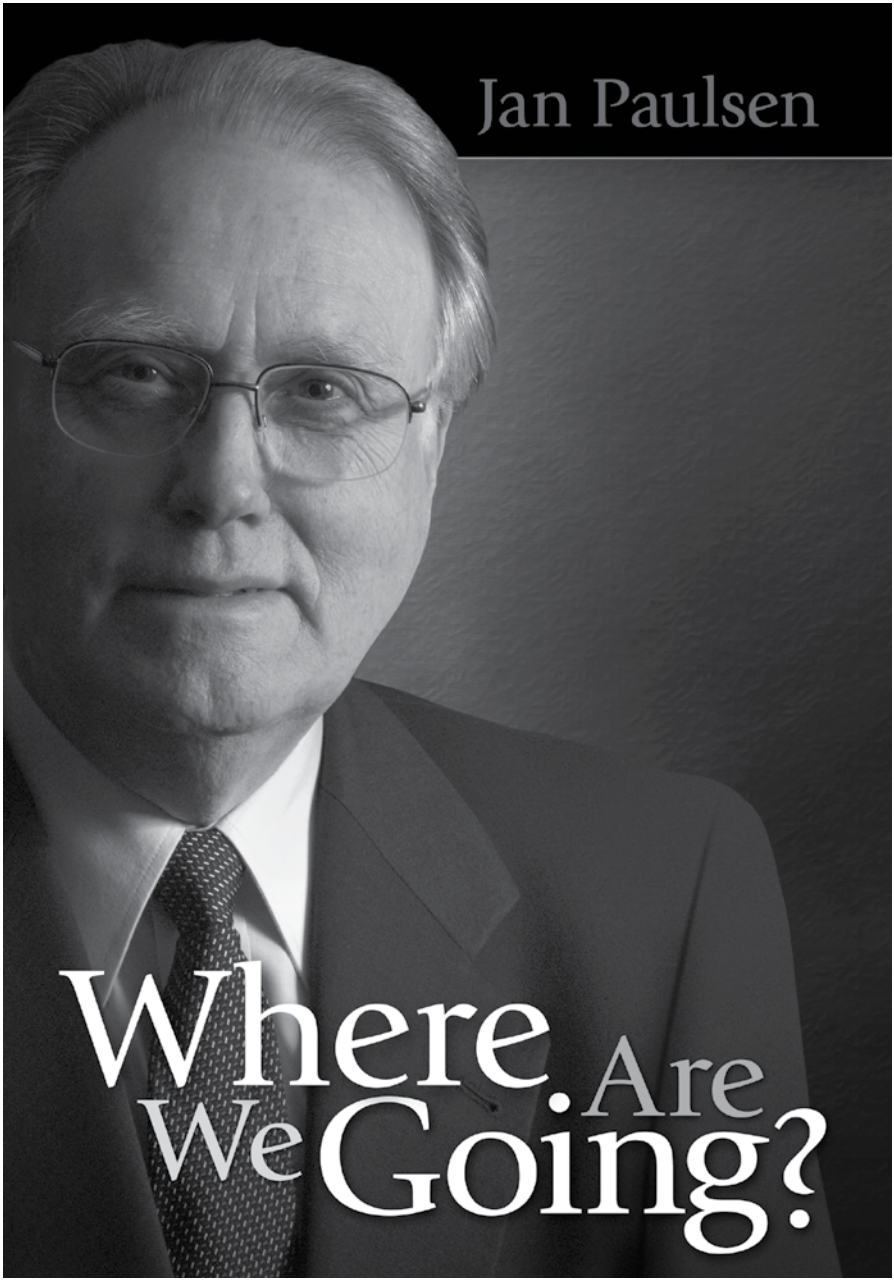

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Also by Jan Paulsen

Let Your Life So Shine

When the Spirit Descends

In Appreciation

God and His people are indescribably important to me. My love for them and commitment to them know no measure. They are my life. I thank God and the church for the opportunities to serve that I have been given. At times, it has gone well; but, at times, it has also been flawed. Nevertheless and in all, thank you.

I am grateful also to colleagues in leadership who have made it possible for me to function and to grow. They were patient and very supportive—with an understanding of human limitations. I say thank you to them.

To Kari, my wife and special companion in more than fifty years of ministry, and to our children—well, let me not try to put my thoughts into words. Just thank you for what you have been to me.

