

Elder Maximiser Training



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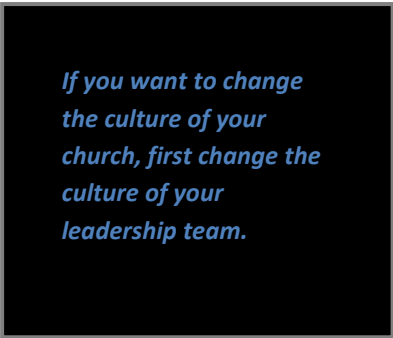
“The elders ... should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life, but that all may accomplish what they can according to their several ability. . . .” Ellen White Review and Herald 1888

The key role of the Elder is about creating ‘spiritual families’ (groups) that care for members that put members to work and welcome newcomers. The Pastor’s role is to support the elders in ensuring these groups are healthy and multiplying.

Often pastors in their legitimate desire as leaders to build greater health and purpose in their church approach change from a congregational viewpoint. They think they have to change the congregation’s mindset etc. They believe that they have the responsible, often on their own, to change the congregations thinking and behaviour. This can be a daunting task that is fraught with danger and can end up being very discouraging. It is important for pastors to understand that their greatest task is not changing the congregation but building a team of leaders who have the capacity through their influence to change the congregation. This is a much more doable scenario.

Change Agents

The best place to begin a change process is first with the leadership team. Scripture says, ‘the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore, to send out more workers to His harvest field.’(Luke 10:2) Most churches do not have enough elders and few who function effectively. If you want to change the culture of your church, first change the culture of your leadership team.



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The challenge for the Church today, as it has always been, is not a lack of people ready to join the church, but a lack of workers to bring them in. In a typical church, 80% of what happens is carried by 30% of the congregation. It’s very easy for church members to live a life where their discipleship is a small part of their life that doesn’t receive any regular attention. Their discipleship is not the centrepiece of their life. Who is going to remind them of their calling? Who is going to assist them to honour their calling, to organise their lives to be more in alignment with their calling? The Pastor cannot do it on his or her own. It won’t happen through a sermon here and there. It requires a systematic approach where members are encouraged on a regular basis to think about the Christian purpose. It is the work of the Elders to play this reminder role.

Most members have good intentions but fail to realise them. We see in the great revivalist John Wesley how a renewal movement is created by developing a systematic approach for helping followers of Christ develop spiritual disciplines.

“...what gave Wesleyan Methodism its special momentum, the ingredient which made it unique among the rival or rebel religious movements of the day, was the thoroughness of its discipline and organisation. What counted was not so much the emotional conversion as the well managed follow-up.” (Ayling S. John Wesley, 1979, St James Place, London. Collins, p. 17).

Elders are a key part of managing spiritual health and discipleship in a church.

Sharing the Leadership Task

This lack of participation by members in the ministry activities of the church is a cause of much leadership burnout. We know in Australia, from National Church Life Survey that across all churches about a quarter of pastors and lay leaders are burnt out. About half are getting close to burn out.

A study of Adventist ministers was conducted in 2007, and it was discovered that a third of Adventist ministers had experienced periods of depression caused by their work. Imagine trying to pastor a church while experiencing depression? The report also found that a third of them felt lonely and isolated. (Surveying Adventist Pastors by Barry Gane, South Pacific Division Record July 7 2007 Signs Publishing Australia). You can see the challenge that if our leaders aren't emotionally healthy, they're not going to be effective leaders. Depression causes lethargy, and loss of perspective, which is not a good place to be. So, the challenge for us as leaders is to constantly focus on growing our leadership base. You cannot increase ministry in the Church without increasing leaders first. You cannot keep adding work onto your leader. Church growth is limited by its ability to grow new leaders.

There are many people who are sitting in our churches that have leadership ability. However, getting them to sign on at a higher level of discipleship is the challenge. Following are three case studies which show how some churches have addressed the issue.

Case Study A: Low Relationship Church

On a visit to Case study A church during the Sabbath School time I shared with them Ellen White's statement regarding the reason we gather as a church, "What is the object of assembling together? We meet together to edify one another by a mutual interchange of thoughts and feelings, thus making one another acquainted with our aspirations, our hopes, and gathering strength and light and courage from one another..." (Review and Herald May 30 1871) I then ask them to rate how edified they felt week by week coming to church. The average score was "3" out of 10. This church had a history of conflict.

