

Things We Pastors Do and Don't Do

By Barrington H. Brennen

My Life, Part 1

Introduction

At the end of November this year, I will celebrate almost 42 years since I started work (June 12, 1978) as a minister of the gospel in the Adventist Church. It has been a wonderful journey. At times it was very challenging, painful, and very few times, discouraging, but it was sweet overall.

I started out the ministry with this philosophy: **“If I am going to be an ordinary pastor, I do not want to be one at all.”** This has driven me to think out of the box. This has empowered me to be creative and innovative. I know also, I have been the laughingstock of some, and others thought I was stupid doing what I was doing. There were still others who looked up to me and valued and respected what I was doing.

One outstanding pastor told my wife thirty-five years ago that I will never make it as a pastor. He was proven wrong. He measured me by his standard at the time. Believe it or not, within ten years, he changed his mind.

My free thinking and openness afforded me to be observant of human beings. There were times when I shared my observations or suggestions to fellow colleagues, they did not take them seriously. However, in my own way, I sought to be genuine and real. I wanted to be an authentic Barrington Henderson Brennen, and no one else. Now looking back, I have seen that everything I have shared or observed has proven to be true. But some are still not listening. One thing I have learned it is this; tradition is very, very hard to break. We will let it take us to the grave even though we know it is causing cancer in our bodies.

My gift of administration has been a stronghold for my success. Organizing, having regular office hours, forecasting and long-term planning, removing the “debris” out of worship services, visitation, etc., have been my strengths. Yet, some, even members, thought I was not “spiritual” enough. I did not preach like most pastors. I did not make long altar calls like some others. But it was a sweet journey. However, my sermons oftentimes spoke directly to the needs of the members.

I also acknowledge one of my greatest weakness as a pastor. It was lack of following through at times. That is not taking a plan to its completion.

As a pastor, I learned I had to fight the battle in my own armor. If someone laughed at my “amour” that would have been their problem, and not mine. I was not afraid to be myself. Quickly in ministry I learned not to be ashamed or embarrassed because I was not asked to do something. Even when I was not asked because they did not ask me because would not like the way I would do it. My congregational prayers where simple, clear and direct. I wanted them to be truly like a conversation with God. As for as possible I avoided the jargons, clichés, and long platitudes.

I know I have failed at times. I know I have been successful many times. That's the beauty of ministry and having successful career.

And now my service as an active pastor is coming to an end. I will be transitioning on November 30, 2019. I will not be "retiring" but transitioning. To explain, retirement is a transition to a new way of living. I will still preach on Sabbaths when asked, sing or play the organ. However, I will be in a different career as a psychotherapist, motivational speaker, presenter, consultant, etc.. I will be writing, conducting workshops and seminars and doing major national and international research with my wife, Annick, who stayed by my side for more than 42 years. I could not have become who I am without her. She encouraged me, lovingly criticized me, admonished me, helped me, supported me, and was real to me. She served as one of the best treasurers, community services leader and children's ministries leader, in a few of the churches I served.

Do you realize what has been one of my pet peeves? When I lived on the family of islands, I remained there during all Christmas, New Years, Easter holidays, etc. I wondered why many pastors did not do that. I reasoned, "How could I effectively pastor if I was not there during every holiday. How can I understand the traditions and celebrations if I am not there?" Our first child was even blessed in Mount Thompson Church, Exuma, The Bahamas, by Pastor Kenneth G. Vaz. The member were surprised but honored and blessed that we did that.

And now, I thought I would share a few points I have found to be true as a pastor. Some are painful and some not so painful. Others will just be good information that can transform your life. Kindly read right to the end.

I am going share about the following:

1. Welcoming of visitors
2. The bulletin and website
3. Blessing of infants
4. Making the appeal
5. The Communion Service
6. Preaching style and visitation
7. The racial/national divide.

Authentic Ways to Welcome People in Church

"Please, do not call my name or ask me to stand."

