New MINISTERIAL SPOUSES 101

North American Division of Seventh-day
9705 Patuxent Woods Drive, Columbia, MD
Welcome, New Ministerial Spouses!

Your new tribe
You have recently joined or will soon enter the fellowship of over 5,000 spouses of Adventist pastors, chaplains, and religion teachers from Bermuda, Canada, Guam, the Micronesian Islands, and the United States of America. In addition, this group of females and males include those who are both a pastor and a spouse of a pastor.

Purpose of resource
Created to support you in beginning well, the topics reflect the results of surveys of new ministerial spouses and of those with more experience, resulting in a buffet of topics. These topics are categorized under three headings that spouses have identified as areas that help them be more effective in this new role: character, management skills, and relationships.

Mode of delivery
This free resource, being initially introduced in printed and electronic formats, features articles, videos and discussion questions, most of them short because we get that your time is precious and that many desire interactivity. You are free to use the material found here for your personal ministry.

Advisors
Besides our union and conference ministerial spouse leaders, we’re grateful to a team of six, enthusiastic millennial and gen Xer ministerial spouses that have advised us on the development of this resource, plus they organized and ramped up our social media outreach.

How you can add to this resource
Though it features a diverse group of writers/presenters with varying perspectives – with which you may agree or disagree - the goal is for it to be organic and to grow with more short stories in video and print. Why not add your voice and experience to help new spouses by sharing with Donna at donnajackson@nadadventist.org one of your stories such as:

- the lessons you learned from what appeared unsuccessful or aggravating, etc.
- a humorous thing that happened to you or
- the miracles or ministry that God surprised you with or
- how you learned to operate out of your strengths and gifts or

Friends, on your journey, may you experience the strength of your Father, the grace of your Redeemer, and the wisdom of your ever-present Counselor.

D id you know that as a ministry spouse you have a power no one else has? You really do! As a ministry spouse, you have tremendous power to influence those around you through your relationship with God.

I first experienced this power many years ago as a result of people praying for me to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. My life changed dramatically, and I began spending daily time with God in prayer and the Word. My husband saw the change in me, and he too began praying the Word into his life and humbling himself before God.

Then one day I realized my sons really valued my counsel on decisions they were making. The same thing happened with my daughters-in-law. I was so amazed. As I talked to God about it, I realized it was because they knew I spent time daily with God, praying God’s Word into my life and asking Him to change me, and praying for my family and others. They see the difference God can make.

You, too, have power to influence your spouse, children, and church members as you choose to seek Jesus daily and have a love relationship with your Redeemer God. “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14, NKJV).

 Janet Page serves as the associate secretary for pastoral spouses, families and prayer ministries of the General Conference Ministerial Association. This message was adapted for this resource by Janet from her 3rd Quarter, 2013 Tie Journal editorial.
Character

Section 1
Prayer
Why pray?
God invites us to connect with Him through prayer. He invites us to open our hearts to Him as a friend. We are nourished and grown through prayer. We are also actively involved in ministry when we intercede on behalf of others. God will use prayer to change our hearts and to minister to our families and our churches. Is prayer always practical? Can its outcome be measured?

Confession is good for the heart, and God happily takes our burdens from us. Too many of us carry around guilt, shame, and fear unnecessarily. God’s shoulders can carry the burdens of the world, so give it all to Him. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV).

Thank God. Spend time praising God for His work in your life and for His answered prayers. Praise keeps us centered on the goodness of God, even when the present moment might be difficult. Keep a thanksgiving journal, or write quick thank you notes to people who have made a difference in your life.

Don’t give up. God will always answer. His answer could be yes, no, or wait. Pray until you hear His answer—it won’t necessarily come right away. Persist.

Meditate in God’s presence. Prayer is as much listening as it is speaking. Quietly meditate and listen for God’s still, small voice. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, NIV).

Sing a new song. Music can speak to our hearts in ways that words often cannot. Include some favorite spiritual music in your devotional and prayer time. “Often Jesus expressed the gladness of His heart by singing psalms and heavenly songs. . . He held communion with heaven in song; and as His companions complained of weariness from labor, they were cheered by the sweet melody from His lips” (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 73).

Pray for your church. You know the needs of your church better than almost anyone else. Pray specifically for the church leaders, struggling members, and also for specific outreach events. Spend some of your prayer time focusing on the specific needs of your flock.

Resources:
The Desire of Ages or any of the Conflict of the Ages series, by Ellen G. White
Experiencing God, by Henry Blackaby
The Hour That Changes the World by Dr. Eskinder
The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omartian
Prayerwalking, by Steve Giglio
Riddles of the Coral Streets and Obstacles to Contemplative videos about George Whitefield’s life
Various videos by Louise Giglio

Tell us about your devotional time:

1. I have personal devotional time:
   a. Daily
   b. Several times a week
   c. Weekly
   d. As often as my schedule allows

2. The best time I find for quiet devotions is:
   a. Early in the morning
   b. At night after the house is quiet
   c. I take a break during my work day
   d. I struggle to ever find quiet time

3. I love to share my faith:
   a. Witnessing to neighbors and others in my community
   b. Leading a small group Bible study
   c. Teaching children’s Sabbath school classes
   d. Speaking up front at church and at events

4. I enjoy Christian fellowship best through:
   a. Church social events
   b. A shared meal with a small group at my home
   c. Pastoral spouse events
   d. One-on-one fellowship with close friends

P pastoral spouses are a diverse group. Some of us work full-time, supporting our spouses on Sabbath mornings and at special events. Some are busy with the demanding daily activities of raising a family. Still others are able to dedicate most of their time to working side-by-side with their pastoral spouse. The demands of life often dictate which group we fall into, and our level of involvement can shift over time depending on our own life commitments.

No matter our level of involvement, we are all growing Christians, and growing Christians need spiritual food. What follows are some practical approaches and resources for a healthy, dynamic devotional and prayer life. We need this for ourselves, our families, and our churches.

Personal Journey
We know we need to make time for spiritual growth, but knowing and doing are not the same thing. How do we ensure a healthy walk with God? We read in Colossians 3:1, 2, “If you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Here are a few practical tips for setting our minds on heaven.

1. Devotional time: Life is busy, and the time demands on a ministerial couple or family are practically endless. Setting aside a quiet hour or even twenty minutes can feel selfish when the needs of the day press on us. But never feel guilty about the time. Regularly scheduled time carved out just for you and God is the best thing you can do for yourself and for your spouse’s ministry. Try varying the Bible versions you read from. If you haven’t tried paraphrases such as The Message or The Clear Word, try alternating them with a traditional version such as New King James. Scripture memorization. Revisit childhood and memorize favorite scripture verses. As you get back into the habit, challenge yourself! Learn a whole chapter or more. You’ll find all kinds of free resources for memorizing scripture. Here is a great place to start: http://mintentools.com/blog/adults-memorize-scripture.htm. Include the kids and make it a family affair.

2. Share: Sharing our faith with others has a way of refreshing our commitment and reminding us of why we became Christians in the first place. Places to share include children and adult Sabbath school classes, Bible studies, literature distribution, and evangelistic outreach events. Find a comfortable place to share your unique talents and testimony. Christians can provide a tremendous spiritual lift. Places to share include children and adult Sabbath school classes, Bible studies, literature distribution, and evangelistic outreach events. Find a comfortable place to share your unique talents and testimony. Christians can provide a tremendous spiritual lift.

3. Meditation: Meditation in God’s presence is critical to our entire Christian journey. We will dedicate the entire next section to prayer.
10. Find a prayer partner. A prayer partner can be a tremendous source of strength and support. Find someone you trust and who will uplift and encourage you and your family.

Ways to help your church grow strong in prayer
1. Make prayer a priority. Encourage leaders to make prayer a key emphasis in your church. Reflect this priority from the front of the church, in Sabbath school classes, and in events.
2. Establish a prayer room. If at all possible, designate a room in your church as a prayer room. Make it a special spot where individuals can pray alone or with small groups.
3. Designate a prayer coordinator. This person will plan activities to encourage the growth of prayer in the church.
4. Plan regular days of prayer and fasting. Special events that bring the whole church together in a common mission will bind them together and strengthen their faith.
5. Try prayerwalking. To walk while praying is probably not a new activity, though it seems different from the well-known formats of prayer. Prayerwalking is simply praying on-site with insight. It is genuine prayer—God working with and through people on earth. It is directed intercessory praying. Prayerwalking helps pray-ers learn how to pray for others, deferring urgent matters in their own lives and moving others to the top of their prayer agendas. While many believers enjoy communing with God during private walks, prayerwalking focuses intercessory prayer on the neighborhoods, homes, and people encountered while walking.

How does prayerwalking help?
- It will thaw the ice in your neighborhood. The climate of steady prayer can warm the atmosphere of friendship. Hearts opened by prayer can lead to doors opened for God’s healing touch.
- It will help you overcome fear of the troubled parts of your city. Prayerwalking provides a way to re-enter your inner city with Godly confidence. Prayerwalkers find that they belong to the places they pray for.
- It contends with evil. Rising crime and open hostility to Christ are energized by spiritual evil. It makes biblical sense to step out from a defensive, fortress mentality and come physically near to the people whom God longs to redeem.
- It brings progress in prayer. Most Christians sincerely desire to pray more. Prayerwalking offers struggling intercessors a stimulating way to stretch themselves in prayer.

Spend a little time understanding your prayer experiences:

1. I feel like God hears and answers my prayers:
   a. Always
   b. Usually
   c. Some of the time
   d. For others, but not for me
2. As I pray, I enjoy connecting with God by:
   a. Journaling my praise, requests and answers
   b. Listening to spiritual music
   c. Prayerwalking
   d. All of the above
3. My church’s prayer ministry includes:
   a. Special days of prayer and fasting
   b. A prayer coordinator
   c. A prayer room
   d. All of the above
   e. None of the above
4. In my experience, prayerwalking is:
   a. A great blessing to me personally and to my church and community
   b. Personally satisfying
   c. Not really my prayer style
   d. I don’t know, I’ve never tried it
5. Try prayerwalking. To walk while praying is probably not a new activity, though it seems different from the well-known formats of prayer. Prayerwalking is simply praying on-site with insight. It is genuine prayer—God working with and through people on earth. It is directed intercessory praying. Prayerwalking helps pray-ers learn how to pray for others, deferring urgent matters in their own lives and moving others to the top of their prayer agendas. While many believers enjoy communing with God during private walks, prayerwalking focuses intercessory prayer on the neighborhoods, homes, and people encountered while walking.

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Read Psalm 37:1-11
This psalm shows concrete ways of trusting God: delighting in Him, waiting, and being still.

R
eflect on the questions below in your journal or other paper. 1. How do you think a person who has learned to wait on God, delight in God, and be still before God would be different from others? 2. Which word or phrase in verses 1-11 is most meaningful to you? Why? 3. What does that tell you about how you want to connect with God?

Sit in a quiet place and read the following verses: The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

a) What song would you like God to sing over you?
b) What song would you like to sing to God to show your delight in Him?

Go for a walk and in some way delight in God at the same time. Don’t try too hard or worry about doing it perfectly. Just try it. When your mind wanders, pull it back gently to God’s goodness in your life.
If Christians lack fulfillment and purpose in life, it is obvious that we need to acknowledge God’s plan for our lives. The need for fulfillment and purpose is a universal experience, and it is often a driving force in our lives. If we are to live a transformed life in Christ, we need to recognize that our purpose is not just to fill our days with activity, but to live a life of purpose and meaning, rooted in our relationship with God.

The LORD gives a new song to the weary, new hope to the despairing, a new perspective to those who have lost hope. (Psalm 42:7-9)

Developing Spiritual Habits

Introduction

I am sure that each of us desires a greater sense of the divine presence in our lives. We all long to make spirituality a deeply relevant, sustained source of meaning in our lives, rather than a marginal pursuit limited to Sabbath mornings. We want our Christian experience to be joyful, compassionate, mentally stimulating, and creative. We achieve this spiritual posture by what some call spiritual formation or religious disciplines. It must be made clear that a spiritual discipline is something we offer God as a loving, obedient response to His grace in our lives. It is not something we are trying to do in order to impress God or others. It is a spiritual offering that we present every waking minute of our lives.

Spiritual formation or developing personal religious disciplines, is essentially the process of being shaped in the full image and likeness of Christ. This process begins when we make the decision to allow Christ to control everything about us (Galatians 2:20). All too often, we neglect the nurturing of our souls, not because we do not understand its importance, but because it is easy to become distraught by the unrelenting pressures of life that result in the urge to focus on preserving and gratifying self at the expense of daily life.

If Christians lack fulfillment and purpose in life, it could be due to the fragmentation of our lives. Without a center of meaning and purpose around which life is organized, our days can be reduced to a frustrating pattern of multiple loose ends. The needed center or focus for personal existence can be achieved only by the practice of Spirit-directed and purposeful disciplines. When such disciplines are in place, God brings all our habits, sensibilities, and desires into focus upon Him and His love. It is at this point that we are ready for service.

What are these disciplines? How is this process of spiritual formation started and nurtured? How long does it take? In order to answer these questions, we will examine the experience of Moses. While engaged in this exercise, we will be practicing the disciplines that should mark our growth towards maturity as Christians.

First Session

Moments of reflection - Meditation/journal entries

Christians need to schedule some carefully guarded time EVERY DAY with the Word of God. There is no short cut to the development of this discipline. Read the following Scripture passages and complete the exercises. As you read, make your priority that of listening to God. Keep asking yourself, "What is God seeking to say to me in all of this?" By adopting that posture toward the text, you will begin to allow the text to become an instrument of God's control in your life.

- Moses is born (Exodus 2:1-10). It is obvious that Moses' miraculous escape from death is an indication of God's plan for his life. Record specific ways in which God has revealed His plan for your life.
- Moses makes a fatal mistake and escapes from Egypt. He moves from an influential position to one of dependence and limited resources. He is also forced to learn a new culture and work for someone else (Exodus 2:11-21). Was Moses' escape a part of God's plan? How did Jethro, Zipporah, and sheep fit into this plan? Can you think of a time when you had an experience similar to that of Moses at this stage? What was the outcome?

- God speaks to Moses (Exodus 3). God engineers a detour in Moses' journey - a detour that includes a mountain, a bush on fire, miracles, and an introduction with God. Name some detours God has used in your life to get your attention, and to prove His sovereignty. Points to note: God takes advantage of a negative incident (murder) to pull Moses away from a life of luxury and comfort. In order to get his attention, God can use anyone willing to be used. Moses was a murderer, but God saw what he could become when transformed by grace.

When God speaks to us in meditation, He wants our full attention. This means that we need to be separated from family, friends, and life's demands. Moses was drawn away from everything and everyone in order to enjoy uninterrupted intimacy with God.

What is there about Moses' interview with God that speaks to your interaction with God?

Second Session - Prayer

Moments of reflection

One of the disciplines Christians need to develop and maintain is that of prayer. Prayer must be thoughtful and purposeful. The door to the outer world must be closed. As far as possible, distractions and disturbances must be eliminated. Prayer is a relational conversation with God. It is listening. It's praying. Prayer is moving along in the confidence that God is guiding whether or not we are aware of where and how He is working. What we are certain of is that no matter where we are, He is there too. In the act of prayer, our focus should not be on our words, our posture, or our interests, but on God. Our prayers should always be in the context of His attributes, His will, and His glory. Only then are we in harmony with Heaven.

Read Exodus 4. As you do, put yourself in the place of Moses and pray through each of his experiences. The intimacy Moses enjoyed with God can be ours as well.

The God who gives great power to Moses (verses 1-17). All heaven is available to us during times of prayer. The Holy Spirit is the power at work in us (Ephesians 3:20) to do far more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:21). His power is limitless.

When we approach God in prayer asking for tools for ministry, His focus is on what gifts He has given us. He will use what we have because each gift is tailor-made for each of us. All God asks of us is "What do you have in your hand?" (Exodus 4:2). In connecting with us, He is not concerned with what others have in their hands - He will deal with those individuals in His time and in His way. But our prayer should be for God to use what we have and are for His glory. If we need additional gifts, He will supply them (see Exodus 31:7-8).

God chooses a ministry partner for Moses (Exodus 4:27-31). There are times when we need to be engaged in ministry alone, but sometimes there is a need for a partner. God is aware of the gifts of each of His children, and He provides whatever assistance we need to complement our area of ministry. The bottom line is that we need to allow Him to do the choosing.

Third Session - Service

Moments of reflection

We've seen through the life of Moses that God uses many means to prepare His people for service. The greatest task in which God has engaged Himself is that of redeeming His creation. When we keep company with God, therefore, we will be involved in acts of service, not for personal stimulation and expansion, but as unselfish agents of God in ministry to the world.

Service comes in many forms. One of the most striking examples of the impact of love spending itself in service is given in John's account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-7). When we as Christians mature and live a transformed life in Christ, He shifts the center of interest and activity from us (our bodies, possessions, self-interests) to a larger concern for the community of people whose lives may yet be touched by the creative power of God.

Read Exodus 5

Find a partner and discuss this chapter using the following guidelines.

- Service involves facing the enemy and/or his associates - 5:1-21.
- We are bolstered by the promises of God which enable us to live confidently and face anyone or anything - 5:22 - chapter 6:13.
- And the story of spiritual growth continues ...

Victorious living is a journey that is guaranteed when
we repeat the steps outlined in this study continuously. The story of Moses is a testimony to God’s faithfulness in enabling us to enjoy closeness with Him through disciplines of personal growth. Spiritual growth is facilitated through ministry. WE CANNOT GROW WITHOUT SERVICE. If we do not share, we are in danger of becoming as stagnant as a body of water with no outlet. But when we share, we are like a stream that keeps moving and finding new paths of effectiveness.

