

Chapter 1

Why Does the Church Need Leaders?

“Thou shalt provide... able men, such as fear God,... and place such... to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”¹

The Congo had received its freedom - with a vengeance! Within hours after Belgium handed over sovereignty to her sprawling, steaming Central African colony, anarchy broke loose. Mutinous troops, armed with modern weapons, ran amok. Beer and blood flowed freely. Members of all races suffered.

Missionaries, beleaguered and threatened, were caught in a vortex of terror. Hundreds of such victims finally reached the safety of staging areas and were flown out of the country in American Air Force Sky-masters. Many of them arrived in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, with only the clothes on their backs. Their homes had been looted. Money, furniture, clothing, personal effects - practically everything they possessed - had been destroyed or carried off.

Some of these missionary refugees, free-lancers for God, had no mission organization supporting them in the field, and no fellow churchmen to meet them. They had no idea where to go for shelter and care. The future was dark and uncertain. Many later returned to their homelands leaving their mission work to a precarious future.

Seventh-day Adventist missionaries faced more hopeful prospects. They knew friends would be at the plane to meet them. They had confidence in God and in their church organization. They knew “the brethren” would provide for their immediate needs and help in planning their future. The mission work they had left behind was in capable African hands according to a prearranged plan.

“Thank God for our church organization,” our workers said over and over. “How thankful we are for a church with an established system of operation.”

This organization, born of the Holy Spirit, was competent to succor hapless workers during the disaster. Plans had been laid by responsible leaders for a possible emergency. Through days of uncertainty and tension before trouble broke, contact had been maintained on various levels of administration. As smoothly as confused conditions and primitive travel permitted, emergency plans

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

were carried out. Workers knew where to go. They were advised on the best means and routes to reach their destinations. Arrangements had been made for them upon their arrival. A God-blessed organization made plans, personnel, and funds available to meet the crisis.

This happens repeatedly as critical situations arise in various parts of the world. Every member and worker in the advent movement may well say, “Thank God for our church organization.”

The main function of Adventist administration, however, is to provide plans and policies to assure the welfare and growth of the church under more normal conditions. Thus in peaceful days also we may well say, “Thank God for our church organization.”

A minister of another denomination called on two of our conference officials in South Africa to discuss the purchase of our church property in the heart of Johannesburg. We were interested in selling and moving to a less congested area.

Mr. Blank liked our property. It was well located for his purpose. It was the right size. It was just what he wanted. Even the price was right. The problem was in securing the funds.

“You see,” Mr. Blank explained, “I have no mission board in America to send me funds.”

“How do you raise money for your projects?” Elder Coetzee asked.

“I write letters to friends in the homeland,” the minister replied. “Also I write articles for various papers in America explaining the needs of my congregations. I hope and pray that members in the homeland will read my articles and send money to enable me to carry on my work.”

I would not belittle this “article and hope” method. It might be well if Adventists learned lessons of trust in God from “faith” mission friends. Personally, however, I thank God for an effective organization through which He works to supply workers and funds, plans and policies, to carry on His work in lands afar.

It is adaptable to the needs of the work in all parts of the world. It functions smoothly in the large conferences and complex institutions of the homeland. It adequately serves the cause in burgeoning mission fields where endless problems abound.

An Organization Born of God

On the banks of the river Chebar the prophet Ezekiel was given a glimpse into the opened heavens. He beheld a scene of dazzling

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

splendor - “visions of God.”² He beheld majestic living creatures in the midst of burning coals, flashes of lightning, and wheels within wheels.³

As the Lord’s messenger describes “God’s organization,” she refers to Ezekiel’s vision. “To the prophet the wheel within a wheel, the appearances of living creatures connected with them, all seemed intricate and unexplainable. But the hand of Infinite Wisdom is seen among the wheels, and perfect order is the result of its work. Every wheel works in perfect harmony with every other.”⁴

“I am sure that the Lord has wrought in the organization that has been perfected,” she wrote.⁵ “The Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point.”⁶ This “system of organization... has been built up by wise, careful labor.”⁷

“Let none entertain the thought that we can dispense with organization. It has cost us much study and many prayers for wisdom, that we know God has answered, to erect this structure. It has been built up by His direction, through much sacrifice and conflict.”⁸

Organization in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been patterned after the order given by God to His people in the days of the Exodus. “The government of Israel was characterized by the most thorough organization, wonderful alike for its completeness and its simplicity. The order so strikingly displayed in the perfection and arrangement of all God’s created works was manifest in the Hebrew economy.”⁹

Israel’s organization was born of necessity in Moses’ day. God’s leader was burdened with the problems of the Exodus movement “from the morning unto the evening.”¹⁰

“Why are you meeting these people all day long like this?” Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, asked.

“Because they come to me to inquire of God. When they have problems, they expect me to listen to them and give counsel. I help them to understand the laws and the statutes of God.”¹¹

“The course you are following is unwise,” Jethro warned. “You will wear yourself out. This program is too heavy for you; you can’t possibly do all of this work alone.”¹²

Then Jethro outlined a system of delegated authority that has stood the people of God in good stead until the present. “Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.“¹³

“Moses stood as their visible leader, by God’s appointment, to administer the laws in His name. From the elders of the tribes a council of seventy was afterward chosen to assist Moses in the general affairs of the nation. Next came the priests, who consulted the Lord in the sanctuary. Chiefs, or princes, ruled over the tribes. Under these were ‘captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens,’ and, lastly, officers who might be employed for special duties.” ¹⁴

In New Testament times, Paul tells us, the early church followed a similar wise course of organization. Christ Himself, the Head of the church, “set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.” ¹⁵ To carry on the varied facets of the church program Christ endowed men with gifts and talents, effecting an organization commissioned to proclaim His gospel “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” ¹⁶

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.” ¹⁷ “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” ¹⁸

So the wheels within wheels that God has designed to serve as a vehicle of order and power in His church were to run smoothly, the function of each complementing that of the others.