I have seen it and proved it. Welcoming a visitor to church from the pulpit by calling their names and/or asking them to stand, it more negative than positive practice. It is not the best thing to do and it is not a good tradition we have. For some visitors, it is embarrassing and frightening. The real welcome of a visitor is at the parking lot, entrance door, and by the person they are sitting beside; and not from the pulpit.

Over my four decades of pastoring in many settings, I have seen the shock, shame, and embarrassment, on the faces of some visitors when asked to stand. Although will not be every visitor, however, I have noticed it every time there is a request for visitors to stand.

In a certain church the visitors were asked to stand and introduce themselves. There was one visitor all alone in the third row in the front. She did not stand. I watched her body language and it was clear to me that she was regretting that she was sitting there. Finally, it was her time to stand and give her name and where she was from. The one giving the welcome, not noticing her uneasiness, insisted that she stand. She stood, with expressions of embarrassment and disgust on her face, and just gave her first name. It seems he did not notice her embarrassment. She was again asked where she was from and she muttered, "Baptist." I felt her embarrassment that day.

I learned not to do this within ten years of my being a pastor. Thank God! Many times I have been given notes on the platform to recognize a visitor, and never did it.

I said earlier that one of the first ones to truly make a visitor feel welcome is the greeter at the door. In the Elder's Digest 2001 article, "Greeters are VIPs in the Church" by Sildete Lopes, it states:

"As a greeter in your church, it is your primary responsibility to let visitors know they are welcome. As a visitor, they are a guest of your church. When they pass through the church doors, it is your responsibility to see that they are served and that their needs and concerns are met. It is your responsibility to see that they are comfortable and treated hospitably."

When you go to visit a home for the first time, your level of comfort when entering the home, would be determined how you feel welcomed by the one who opened the door to let you in. Our emphasis on calling names from the pulpit is a laissez-faire attitude, easy-way-out approach. Any other way calls for planning, creativity, and hard work. To reiterate, is it fair then for me to say that maintaining the old system of calling names of visitors is a demonstration of poor planning, stubbornness, and kind of a legalistic approach to not doing what is best?

Are there exceptions? Well, some might think there are some exceptions, but in reality, there are no exceptions with the context I am speaking. The context I am speaking is only dealing with authentic visitors—those people who come on their own volition or who were invited by a friend or member to "just come and worship with us today." I am not talking about a member who was at home sick and the entire church was prayer for him or her. I am not talking about the students who are home for the summer. I am not talking about a person who was specifically invited for a special service because of his or her position or duty in the community/country. However, it is imperative we do not go overboard with these either.

The challenge many have is when another Adventist pastor visits the church, or a pastor for another faith is seen in the congregation. We make a mistake by thinking that this person came for other reasons than just visiting. It even gets worse if the person is an outstanding leader in the community or governmental official who comes on his or her own volition to visit. We should not feel compelled to recognize these persons.

I have been told over and over by visiting pastors and governmental officials who visited some of the churches I pastored, that they were just visiting as a citizen. In reality, they were searching for another experience. Some of them have told me "Not to recognize them."

When we do recognize them, we destroy the reason they came and inflate their ego. If a governmental official has a program of visiting churches in the community and calls ahead of time to inform the pastor, this person can be recognized but should not be asked to speak. The person might want his or her constituents to know that he is connecting to the people that way.

“10 of the Best Ways to Make Visitors Feel Welcome at Church”

Recently I came across a very good article entitled “10 of the Best Ways to Make Visitors Feel Welcome at Church.” I thought it was important to share these points. Note carefully.