My very able and gifted assistant Bettina Krause has been an important partner in the production of this book, not only in editorial work but also in critiquing my points and strengthening and making clear what I am trying to say. Thank you, Bettina.

And thank you to Pacific Press for being the instrument to bring this book to the public.

Jan Paulsen
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Preface

Shortly after I'd been elected president of the one of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's world divisions, a woman from my home country, Norway, shared with me her delight at what had happened. Her delight was not so much that I had been elected but that someone had been elected who was *not* from one of the leadership dynasties of the church. She herself had married into a family in which church leadership was something of a family business, and from her privileged position on the inside, she had seen and reflected on some of the goings-on. I sensed that she was none too impressed. Yet I had come from nowhere and had been elected to senior leadership positions of the Adventist Church in more than twenty countries. "How absolutely wonderful!" she said.

As the years have passed, I've reflected on her reaction, and I've become firmly convinced that no nationality, no race, and no individual has exclusive rights to any leadership position within the church. The church's offices can't be passed along as an inheritance. They're not entitlements. God has—and His people must also have—total freedom in the choice of leaders. God guided in the choosing of David of old, who came from nowhere. He will lead His people to make unexpected choices any time He wants to.

That's how I became a leader. God surprised me—as He often does.

Jan Paulsen

Introduction

As a leader, the apostle Peter was a study in contradictions. He was brave and loyal, yet also given to bouts of cowardice. He could be overconfident and hasty of tongue, yet his leadership within the early Christian church exemplified rock-solid steadiness of purpose. He began as someone who possessed in almost equal measure both great leadership potential and great potential for messing up. Yet under Christ's tutelage and the leading of the Spirit, we see Peter mature into an extraordinary leader of God's people. In his complex mix of strength and weakness, good intentions and human inconsistencies, Peter was much like many of us.

I like the old story that's told about the later years of Peter's ministry—and it's just a story, no doubt utterly apocryphal. According to the ancient tale, Christians in the pagan city of Rome are once again being targeted for persecution, and Peter is caught up in the panic that races through the Christian community, so he decides to flee.

On his way out of Rome, Peter meets the crucified and resurrected Lord, who is heading into the city. Startled, Peter asks Jesus, *"Quo vadis, Domine?"*—"Where are you going, Lord?" The Master replies, "I'm on my way into Rome to be crucified afresh."

According to the story, this stops Peter. He takes the Lord's comment to mean that the Lord will suffer death again in the life of His disciple Peter. So Peter turns around and goes back to Rome, where he later suffers martyrdom.

Yes, it's just a story, but it invites a provocative thought. If those entrusted by the Lord with leadership assignments—whether in the local church or elsewhere—were to walk away from their responsibilities, the Master might confront them and ask, "Is this the direction you want to go?" Or He might just look to someone else to carry forward His mission of sharing salvation with lost humanity. The Lord Himself is always the One who sets the direction and defines the agenda for His people, and we must commit ourselves to be obedient to His will.

As Seventh-day Adventist leaders, our choice of direction is critical. How did we make that choice? Did we hear His voice? Do we know where we are going and why? Are we focused on the task at hand, which is mission? Or have various distractions—church politics, personal ambition, or just plain leadership burnout—turned our steps away from the priorities to which Christ is calling us?

The market today is flooded with books on leadership, both secular and religious. It's difficult to imagine any area that's not covered by how-to leadership material. So, what is the point of this book? Does it take readers where others do not? You'll be the judge of that, but what I've written here isn't advice I've gathered by research in books. Rather, it's the perspective I've developed through a lifetime of personal experience.

This book is not a continuous narrative. Instead, it's a series of reflections on issues that are important to the life of our church, issues that leadership must address. They're issues I've encountered on my journey—some of them being matters I wish I could have resolved more effectively than I did.

The Adventist Church has become a very complex global community of some twenty-five to thirty million people, both young and old. It's established in more than two hundred countries. It operates a massive range of services. Its "business" is conducted in almost all imaginable languages. And it spans a multitude of different cultures and people groups. How is this sprawling, diverse worldwide community organized and managed? Is it hierarchical—does it have elements of the Vatican model? What role does local leadership play? Are local leaders autonomous decision makers or do they owe accountability to the

larger body? Are Adventist institutions—schools, hospitals, and publishing houses—loosely related entities, charting their own courses, defining their own values, and "answering only to God," the oft-used escape clause people use to avoid accountability?

