

## CHAPTER 23

### **Conducting a Training Retreat for Deacons and Deaconesses**

A weekend retreat at a resort surrounded by nature can be a tremendous blessing to the deacons and deaconesses. It would be a time for them to bond with each other and with the pastor also. If going to a resort is not feasible, the training can be done on a weekend at the church.

I recommend that the pastor reiterate to the church elders and other officers the purpose of empowering the deacons and deaconesses to return to the biblical model for ministry. The purpose is to equip them to become more effective in working along with the elders as members of the same team in ministering to the church. Having this assurance will minimize the tension that could possibly arise. The pastor may consider inviting the first elder to attend the retreat with them. Upon returning, he could share his experience with the other elders, and encourage them to support the concept.

The pastor should have a joint meeting with the deacons and deaconesses and share his burden to support them in their ministry. He should ask them how they would feel about going on a training retreat. The purpose of the retreat would be to seek God's vision for the deacon and deaconess board, develop a vision and a mission statement, and establish goals and objectives. If they agree, ask them for suggestions about the location and dates. The pastor along with these officers may decide on inviting someone other than the pastor to conduct the training. If that is the case, the pastor, head deacon, or head deaconess would contact that person and plan around his/her schedule.

Try to arrive at the resort around 4:00 p.m. on a Friday (March-September ideally). The group should have enough time to get set up and finish supper by 7:00 p.m. Here is a suggested schedule of events for a weekend deacon and deaconess retreat.

# THE SAMPLE S.D.A. CHURCH DEACON & DEACONESS RETREAT



The Nature House Christian Retreat  
Anywhereville, AL  
May 21-23, 2010

*“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself [herself] unspotted from the world.” James 1:27*

**Friday, May 21, 2010**

- 4:00-6:00 p.m. Arrival and Personal Preparation
- 6:00-7:15 p.m. Supper
- 7:30-8:00 p.m. Vesper  
Song Service  
Prayer  
Special Music  
Speaker- Deacon \_\_\_\_\_
- 8:00-8:05 p.m. Break
- 8:05-8:30 p.m. Group Exercise



- 8:30-8:55 p.m. Prayer Session (Seek God's vision for Deacons and Deaconesses)
- 8:55-9:00 p.m. Closing Remarks and Benediction

**Sabbath, May 22, 2010**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 7:30-8:45 a.m.   | Breakfast  |
| 9:15-10:30 a.m.  | Sabbath School<br>Song Service<br>Prayer<br>Special Music<br>Lesson- Deaconess _____<br>Deacon _____ |
| 10:30-10:50 a.m. | Prayer Session (Seek God's vision<br>for Deacons and Deaconesses)                                    |
| 10:50-11:00 a.m. | Break  |
| 11:00-12:00 p.m. | Presentation- Pastor/Presenter   |
| 12:00-12:05 p.m. | Break  |
| 12:05-1:05 p.m.  | Group Exercise   |
| 1:30-2:45 p.m.   | Lunch  |
| 3:00-5:00 p.m.   | Hiking/Relaxation  |
| 5:00-5:30 p.m.   | Group Exercise   |
| 5:30-5:45 p.m.   | Prayer Session (Seek God's Power<br>to fulfill His vision through us)                                |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 6:00-7:15 p.m. | Supper   |
| 7:30-8:00 p.m. | Vesper<br>Song Service<br>Prayer<br>Special Music<br>Speaker- Deacon _____ |
| 8:00-8:05 p.m. | Closing Remarks and Benediction  |
| 8:15-9:45 p.m. | Recreation   |

**Sunday, May 23, 2010**

|                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| 8:30-9:45 a.m.   | Breakfast               |
| 9:45-10:45 a.m.  | Testimonies and Sharing |
| 10:45-11:00 a.m. | Season of Prayer        |
| 11:00-12:00 p.m. | Cleaning and Packing    |
| 12:00 p.m.       | Departure               |

To begin the work for the evening, have a vesper service with one of the deacons giving a vesper thought. Afterward, the pastor or guest presenter should state what he/she hopes that they will accomplish that weekend together—to seek God’s vision for the deacon and deaconess board, develop vision and mission statements, and establish goals and objectives to be carried out upon returning home.

Divide the deacons and deaconesses into groups, consisting of no more than five in each group. Have a mix of deacons and deaconesses in each group. Each group will select a secretary and a facilitator. Everyone is given a Pleased and Troubled Worksheet on which to list the things they are pleased about and troubled about as a deacon or deaconess. As each person shares his/her list in their group, the secretary records it on a large master sheet and puts stars by those areas that are repeated. Then each person in the group will rank the pleased and troubled areas by putting a red dot by the areas that are most important to him/her, and a blue dot by the areas least important. Each group will turn in their big sheets to the pastor/presenter to be synthesized. Once they are synthesized, the goal is to continue to improve upon those areas in which they are pleased, and to implement strategies to address those areas in which they are troubled.

The next item scheduled for that evening is to have a twenty-five minute prayer session. The focus of the prayers is to thank God for what these officers are pleased about, seek direction in how to address their troubled areas, and to seek God’s vision for them as deacons and deaconesses. If the prayer session goes beyond twenty-five minutes, that’s okay. Prayer is the key that will bring about the results that these officers are seeking. After a few remarks by the pastor/presenter, and the benediction, the group is ready to settle in for the night.