1. Have a great church website: You get one chance to make a great first impression, and your church’s website is often the first interaction a visitor has with your church. The website will share that services start and end times. Displaying the start and end time of your service lets visitors know when to arrive, and how long they can expect to stay.
2. Easy parking: Your new visitors have your address and are excited about their first visit to your church, but they’re nervous, too!
3. Friendly Greeters: Greeters are the first points of contact for new visitors. They can make anxious guests feel cared for and comforted as they navigate the hectic first few minutes of arriving at your church. Keep in mind that all greeters should receive some training on best practices. They should be friendly but not overwhelming, able to answer any questions, and able to direct visitors to any part of the building. Above all, they need to be good people readers!
4. Interior Signs: Visitors need to be able to know where to go as soon as they walk through your doors. Yes, you have greeters in place, but they could be occupied with other guests. Plus, if a guest is on the shy side, they might prefer finding their way on their own. This means you need signs that clearly indicate where to find where they need or want to go.
5. Inviting Atmosphere: What does this mean? Your church needs to be clean, and it needs to be well decorated. A dingy lobby or dirty restroom is an instant turn-off to church visitors. It shows them that you don’t take pride in the presentation of your church. It’s important to be good stewards of our spaces, so here are two must-haves for an inviting atmosphere: Clean spaces, welcoming décor.
6. Exceptional Childcare: A guest’s experience with your children’s ministry can make or break their first visit. Imagine how anxious parent and kids may feel about being separated when they visit a new church. Having an excellent children’s ministry can relieve their worries from the start!
7. Visitor-friendly sanctuary: Creating a sanctuary that invites visitors in is pretty straightforward: Don’t have large sections roped off. This might confuse visitors and make your church seem uninviting. Do have ushers available to guide visitors to seats if necessary. Smart ushers can even place visitors next to friendly individuals or families who will be sure to engage guests before or after the service. Don’t place new visitors right at the front. There’s no quicker way to make them feel like they’re under a microscope!

8. Acknowledge visitors during the service (read carefully): New visitors will be paying close attention to the order of your service. It's important to include them in ways they won't find embarrassing. Here's how: (1) **Welcome them, but don't single them out.** Simply say something like "If this is your first worship service with us, welcome! We're so glad you're here!". It's probably best not to ask them stand up or raise their hands. Some new visitors might not mind this, but it could mortify others! (2) Let your visitors know there's a visitors/connection card in their bulletin, and tell them where to turn it in. If you want to make sure you get these back, tell them to take the card to the welcome desk after the service in exchange for a free gift. (3) Don't make the offering an obligation. When it's time to pass the offering plates, let your guests know they're welcome to give if they would like to, but that it's not expected or required.
9. Post-service connection: After giving your guests clear instructions for what to do after the service, have volunteers head out to the info booth a few minutes before the service ends. This way they can be ready and waiting to greet guests as soon as they exit the sanctuary. Here's how you can connect with visitors: (1) Have greeters available to connect with guests. They can pray with guests, answer their questions, or just chat with newcomers to get to know them. If possible, have your pastor available to greet them, too! This will make new visitors feel extra valued. (2) Collect visitors/connection cards and offer guests a free gift. (*Notice that the gifts need not be given out from the pulpit or by ushers in the sanctuary. Remember, some visitors want to remain incognito—Brennen input*) You should still offer a gift even if visitors don't fill out the card. If they don't feel ready to offer up their contact information after one visit, a no-strings-attached gift will go a long way toward making them feel like their presence is genuinely appreciated. T-shirts, books, and mugs all make great gifts. Inform greeters of ways new visitors can get plugged in to your church. Some first timers may not be ready to commit right away, but others might be ready to sign up for a small group, prayer breakfast, etc.
10. Follow up: Now that you've collected those connection cards, don't forget to reach out! Timely contact with church visitors is key. If they took the time to fill out the card and give it back, chances are high they'll be happy to hear from you! (Brennen input: It is my view the follow-up should be done within ten days of the visit by a special "trained follow-up team of two persons).

Note carefully the emphasis of these points. Far too often our only emphasis is the welcome itself, and we forget about the weeds near the front door of the church, the trash and unkept hedges around the church, the broken-down, smelly bathrooms; broken glass in the main sanctuary, the poorly produced bulletin, the unrepaired front door locks, the cold and distant greeting at the door and parking lots. Oh! But what a "beautiful welcome" it was. Remember, this kind of beauty fades quickly. The long-lasting beauty is what touches the hearts.

To repeat, I have witnessed visitors refusing to standing or reluctant to stand every time I observe the welcoming of visitors in our churches in Nassau. I've seen this in all our churches. The irony is that we never know all the visitors and we always leave out some. Always. The safest and best way is not to recognize the visitors.

