

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A Paper
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

By
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Life Leadership Vision

As I look forward over the course of my career, I see my life in the following ways:

Spirituality

I spend unabridged time each day devotionally, alternating disciplines. I study topics systematically as they interest me and I do so comfortably in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. But my spiritual staple is receiving God's word as it comes through broad reading and reflective prayer. My confidence in ministry and in the home grows from this time with God, making my stress level unusually low. I emulate my biblical hero Elijah and live my life at the will of the Spirit.

Personhood

I see myself taking family vacations without feeling guilty. I find time for language study, both modern and ancient. I also write books and articles on a regular basis, as a creative outlet. I read widely and regularly. I exercise in the open air daily. And I preserve time for solitude. My life is characterized by balance between mind and body.

Relationships

I see myself spending regular time with my wife Laura, my daughter Kara, and any subsequent children. In the average week, I don't let a day pass without spending two hours with my family. I also live near my family of origin. I do household chores on my workdays so I am free to spend most off days recreationally with my family. I also see my family and myself occasionally engaged with people outside my home for purely recreational purposes. I put people above projects and other ambitions. I am authentic in my relationships.

Profession

I see myself fully occupied with preaching, teaching, mentoring, and writing, without major obligations outside these areas. My preaching makes the deep, life-transforming truths of Scripture understandable and inspiring for the average person. I preach a deeper theology than most hear on Sabbath morning but it is clear and exciting. My teaching occurs on a regular schedule, either in the academic setting or in the local church, and it equips others for ministry—teaching them to develop as people first and minister from their God-given gifts. My practice of mentorship helps developing people navigate through new vistas of their calling. My writing incarnates the life of my preaching and teaching in the published page to help develop those I could not otherwise serve.

Current Leadership Situation

As I near the end of my doctoral studies, I can best describe my current situation in the following ways:

Personhood

I still try too hard to please people, which drives me to perform at a high level. But I sacrifice my well-being in the process. Two maladies result. First, I find it hard to take time off without feeling guilt or stress over the tasks left undone, which is a barrier to recharging. Second, my people-pleasing nature drives me to spend too large a share of my time on tasks that mean nothing to me, except that they pacify others. Although God wants me to be a self-sacrificing servant, through this trait, I often serve others instead of God. In short, I have some ground to cover between where I am and where I want to be.

Spirituality

I am immune to philosophical atheism but practical atheism is a real danger. I will never be convinced that there is no God but I naturally attempt to live and accomplish life's tasks without him. The people who influenced my childhood development contributed to both tendencies—my mother as the one of faith and my father as the man of work.

My father instilled in me a driving work orientation. As a minor, whenever my dad would walk into the house and find me sitting, he would say, "Shouldn't you be doing something?" So, now, whenever I stop to receive instructions from God, his

messages get drowned out by a voice in my head saying, “Shouldn’t you be doing something?” This makes me more prone to do than to seek God.

My mother instilled in me a passionate, consistent God-awareness. She taught me to always ask what God was doing, and turn first to God in any decision or challenge. She taught me the approach that has saved me from complete functional deism. Since my dad’s work orientation has kept me hopping, at least I have learned to talk with God all through the day. This also makes me aware that a deeper dependence is needed.

These dueling worldviews pull me down two different ministry paths at different times. I tend to plan and do first then ask God to bless. But, at rare, bright moments God hits me with the reality that he is active and willing to lead. Currently, God has allowed me to burn out to see that my burnout-pace planning and doing made little difference. This is how, over the past year, he has pushed me toward functional theism. This is good movement.

Relationships

The most important people in my life are my wife Laura and my daughter Kara. The people of secondary importance are those in my family of origin (and that of my wife). My professional relationships come third. These include my conference leaders, colleagues, and local church leaders.

I make myself available to my wife and daughter at the expense of all other relationships. Though I occasionally lapse in keeping this priority, it is a strong principle that guides my choices. It stems from a conscious determination to place family above work, in contrast to my father’s choices.

My secondary and tertiary relationships often lack the level of attention they require. My task orientation leads me to put programs and ideas above people, unless I become conscious of the reality and choose to reorder my time. I do engage in mentorship on an individual level but the larger bodies of leaders, such as elders and deacons, merit more of my time. I also need to reserve more time to be alone and think.

Profession

I currently preach every week, but the time reserved for sermon preparation is consistently inadequate. This is a symptom of systemic overload. I am also involved in teaching and mentoring, through the lay ministry training course I lead and my work with local leaders and other pastors. These efforts are rewarding but they, too, suffer from systemic overload. I have not managed to carve out time for much writing outside of what is required of me.

My professional life badly needs parameters. Since the Conference has not put adequate parameters on my role, I will have to come to terms with an ethical dilemma. I believe that I honor God by doing ministry effectively. I also believe I honor God by being responsible to the tasks I am paid to accomplish (i.e. what Conference leaders tell me to do). These two ideals have become mutually exclusive to some extent. I will have to be willing to disappoint some obligations of my employment so that I preserve my effectiveness. This is hard for a people-pleaser and a person with a strong sense of responsibility to given tasks.

