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Married to a Minister

I did not marry a pastor, but knew this could be in my future. My husband Gary's education prepared him to teach or pastor. However, he accepted a teaching ministry position across the country from our families. At 21, I was relieved not to add "pastor's wife" to my list of titles. He would teach and I would be office manager. *Plenty of opportunities to minister in those roles*, we thought, and soon it was true.

Before the first school year ended, however, Gary received a call to pastoral ministry. After much prayer, neither could shake the strong impression God was calling us to new roles: pastor and pastor's wife, though neither fully understood the scope of this invitation.

Gary was prepared to move whenever God called because his parents did so frequently in their ministry journey. Though very mission-focused in their workplace, church, and community, my parents were not called to the transient lifestyle many ministry families experience. Because of this, I found it challenging and stressful to move. However, lyrics to "Whither Thou Goest," performed at our wedding, echoed in my mind. With renewed commitment, we packed for our first pastoral district.

I recalled what other ministers' wives experienced (I do not recall any female pastors in those days). Doubt crept in, and I did not see how I could measure up to what these ladies had been or done, nor was I sure I wanted a life like theirs—busy, scrutinized, demanding, and more! I began to think, *What does God want of me?*

Reality set in when Gary phoned church leaders to let them know our arrival date. One leader said, "By the way, the Nominating Committee is placing Diane in the Kindergarten class as a leader. Will you let her know?" Gary hesitantly relayed the message. After learning the church's plans for me, I wanted to turn around and go back.

I pummeled my husband with questions as we drove: "Why did they decide that without talking to me? Why do they think I have the gifts to lead a children's division? When do I have to start?" Gary tried, but did not have all the answers.

We did not think "No, thank you," was an option, but that is what I wanted to say. The knot twisted tighter in my stomach. We continued a journey I no longer was excited about. My prayer life took on a

new dimension that day, as did my faith walk.

Four years later, shortly before Gary's ordination, we attended the service for our friend, Gaylen Herr. I asked his wife, "Laurie, are you ready to be a pastor's wife for the rest of your life?"

Her response is what I needed to hear, and her words have echoed often in my mind: "Diane, another pastor's wife shared with me that what I need to do first is decide what kind of Christian I want to be and how I would serve God if I was just another member in the pew." That made a lot of sense and lessened my anxiety. I desired to serve God and would wait for Him to reveal His will for my life.

God strengthened me and continues to equip me, although I have learned it is okay to say "no" when others' expectations do not align with God's priorities for my life. He has used His timid, skeptical-at-times daughter in surprising ways. I am reminded, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7, NIV).

The devil is resolute and cunning with his plans to distract, destroy, and rob pastors' families of joy in service. A ministry journey is much like a tapestry, and each side tells unique stories. On the front are colorful strands of yarn woven to form beautiful images. On the reverse are redirected threads and knots. Some threads, like communication, time, friendships, health, personal growth, and shared mission, bring understanding and add joy on the journey. Let us consider these threads that your spouse and you use to weave a ministry tapestry.

Communication

Brenda Aufderhar and her pastoral husband, Mike, have a passion for families, and their focus on communication has blessed many ministry couples. They highly recommend *Talking and Listening Together: Couple Communication I*, a practical curriculum to help couples acquire a set of talking and listening skills.

Brenda says, "Communication that flows easily, creates understanding, and supports finding solutions is essential and necessary for the minister's home to survive and thrive. It helps each person better manage the stresses of the outside world while preventing a volcano from forming inside the glass house. Good communication decreases the blame game, formation of bitterness, and the emotional chaos that follows. An open heart with the skills to listen, talk and problem solve increases self-responsibility by strengthening self-awareness, which is foundational for relational stewardship—the work of owning and being responsible for one's part of the interactions with others. At its best, the flow of words and ease of attentive ears is authentic, godly love in action."

Learning *and* living better communication skills have been part of the Aufderhars' experience. Brenda says, "Each time we prepared to present together at various parenting junctures, and dealt with 'attacks of friendly fire,' in various places we have served, we were stretched to grow the most. While our learning times often have been messy, hard, and tedious, we have noted with gratitude, like finishing a marathon, a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that our hearts were more knit together and a greater sense of God's love rested in and between us."

Couples who acquire and practice these skills also offer a gift to the churches they serve.

