

**T H E M I N I S T R Y O F**

*Bible Studies*

You may be reading this because you have been asked to serve your local church through the ministry of the Lay Bible Minister. Or perhaps you serve on a church nominating committee and are wondering what the Lay Bible Minister is expected to do. In either case, if you understand the church as the body of Christ, and understand the call to ministry as experienced by each member, this will help you see the role the Lay Bible Minister fills within the local church.

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# *God supplies each person in the church with the resources for ministry — scripture, spiritual power, God's character and spiritual gifts.*

## **Bible Principles**

The last words of Christ before His departure from this world to those whom He had trained to carry on His work are of utmost importance to the church today. Notice His exact words: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8 KJV.

This command was given not only to all those who heard Him speak, but also to all who would accept Him in the ages to come. They were to make known to the world the story of the Father's love and salvation.

Revival and church renewal take place when members use their Bibles to witness for Christ. Ellen White has written of "a great reformatory movement among Gods people . . . Hundreds and thousands were . . . visiting families, and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world

seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence. Great blessings were received by the true and humble people of God" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 9, page 126.)

## **The Role of the Lay Bible Minister**

No other office in the church is more important than the work assigned to the Lay Bible Minister. He or she assists the pastor in reaching those who show an interest in the message God has given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Lay Bible Minister works with prospective members leading them to accept Christ and teaching them the beliefs of the Adventist church. In larger churches your work will be supervised by the Church Ministries Council or Outreach Committee, but in smaller churches it may be the pastor or an elder.

The Lay Bible Ministers in each congregation or district should form a support group to pray for one another and coordinate their work. Regular meetings to share experiences and learn from each other are essential.

## **Time Commitment**

A committed Lay Bible Minister will set aside a few hours each week for this ministry. Once you have started a Bible study it is necessary to meet with the students on a regular routine, usually every week. This is

important if you want to see the students make progress toward a decision to follow Christ. You will also find it a must to have time to prepare for your studies with prayer and meditation.

## **Appropriate Spiritual Gifts**

Some think that only those who have the gift of evangelism are called to serve as Lay Bible Ministers, but that is not necessarily true! Christ's command promises the strength and wisdom necessary for you to help others in their study of His Word.

The Holy Spirit may have bestowed one or more of the following spiritual gifts: The gift of teaching can be especially helpful. It is that ability that God gives to certain members to communicate in such a way that others will learn. The spiritual gift of exhortation or encouragement is useful to the Lay Bible Minister to guide people along in their spiritual growth. It is the ability to share words of comfort, support, and counsel in such a way that people feel helped. Of course the gift of evangelism can be very helpful. It is the ability to share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that they become followers of Jesus and responsible members of the Body of Christ. Perhaps you are inclined to shy away from claiming this gift because you compare yourself with professional, fulltime evangelists. Remember that this gift operates one-to-one as well as in large groups.

## **Activities and Events**

There are certain vital factors in giving Bible studies that lead to

success. These include two principles: First, you are giving the Bible studies in order to share Christ with others. Bible studies are not given merely to share theological information with someone who believes differently than we do. You will not see great results if this is your motivation. Jesus said the Scriptures are "They which testify of me." In your work Christ must be lifted up so He can draw men and women to Himself.

It is very important to present Christ and the plan of salvation first. If you use this approach, you will prepare the heart and mind of the student to receive and accept things that require change in his life.

Second, you must find ways to establish friendships with the people with whom you study. "Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart" (Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 193) A bond of confidence and friendship will keep the student from dropping out and make them willing to discuss topics which they fear. Listening skills are vital in this relational ministry. You will not want to preach or exhort, but witness by sharing your own relationship with Jesus Christ.

Where can you find good prospects to study with?

● **Your own family and friends:** Personal contacts will prove to be the best source of prospects. As you demonstrate the power of the gospel in your daily life and share your knowledge of the Scriptures, your friends and acquaintances will ask you questions. That will give you an opportunity to invite them into studies. Your daily prayer should be "Who today, Lord?"

● **Names from your pastor:** Your pastor meets interested people with whom he does not have time to study. Let him know that you are willing to give Bible studies. The first time you may want to ask him to

get the person started and then take you with him.