Strengths and Weaknesses

My talents and passions are mostly in the teaching and leadership realms. I love exploring, organizing, and presenting ideas and systems; and I love helping others develop. I am most often affirmed for my leadership in small group study, for my preaching ability, for my organizational skills, and for my people skills. Since my passions match the strengths that others identify in me, I can say with confidence that these are my God-given gifts—especially teaching.

To summarize my strengths and weaknesses, as various assessment tools define them, a helpful frame is evaluating them through five competency areas. These are competencies I derived from a Duke University study of the most common clergy practices (McMillan, 2002) and personal reflection on Paul's letters to Timothy. They are spiritual vitality, biblical teaching, leadership, people skills, and team building. Following is my assessment of both the strong and the weak sides of each competency.

Ministry is a broad term but, when I use it here, I use it to describe my pastoral ministry in a multiple church district. I would function differently in a different ministry setting and so the relationship of my strengths and weaknesses to ministry would also differ. Even an assessment of my strengths and weaknesses in relation to my desired role of teaching would be speculative. I only attempt to speak to my current context. I speak here only of what I know.

Strengths

Spiritual vitality is the most challenging piece of self-assessment. It is also the competency that can, by virtue of the broken nature, never be mastered in this life.

However, my strengths in spirituality are that I am growing, that I relate to God as a servant, and that I am capable of great faith. The fact that I am still growing means that I have fresh insights to share in my sermons and counseling. The servant approach to God lends itself to a high level of ministry productivity. It also seems to garner respect, which strengthens my leadership potential. That I am capable of visionary faith leads me to lead the church toward bigger things, with some success.

Biblical teaching is the area that I excel most in. Everything from my spiritual gifts to my temperament to my abstract analytical thinking process confirms this. This strength has helped me instill a deeper knowledge base in the congregations I now serve, and has helped me to develop a number of others into more substantial ministry roles. I believe my ability to teach well through preaching has increased and retained Sabbath morning attendance in both churches, which, in turn, gives more opportunity to influence attendees for God.

Leadership is strengthened by my project approach to tasks, my tendency to plan and organize, and my strong ability to conceptualize the details necessary for a plan to succeed. My project approach keeps me close to the progress of the current endeavor, so I can more easily adjust course or add help or encourage at the moment it is needed. This is the navigational aspect of leadership. By this, I am able to know the process at the level of intimacy needed to guide it (since I usually design it or guide its design). My ability to connect with people also goes a long way in making my guiding role effective.

People skills is one of my strongest areas, second only to biblical teaching. Everything I do is strengthened by this strength. My temperament makes me attentive to people, which tends to make them feel comfortable with me and trust me. My general

openness to alternate views, which comes from my intellectual approach to life, also helps people feel respected.

Team building is somewhat natural for me because of my strength in people skills and my passion for teaching and empowering. My affinity for navigating the process can also help create the clear expectations that a team needs. Nonetheless, this is not currently my strongest area.

Weaknesses

Spiritual vitality is always a challenge for broken human beings. For me, the trait that most often draws me down is my tendency to take charge. My project planning approach is an expression of my self-sufficiency. When faced with a new challenge or too many things to do, I tend more to think and plan than to pray and listen.

Biblical teaching is my strongest area. However, my weakness in this comes from my analytical approach to it. Although this is often a strength, it sometimes leads me to teach biblical concepts effectively but reduce the naturally inspiring concepts to dead analysis.

Leadership is sometimes hindered by my introverted personality. Since I gravitate toward the inner world, I tend to neglect the communication and personal touch needed to lead well. Although I am good at people skills, I may not naturally put myself in the place to exercise them.

People skills are most often hindered by this tendency toward the inner world. I have also found that, when I engage intellectually, my warm touch cools down. My analytical nature kicks in and the conversation becomes about the topic and not the

person. In the few cases that I have offended church members, it has been during intellectual discussions. I am not unkind but I don't avoid conflict when the discussion is intellectual. Instead, I thrive on it and feel it is a needed part of the sharing of ideas. Not everyone is used to this frankness.

Team building is also hindered by my structured approach to things. When I lay out plans and dole out tasks in a structured way, I expect that these clear expectations will be followed. I also expect people to remember their clearly articulated roles. Some people work this way. Most people don't. Most people need reminders and clarifications and the warmth of personal touch. I clarify when asked but don't always think to check in and rearticulate as much as I should.