Once Moses was prepared for ministry, he did not retire. His story is a fascinating journey of grace - from rescued child to prince to murderer to fugitive to shepherd to messenger to leader to great prophet. His story (Exodus to Deuteronomy) is a record of a fearless, Spirit-filled leader, but more so it is a story of an awesome God who longs for us to get close to Him and share in His purpose of saving lost humanity.

**Additional Material for the Facilitator**

**First Session**

God speaks to Moses (Exodus 3).

• God took advantage of a negative incident (murder) to pull Moses away from a life of luxury and comfort to get his attention.

• God can use anyone willing to be used. Moses was a murderer, but God saw what he could become when transformed by grace.

• When God speaks to us in meditation, He wants our full attention. This means that we need to be separated from family, friends, and life’s demands. Moses was drawn away from everything and everyone to enjoy uninterrupted intimacy with God.

**Second Session**

The Lord gives great power to Moses (Exodus 4:1-17).

- All heaven is available to us during times of prayer. The Holy Spirit is the power at work in us (Ephesians 3:20) to do far more than we can imagine” (Eph 3:21). His power is limitless.

- All He asks of us is “What do you have in your hand?”

(Moses 4:2). In connecting with us, He is not concerned with what the other person has in his/her hand - He will deal with that person in His time and in His way. But when we approach Him in prayer asking for tools for ministry, His focus is on what gifts He has given us. He will use what we have because each gift is tailor-made for the person who has that gift. Our prayer should be for God to use what we have and are for His glory! If we need additional gifts, He will supply them. (See Exodus 31:1-6)

Moses returns to Egypt (Exodus 4:18-23).

• Once we have been ‘ticked away’ with God in communion, and have been given power as a result of a consistent, solid prayer experience, God wants us to return to our “Egypt”. There are many there who need the same deliverance we now enjoy.

God chooses a ministry partner for Moses (Exodus 4:27-31).

• There are times when we need to be engaged in ministry alone, but sometimes there is a need for a partner. God is aware of the gifts of each of His children, and He provides whatever assistance we need to complement our area of ministry. But the bottom line is that we need to allow Him to do the choosing.

**Third Session**

Exodus 5

• Spiritual growth is facilitated through ministry. WE CANNOT GROW WITHOUT SERVICE. If we do not share, we are in danger of becoming as stagnant as a body of water with no outlet. But when we serve, we are like a stream that keeps moving and finding new areas of effectiveness.

• Once Moses was prepared for ministry, he did not retire. His story is a fascinating journey of grace - from rescued child to prince to murderer to fugitive to shepherd to messenger to leader to great prophet. The story of Moses (Exodus to Deuteronomy) is a record of a fearless, Spirit-filled leader, but more so it is a story of an awesome God who longs for us to get close to Him and share in His purpose of saving lost humanity.

**One of the most striking examples of the impact of love spending itself in service is given in John’s account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples (John 13:5-17).**

Maria McClean, DMin, serves as the health and prayer ministries director of the Ontario Conference of SDAs.
told God I really did want the Holy Spirit. I wondered if I could prevent this couple's separation, should be claiming. I stopped praying. There was nothing more I had to say. Suddenly, a thought-voice spoke in my mind: you should go talk to her husband! I dismissed the idea instantly, thinking, (can’t go.) I wouldn’t know what to say. Again that thought-voice spoke a command into my mind: Ask for the Holy Spirit. That was out of the question for various reasons, including that in my teens I’d heard a preacher warn about the Holy Spirit, saying that if you ask to receive the Holy Spirit, you’re likely asking for trouble. I’d decided never to ask. So instead I prayed, “God, just tell me what other promise I should be claiming.”

Again the thought came, “YOU go talk to the husband.” Again I replied, “But I don’t know what to say!” Twice more I was instructed, Ask for the Holy Spirit.

I put away my vacuum and, with much hesitancy, took my Bible and went to my bedroom. I opened my Bible on the bed, knelt beside it, and put my hand on the text in Luke 11:13. I prayed God’s promise to Him: Dear God, You say right here, ‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?’

I continued, “God, I am asking for the Holy Spirit so that I will know what to say when I go to visit that man, who is such a sinner! You said that when I ask, I receive, so I believe I have received Your Holy Spirit. Thank You, Jesus name, amen.”

I paused. Nothing happened. I prayed again. Again, nothing happened. I’d learned that you don’t stop asking after the first prayer. So I repeated His promise and claimed it again and again for perhaps thirty minutes. Finally I realized that God knew I was reluctant about His gift. I wondered if I could prevent this couple’s reunion because of my unwillingness. I confessed this to Him and asked Him to help me to want it. Then I told God I really did want the Holy Spirit, and would accept that gift. It was then, finally, that I became aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence. In my mind’s eye I could see the silhouette of the three crosses on a distant hill. I saw no Person, but I was aware of Who had been on the center cross. The thought-voice spoke in my mind: Your temper is sin, to be confessed as sin and forgiven. I was stunned. It was true, I’d had a bad temper and even tantrums when I was displeased as a newlywed. But now it was under control. No more doors slammed until the platter fell, rarely tears from sheer anger. I’d never claimed to be perfect, but over the years I’d told myself that since my temper was inherited, it was excusable. Now, I was supposed to call even my mature control of that temper “sin.” So I read 1 John 1:9 and confessed to God that even my “controlled” temper was sin against Him. I accepted and thanked Him for His promise of forgiveness and cleansing. A moment later the thought-voice seemed to speak again: Your spirit of criticism is sin, to be confessed as sin and forgiven. I’d always thought I was gifted with a “discerning spirit.”

Often I had inwardly criticized hypocrisy in others. For example, during ministers’ meetings, I’d judged the way some pastors uttered loud and fervent “Amens” to the prayers of visiting union or division or General Conference leaders, in contrast to what I thought was relative silence to when a “lowly” intercessor was praying. Also, the sight of a loved one’s weight problem continually provoked my inner condemnation. Now I realized that my spirit of criticism was more repulsive in God’s sight than someone else’s supposed apple-polishing, seemingly unfair monetary decisions, or a loved one’s genuine struggle with excess pounds. It was my sin that sent Him to the cross. Almost in shock, I again claimed the promise of 1 John 1:9, calling the spirit of criticism a sin. I accepted and thanked God for His forgiveness.

As quickly as I thanked Him, another thought came: Your impatient tone of voice and the unkind look on your face toward your family is sin, to be confessed as sin and forgiven. (He helped me understand He was referring to those mornings when I had a headache after being up late claiming promises with someone the evening before—while I had been excusing my poor family behavior!) I quickly called those behaviors sins also and accepted forgiveness. Then I asked God, Please, just forgive it all. I’m truly the sinner. Forgive me. Now there were no excuses or justified reasons that I had used before for my attitudes and actions. At that moment I knew I was standing fully exposed before God.

I thanked God for forgiveness and fully expected more rebuke. No thought-voice spoke. I prayed again, “Please, Lord, tell me what else I need to confess. I don’t want any more sin. I have been so blind, so busy straightening everyone else out, so busy praying for everyone else. I’ve been the sinner all along. I thank You, Jesus, for all your forgiveness; I accept it. But I’m sure there is more sin! Please tell me if there is anything else, because I want to be forgiven of everything—

No additional conviction came. Finally I opened my eyes and looked down at the Bible, lying open on the bed to 1 John 1:9. I’d never before noticed a promise on the opposite page, which seemed to jump out in front of me, saying, “And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25, KJV). I couldn’t believe it. He would want me! I got up off my knees and walked over to the window of my bedroom. It was for my sins specifically that He had gone to that cross. I was the sinner, self-righteous and hypocritical. Yet He loved me and wanted me with Him in heaven. Everything was amazing! He was telling me in 1 John 2:25 that I had eternal life. I got back on my knees to thank Him and weep at such love. I told Him, “God, I want to see You. What kind of God are You, anyway? You have waited so long, so courteously . . . I want to see You!” It was as if for the first time my eyes were open and I was free of the need for pretense, free of a façade. I had no idea I had been carrying a burden all my life, yet now I knew I was free. I was embarrassed for not even seeing the portion of Luke 11:13 where it says the Holy Spirit is the good gift of the Father. The inner peace was amazing. The next morning I began apologizing to family members I’d hurt by my attitude and words. The next morning I began apologizing to family members I’d hurt by my attitude and words.

The inner peace was amazing. The next morning I began apologizing to family members I’d hurt by my attitude and words. Then I told God I really did want the Holy Spirit, and would accept that gift. It was then, finally, that I became aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence.
Did you know that all of our human family roots are traced in Luke 3:23-38?

One morning, a beautiful, tall, shapely young woman walked into a conference that I was attending. She sat with a pensive expression among a room full of mostly middle aged and older ministerial spouses. Late in the afternoon she stirred to share. Her voice carried pain as she recounted how she had been raised with great expectation, followed her new husband into his first pastorate. Though the congregation was composed mostly of seniors, she was eager to support her husband and ‘fit in’. She admitted that after months of trying hard, she didn’t know how to try anymore.

Another woman at the conference asked the young spouse what she liked to do and was good at. The young spouse shyly responded, “I love to play my bass guitar but the members certainly don’t want to hear it. They just don’t know what to think of me.”

The responding laughter that rippled through the room was quickly cut short (without a call to do so). Instead we pulled around her realizing that our young sister was courageously and literally crying out for understanding and help.

While this is a rather extreme example from the wide spectrum of responses that spouses may encounter in their first pastorate or area of service, it does highlight some of the angst that some experience in those early months. And it is not only the fledgling ministerial spouses who search for their place of belonging when thrust into a new congregation or military base, or campus, etc. “Who am I?” and “Am I acceptable?” are two of the big questions bequeathed us by Adam and Eve’s fall. Our sinful nature has a lasting effect on us – like a frigid draft blowing up from deep within us and, at times, seemingly with the power to pull us down. That is why we need frequent assurance that we are acceptable. That is why we desperately need what Jesus said to seek – a constant abiding (or remaining) in Him and He in us. (John 15:4) While it is natural to attach importance to what people think and expect of us, (and this temptation may never entirely abandon us until Jesus returns) there are three common responses that we can fall into: greater attempts at people pleasing; developing ‘attitude’; or reminding ourselves of our true identity and place of belonging in God.

Your family tree begins with God

Did you know that all of our human family roots are traced in Luke 3:23-38? This genealogy starts with Jesus, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. “We are sons and daughters of God!”

God has perfect knowledge of you

In Psalm 139, one of the most magnificent and intimate prayers of trust in God found in Scripture, David affirms God’s omnipresence and omniscience including God’s intimate knowledge and interest in you from conception on. Scientists keep discovering more astounding mysteries about humans. If you drift into a downer, just google Alexander Tsiaras’ TED talk Conception to Birth visualized?language=en

If you answer this call of Jesus with all our heart and mind, and strength, and renew it daily, He will abide in us and we in Him.

The chart (left) is my little attempt to show just some of the things that make up the richness of the unique you. You are unlike no one else on the planet. Our true identity from God is that we have been created by Him, connected to Him, gifted by Him, redeemed by Him, forgiven by Him, called by Him and empowered by Him. Why not humbly wear your real identity and play your life with zest to the audience of One? And celebrate!

And the end of our exploring will be to arrive at the beginning and know the place for the first time. ~ T.S. Elliott

Donna Jackson serves as an associate director for the North American Division Ministerial Association and is responsible for supporting ministerial spouses.
Preparing to exit the van, I looked through the rear window. She could no longer conceal the sadness in them. “Okay, get yourselves together,” I demanded. Each was Sabbath actors, performing our Sabbath best. Their eyes appeared bright and cheerful and we walked into church. We are slaves, who must accommodate your will. What a real-life dilemma of temptations. Some of these issues are publicly known to our congregation, while many are only known within our own hearts and by God. We are tempted when filling out our parsonage exclusions. We are tempted with exaggerating mileage on our worker’s report. We are tempted when we want to do what is right, but our human nature wants to do otherwise. We are tempted when filling out our parsonage exclusions. We are tempted with exaggerating mileage on our worker’s report. We are tempted when we want to do what is right, but our human nature wants to do otherwise.

I noticed an interesting watermark on the slides on the screen. The graphics on the screen were clearly marked with the following words, “Thou shalt not steal!” The pastor had illegally downloaded the graphics without paying for them, and his crime was clear to the entire congregation. I was listening to a sermon when the Pathfinder leader pulled up behind us. What a perfect family. They had one more child than we did, and yet, they were so active and involved in church, and always on time! They hosted a Pathfinder vespers every Friday night at their home. Their wife dutifully made supper for over 25 kids and parents. Even though vespers often ended late, they seemed to get to church early every week. I wish I could trade families for a day.

As our families vacated each vehicle, the Sabbath smiles and greetings emerged. There were giggles and hugs replacing what, only a few minutes ago, was hitting, fighting, and crying. Miraculously my wife’s eyes appeared bright and cheerful and we walked into church together, hand in hand, as one happy family. We were Sabbath actors, performing our Sabbath best. Can you resonate with this story? I wish I could say this only happened once. Unfortunately, a version of this story has occurred too many times to count. And after serving as a conference ministerial director, I know many pastor’s families who have had a similar experience where there is the pressure to be or act perfect.

So what can be done to preserve the authenticity and emotional health pastors and their families? How can they live a life of integrity in public and private?
1. Great Controversy
Conversation Starters: How do you think Chaplain Sanjay handled the dialogue with his senior pastor? How would you have handled the senior pastor’s request? What are some potential impacts of compromising your integrity and/or authenticity over a prolonged time-period?

www.vimeo.com/245053896

2. The Secret
1. True or False: It can, at times, be easier to see inconsistencies in my partner or someone that I’m close to than to recognize them in myself. If you agree, give an example and tell why you think this happens.

2. Have you ever found yourself taking a stronger stance on something you don’t fully believe or practice just to make a point? What made you do so?

www.vimeo.com/245053944
A New Focus: Avoiding Burnout

We lose the balance we need between being with God versus doing the work of God.

As a pastor’s spouse, do you feel worn out or pressured by unrealistic expectations? Have you ever felt like the “doing” of your ministry was unsustainable? I want to suggest that when you get to the place where you just feel overextended...overwhelmed...totally exhausted, you must say to yourself: “Hey, I need to make a change.”

In addition to being a pastor’s spouse, you are working inside and/or outside the home. You may also be a parent or caretaker of your parents. Whatever your personal responsibilities, the expectations of others can add layers of stress on you. Left unrecognized and unchecked, stress can be an open door to burnout—a recurring possibility in the ministerial life. I define burnout as a multifaceted, experiential feeling of exhaustion resulting from layered stress. It is felt physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

So how do you prevent burnout? First, you must be aware of your layered stress and exhaustion. Then, you must acknowledge your need for self-care. In times past, taking care of yourself was not viewed as an essential priority for Christian living. Indeed, giving any thought to yourself was regarded with suspicion. Some even believed it was inappropriate behavior for a faithful Christian disciple. Consequently, most of us learned that we should be careful about how we considered ourselves.

Quite frankly, this is a non-biblical approach to living. Even Jesus often went off to a private place to rest awhile (Mark 6:31). If periodic physical, mental, personal, and spiritual self-care was our Lord’s practice, it should be ours. It’s very difficult to take care of others if you neglect your own well-being. So, take care of yourself!

Another way to prevent burnout is to find a joyful balance between “doing” and “being.” We need to shift our focus and understand ministry as not solely a task-oriented practice. Contemplative personal time with the Lord is just as important in the life of a pastor’s spouse as are the active times of responsibility, care, and leadership.

This balance can be difficult for ministerial spouses. They are often so busy “doing” that “being”—the devotional activity—seems impossible. Home life, personal concerns, work, and church involvement often crowd out our relationship with Jesus. We lose the balance we need between being with God versus doing the work of God. Our need is not for more activity, even activity that is spiritual. Rather, we need to shift from the “doing” to allow time and space for the spiritual.

In his book, Between Two Worlds: Understanding and Managing Clergy Stress, Andrew R. Irvine writes: “The clairamour of altitude in the outer physical world; prompted by the clutter of unresolved issues in the inner world, prevents the development and nurture of the spiritual which must transcend both worlds. There is a need to remove the clutter so that in the midst of all of life, the transcendent spirit can be experienced!”

Burnout prevention and balanced living are dependent on the daily practice of being in a close relationship with God through mind, body, soul, and spirit. This is the journey of a lifetime. Francis De Sales said it well: “Be patient with everyone, but above all with thyself.”


I was a long day at church and I was looking forward to getting home to put on some comfortable clothes and enjoy a good meal. However, before I could do that I needed to gather the children, find my pastoral spouse, and make a mad dash for the car. I soon realized that I wasn’t the only one looking for my husband. Some members inquired of me his whereabouts and I kindly informed them that I was on the same mission as they were. Thinking that this would be the end of the conversation, to my surprise, many members gave me messages to share with him when I located him.

Since this was early in our ministry, I wasn’t quite sure how to handle this situation. Would this become a weekly ordeal? What if I forget a message? What if I don’t know the name of the member who gave me the message? These were just a few of the questions that danced around in my head. I thought to myself, “I’m not his administrative assistant!” Then I noticed that my attitude began to change when, week after week, members began to seek me out and give me messages for my husband. My husband also noticed the change in my attitude. After several conversations we were able to get to the bottom of the problem. Although we’re one flesh, I wanted to be seen as an individual and not just an extension of my spouse.

The Plan

We needed boundaries. Personal boundaries provide guidelines regarding what members can expect from their pastor and his or her spouse. When a ministry couple has personal boundaries, it becomes a win-win situation. The congregation and pastoral couple are able to communicate and relate to each other in a more effective way.