The pastor was a new lay pastor, someone who had no experience as a minister, never attended Seminary or any training in that area. However, he was a man who had a good life experience working with people. Together we began looking at the church's history and health. We conducted a Natural Church Development health survey.

The lowest score in the survey was in the category of "loving relationships". So, the leadership group came up with a very simple strategy to improve relationships. The group of leaders, there were six of them, were divided into three, and their task was to care for a third of the church. Their role would be to visit members, invite them to their home. Over the following year, the leaders did just that. The church ran social activities, and strange things started to happen. The church went from an average attendance of 32 to an average of 63. This is a huge improvement. There were people that hadn't been to church in a decade, who started attending. The pastor of that church recounted to me the story of a couple who had been praying at home about the question of whether they should go back to church. As they were praying and talking about it, suddenly there was a knock at the door. It was a church member coming to visit them!

There has been much progress in this church. They have a ministry for Indian and Pakistani families, run by a church member of that cultural origin. One of the activities for this group is playing badminton during the week in the church hall. This is quite a vibrant church nowadays. A second church health survey was conducted and the results have been encouraging. The category of "outreach" in church life increased by 14.68 points and the category of "loving relationships" went up by 21 points. These are significant growth results in the health of the church.

Case Study B: Lacking Focus Church

Case Study B is a regional church of around 220 member church, which had a new pastor appointed. I had coached him at his previous church. By the time he went to his new church, he understood the importance of focussing and motivating his leadership team. Church B was a good size church, however it had had its share of ups and downs. I conducted an Elders training week there, and we challenged the Elders to take a serious look at their role. I challenged them to meet for eight weeks, to work through some material I had provided them, and they agreed. However, they did not stop at eight weeks; they are still going, three years on! Church B Elders meet every week.

A simple strategy to grow your church, grow friendships.

Case Study C: Poor Attendance

This story is one of those that you wish happened more often in your ministry. A pastor, who has been ministering in his church for nearly eight years, grabs hold of an idea and in a short

time brings about radical change in his church. This change sees attendance at Sabbath School increase from 25 members on average, to 75, all within seven months. What was the change 'idea'? Simply put, multiply classes!

When Case Study C church multiplied its first class there was some apprehension as to the possible negative impact it would have on the original two classes. What happened was quite the opposite; more people came to Sabbath School. The pattern has continued over the last seven months with five classes now functioning.

"Healthier churches, particularly those that are growing, place significant emphasis on the need to multiply small groups." NCD

The end result of this change has been an increase in participation in church life, an increase in worship service attendance and a new social/hospitality ministry for seekers that has resulted in kingdom growth.

So how did this change happen? If you ask the pastor he is not totally certain as to all the factors but here are some that have stood out to me as his coach:

1. *Prayer:* The pastor in prayer was seeking God's leading for his church. He had been taking it to God in prayer over a number of months. Focussed prayer helps to clarify what is important; it opens us up to new ways of thinking and builds courage for doing things differently.
2. *Support:* The pastor sought some outside assistance by entering into a coaching relationship. The coaching process provided some clarity as to what it was that God wanted the pastor to work on. It also helped to build personal accountability in the pastor.
3. *A simple plan:* From the coaching process the Pastor selected an approach by which to renew his group life through Sabbath School. He adopted a simple plan from the book [*Sabbath School Maximiser*](#) to implement.
4. *Circumstances were right:* The church leadership were open and willing to change. New leaders were willing to get on board.

The most difficult part of this change process was the initial convincing of leaders that they should start a new class. Once this occurred, the power of multiplication kicked in. The subsequent two classes came much more easily.

The Natural Church Development study has found that "...healthier churches, particularly those that are growing, place significant emphasis on the need to multiply small groups. Likewise, churches that are of low quality and declining, place little emphasis on

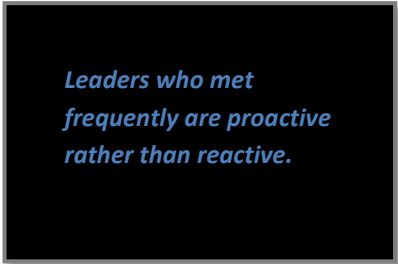
multiplication.”¹ Yes, it is a hard thing to divide a group of people that have formed strong relationships. However, groups that fail to multiply tend to lose their vision and vitality.

