

**AN EVALUATION OF THE MASTER OF DIVINITY PROGRAM  
BY GRADUATES OF 1988 AND 1993**

A Research Report

Prepared for

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Prepared by

The Institute of Church Ministry

Andrews University

Written by

Roger L. Dudley, Director

The Institute of Church Ministry

October 1995

**AN EVALUATION OF THE MASTER OF DIVINITY PROGRAM**  
**BY GRADUATES OF 1988 AND 1993**

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University is the designated institution for the preparation of clergy to serve the Adventist church in North America. The standard program to provide this preparation is the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) which is offered in nine consecutive quarters.

The faculty at the Seminary desire that this program be as effective as possible in producing graduates who will have the attitudes and skills most appropriate to the Gospel ministry. Over the years the program has been continually studied and from time to time major or minor changes have been introduced. Near the end of each Spring quarter the current M.Div. students have been asked to complete a comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the program as a guide to future planning.

However, perhaps current students are not in as good a position to judge the value of the program as are those who having completed their academic work have actually served for a time in ministry and, therefore, have had opportunity to test the value of what they have learned. With this in mind the Seminary administration commissioned the Institute of Church Ministry (ICM) to survey a representative sample of fairly recent graduates.

## Methodology

A questionnaire was especially constructed for this study (see attached instrument). It listed 46 areas of ministry and asked the respondents to rate each one as to the extent to which their Seminary training prepared them for that area. Ratings were on a five-point scale from "not at all" to "extremely helpful." Then the graduates were asked to go over the same list a second time and indicate how important each area is for effective ministry. The five-point scale was from "not important" to "absolutely essential."

The respondents were also requested to rate their overall Seminary experience and to list the areas of ministry in which they felt *best prepared* and *least prepared*. Several demographic questions completed the survey.

Two graduating classes were selected for the study. Graduates of 1993 would represent those who recently (two years or less) received their degrees while graduates of 1988 would allow respondents to have had six to seven years experience in the ministry as a basis of their evaluations.

A list of graduates and their addresses from these two years was secured from the Andrews University Alumni Association. Names with no address or with addresses outside of the United States and Canada were deleted. The remainder were mailed a survey with a letter of explanation and appeal by Dr. Werner Vyhmeister, Dean of the Seminary, in June of 1995. A follow-up letter by Dr. Roger Dudley, Director of ICM, was mailed in August to those who had not responded. Both letters included a questionnaire and a stamped envelope addressed to ICM.

A total of 105 surveys were sent to 1993 graduates, and 54 or 51% returned completed instruments. The class of 1988 responded somewhat better. Out of 70 surveys sent out, 45 were returned for a rate of 64%. Taken together, the study yielded 99 returns from 175 graduates--a response rate of 57%.

### **Characteristics of the Sample**

Of those responding, 77% were currently in denominational employment and 23% were not. Most (66%) were in the pastoral ministry, but 3% were departmental directors, 2% were church administrators, 3% were in chaplaincy, and the remainder were in other types of work. About 26% had done further graduate work since leaving the Seminary (most of these from the class of 1988).

The great majority were male (97%). As to ethnicity, 12% were Asian/Oriental, 19% were African American or Black, 7% were Hispanic/Latino, 54% were White, and the remaining 8% listed "other" as a category.

The sample tends toward youth with 62% between 20 and 35 years of age, 37% between 36 and 50, and only 1% over 50 years of age. This then is the group that evaluated their Seminary M.Div. experience.

### **Rating the Seminary Experience**

The respondents were asked how they would rate their overall Seminary experience. The following chart shows the percentages that chose each of four possible ratings given by the classes of 1988, 1993, and the total group.

	<u>1988</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>Total</u>
A waste of time and effort	5%	4%	4%
Some benefit in my ministry	36%	23%	29%
Made me a much better minister	32%	44%	39%
Tremendous impact on life and ministry	27%	29%	28%

About two-thirds claim to have received significant benefits from their Seminary experience, and only 4% say they received no benefits at all. While the two groups rate much the same at the extreme positions, the class of 1993 is the more positive in perceiving that "It has made me a much better minister" over "It has had some benefit in my ministry."