The following week, I went to church armed with a smile and my newfound boundaries. After the service, a well-intentioned member who asked me to give a message to the pastor for them approached me. I kindly shared with them the best way to ensure that their important message was received by the pastor would be to contact him directly during his office hours or stop by his office and give him the message personally (in writing preferably). It was a new way for some members, however it was well received in time and we lived happily ever after.

Honesty, boundaries can sound harsh but they really are a beautiful thing. They communicate mutual respect for all involved. Boundaries are defined as something that shows where an area ends and another area begins. They indicate a point or limit that shows where two things become different. When we have boundaries with our members it facilitates a healthier relationship.

When practiced daily, it can free us from resentment towards our members and spouse. It allows us to clearly state how we can be of service versus the areas outside of our gifting or comfort zone. I would like to recommend a book called Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. It revolutionized my relationships and ministry.

God has boundaries with his people because He loves us. We can benefit from being honest with others and ourselves about what we can do and how we can serve. Keep in mind that we can always reserve the right to make adjustments along the way as our circumstances change as a ministerial spouse and family. Boundaries are one way of showing love for others without forgetting to love ourselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List some ways in which boundaries can foster healthier relationships.
2. Share one boundary that have you set for yourself personally or for your family with church members that has led to a positive benefit in your life.
3. We are told to “love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 19:19) How can setting boundaries help us to do this?
4. Discuss some of the boundaries that Jesus established in His own life on earth and find a Scripture passage that addresses it such as:
   - Prayer time
   - Played His life to an audience of One
   - Forthright communication
   - Set priorities
   - Others

Since this was early in our ministry, I wasn’t quite sure how to handle this situation.
Many expectations about pastors and their families lurk silently and invisibly beneath the surface of church life, like giant jellyfish. Until we bump into a stray tentacle and feel its sting. We’ve only been in our first church a few months when some young women arranged to meet me. They sat and prayed for me while I read their thirteen-page letter. It listed all my serious flaws, like making desserts for pot-luck (totally forbidden), rocking our baby daughter to sleep in church (she should be awake and listening — seriously!) and not coming to every meeting in the church. I was young and devastated, and I said some things that I hope they’ve forgotten. I made a mental note of the unspoken pot-luck rules. But most of their expectations were based on the experience of their previous, almost retired, pastor’s wife — totally unrealistic for a young mother and small children.

Congregational expectations change quite a bit if you’re male. But I’ll allow the spouses of women clergy to express what their experience has been.

**Connect**
It’s normal for churches to have some expectations of the pastor’s family, and vice versa. When you arrive at a new church explore the members’ expectations by connecting with them and having an open discussion about expectations. Here’s one idea to initiate a discussion: Prepare several food cartons, such as pizza boxes, chocolate boxes, cereal boxes, and fast food sacks. Mix up the contents. Put cereal in the chocolate box, chocolates in the pizza box, and salad in the fast food box. Ask people to guess what’s inside each container. Sometimes the contents are way beyond our expectations, sometimes they’re surprising, and sometimes they’re just very disappointing. Invite people to talk about how they manage other people’s expectations of them, or how they manage when other people disappoint them.

Distribute slips of paper in two colors, one for the expectations of the pastor’s family, stack them in one color box, chocolates in the pizza box, and salad in the fast food box. Ask people to guess what’s inside each container. Sometimes the contents are way beyond our expectations, sometimes they’re surprising, and sometimes they’re just very disappointing. Invite people to talk about how they manage other people’s expectations of them, or how they manage when other people disappoint them.

Distribute slips of paper in two colors, one for the expectations of them, and another color for what the pastor’s family can expect of the church members. Meanwhile, write a list of what the members can expect from you, including some of your unexpected talents (perhaps you’re a gifted cellist), your roles as you see them, and one or two of your “growth areas” (such as forgetting people’s names, or not being the best children’s story teller in the world). Sharing your challenges reminds them that no pastor’s family is perfect.

**Invite the church members to look at their expectations of the pastor’s family, stack them in categories, and then arrange them to show which ones they think are the most important. Share your own expectations and encourage a warm and open discussion about what you can reasonably expect from each other, and how to respond when your different expectations bump into each other.**

**Reflect**
Hopefully this open dialogue will clarify some unspoken expectations and create the space for you to explore the role God has created and given you to have. Prayerfully reflect on His unique purpose for you in this unique context, at this unique time in your life. What are God’s expectations of you (Micah 6:8)? What are your values and current life goals, and how do they fit with your own expectations of being a pastoral spouse? Which expectations might you need to put aside because you have a family, a busy career, or a dissertation to write?

Reflect with your spouse on the level of support you can realistically offer in this current ministry context. Give yourselves a reality check: what might you expect church members in a similar situation to do for the church? Audit the amount of time that you spend in ministry-related activities each week. How does it compare with your expectations of others, yourself, and your current activity level? What might you need to change? How will you support each other in managing your own and other people’s expectations?

If you have special skills to share with your church, train others to fill your place before you leave.

**Questions for a pastor’s spouse …**

**Respect**
Once you have set clear boundaries, respect them, and encourage others to respect them too. Try saying things like, “I would love to help you, but it wouldn’t be realistic for me to say yes at this point in time.” Use a scale of 0-10 to monitor how you and your spouse are coping, where 0 is no pressure at all, and 10 is completely stressed out. Protect each other from unrealistic and overwhelming expectations. Check in with each other once a week. If either of you feels overloaded, wonder whether the pressure is coming from other people’s expectations. Perhaps a responsibility can be given to someone else for a while.

**Great expectations!**
We pastored a church that included several retired pastoral couples. They were experts on congregational expectations! On our first Sabbath they presented me with a hand-tied bouquet of flowers. “We know that being a pastor’s spouse is a huge responsibility. You do so much behind the scenes that no one ever knows about. But all we expect from you is to love the pastor, show up and love us! If you want to do anything else let us know, and we’ll happily fit you in!”

That’s perfect! I thought. Clear, simple and achievable expectations. I smiled. “You know what I’d really like to do… I’d like to bring a dessert to every pot-luck.”

**Discussion Questions**
1. People can have many expectations for a pastoral spouse but what really counts is what God’s expectations are. After all we are working for Him and not for a church. Make your list of Bible verses that explain God’s expectations. Here are two to get you started… Micah 6:8; Matthew 11:28-30.

Great expectations!

2. How can a pastoral couple set boundaries to safely guard their marriage and family while still meeting the church’s expectations?
3. Are there any non-negotiable expectations that you believe must be met in the relationship between a pastoral family and a church? If so, what are they and what would be the best way to share them with your church?
It is not just you. Male pastoral spouses around the North American Division are adapting each day to the unique role that God has called THEM to fulfill.

Mr. Mom situations that you probably didn’t envision when you said, “I do.” Okay, that was an understatement, wasn’t it?

Maybe you can relate. For example, the Sabbath where you find yourself hanging out in Cradle Roll and Kindergarten with your baby, other babies of other families, and their moms. Or, when you find yourself tucking your kids into bed for the fifteenth night in a row, and they look up and ask, “When is Mommy getting home?”

When my wife transitioned to Children’s and Club Ministries departmental work, a new chapter of parenting awaited me. As we headed off to camp meeting, she had a whole new rack of responsibilities, leaving me with the children (ages 3 and 9 at the time). I dutifully took our 3 year old to Kindergarten, and to my utter amazement there was ANOTHER guy with his kids there too!

After a little bit of whispering, I found out he too was a pastor’s spouse. We had things in common! I have discovered that women, despite our different roles, share their experiences with us. I’m not sure why, but I’ve felt it’s because we’re all trying to do the same thing.

We have kids. With the kids comes the variety of parenting constraints, needs, and responsibilities. And when the shepherdess, a provider of tender loving care (and hours in Kindergarten) is busy preaching, counseling, visiting with a distressed member, or leading out in Youth Church. Maternal instincts aren’t instincts many males have. The skills have to be learned, and thus can cause stress. Add to that our mountain of volunteer responsibilities, that we may have volunteered for in vain hope that it would give us more time in the same sphere as our spouse. Not likely. That can leave us well outside our comfort zone and feeling harried and unfulfilled. How do we adapt and yet thrive?

Here are some themes that I am finding useful.

Realization
It is not just you. Male pastoral spouses around the North American Division are adapting each day to the unique role that God has called THEM to fulfill. Yes. Just as God called your wife to her unique ministry, God has called you to the unique role of being a male pastoral spouse. You may question me on this point, after all “He called some to be pastors and teachers…” but you haven’t seen anything in that same verse that “He calls some to be pastoral spouses.”

However, does God need treasurers, Adventurers, Pathfinders, or School outings, we can expect to spend time volunteering for ministries they are involved in, or acting as shuttle service to the events they need.

I have found that it works best in our family if I say “no” to volunteer ministries that don’t directly involve the kids and say “yes” to those roles that are with or alongside (in the same time slot) as those my kids come to need or want.
Mark O’Ffill interviewed by Joanne Cortes
https://vimeo.com/295059891
Understanding of a Male Ministerial Spouse

Dwayne Hill
www.vimeo.com/157279077
Trailblazing in Bermuda

I. Don’t have any other god but Me. God’s first commandment is to put Him foremost in our lives. Financially, we do this by tithing—giving back to Him 10% of what He has provided. As Christians we know that God is the provider of all, from our very lives to our means of support to the food on our table. All He asks is that we return 10% of our gain—whatever that may be—back to Him. Tithing is not optional. This money belongs to Him, and the first rule of financial stability is to return what is rightfully His.

Our tithe should be the first expenditure from each paycheck and the very best of our increase. He asks us to give Him not a tenth, but the first tenth. In Biblical language it is often referred to as “firstfruit.” This was not only the first of the crops but the best. Tithing also speaks to the fairness of God when it comes to our finances. The Biblical sacrificial system was designed to accommodate all levels of economic status. Today, He asks us all to give equally by returning 10% of what He has blessed us with. All He requires is that He comes first.

It is interesting that the earliest Biblical instance of tithing is in Genesis 14 when Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils from war. This is hundreds of years before the instructions were given to the Israelites in the wilderness. Abraham’s example would indicate that it was a practice that came from the very beginning of man.

II. Don’t make anyone or anything an idol

God gave us life and provides the means for our daily existence. He also supplied a way for us to have eternal life through the gift of His Son. He is to be worshiped and hold ultimate importance in our lives. Nothing (or no one) else should have a higher priority than Him.

What we choose to spend our money on shows the world what is important to us. It is the outward manifestation of our priorities. If all of our funds are spent on “things” that are transient—that new car, the latest gadgets, the current fashions—it indicates to others that the things of earth are important. In a sense, we become what we idolize. When we moved to Southern California from the Chicago area, our financial situation was a bit tenuous. I did not have work yet, and housing was significantly more than the market we came from. We decided that the children’s Adventist Christian education was our top financial priority, so we paid for their school year up front (which incidentally earned us a discount!) then calculated how much earned us a discount!)

But we know that there is only one God. No Father, who created everything, and saw her for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we live and give life. (I Corinthians 8:6, NLT)

Don’t make idols of things! (Romans 1:28, NLT)

Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? (Romans 6:16, NLT)

“Don’t make idols of things!” (Romans 6:16, NLT)

III. Don’t dishonor Me by misusing My name

In my opinion, the third commandment is the basis for the way we live. God is to be part of our very existence but not taken for granted. He asks us not to trivialize Him by using His name inappropriately or holding Him responsible for our choices. He has given us rules to live by and promises that if we follow His law we will have the necessities of life.

“Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And God, according to what you have, not what you don’t have.” (II Corinthians 8:11-12, NLT)

10 Commandments

OF Christian Finance

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Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? (Romans 6:16, NLT)
God promises that if we are faithful in returning our tithes and offerings He will bless us and our Church.

But if we go our own way, we cannot blame Him when we run into trouble. This translates into not acknowledging God for disasters that result from bad decisions that we make—including financial ones.

The story of Cain and Abel is a good example of trivializing God's instruction. You remember that both men were told to bring a specific sacrifice and Cain decided he knew better. When his offering was not accepted, he blamed God. He had all of the right information but made a bad choice, then took no responsibility but accused God of being unfair.

Investing unwisely or spending money like it grows on a proverbial tree and then crying out to God because we cannot pay our bills, desecrates the name of God. In fact the Bible calls it a sin.

IV. Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

As the body of Christ, the Church is His representation here on earth. Our tithe and offerings are given to support the local, national and worldwide work of His Church. It is not up to us to decide how it is used.

Our only obligation is to bring it to the “storehouse”. Abraham is again a good example. The Bible doesn’t tell us what Melchizedek did with the offering. It only indicates that he was a priest—a man of God.

When we pay our tithe to the local church we are fulfilling our religious responsibility. Note that God does not ask us to give to whatever organization or ministry WE decide is important—that’s what offerings are for. Our tithe is to go directly to the “temple” It is for the support of His work.

The point is, when God does give instruction to the Israelites regarding tithe, He directs them to give it to the priests (Levites). The priests then, in turn, returned their tithe directly to the High Priest, Aaron. This is the way God’s “earned” tithe living.

Our current system works very much the same way. The usual division is for a local Conference to retain the majority of the tithe for paying pastors, teachers and administration personnel. The remaining amount is remitted to the Union, where it is distributed to the North American Division and General Conference for their projects (such as Loma Linda University), the mission program of the church and realization back to the Union and Local Conferences.

God promises that if we are faithful in returning our tithes and offerings He will bless us and our Church.

V. Honor your family

This means not only providing the necessities of life (food and shelter), but also planning ahead. I am talking about savings here. Whether you have a spouse and/or children, are supporting parents or are single, putting something away every month is vital. It does not have to be a huge amount. Start with what you can—even if it is $5 each week. The goal is to make it a habit. Right now, even with interest rates at an all-time low, after twenty years you would have saved $5,434—$553 of which is interest. Naturally, if you can put away more than $5 a week it will grow exponentially, and interest rates are certain to be rebound thereby netting substantially more.

In addition to general savings, it is important to start planning for retirement. If your employer has a matching fund available, take advantage of it. After all, it’s free money! If you have young children, or are planning on starting a family, set up a fund for their education. Along with saving, make sure you have provided for your family through a will or trust. Whether you are single or married, it is vital to have that legal document. Our family found out the hard way when my brother died in an accident when he was 35. Even though he was single, had no dependents and did not own a home, it was literally years before all of the financial legacies were resolved. A will also precludes the government from taking more than what they already claim to lay.

VI. Don’t murmur

We do not create life; therefore, we do not have the right to take it away. This same concept holds true for money as well—money we have not earned is not ours to spend! In a word—debt. The Bible is very clear on the fact that it is in our best interest not to borrow. This is a practical concept as well when you look at what the actual expense is to buy goods on credit. Do not be fooled by low or “no” interest car loans. If you finance $10,000 for 36 months it will cost you over $14,000. Or if you are going to buy $6,000 worth of goods you will never borrow all $6,000 in fees in all cases. In other words, a car that you pay $12,000 for cash ends up costing you $18,000 if you pay $2,000 up front and finance the other $10,000! Add on the fact that the sales price will be less as you pay back the loan and the reality that dealers usually want to have 48-60 month financing, and that vehicle you thought was $12,000 ends up being $20,000 or more.

Debt is defined as “something that is owed or that one is bound to pay to or for another” (www.dictionary.com)

There is the problem. You are now beholden to another entity for something you supposedly own! Going into credit card debt just to have things you cannot immediately afford is the costliest financial mistake. This also includes incidental debt—commonly called an overdraft. This year banks will collect more than $35 billion dollars for that occasional $15 meal on the debit card drawn from your bank account that only had $12 in dollars. These fees have escalated to $30 and more per occurrence. Make sure you know your balance before whiping out that debit card or when automatic withdrawal dates are near. Most financial institutions will let you request a specific day of the month to have your automatic payments occur, so you can either spread them out through the month or have them take place soon after you know deposits will be in.

Excluding a mortgage (as it is usually considered an investment), we should strive to only make purchases for which we have the cash on hand.

VII. Don’t commit adultery

A vow is sacred, whether it is a marriage vow or an IOU. That means, if you do have debt, it is your Christian duty to pay it back.

As well as being a moral obligation, there is no better time than now to work on debt reduction. Most creditors—including credit card companies—are willing to “deal” to get most or part of their funds. In addition, the law is on your side with many creditors recently instigated to the consumer from additional charges. You are usually much better off talking directly with individual entities rather than a debt-consolidation company unless you are so far under that you need professional help.

Bankruptcy is a touchy subject, because there are instances when there is no other option. However, as Christians we should never borrow money with the intention of not paying it back—which is why a school loan, credit card debt or mortgage. Make sure you have exhausted all other alternatives before you sign that loan document and that you have the resources to fulfill the commitment. Then, if the unexpected happens, you will still have options. On the other hand, if you are going into debt for frivolous purchases or knowing that you have no way to make the payments, it is moral and legal fraud.

VIII. Don’t steal

When we don’t pay a faithful tithe, we are robbing God. As Christians we have made a promise to return to Him what is His. When we do not pay, we are making a promise to our creditors that we will pay them. On the other hand, if you are going into debt for frivolous purchases or knowing that you have no way to make the payments, it is moral and legal fraud.

God makes men attractive. It is better to be poor than dishonest. (Proverbs 19:22, NLT)

When you tell God you’ll do something, do it. More important than the actual offering is your attitude. (Romans 13:8, MSG)

“Do you expect me to overlook the promise you made? If you have an agreement, honor it!” (Proverbs 6:1, MSG)

Loyalty makes a person attractive. It is better to be poor than dishonest. (Proverbs 19:22, NLT)

When you tell God you’ll do something, do it. More important than the actual offering is your attitude. (Romans 13:8, MSG)

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IX. Don’t testify falsely against your neighbor

In the story of the Good Samaritan, we learn that the person that acted as a neighbor was the “who had mercy on him.” (Luke 10:33, NLT)

When we take care of those who are down, we take care of God’s work. When we don’t take care of those who are down, we are robbing God. We are taking the opportunity of receiving the blessings He wants us to have. We want to lavish us with joys until we will only hold up our end of the bargain.