Early in our church's history, we decided that we would stay together as one global organization. We would share biblically based spiritual and moral values, which would become identifying marks of our community around the world. I believe that to this end, God led us to set in place a system of governance that allows for worldwide consultation and input.

What does this mean in practice? It means that our identity is owned by the global church. Adventism is not North American, European, African, Asian, Australian, or Latin American. It is *global,* and it is just *Adventist*—with no geographic qualifiers. There is no such thing as a national Adventist Church with its own value system or identity.

This doesn't mean we're culturally homogenous. As General Conference president, I saw an incredible range of ways people can "be Adventist" within their own culture. Our core values remain unchanged, but our culture lends a special flavor to our faith. Members in the United States and Canada will worship in different ways than do members in Kenya, Brazil, Korea, Germany, and Jamaica. But I believe these differences in how we live, look, eat, speak, and worship our Lord are mainly cosmetic. When we dig a little below the surface, we find a fundamental resemblance, something I've experienced time and time again.

Through the decades, we've stayed together as a church and weathered difficult times in large part because we talk to each other. Church leaders from around the world meet at least once a year at what is known as Annual Council. Although it's usually described as a business meeting, in essence, Annual Council is the time each year when world church leaders reaffirm to each other and to God that we will work together as one people, with one faith and one mission.

At Annual Council, church leaders consult, seek consensus, and draft policies and guidelines for the whole church. We debate the global mission agenda of the church. We set directions and spell out priorities. We talk about how we will share resources, financial and

otherwise. Do we always agree? Of course not. But these meetings are marked by a pervasive sense of global ownership, a sense that local and national interests must give way before the needs of the larger community.

In the first decade of this century, church leaders meeting at Annual Councils took up issues of tremendous importance. We considered Fundamental Belief number 6—"Creation"—and comprehensively rejected any notion of evolution as an explanation of origins. We strongly affirmed the historic position of the church that Creation, as introduced in Genesis 1 and 2, took place in one week of seven literal days, celebrated by the Sabbath, which marked the end of the Creation week.

Annual Councils have also looked at church structure and introduced more flexibility for forming "Unions of Churches," thus eliminating a layer of administration where this would allow us to use resources more efficiently and better position us for mission.

Leaders have also considered the role of women in ministry—an issue that we will explore at greater length later in this book. The church has never taken the view that biblical teachings exclude the possibility of women being ordained to ministry on an equal footing with men. But global leadership has felt that local readiness and perceptions—heavily influenced by culture—have thus far kept us from moving forward on this as a global community. For some members, women having a role in ministry is not a problem, but for others it is. So there's no doubt this discussion still has some distance to go; it's not going away.

Areas of significant disagreement, such as the precise role of women in ministry, demonstrate clearly that in our multicultural church we have to do better at listening to each other with understanding. It's particularly important that those of us who are leaders in the church be able to listen to someone who thinks differently—who perhaps vehemently disagrees with us!—and yet not feel threatened.

Difficult issues raise the question as to whether global leaders should ever walk away from consensus. Are we ever entitled to say, "Well, this may not work for you, but it works well for my church in my part of the world. This is what *we* must do to be obedient to God where we live"?

I believe that global unity is a nonnegotiable value for the Adventist

Church, and thus you cannot impose on a global community something that major segments of that community find unacceptable. Witness the recent experience of other denominations that have fragmented over the question of the ordination of gay clergy or their consecration to senior church offices.

Preserving unity, even in the presence of disagreement, is a leadership issue, for if leaders will not face this task, who will?

I've talked with some leaders who would prefer to deal with differences in the global community by the "easier" method of turning a blind eye to local aberrations. But in the long run, that approach is untenable. It may be difficult to wrestle with diversity and to search for up-front ways to accommodate it, but doing so is the only sustainable way to deal with differences without breaching the unity of the global church.

Thinking locally as well as globally is not easy, and finding enough leaders who can do so is especially challenging in a dynamic, growing organization such as ours. With some seven thousand schools and universities, six hundred hospitals and clinics, and a force of some thirty thousand ministers, there is a constant demand for leadership personnel to keep it all going. It's fair to ask, "How do we train an adequate pool of high-quality leaders who can meet the needs of the church locally, but who also have allegiance to the wider, international body?"

