Damsteet, “Have Adventists Abandoned the Biblical Model of Leadership for the Local Church,” in *Here We Stand*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005), 654-662.

¹⁰ W.H. Littlejohn, “The S.D.A. Church Manual,” *Review and Herald*, June 19, 1883

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² It is interesting to note that the church in Jerusalem was where the apostles were first based (Acts 8:1), church elders are first mentioned (Acts 11:30) and the office of deacon is established (Acts 6:1-7). In commenting on the establishment of gospel order in the Jerusalem church Ellen White writes, “The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where the messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.” *Acts of the Apostles*, pg. 91

¹³ For lengthier treatments of early SDA adoption of this model see Chapter 7 of Russell Burrill’s, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998) and Gerald Damsteegt’s “Have SDA’s Abandoned the Biblical Leadership Model” in *Here We Stand*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005).

¹⁴ Russell Burrill, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998), 162-173.

¹⁵ P.G. Damsteegt, “Have SDA’s Abandoned the Biblical Leadership Model” in *Here We Stand*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005), 655.

¹⁶ Plain Dealer (Wabash Indiana), Some Facts and Figures About Seventh-day Adventists as Reported by Elder Starr, Oct. 1, 1886, cited in Russell Burrill, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998), 185.

¹⁷ A.G. Daniels, Ministerial Institute Address, Los Angeles, California, March 1912, cited in Russell Burrill, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998), 177-78.

¹⁸ P.G. Damsteet, “Have Adventists Abandoned the Biblical Model of Leadership for the Local Church,” in *Here We Stand*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005), 659.

¹⁹ Review and Herald, October 22, 1889 par. 2.

²⁰ This number was determined by searching for “hovering over churches” or similar variations of that phrase with the Ellen G. White Writings CD-ROM, excluding repeated statements in various compilations and reprintings.

²¹ Pastoral Ministry, pg. 99-100.

²² Testimonies Vol. 3, pg. 406

²³ General Conference Bulletin, April 16, 1901, par. 7

²⁴ Bert Haloviak, “Approaches to Church Reorganization,” unpublished manuscript, Feb. 1993

²⁵ F.W. Wilcox, “Danger of a Diverted Ministry,” *Review and Herald*, vol. 102, no. 21, (May 21, 1925), cited in Russell Burrill, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998), 185.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Russell Burrill, *Recovering An Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Hark Books, 1998), 185-192.

²⁹ The data used to calculate these statistics from 1870 to 1912 can be found in Burrill, 273-74, and from 1913 to the present at http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=D_NAD.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “The ministers who are hovering over the churches, preaching to those who know the truth, would better go into places still in darkness. Unless they do this, they themselves and their congregations will become dwarfed.” Review and Herald, Feb. 9, 1905, par. 12. Elsewhere Ellen White states that if ministers, “stop doing aggressive work, and hover over a few churches, treading on one another's heels, their light will go out.” General Conference Bulletin, April 5, 1901 par. 39.

³² Union Conference Record, July 15, 1902; The Indiana Reporter, January 20, 1904 par. 5; RH, June 25, 1895 par. 6; ST, Dec. 4, 1901 par. 3; 14MR 141.1; 15MR 8.3; UL, pg. 274.6.

³³ TM, pg. 231; GCB, April 5, 1901 par. 43; RH, June 25, 1895 par. 6; RH, January 19, 1897 par. 9; RH, February 9, 1905 par. 12; 2SAT. 156; RH, July 16, 1908 par. 16; PaM, 121; 2SM 156.1; 9T 139.2.

³⁴ Testimonies Vol. 7, pg. 18.

³⁵ Testimonies Vol. 7, pg. 18.

³⁶ Letter 132, 1901, p. 8.

³⁷ Pastoral Ministry, pg. 121.

³⁸ Evangelism, pg. 382.

³⁹ SDA Fundamental Belief #18, The Gift of Prophecy, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/fundamental-beliefs-of-seventh-day-adventists.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed. (2010), 106-111.

⁴² Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed. (2010), 124-127.

⁴³ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed. (2010), 71-75.

⁴⁴ Burrill writes, “Interestingly, while North American Adventists abandoned the New Testament model of clergy ministry in this century, the third world, probably because of financial reasons, continued in the biblical mode. There, Adventist pastors often are responsible for twenty-five or more churches and local elders do all the pastoring. In those countries even today Adventist clergy are primarily responsible for baptizing new converts and raising up new churches. Perhaps, a recapturing of the early Adventist model of ministry can reignite the missional organization of the twenty-first century church.” Burrill, pg. 192.

⁴⁵ I recently had a conversation with a former Pentecostal minister who is now an Adventist minister. He said one of the biggest surprises for him was how little power SDA ministers have in the local church (in reality the church board has 100% of the authority in an SDA church). I explained that the local structures of SDA churches were designed at a time when most ministers were evangelists and this structure is essentially still with us. In a strange way, this makes the SDA minister of today somewhat of an interloper in the local church by placing him within a system that was designed to function without him. SDA ministers feel responsible to ensure the health and growth of their congregations but have virtually no authority to do the things they feel will help the churches get there. This leaves many ministers frustrated and disillusioned with the local church structure.

⁴⁶ I believe this is a significant factor in the rise of congregationalism in Adventism. The conference structure was originally designed to support an ecclesiological model that assigned ministers to territory as opposed to assigning them to churches. Now that Adventist ministers are assigned to churches and often stay a long time (10-20 years) many are wondering why all of the tithe money needs to go the conference office, or why we even need a conference office in the first place. While I strongly disagree with congregationalism it seems to me to be the logical outworking of a ministry model that assigns ministers to churches and keeps them there for a long time.

⁴⁷ Dr. Burrill rightly deserves enormous credit and appreciation for introducing a generation of SDA ministers (including myself) to these concepts. But while Dr. Burrill taught similar ideas some of the key concepts in this paper are different from what he advocated. Dr. Burrill didn't clearly connect the office of elder and pastor and therefore his treatment of the term *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) is somewhat ambiguous, leaving the reader unsure of exactly who the pastor of the church should be (Burrill, pgs. 192-96). He recognized that the removal of ministers for evangelism and church planting would create a void in the local church and his solution to filling that void was small groups (Burrill, pg. 261). While small groups are important they don't replace the need for pastors and I believe this created some reservations in the minds of some to embrace this model. Also, the SDA Church doesn't have a small group culture so this is functionally very difficult to implement in existing churches. The solution of replacing SDA ministers with local elders is biblical, has already worked in the past in the SDA Church, and we still have the structure in place for it. It is therefore easier to implement and more likely to succeed.

⁴⁸ Accompanying this transition should be training. This training should include worship renewal that is not pastor centered. The pastor and his sermon have become central in the life of Adventist worship (much to Ellen White's objection I would add). Training should include a more biblical and Spirit of Prophecy based Sabbath morning worship model that includes testimonies, devotional messages by members, more time for prayer and singing, and sermons by elders, other members and occasionally a minister. I've found that implementing these more "organic" approaches to worship as opposed to sermonizing every week has created a more dynamic and interesting worship service.