Ministry Assignment

I am pastor of two small churches (with a total of 150 members attending) in which I am able to exercise my interests and strengths. Currently, however, my other administrative duties draw me away from these areas a majority of the time. I administer and serve as lead teacher for the Pennsylvania Conference Lay Ministry Training Course. This affords great opportunity to use my teaching gifts and an equal challenge to delegate added administrative duties so I can teach. In addition, one of my churches operates a big community service center and a junior academy. And, to fill it out more fully, I am the regional ministerial leader for Philadelphia area. This situation is much better than it was a year ago when I also served as mentor to two additional churches and a church plant.

Leadership Development Action Plan

Moving from my current situation to my preferred future requires certain action steps. The following action plan emphasizes the professional aspect of my future. Though this is an evolving document, my plan for leadership development currently includes the following components:

Doctor of Ministry and Beyond

The remainder of the doctor of ministry curriculum contributes to my leadership development by its structured requirements. These will serve to focus my leadership priorities and give me tools for assessing my leadership situation. It is my intention to make the learning process a part of my weekly ministry rather than a crash session at semester's end.

My chosen doctoral project also provides opportunity to develop my teaching and mentorship skills. In it, I have field tested a curriculum for lay pastor development and I continue to lead this course for the foreseeable future. This will continue to afford me ample mentorship opportunities with both current and former students. I will also expand my training opportunities by adding a section for second year students.

When I am finished with my D. Min. studies, I will begin to apply to a Ph. D. program. This will provide the main structure for my professional growth for the next several years.

When I am finished with my Ph. D. studies, I will immerse my self in a yearly research-based writing regimen. This will include the completion of one book and two scholarly articles per year.

Extra-Curricular Leadership Development

I will attend a leadership-training event of some kind each year, varying the type of events to include both training through local seminaries and through business organizations.

I will also read no less than three leadership books per year outside of assigned reading, focusing especially on the area of developing other leaders through teaching and mentorship. I will teach no less than two leadership training events each year in my local district (winter and fall). And, I will closely mentor at least one person through the best of the leadership material I am receiving. This teaching/mentoring component will force me to condense and organize the concepts I learn and direct me toward my personal vision.

Personal and Spiritual Development

Outside of my professional development, I will determine to spend no less than half an hour each day in devotional time. I will strive for more but hold this as the minimum. I will have a date with my wife no less than once per month and social time with another family at the same frequency. I will work no more than fifty hours in the average week. I will plan a personal retreat, such as a backpacking trip, twice per year (spring and fall). I will write my own job description and provide it to my Conference

leaders, so they know that I am serving strategically and know why I can't do all they may ask.

Relevant Forces

Forces that hinder these goals are the traditional expectations of the pastor, my own tendency to please people above God, and the conflict between professional responsibilities and unanticipated family needs. Forces that help are a good-willed group of church members, a number who want to be empowered for ministry, my ability to persist in a task until it is finished, the D.Min. program, and a ministerial director who supports continued education. To succeed, I will need to consciously monitor these hindering forces and draw on these helping forces.

The most important issue is keeping a margin of my personal resources. Violating the doctrine of margin puts Seventh-day Adventist ministers in theological crisis, because the doctrine of margin is the doctrine of Sabbath. When I choose to live without a margin, I am choosing to live outside of God's Sabbath grace. I will explain what I mean.

Before sin, God's provision for human life was abundant and unlimited. He planted a garden and told his human children, "you may freely eat" (Genesis 2:16). Tragically God's provision seemed too little for them so they "ate" of the forbidden tree that promised to make them "like (or equal to) God" (3:4-6). In response, God pronounced, "in toil you shall eat" (v. 17).

In other words, God gave his human children the task of provision that they asked for—a God-sized task. But then he added grace. He commanded them to work six days at this task of self-provision but to stop for one day (Exodus 20:8-11)—one day that would

suspend the curse. This would give them a chance to see that they could not provide all their needs—to see that they still needed God. In light of Sabbath, a life without margin is a life without grace and without trust.

For me, this theological crisis reveals itself most in my stewardship of time and emotion. I am an optimist when I make my schedule and a pessimist when I view its aftermath. In short, I don't include a margin in time management and I reap the emotional impact of stress and failure. I must arbitrarily limit my hours to what I know is reasonable and give myself permission to relax outside of this. If I don't set limits, I know myself well enough to know that I won't stop until the damage is done.

Emotion also comes into play when I fail to account for it. I have long planned my schedule with no consideration for limits other than time. Over the past few years, a growing awareness of my emotional limitations has developed. At first, I thought I just needed to be stronger. Slowly, I have realized that I am dealing with basic human limitations. I must learn to be a steward of what I have and not borrow from what I don't have.

A more fundamental challenge I face is the theological crisis of Sabbath—both symbolically and literally. Symbolically speaking, I am inclined to imbibe the curse of self-preservation in ministry, failing to offer trust and receive grace in regard to ministry productivity. Literally, I work my Sabbath experience away and cannot fully recapture it another time of the week.

The broad solution to all of these challenges is to do less. This means demanding less of myself, first. Second, it means communicating my limitations to foster clear expectations and reduce the frustration of unmet expectations.

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