The process of electing leadership plays a very important role in our church—from the local congregation to the General Conference. While there may be slight differences in forms or procedures, the essential ingredient in all of our electoral processes is delegated authority. Human authority within our church doesn't follow a hierarchical model, flowing downward, from top to bottom. Instead, the power of choosing the church's leaders lies in the hands of individuals who've been entrusted to represent their fellow church members in the decision-making process. Beyond the mere mechanics of our electoral system, though, we also acknowledge a more important force at work: the Holy Spirit responding to our invitation for Him to prompt and guide us in what would otherwise surely be a difficult and risky enterprise.

Some may wonder whether ulterior factors that smell of political influence or secret deals tarnish an otherwise beautiful concept. Is it

possible that God, who is present to guide the church in these elections, is sometimes left with a less-than-best choice simply because we compromised our values? We'll explore such questions in a later chapter, but I strongly believe that the presence of the Holy Spirit, in response to prayer, *will* guide the process if we allow Him to work and if we keep our hearts pure.

So, against the backdrop of all these challenges, I ask again the question, As Adventist Church leaders—local elders and pastors; school and hospital administrators; conference, union, and General Conference administrators—*quo vadis*? Where are we going? Are we walking toward or away from the task Christ has given us? Can we really know what He expects of us?

The coming pages record some perspectives on leadership that I've developed through the years, as well as some often hard-learned lessons that I've absorbed along the way. Each of you will recognize that the experience of leadership can bring a tremendous sense of purpose, joy, and fulfillment, while at the same time yielding up ample servings of pain, vulnerability, and seemingly impossible situations. Yet for each of us there is one constant: no matter what circumstances we face, we can be sure of the abiding presence of our Lord. For this is His church, and we are His servants.

Chapter 1

My Journey

As leaders, we can't escape our personal histories. The decisions we make today—our unconscious "default" positions, our response to challenging people or issues, the way we define our leadership role—are all shaped profoundly by the path we've traveled and our experiences along the way.

My journey began two hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle in Norway during the depression of the 1930s. The Adventist Church went through a strong growth and revival in north Norway during those years, and my parents were a part of that. They were baptized, joined the church, and created for their children a warm and faith-affirming Adventist home. I learned early in my life to value the spiritual nurture of Ellen White's writings. As a child, I felt we were special. We were different, but we differed in a positive way.

At that time, being poor was considered normal. One day, I said to my father, "We're not really poor—we eat every day!" He just looked at me. He was a cobbler, and feeding his family of three children was just about all he could do.

My father had set up a small shop to fix shoes because as a Seventh-day Adventist in north Norway at that time it wasn't easy to find employment. Those were the days of forty-eight-hour work weeks, and it was the rare employer who would look twice at someone who wouldn't work on the Sabbath. The situation was complicated even more by the Arctic Circle Sabbath, which in the dead of winter began

at midday on Friday. To employ someone who would be gone for much of each Friday for a good part of the year—well, it was usually too difficult.

We were poor, but there was a sense of honor in it. In our community, we empathized with each other, we helped out when we could, and we didn't take advantage of anyone. For me, it was good to learn early in life to live with little.

The Second World War came to Norway when I was five years old. The occupying German soldiers had set up a prisoner-of-war camp in Beisfjord, outside Narvik, to hold some Serbian prisoners. I remember looking at them through the barbed-wire fencing and asking my mother, "What have they done?"

She said, "Nothing. They are just from another country."

That was my first exposure to ethnic cleansing and the strong, irrational feelings that sometimes flow from cultural or national allegiances. Even then, I just knew it didn't make sense and it was wrong.

Lesson for a five-year-old boy: No one should have to suffer because of where they come from or what they look like.

During the next five years, I lived with my family in an old school building that we shared with three hundred German soldiers. We lived in the caretaker's flat, and the classrooms were the soldiers' bedrooms. My childhood memories from those years are mostly good. The soldiers meant us no harm. They were busy training for arctic warfare, and we just got on with our lives. War or peace, shoes wear out and need repair, and my father kept his repair shop going.

One night, toward the end of the war, I heard the sound of someone crying coming from one of the rooms occupied by the German soldiers. I asked my mother, "Why are they crying?"

She said, "Well, they're just boys. They miss their mommies and daddies, and they just want to go home." Some of those soldiers were just boys of fourteen or fifteen years of age.

Lesson for a ten-year-old boy: Whether you are one of the perpetrators or one of the victims, war hands out suffering indiscriminately.