The challenge for leaders is to be constantly looking for reasons to multiply classes. This needs to be their highest priority, as every new class-group produces a new leader, a new team, a new opportunity for people to participate in ministry as well as a new place for newcomers. Newcomers find it easier to join a new group rather than an existing one. The principle is simple, multiply for health and grow.

Frequent Elders Meetings

As a ministerial secretary my primary role is to support ministers in my Conference. I tell ministers who come and want to get into a formal coaching relationship that I require of them at least fortnightly meetings with their Elders. If they’re not willing to do that, then it is less likely to work. This was the catalyst for progress in all three case study churches.

If you go to Church B today, their elders met weekly. And even though they have a different pastor it is still healthy and progressing. Every elder is doing at least one bible study. Every elder is involved in leading a class or home group. The Elders are very visible. Here is a church where elders are doing what elders are meant to do. These elders are busy, no doubt about that, but they are happy to be busy. They are seeing the results, the baptisms, and the growth.



Leaders who met frequently are proactive rather than reactive.

Scripture and Ellen White both clearly teach that the Elder’s role is that of a pastoral assistant. Elders are chosen because their church recognises them as a mature Christians who are seriously attempting to be disciples of Christ. Elders are the key influencers in their church community. They along with the pastor are the key to church health and growth.

Managing Conflict

The influence that elders have plays a vital role when it comes to managing conflict and dysfunctional behaviour in church life. It is an important function of leadership that elders accept the responsibility of managing conflict and protecting newcomers and less mature members from such negatives situations. It is important that before controversial issues are addressed by a board, and even more so by a business meeting, that the pastor and elders arrive at an agreed position to recommend. It is too easy for such situations to split churches and cause long term damage.

The more polarised a church becomes on an issues the more it loses the ability to problem solve creatively. Often in the heat of the moment people say things that latter they regret but

can never take back. When people get emotional they move from being partners with a problem to opponents. Effective leaders contain issues within forums that are mature enough to work through differences.

The apostle Peter describes the role of the Elder as one who 'tends' the flock, and has oversight (1Peter 5:2). This is a very important role of an Elder. Elders are there to both nurture and protect members from the troublemakers that seem prevalent today. I consulted with a church recently where the pastor was ready to move on, being so frustrated due to the apparent over-representation of "highly dysfunctional" members. These were the people who would target newcomers and try to fill their heads with controversy. So the Pastor spoke to the Elders, and essentially gave them an ultimatum, "Please support me and help me manage these people, or I will move on". Those Elders stepped up and made it part of their duty on Sabbath to protect the flock, particularly newcomers. It is the role of Elders to be observing the people arriving at church.... are they spiritually vibrant or do they need support etc. It is the role of the elders and pastor to oversee the health of church members.

Effective leaders contain issues within forums that are mature enough to work through differences.

Characteristics of an Elder

When you look at what the Bible has to say about the characteristics of an elder it is quite challenging.

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Blameless | 2. One-woman man |
| 3. Temperate | 4. Sober-minded |
| 5. Good behaviour | 6. Hospitable |
| 7. Able to teach | 8. Not addicted to drink |
| 9. Not violent | 10. Not greedy |
| 11. Gentle | 12. Not quarrelsome |
| 13. Not covetous | 14. Rules their house well |
| 15. Children are obedient | 16. Not a novice |
| 17. Has a good testimony | 18. Has believing children |
| 19. Not self-willed | 20. Not quick tempered |
| 21. Lover of good | 22. Just |
| 23. Holy | 24. Self-controlled |
| 25. Holds fast to the Word | 26. Able to exhort |

Reading all of these characteristics could lead an elder to feeling like giving up! Remember, Paul is painting a portrait of the ideal elder. All the qualities he lists are important; however there are four characteristics that are a little different from the rest. These four focus on the elders leadership abilities. Paul teaches that Elders are to be people who:

1. Know how to teach.

2. Who gather people together through hospitality.
3. Are mature spiritually and have leadership ability.
4. They know how to encourage and mentor others.