“Just as the rich rule the poor, the knowledgeable man is in servent to the learner.” (Proverbs 22:7, NLT)

“No one has anything to report—except for your obligations to love one another.” (Romans 13:8, NLT)

“Do nothing to impair—except for your obligations to love one another.” (Romans 13:8, NLT)

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The church needs you. (Malachi 3:10, MSG)

God will make things right. (Malachi 3:10, MSG)

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There will always be somebody that has more than you do, and you will wear yourself out trying to catch up.

There was a report on CNN about a family of three—mom, stay-at-home dad and four-year-old son. The mom had recently lost her job, and they were attempting to make her three-month severance and unemployment income last for a year. The reporter outlined the measures they were taking to cut costs. At the end of the piece, and almost as an aside, the announcer stated that the family gave 10% of their income each month to their local church. It proves the point, that if we will be faithful in returning what belongs to Him and make every spending decision a spiritual decision, God will take care of the rest.

Contentment comes from having what you need most—a relationship with Jesus; friends who love you for who you are and not the material things you own; and the basic necessities of a place to live and food on the table.

There is a song from a few years back by Cheryl Crowe with lyrics that say, “It’s not having what you need . . . . ”

“Enjoy what you have. You will be much happier if you are not constantly trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

Be satisfied with what you have. You will be much happier if you are not constantly trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

If it sounds like you don’t have enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye, it can happen, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.” (Proverbs 23:4-5, NLT)

X. Don’t covet what others have

Be satisfied with what you have. You will be much happier if you are not constantly trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves back those loans in full—(Proverbs 19:17, MSG)

“Don’t wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye, it can happen, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.” (Proverbs 23:4-5, NLT)

Mercy to the needy is a blessing to them and same to us as it build character within us. Get yourselves back those loans in full. "Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves back those loans in full—(Proverbs 19:17, MSG)"

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If it sounds like you don’t have enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye, it can happen, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.” (Proverbs 23:4-5, NLT)
I have felt that suffocating sensation trying to slip its fingers around my neck and tighten its grip on me many times. I struggle to break loose. The older I get the sooner I recognize it’s a trap, which is helpful in breaking free of this strangle feeling: loneliness. I remember those early days of seminary and being warned that I, the pastoral spouse, would face loneliness. “Great!!!”, I sarcastically thought. I had emerged from years of a lonely childhood. Growing up being home schooled through high school, my only playmates were my brothers who could care less about playing dolls, house, and department store. When I got to college The last emotion I wanted to feel again, was being lonely.

Before my husband and I were even assigned our first church I cried out to God. My request was part out of desperation and part out of fear. I asked Him to grant me friends. He has been faithful to fulfill my request. It has looked very different over the years and involves risk on my part. If I summarized what I have learned about loneliness in the last twenty plus years of ministry, I would sum it up in these three points.

Ask God for some close friends. But just asking isn’t enough. Be willing to risk being friendly and allowing people to befriend you. We also need to be wise with what we share with whom. Think about if you are willing to have friends within your church. I was. Did people get jealous? Probably. Did it help you are willing to have friends outside of the church? Absolutely! I feel mine is to them. Their walk with the Lord is inspiring and refreshing, as I feel mine is to them.

One of my most recent new close friends is Ida, a lady from the culture where we serve. Our friendship is extremely unique because my language is limited to childlike depth. We laugh together and play with her babies. We cook together, and I teach her how to make Indonesian food. Would this friendship alone keep me out of lonely valley? Probably not, because I am limited to not being able to share the depths of my heart, but Ida and I are on such a precious friendship journey together.

Seek people out. When I start to feel lonely I know that I need to get off my duff, go out my door, and go see someone. Anyone. But especially someone who needs a friend. Tah Dah. There is NOTHING that will cure a case of loneliness than to just go out the door and be a blessing to someone. In other cases I have found both to be completely ineffective in fighting loneliness.

Ida is someone that the Lord often (sometimes daily) nudges me to go and see. Less than one year ago she lost her two-year-old son to upper respiratory failure. Oh, the grief and sorrow my dear friend has experienced. Many times, I would just go sit with her, and we would just cry, hold each other, and say, “I don’t understand. I don’t understand.” She would always

Loneliness:

ESCAPING THE GRASP

Their walk with the Lord is inspiring and refreshing, as I feel mine is to them.
As ministerial spouses we “have to” be kind—even if it is a plastered-on fake kindness (I’m sure we have all had our moments of wearing this mask).

Thank me for giving her strength (believe me, it was Jesus giving her strength through me). I know Ida was beginning to heal when she started to minister to others. SEEK to give strength and friendship to those in need.

Kindness. As ministerial spouses we “have to” be kind—even if it is a plastered-on fake kindness (I’m sure we have all had our moments of wearing this mask). I want to challenge you that we not only need to be kind to others but also to ourselves. Especially in friendships. Hear me out for a minute. There are the friends who equally give and take from us, and then there are the friends who take and take and take, giving very little back. Join me in recognizing these friends for who they are and spending more time with the ones who give and take equally and less with the ones who drain our emotional banks.

My husband often travels, leaving me home alone with our sons. A missionary spouse who is left alone is referred to as a grass widow. For years now, every time my husband leaves, I figuratively put on a grass cloak symbolizing super powers and strength as I go on for more than one moment. It rolls into days and weeks. I’ve been there. It was a long valley. It really is a horrible feeling. And I think true loneliness is more a feeling than a reality. At least this is true for my own life. And there are many articles and research that prove that pouting at social media increases those feelings verses making us feel more connected. So unfortunately, some of our own new behaviors are becoming our own worse enemy. Also Satan is the Father of lies and He loves to whisper into our souls untruths. For example, “You are so alone right now. No one really cares about you. You will never have a soul mate or a kindred spirit or… You are so…” “…that no one wants to be your friend.” If you resonate with any of these phrases or maybe you thought of other ones, it is important to stop and recognize who that lie came from and break agreement with it. I have learned that often we go along with these ideas and believe them to be true. When in reality that is not what the Lord has promised over us. Realistically there are some of us who are truly lonely and honestly have very few friends. The reasons are too vast to flesh out. A few of them being: personality, lack of trust, situational, location, and choices are just a few. It really is a horrible feeling. And I think true loneliness goes on for more than one moment. It rolls into days and weeks. I’ve been there. It was a long valley. Thoughts for the valley?

On a good day, when not feeling so lonely blue, I pray that the Lord would bring you a close friend. Perhaps there is someone who needs a friend. Write them down also. Also write down who all your true friends are. Someone you know is a mutual sharing of care. Then ask the Lord to help you think of all the people you know or not they really are helping to ease the loneliness or making it worse. Pray about it and then formulate an action plan that you can turn to when feeling lonely rather than turning to activities that will make you feel worse.

Courage to you, my friend, as you face a ministry full of people. Ironically it can be lonely, but it doesn’t have to be.

Vanessa Seifert
Feeling Disconnected
https://vimeo.com/304940076

Julie Norton
Being Content with Yourself
https://vimeo.com/304940057

Ruth Boyd is a nurse who ministers with her pastoral husband in Papua, Indonesia with two of their four sons.
Moving ... again?

WAYS TO HELP YOUR FAMILY DURING A MOVE

Anna’s story
Anna was in the kitchen when the phone rang. She heard her husband, a pastor, pick it up and speak to their conference president. “Well, we hadn’t expected a move so soon . . . We’ve only been here three years . . . But if you want us to move to the Silver Hills district, I’m sure God will work it out.”
Anna slumped into a chair and put her head in her hands. Another move. So soon! They had just finished decorating their bedroom, she had been promoted at work, and they had finally found a tutor to help their son with his dyslexia. Not again, thought Anna. Moving takes so much time, so much money, and so much work.

Linda’s story
Linda was in the kitchen when the phone rang. She heard her husband pick it up and speak to their conference president. “Well, we hadn’t expected a move so soon . . . We’ve only been here three years . . . But if you want us to move to the Sandy River district, I’m sure God will work it out.”

Linda smiled. Yes! She thought. I can’t wait to move! Linda was tired of the family feuding in their local church. Her husband had done his best, and they had both prayed for the church, but Linda knew he was more stressed than ever before. Besides, Sandy River was only 50 miles from her parents. It would be so good to live near them again.

The extra challenge of a ministerial move
Nothing produces mixed feelings quite like moving. And whether you are disappointed or delighted at the thought of a new home, one fact remains constant: moving is stressful. Thankfully, the Bible overflows with encouragement for anyone who yearns for a place to call home. “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, NKJV).

Moving is not unique to pastors, but many non-ministerial couples have a chance to discuss the idea of moving for several months. Then they decide together on where and when to move. Usually this is a shared choice that comes from within the relationship. It is still stressful at times but usually easier because the couple has made the choice together, to suit their needs and life plans.

But when a ministerial family is asked to move, they usually experience a different dynamic. Ministerial moves can be sudden, unexpected, and non-negotiable. The move often benefits one spouse while seriously disadvantaging the other. They may be so used to helping others that they find it difficult to ask for help. The pastor might be working long hours to make sure everything is ready for the incoming pastor and also attending meetings with the new church district. Meanwhile, the spouse comes home from a busy day at work to spend the evening packing boxes alone, and not know how to talk about their feelings because it might seem like a lack of faith to question anything about the call.

The pastor might be unsure on how to comfort the spouse; after all, it’s his or her “call” that has caused the partner such distress. It may also be hard for both partners to ask for help from other people and each other. They may be so used to helping others that they find it difficult to ask for the help they need.

Ways for pastors to help their families
• Pray for your spouse daily during the move experience. Ask God to help them see their family members through His loving eyes each day, so they can be channels of His love into their lives at this difficult time.

• Find time to listen to the family’s experience of sadness, fear, frustration, and even anger about the move. Acknowledge their feelings as normal and valid.

• Avoid critical or judgmental comments about the family’s feelings, which are just natural responses to a very challenging situation.

Talk about your own complex feelings and ask for the help you need too.

• Accept that it may take longer for the spouse and children to adapt to a move. In the meantime, find ways to

CONVERSATION STARTERS:
1. Name four or five emotions that Sam is exhibiting? 2. Do you agree with the way that Sam’s parents handled this situation? Explain your answer.

Even when the spouse freely accepts a move, they often carry the greatest share of the work and stresses involved in relocating and can feel tired, overwhelmed, and even resentful.

Both partners may be so used to helping others that they find it difficult to ask for help.

PASTOR, PUBLISHING, AND PERSONALITY

There is no one person who is uniquely suited to the role of a pastor. However, there are certain personality traits that can help a pastor be successful.

• Openness to feedback. A pastor who is willing to hear feedback from others is more likely to be successful in their role.

• Good communication skills. A pastor who is able to communicate effectively with both their congregation and their superiors is more likely to be successful.

• Strong leadership skills. A pastor who is able to lead their congregation and guide them in the right direction is more likely to be successful.

• Good organizational skills. A pastor who is able to keep track of their schedule and manage their time effectively is more likely to be successful.

• Strong faith. A pastor who is able to lead by example and live out their faith is more likely to be successful.

These are just a few examples of how personality traits can help a pastor be successful. It is important to note that there is no one perfect personality type that is required to be a successful pastor. Each pastor has their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

It is also important to remember that personality traits can change over time. A pastor who was once open to feedback might become less open as they become more comfortable in their role. A pastor who was once good at communication might become less good as they become more focused on other tasks. It is important for a pastor to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and work to improve them.

In conclusion, there are many personality traits that can help a pastor be successful. However, it is important to remember that there is no one perfect personality type that is required to be a successful pastor. Each pastor has their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and it is important for them to be aware of these and work to improve them.
Invest in your marriage and protect it. Stay connected to your spouse in warm and positive ways throughout each day ... be considerate, comforting, and supportive.

• Think about the relational needs of the spouse. For example, accept them and their feelings; show affection; be appreciative of all the work they are doing to facilitate the move; cherish the couple relationship; give them focused attention; comfort their sadness; encourage them when it is hard to reach their goals; and support them when they are tired and struggling.

• Commit to regular and protected amounts of time to help your spouse with the practicalities of the move. Leaving a spouse to struggle alone, or letting them down when another need arises in the congregation, really hurts the spouse and adds even more pain and resentment to the pile of emotions.

• Invest in your marriage and protect it. Stay connected to your spouse in warm and positive ways throughout each day: text messages, phone calls, e-mails, notes, flowers, a surprise treat, a restaurant dinner, a love note written on the base of a packing box where the spouse will find it, and so on. Although this can take a little time, it’s worth the effort. Other family members may need special attention too.

• Give your spouse the opportunity to take a break from regular church responsibilities for a year after a move, unless they want to be involved.

• Be willing to attend counseling sessions or therapy in order to talk about the effect the move is having on your relationship.

Ways for ministry spouses to help themselves and their families

• Imagine you are sitting in God’s lap when you pray and that He is holding and comforting you through the challenges.

• Write down your feelings and thoughts. Use these headings: What am I sad about losing? What are my concerns about the move? What do I feel frustrated or discouraged about? What are the potential benefits of the move?

• Make a list of the practical things your spouse can do to help.

• Think of your relational needs and ask for them to be met. Examples of items to ask for are, complex emotions to be accepted, a hug or comfort when upset, a listening ear, or some encouragement.

• Make clear and specific requests for the practical help you need instead of struggling alone, complaining, or feeling guilty about asking for help.

• Turn negative thoughts into positive ones. “I don’t have a job to go to” can become, “I will have time to fulfill some of my other dreams while I am looking for a new job.”

Find trustworthy friends to talk to.

• Tune into the feelings of your children through attentive listening and helping them identify their own emotions.

• Assist the family in the process of saying goodbye. For example, celebrate the positive relationships and experiences you enjoyed in your old home. Say a proper goodbye to those whom you have grown to love. Recognize times when you are experiencing normal emotions of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, sadness or depression, and acceptance). And keep your heart open to the adventure of a new chapter in your family’s life.

Moving reluctant teens

Moving a reluctant teenager can be an especially stressful experience. The teenager may have very little say over the move. Their sense of security and trust in a semi-predictable future are torn apart. Many hopes are dashed, close friendships are challenged, and they have to reconstruct their lives and relationships in a new place.

• If you are moving with teens, pray for them as often as you can. And pray for all the wisdom, love, and patience you will need to support them.

• They may not have any choice about the move, but you can help by giving them as many other choices as possible: which school to go to, which bedroom to have in the new home, how to decorate the room, which new clubs to join, and so on.

• Be considerate, comforting, and supportive.

1. Am I able to put myself in the shoes of my family members and be open to ideas other than my own?

2. How can I enable my family to make decisions while I still follow, what I perceive to be, God’s direction?

• When they are upset, they need you to comfort them, listen to their distress, and soothe their anger and frustration. Let them know it’s OK to talk to you about their complicated and negative feelings. Make the time to listen. Take them on parent-teen dates to a favorite restaurant to talk and show how important their concerns are to you. Avoid being defensive.

• Remember, reflect their ideas back to them, ask questions to show you are interested in understanding, and comfort their pain in ways they appreciate.

• Find something special to help them look forward to their new location: a new opportunity, their own car, a fun project, an adventure.

• Help them make friends with local teens. Ask for their ideas about how to do this. Try to find at least one teen who can help them settle in and make friends. Encourage them to connect before the move, perhaps by visiting or using Skype or Facebook.

• Talk about the move in positive terms. A teenager will soon have to leave home for college. Moving as a teen will help them develop the useful skills they will need to reestablish themselves in a new community. It’s a practice run, with parents around to support them, so they will be a step ahead when they leave for college.

Make new memories

Positive experiences help everyone feel better after the challenge of a move. Families should create opportunities for peaceful relaxation, laughter, and moments of wonder.

Some ideas for pastoral families to try:

• Plan a treat or vacation soon after the move so that everyone can have a refreshing break after all the work.

• Plan regular family fun days, or couple dates, that will help them discover their new area and create happy memories together. This will help everyone to think of the new home as an interesting and enjoyable place to be.

• Find beautiful and inspiring places to go for hikes and picnics.

• Do something special that they could not do in their previous location, such as white-water rafting or climbing a mountain.

• Gather flyers of fun places and events to visit in the new district. Restaurants, farms, zoos, parks, art galleries, tourist sites, fun sports activities, farmers markets, forest walks – whatever anyone in the family would like to do. Take turns choosing where to go for an outing.

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist and is currently the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division and a regular contributor to The Journal, a quarterly publication for SDA pastoral spouses.
Real Life or Reel Life: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTS THE MINISTERIAL FAMILY

So, to start off, the reason I am writing this article is not because I am the model citizen of media. In fact, (let’s be honest), I was probably asked to do this because I tweeted something about the clear lack of discipline surrounding my attachment to social media. Maybe the conference is monitoring my Facebook account, or following me on Instagram. Maybe they saw the picture I posted of me sleeping in my van last night at the pastor’s meetings. Obviously, somebody thought I needed to learn a lesson. So, to start off, the reason I am writing this article is not because I am the model citizen of media. Unfortunately, I always get distracted on my way to take it. What you probably did not know is that YOU may have some of the effects of ADHD too! A study done in 2015 and published in Psychoneuroendocrinology studied for a long time.4 It’s nothing necessarily wrong with playing a game or reading an article on your phone, so what is it that Anne and Marvin are missing in this episode? I have also struggled with addictions of different kinds. I think this is something that we probably don’t talk about enough as pastors. Unfortunately, when it comes to the phone, I am still struggling. My wife asked me the other day if I felt addicted to my phone and I think I yelled, “YES” before she even finished her sentence. I feel panicked when I can’t find it, I find myself feeling powerless to put it down and not pick it up. I make excuses about why I need to constantly have it (what if someone needs to get into the church at 9 pm to organize the silverware for potluck next week and I miss their call?). Did you know that there is now an actual medical diagnosis called Problematic Internet Use (PIU)? And millions of people have it. You may want to ask yourself a few questions about your electronic devices. When I asked my wife how to tell if you’re an addict, she mentioned the “CAGE” questions that doctors use for alcoholics. We are going to substitute digital devices and social media for alcohol in these and you can take the quiz.