One summer, toward the end of the war, a man from the hills—he belonged to a people group we called Lapps—came to my father's shoe-repair shop and asked to borrow one of his sons for a couple of months. The Lapp needed someone to help look after his herds of sheep and goats in the hills where he lived. "I'll look after your boy well, feed him well, and give him some new winter clothes as payment," he promised.

Although my brother was a bit older than me, I was slightly bigger, so it was decided that I could go with the Lapp. It meant that I'd spend the summer some fifteen miles away from my family, which was a vast distance when the only transportation options were bicycle, horse, or one's own two legs.

For me, that summer was a traumatic experience. The Lapp had promised my father I wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath, but I quickly lost track of the days, and it soon became apparent that my employer was determined to get the most out of me. I'd better not describe the food he gave me! It was nothing like my simple menu from home. I missed my family terribly, but when I cried, he laughed at me. I was convinced I'd been forgotten, nobody loved me, and I would never see my family again.

In the middle of one of my nights there, the Lapp woke me and said two goats were missing. "Go back into the hills and find them," he told me.

"But it's the middle of the night, and it's raining hard," I protested, to no avail. I remember feeling utterly rejected and abandoned. The water that ran down my face tasted salty—it was a mix of rain and tears. Then something warm touched my hand, and I looked down and saw my dog, my constant companion. He sensed my aloneness, and he reminded me that he was there. Somehow, together, we found the goats and brought them back down from the hills, and I was able to go back to sleep again.

When my father came at the end of the summer to take me home, the "pay" for my work was a pair of hand-knitted mittens. In the years that followed, my father told me many times, "I should never have let you go." But it happened, and I learned a lesson that has stayed with me.

Lesson for a boy who felt abandoned: The Holy Spirit is a constant Companion,

even in difficult moments. He is there in the midst of success and of failure—and in everything in between.

When there's little love

My mother's parents belonged to an austere, pietistic branch of the Lutheran Church known locally as *Laestadianer*—followers of a Lutheran revivalist named Laestadius. My grandfather's austerity expressed itself in a joyless and severe Christianity. No flowerpots on the windowsills and no neckties. If you laughed and were happy, you were made to feel guilty. I can still hear him saying to me as a boy, "Don't whistle. If you whistle, you call on the devil."

He believed my father had led his daughter into an "apostate sect," and he maintained a hostile attitude toward our family. My grandparents were among the lucky ones during those hand-to-mouth years because they had a small farm and could grow their own vegetables and keep a few cows. To punish us for being Adventists, my grandfather refused to sell us potatoes. But we went elsewhere, and we survived.

Lessons for a hungry child:

- *Being a follower of Christ shouldn't be a joyless experience.*
- *No one has the right to judge and condemn others on account of what they believe.*
- *Don't deny potatoes to those who have none. And especially, don't be cruel to your own family.*

By contrast, my grandmother was wonderfully warm and caring; she would find ways to circumvent my grandfather's designs. When I stayed in their house, I was given barley porridge cooked with water. The gray mass was placed before me without butter or sugar. "Be grateful and eat" was my grandfather's message, so I worked at it slowly. But when my grandfather had finished and gone outside to do his chores, my grandmother would say, "Now come," and she would bring out the butter and sugar.

Lesson for a boy who disliked plain porridge: Find ways to do good and make life easier for other people. Why should everything be so stark and unpleasant?

Two or three times a year, these austere Laestadianer would come together in community gatherings known as *samling*. These were all-day spiritual and social events at which a revivalist preacher gave a stirring message and families brought their best food to share. During these get-togethers, people gave public testimonies and confessed their failings. They would publicly go to someone they'd wronged, confess their sin, and embrace that person. As a young boy, I found it somewhat strange that so many of the older men had a need to confess to and embrace the younger women in the group. It just didn't look right. My brother and I would go outside to whisper and snicker.

Lesson for everyone: It's amazing what children see. Don't discount their ability to diagnose accurately what's going on !

When the war ended, we moved from the countryside back into the city of Narvik. For the first time in five years—which meant for the first time in my memory—we could attend an Adventist church and meet people who were as "peculiar" as we were. It was wonderful!

It was there that Christ spoke to me personally for the first time. Yes, I was born an Adventist, but it wasn't until I was fourteen years old that faith became something special to me, something I "owned." I can still picture the scene clearly. My mother and I had gone to prayer meeting one evening, and we were joined by a dozen or so others, mainly women and all much older than me. There was no preacher or special speaker to stir our hearts. The Spirit had to work unassisted.