We like to embarrass ourselves. I have seen is very often. We ask for visitors to stand and no one stands or there are no visitors to stand. Why do we like to make ourselves look so pitiful?

How do visitors think about us when they come to our churches and notice how we keep it? I can tell you, visitors do notice how unkept and drab the church is. It turns them off. It is not a place of welcoming beauty.

I could never forget my first week at a church in the mid-1980s. While walking around on my get-acquainted visit, right away I noticed that a door was leaning on the wall in the back of the sanctuary blocking broken window. I was told that was placed there at least five years earlier to hide the broken window. No one, not even the pastors or deacons, sought to repair the window. It was treated as though it was impossible task to do. Within one week, I got that window repaired and others broken windows, nearby, for the total cost of \$25.

My first week at another church in the mid-2000s was introduced with large ugly rocks being used to keep the main doors of the sanctuary open. How nasty and tacky I thought it was. I said to the deacon, "How could we treat the church this way and we would not do this in our own homes." I asked them to purchase 12-inch door hooks and eyes to replace the ugly rocks. That "little" task was completed before my first sermon at the church for a cost of less than \$20. These are some of the very important "little thing" that make leadership so impactful.

The missing members. Here is another painful thing we do. Recognize or calling the name of a visiting missing member, or a member we know had "fallen away" and we are so happy to see them in church. I've heard a welcome like this: "We welcome Sister Henderson back home. Happy to see you. Where have you been? We missed you." I have seen these persons faces shrink with embarrassment; but we think we did something so honorable. Leave these returning saints alone. They did not return to be "honored" from the pulpit. They came to worship Jesus.

Our Need to Honor and Recognize Officials

A great problem I have regarding our worship services, funerals, wedding, etc, is that many of our pastors feel it is wise or appropriate to always ask governmental officials who attend these services to speak or that it is most apropos to if only, recognize their presence by pointing them out in the service. It is as though they are honoring us with their presence, and we must return the honor by asking them to speak or by recognizing them. This is a brutally wrong practice or tradition. It is as though the presence of these officials have diminished our own leadership authority in that setting and the only way to be elevated again is to seemingly "honor" the official by asking him or her to speak or by recognizing the person.

Once again, only if the official was previously invited to speak should the person be allowed to speak. There is no political or ethical reason we are to go beyond that in a worship service, funeral or wedding.

Repeated Intervals of Recognition

A practice seen among many Adventist pastors is the disturbing of the flow of a beautifully planned service by interrupting the process to recognize an official we would have noticed in

the congregation. I attended many funerals, memorials, or religious services, where this was done. During the welcome, all the known officials were welcomed. However, during the entire service the platform participants or chairperson would recognize someone and at any point in the service. I've seen this done three and four times in one service. It is a distasteful practice. The person did not come to be recognized. The person came to honor the memory of someone else, not him or herself.

However, if the person did to come to the service to have his or her ego stroked by our celebration of their presences, we are not to award their narcissistic-type attitude.

Note carefully that the person's position is not higher than the purpose of the funeral/memorial, worship services. This practice elevates the person high above the very intent of the service/meeting itself or the one we came to really honor.

My point is there is only one welcome. In that welcome do all the recognition that is appropriate. Make a general recognition also that can encompass all not specifically called by name. After that, it is totally rude to the service organizers, the sacredness of the service, and common dignity, to interrupt the flow to recognize someone, not matter who they are, even the President, Prime Minister or the Governor General of a country/institution.

A personal story of mine is a good example. When my mother died, careful and specific instructions were given to the funeral organizers/pastors, that absolutely no governmental official will be allowed to speak at the funeral—none. My father said the only duty of the platform persons would be to only recognize them one time and not to interrupt the service by continuing to recognize others just seen in the audience. At the service the Prime Minister at the time unexpectedly attended. He was surprisingly early. Yes, he was a friend of my parents and his parents were friends and neighbors of my parents. Also, the Prime Minister at the time was once the boss of my father. Nevertheless, the instructions were given.