Time

In a 2014 study of Adventist pastors and families, "Over two-thirds of pastors and spouses felt that the time demands of their roles prevented sufficient leisure time with their families." Absence of time together results in stressed, fractured relationships. Couples who dialogue about workloads and are

intentional about guarding family time are more content. There is less tug-of-war between the demands of their respective responsibilities with a commitment to support and build stronger relationships.

Kim Kennedy and her pastoral husband, Dave, highly value strong relationships in their home. For them, this comes through quality time. Kim says, "Family meal times around the kitchen table and a scheduled weekly family night are essential to making relationship-building a priority. Thursday nights are off-limits to anyone who wants to do something that does not include the whole family. In the beginning, church members tried to schedule appointments on this night, but the beauty of family night is being able to say 'no' for a great reason. Our boys appreciate that work is not the priority that evening, and Dave and I gain respect with our church and friends for making time for family. We still experience family night together even though our family dynamics have changed with older children. Lucas, a junior in college, has this constant rhythm to depend on when he visits, and our youngest, Logan, soon a senior in high school, asks every week, 'What are we doing for family night?'"

Jed Dart and his pastoral wife, Lee Lee, are proactive in making date nights and time "to keep us connected, so our marriage stays strong!" Jed finds that "time together can be challenging because Lee Lee's evenings are more full now, and that is when I am off work," he says.

Ronald Knott and his pastoral wife, Esther, have been in ministry together since 1990. They have another approach to family function. "I don't believe we have ever ordered our marriage and family life on the basis of 'quality time.' By accident or design, we operate more on the basis of 'continuous engagement.' We share everything of interest, and have been blessed to find many opportunities for creative synergy between our jobs, which makes it all the more fun," Ronald says. The Knotts also determined to implement the continuous engagement principle when their daughter, Livvy, joined the family. This commitment resulted in realigned personal and professional priorities for Ronald and Esther.

Thoughtfully devise a plan with your spouse to nurture family relationships. Try the plan for a period of time and evaluate the benefits. Adjust if necessary.

Friendships

Laurie Snyman and her pastoral husband, Royce, have learned the value of forming friendships for support. Laurie says, "Personal friendships are a wonderful blessing, but not always possible for the ministry spouse. We sometimes have to keep boundaries to be able to maintain objectivity since our role is to serve and avoid conflicting dual relationships. These boundaries can make one feel isolated."

Laurie felt this isolation when raising a toddler. "My daughter had been acting up, and I tried to think of someone to call with more experience in parenting than myself. I could not think of one person I could fully trust.

"Not long after that, my husband initiated inviting pastoral families and couples to our home on Saturday nights. We found new friends (who had always been there) and, by spending time together, formed intimate connections. We prayed, discussed, and problem-solved. What a benefit we had missed throughout all those early years in ministry!"

José Hernandez' wife, Ann Roda, is a pastor. He says a unique challenge male ministry spouses face is "that there are so few male ministry spouses. It is very difficult to get to know one another and establish a network of support. It can be isolating, especially during pastors' meetings or retreats when the entire family is invited and all the male pastors have established friendships with one another, and the pastors' wives have their own meetings." While well intended, José also finds that "publications, letters, cards, and gifts sent to the home are geared specifically for the pastor's wife rather than a pastor's husband."

If you do not serve where close fellowship with other Adventist pastoral couples is possible,

connect with the minister and ministerial spouse community groups on Facebook where fellowship and support are plentiful.

Health

There are numerous reasons to support one another on your pathway to health. The stresses of life and ministry are detrimental if not guarded. In addition to healthy eating and other counseled lifestyle habits, consider supporting each other's exercise goals. Better yet, find time to exercise together.

In her blog *Meet, Catch, and Keep*, Theresa DiDonata shares "5 Reasons Why Couples Who Sweat Together, Stay Together." The benefits include: 1) Increase happiness with your relationship; 2) Improve efficiency of your workouts; 3) Make your partner fall in love with you; 4) Help you achieve your fitness goals; and 5) Increase your emotional bond.

Why not involve the whole family? It is never too early to model a healthy lifestyle. This can be part of your plan to build family relationships, too.

Personal Growth

Charles H. Spurgeon said, "Man's wonder grows with his knowledge," and Jesus "kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52, NASB). Learning new skills or advancing education goals can open new doors professionally, provide opportunities in ministry for your spouse, and may bring a greater fulfillment in service. Continued spiritual growth brings a deepening awe, trust, and faith in our Savior, too.