We sat in chairs arranged in a circle, taking turns reading the Week-of-Prayer material. On the surface, nothing was there that would stir a young mind—it was pretty much run-of-the-mill reading. Yet something in the message overwhelmed me, and I began to cry. My mother told me Jesus Christ had touched me, and He wanted me to accept Him as my personal Savior. And I did.

I made a second decision that evening too. I decided that I would become a preacher. In hindsight, it was an odd decision because I had a rather significant problem: I stuttered and stammered badly. But that night I set the course of my life, and over the next five years I overcame my speech impediment.

In my late teens, I went to college for ministerial training with a

sense that I was wasting my time. Christ was coming! I felt I shouldn't be sitting in a classroom; I should be out somewhere telling people about His coming. But those two years in college certainly were not a waste, because it was there that I met Kari, the woman who has been my life companion. The story of what actually happened varies, depending on who the storyteller is, but out of it came two teenagers who decided to build their lives together. We were young, inexperienced, idealistic, in a hurry to get moving, and we both felt an irresistible call to the ministry. Our partnership seemed to have been made in heaven! Two years later, we married and headed full steam into the future.

Hard lessons

My lesson learning picked up speed in the years that followed. The two years of higher education became many more. I completed college and two years at the seminary when it was in Takoma Park, Maryland, and I spent a third year at Andrews University after three years of pastoral ministry in Norway. In 1962, Kari and I, with our one-year-old daughter, Laila, left for West Africa with a call to teach Bible at Bekwai in Ghana. And so began our almost fifty years of service in Africa, Europe, and the United States.

When we entered Africa, Africa entered our lives, and this bond has never gone away. Although we stayed at Bekwai for just two years, it was a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Malaria was our ever-present health challenge. It intruded unrelentingly into our lives—with particular venom in Kari's case. She contracted cerebral malaria, and it almost took her life. Although she recovered, she didn't escape unscathed; ever since then her health has been severely compromised. But in spite of less-than-full health, Kari has been an incredible partner in fifty-two years of ministry, thirty-five of which were in senior leadership positions that often entailed my traveling away from home. I could not have asked for a more supportive and committed partner, who, at the right times, has also been my fiercest critic.

I'd been called to teach students at Bekwai's secondary school and teacher training college, but I suspect the students taught me far more than I taught them. I learned to see the beauty of a culture other than

my own. I learned to respect and value people who looked, spoke, and ate differently than I did. My looks I could do nothing about; the language—well, I learned a few greetings. But much of the food we came to love.

Our garden boy was a Muslim—mostly. He was earnest about his faith without completely stepping away from his primal religion. During the difficult time when Kari was hospitalized, unconscious and struggling with cerebral malaria, he fasted for three days and went to the mosque to pray for her. And then he went into the bush and offered a small sacrifice to one of the gods of his ancestors—he wanted to cover both fronts. How deeply he cared about Kari was apparent, and we've never forgotten him or his love.

Lesson for a novice missionary: A person's religion says little about his or her capacity for true caring and human compassion.

I was also the pastor of the campus church at Bekwai, and one day someone informed me that one of the teachers had married a second wife. Well, to the pure mind of a young missionary, polygamy was absolutely intolerable. I went to see him and I laid down the law. "You must separate yourself from your second wife," I told him in no uncertain terms. I didn't understand at the time that polygamy within that culture was not an immoral, promiscuous arrangement contracted because you fancied someone else. I knew little of the pressure on a family to ensure that the circle of life remains unbroken—a pressure that is especially acute if your first wife is barren.

Maybe I would deliver the same message today, but I would do it differently—I would speak with greater sympathy and kindness.

Lesson for a well-intentioned missionary: Christian values can be communicated ever so harshly if compassion for the human element is missing. Being kind is every bit as important as being right. I have found that sometimes my church is much better at being right.

After two years at Bekwai, the call came for us to move to Nigeria and join the staff of the first degree-granting college established by our church in sub-Saharan Africa. In the early 1960s, it was called the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA). When I came to ACWA in

1964, we had an enrollment of some seventy college students and a similar number in pre-college programs. Since then it has grown into what is today Babcock University, an institution with more than seven thousand students and with one of the finest reputations of any university in West Africa. Students come from all over West Africa because they yearn for opportunities to rise, to grow, and to set themselves and their families on paths to better futures.