Before the service began, four different individuals at different intervals came to me and my father requesting that the Prime Minister speak because "it was the proper protocol." Repeatedly, the message was sent to the pastor's office that the Prime Minister will not be speaking as instructed earlier. Note, that this will be a total of five times the instructions were clearly given.

The services began as planned. Midway through the service a spiritual leader on the platform felt compelled that it was "important" that the Prime Minister speak. Therefore, he got up and invited him to speak. I was livid when I heard the request. I could hear the disgust from those around me. I allowed five minutes to pass and then stood up (I was sitting in the front row) in protest. I remained standing looking straight forward, hoping the Prime Minister would get the message. I was angry.

How in the world this could have been allowed by intelligent leaders? I said to myself: "If he continued three minutes longer, I will go up and stand beside the organ and look towards the Prime Minister." Thankfully, he did end before three minutes, making his presentation one of the shortest—about eight minutes. Some people noticed that I stood up and thought I was rude. What about the disrespect and "rudeness" of a spiritual leader to so blatantly dishonor

the wishes of the family? What about the leader who could have respectfully declined to speak because it was a part of the program? Wasn't he/she out of order?

Here is something to think about. You can even put this in your bulletin. This can be your church's theme or philosophy. Here it is:

“Dear visitors, we do not call your names or ask you to stand in worship services, not even to make us feel good. We seek to connect to your heart by our care and love. We believe this is long-lasting and of greater importance.”

The Church Bulletin and the Website

I get the impression that most pastors do not understand the value and important of a good church bulletin. I say this because of what I have observed or do not observe in bulletins each Sabbath.

Let me tell you one of my secrets. It is this: **The bulletin is the face of the pastor each Sabbath. It is a pivotal point of effective leadership.** The beauty, clarity, and order of the bulleting is key. The information is of top priority. It appears each week, that many pastors just hand their preaching information to the church secretary/clerk with perhaps a little note from the pastor. The pastor is not concerned too much about what information is in the bulletin, order and format of the bulletin. Key information from the pastors or other leaders is absent.

I have attended Adventist churches when they were promoting an upcoming activity that the church will take part in on a given Sabbath. There will be lots of oral promotion and planning each Sabbath leading up to the day. However, on the actual day of the event, the bulletin does not even reflect what will take place that day. This is because the pastors do not understand and value the purpose and importance of the bulletin. The bulletin is disorganized, and perhaps, so is the pastor. The pastor does not realize that people determine there expectation of the service from the bulletin.

Another distracting and annoying practice is the announcing of every item on the program. This causes the platform to be filled with seven to nine individuals. Some pastors say that “they want to get people involved” as a reason to clutter the platform with unnecessary personnel. Some of you might have noticed that I am not usually on the platform during joint meetings. The main reason is I usually refuse to participate because I am being asked to announce an item that in my view, does not need announcing or can be done by another person on the platform.

Why in the world the platform must be packed with twelve people to announce a few items that really do not need to be announced? Far too many of us are ecclesiastical clutterers. I am convinced that we need a support group like an **“Adventist Pastoral Clutterers Anonymous,”** (APCA) an organization where pastors can seek help for being program clutterers. APCA can meet monthly at a confidential place (smile).

The bulletin is the pastor's face and personality. This means when someone looks at and reads the bulletin, that person is actually “looking” at the pastor's administrative ability to plan,

organize and transmit information. They can even determine if the pastor is thinking about them or sensitive to their needs. When things are missing out of the bulletin it makes the pastor appear disorganized or scatter brain. The bulletin is not a “by-the-way-here-it-is” tool. It is a most important implement to create and promote effective ministry in the church.

If pastors would take the bulletin more seriously there would be or can be fewer oral announcements on Sabbath. No one should be allowed to hand little notes to anyone on the platform with an announcement to give to the congregation. If a department forgets to send in an announcement ahead of time it must, under no circumstance, be injected into the service and not even mentioned from the pulpit after the service.