● **Literature Evangelists:** They meet about a dozen people a day who have some interest in religion. Tell the Literature Evangelist working in your area that you will be happy to follow up any interest that he finds in your area. Ask them to help you get started by taking you back and introducing you.

● **The Church Prospect File:** Every church should have an up to date interest file or prospect file in which the names and addresses of all those who have had some contact with the church are recorded. This should include all who have attended entry events such as Vacation Bible Schools, Community Services, Health Classes, etc. If your church does not have a prospect list, volunteer to help your pastor put one together for future use. If your church has such a file, you can start visiting those who seem to have the greatest degree of interest. Because of their background, they can prove to be good Bible students.

● **Door to door contacts:** A door to door survey to determine religious interest is sometimes an easy way to locate those who would like to study the Bible. Ask your pastor's help in finding one that will be easy for you to use. People contacted in this way usually require many months of friendship and study.

● **Direct Mail:** Many local conferences have success using direct mail with cards such as "Something Wonderful For You" which advertise free Bible studies. These mailings usually have a 1% to 3% response. The people you find this way usually take longer to make a decision because of the lack of an Adventist background, but many will eventually unite with the church.

## Training

You can study on your own. You can enroll in a correspondence course on how to give Bible studies by writing Home Study Institute at 6840 Eastern Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20012. A video training course called *Witnessing A Way of Life* will give you an in-depth view of how to systematically study the Bible with others. It can be obtained from your conference Church Ministries office.

The best kind of training is on-the-job training with your pastor or an experienced Lay Bible Minister. Ask your pastor to set up a training time for you to assist him in his work of giving Bible Studies.

Most local conferences offer training programs at campmeeting and during Lay Bible Ministry weekends. You can get information about these programs from your pastor or conference Church Ministries office. The North American Division Evangelism Institute in Chicago was set up primarily to train pastors, but they also accept some lay people for intensive instruction in how to be a Bible Worker. Atlantic Union College has a full B.A. program in Bible work.

## Tools for Ministry

There are a number of Bible study systems that are used in the North American Division. You will want to select the system that best meets the needs and matches the learning style of the person you work with.

The *Open Bible Method* is an approach in which the Lay Bible Minister reads the Bible text with the student following along and comments on the meaning of the text and ties it together into a study on a subject. Study outlines for this method are available, such as *Bible Studies You Can Give* by Jerry Johnson and Mary Walsh (Signs Publishing Company, 1972) or *Bible*

*Lessons for Catholics* by Mary Walsh (Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1967). A unique and very useful resource for round-table Bible studies is the *Encounter Bible Study Cards* in which the outline has been divided onto a set of small cards with one question and a Bible text on each card which can be passed around to encourage participation.

The **Audio-Visual Method** makes use of either filmstrips, slides or video and the student learns through sight and sound. The *Encounter*, *Encounter II* and *Good News for Today* Bible studies are available in slide or filmstrip format and *Truth for the End Time* is available in VHS and Beta video formats. You can obtain these from your ABC or local conference office. Your church may have a set you can borrow.

**Correspondence Courses** are available through the Adventist Media Center Bible schools. Printed Bible lessons are supplied to the student which he returns to the instructor by mail.

The **Delivery Method** is one in which printed lessons are delivered to the student who fills in answers. You return with two more lessons and pick up the completed lessons to be corrected and returned at the next delivery. *The Bible Says*, *The Real Truth*, *Good News for Today*, *Twentieth Century Bible Course* and *Encounter* printed lessons are all designed to be used in this way. Other series are available, including lessons in Spanish, French and other languages.

**Small Group Bible studies** are becoming very popular. This approach involves 6 to 12 individuals who gather to study the Bible. They

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*--Gospel Workers, 193--*

study the lesson in advance and discuss the conclusions they have reached at the weekly sessions. Available materials include *Window to Revelation*, the home Bible study materials published by the Oregon Conference. Their Resource Manual and the booklet *12 Steps to Leading Better Bible Studies* are especially helpful.

The **Self-study Sharing Method** asks the student to study a printed lesson on their own. Then they meet with you to go through the lesson. This last method has become the one most widely used by lay people giving Bible studies across North America because of certain advantages that it has. The Lay Bible minister can easily use this method without a lot of Bible knowledge and it encourages the student to study the Bible on his own.