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your digital device use?
2. Have people Annoyed you when they criticized your digital device use?
3. Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your digital device use?
4. Have you ever used your digital device first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to follow up on who may have posted on your Facebook or Instagram account the night before? (an Eye Opener)

A score of 2 or greater is clinically significant. Hmmm. And you’re probably not addicted to making phone calls to your parishioners.

No Phone Zone

Conversation Starters:
1. How do you relate, or not, to this scene between Anne and Marvin?
2. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with playing a game or reading an article on your phone, so what is it that Anne and Marvin are missing in this episode?
3. Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your digital device use?
4. Have people Annoyed you when they criticized your digital device use?

Technically Speaking

www.vimeo.com/245053805

www.vimeo.com/245053872
SECTION 2: MANAGEMENT

Conversation Starters

1. Sophie asks her dad, “How is me being there for my best friend not as important as you having a mic turned down?” How can adults help their kids make good decisions on setting boundaries for technology use, in spite of being imperfect examples?

2. Getting kids and adults to put down their phones in church is a challenge. How can we engage them and encourage them to be present during the service?

Another aspect of social media is its known effect on emotions. I regularly visit a pastor friend’s Facebook page and scroll in awe as I gaze at his talented and perfectly coffee-fueled children, admire the depth of his spirituality (I knew I should have posted a Bible verse today instead of that amazing picture of my coffee cup!) and watch videos of him spending time with his family (what a cool dad!). Could he be any more perfect? And could I be any less? My children are currently running around the house in their pajamas pulling each other’s hair. It’s human nature to compare ourselves. I find myself feeling really down when I see the apparent success and happiness of others posted via pictures on social media. Not because I’m not happy for all of you—I really am, it’s just that I want that, too. I want the nice car, the kids without applause in their hair, and the walk with God that you seem to have. A recent study at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine determined that the more time young adults spent on social media, the more likely they were to become depressed. It’s easy to forget the inherent worth we have as one of God’s children, when we are constantly comparing ourselves to others. Depression, like addiction and ADHD, also causes a major strain on families. The feeling of inadequacy that social media contributes to, affects our spouses and children, too. Some of us try to use the people around us to make us feel better about ourselves. This is obviously dangerous territory. Depression can lead to further isolation and drive a wedge between us and the community that we all crave. As any of us who have struggled with depression tell you, the change in brain chemistry associated with depression can be difficult to reverse and often requires a significant amount of time and effort. Ideally, we want to avoid things that could lead us into this territory in the first place. Obviously, being too connected on Facebook (in real life) can also lead to decreased connectivity in real life.

So now that we have established that social media can fry your brain, turn you into an addict, and alter your mood, you may be wondering why we don’t all revolt and tear down the social media empire. Well, as you are probably aware, most people do actually try to use social media. This is also a pro for us at our work place. Pastors need to be available a lot. Finally, it can increase our connectedness. This is a good thing if we use it wisely. It can be great to re-connect with friends from our past and used as a tool to help people who would not otherwise be connected.

So, what do we do with this thing called social media? I propose several ways of balancing its positive and negative effects. I have discussed all these with my wife to be sure I am connecting with her on this issue. I would propose you do the same with the people closest to you. Create the conversation about how to wisely and safely use social media.

1. Use Facebook and Instagram for the church sites only when I am at work and away from my family.
2. Use my personal Facebook and Instagram accounts only at designated times during the day.
3. Put my phone down and on airplane mode when I come in from work so that I can focus on my kids without distraction.
4. Make sure that my phone is not plugged in beside my bed so that I am not tempted to look at it first thing in the morning or in the middle of the night.

When I first started working at Adventist HealthSciences Center, and I was still in the corporate world, my phone used to ring hundreds of times a day. Now that I have a phone, I use it only when I need to—especially for my kids. I am sure that you have experienced this phenomenon continue as well. First of all, it can help us increase our awareness of a company, product, or cause. As pastors we definitely have a cause we should be promoting. Secondly, it increases our social media availability. This is also a pro for us at our work place. Pastors need to be available a lot. Finally, it can increase our connectedness. This is a good thing if we use it wisely. It can be great to re-connect with friends from our past and used as a tool to help people who would not otherwise be connected.

So, what do we do with this thing called social media? I propose several ways of balancing its positive and negative effects. I have discussed all these with my wife to be sure I am connecting with her on this issue. I would propose you do the same with the people closest to you. Create the conversation about how to wisely and safely use social media.

Better together

When Bernie and I were very new in ministry, we were sent to an isolated church that was going through a difficult time. Soon we were overwhelmed and discouraged. It felt as if nothing we did was ever right or good enough.

Then our friend Jeff called us. We’d gone to seminary together, and now he was preparing several couples for marriage. He invited us to work with him on a weekend of seminars for engaged couples. We had a toddler and a crazy busy life, but we went along—often writing our next seminar while Jeff was presenting his! At the end of the weekend we were exhausted, inspired, and invigorated.

Completely unintentionally, we had stumbled across our shared ministry! Twenty years later we are still regularly involved in couple and family ministry. Our own marriage has inevitably been enriched and strengthened by preparing seminaries, taking further studies, and learning from the couples we counsel. The demands of ministry could easily send us off in different directions, but we reconnect deeply several times a year when we minister to other couples.

Ministering together is not for every ministry couple. It has profound challenges as well as joys, and working on a shared project isn’t always easy. We may still find ourselves doing some of the work alone, we may still struggle with our different ideas about how and what we should do, but many couples find that even a small shared ministry can enhance their closeness and happiness. “Two are better than one,” writes the teacher of Ecclesiastes, “because they have a good reward for their labor” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, NKJV).

Six reasons for sharing a ministry

1. Ministering to others can bring you closer to God and inspire you. Again, they may be similar to things you have put in the other lists, but there may be some things because of your education and training background, such as nursing, teaching, accounting, creating a web site, leading a choir, etc.
2. My skills:
   a. These are the special gifts that were born with and nurtured over the years, such as being able to fix a car, grow vegetables, decorate a home, ride a bike, cook, etc. They aren’t spiritual gifts or talents, but they are very useful skills that you have learned over the years.
3. My education:
   a. You have learned how to do some things because of your education and training background, such as nursing, teaching, accounting, creating a web site, leading a choir, etc.
4. My natural talents: These are the things that interest and inspire you. Again, they may be similar to things you have put in the other lists, but there may be isolation with separate ministries, which can more than double the time you are apart from each other.
5. The enjoyment and sense of purpose you have in your shared ministry can help you to weather the storm when you face challenges in your local churches.
6. You can spend time together working on projects you enjoy, and your spouse can still count it as ministry time!

Discovering God’s unique ministry for your marriage

Take a piece of paper each and write seven lists:

1. My spiritual gifts: These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in the Bible, such as being generous, teaching, being kind and merciful, serving, leading, etc.
2. My education:
   a. You have learned how to do some things because of your education and training background, such as nursing, teaching, accounting, creating a web site, leading a choir, etc.
3. My skills:
   a. These are other skills you’ve learned and practiced over the years, such as being able to fix a car, grow vegetables, decorate a home, ride a bike, cook, etc. They aren’t spiritual gifts or talents, but they are very useful skills that you have learned over the years.
4. My natural talents: These are the things that interest and inspire you. Again, they may be similar to things you have put in the other lists, but there may be
Blending your gifts

Now look at each of your lists and prayerfully consider what God has given you. Pray that He will guide you to fill an important need in your community or circle of influence. Look for any common threads in your lists, such as passions and skills for working with children, or running a cooking class, or developing an outreach web site, or running family life seminars. As you discuss and explore your unique blend of gifts, talents, interests, skills, passions, education, and ministries, you may discover some ministry that excites you both. Maybe, like us, you’ll minister a couple of times a year at a marriage retreat. Perhaps you’ll work together in a Pathfinder class for an hour a week. Maybe you’ll go overseas and build schools for one week a year.

Couples ministering together

Steve and Meg are passionate about making a church a place where children and families want to be and where they are always learning about Jesus. Meg is especially good at finding fun ways to involve the children in Steve’s worship services. Paula loves teaching children about health and making it fun. Her husband, Bob, is great at playing the guitar and writing easy-to-learn songs. So they visit local schools during health-emphasis weeks, helping children to learn about healthy choices and teaching them fun songs to reinforce their message.

Now it’s your turn. How could God show His love for the world through your unique couple ministry?

Working Together

• The goal of this exercise is to discover how God wants to use the love He has poured into your marriage as part of His mission plan for sharing His love with others.

• By the end of this exercise, we hope you will find something that God has uniquely equipped you to do together. It needs to be something you’ll both enjoy doing together that shares God’s love with your target group.

• Pray that God will guide this process as you work together with Him to explore His mission plan for your marriage.

• Swap worksheets and look at what your spouse has written.

• Compare the sheets and see where you’ve agreed, and where there are differences.

• God is calling you both to a shared ministry that will also share His love with others. What ministry do you think that might be? Or perhaps you’re already involved in a shared ministry, such as working with teens or feeding the homeless.

• On a separate sheet of paper, write down some ideas about how you could use your unique blend of gifts, talents, and skills in a ministry to reach one of your identified target groups.

• Plan a ministry project in your chosen shared ministry area within the next three months. What will you do? Write it below. Then pray for your project together.

• Write a mission statement for your “couple ministry” that focuses on both of you working together and sharing God’s love with others. Work out your mission statement on spare paper and then write your final mission statement here:

Keep looking for the exciting and fresh ways God is calling you to minister together. Also notice how working together blesses your marriage!

The Benefits of Team Ministry

noticed while I was an elder in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, where my wife is serving as an associate pastor, between my duties and hers, our time together became nearly extinct. So I came up with a plan! Now I’m a deacon and to make sure that we have quality time together without my wife neglecting her duties, I started tagging along whenever possible—to hospital visits, nursing homes, Bible studies, weddings, and funerals. The people we visit express their appreciation for my presence and I enjoy getting to know them better.

It is also beneficial to, on some occasions, do Bible studies together if the candidates agree. On Herbert’s numerous occasions my wife has had more urgent matters to attend to, such as hospital visits, so I carried on the Bible studies until she was able to join us. Suddenly a three thousand member church became a church of individuals—each having a different story to tell. Suddenly the church became more like a family. We like to combine a visitation or Bible study with a “romantic” outing afterwards, a restaurant, or just sitting on a park bench watching the world go by.

Pastors can get very busy and sometimes their time with their spouse suffers, so doing things together, where possible, increases quality time together. You learn from each other and discover things in your spouse that you never realized before. I never really knew what was involved in pastoral work but my eyes were opened once I started getting more involved. I came to understand that a pastor has to be everything to everyone which can be very draining. I am sure your pastor spouse would appreciate if he or she gets more support from you becoming involved in their work. And you know what—IT’S FUN!

Herbert Eisele, an educator who hails from Vienna, Austria, has taught at institutions of higher learning in Australia, New Guinea, Fiji and the USA. At his last two jobs he served as the administrative director of the graduate program at Washington Adventist University and later for ADRA International as Director for Staff Development. (Since he wrote this article, Herbert’s wife has been transferred but he maintains his enthusiastic support for their ministry.)

Now look at each of your lists and prayerfully consider what God has given you. Pray that He will guide you to fill an important need in your community or circle of influence.
The Fast-Paced Adventures of a Two Pastor Family

There was a wrinkled Pathfinder uniform, two bags of fruit, water, snacks, a diaper bag, my laptop, two backpacks that had enough activities and books to last a day, and a piping hot casserole. I was thinking, "there is no one way I'm going to get all this stuff and the kids in the car and to church on time!" It was one of those Sabbaths: packed with worship services, meetings, afternoon bible studies, potluck lunch, and an evening concert. We would be spending the entire day at church, all 3 of us: my husband, Orlando; our three boys, Gabriel, Isaiah, and Samuel; and myself. I am not going to lie, I was overwhelmed with the thought of getting into the car, much less having to pastor all day and take care of the kids at the same time. These ordinary logistical thoughts never entered my mind when my husband and I were first married. We were blissfully unaware of what pastoral life would look like 12 years and 3 boys later. But when both spouses are pastors, life can get excessively overwhelming with the thought of getting into the car, much less having to pastor all day and take care of the kids at the same time.

These ordinary logistical thoughts never entered my mind when my husband and I were first married. We were blissfully unaware of what pastoral life would look like 12 years and 3 boys later. But when both spouses are pastors, life can get excessively overwhelming with the thought of getting into the car, much less having to pastor all day and take care of the kids at the same time.

Bedtime Stories

www.vimeo.com/245054100

Conversational Starters

1. If you are a two-clergy couple, what is the biggest challenge you face due to your work assignments?
2. How can a couple plan to have children and both be ministers, prepare for the potential, fast-paced realities and challenges of parenting while both in ministry?

After our rough start to marriage and family (where my husband and I worked in separate congregations), I began chaplaincy at the Adventist school beside the church my husband pastored. For four years we were able to deliberately balance family and ministry, and enjoyed the support (a.k.a. free babysitting and food) of our nearby family and the blessings of an awesome church and vibrant school. But as you know, pastoral assignments change and the call to work together in a church came as a surprise.

I was excited to work as a team, because I really admire my pastoral husband's experience and ministry wisdom. At the same time, I was anxious because this call took five days away from family to and a city with no friends or support. And we needed support. Our kids were four and five years old and I was five months pregnant with our third son. How were we going to manage to raise them, nurture our marriage, and lead this new congregation? I was anxious - and I am still not the best at keeping a calm heart. It was fear: fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of being out of balance, fear of having my children labeled, and fear of how this new church would accept us.

How awesome is our God that takes all our fears and, in return, gives us peace. I clung to the promise in Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." A simple yet powerful guarantee to squash my apprehensions. Little did I know, God would call this verse to mind again in the future, to gently remind me of His authority in all things.

Pastor's Wife

Conversation Starters

1. What do you think were some of the emotions that Pastor Anne experienced during this episode and how did she deal with them?
2. Contrast the ways in which Pastor Marvin (in the video) and Pastor Orlando Pule (as discussed by the article writer, Pastor Elizabeth Pule, in the previous paragraph) dealt with painful gender discrimination levied by church members against their wives.

Fast forward a year and half later, we are now a family of five, carefully trying to maintain equilibrium on all fronts. There were days when everything went according to plan, other days were a struggle. Such is life with three boys, especially with pastoral parents. Just when we hit a comfortable rhythm, things were about to get turned upside down. During a routine speech therapy assessment for our youngest son (our first child also needed speech therapy, when he was in kindergarten), our world was forever changed. At an introductory appointment, I was told that Samuel may have "other issues." Apparently, "other issues" was code for autism.

What followed was a year of various testing, assessments, specialist visits, observations, and confusion. For over a year we held our breath on an official diagnosis, trying to get into focused private therapy while waiting to hear back from the doctors. During this time, I cried a lot, my heart was heavy, and it was difficult for me to be at peace with all the uncertainty.

For over 400 days, our morning prayer during family worship was for Samuel "to use his words." At this point he was 28 months old and did not have enough vocabulary or pronunciation of simple words to meet the age-appropriate milestones. He would have terrible tantrums because he was unable to communicate his needs and wants. During speech therapy he would throw himself on the ground and thrash when he was challenged in any way.

Petula, in the previous paragraph, dealt with painful gender discrimination levied by church members against their wives. But when we hit a comfortable rhythm, things were about to get turned upside down. During a routine speech therapy assessment for our youngest son (our first child also needed speech therapy, when he was in kindergarten), our world was forever changed. At an introductory appointment, I was told that Samuel may have “other issues.” Apparently, “other issues” was code for autism.
Finally, in June 2016 we received Samuel’s official assessment for ASD. There were still so many questions I had about the entire process, but now with this diagnosis, we could start to access government programming and resources.

The next 10 months were full of prayer, relentless independent research, applications for funding, interviews at therapy providers, and meeting other families with ASD children (all wedged in amidst ministry appointments). It was a very long, frustrating journey. Our awesome God called to my heart every day the promise in Romans 8:28 “In all things, God works for the good.”

Now, putting it simply, over the past 10 months, our Samuel has not only learned how to “use his words,” but he can read at a Grade 1 level, count up to 150, identify his alphabet, colors, shapes, and can independently use the potty. He also sings our praise and worship songs by memory (accompanied by the best dance moves).

Can I get an AMEN?

Psalm 5:11 says “But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.” God is awesome! He has opened countless doors for Samuel to receive the best therapy and resources Ottawa, for him to thrive despite his challenges.