Elder as Leader

My observation across many churches is that most Elders are not actually leading anyone anywhere. Most Elders are sitting on the church board, they are members of committees. They may do a little visitation, but they are not leaders in their own right. Typically these committees tend to consume the Elder's time preventing them from being out there visiting and connecting with people. I know most Elders I've spoken to feel guilty about the lack of visitation that they are performing.

The role of the elder is to be a disciple maker, talent hunter, someone who is unearthing the spiritual gifts of members.

Ellen White is very clear on what she considers is the key role of the elder:

"The Elders... should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life, but that all may accomplish what they can according to their several ability..."¹.

So what she is describing here is that the role of the elder is to be a disciple maker, talent hunter, someone who is unearthing the spiritual gifts of members. The elder is to be someone who is giving members the opportunity to discover their gifts and develop them. It is very much that of putting the members to work in ministry. This description of the work of the Elder is virtually identical to what Ellen White says the work of the pastor is.

"...the pastors want to have a discriminating mind, as he talks with different members of the church, to know just what that individual is fitted for. I believe we can do this." (Ellen White Christian Leadership p55)

So what is the difference between the two? The elder has responsibility for caring for a segment of the church, whereas the pastor has overall responsibility of the church. The concept here is that of breaking down the church into subsets or groups, and it is the elder's role to manage one of those groups. If we look at the life of Moses, we can see that he was not a very good leader in the first part of his leadership of the children of Israel. Fortunately, God had placed in his life a father-in-law that had excellent organisational skills. "Jethro advised that men be appointed to act as *rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens...* thus relieving Moses of wearing responsibility of giving consideration to many minor matters that could be dealt with wisely by consecrated

helpers.”². I would imagine Moses spent most of his time caring for the rulers of thousands. He would not have been spending a lot of time with the rulers of tens or of hundreds.

The elders should be the most important people, the centre of the pastor’s attention. Elders are assistant pastors. They are the people who multiply the pastor’s ministry. These people are so important that they require more of the pastors focused attention. The stronger the elder team the greater the health of a church.

Elders are assistant pastors. They multiply the pastor’s ministry.

4 Aspects of Elders Leadership

The work of pastoral leadership team in a church can be divided into four areas:

1. *Building Community*: Elders are involved in creating small group communities within the church that welcome and assimilate newcomers.
2. *Facilitating Pastoral Care*: From these groups the elders facilitate pastoral care to members and persons in need.
3. *Disciple Making*: Elders manage, with the help from their group, the mentoring of new Christians and the development of new leaders.
4. *Multiplying Group Life*: Elders take responsibility for multiply their groups in order to create more places for more newcomers as well as maintaining group accountability.

Facilitating Welcoming Communities

The elder’s first priority is to build a welcoming and nurturing community (group) that people will easily connect with. Unless this is achieved the other aspects of the elders work will struggle. Pastoral care is dependent on having a group of people who can assist in ministering to people’s needs and also welcome newcomers. It is within group community that newcomers are discipled.

Elder’s first priority is to build a welcoming and nurturing community.

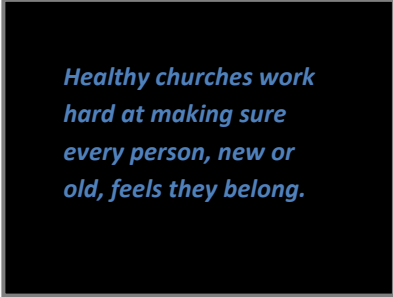
How does an elder create a welcoming community? If you look at what Paul says in Romans 12 you find at the end of his statement on Christian virtues two words, ‘practice hospitality’.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

These two words sum up how Christian community is created. For the early Christians the practice of offering hospitality was high priority. According to the historian Mortimer Arias the explosion of Christianity in the first century, was “due not only to proclamation of the gospel but the extraordinary quality of Christian hospitality.”³

How often do leaders, Elders, board members, talk about hospitality ministry on their committees? According to this, it should be high up there on the agenda. It’s probably more important than talking about worships styles, or furniture. If we don’t talk about it, we won’t practice it. People have to be constantly reminded and challenged to be doing it. I want to suggest to you that what your priorities are as leaders will become your member’s priorities.

