

EVIDENCE FROM EARLY ADVENTISM FOR A  
NEW TESTAMENT-STYLE PRIESTHOOD IN  
THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Adventist History and the Non-Settled Pastor**

Listed below are a number of quotations from Adventist history and the writings of Ellen White that illustrate how pastors and churches functioned for the first 60-70 years of the church's history.

The Pastor as Church Planter

**1. Interview with G. B. Starr, reported in the Wabash, Indiana, *Plain Dealer*, October 1, 1886. p. 5**

The Seventh Day Adventists

Some Facts and Figures Gathered from Elder Starr—How They Have Grown in Forty Years—and What They Believe

“By what means have you carried forward your work so rapidly?”

“Well, in the first place,” replied the Elder, “we have no settled pastors. Our churches are taught to take care of themselves, while nearly all of our ministers work as evangelists in new fields. In the winter they go out into the churches, halls, or schoolhouse and raise up believers. In the summer we use tents, pitching them in the cities and villages where we teach the people these doctrines. This year we shall run about 100 tents in this way. Besides these, we send out large numbers of colporteurs with our tracts and books, who visit the families and teach them the Bible. Last year we employed about 125 in this manner.

“Bible reading is another class of work. The workers go from house to house holding Bible readings with from one to twenty individuals. Last year they gave 10,000 of such Bible readings. At the same time we had employed about 300 canvassers, constantly canvassing the country and selling our larger works. In addition to this, every church has a missionary society. Last year these numbered 10,500 members. Every one of these members does more or less missionary work, such as selling books, loaning or giving away tracts, obtaining subscriptions to our periodicals, visiting families, looking after the poor, aiding the sick, etc. Last year they made 102,000 visits, wrote 40,000 letters, obtained 38,700 subscriptions to our periodicals, distributed 15,500,000 pages of reading matter and 1,600,000 periodicals”

**2. *Seventh-day Baptist Sabbath Recorder*, December 28, 1909 reported in *Review and Herald*, January 14, 1909**

“All Seventh-day Adventist clergymen are missionaries—not located pastors—and are busy preaching, teaching, and organizing churches the world over.”

**3. *George I. Butler Replies to Elder Canright’s Attacks on Seventh-day Adventists, “Assumption of Facts” (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1888 and 1895, p. 24***

In the quotation taken from the Kalamazoo Telegraph, we find this statement: At the time he [Canright] dissolved his connection with them, he had the charge of eighteen churches in Michigan. The facts in this case are these: Seventh-day Adventist churches in Michigan maintain their regular worship without the assistance or any located pastors, having our entire ministry free to act as evangelists in new fields. As a consequence, many of our churches pass long periods without any preaching, and consequently conference committees aim to arrange the labor in the State so that ministers will occasionally be at liberty to visit the churches, to help and encourage, them in the Christian life by a few meetings. At a general meeting for the state of Michigan, held at Ithaca during the closing days of 1886, Elder C. was present, and it was there arranged that the minister of the State should spend a little time not favorable for other work in making brief visits to the churches, each one being requested to take a certain district, so that the whole State might be covered. The district which Eld. Canright was requested to visit, though no special charge was committed to him, contained, we presume, eighteen churches; we take his count for it. To enter upon this duty he left his work in the College, to which he never returned, and commenced the visitation of these churches, which he never completed. And this is the extent of his ‘charge’ of eighteen churches.

Ellen White’s Endorsement of This Clergy  
Role/Church Planting Strategy

**4. *Christian Service*, p.61**

As churches are established, it should be set before them that it is even from among them that men must be taken to carry the truth to others, and raise up new churches; therefore they must all work, and cultivate to the utmost the talents that God has given them, and be training their minds to engage in the service of their Master.