Lesson for a young educator: Leaders in the church have a responsibility to create hope in the hearts and minds of young people and to help them convert hope into reality.

People: The greatest challenge

After two years, the board asked me to take on the responsibility of serving as president of the college. This was my first major leadership post in the church. At thirty-one, I was probably too young for the job. I certainly had much to learn. The day-to-day running of the college—the finances, the physical facilities, and the industries—was not too difficult. The most demanding lessons I had to learn were about handling people: students, their parents, and staff. Today, many years later, I still find that *people*—not circumstances or issues—present the greatest challenges for church leaders.

In West Africa, I found the major issue facing students and their parents was finances. They had so little, so how could they possibly pay for their tuition and board? Yet the school couldn't operate if the fees weren't paid.

I still see before me a mother who came into my office to plead her daughter's case. The student was way behind on her fees, and we'd told her she could take her final exam only if she paid in advance. Her mother sat before me with tears running down her face, and I felt cruel and insensitive. Was this the most Christian way to do it? I was young and I just wasn't sure. But I felt I had no choice. I told the mother that the family would have to collect the funds or her daughter would be out of school. The mother cried until the tear wells seemed to dry up. Then a faint smile came over her face, she adjusted her clothing slightly, and she fished the required funds out of her blouse!

Lesson for an administrator in training: Reading people—their motives and

intentions—is no easy task. Proceed with caution.

I faced the issue of polygamy again in the college church. I think of one man from the village of Ilishan-Remo who had three wives. Each of his wives was a baptized member of the church, for they each had only one husband. He, on the other hand, could not be a member for he had three wives.

Maybe we overlooked the principle in the matter. Maybe when a person comes to join our church as a first-generation Adventist believer, we should accept them as they are and where they are. There are some things we simply cannot go back and fix. If people have divorced and remarried five times, we consider it history. Could it be that a first-generation polygamist should be treated similarly? New standards of conduct should apply once a person has become a member of the church. But when you ask a polygamist to send away, in the name of Christ, all but one of his wives, you are sending those other wives into a very uncertain future. They may well become "public property" on the streets. And what of the fate of the believer's children—children who are the offspring of his marriages? Breaking up their home and their ties to their father seems brutal, to say the least. Even the notion of the man's keeping his former wives and providing for them, but no longer living with them inflicts another type of cruelty on these women who have done no wrong.

Lesson for everyone: People matter most. Remember that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Of rules and punishment

Rules and their application can be so wooden and insensitive that, in enforcing them, we can inflict such unreasonable punishment on someone that we dishonor God, who made both people and rules. Leadership must always be up front about right and wrong and give clear direction as to how the church should conduct its business. But, as leaders, we must also remember that God is in the business of saving as many people as He can possibly lay His hands on. It is love that drives Him. He isn't there just to prove a point. Leaders, then, must continually ask, "How can we reach people and make them feel wanted?

How can we communicate hope? How can we heal personal fractures? How can we offer a secure future? How can we make people feel that they are the ones that matter?"

As a young college president, I was feeling my way in many matters, and I made mistakes. My colleagues on the staff, most of whom were older than me, were critically tolerant of this young upstart, and they probably had good grounds for their reservations. This early experience, however, taught me the importance of supporting the person who has been appointed to lead. Maybe I don't think he or she is a great leader; maybe I think he or she is incompetent. But the person has been given a leadership position and responsibility, perhaps without even wanting it. I owe it to God, I owe it to the church, and I owe it to the people in charge to help this person do his or her best. It's the church's reputation—and God's, for that matter—that may be at stake.

I learned this lesson anew when I left Africa to join the staff of Newbold College in England as chair of the religion department. There I worked with a college president who had a warm, kind heart but who exercised his leadership clumsily. I vowed never to criticize him or share in the jokes that were readily handed out. I had been where he was. I knew that it's hard enough to be a leader even on the best of days, and I was determined not to make his task more difficult.

Later, as president of Newbold College, I continued to learn the often-elusive lessons of dealing with challenging people, especially young people. I met a woman some time ago who reminded me of an exchange we had while she was a student at Newbold. This particular woman had not been an easy customer to handle as a dormitory student. She tested the tolerance and patience of the dean of women almost to the breaking point.

One day, she was standing in the hallway of the administration building talking to two other students when she saw me coming down the hallway. She said to her friends, "I'm in trouble. I've gone too far this time and I know they're going to throw me out." It wasn't that she had done some particularly evil act. Instead, it was what she looked like—which was outrageous! Her hair was colored a very bright green, and I won't describe the rest of her appearance.