### **Developing a Vision and Mission Statement**

After breakfast Sabbath morning, a Sabbath school program should be conducted. At least one deacon and one deaconess should facilitate the lesson study. At the conclusion of the lesson, the group should have another prayer session to seek God’s vision for them. After prayer and a ten minute break, the worship service follows. This consists of a presentation, ideally in PowerPoint that identifies the

current problem of your local church and other Seventh-day Adventist churches. The problem is that the deacons and deaconesses of the Seventh-day Adventist church are under-utilized. They have been relegated to caring for the church facilities while the spiritual leadership responsibilities that were carried out by the deacons of the first century Christian church have been assigned to other departments established by the church.

The pastor/presenter should give examples from the Scriptures to show the biblical model that deacons and deaconesses of the twenty-first century should adopt. As the deacons and deaconesses listen to the presentation, they are to write on their Vision Worksheet the vision that God is revealing to them about their ministry. The pastor/presenter should also use the material in this book as a guide.

After the presentation, the deacons and deaconesses are to separate into their groups and share what they wrote on their Vision Worksheets, while the secretaries write it on a large master sheet. The same process is followed for this exercise as was followed with the Pleased and Troubled exercise. The synthesis of their worksheets will define the vision for their ministry. According to James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, “visions are statements of destination, of the ends of our labor; they are therefore future-oriented and are made real over different spans of time.”<sup>4</sup> The following is an example of a vision statement for deacons and deaconesses:

#### VISION STATEMENT

The deacons and deaconesses of the Sample Seventh-day Adventist Church identified the following vision of themselves and their work: (1) being filled with the Holy Spirit, (2) being teachers and preachers, (3) being students of God’s Word, (4) being soul winners, (5) being prayer warriors, (6) keeping order in the church, (7) coming together on one accord, (8) meeting once a month as a whole group—deacons and deaconesses together, (9) coming together to study and to be taught how to be effective, and (10) having seasons of prayer before Holy Communion.

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<sup>4</sup>James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 130.

Dinner is served at the conclusion of the group session. Allow a couple of hours of leisure time after dinner for those who want to take a hike and/or relax.

After relaxing, the deacons and deaconesses are to meet in their groups again for another group exercise. This exercise involves the development of a mission statement and setting some goals and objectives to be accomplished in the near future. The same process is used as in the previous group sessions. The following is an example of a mission statement for deacons and deaconesses:

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the deacons and deaconesses of the Sample Seventh-day Adventist Church is to serve its members and community—especially those that are most vulnerable—by providing for their emergency physical, social, and spiritual needs, addressing relational problems in the church, and teaching and preaching God’s Word through public and personal evangelism. We will lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and disciple newly baptized church members. We will visit, assess needs, and network with departments within the church and agencies in the community in order to accomplish our mission. We will be responsible for maintaining the upkeep of the church and its properties. We will engage in on-going personal development through prayer, the study of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and other relevant materials so that we might become better persons that are better equipped to glorify God and serve humanity.

#### **Setting Goals and Objectives**

The final task of this group exercise is for the deacons and deaconesses to set goals and objectives for them to carry out upon returning home. One example of a goal, in the context of the sample mission statement, is for the deacons and deaconesses to identify who are the “most vulnerable” individuals mentioned in the mission statement that they will serve. Define their needs. Develop ministries to meet those needs. Contact social service agencies in the community and invite their representatives to come and speak to the board of



deacons and deaconesses; find out what services they offer to assist these individuals, and how the deacons and deaconesses can network with them. Finally, the deacons and deaconesses should identify both human and financial resources of the church that can assist in meeting the needs of these “most vulnerable” individuals. You should be able to obtain a list of all of the social services agencies in your community by asking any one of those agencies.

Whatever goals and objectives the deacons and deaconesses set at the retreat, they must be sure to establish a timeline for accomplishing them. The head deacon and head deaconesses must hold the members of their boards accountable for taking the necessary action steps to complete the tasks. Therefore, assignments should be made in this group exercise. The secretary of each group is to record the names of the deacons and deaconesses who agree to carry out assignments on an Action Steps Assignment Sheet. A date is set for the meeting when these officers will give their reports.

This group exercise concludes with a prayer session to seek God’s power to fulfill His vision through the deacons and deaconesses. Supper is next, followed by a vesper service, closing remarks by the pastor/presenter, and an hour and a half of recreation before turning in for the night.

The final hours on Sunday morning begin with breakfast, followed by a time for testimonies and sharing, and conclude with a season of prayer. The pastor/presenter should have each of the deacons and deaconesses to fill out a Commitment Form (at the end of the chapter). Copies should be made so that they will have a copy as a reminder, and the head deacon/deaconess, and pastor will also have a copy as a reminder to pray for them.

These officers are now ready to depart from this mountain top experience to return to their church and community to serve. They are equipped with God’s Spirit, a vision, a mission, goals, objectives, action steps, and the empowerment of their pastor and church family to accomplish their ministry.

### **DEACON AND DEACONESS COMMITMENT FORM**

In as much as I have taken a critical look at the Biblical Roots of the office of Deacon and Deaconess, I am now willing to reshape my ministry so that it will fit the Biblical Model and be aligned with our Mission Statement. Therefore, I am making the following commitment:

Please check the appropriate line(s)

To spend at least one hour each day reading my Bible and praying for the infilling of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Become actively involved in visiting and nurturing the members of my church.

Use my influence to solve the problems that arise in the church that create dissatisfaction and murmuring among the membership.

To make sure that the church properties are maintained in such a way that they will always present a positive witness for God.

To be a team player, attend all of the scheduled meetings of my office, and faithfully carry out my assigned duties.

Become actively engaged in soul-winning by giving Bible studies, conducting cottage meetings in my home/community, passing out Bible tracts, or do some other form of evangelism in consultation with my Pastor.

Other:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_