**5. “Go Ye Into All the World,” *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1895**

There has been too much spiritual energy expended in the church at Battle Creek. Those who have listened to the precious truth that has been pouring forth in such a free manner as it has there, have generally failed to receive or to appreciate the light

given. They have failed to communicate what they have received. The persons who have been attending the ministerial institutes, have had presented before them line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. But they have failed to receive any great benefit, because they have not imparted the light to others. The great outlay caused by these institutes, which have been held so often, would have brought far better returns if expended in maintaining the ministers in some part of God's neglected vineyard where there are no Sabbath-keepers. If the large churches settled in some of our cities were scattered to the four quarters of the globe, they might reveal how much the truth they have appropriated has to do with the shaping of individual character, and many eyes would be opened to behold the light of the truth. As they saw the great ignorance existing among the people, they would realize that there is work, solid, earnest work, for all in the neglected portions of the Lord's vineyard. If they were sons and daughters of God indeed, they would see that there is need of decided effort to reach the heathen in America as well as in heathen lands. The gospel is to go to every nation, tongue, and people, and ministers are not to devote their labors so entirely to the churches which know the truth. Both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor. It is by engaging in earnest work, by hard painful experience, that we are enabled to reach the men and women of our cities, to call them in from the highways and byways of life. But many of our people are surfeited with the privileges they have enjoyed, and have lost the sense of the value of human souls.

**6. *Review and Herald*, May 7, 1889**

Do not depend on the ministers to do all the work in your church and neighborhood. The pastors must seek the lost sheep, and you must help them; and while the ministers are called to labor in other parts of the vineyard, the people of God must have light in themselves, speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts and making melody unto the Lord. While you should respect the ministers highly for their work's sake, you must not trust them as your saviors, but build yourselves up in the most holy faith. When you assemble in the house of God, tell your experiences, and you will grow stronger. While you speak in meeting, you are gaining an education that will enable you to labor for others.

**7. "The Work in Greater New York," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, January 8, 1902**

There should not be a call to have settled pastors over our churches, but let the life-giving power of the truth impress the individual members to act, leading them to labor interestedly to carry on efficient missionary work in each locality. As the hand of God, the church is to be educated and trained to do effective service. Its members are to be the Lord's devoted Christian workers.

**8. *Review and Herald*, October 27, 1910**

God calls for pastors and teachers and evangelists. From door to door His servants are to proclaim the gospel message. The knowledge of present truth is not to lead those who receive it to settle down and colonize; it is to lead them into new places.

**9. *Loma Linda Messages*, p. 179-180**

It has often been presented to me that there should be less sermonizing by ministers acting merely as local pastors of churches, and that greater personal efforts should be put forth. Our people should not be made to think that they need to listen to a sermon every Sabbath. Many who listen frequently to sermons, even though the truth be preached in clear lines, learn but little. Often it would be more profitable if the Sabbath meetings were of the same nature as a Bible class study.

**10. *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 6, pp. 29 & 30**

An American business man [sic], who was an earnest Christian, in conversation with a fellow work, remarked that he himself worked for Christ twenty-four hours of the day. 'In all my business relations,' he said, 'I try to represent my Master. As I have opportunity, I try to win others to Him. All day I am working for Christ. And at night, while I sleep, I have a man working for Him in China.' In explanation, he added: 'In my youth I determined to go as a missionary to the heathen. But on the death of my father I had to take up his business in order to provide the family. Now, instead of going myself, I support a missionary. In such a town of such a province of China, my worker is stationed. And so, even while I sleep, I am, through my representative, still working for Christ.'

Are there not Seventh-day Adventists who will do likewise? Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: 'Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, we will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields.'

**11. *Pacific Union Recorder*, Dec. 4, 1902**

God desires His workers to make the world their field of labor, rather than to work only for those who already know the truth. Never did the Lord Jesus confine His labors to one place. We read of Him that He 'went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom....'

**12. *6 Manuscript Release*, p. 200, paragraph 3—a letter to A.T. Jones and Prescott, June 7, 1894**

We are to labor interestedly for the whole human family. Much more time has been devoted to instructing those who already know the truth than is consistent to devote to them; for in this way the ignorant, and those who are in error, and who know not of the light heaven has sent, and the provision heaven has made for the salvation of their souls, are robbed of the message of the gospel.