This is what the woman told me years later: "When you came

down the hallway, you stopped in front of me, looked at my hair, and said, 'Well, I suppose even that is possible!' And then you just walked away." I'm happy to say that in later years, this young woman became a wonderful professional and a faithful member and lay leader in her church.

Lessons for a new college president and for anyone else who deals with young people:

- *Allow young people space to make mistakes, for these are opportunities to learn and grow.*
- *Don't get frustrated by the constant questions young people raise—they're sincere, serious, and they care. Answer them carefully, because they're not pushovers.*
- *And love them. Love is the single most powerful gift we can give those who are young.*

A couple of years after we returned from Africa to Europe, I was granted a two-year study leave at Tübingen University in Germany to finish my doctorate in theology. Those were unforgettable years. We had, and still have, a warm and strong Adventist church in that city, and our spiritual family there received us with open arms. However, on the other six days of the week, our contacts—social and otherwise—were with people who were not part of the Adventist community. For my family, this was a completely new and somewhat intimidating experience. Within the Lutheran world of Germany, Adventists were widely looked upon as a sect. I took some classes from one of Tübingen's most famous theologians. When he learned that I was an Adventist, he said, "What on earth are you doing at Tübingen?" I suspect that over the years, some of my fellow church members have wondered the same!

Lessons for an Adventist administrator grappling with his first prolonged exposure to the "world":

- *People of other faiths relax when they get to know you as a human being.*
- *Mixing socially with people of different faiths or no faith is the best way to share your values and show people why you're passionate about your beliefs.*

When people like you

I discovered that when people like you as an individual, they will consider respectfully even potentially sensitive questions of theology. One day, without prior notice, a professor asked me in the presence of some twenty other students in a seminar, "Ellen G. White has a special function in your church. What is her role and her authority?" I gave my answer and stated how we see in her writings a manifestation of the prophetic gift spoken of in Scripture. They may not have agreed with me, but they received my answer respectfully and wanted to understand me because they knew me and knew I was genuine. There is a lot to be said for just being a friend.

Eighteen years in the academic community as both a teacher and an administrator came to an abrupt end in 1980, when I was elected to serve as one of the officers of the Trans-European Division. The first three years I was the secretary, and the next twelve the president. At the 1995 General Conference Session in Utrecht, I was elected to be a general vice president of the General Conference, so Kari and I moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, to begin a new challenge in leadership.

Then came an unexpected turn in my journey. The Adventist Church was traumatized by certain events, which led to my being entrusted with the leadership of the General Conference on March 1, 1999. The trauma was particularly acute among workers at the headquarters of the church. Many of them struggled to interpret what was happening, with only rumors and speculation to go by. An extraordinary meeting of the full General Conference Executive Committee was called, and together we looked at questionable activities centering in the office of the president—activities that had taken place over a period of time. The committee dealt responsibly and briskly with the matter. Some people have felt that the information available to the Executive Committee should have been published more widely after the event, but I think not. I believe the matter was managed responsibly. Activities that hurt people should not necessarily have maximum exposure, and healing must be focused on the location of the hurt, and this was done.

Afterward, there was a clear sense that we needed to leave the matter behind and get on with the mission of the church. That same desire

was particularly palpable among the in-house staff. Therefore, although becoming General Conference president at this time was difficult in a sense, I experienced wonderful support from my colleagues. Everyone wanted to turn the page and start a new chapter—there was an incredible yearning to be done with yesterday and move on.

When I recall that time, I think of the words of an Irish blessing: "May the wind be always at your back." Well, I felt then that it was. And throughout the subsequent years of my presidency I have felt, though maybe not equally strongly all the time, the supporting wind of the Spirit at my back. For that I shall always be profoundly grateful.

Let me mention just one memory among many from those years: When I traveled around the world visiting with our global church family, those I met always gave me a warm and generous reception. And no matter where I went, one particular message never failed to move me. From the lips of many hundreds, if not thousands, of men and women who I'd never met, came the words: "Pastor, I mention you by name before God in prayer every day." Nothing has meant more to me than this, for it is the kindness of my brothers and sisters in Christ that has made my burdens light and given joy to my journey.

Lesson for every church leader: Prayer—your own and that of other believers—is a force that will always sustain you and keep you moving forward, no matter what happens.