For us, being a pastoral team means our whole family working together with Jesus. It means acknowledging His authority in our lives; being faithful to His call as spouses, parents, and pastors; accepting His peace for our future; and giving thanks for His providence. Husband and wife pastoral teams may not be common, but I have no doubt the Lord has called us to be exactly where we are. We recognize there will be days of utter exhaustion, crumpled shirts, messy rooms, miscommunication, and misunderstandings. But we celebrate and praise God for this great adventure.
1. Balance the urgent with the important
Consider the following depiction of things that demand your attention and decide under which heading you operate most of the time.

a. Nonurgent and Unimportant: Here we find the pastoral demands of the trivial, unimportant, inconsequential, irrelevant—or what we might call the junk mail—which some have difficulty escaping from.

b. Urgent but Unimportant: This is the area that demands most of our time. These things seem urgent but are often unimportant in the overall scheme of things.

c. Urgent and Important: This may seem like the best place in which to operate; however, in this setting, you are in crisis mode. Who wants to be putting out fires every day? There must be a better way.

d. Nonurgent but Important: This is actually the best quadrant in which to minister. Deal with the important before the important becomes urgent. The best way to get into this quadrant is to plan, organize, and prioritize. Learning to operate here saves time that you can then give to your family.

2. Let others hold you accountable and help you
You may need some outside help to review how you are using your time. Talk to your local conference ministerial secretary and seek guidance and counsel. Keep a journal for a 30-day period and review it. How do you spend most of your time? Have a mentor review the journal with you and give you feedback. You may need someone else to "give you permission" to take some time off. Eliminate things that are not necessary. March to the mission that Jesus called you to do, not to the mission that others want you to do for them.

3. Set limits on time for regular church office/work time
What is a reasonable amount of time for staff development, to sit on committees, to meet with church members, sermon preparation, and other items? In one survey of lay people, the answers to this question averaged 82 hours per week—an incredibly great amount of time. One church member even proposed that the pastor may work 200 hours per week.

There will be those special events or times, such as during an evangelistic series, when you may have no choice but to work many hours. But at the end, reward yourself and your family with some special alone time together. This will give you all a treat to look forward to as you dedicate yourself to ministry at those particular times.

4. Guard and protect boundaries
Set and lovingly communicate parameters to your church family in order to protect your private family time, and encourage them to do the same. A good minister will always respond to legitimate emergencies, but it is important to define an emergency. Be candid with your church about how they can expect you to respond to various crises. What is an emergency? What is a crisis? Defining these terms ahead of time will help you identify those instances that may, or may not, need immediate attention. Some "emergencies" can, in fact, wait. Your clearly communicated responses will diffuse misunderstandings before they develop and often prevent the manipulation of your time. Establish a day off each week and make sure that all your church family is aware of what time has been set aside. Guarding your boundaries requires action. Put your computer and phone aside when you are with your spouse or children. You do not have to answer every call immediately. Preserve your family meal times. Eating together as a family is an important time to talk and share about the day's happenings, challenges, joys, and tomorrow's events.

5. A regular schedule makes crises easier to bear
If you have a regular day off with your family and take time to give them a place of importance in your schedule, then when a real crisis arises that takes you away, these kinds of events will be easier to bear.

6. Mentor others
Delegate as much as possible to other church leaders. Trust and train them to do the job that the nominating committee has elected them to do. Allow them to serve. Do not take service opportunities...
Schedule one evening with the entire family. Remember to make each child feel special. Try to schedule time with each child alone.

away from your church members because you feel you can do it better or faster. Help out the church family and yourself by sharing in ministry.

If you are too busy, you are probably not delegating. Train and trust people to coordinate and lead programs and events. Investing time in the training of others will not only save you hours, but fulfill the scriptural guidance offered in Ephesians 4:11, 12: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (NIV).

7. Schedule family time in your calendars now

Schedule one night every week with your spouse, a kind of “date night.” When God created Adam, He said it was not good for him to be alone. So He gave Adam a wife, not a whole church family.

Here is a formula that may be good to adopt: Spend at least 30 minutes each evening together, one entire evening each week, one day each month, and one weekend each quarter.

Schedule one evening with the entire family. Remember to make each child feel special. Try to schedule time with each child alone. When you are traveling, remember to call home and speak to your spouse and to each child.

One minister offers his family his daily planner to schedule time with each child alone. When you are busy, it may not be possible for you or your family members to be together and do things together. You may need to make time for your family in a more deliberate way.

Questions for further reflection/discussion:

1. Where are your church responsibilities on your priority list?
2. Where is your family on your priority list?
3. What constitutes an “emergency”?
4. Are there people with whom it’s easier to say no to than others? If so, what makes the difference?
5. Why does saying No make you feel guilty?
6. Regarding my time, do I say Yes to my church family more often than to my family?
7. What can I change, beginning today?

Pamela Consuegra, Ph.D., serves as the NAD associate family ministries director and has a background in Adventist education having served as a teacher, academy principal and Superintendent of Schools. Pamela and her husband, Claudio, have two adult daughters.
Spouses and children need our focused time, careful attention, warm encouragement, and gracious acceptance to help them flourish. Happier, healthier and more loving. But it starts with the minister’s family.

The future of our church depends on this changed perspective. One of the reasons young people give for not becoming pastors is that they’ve seen the distress in older pastor’s marriages, and they don’t want to put their own family through the same pain.

Loving God
We love others best when we experience God’s love first (1 John 4:19). Focus on God’s love for you. Reflect on verses that describe God’s love, such as Psalm 23, 103, and 145. Read the Father’s Love Letter at www.fatherslovletter.com. Notice the million ways that God is showering His love on you. The more loved you feel by God, the more God’s love will flow through you into your family and church. If you struggle to experience God’s love, then it’s a good idea to find a Christian counselor to help you.

Love your family
When pastoral families prioritize their own family relationships, lives are transformed. Spouses and children need our focused time, careful attention, warm encouragement, and gracious acceptance to help them flourish. When those we love never have to question our love, or how important they are to us, they are much less likely to complain, be resentful, misbehave, start arguments, or even suffer from depression. Set aside the best time for you and your family to be together and protect it. Put it in your schedule and give it a name. One pastor calls it Boot Camp, and guards it like a national secret. Put your love into action in tangible ways. Ask each person in your family, “What can I do today to show my love to each person in your family, and then do them as often as you can.” Appreciate what they do, listen to them well, and be compassionately sad with those who are sad (Rom 12:15).

When priorities clash
Ministry life isn’t predictable. There’ll be emergencies and tragedies and there’ll be times when you may have to choose between your child’s concert, or your anniversary dinner, and a family in the emergency room or the funeral home. When members feel that you genuinely care for them, they’re more willing to understand if something else has to take priority. Most caring professionals are not expected to be on call 24/7. Ask your elder or a trained counselor to be on call when you’re attending a special family event. Advertise this in your bulletin and live a positive example of putting your family before your work.

When needs clash, talk about the choice together and ask some of these questions:
- What will the decision mean to each person in my family?
- On a scale of 0-10 how much will the choice hurt my spouse and children, or bring them joy?
- What might be the long-term implications of this choice for each person in my family?
- How might this choice affect my spouse and my children’s relationship with God?
- What does my choice say about me, my values and my priorities?
- If my family agrees to take second place in this instance, what do I need to do to re-balance and heal the relationship as soon as possible?
- If I prioritize my family, who is the best person to minister to the church situation?

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist and is currently the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division and a regular contributor to The Journal, a quarterly publication for SDA pastoral spouses.

Since 2010, I’ve had the privilege of associating with many male ministerial spouses within the North American Division who have related primarily positive experiences to me of their journey as ministerial spouses. There is a real issue, however, that surfaces often that I’d like to explore.

Clash of expectations
Within the current North American Adventist culture, there is a challenging reality that faces male ministerial spouses as I could to learn their feelings and let them personally know that their ministerial team at the NAD was earnestly praying for them and their family members. One male ministerial spouse told me that it felt like he had been kicked in the stomach. Another said that he wished to leave the church. Many sadly expressed that their teen and young adult children
Middle Ground

In relating to this complex issue, what would the middle ground look like for you? Only you, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and with an ongoing understanding of your own emotions and those of your wife and children, can decide what boundaries you need to set for yourself and your family. If your family includes children of an age that can be affected by this issue, make sure to hear their perspectives and how they are being affected.

While much can be said by many veteran male ministerial spouses of taking the high road and maturely developing a ‘graceful’ back, there are two cautions. First, be aware if some of the grease is leaking inward and causing blockages in your own spiritual, emotional, or physical arteries. Second, there may be times and places where the most appropriate reaction to bullies will be to speak truth in love to everyone and in whatever way God directs.

On the lighter side, I’m intrigued by the parable of the unrighteous steward found in Luke 16:1-13 in which the master praises the unjust steward and states that the people of the world are wiser in dealing with people of their generation than the children of light (Luke 16:8). Which reminds me of the applicable ‘wisdom’ found in two lines of Don Schlitz’s lyrics in The Gambler:

“You got to know when to hold ’em, know when to fold ’em, Know when to walk away, and know when to run.”

Staying authentic

Though the personalities, talents, and skills vary dramatically from one male pastoral spouse to another, many have shared with me how doing what they enjoy and are gifted for within the congregation(s) that their spouse pastors, has usually contributed to their happiness and to the decreasing of the stresses often felt with judgments initially passed by others. Here are just a few examples.

A woman pastor, whose hiring broke new ground in her conference, told me that she was assigned two churches which included some members who had a strong bias against female pastors. After a challenging beginning, her husband, armed with his toolbox, mechanical skills, and generous spirit, spent some of his spare time attacking the things that needed fixing at the churches. “Oh Donna,” she said, “they absolutely love my husband! And they show their love for me too!”

In another conference, a woman pastor shared with me that, being the first woman pastor hired in her conference, a church she was assigned to had some members with entrenched prejudices against women clergy. Her husband’s wise assessment of the problematic personalities in her congregation, she told me, was an invaluable help to her in avoiding interpersonal pitfalls. She also reported that at other times, when the struggles weighed her down, her husband buoyed her up and gently reminded her of her calling and gifts.

A spouse told me that he enjoyed creating media backgrounds for his pastoral wife and running the PA during church and felt that this team ministry kept them close and his wife feeling supported. Another pastor’s husband told me that he enjoyed doing hospital and home visits with his wife when he wasn’t traveling for his own job.

The common factor is that they all did what they chose to and enjoyed doing. Incidentally, protection and advocacy can wear many hats.

Two important things that male spouses of pastors have reported that provide them with perspectives and useful tips in navigating rough situations include finding a support network of other male spouses and connecting with a godly mentor who understands and/or can relate to their circumstances.
Creative Conflicts for Caring Couples

Conflicts are normal. They happen when two very different people grow close to each other and notice that they have different priorities, beliefs, habits and values. As A.P. Herbert once said, ‘the concept of two people living together for 25 years without a serious dispute is almost as rare as a sheep!’

But when your differences threaten your closeness, you have a choice. You can fight about them bitterly and hurt each other. Or you can talk about them in constructive ways, learn more about what’s important to each other, and find creative solutions that you both enjoy. Here are some creative ideas for couples in conflict.

Laying peaceful foundations
The more we feel that our partner loves us and cares for us, soothes us, puts us first and has our best interests at heart, the easier it will be to manage conflicts and differences in the relationship.

Stay safe
There are plenty of landmines in conflict territory! Here are three dangers to watch out for:
- Blame – Avoid blaming each other for the problem. It pushes your partner further into hurt, shame and distress and makes it harder to work things out.
- Walking away – If you need some space to think, don’t just walk out without saying when you’ll come back. This can leave your partner feeling frightened or angry. Say you need some time to think about things properly, and agree on a good time to talk later.
- Scorn – Avoid attacking each other’s character or family members. Rude and disrespectful words hurt and wound deeply, and stay in our memories for a very long time. Imagine you’re disagreeing with your boss instead of your partner and you’ll probably find yourself saying things in quite a different way...

One at a time...
Focus on one conflict at a time. Bringing up negative past experiences only distracts you from discussing what’s important now. So make life simpler for yourselves by sticking to one topic.

Share your ‘problem’
When you describe a problem as ‘our problem’, rather than your problem or ‘my problem’, you’ll both feel more responsible for working it out together.

Listen to each other
When we argue we don’t listen to each other properly. We’re too busy wondering what we’re going to say next, or we’re too angry and upset to hear what the other person needs to say. Good listening can prevent arguments escalating out of control.
- Try listening to your partner as they make one point at a time.
- Then repeat back what your partner said, simply and warmly, to check you’ve heard correctly. ‘So you’re saying…did I get that right?’
- Let your partner clarify anything that you may have misunderstood.
- Then swap roles so you each have a chance to speak and be heard properly.
- Repeat this process, one point at a time, until you’veclarified and understood what you both have to say about the issue.

This process can feel strange at first – so don’t worry if you feel awkward. It’s worth persisting because it feels very good to know you’ve been heard, and that experience alone can lower the heat of the discussion.

Never say never…always
The phrases ‘You never…’ and ‘You always…’ are virtually guaranteed to make any conflict worse, because our partners will almost always disagree with us!

Try saying ‘Help me to understand why you find it difficult to do such or such…or why you choose to do such and such.’ Your partner is much more likely to respond positively, and it’s really useful to hear their side of the story.

Write it down
Take a large sheet of paper each and divide it into nine numbered rectangles. Label them like this:
1. I am glad we’re discussing this because…
2. This concern is important to me because…
3. When I was a child my family managed these concerns by…
4. The emotions I feel when I think about this concern are…
5. The concern we agree to explore is… (fill in this central square first.)
6. My past experiences with this kind of concern are…
7. From my perspective this concern is affecting our relationship by…
8. Some ideas about how we can work together to solve our problem are…
9. Something else it would be helpful for you to know is…

Write in as many rectangles as possible, then swap papers and read each other’s answers. If you have any questions, write them on sticky notes and add them to the page for your partner to answer.

This helps you to get your important points across clearly and simply, without having to argue and fight about them.

Win-win
No one really wins an argument. The winner loses the trust and respect of the loser. The loser loses hope. And sometimes the relationship is lost forever.

When you’re both working towards a mutually beneficial solution, you’re more likely to feel respected, understood and positive about each other. You may have to be flexible, and you may not get exactly what you hoped for. But it’s better than destroying your relationship.
Ask yourself – What’s most important here? The issue we’re discussing, or our relationship?

Turning a Nag into a Polite Request
Nagging is probably the least effective way to help a person change their behavior! It can make the other person feel defensive, stubborn and even rebellious! Whenever you feel frustrated, and you want to ‘hag’ your spouse, stop. Hold it right there and turn it into a polite request. Write down your polite request and practice saying it so that it rolls off the tongue quicker than a nag!

Here’s how to do it:
1. In this situation (be specific but avoid saying ‘you’) 2. When this happens (be specific) 3. I feel (be specific) (and maybe you feel…) 4. And it would really help me if you could do (be specific) 5. And then I can help you by (be specific)
So, instead of saying ‘I can’t believe you left your dirty football kit in a bag all week! Why on earth didn’t you put them in the laundry hamper?’, you would say:
1. When dirty football kits are not put in the laundry hamper to be washed
2. And they are not clean and ready when you need them again
3. I feel frustrated (and maybe you do too)
4. It would really help me if you would put them in the laundry hamper, or by the washing machine, as soon as you come home from a football game and then I can help you by making sure that they are clean for your next game.

Try this kind of positive ‘nagging’ and see what happens!

Kiss it better quickly
It’s important to apologize quickly after a big argument. You can say you’re sorry. You can write a note or text message; send a card, give flowers or small gifts; hug and comfort each other; do something kind; or show you’re trying to do better, etc. Whatever you do it’s very important to ‘kiss and make up’ as quickly as possible, and to reassure your partner that you still love them.

Creating a positive plan
When you’re facing a conflict or a problem it can help to follow a process.
1. Listen to each other, or write your ideas down simply and clearly, so that you both understand each other’s hopes and concerns, and why you are facing a challenge.
2. Make a list of all your ideas for solving the problem, including some funny ideas. The funny ideas are important too, because laughter can help your brain to find more creative possibilities.
3. Have each person rate each idea on a scale of 0-5, where 0 is ‘I would not even think about doing this’ and 5 is ‘I think this idea would work very well’.
4. Add your two ratings together, and the idea with the highest rating is your shared favorite.
5. Agree to try this idea for a week, as an experiment. Then evaluate it, adjusting it if necessary.
6. If you had several ideas that scored high, try each of them for a week, and see which one works best, or which one you like the best.

Biblical wisdom for couples in conflict
Philippians 2: 1-4; James 1:19, Ephesians 4:29,32; 1 John 4:18; Romans 12:10, 15,16.

Having a Tender Heart and Thick Skin

As I look back over the last 40 plus years my husband and I have spent in ministry, I can honestly say that they have been wonderful years filled with much joy. Of course, there were times of discouragement and hurt as well. It’s easy to love people that are kind and agreeable, but not so easy to love those who are treating me or my husband or family poorly. Those who are critical and hateful I would rather ignore.

But as Christians and as pastors’ spouses, isn’t loving someone who has been unkind exactly the kind of loving we are called to? Don’t I want to be a pastor’s wife who’s characterized by love for others regardless of whether or not I’ll be treated well in return? It’s not an easy thing to do but through grace I can become a combination of a thick-skinned but tender-hearted woman. It’s not that I want to grow calloused or will never struggle with sadness or hurt. So what does it mean to be thick-skinned? It means to have the grace and strength to avoid being overly sensitive or easily hurt. It means having a quiet confidence in who you are as a child of God, regardless of comments, infirmities, or comparisons. Yet it also means having a heart that is tender and warm. There is such a beauty in a person who can extend grace to those who have caused pain. So how do we develop this thicker skin and a softer heart? Of course, it’s not easy. We are all human. We would rather fight back, get defensive, or take revenge. It’s definitely something we can’t do on our own. I believe we must look to our beautiful Savior, saturate ourselves in His Word, talk to Him openly and honestly, and bask in His love. This strengthens us from within, giving us a calm resilience while still keeping us compassionate, kind, and open to new information about ourselves. As I grow in spiritual maturity, I can listen carefully and empathetically without being easily offended. Whether ministry is sweet or sorrowful, whether there is love or hurt, whether there is peace or pain, what we need most of all is to look to Jesus. Remember that simple song “Jesus loves me this I know.”