Churches where elders are committed to being a welcoming church will model it. It has to be intentional and systematic. Sabbath morning is obviously prime time for elders to “survey” the church for newcomers. At the end of the worship service, the elder’s role is to look around and see who is talking to whom, and who is not talking to anyone. It’s a little like a military sweep of the area. The elder facilitates relationship building by not only targeting those who are not being engaged but by also introducing other members to newcomers etc. The before and after service times are great opportunities to do this. How welcoming and inclusive the elders are will set the bar for the church.



Healthy churches work hard at making sure every person, new or old, feels they belong.

Healthy churches work hard at making sure every person, new or old, feels they belong. All Christians are called to offer hospitality. Some are gifted in that area and love doing it, but others do it out of duty, and find it a bit tough. Elders preferably are gifted with it or have developed the skills.

You can preach about being welcoming, but the best way is to model it, people learn by observing. If elders do this on a regular basis, other church members will do the same. Are you worrying about having a tidy home for visitors? Go to a park for a picnic. Offering hospitality isn’t meant to be easy, it involves work. However it’s important not to make it more work than it’s meant to be.

Structured Care

When you spend time with people and listen to their story you discover opportunities to minister to them. The Adventist church in Australia according to the Natural Church Development health survey national results 2011, suggests that we struggle in this area. The lowest scoring question of the survey is: “I am a member of a group in our church where it is

possible to share personal problems.” For pastoral care to be effective it needs to be intentional and structured.

The problem we face with pastoral care is that most elders have a very limited concept of what it is. Most think that it is about them going out during the week to visit members in their homes. Now when you look at this scenario there is a problem. Let’s take a church that has 100 members. They probably have around 5 elders. Roughly divide 20 church members for each elder. However, taking into account families or couples, it could end up being 12 or 15 sets of people to visit. How many times in a year would these families receive a visit? If you said once or twice, that would probably be a reasonable estimate. The problem is that a couple of visits a year will not be very influential in someone’s life. Influence comes from multiple conversations where you share in the person’s journey.

Elders achieve far more when they have a pastoral care coordinator(s) working with them. The pastoral care person’s role is to assist the elder in observing who is missing or in need of support. It is very easy for people to go missing without leaders noticing. We count people because people count to us.

How would this work? The simplest and most effective method is to take our existing small group system, Sabbath School and assign Elders to each class. It’s a good idea to keep a roll of who is attending Sabbath School. It depends on the size of the class, however even if you only have 10 people attending, it’s a good idea. Your memory may not be as good as you think it is. If someone is missing and you know they’re not doing well at the time, you can ask if someone in the group would like to visit them. Sometimes there are people in the group that it would be inappropriate for them to visit the member; in that case, ask someone specifically in the group, rather than opening it up to volunteers. Of course, if there is a major issue or crisis, this visitation should be done by the elder and/or pastor.

The small group is the safest place for newcomers and former members to be introduced to the church.

The pastoral care coordinator assists the elder to facilitating pastoral care at three levels:

1. Peer care – class member to member.
2. Elder and Pastoral Care Coordinator
3. Church pastor

Inviting class-group members to visit and support each other is an important principle of group life. The more involved group members are in ministering to each other the deeper the relationship will be. Peer support is also a very effective way to provide support because you

can match people by experience, personality, life stage etc. It is unreasonable to expect that the elder can have deep relationships with every one under his/her care.

The best form of visitation that you can do as an elder is to invite groups of people to your home for Sabbath lunch. This is a brilliant form of group pastoral care. One concern in recent times is that there has been a move to replace the culture of home invitations, by holding combined church luncheons each week. Church luncheons have their place, however, there is a

downside to them, and that is that people can avoid inviting people to their own homes. The home invitation is a much more intimate and relationship building activity than a church hall luncheon. There is a place for both but not at the expense of each other.

The more involved group members are in ministering to each other the deeper the relationship will be.