In addition to the overall rating, the survey collected ratings on 46 individual items. To display these in a way that would make comparisons easiest to grasp, the following procedure was followed: The percentages of those choosing #4 "very helpful" and #5 "extremely helpful" were totaled. These were then arranged in descending order according to the total group. Then the corresponding percentages for each of the graduating classes was placed next to those of the combined group. This chart is attached to this report.

Areas which the graduates have found most helpful for their ministry tend to be Biblical studies, theological and doctrinal understandings, and church history. The top "practices" areas of relationships with the congregation and preaching were found helpful by only about half. Only 45% felt that their Seminary training was particularly helpful for conducting public evangelism. All of the areas which were found helpful by less than a fourth were in the practical skills areas, especially for special type ministries. Fears that the Seminary program is overloaded with practical courses and weak in Biblical studies do not seem to be supported by the graduates.

While differences in ratings appear between the graduates of 1988 and those of 1993, the general order tends to be the same. On only 8 of the 46 items do the percentages differ by 10% or more. The two most notable differences are that 20% more 1988 than 1993 graduates received significant help in youth ministry, and 18% more 1993 than 1988 graduates were helped in motivating and equipping laity for ministry.

### **Criteria for Effective Ministry**

After evaluating the effectiveness of their Seminary training in preparing them in 46 ministerial areas, the respondents were then asked to indicate how important these same 46 areas are for effective ministry. Ratings were done on a five-point scale from "not important" to "absolutely essential." On the attached chart the percentages of those choosing #4 or #5 have been combined, and the list has been arranged in descending order by the total group with the 1988 and 1993 subgroups listed separately for comparison purposes.

The ordering here is quite different than the evaluation. Personal items like their own family life and their own spiritual life have high priority as to importance whereas they ranked only 29th and 16th as to the preparation received at the Seminary. The areas of practice are given some of the top ratings: "Motivating and equipping the laity" (2nd), "Preaching" (3rd), "Providing inspiring leadership to the church" (7th), "Gaining decisions" (8th), "Leading public worship" (10th), "Handling church problems" (11th), and "Ministering to personal needs" (12th).

On the other hand, the Biblical and theological areas in which the Seminary prepared them so well sink in importance for effective ministry. "Methods of Biblical interpretation"--first on the list for preparation is only #28 in importance for effective ministry, "Biblical study and

research" is in second place on the first list but in thirty-second place on the second list, and "Thinking theologically" is fourth and eighteenth respectively.

A comparison of the two subgroups reveals that they are very similar on the top twenty areas, but differences of ten percentage points or more occur in sixteen areas in the middle and toward the bottom of the list. Even then, both rankings tend to be linear with a few notable exceptions. One of the most interesting is in "Youth ministry," where 85% of the class of 1993 rated it as important in contrast to only 51% of the class of 1988. Yet the class of 1988 felt better prepared in this area--41% to 21%.

A major conclusion to be inferred from these data is that M.Div. graduates consider their preparation to have been most thorough in Biblical and theological areas but consider the practices and personal areas for which they were not as well prepared to be most important in an effective ministry.

### **The Free Response Answers**

Two questions called for free responses. Question 94 asked: "In which area(s) of your ministry do you feel **best prepared** by your Seminary experience?" Question 95 asked: "In which area(s) of your ministry do you feel **least prepared** by your Seminary experience?" These answers have been tabulated and categorized. The two lists are attached to this report.

These listings largely agree with the previous conclusions. The respondents felt best prepared in theological issues and study skills and in Biblical study. Adventist doctrines and research also ranked high. However, two "practical" areas, preaching and evangelism placed third and fourth.

On the second question, the group clearly felt least prepared in practical areas such as counseling, special services, pastoral leadership, daily ministerial duties, managing conflict, finances, and time, and dealing with difficult people in the congregation. Both in the rating charts and on the free-response questions, these graduates seem to be saying that they need more help in the practical aspects of everyday ministry.