While I was pastoring at Maranatha Church in the mid-1980s, I had gotten the church board and congregation to accept that regular church board meetings will not be announced from the pulpit. It was successfully done. First, it was understood and clear that the church board was always on a specific day and time (unless an emergency). The announcement for the church board was in the bulletin two Sabbaths before the actual board. Items for the agenda was sent out. Board member were asked to observe the bulletin. I held firm to that plan and all board meetings were successful. This was also effectively done in other churches I pastored. Oh the power of the bulletin and effective pastoral leadership!

The Worship Service and the Bulletin. The program in the bulletin should present a beautiful symmetry and flow of the service. Every item is to be connected. The service is to be like a beautiful flowing stream of cool water. Most of our services are disjointed and cold, not because of the items themselves, but how the service is packaged.

Far too often the call to worship, announcements, greetings, scripture, have no connection to the sermon or songs. Here are other serious problems: The praise team will do their own thing. Sometime comments are made that are not in sync with the day’s theme or is in contradiction to what the preacher will be speaking about. There are times when persons on the platform will be handed a piece of paper with an announcement or promotion that is not even connected to what he or she supposed to be doing. I am shocked that they even have the audacity to make that announcement.

The introduction of every item is unnecessary and makes the service disjointed and unnecessarily longer.

Here is a major weakness in most of our services. The scripture, beautifully read, is given to set the tone for the spiritual message. After the scripture, the song is presented as an appetizer for the sumptuous meal. But what messes this up is when between the solemn scripture and beautiful musical meditation, there in an interruption called the introduction that immediately destroys the mood and flow. The introduction is a superfluous expression of verbiage that distorts the intent of what’s to come.

When the speaker finally starts to speak, he/she feels compelled to thank the one who does the introduction as though it is a service more about the speaker and not a celebration and worship of the Master. The speaker makes things worse by taking the congregation on another unexpected journey of wasted words and sentences (*“Thank you for your kind words of introduction. Remember the series that is coming up. . . It is good to see Sister Robinson*

today. . . How wonderful it is to have Pastor Harry and his wife visiting today”, etc.) that are not even related to the scripture or musical meditation nor the actual sermon. By this time the mood and preparation for the sermon created by the musical selection, has been lost.

The song is designed to prepare the congregation for a spiritual message, but we get announcements and reminders instead. What a mess! The poetry created with the scripture and song is lost and it takes the preacher fifteen to twenty minutes of valuable time to restore, even though he/she caused it. Pastors, I have learned to give all my remarks, promotions, commendation, during the welcome or announcements time.

When it comes to the blessing of babies, I have observed a disturbing practice over the years. It is the blessing of babies in an “appears-to-be make-shift service” between the Sabbath School and Worship Service. It seems to be a practice the we continue to do without any thought of the meaning or impact. For me, this practice diminishes the purpose of the blessing. I have never done this as a pastor. Even when pastors of another congregation were being requested to partake in the blessing, I held to my guns. I believe we should bless the infants during the Sabbath School or Divine Worship. It can also even be done on a Wednesday night. There can even be a special service alone at another time for the blessing.

Another problem is that the blessing of the baby usually looks ad hoc because there is no record of it in the bulletin. Yet, there will be literally dozens of visitors who would have come just for the blessing. My practice has been to have the blessing within the worship service, and it is mentioned in the bulletin just like the “Offering” or “Scripture” is mentioned. I also include the name of the infant being blessed and names of the parents. Pastors, even when I had two churches at one time, this practice did not change.

Pastors, think of the bulletin as the church’s “**Hansard**.” It keeps a record of all activities, details of programs/services, and list participants, etc. Five or ten years later when I looked back at a bulletin, I was easily be reminded what was the worship service all about and all these who participated. **Another way to describe the bulletin is that it also serves as the “Minutes” for the Sabbath activities and all other church programs and events.**

Dear pastors, we must find ways to elevate our services and display a higher level of professionalism, love, and compassion.