There is an issue in some churches where members live far distances from each other and from church. This is a challenge, but can be managed with some creative thought. Paul says in scripture that elders must be people who offer hospitality, not in the church hall; in their homes. In my home church, there were some Sabbath School leaders that lived a distance from the church. They would invite two class groups once a quarter to their farm, which was over an hour away. People would have a lovely afternoon, and it wasn't necessarily a problem for them. You could hold a picnic, or sometimes gather in the church hall, however when I invite you into my home, what does that say to you? You're valuable, and I want to have you in my life, I want to be friends. Church luncheons tend to be more of a situation where people will chat because you are there, however it's not a big statement, rather an acknowledgement that you are looking after visitors in general, rather than sending the message that you want to be their friend. Church luncheons have their place, however we have moved to a situation where they are replacing the personal invitation into our homes.

If you are concerned that your spouse may not want regular visitors to your home, due perhaps to the extra effort involved, I have an answer for you. You help out with the cooking! And don't make it too difficult for you or your spouse. Frozen food options for vegetarians these days are many and varied. There is no excuse not to have people over, just keep your freezer stocked. It is important you put your energy into people, not use all your spare time preparing the meal. Spend that time on the phone inviting people to lunch.

An important question that elders need to ask themselves is, 'What is the purpose for their visit'? There are many reasons we visit:

- *Provide support:* When people are ill or experiencing some crisis then they need their elder and probably pastor to visit.

- *Check on spiritual health:* A visit is sometimes needed when someone is wavering in their attendance, is in conflict, or discouraged. By visiting issues can be identified and appropriate support provided.
- *Affirm that people are valued:* Visitation is certainly one way to convey to people that they are important to us. Probably required more than one visit however.
- *To connect people with community:* Visitation gives the elder opportunity to invite people to group or church events. It is smart for elders to take other core group members with them on such visits. The more connections the better.
- *To involve people in ministry:* Spending time with people creates opportunity to explore who they are and their possible giftedness.

All these reasons are important. However, involving people in ministry is the ultimate reason elders visit. The apostle Paul taught, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6) The farming principle applies in the Christian walk, you must give to receive. Member need to be involved for their own spiritual wellbeing. The pastor and elders play a pivotal role in encouraging and finding ways to involve members in ministry.

Involving people in ministry is the ultimate reason elders visit.

Pastoral Care through Socials

As I have suggested the best and most efficient way to offer pastoral care is through class-groups. The model that works best has a dual system. The class-groups meet on Sabbath and during the week, in homes. You are going to be quite a robust church if you do it like that. These class groups are involved in socials, for pastoral care reasons and for evangelistic purposes. Every person that comes is listed in a group, whether they attend regularly or not, so that when there is a function, they are all invited.

The challenge is to develop a group of people at church, which would be at least a core group within your class group, who understand how to include newcomers. Class group needs to become a spiritual family. We need to develop whole-ism and multiply.

It's important not to invite people to simply to church, as you'll be disappointed. Invite people into your home, into your life, then one day invite to church. Inviting people to church can be scary. Firstly we need to establish a relationship. Church A did that very well. Within a class-group you can create a safe environment to bring newcomers to before they meet the others less mature members.

Ellen White talks about the social way Christianity comes into contact with people in the world. I know this is true, and it works. If members connect with seekers (undergoing change or crisis in their life) once a week in a social capacity, they will win people to Christ. In the Homes of Hope program run by the Australian Union Conference, 34 church members committed to offering hospitality weekly. They ended up with 108 newcomers attending church, most being baptised in around a year. It truly is staggering the amount of money we pour into traditional forms of evangelism, and ignore what Ellen White says. Public evangelism when connected to a hospitality ministry that meets people's needs can be very successful. However, if I have to make a choice I will go with hospitality.

If members connect with seekers once a week in a social capacity, they will win people to Christ.

The Elder's Connection

Even though we have suggested that the elder as a leader has a 'facilitating' role this does not discount how important it is for the elder to connect with those they are responsible for.

There are two principles to keep in mind regarding pastoral care:

1. *Frequency*: It is frequent contact that is most helpful to persons you are supporting. It is within the ongoing conversation that Elders builds trust, understanding and can be a helpful resource.
2. *Priority*: Every church member deserves pastoral support but some are a higher priority. The greater the need the higher the priority.

Elders can connect with their members in a variety of ways.

- Visit in the Home.
- Visit in the work place.
- Visit at lunch time.
- Visit via the phone.
- Visit frequently via text messages.
- Visit with emails
- Visit with cards and gifts.
- Visit by inviting members to your home.
- Visit by inviting members into your life.