## Resource Materials

*Witnessing for Christ* (Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1981) is the official manual prepared by the General Conference for church members involved in lay Bible ministry. The manual includes an instructor's guide for a lay witness training class.

*Winning* by D. E. Caslow (Pacific Press, 1981) is a handbook prepared especially for the Lay Bible Minister developed in the North American Division. It covers in

greater detail all of the duties and suggestions mentioned in this leaflet.

*Decisions: Persuading People for Christ* by Mark Finley (SDA Ministerial Association and Center for Continuing Education in Ministry, 1984) is a readable, practical book that focuses on the special skills needed to help people make decisions.

*A Simple and Easy Way to Study the Bible With Others* by Don and Marjorie Gray (Pacific Press, 1985) is the briefest and most practical how-to book available.

*Lay Bible Worker's Manual* is used in many conference programs. It was prepared by the Lake Union Conference Department of Church Ministries, and can be obtained from them if you cannot get a copy from your local conference or Adventist Book Center. All of the other volumes are regularly available in all ABCs in North America.

*Your  
Ministry  
Matters!*

## *Duties of the Lay Bible Minister*

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The work to which a person is called when he or she becomes a Lay Bible Minister can best be described as follows:

**1. Bible Studies.** Most of the time that the Lay Bible Minister has available will be used to conduct personal Bible studies with individuals and families who have expressed an interest in studying the Word of God. Each study will take one or two hours a week. A regular routine of appointments are important in order to build relationships and help people grow in discipleship.

**2. Inquirers Class.** Lay Bible Ministers assist with the Pastor's Bible Class and bring their students to this class as they begin to attend church. (Sometimes the special Sabbath School class for

prospective members is called the Discovery Class or Visitor's Class. It is often led by an elder or a Lay Bible Minister because the pastor has two or more congregations to work with each Sabbath and cannot attend Sabbath School.)

**3. Missing Member Visits.** From time to time the pastor may assign the names of former or missing members to visit. This will give you contacts with people with whom you will be able to study after you gain their friendship and confidence.

**4. An Undershepherd.** The Lay Bible Minister will help the pastor seek and find the lost. He or she provides the pastoral caring and attention which the pastor will not have the time to give to each prospective member. Often people turn to Christ and begin to think of joining a church at times of crisis in their lives. This means that the Lay Bible Minister must help to meet their emotional, economic and social needs as well as their spiritual needs and religious questions. Much time may be spent just listening. Time

will also be invested in helping prospective members to make friends among church members, attend classes that are important to their growth, such as stop smoking programs or family life seminars, and make use of the aid provided by Adventist Community Services and other social services.

**5. Finding Prospects.** A Lay Bible Minister is constantly on the alert for people who may be ready to enter into Bible study. He or she will be sensitive to possibilities among friends, relatives, work associates, visitors at church, newcomers in the community, participants in outreach seminars and those who respond to Adventist Media Ministries and awareness activities. And he will learn to invite prospects to begin Bible studies.

# The Caring Church Strategy

The ministry of the Lay Bible Minister is vital to accomplish the mission of your local church.

A balanced church program is just as important as any of the individual offices or functions of the church. Your ministry is given meaning and effectiveness as you fit into the overall mission that Christ has for your congregation. The Holy Spirit calls you to teamwork and cooperation with the other leaders in your church, according to a united plan of action.

What are the essential elements of a healthy local church? There are at least four fundamental activities that must be present in any Adventist church for it to be successful:

**1. Reaching the community.** Healthy churches discover the kinds of people who live in their area and

understand the needs of the people, so that they can provide activities designed to meet these needs and create a strong public awareness of the church.

**2. Winning people to Christ.** Healthy churches cooperate with the Holy Spirit in establishing meaningful relationships with those attracted to Christ, provide opportunities for them to become acquainted with His Word and His fellowship, and challenge them to become His disciples.

**3. Nurturing the members.** Healthy churches provide for the continuing spiritual growth of all their members through enthusiastic worship, interesting Bible study,

supportive friendships, and opportunities for significant service.

**4. Inspiring leadership.** Healthy churches have pastoral and lay leaders that help the congregation to identify the needs in the church and the community, clarify goals, gather the necessary resources and implement effective action.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.)