Organization of God’s Last Church

In the early days of the advent movement our spiritual forefathers were not easily convinced of the blessings of organization.

“As our numbers increased,” wrote Ellen G. White, “it was evident that without some form of organization, there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully.... Yet there was strong feeling against it among our people. The First-day Adventists were opposed to organization, and most of the Seventh-day Adventists entertained the same ideas. We sought the Lord with earnest prayer that we might understand His will, and light was given by His Spirit, that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church,

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

that organization was essential.” - General Conference Bulletin, Jan. 29, 30, 1893.

In the church of the remnant God has His tens, His fifties, His hundreds, and His thousands. The first unit of organization in Seventh-day Adventist polity is the local church. When a group of seekers after truth accept the advent message and have been baptized, arrangements are made with the conference to organize them into a local church body.

The second unit of church organization is the local conference or mission field. In some countries the term “mission” is not in good repute, being associated with colonialism. In such lands the words “field” or “section” or some other appropriate term is used.

A local conference or mission is “a united body of churches in a state, province, or local territory.”¹⁹ Today there are nearly four hundred local conferences and missions around the world. Each is administered by officers and a committee. Associated with them and playing important roles are departmental secretaries and pastors, evangelists, teachers, literature evangelists, office and institutional workers.

The third unit of church organization is a union conference or union mission. A “union” is “a united body of conferences or mission fields within a larger territory.”²⁰ It is administered by officers and a complement of departmental and other workers very similar to those required in a local mission or conference. Some unions have both missions and conferences within their territories. The South African Union Conference, for example, has four local conferences and seven local missions.

The fourth unit of Adventist administration is the division. A division actually is “a section of the General Conference, embracing local or union conferences or missions in large areas of the world field.”²¹

Thirteen such division organizations make up the church throughout the world field today. Little is known of our work in two of these divisions because of political conditions. But word received from time to time indicates that the Lord has a care over His own and that national leaders within those countries are doing their best not only to hold the work together but to preach the advent message.

The fifth unit of our church administration is, of course, the General Conference, which is “the general body embracing the church in all parts of the world.”²² The Church Manual has this to say about

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

the position the General Conference occupies in the worldwide program of the church:

“The General Conference... is authorized by its constitution to create subordinate organizations to promote specific interests in various sections of the world; it is therefore understood that all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the General Conference in session, and the Executive Committee between sessions, as the highest authority, under God, among us.” 23

The Lord’s messenger also tells us that the General Conference is the highest church authority on earth: “I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.” 24

Leaders Required

You may have heard the story of Sam and the hornets. Sam and a friend were driving leisurely down a country lane. As they drove along, the young horseman would take his whip and snap the ends of overhanging branches, sending the leaves fluttering to the ground. Along the way the pair passed perilously close to a hornet’s nest hanging from one of the trees.

“Why don’t you snap those hornets, Sam?” his friend bantered.

“No sir!” Sam replied. “Not me! Them hornets is organized!”

Sam well knew the effectiveness of organization. It is the same with God’s remnant church. Careful organization plus consecrated leaders add up to successful soul winning and soul conservation.

“A mass of men without organization is a mob.” This same group of men, properly organized and with capable leadership, may be welded into an efficient fighting force or a prosperous industry. In the case of the advent movement they may well hasten or delay the accomplishment of our God-given task and the return of our Lord.

Five different levels of administration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as detailed above, require leadership. This is where you may come into the picture.

Many thousands of Seventh-day Adventist churches scattered throughout the world require officers. These units will function

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

effectively for God only as they are staffed with dedicated elders, deacons, deaconesses, clerks, treasurers, missionary leaders and secretaries, Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteer officers, and other church leaders.¹ Think of the challenge of leadership in all of these churches. In this first unit of administration alone the world church possibly needs more than 150,000 leaders! We need to know what God expects of leaders in His remnant church. We need to know how to lead effectively for Him in these closing hours of time.

With nearly 500 union and local conferences and missions throughout the world requiring officers and departmental secretaries and thousands of pastors, teachers, and other leaders, think of the demand for denominational leadership!

And that isn't all. The General Conference and our more than 700 medical, educational, and publishing institutions in different lands also need dedicated leaders and workers.

What a challenge! How do you measure up as a leader? Perhaps you will know better after you have read the next chapter in this book.

1. Exodus 18:21.
2. Ezekiel 1:1.
3. Ezekiel 1:5-16.
4. Testimonies to Ministers, page 213.
5. Fundamentals of Christian Education, page 254.
6. Testimonies to Ministers, page 26.
7. Testimonies, Vol. 9, p. 258.
8. Testimonies to Ministers, pages 27, 28.
9. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 374.
10. Exodus 18:13.
11. ee Exodus 18:14-16.
12. See Exodus 18:17, 18.
13. Exodus 18:21, 22.
14. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 374.
15. 1 Corinthians 12:18.
16. Revelation 14:6.
17. 1 Corinthians 12:4, 5.
18. 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28.
19. Church Manual (1963 ed.), p. 44.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER!

23. Ibid., p. 45.

24. Testimonies, Vol. 3, p. 492.