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The Monthly Elders' Meeting

CARL COFFMAN

IS THERE a need for a monthly meeting of the local board of church elders? Some pastors hold such a meeting regularly, some do not. Is the monthly meeting of the church board adequate to care for the business of a growing church? Is *another* meeting with the elders simply adding to the demand on one's time? Or is there a purpose for such a meeting in order to enrich the local church through more effective ministry of its local elders? Would not such lead to closer unity of the entire

church, and contribute to a more rapidly maturing church, as well as to the finishing of God's work?

The varied practices that exist in different churches relative to an elders' meeting may reflect the fact that the need for and purpose of the elders' meeting has not been included in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.

The *Church Manual* does state that the office of elder ranks as "the highest and most important" in the organization of the local church (page 80, 1971 edition). In light of this, it seems imperative that some organization and possibly some training be instituted in order to enable the church elder to accomplish his best while serving in the high office entrusted to him by God and the members of the church.

A regular monthly meeting of the board of elders can be a strengthening and unifying factor for the church. First of all, it affords the pastor an opportunity to counsel with a group of mature men whose experience and dedication can be very valuable to him in finding a way through both routine business and difficult problems. Foolish the leader who risks mistakes in leadership when he has a group of associates in the local church who can assist him to find the wisest course of action. Unity, strength, and confidence result where the pastor and elders work together to find the most effective ways of furthering God's work.

If the elders' meeting is scheduled a day or two before the monthly church board meeting the elders can have an opportunity to suggest items that should be discussed by the board members. Thus the elders' participate in the actual planning of the board agenda. If difficult items are to be presented to the board, the pastor can seek the guidance of the elders and find the very best way in which that item can be presented and handled at the board meeting. The writer has seen quite a number of serious clashes avoided as the result of this careful study with the elders beforehand. The danger that some might see here of an attempt by the pastor and elders to "railroad" an item through the board meeting is, of

course, something that will be avoided by those involved in Christian church leadership.

The elders' meeting is *the* place for making assignments in connection with their work. Sabbath platform schedules can be discussed and agreed upon. In our next month's column we will discuss the guardianship program, which enables the elder to assist new members to grow spiritually. It is vital that this program, if used, be reviewed monthly so that the elder, the newer church members involved, and the pastor can work at maximum effectiveness for a healthy church.

An important function that should be part of the regular meeting of the elders is a generally overlooked one. If the elders are to work at peak efficiency certain items of training should become a regular part of the agenda. This might take only ten to fifteen minutes per meeting, and in case of pressure of business would not have to be included every month. But the local elder's service in areas such as how to handle the announcements properly, especially last-moment items, how to pray in public, how to call for the offering, what to include in a benediction, how to visit a non-member or backslidden member, even a layman's course in homiletics, and other areas pertinent to the elders' service can be strengthened in brief training sessions. This idea of training will be discussed in detail later in this series.

Certainly, the regular monthly elders' meeting is crucial to a well-functioning church. The first step toward recognizing the need for conducting such meetings regularly is that of understanding that elders and pastors must work together as an effective "team" for the furtherance of the work of God's church. When we recognize this the need to continue this important counseling and training session will be evident, and we will reap the very positive results certain to follow.

Where the church is very small and there are perhaps only two or three elders it would still be well for the pastor to meet with them on a regular basis to plan the work together. 