Ministry through Team

All good leaders know how to build teams. The elder will achieve significantly more by developing a team (another word for group) that ministers to each other and to newcomers. Ellen White expresses it well we she says, "*The work of the Lord's ambassadors (that's you) is to organise companies of workers to hunt for the souls who need help.*"⁴ The word organise or

facilitate is critical. Many elders carry out a solo ministry. Effective elders work through their group.

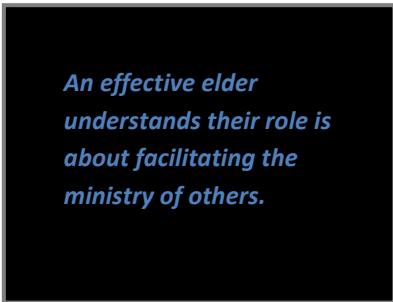
Before you can organise work teams you need to train leaders. It can be difficult to find the right person, however if you have apprentices it comes more easily. The last class that I led came from an existing class that had 20 people in it. Within a year after dividing, those two classes had built up to the point of doubling what had existed the year before. You cannot divide a class until you have a leader in place, as you need two leaders at least. The sooner a new class-group appoints an apprentice(s) the sooner multiplication can occur again. You can have more than one apprentice. In my class from the beginning I had two apprentices. One cared for Sabbath School, the other cared for mid-week meetings and I cared for the social and pastoral care. The more apprentices you have the better.

It is good to meet on Sabbath mornings in Sabbath School, and once a week in homes. There should be someone following up and checking on people and their needs. There should also be someone organising the social aspect. The challenge for elders is constantly remind the members to put up their surveillance antenna to look for seekers.

It is the responsibility of elders to manage the mentoring and the discipling of newcomers through class groups. Each time a newcomer begins attending the Elder needs to assign a group member to mentor them. This probably will include Bible studies, friendship making, gift development etc. It is important that this is not the same person that brought them to church. It's important that they develop friendships with others as soon as possible.

The Facilitating Elder

An effective elder understands their role is about facilitating the ministry of others. It was the preacher Moody who said, "It is better to train ten people than to do the work of ten people. But it is harder." Within each class-group there will be a core group of members. The core members are the mature and committed members who take on additional responsibilities within the class-group. This may be a formal role like pastoral care, hospitality, newcomer mentor or teaching etc. It may be informal like organising a cake to celebrate a group member's birthday. The aim is to continually add to the core. The stronger the core the sooner the group will be able to multiply.



An effective elder understands their role is about facilitating the ministry of others.

Essential to the building of the core is the Elders ability to delegate tasks both formally and informally. Below are some important principles to consider:

1. Assigning responsibility to others does not lessen your responsibility– it gives you the capacity to handle greater responsibility.
2. Never assign a task to someone because the task is unpleasant to you.
3. Delegate only if you have confidence that the member is capable of handling the task.
4. When delegating, be sure to back up the member when his or her authority is called into questions.
5. Even though you may be able to do the task better or faster, delegating allows others to grow.
6. Delegating often includes teaching someone how to do a task—what better way to ensure that others can run the group when you're gone?
7. Delegating can be a significant motivator in retaining members, it gives them a sense of accomplishment when a task is successfully completed.
8. Delegation is most successful when someone expresses an interest in the task, when he or she has a specific skill which would suit the task, or when he or she is experienced.

Adapted from a MIFCA/MAPCA Conference Booklet

Conclusion

The empowerment of elders is critical for healthy and growing churches. Elders are the big picture people who are responsible for discerning the will of God for their church. They are responsible for overseeing the working of the church. They are responsible for challenging the processes of the church for great effectiveness. Elders along with their pastor create an inspiring shared vision. Through their own example as individuals and as a leadership team they model the way for the congregation. They are charged with the duty of enabling others to minister through their teaching and mentoring. Their focus is on building spiritual communities that welcome and disciple newcomers.

"The work of the Lord's ambassadors is to organize companies of workers to hunt for the souls who need help." Ellen White Manuscript Vol 12 p240

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References

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- ³Soul Feast - Marjorie J Thompson
- ⁴Ellen White Manuscript – Vol 12, p240