Christ said, ‘I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’ We should do very much more to carry the light into ‘regions beyond’ that sinners may be converted to the truth. Many of those who profess to believe the truth, have heard a great deal from the Scriptures, have had golden opportunities and valuable privileges. Because of the abundance of privileges that have been given them they have not valued them as they should, or appropriated the truth to their souls as they should. Had the people had less instruction, and had unbelievers had a great deal more, it would have been more after the order of God. The living testimony should have been borne, and regular organized efforts should have been made in every church, and persons should have been set to work for those who are unbelievers. Christian growth is promoted by active work for others.

**The Pastor as Trainer/Equipper**

Ellen White defined the pastoral role as trainer/equipper when working with existing churches, so that when the people are trained, the pastor can resume church planting.

**13. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p. 20**

“Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching. Let him teach the people how to give to others the knowledge they have received.”

**14. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p. 21**

“It is not the Lord’s purpose that ministers should be left to do the greatest part of the work of sowing the seeds of truth”

**15. Gospel Workers, p. 196**

“In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable co-operation.”

**16. Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, p. 18**

God has not given His ministers the work of setting the churches right. No sooner is this work done, apparently, than it has to be done over again. Church members that are thus looked after and labored for become religious weaklings. If nine tenths of the effort that has been put forth for those who know the truth had been put forth for those who have never heard the truth, how much greater would have been the advancement made!

**17. Review & Herald, March 11, 1902, para. 9**

The Lord will not approve of ministers' spending much of their time with churches that already believe the truth. When they preach to those who understand the truth for this time, and labor with them, devoting their time to the flock, they teach the people to depend upon them in their various perplexities. It is needful that our churches should be visited by ministers, but the churches must not expect that the minister is to hold them up, and make them believe. By such a course, the church is weakened rather than strengthened. Ministers have a work to do that will call them forth from believing companies, for they are to preach in 'regions beyond', and bear the warning message to those who have never heard the truth for this time.

**18. Evangelism, p. 113**

Sometimes ministers do too much; they seek to embrace the whole work in their arms. It absorbs and dwarfs them; yet they continue to grasp it all. They seem to think that they alone are to work in the cause of God, while the members of the church stand idle. This is not God's order at all.

**19. Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, p. 19**

“The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers.”

## **20. Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, pp. 18 and 19**

“So long as church members make no effort to give others the help given them, great spiritual feebleness must result.”

## **21. Gospel Workers, p. 197-198**

In some respects the pastor occupies a position similar to that of the foreman of a gang of laboring men or the captain of a ship's crew. They are expected to see that the men over whom they are set, do the work assigned to them correctly and promptly, and only in case of emergency are they to execute in detail.

The owner of a large mill once found his superintendent in a wheel-pit, making some simple repairs, while a half-dozen workmen in the line were standing by, idly looking on. The proprietor, after learning the facts, so as to be sure that no injustice was done, called the foreman to his office and handed him his discharge with full pay. In surprise the foreman asked for an explanation. It was given in these words: 'I employed you to keep six men at work. I found the six idle, and you doing the work of but one. Your work could have been done just as well by any one of the six. I cannot afford to pay the wages of seven for you to teach the six how to be idle.'

This incident may be applicable in some cases, and in others not. But many pastors fail in not knowing how or in not trying, to get the full membership of the church actively engaged in the various departments of church work. If pastors would give more attention to getting and keeping their flock actively engaged at work, they would accomplish more good, have more time for study and religious visiting, and also avoid many causes of friction.

### Why Established Churches Do Not Need Settled Pastors

## **22. Acts of the Apostles, p. 105**

Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers went everywhere preaching the word.

**23. Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 267**

“Those who would be over-comers must be drawn out of themselves, and the only thing which will accomplish this great work, is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others.”

Note that Ellen White’s primary rationale for the church to be into this model of ministry had to do with the spiritual nurture of existing Adventists. She clearly envisioned a working church to be a healthy church, and a pastor-dependent church to be unhealthy.

