Youth, Leadership, and the Church

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Recommended Citation
Bell, Skip, "Youth, Leadership, and the Church" (1999). Faculty Publications. Paper 11.
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Youth, Leadership, and the Church

T he cliché is used a thousand times. “Youth are the future of the church.” Often it is corrected; “Youth are the church of today.” Too often the words mean nothing.

Are we a youth oriented church? Perhaps. We do invest heavily in Christian education. And I believe Adventists over 30 earnestly want youth to grow spiritually and share ministry. However, some changes are needed before our churches can truly claim the distinction of youth orientation.

1. Some elders, deacons, clerks, and other church leaders should be teens and young adults. I am not referring to “junior deacons.” As positive as those apprentice­ship positions are for juniors and earlites, they are not a substitute for investing leadership in those who reach 15 or 16. Why is it that junior deacons disappear at 16 and do not reappear again until they are 25? Is the scripture opposed to a 19 year old being ordained as a deacon? Give leadership in our churches to youth.

2. Be sure there are at least three youth on the church board. We may object that difficult issues demand life experience. Would you agree that evangelism, church growth and spiritual nurture are the most important issues for your church board? Who is better prepared to understand the unique spiritual issues of teens and young adults than others their own age? Who can plan for youth evangelism better than youth who are living as disciples of Jesus? Who better can assure that your worship is meaningful for youth and young adults?

3. Revise the constitutions of local conferences to mandate at least three people on the conference executive committee who are teens or young adults. Our conference has made provision for one such member—I hope the provision will be expanded. The church should not plan and develop policy without a generation represented. If we do we will become stagnant and irrelevant.

4. In about two years we will meet again as a Union Constituency. Let’s revise our constitution to seat three youth or young adults as members of our executive committee—for the same reasons.

Deeper issues guide our response to these and other suggestions. Let me address just three.

Trust—Are we able to trust a generation with different life experiences than ours with responsibility?

Fear—We value the church. We are afraid of what might be lost if inexperienced people make mistakes.

Understanding—Culture and experience constantly change. Language, dress, music, attitudes; they can all seem strange to observers separated by 15 or 20 years.

Since I am a parent I have had the privilege of observing many young people in our home, on family trips, and in casual gatherings at our schools in the past 10
years. My impressions are clear. Youth and young adults today have the capacity for deep and authentic spirituality. They enjoy life most when they are serving. Their discernment for spirituality in worship is exceptional. They place a high value on devotional life. And they eagerly anticipate Christ’s return. Not all Adventist young people, of course, share these attributes. But probably a higher percentage do than my generation, and at their age they are more likely to turn their hearts to Jesus. Adventist young people can be trusted. They will lead our church to a more authentic spirituality. Our church will be a better church if they insist that our ministries become relevant. We do not have to fear losing what is essential. While the music or expression of youth may vary from my generation it will not lack in true devotion. When given the responsibility they will renew foundational beliefs. I hope these words challenge your thinking, stir conversation, and create some change.

Skip Bell is president of the New York Conference

Special Offering Appeal for Haiti
SABBATH, JULY 31, 1999

As part of its mission outreach the Atlantic Union has approved the taking of a special offering for Haiti on Sabbath, July 31, 1999.

The Haitian Union Conference is among the fastest growing unions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Organized in 1989, it comprised two missions, 300 churches, and 136,026 members. By the end of 1998, due to incredible growth, it was necessary to restructure the union into four conferences. The number of churches jumped to 948, the membership to 214,031. The total growth in nine years is 78,000 members.

However, the fast growth makes it very difficult for church housing. About 200 churches are housed. There is a need to house 748. These churches are between 100 and 1000 members. They meet everywhere: under tents, under trees, in private homes, etc.

Maranatha International has offered a package deal. If the Haitian Union would come up with US$300,000 it will build 50 churches, which is US$6000 per church. What can you do to help?

We trust that the Lord will impress your heart to give generously as did the people of Israel at the construction of the Temple: “The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord . . .”—1Chron. 29:9.

If you are moved by the Holy Spirit and feel that you should share some of the blessing that you have received by sponsoring some churches, please give generously for this Special Offering Appeal for Haiti. Thank you and may the Lord continue blessing as you willingly give for His cause.

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