I pray that each of us continues to let God grow in our hearts more and more each day, helping us to develop a thick skin but a tender heart for people.

Marilyn Wright is a nurse who recently retired which gives her more time to enjoy her children, grandchildren and travel with her husband, Dr. Ed Wright, President of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. As the ministerial spouse leader in her conference, Marilyn writes a monthly newsletter to her ministerial spouses. This writing is adapted from her April 19, 2018 issue. Used with permission.
After a special revival weekend at my church, and God’s gentle calling through my high school years, I knew I must follow the Lord. I was only 17, but I wanted to devote my life to God in ministry. I did not know how or where, but I knew it had to be with God. Throughout college and various challenges, I still had kept that same desire. In terms of marriage, I could not see anyone with the same calling as I had, so I accepted that I would probably be single for the rest of my life. I prayed that whatever happened, I would always put God first. Not until that prayer, did God allow me to meet someone wonderful! He was a young Vietnamese man named, Vinh. He had just attended a Revelation seminar, felt God’s calling, quit his prosperous computer engineering job, and entered the seminary. Praise the Lord for His leading. Vinh and I were married 3 years later, and committed our lives to service in the gospel ministry. We wanted our children to also partner with us and experience the joy and privilege of ministry. I would like to share a few tips that have greatly helped us do ministry as a family.

Devotional Life
A strong devotional life will give you renewed strength and energy. It will give guidance and wisdom in the life of your family. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6). Having daily devotionals is a great time to get together in the evening with the family. Suggestions:

- Read the Bible Together - Follow a Bible reading plan, read a daily devotional, or study a Bible lesson. Children like to stay on schedule with a Bible plan. They do well with structured time.
- Prayer Journal - Keep a prayer journal with daily thanksgiving and prayer requests. Prayer will rejuvenate your life.
  1. Praises - Daily praises encourages the spirit of thankfulness.
  2. Prayer Requests – Write down prayer requests, and later record when the prayers are answered. Looking back, you and your children will be amazed how God answers each prayer!
- Daily Devotional Books
- Listen to Bible CDs - For example, Your Story Hour CDs in the car, on the way to school and work.

Support your Pastoral Spouse and your Children
“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thes. 5:11).

- Pastors Need Encouragement - The spouse plays a vital role in encouraging and uplifting the pastor.
  1. Daily Walks Together – Walks together in the daytime or evening is a way to reconnect with each other while keeping physically fit.
  2. Date Nights, Vacations, etc. – Scheduling regular time with your spouse is very important for a healthy marriage and effective ministry.
- Children Need Encouragement – The Pastor’s children need to be especially loved and appreciated. We need to be sensitive to our children’s needs. Be interested in what your children enjoy.
  1. Play sports or exercise together with your children.

Write prayer requests down, and later record when the prayers are answered. Looking back, you and your children will be amazed how God answers each prayer!
SECTION 3: RELATIONSHIPS

Include the whole family in evangelism, visitation, and literature distribution, while taking time to do fun and enjoyable adventures with your children.

2. Children’s performances or programs should be a priority for the family. Children need to know that their parents support them and are proud of their accomplishments.
3. Get Support - For healthy mental, spiritual and physical well-being, Pastoral Spouses need support as well! We were not designed to struggle alone through difficulty. Look for the many resources available to get help and support.
4. Ministerial Spouse Associations - Spousal Groups in your area can be very uplifting and nurturing.
5. Spiritual Mentors - Find another Pastoral Spouse to be a spiritual friend and supporter. Look for others that can provide spiritual guidance and that can relate with you.
6. Marriage and Family Resources, Counseling, Seminars - Take advantage of the many resources available. Schedule time for learning and growth that can be applied to your daily life.

Make Efforts to Develop the Spiritual Growth of Your Children

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

a) Literature Evangelism - Youth who are involved in canvassing work greatly develop their spiritual life. Youth in programs such as Youth Rush, Youth for Jesus, etc. develop skills on how to share their faith, how to witness in the community and how to give Bible studies.

b) Children’s Programs - Attend conventions where there are other Pastor’s children with similar spiritual beliefs, who make similar healthful lifestyle choices, and where they can make lasting friendships.

c) Christian Education - Quality Christian education is an incredibly positive influence on children in molding their character. Studies show the longer that children are in Christian education, the greater their achievement academically and spiritually.

Make Ministry Fun!

Include the whole family in evangelism, visitation, and literature distribution, while taking time to do fun and enjoyable adventures with your children.

a) Evangelism - As much as possible, include the family in ministry. The children can participate in music evangelism, cooking shows, evangelistic video clips, etc.

b) Literature Distribution - In every road trip, make it a missionary and fun trip! Install in the children the burden for souls. Pass out small witnessing tracts at gas stations, restaurants, hotels, while visiting National Parks, scenic attractions, etc.

c) Visitation - Visit new members and their children as a family!

“And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

“Workers for Christ are never to think, much less speak, of failure in their work. The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands, to be channels of light, our means of doing good will never be exhausted. We may draw upon His fullness, and receive of that grace which has not limits” (White, Ellen G., Gospel Workers, p. 19, Pacific Press, Nampa, ID, 1915).

The Value of Adventist Education for Ministerial Families

You might ask, “Why is Adventist Education so important for families in ministry? I’m glad you asked! First of all it’s not just important for families in ministry, but it provides ALL families the opportunity to stack the odds in their child’s favor for developing and maintaining a relationship with Christ, remaining in the church, and being ready to meet Christ in peace when He returns.

Deuteronomy 6:7 (NET) says, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength. These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind, and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the road, as you lie down, and as you get up.” In other words, we are to keep Christ before our children. In most families today both parents work outside of the home. In order to follow the counsel given in this scripture, our children must be placed in an educational environment where this can happen. Our children spend more of their waking hours in school than at home. Therefore, it’s imperative as ministerial families that they’re in an environment that is reinforcing what we’re teaching in our home and preaching in our congregation.

The next point is that the home, church and school need to work in partnership for the salvation of our children! They’re like a 3-legged stool. If one of those legs breaks the stool is unstable. The church in which God has appointed you to as the leaders along with the school, are to be partners in ministry. Both exist to fulfill the gospel commission of making disciples. The Spirit of Prophecy in chapter four of the book “Education” says, “In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, ‘other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’ There have been countless families who’ve accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and have gone down into the watery grave of baptism because of Adventist Education.

There are a growing number of pastoral families who are choosing public education or other non-SDA private schools in which to educate their children. The number one question to be answered in this case is are they reinforcing the values and beliefs being taught in your home and in your congregation? They may be close but not 100%.

Some of us have experienced some real challenges with the Adventist schools in which we’ve enrolled our children. There have been some legitimate concerns ranging from bullying, to subpar academics. The question has been raised, what do we do? We want to keep our children in Adventist Education, but what do we do when the challenges seem insurmountable? The first step is PRAYER! As the well stated in a favorite hymn, ‘Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pains we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer’

The next step is communication. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate with your child, with your child’s teacher, with the principal, and with the Superintendent if necessary. Hopefully you won’t need to go this far, but prayerfully present your case to the conference administration if necessary. Get involved at the school. Build a relationship with your child’s teacher and the administration of the school.

Most often, if they see you involved and your concern, it will increase their awareness and sensitivity to the needs of your child.

Hang in there and fight for the salvation of your children! This is not just about preparing them for this life but for the life to come. This is an eternal life versus a temporary one! When one leg is broken, the stool is unstable. We are in a spiritual warfare! The enemy will not sit back and allow us to keep Jesus before our children without a battle. He will try to stop it from happening by any means necessary; whether from without or within our own ranks. In a war, there are going to be some battle scars, but we will come out victorious if we remain faithful. The battle is not ours it’s the Lord’s!

If you’ve done all of the above, and believe that you’ve exhausted every solution, continue to pray and ask God to provide another way. He will! Other options are home schooling, and on-line education. There are Adventist
The Four Places of Forgiveness

A challenge common to many ministerial families is that of the “two drained wells.” The pastor who has unselfishly poured himself out in ministry and throughout the day longs to come home to be replenished.

At the same time the spouse has also been working hard at his or her job—along with caring for children, making meals, helping with homework, ferrying children to classes and events, looking after the needs of church members, and in some situations, functioning very much as a single parent. The pastor may not arrive home until late in the evening, by which time the spouse may feel tired and resentful.

At that point both spouses are running on empty and when they finally come together, both may be too hungry and drained to help the other. In that situation, whose needs are considered most important? Who gets hurt? And who goes “hungry”? Some spouses express that their pastor-spouses view their practical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs—those of their children—as ranking below the needs of other church members.

Other spouses have expressed that they are overworked and need to say “no” but can’t because it would be saying “no” to God. Some may have felt very alone but are afraid of being judged as selfish and criticized if they talk about their painful experiences with others, or even with their spouses.

These challenging beliefs and experiences can be very painful for members of the pastoral family—each striving to be valued, respected and cherished.

Forgiveness requires understanding

If we hurriedly say “I forgive you” every time someone hurts us or “I’m sorry” every time we hurt someone else, then we are missing some ingredients of effective forgiveness. We can say the words quickly, like sticking a bandage on a cut. But this does not improve our understanding of each other, nor does it help us learn to do better next time.

One of the obstacles to working through our hurt and forgiveness is that we often limit our view of the situation to our own perspective. If we have hurt someone we can become self-defensive. And if we have been hurt we can become absorbed in our own pain. What we need is to understand God’s perspective on the situation.

The Four Places

Forgiveness place #1: The heart of God

Before we can understand how to respond to a painful situation, we need to spend time alone with God. We need to be still and listen to His love for us and our spouse.

If you are the “hurter,” you need to remember how much God loves you and is willing to forgive you. You also need to understand that God hurts because your spouse hurts, and you caused that hurt. This is a vital part of the process because it helps you understand the spiritual significance of your actions. Jesus died so that you could be forgiven for the hurt you caused your loved one. Don’t rush through this place on the forgiveness journey. It’s the most important one because this is where you face the truth about your actions.

If you have been hurt, you need to remember how much God loves you and how sad He is that you are hurting. You also need to see that God loves your spouse too, and He wants you to use this experience to help you both understand more about His love and forgiveness.

(See Psalm 103: 1 John 1:9; and 1 John 3:1-4:21)

Forgiveness place #2: The other person’s shoes

It’s important for each of you to understand what the other person is experiencing.

If you are the “hurter,” you need to understand how much your actions have affected your spouse so you can fathom the depth of the forgiveness you need. This will help you avoid repeating the same mistake.

If you have been hurt, it’s helpful to wonder why your spouse made the mistake so you can pray for them in a focused way. Does John need help exploring his priorities? Does he help others pray for them in a focused way?

Forgiveness place #3: The ministry and the world

This is where you face the truth about your actions.

If you are the “hurter,” you need to understand that God may be trying to get your attention. He may have hidden in your work to help you explore your priorities. Does he help others explore their priorities? Does he help others explore how their actions affect others?

Forgiveness place #4: The people you care about

This is where you face the truth about your actions.

If you are the “hurter,” you need to understand how much your actions have affected your spouse so you can fathom the depth of the forgiveness you need. This will help you avoid repeating the same mistake.

If you have been hurt, it’s helpful to wonder why your spouse made the mistake so you can pray for them in a focused way.
Forgiveness place #3: The relationship
Each of you needs to ask yourself what your relationship most needs from you to help it heal. If you are not sure what to do or say, pray for wisdom and ask, “Will this help our relationship, or will it cause more pain?” (See 2 Corinthians 2:7, 8; Luke 6:37; Romans 12:10; Ephesians 4:31, 32; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:12-15; James 5:16.)

Forgiveness place #4: The future
This is often a place we forget to explore when we are working out how to help our hurting relationship. Think about your hopes for your marriage and the commitment you have made to cherish each other. What do you both need to do now to protect your relationship from future hurts? What plans can you make to help your marriage grow stronger and closer? If you are the “hurter,” what decisions can you make to ensure you do not hurt your loved one in the same way again? If you are the hurt person, how can you respond to your spouse in a way that will help you grow closer and not damage your future relationship? (See Romans 12:14, 17-20; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3, 4; Isaiah 55:7.)

Care-filled conversations
Care-filled conversations are calm, kind, clear, and hopeful. After spending prayerful time in the four places of forgiveness, Rachel could say, “When you chose to help Jason rather than spend my birthday with me, I was very sad and hurt because it felt as if I wasn’t very important to you. I felt lonely, abandoned, and disappointed. I need to know you value our relationship. Next time, could you please stop and ask me first before making choices that affect me? I am also wondering how we can take care of our relationship by making it more of a priority in our lives.”

John could say, “I am so sorry, Rachel. I realize that I hurt you when I chose to help Jason rather than spend the day with you. I need to understand just how much my ministry choices hurt you at times. I was wrong. Please forgive me. What can I do differently in the future to show you how special you are to me?”

The journey
Some things are very hard to forgive, such as adultery, domestic violence, abuse, continuous neglect, betrayal, or being seriously shamed, bullied, or ridiculed. When we cause such deep wounds, we can expect healing to take a long time. If someone tripped you and broke your leg, you might forgive the person immediately, but the fracture will still need six weeks to mend. Hurts, resentments, and grudges fracture the oneness that God wants us to experience in marriage. Forgiveness binds the relationship together again, like a plaster cast, so that our hurting hearts can be healed and become stronger than ever before.

Apologizing
Once you fully understand the pain you have caused your spouse, it’s important to apologize. Pray that you will be able to do this well. It’s not an easy thing to do, but it helps put things right again. One example of a simple apology: “I am very sorry that I hurt you by (be specific). I know that I caused you to feel (be specific). It was very wrong of me, and I never want to do that again.” Other actions that might enhance the apology:
• Giving the person a warm hug or other physical sign of apology if they are receptive to it.
• Doing something thoughtful for the other person, such as buying flowers, sending a card, or giving a gift.
• Fixing what you did wrong. It helps us feel better about ourselves when we are involved in mending what we have damaged.

Ask yourself what else you can do to make sure you have offered a thoughtful apology to someone you have hurt.

Accepting an apology
When others have listened to your experience and understood your pain, pray that you will be able to accept their apology warmly. This will help mend the hurting relationship.

Some ways to accept an apology:
• Simply say, “Thank you for saying you’re sorry,” or, “What you did really hurt me because. . . . But I choose to forgive you because I want us to be friends again.”
• Give the other person a warm hug or other physical sign of affectionate acceptance.
• Invite the other person to help make things better, possibly by fixing the mess, mending the broken object, or doing something kind and helpful.

Click on Forgiveness Activity Resources for more info on the topic of forgiveness.

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“Will they think I’m too cheap, lazy, or plain?”

We’ve all had those thoughts—I know I have, but when I focus on this fear, this focus moves the spotlight to me instead of them. Then I can’t really get to know my guests. I can’t relax and enjoy the visit, and I forget what my goal really is to love them into our family, to use our home to build God’s kingdom.

Last Thanksgiving we had invited a random mix of people over to our house. After they left, it occurred to me that I hadn’t cleaned our powder room. For a minute I thought “Oh no—I wonder what they thought of me?” Then I chuckled as I remembered a poster I recently saw. Excuse our mess—we LIVE here. I hope they felt like they were in a normal home, with people who aren’t perfect, and who sometimes just don’t have time to get the toilets cleaned!

Fear #4: We fear it will take a lot of work.

Working full time, volunteering at church and in the community, exercising, and doing housework leaves little time for all the work it takes to entertain. Cleaning the house till it sparkles, cooking gourmet meals, and creating a fantastic centerpiece for the table all takes a whole lot of time. But wait a minute, is that really what people expect, and what we should expect of ourselves?

I find that people seem to have the best time at our house when they’re sharing in the work. I love it when guests ask, “How can I help?” I ALWAYS find something for them to do, regardless of age or gender. If they don’t ask, I try to find some assignment for them so they can participate in the experience rather than just being an “observer.” Sometimes I hand them a broom, give them a head of lettuce to chop or have them set the table. That’s when they really invest themselves into the experience of being in our home. I’ve had countless guests thank me for trusting them enough to let them help. Food brings people together and so does the preparation of food. When I open our home with this mindset, it offsets the fear that I need to do all the work all by myself.

Fear #3: We fear it will take a lot of money.

When grocery costs climb faster than paychecks, cupboards don’t overflow with extra food. How can we afford to have company over if we barely have enough food for our own family?

I’ve discovered some creative ways to eat and share our home while on a tight budget. I try to assign people part of meals such as pasta Primavera, baked potato bar, crepes, Sloppy Joes or hay stacks, which are all super inexpensive meals in which people can get involved. Some can bring the veggies, some the salad or dessert, so no one is spending much money or doing a lot of work. The meal is more manageable and no one seems to mind. I’ve found that God seems to do just what He did many years ago on that hillside with the leaves and fishes—He works it out so that we always have enough food, and we’ve never gone into debt because of our grocery bill. Sometimes, every serving dish is scraped clean, but everyone was fed. Opening our home doesn’t require wealth, but a willingness to be real with people. And this brings me to the next fear.

Fear #2: We fear they’ll find out something bad about us.

Guests who come to our house are free to look at our books in our bookcase, our pictures, our kitchen cabinets or our medicine cabinets. If there are offensive items in these places, it could be embarrassing or they could judge us.