When it comes to churches having a website, I am extremely disappointed that there is such a disinterest by pastors for having a church website, even if it is just a “post card” website. That is a one-page website with the key information of the church—name, location, contact, pastor. In this modern day we need to understand that a ministry or business without a website is like a business without a telephone number and sign outside the store front. Please pastors, get the websites going. When I was at Johnson Park Church (1996 to 2000) we developed the first church website. Only the Conference and Johnson Park Church had websites at that time. It was a blessing to have visitors on a given Sabbath day who can to Johnson Park Church because they found us on the website. These would have been visitors locally or from overseas. I remember the first one was from Norway.

Making the Appeal

I am going to be very honest with you, just like I have been doing earlier in this article. I have extreme difficulty being in a service when a pastor is making a forceful, frightening appeal. I have seen pastors go down to persons wearing jewelry and speaking to them directly to “accept Jesus.” It is insulting. The pastor would be making some false assumptions. (1) Wearing of jewelry would mean you are not a Christian. (2) Weaning of jewelry means you have not accepted Jesus as your personal Savior. Pastors, please do not make this gross error. This is embarrassing. This is a distorting of the gospel. We are not to force people. It is an abuse of power. It is also legalistic and a corruption of the gospel presentation.

Also, there are many without jewelry or extravagant makeup who look pious but are as wicked and as one can be. But the preacher would pass these “wicked” persons when making the appeal and go directly to the one wearing the jewelry. Something this gives the impression that what matters most is numbers. “I cannot end this serious without baptizing a good number of people.” Appeals are not to be long and painful. They are to be short and encouraging.

Pastors, do not be ashamed when no one responds to the appeal. Do not drag it on and on making those that are standing tired and emotionally turn off. Sometimes during my appeals no one responded visibly. However, while shaking hands at the door, or during the next week, or by a phone call, someone would call who was in the meeting and say that he or she wants to be baptized.

If your goal is to get “numbers” (lots of baptisms), you might get the numbers, but most will not stay in the church. If your goal is to minister and care, you will get the “numbers” and most will stay. I have seen that in my ministry over the years.

Truthfully pastors, I have never been pressured by no one to produce numbers; even when there was pressure from the leaders. The conference leaders would not admit it, but they do, and really do pressure us. There were times I had a “required” goal of 25 baptism for the year and only twelve persons had been baptized with only two months left in the year. I was not one of those pastors who would succumb to the pressure to have an evangelistic serious to get the remaining numbers. Especially when I knew that that method was not my gift or calling. I knew my ministry was impactful. Most times, the remaining goal and more would have been reach simply by people responding to the care and ministry of the church.

My evangelism philosophy has always been this: **“Those we KEEP will win others.”** It is not “Those we win with get others. So, let’s win some more.” No. My focus has been on keeping and not winning at the expense of keeping. With this philosophy I have been a centurion a few times and have won over 1200 souls to Christ.

I am happy to say that when I left a church I would know where all of the members are whom I baptized. I would know that they are in church or I would **know** that they are not in church. My point is, many pastors do not even know if their members are in church or not.

The Communion Service

The Communion Service in the Adventist Church should be one of the most meaningful and beautiful services. When you speak to many members you will learn that they are only attending because “they have to” or they know the importance of it. Quickly in ministry I observed the following about how many pastors conduct the Communion Service: (1) It is treated as another service after the Divine Worship. (2). It is unnecessarily long and laborious. (3) It is lack of beauty and creativity.

For me, the Communion Service as another opportunity to minister and meet the needs of the attendees. Also, the Divine Worship Service on Communion Sabbath, is one service. In other words, the entire service is the Communion Service. The members should not get the feeling that they are attending two services. Usually, I preach my “Communion Sermon” of spiritual renewal the Sabbath before. Therefore, on the Communion Sabbath, the sermon/thought is short and focuses on renewal and celebration. There is a flow of items and beautiful music.

I usually seek to be creative by adding a feature that might include more music, poetry, etc. Over the years, I observed that many members joyfully look forward to coming to Communion Services I conducted. The length of the Communion Service was short and not longer than a regular worship services. They also wanted to see what it would be like the next time. One Sabbath there was Communion, baptism and baby blessing, and the service was not longer. It was just about careful planning and and organizing. All what was done was link into one theme—rebirth.

