

A CARING CHURCH IS A CARING PERSON

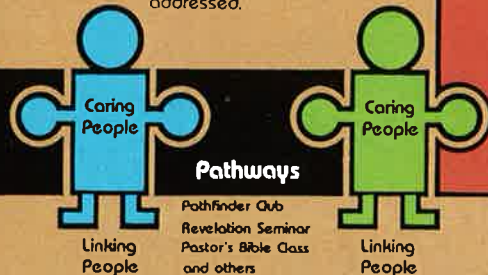
Vacation Bible School
Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking
Natural Foods Cooking Seminar
Weight Control Seminar
Stress Control Seminar
Daniel Seminar
and other

Entry Events

High-rise cities and small country townships. Both hold people we need to reach.

But how we contact those people should depend on who they are, where they live, and how they live!

And that's where the caring church comes in. Through Entry Events the needs of people are addressed.



These events, coordinated with evangelistic crusades, multiply the impact of the caring church. And following baptism, as new members are nurtured, they too are involved with linking people to the church. If you would like to belong to a caring church, remember, a caring church is made up of Caring People.

But the caring church doesn't provide just outreach programs. Through the personal relationships developed, people are linked with Pathways. This linking is a personal ministry. Something in which each member can take part. And the linking is just as important as the event itself.

Cover artwork by Greg Martin. Color added by Gary L. Ivey.

by Roger L. Dudley

When I emerged from college some years ago and entered the pastoral ministry, I brought with me a mistaken idea of why people join the church. "Convince them that the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are supported by the Bible," I assumed, "and they will have no other recourse than to enter the baptismal waters."

So I sallied forth, armed with proof texts, and found that, indeed, I could best most of the non-Adventists I encountered. They were no match for my logical reasoning and superior firepower. But I soon discovered that they did have other recourses than accepting my faith and joining my church. They could (and did) lock their doors when I called and avoid me like the plague. Converts were few in my early ministry.

Gradually the truth dawned. People do not join churches simply because of teachings that are true and biblical. Few humans make any kind of life-style change solely on the intellectual basis of true or false, right or wrong. People change because the proposed action promises to offer them something personal in the form of more effective living.

Modern behavioral science has helped us to see that people are motivated to do that which will bring need satisfaction. All of us are created with intrinsic needs—physical needs, psychological needs, and emotional needs. The need to feel safe, the need to love and be

loved, the need for self-esteem and the esteem of others, the need to do something significant with our lives is a part of each one of us. And while many frantically try to meet these needs in ways that are self-destructive and unfulfilling, yet the needs themselves are legitimate. God placed them in the human breast, and only He knows how to meet them in ways that enhance human dignity. One of my favorite texts is: "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19).

How does God meet these needs? Often through the church. We become God's co-workers to supply the deep, heartfelt needs of our fellow humans. This is what the Caring Church is all about. The church that would grow must become the church that serves. The Caring Church is not another program conceived at hierarchical levels far from the grass roots and imposed on unwilling pastors and members. It is an attitude, a way of life, a redemptive community. It stops talking at people and listens to them. It starts with what they think they need instead of what we think they need. It makes convincing them secondary to loving them.

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Profile of a Caring Church

TIDINGS—We've been hearing about Faith/Action Advance. Now we have the "Caring Church" emphasis. Why do we need another program?

GORDON—The Caring Church was developed as the main thrust of FAA. It is a concept and a philosophy, not a program. The approach is almost revolutionary in Adventist circles.

How is it different?
The most important entity is not the General Conference, the union, or the local conference, but the local church. Each congrega-



M. D. Gordon, president of the Carolina Conference, is chairman of the Ministries Coordinating Committee, which has been commissioned by the North American Division to foster the Caring Church concept throughout the Division. He was interviewed April 13 by SOUTHERN TIDINGS Editor George A. Powell.

tion is to analyze the needs of its community and determine which programs will best meet those needs. The conference staff becomes a support team to counsel and assist the local church in accomplishing the goals that it has chosen.

Is this what is meant by "ministering to people's felt needs?"

Yes. Sometimes we've gone in and said, "Okay, here is a city of 50,000 and what they need is a big evangelistic crusade." But that community might have needed health-related programs, a youth-oriented outreach, or community services first. Then they would have been more receptive to a crusade.

One of our saddest realities is that more than one-third of those who unite with our church eventually leave us. Not only is this a tragedy for the individuals and the church, but it creates a difficult environment for church growth to have thousands of people out there who became disenchanted with the church and have probably shared

their misgivings with their friends. The emphasis of the Caring Church is not only baptizing people, but also nurturing and disciplining them. When our people become involved in caring ministries to others, they will be excited and become real disciples, rather than simply pew warmers. This will help keep the back door shut. I used to have evangelists call in and say, "We've got a big crowd of people coming and we need three or four pastors to help visit." So we'd jerk pastors out of their districts who may have had 25 Bible studies going. But now, trained laymen are doing the visiting, making gospel presentations, even calling for the decision for Christ. Then, when the team leaves, there isn't a big let-down because those people have made friends who continue to nurture and be with them. When the going gets tough, they're right there with them. This is the biggest step forward I have ever seen in evangelism.

How does the individual church member fit into all this?

Every member of the church was, at his baptism, ordained to a ministry. The pastor should help him determine what his spiritual gift is and then assign him duties where that gift can be utilized.

Haven't we always been a "Caring Church?"

I believe we have. But we may often have been more program oriented than people oriented. The church is a hospital for sinners and not a club for saints. We're not lowering the standards at all, but we must follow the example of Christ, who ate with publicans and sinners and brought them, by love, to higher standards. If religion is



based on fear, people have a certain outward appearance of Christianity, but, when it's based on love, it's a total commitment that, in the long run, will be stronger.