**24. H.M.S. Richards, Feed My Sheep, (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 156**

H.M.S. Richards refers to this common understanding among early Adventists churches needing pastors as being in poor spiritual health:

Then he went on to write about something which I suppose is hard for some of us today to understand and feel about as he did. He mentioned what he called the ‘unfortunate growing tendency in our denomination toward settled pastorates.’ The time of too many of our preachers, instead of being occupied with carrying the message into new fields, is taken up in settling church difficulties and laboring for men and women who should be towers of strength instead of subjects for labor.

When I was baptized, and later became a young preacher, we looked upon churches that had to have settled pastors over every flock as being decadent. Most of our preachers were out on the firing line, holding meetings, winning men to Christ, and raising up new churches. Then every few months they would come around and visit the churches that had already been established. This seemed to be, according to our view of it, the plan of the apostolic church.

On Troubled Churches Calling for a Settled Pastor

**25. Evangelism, p. 381**

The churches are dying and they want a minister to preach to them. They should be taught to bring a faithful tithe to God, that He may strengthen and bless them: they should be brought into working order, that the breath of God may come into them.

They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again.

**26. “The Most Effective Agent for God,” *Signs of The Times*, Jan. 27, 1890**

The success of a church does not depend on the efforts and labor of the living preacher, but it depends upon the piety of the individual members. When the members depend upon the minister as their source of power and efficiency, they will be utterly powerless. They will imbibe his impulses, and be stimulated by his ideas, but when he leaves them, they will find themselves in a more hopeless condition than before they had his labors. I hope that none of the churches in our land will depend upon a minister for support in spiritual things; for this is dangerous. When God gives you light, you should praise him for it. If you extol the messenger, you will be left to barrenness of soul. Just as soon as the members of a church call for the labors of a certain minister, and feel that he must remain with them, it is time that he was removed to another field, that they may learn to exercise the ability which God has given them. Let the people go to work. Let them thank God for the encouragement they have received, and then make it manifest that it has wrought in them a good work. Let each member of the church be a living, active agent for God, both in the church and out of it. We must all be educated to be independent, not helpless and useless. Let it be seen that Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church. The members of the body of Christ have a part to act, and they will not be accounted faithful unless they do act their part. Let a divine work be wrought in every soul, until Christ shall behold his image reflected in his followers.

**27. *Medical Ministry*, p. 315**

“Upon all who believe, God has placed the burden of raising up churches, for the express purpose of educating men and women to use their entrusted capabilities for the benefit of the world, employing the means He has lent for His glory.”

**28. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109**

It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of soul saving depends alone upon the ministry. The humble consecrated believer upon whom the Master of the vineyard places a burden for souls is to be given encouragement by the men upon whom the Lord has laid larger responsibilities.

**29. Christian Service, p. 58**

God expects His church to discipline and fit its members for the work of enlightening the world. An education should be given that would result in furnishing hundreds who would put out to the exchangers valuable talents. By the use of these talents, men would be developed who would be prepared to fill positions of trust and influence, and maintain pure, uncorrupted principles.

**30. Christian Service, p. 61**

As Churches are established it should be set before them that it is even from among them that men must be taken to carry the truth to others, and raise new churches. Therefore, they must all work, and cultivate to the utmost the talents that God has given them, and be training their minds to engage in the service of their Master.

**A Foreshadowing of Decline**

Perhaps the most stunning quote of all concerning settled pastors and church planting comes from A.G. Daniells, who at the time he said the following was GC President. He and Ellen White were the last and strongest opponents to settled pastors. And though A.G. was not a prophet, it appears that for at least one moment he prophesied quite accurately.

**31. A.G. Daniells, Ministerial Institute Address, Los Angeles, California, March, 1912**

We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized and work will be on a retreat.

## **Conclusion**

In 1915, Ellen White died. In 1920, A.G. was voted out of office. Within the decade, settled pastorates were well on their way to becoming the norm. And an amazing thing happened – or perhaps not so amazing when we stop and think about it. Our growth rate dropped sharply, i.e., less and less people met Jesus through the Adventist Church. No, we didn't stop growing. But our rate of growth declined drastically. "Israel" had gotten the "kings" she so desperately wanted, indeed making her like the other denominations around her which today are facing nearly mirror-image decline. We adopted their ways of doing church, and now we have their problems.