Sandi Case, a retired pastor's wife, recently reflected on her spiritual journey: "She's a pastor's wife; devotional life is easy for her. We all know it is not true, but we do not explain how we struggle daily to maintain that life! ... It was important to discover why I was a Seventh-day Adventist believer. My beliefs and personal walk first had to be *mine*. With that perspective, it was more difficult for hurts, disappointments, and frustrations to 'derail' me. Owning my beliefs, I was able to encourage my husband's faithfulness and exhort him in his ministry."

Shared Mission

Jed Dart states that he and his wife, Lee Lee, "Have always made a good team. Our strengths complement each other, and we love serving together. I also love having a front row seat to watch my wife tell people about Jesus firsthand with her words and actions. This blesses me so much. My prayer life has become richer and deeper, too, as we pray for those to whom she ministers."

José Hernandez enjoys being a part of the process as Ann Roda prepares her sermons. He says, "We discuss the biblical passage, and she shares how God's Word has spoken to her. She invites me to take the same journey in the passage, then together we share what God has put in our hearts. Our different thoughts and perspectives are spiritually enriching. On Sabbath morning, I try to listen with fresh ears. God enables me to hear and see something different from His Word. I praise God for this experience. It's been a wonderful journey that strengthens our spiritual connection with one another."

Scripture reveals the supportive roles of husband and wife within a family unit. Yet, it does not clearly outline God's expectations of a pastor's spouse. However, we learn that all believers are called to serve in a royal priesthood that we "may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." (1 Pet. 2:9, NASB).

It took a while to accept that Gary and I are *together* in ministry for a purpose. I am not just the spouse along for the ride (though I have been to unimagined destinations). I am not just the spouse to hold up the preacher (though I now realize how much he values that support). I am not just the mother

who endeavors to produce perfect role models for the congregation (though if the “wife and mother works for the best interests of her family, seeking to fashion their characters after the divine Model, the recording angel writes her name as one of the greatest missionaries in the world”). I have been called to serve, and there is much variety in what He asks me to do.

God has a significant ministry calling for your spouse, too. He wants you *and* your spouse to influence for Christ, faithfully serve, and share God’s grace in its various forms (1 Pet. 4:10, NIV). The question I continue to ask myself is “Will I develop the gifts God has entrusted to me for mission, or will I waste those talents?” It is a question each ministry spouse faces.

God partners with ministry spouses in many ways. They teach, greet visitors, host hospitality lunches, prepare newsletters, minister to the sick and aging, preach sermons or evangelistic series, lead small groups or Bible studies, present family-strengthening classes, operate audio-visual equipment, write songs or lead music groups, coordinate community outreach events, etc. We are encouraged to “individually consider the many branches of the work. ... Consider prayerfully what would best tell for the cause of God. If there is a humble, unselfish heart, and a contrite spirit, in seeking to know the Lord’s will, He will lead each of us in the path where He would have us walk.” All of us are stewards trusted by God to do a work appointed by Him.

Not all pastors’ spouses embrace or realize God’s desire, and some have been discouraged when they have served. In his blog post “Is There an Office for Pastors’ Wives?” John Leeman states that a pastor should help his wife “not compare herself to other women, but to seek to be faithful with the gifts and opportunities God has given her.” If this is happening, one might expect to find an exuberant, engaged pastor’s spouse in every district. However, Flourish, a Baptist equipping ministry for ministry wives, suggests that, in relationship to her or his calling, a pastor’s spouse’s response falls into one of four categories: 1) uncertain, 2) solid, 3) struggling, or 4) robust. The category in which pastors spouses find themselves could vary at different points in the ministry journey. Flourish identifies situations or variables that impact a ministry spouse in her or his lifetime: 1) stages of life; 2) field in which the couple serves; 3) challenges of personality; 4) spiritual issues encountered; and 5) ministry issues that arise.

Most pastoral couples acknowledge that the home is their first mission field and that each should labor for the salvation of the family. They also accept that “love for that which is human is to be secondary to [their] love for God.” It is the variables and challenges in life that can cause a spouse to struggle for life balance and impede, at least temporarily, their response to or fulfillment of God’s calling to serve. I encourage each pastor to seek a better understanding of your spouse’s journey.

As God inspires a pastor’s spouse to serve, some church members may express disapproval, or make unrealistic demands or expectations. Some believe every pastor and pastor’s spouse should function in a prescribed way. “Our duty is not decided by what others may plan for us,” Ellen White counsels.