When we open our homes to people, we’re making ourselves completely vulnerable to them. I just expect that this will happen and place books in our bookcases that I’ve really enjoyed and would love to lend out. I put items in our powder room medicine closet that I suspect they may need: band-aids, Tylenol, dental floss, a little bag of feminine products. When we invite them in, we give them permission to know us, and we really don’t have any secrets. That’s where intimacy starts. My biggest hope? That they’ll find Jesus here—and take Him with them.

Fear #1: We fear they’ll never leave.

What’s really exciting is when they don’t want to leave because they’re having such a great time. We find it exhilarating to see a group of random people who’ve never met before, find a common thread of commonality between them, and watch as they exchange contact information, promising to connect again. Or when they’re working as a team on building an incredible salad or try to figure out how to make crepes or doing an “assembly line” of moving wood up our 53 stairs from our forest floor. They create or accomplish something amazing! Together! We like to think that, in a way, they’ll never leave. We have an “art wall,” and ask our guests to do something—a picture, good words, their name, something that will remind us of them! Of course, since we treat our guests like family, when its bedtime, we go to bed and invite them to stay as late as they want, but we ask them to turn the lights out and lock the door when they leave.

Martha Stewart is truly an amazing woman. She’s resilient, creative, courageous, but she has yet to experience the joy of biblical hospitality. I’m sure she’s missed out on some of the blessings we’ve experienced: the gift of watching our family “grow,” of using our home as a hub of influence or a place where our world can expand as we hear other life stories. But the very best thing about opening our old imperfect home is to be able to have “front-row” seats as people make decisions for God.

Additional blessings that we’ve found in having a “landing pad” for people are:

1. Our family has grown. We’ve met people from all over the world, embraced them into our home, given them privilege and responsibilities. Some of the privileges of being in our family are love, acceptance, food, warmth, fellowship, support, and a listening ear. Responsibilities include setting the table, helping with food preparation, and even clean up.

2. There are opportunities for influence when people are in our home. We’ve held worship teams on a regular basis, which enhanced our ability to lead the group to cohesiveness in pursuing our tall order of planning weekly worship services. When ‘trouble-makers’ are invited over for a meal, cold hearts soften.

3. There’s a chance to inspire others. One young physician, who spent Sabbath with us, was perplexed about how we ‘entertain.’ I explained to him my wacky philosophy, which made a lot of sense to him. He recently approached me with a big smile saying that he and his wife have decided that they aren’t going to wait until they have their house decorated, remodeled, and perfectly clean—they’re going to start bringing people home now! The smile on his face made its way to my heart!

4. We had several couples over one Saturday night—and I told them all to bring their favorite aprons. Well, of course, the men thought I meant the women (but I had predicted that, so had picked up some $2.99 aprons at Kmart sale) and put them on them when they came in the door. They grumbled a little as I gave out assignments: the men had to figure out how to cook crepes via some YouTube research while the women found a recipe (online) and got started. While the men were swirling the batter and flipping crepes, the women were making fillings (sweet and savory). When we sat down to eat, everyone RAVED about the food. You would think this group had never had decent food before! When they finally left, one of the gruffest men commented on how much fun they’d had!

5. Sometimes our guests get a chance to have a part in something BIG: We’ve watched guests support each other, pray for each other, participate in artwork for our home, shovel our elderly neighbors’ driveway, and even split wood for our wood stove.

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We’ve watched guests support each other, pray for each other, participate in artwork for our home, shovel our elderly neighbors’ driveway, and even split wood for our wood stove.
Flowers are beautiful creations of God. They come in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. They grace our homes and churches. They even show up on the job and are a part of many important events—holidays, celebrations, funerals, baby blessings, weddings, birthday parties, etc. We cannot seem to do without them. However, they come with drawbacks, objectional features, and peculiar traits. Some roses have painful thorns, calla lilies turn brown and ugly after a few weeks, orchids are quirky about how much water they want, and bird of paradise plants are extremely fragile and territorial. But we still love flowers because of the aesthetic richness that they bring to our lives despite the issues we must deal with to enjoy them.

Our church members are like flowers. They are the most beautiful creations of God with various characteristics and inescapable needs. Just think—what would our churches be like if we did not have the diversity, distinctiveness, and originality of our members that make up the very essence of our churches. We love church members and want them around, but we shy away from their difficulties and the effort we must put forth to live with them peaceably. We must strive for peace with one another—a mandate from God’s word (Mark 9:50).

Establishing positive relationships with church members can prove to be challenging at the very least. However, a ministerial spouse entering a new church environment may find it invitingly provocative to meet the challenge.

As a preacher’s kid (PK) who had a wonderful example of a ministerial spouse, my mother, and as a pastoral spouse myself, I have learned a few things about establishing and maintaining positive relationships with church members. No matter where our members are on the spectrum, they have basic needs and expectations (though many times those expectations are unrealistic). If the truth be told, our needs are the same as theirs. We were members before we became ministerial spouses. In this short attempt to give some practical suggestions to ponder, we will look at a few areas that may prove to be helpful in our desire to “just get along” in the place where God has assigned us.

Three things to understand
In my interactions with church members, the Holy Spirit has brought to my attention three important factors that are essential to understanding how to develop healthy, positive relationships:

1. Church members are fallible human beings who need constant forgiveness as they attempt to follow God’s command to work out their own salvation (Phil. 2:12). They may believe that the blood of Christ has cleansed their sins and secured their eternal life, but retraining the human nature is another story. Members must exercise determination, diligence, and perseverance which takes time and patience. This is the struggle that is visible in forms of mistakes and failings.

   Oswald Chambers stated in his classic devotional, My Utmost for His Highest*, “No man is born either naturally or supernaturally with character, he has to make it.” We can trust God to do His will in the lives of every member we interact with.

2. Church members desire fellowship. We know this to be true because they take the time to come to church each week seeking God’s word, participating and associating with other believers, and receiving comfort and care from each other. Koinonia—
companionship, and an experience of community in a unified body—is a necessity for our members.

3. Church members require church to be a safe place. They want to believe that their sensitive and painful issues can be kept in trust and confidentiality. They do not want to sign any confidentiality documents or such, but at times they simply need a catharsis that only requires a listening ear and a closed mouth. No human judgments necessary and no criticism allowed.

Positive relationships

In light of church members’ needs and our call to ministry as ministerial spouses, it is appropriate to say that we need each other. Church relationships should depict interactions filled with encouragement and support (Heb. 10:14-25). We should find ourselves in prayer and study together. Playing and socializing together is also necessary. Honest dialogue and balanced collaboration should be our best commodities. Making the community a priority and sharing in giving service to others will help make a complete picture of what God’s house should look and feel like.

Let us explore the qualities God has given us to become effective relationship builders.

- Authenticity – Members will be naturally drawn to us when we are authentic. Knowing and understanding our strengths and weakness can translate into strong leadership. Authenticity gives us confidence and the freedom to interact with fellow members within the realm of our God-given purpose. It gives us the ability to consider the ideas and feelings of others. We will find ourselves focusing on possibilities and opportunities for relationship-building. It helps us realize we may lose some battles but ultimately win the war. The quality of authenticity helps us become relationship-oriented, reflective, and transparent. It will help members to trust us and be more likely to follow our leadership.

- Vulnerability – Vulnerability is a characteristic that comes straight out of Calvary’s playbook. Being willing to give even when it hurts is a risk that comes with relationship-building. Christ was willing to lay down His life for mankind. He died so that we could establish a relationship with the Father. In the same manner, we die for our church members/friends (1 John 3:16). Not physically, but we die to criticism, negative attitudes, unrealistic expectations, superiority, and judgment to bring our church relationships in harmony with heaven’s principles. Vulnerability puts us on the same level as our members. It helps them see our humanity and realize we are like them.

- Genuine Kindness - There is something magical about genuine kindness—being friendly, generous, and considerate without ulterior motives. We all know that it represents the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes us sensitive to others’ needs. When members sense we care about them, they will begin to trust us and know we are reliable friends.

God has equipped us to build and develop positive, harmonic relationships in the churches we serve. Determination and diligence will be our taskmasters to keep us focused and relationship driven. Remember, we are never alone in this endeavor (Heb. 1:13-14). Let us keep Christ in our view and never forget to adhere to the Matthew 11:28 call for the answer to all our questions, frustrations, and confusion in working with His people. “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (NLT).


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What practical steps can I take to make church members feel safe in confiding in me?
2. How can we be non-judgmental when dealing with church members that may be promoting opposite agendas?
3. How should I react when a church member shares rumors/information about another member?
4. A pastoral family is often viewed by the church members as being somewhat exemplary. Is it possible to be too vulnerable? If so what and how much should I share with church members?

Paula K. Brown is an educator, pastor’s wife, certified educational mentor/coach, and the president and co-founder of PEB Ministry, a non-profit organization serving troubled youth.
Conference Ministerial Spouse leaders may select one application per year & send to donnajackson@nadadventist.org

1. Applicant information

Conference/Mission/Union ____________________________
Contact Person ____________________________
Phone ____________________________
Email ____________________________

Name of Project: ____________________________
City ____________________________
State ____________________________

Project Manager: ____________________________
Email ____________________________
Phone (cell) ____________________________

2. Description of Project

3. Overall Objectives

a) Planning; alignment and collaboration with your union or conference/mission ministerial spouse (MS) team, administration, ministerial department and other departmental staff

b) Preparation; identifying/assessing the needs of the target group or area

c) Assessment of participants’ expertise and resources and matching this with the needs of the target group

d) Orientation or training of participants for the project/ministry

e) Implementation; planned community outreach, reclamation, or proclamation evangelism, etc.

4. Action Plans

Share briefly how you plan to accomplish the objectives for this ministry:

a) Planning:

b) Preparation:

c) Assessment:

d) Orientation or training:

e) Implementation:

5. Financial Plan

North America Division .................................................. $ 1,000
Local Conference/Mission or Union** ................................ $ __
Other (?) ................................................................................ $ ___
Grant Guidelines

A Purpose of Grant:
To provide seed money, ideas, and opportunities for ministerial spouses (MS) to demonstrate, within the North American Division, the compassion and love of Jesus to the community and to grow His kingdom.

B Criteria and Features:
1. The grant is to be spent on outreach work targeting the community (rather than nurturing members).
2. Union or conference or mission ministerial spouse leaders will decide, with their MS teams, who in their territory will receive the grant. Conference and union MS leaders may divide the grant – plus whatever matching amount is given by their conference or union, among up to four pastors’ spouses who are the first to apply or to spend it on training pastors’ spouses on outreach ministry or by purchasing outreach resources to be loaned out to pastors’ spouses for ministry.
3. Each conference/mission and union leader will apply directly to the NAD Ministerial Department (through the NAD Ministerial Spouse Leader) for the grant money and when the application is accepted, the $1000 grant will be sent to the president of the MS leader’s conference, mission or union.
4. Values that are encouraged are: *collaboration *community engagement *discipleship *sustainability of ministry.
5. A short written report with pictures or video is requested at the end of the year or completion of the project.

C Ministries to Consider (we welcome your ideas!)
- After school tutoring
- Caretaker’s ministry (single mom’s, parents’ time out)
- Children’s ministry
- Compassion ministry – eg. God in Shoes, to abused, refugees, food insecure, families of prisoners, homeless, water insecure (Flint water crisis)
- Evangelism (public proclamation) and Bible studies
- Family focused ministry
- Health focused ministry eg. CREATION Health, Best Pathways to Health
- Prayer ministries – eg. Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, HOPE (Houses of Prayer Everywhere) Heals
- Reclamation of former members
- Recovery ministries for the grieving, divorced and addicted
- Refugee outreach

D Resources to Consider (among many):
- CREATION Health (Florida Hospital)
- Homes of Hope & Health by John, Millie & Wes Youngberg (Advent Source)
- Help! I’m a Parent by Pamela & Claudio Consuegra (Advent Source, ABC)
- Jesus: Who is He? by John and Millie Youngberg (Advent Source, ABC)
- New Beginnings (evangelism PP in many languages) (Check with ASI)
- Breakfast with the Mayor by Don Jacobson (ABC)
- Recovery ministry resources such as: Journey to Wholeness (Advent Source), Grief Share and Divorce Care - for adults and children (Church Initiatives)
- Tracing the Footsteps of Jesus by Tony Moore (ABC)
- Truth for Youth - in 5 languages (Young Disciple Store)
- Welcome to the Family by Claudio Consuegra (Advent Source)

E NAD Sponsored Compassion/Evangelism Union Projects

Begun in 2016, the NAD Ministerial Spouses Association will annually invest up to $10,000 in one or two projects proposed by union ministerial spouse leaders, with the involvement of at least one conference ministerial spouse leader in that union and will invite the participation of many ministerial spouses within the union or beyond (along with the church members in the vicinity of the project). The union ministerial spouse leader will submit, preferably six months prior to the suggested date of the event or beginning of a ministry, the project proposal including a project coordinator and an estimated budget plan that has been agreed on by the partnering conference(s).

2016 Projects:
- April 16 & 17 – Flint Water Distribution – In Flint, Michigan (Lake Region and Michigan Conferences) in partnership with two Flint churches: Fairhaven Seventh-day Adventist Church and Eternal Life Seventh-day Adventist Church. 10,000 bottles of water, thousands of baby and adult wipes and hundreds of prayer cards were distributed plus need surveys were done by approximately 20 ministerial spouses, six pastors and four pastors’ children coming from 3 unions and four conferences. (NAD Ministerial Department invested $1,400 plus an additional $1000 in a follow-up Fairhaven Church Kids’ Health Fairs initiative.)
- April 27-29 - Your Best Pathways to Health Refugee Support – Los Angeles, California (in partnership with Southern California Conference and NAD Adventist Refugee/Immigrant Ministries) Congregations supporting refugee groups in the LA vicinity were invited to invite refugees to the April Pathways And provide translators and other volunteers as well as to nurture ongoing friendships with community attendees. Pastor Vinh & Cynthia Nguyen coordinated this outreach to 16 language groups & their team organized approx 600 translators. As well, min spouses various min spouses volunteered. https://onecms.com/146869/564b47e5bc
(NAD Ministerial Dept invested $10,600 and NAD Adventist Refugee/Immigrant Ministries invested $10,000.)

2017 Projects:
- Aug 19 & 20 – Kids Community Health Fair – Washington, Georgia (in partnership with South Central Conference, Southern Union Conference and NAD Ministerial Dept) About six churches participated in staffing a health fair for kids featuring the eight stations of Kids CREATION Health held in a community center in the small community of Washington, Georgia. Over 100 children participated and received back packs for school.
- Sept 8-10 – Hear Their Voices Anti-Trafficking – Kansas City, Kansas (in partnership with the Mid-America Union Conference, Central States Conference, Kansas-Nebraska Conference, Iowa-Missouri Conference, Rocky Mountain Conference plus congregations within Kansas City) The four prong project involved a) Sabbath afternoon door-to-door literature distribution on anti-trafficking, b) a Saturday night program in a civic auditorium featuring music and speeches by outstanding lawyers and the founder of a local organization that targeted trafficked women c) a Sunday outdoor expo featuring about 12 stations and kids activities plus speeches d) fundraising via a website that we created and throughout the week-end for Veronica’s Voice – which runs a transition home for those exiting the life-style. (NAD Ministerial Dept invested about $13,000 and NAD Women’s Ministries donated $1,000, the union and conferences also invested a large amount and much help from various departmental directors.)

F Some past conference-approved projects of ministerial spouses (all targeting community or non-active members)

- Children’s summer reading program
- CREATION Health training
- God in Shoes/Spa
- Community art classes
- Youth reading evangelism series
- Food & care to community sick/shut-ins
- Ministry to grieving
- Women’s book club
- Discipleship of non-active members
- Health programs
- Bible study/min group outreach
- Health resources for evangelism
- Kids community choir
- Heart Call reclamation
- God’s Closet families ‘Parents’ Night Out’
- EPIC girls night out (arts, crafts, jamming)
- Community babies health & physical needs
**Videos**

**Ministering to Chaplain’s Spouses**
- Debra Anderson
  - https://vimeo.com/295830117

**Discipleship Coaching**
- Nick Howard
  - https://vimeo.com/295829810

**Gateway Skills**
- Nick Howard
  - https://vimeo.com/295829931

**Motivating & Influencing Others**
- Barbara Yoli-Davis
  - https://vimeo.com/295830221

**Restoration in Our Families**
- Jerry & Janet Page
  - https://vimeo.com/141545323

**Cultural Intelligence**
- Carmelo Mercado
  - https://vimeo.com/206423488

**Surviving and Thriving Through Transitions**
- Cheryl Doss
  - https://vimeo.com/295830510

**Married to a Porn Addict**
- Bernie & Christina Anderson
  - https://vimeo.com/31602206

**Resource Articles**

**Facilitating a Small Group Discussion**
- Faith A. Hunter
  - https://vimeo.com/295830117

**Forgiveness Resources**
- Karen Holford
  - www.nadministerial.org/site/1/PDFs/At%20Home/Forgiveness-Resources.pdf

**How to Find a Counselor**
- Laurie Snyman
  - https://vimeo.com/295830510

**Maintaining a Healthy Emotional Balance**
- Karen Holford
  - https://vimeo.com/295830117

**NAD Ministerial Spouse Mentoring Resource**
- Desiree Bryant
  - https://vimeo.com/295830117

**NAD Pastoral Family Stressors Research Report**
- Andrews University
  - https://static1.squarespace.com/static/571690422b8ddee5df762d8e/t/5a270b93652dea92b0bc7859/1512509803573/Family+Stressors.pdf

**Treatment Centers Directory**
- Laurie Snyman
  - https://vimeo.com/295830510

**Understanding Pastoral Burnout**
- Ivan Williams, Sr.
  - https://vimeo.com/295830117

**Wing-it Box**
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind
and with all your strength.

The second is this:
Love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:30-31 (New International Version)