Preaching style and visitation

I have proven over the many years that there are two outstanding functions of the pastor that greatly matters (in addition to what was said earlier). They are providing meaningful, in-depth sermons that meet the needs of the members (feed them) and regular visitation (touch them). You might not be able to preach like Pastor E. E. Cleveland, but if your sermons are well prepared and presented and you visit all the members and respond to urgent needs, you will be an honored and a most blessed pastor. Your members will defend and respect you.

If you preach like T. D. Jakes or Henry Wright, or you preach like others who scream and shout a lot, making the members return shouts of “Amen” and do not visit, and you cannot be reached by phone or respond to urgent needs, your ministry is dead. They will say “Amen” in church, but they will still go home empty. They will even thank you and the door “for such a powerful message” but they will still go home empty. Don’t every think that shouting in church is always a sign of success. The combination of humble, meaningful preaching, combined with home visitation, is what really counts. When you join these two with all mentioned above, you will have a meaningful ministry.

Pastors, here’s another point that has been one of my strengths. **The pastors should know and visit every home/church/business near or around the church property.** The pastor should visit all institutions with his business card and meet the manager, and if possible, the proprietor. Sit and introduce yourself. Do not have a rushed meeting. Let the person know

who you are and what the church is doing. There can be a Sabbath that you have a neighborhood Sabbath for all who live and work around the church. But the goal is not to “invite to church.” The goal is to connect. Also, make it a point to return to visit once every year or two. Do the same with churches in your neighborhood. Visit the pastor during the office time. Sit and chat and share ideas. Connect.

While pastoring at Centreville Adventist Church during the time of 40th Independence Anniversary of The Bahamas, I invited all the pastors of churches in our neighborhood to attend a special independence service at the church. This was the first time in many decades this was successfully done. They were all invited before, but with letters only. How did I do it? I did not send letters at first. I established a relationship with all of them that remains to this day.

Three months ahead of the time, I made a personal contact. I first visited the pastors in their offices on regular days and established a relationship. I have had a tour of the church facilities. I insisted that I would also like to meet their spouses, which I did. I obtained their emails and telephone numbers. I invited them to the Independence Service that year. They all new that they will not be participating or speaking in the service but will be honored and recognized.

Before they came to our church, we had known a lot about each other and had been visiting each other’s office. I would have called them regularly for just a chat. By the time the day came they could not refuse to come. For the first time on a Sabbath, we had all five pastors and their spouses from all the neighboring churches. The official letter for the occasion was hand delivered by me to each pastor long after the relationship was established and the commitment to come. The letter was only needed for their formal record keeping.

Remember pastors, it is relationship that matters most.

The Racial/National Divide

The pastor is to be an agent of change, peace and harmony. The topic of “Social Justice” should be an important message coming from his/her heart. Also, the pastor must be seen as a lover of everyone, regardless of nationality, language or ethnicity. Pastors, avoid beating around the bush, using platitudes and stereotypical phrases and jargons. We need pastors who can speak to love and unity and demonstrate it. Today, we need peace among the Haitian, Jamaicans and Bahamians. Be that agent of change.

I pray that these thoughts will encourage you in your ministry. I will soon “drop the mic” for one phase of my life and pick up another mic. I will do my best to always minister when you ask me to preach, sing or play.

Pastors, remember that relationship matters most. Connect to the people. Meet their needs. Think out of the box. I had Barefoot Sabbath, Sharing Sabbath, Loving Sabbath, Right Side Up Sabbath, Creative Communion Services, Camp Meetings, Outdoor Sabbath and much more. Create your own. Be unique.

I can, and will share more in the future about my life and ministry.

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, JP

Minister of the Gospel

Counseling Psychologist

Marriage and Family Therapist

Nationally Certified Psychologist, USA

Board Certified Clinical Psychotherapist, USA

Certified Youth Leader (Commonwealth Secretariat)

Marriage Officer

Justice of the Peace