We may blend our strengths, but God does not ask the pastor’s spouse to lose her or his individuality. “Of Him should be asked, ‘What is right? What is wrong? How may I best fulfill the purpose of my creation?’”

As the number of female pastors increases, men married to these ministers enter uncharted waters. Michael Nixon serves alongside his pastoral wife, Tacyana. He did not know what to expect from their first congregation. “At first, it wasn’t clear where my place was or if it was even necessary for me to have one,” Michael says. He later realized “the church did not have any true expectations.” He believes that was, in part, because “the role and function of a pastor’s wife is more natural and familiar to churches.” In another congregation, Michael realizes the members’ willingness to allow him to “function and contribute in ways that are more natural and comfortable.” He and Tacyana seek God “on a regular

basis to discern His plan” for their church, and Michael strives “to be ready, willing, and available to do whatever is necessary to support the ministry of my wife.”

It is not just ministry role expectations male spouses face. For Jed Dart, preparing potluck food was an unexpected necessity “because Fridays are super busy” for Lee Lee. He says, “I now make a mean *vegan* cottage cheese roast, thank you very much!”

In his article “I’m Ted and I’m Married to Your Minister,” a husband tells how time fixed the problem faced by some parishioners who, at first, did not know how to treat him. Deeper concerns include his natural defense for his pastoral wife to be treated fairly, those who undercut her pastoral authority for lack of comfort with her assignment, and unsubstantiated judgments about the couple’s child-rearing outcomes. His greatest concern is knowing he is “married to a gifted pastor, but wondering whether [she] will get a real chance to maximize her God-given potential.”

Closing

Pastors’ spouses receive joy and love from members, but also may experience persecution and sacrifice in their duty for God. Ellen White offers some encouraging words: “In former years the wives of ministers endured want and persecution. When their husbands suffered imprisonment, and sometimes death, those noble, self-sacrificing women suffered with them, and their reward will be equal to that bestowed on the husband.”

The spouse shares many pastoral burdens, because we are one flesh (Mark 10:8, NASB). However, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight” (Heb. 4:13, NIV). The “eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chron. 16:9, NLT). May this knowledge comfort and embolden you as *together* you continue your ministry journey. Let your deep love for Jesus enable you both to hold on by faith.

Endnotes

¹Music and Lyrics by Guy Singer, “Whither Thou Goest,” Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., Karin Music, 1954.

²For this chapter, I interviewed a number of individuals.

³See <http://www.couplecommunication.com>.

⁴Duane McBride David Sedlacek, et al. “Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors’ Families” report, (Silver Spring, MD: North American Division Ministerial and Family Ministries Departments in conjunction with General Conference) presented September 8, 2014.

⁵See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/adventist.pastors/>, <http://www.facebook.com/MinisterialSpousesAssociation>, or <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ministerialspouses/>.

⁶Learn the CREATION Health principles at <http://creationhealth.com/CREATION-Health>.

⁷Theresa E DiDonata, “5 Reasons Why Couples Who Sweat Together, Stay Together” in *Meet, Catch, and Keep*. Source: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/meet-catch-and-keep/201401/5-reasons-why-couples-who-sweat-together-stay-together>, retrieved December 21, 2014.

⁸Charles Spurgeon, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/76910-man-s-wonder-grows-with-his-knowledge>, retrieved December 17, 2014.

⁹Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 12, (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1909), 165–167.

¹⁰—, “The Appearance of Evil” in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 594.

¹¹—, “Adopting Infant Children” in *Spalding and Magan Collection* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate 1987), 116.2.

¹²—, “Stewards of God” in *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2001), 367.

¹³Jonathan Leeman, “Is There an Office for Pastors’ Wives?” Source: <http://9marks.org/article/is-there-an-office-for-pastors-wives/>, retrieved December 17, 2014.

¹⁴Source: <http://www.flourish.me/Tools/>, retrieved December 17, 2014.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶White, “Missionaries in the Home” in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 138.

¹⁷White, “Marriage” in *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1991), 126.

¹⁸White, “Adopting Infant Children” in *Spalding and Magan Collection*, 116.

¹⁹White, Ellen G. “Responsibilities of Married Life.” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 45.

²⁰Source: “I’m Ted and I’m Married to Your Minister,” <http://www.whwomenclergy.org/articles/article57.php>, retrieved December 17, 2015.

²¹White, “The Minister’s Wife” in *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 201.