

Priority in Mission Matter

(EUD – Adventist Mission Office)

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvellous light, are to show forth His glory”. (AA p. 9)

A. Factors that make the difference in soul winning

The church and the members

Paul penned that through the Church a witness must be given as the light of Gospel of Christ to everybody, "across the universe": *So that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavens might be made clear through the church the wide - shining wisdom of God, Which is seen in his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Eph. 3:10-11).

Writing to Timothy he said that the church must be the pillar and ground of the truth: *“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:14-15).

The Mission of the Church is to announce Christ as God, Creator, Saviour and Redeemer, Lord and coming King to every man. It is to preach forgiveness, repentance, conversion and holiness in Him.

It is a commission for each believer where he witnesses his freedom in Jesus, his new Life style, his new *raison d’être*, his love for the Lord and for the mankind, his new experience of hope.

The mission is the great opportunity for personal growth, spiritual maturing of vocational experience. Ellen G. White penned: *“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy, the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice, we must participate in His labours for their redemption.”* (The Desire of Ages, p. 142). Still we read: *“Everyone who is added to the ranks by conversion is to be assigned his post of duty.”* (7T,30). And more than this we read: *“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary”.* (Desire of Ages, 195).

The mission of the church is so far beyond a simple duty. It is a privilege and an opportunity for every believer to be an active participant of God's plan. It is not a program to be done or developed in some time and place, it is the opportunity offered by God to every believer to develop HIS own character in the life of his children.

All studies on church growth, and on soul winning show that the mission becomes more effective only when it flows from the testimony of the simple members.

Below we consider a research made by the church grow department of Andrews University and in some churches of our Division, regarding the way people become Church members.

Study made by Andrews University, Church growth dept., 2004 in the USA.

Evangelistic Crusade	1%
The church that meet people's Needs	1-2%
Visitation, (door to door)	1-2%
Walk In, (people who came spontaneously)	2-3%
Church Program	3-4%
Sabbath School	4-5%
Pastor	5-6%
Friend/relative	75-90%

Study Made in Europe

A. Milano, source Italian Union, Nord Field about 150 people, 2008.

1. A flyer, a postcard?	1,0 %
2. A social program, health training, education, or whatever?	1,5 %
3. A radio or television program?	0,0 % (No Radio)
4. Participation in a program or a religious conference?	0,8 %
5. Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	93,0%
6. other	3,0 %

B. Geneva, source Rickson Nobre, Swiss Union, FSC, about 1400 people, 2012

1. A flyer, a postcard?	0,4 %
2. A social program, health training, education, or whatever?	2,0 %
3. A radio or television program?	0,5 %
4. Participation in a program or a religious conference?	2,3 %
5. Book evangelism, Evangelistic literature	5,1 %
6. Frequency range at Adventist school	2,0 %
7. Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	86,0 %
8. other	1,7 %

C. Romanian Church, 202 people

A flyer, a postcard?	2 %
Participation in a program or a religious conference?	5 %
Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	91 %
Others	2 %

D. Ghanaian church, 50 people

A flyer, a postcard?	0,5 %
Participation in a program or a religious conference?	5 %
Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	94 %
Others	0,5%

E. Latino American Church, 103 people

A flyer, a postcard?	1 %
Participation in a program or a religious conference?	10 %
Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	86 %
Others: social program, family	3 %

Two recent churches organized in Italy:

E. Pavia Church 2012, 44 people

A flyer, a postcard?	1 %
Participation in a program or a religious conference?	1,5 %
Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	94 %
Others: social program, family	3,5 %

E. Alessandria church, 40 people

A flyer, a postcard?	1 %
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Participation in a program or a religious conference?	1 %
Contact with a friend, a neighbour, a relative?	94 %
Others: social program, family	2 %

So the factor number one in mission is the active, personal, person to person witness of every member called to be disciples, priests and servants! And, in function of this aim, we need to focus the role of the leader.

B. The “Factor” pastor-teacher. The Role of pastors and of leaders.

The leader makes the difference in mission matter!

The leader in general, and particularly the pastor, is a key person in the organization of the church. His role can be very specific, both for good and for bad effects. Some elements can play a substantial role in his ministry for the enrolment of the members in mission.

For instance:

- to guide them to the essential personal experience of communion with Jesus.
- to train people as “missionaries”.
- to envision the believers in service and mission.
- to lead them to be in front line for soul winning.

For all this, a great importance must be given to the emphasis they receive in their preparation in the theological seminary, where the school curriculum could underline their role in church organization, in coaching, in ecclesiology, in caring people and in mission.

In the GC session in Toronto, year 2000, a report was presented. It had shown some interesting things linked to the ratio pastor – church members numbers. Here we have some interesting numbers:

Europe, Japan, Nord America:	1 pastor each	169 members.	Grow	1,25%
South and centre America	1 pastor each	630 members.	Grow	8,91%
East Africa, South Philippine, etc.	1 pastor each	985 members.	Grow	12%.

From this study we see that the growth of the church is not linked to the number of pastors in proportion to the number of members. Indeed, it seems to be the opposite.

Similar effects can be noticed even in vice versa situations: in some parts of the world field where usually each pastor has many churches and a lot of members, there are also specific situations where a pastor has only one or two churches and not a lot of members, the church grow is the same or less than the pastor which has many churches. Vice versa in some parts of our Division we have noticed similar experiences with a pastor with more churches and a big number of members where the growth trend is not less, on the contrary, most of the time is greater than the average.

These cases help us to reflect on the key factor that the pastor plays. If in his ministry he is focused in developing the human resources of the local church members, on their own personal role in soul winning, on the development of the member’s leadership, the church grow is facilitated.

When a pastor has several churches to lead he cannot deal with all the problems in the local churches, he has to train and delegate his church members and they in the same way are obliged to engage themselves in the different services of the church care, of evangelism from person to person. Somehow they are obliged to accept the biblical role of the pastor-trainer¹, more than a performer as a leader guide.

¹ As it is affirmed by Paul to the Ephesians 4:12 where is penned Pastor – Trainer.

Some Bible and Spirit of Prophecy instruction for pastors and leaders

The following biblical texts and the E.G. White statements can help us to focus on this concept.

A few texts from the Bible

Exodus 18:19-21, *"Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹ Moreover you shall **select** from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens"*.

Matthew 28:18-20, *"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore¹ and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;..."²*.

Luke 6:40, *"The disciple is not above his master: but every one when he is perfected shall be as his teacher"*.

Ephesians 4:11-13, *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"*.

Revelation 1:6, *"and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father..."*.

These are some texts that underline a principle: God wants to invest on people, He wants to develop character, personality and leadership. He wants to make them disciples, apostles and priests. He wants to act through them.

Some quotation from E. G. White writings

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church His fullness and His sufficiency should be reflected to the world. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of the darkness into His marvellous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church the final and full display of the love of God will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places", (AA, 9).

"Everyone who is added to the ranks by conversion is to be assigned his post of duty", (7T, 30).

"Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary", (Desire of Ages, 195).

"Christ intends that His ministers shall be educators of the church in gospel work. They are to teach the people how to seek and save the lost", (Desire of Ages, 825).

"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...", (7T, 21).

"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", (7T 19).

²

The goal in discipleship, or as we read in 1 Pe 2:1-9 and Rev 1:4-6, it is priesthood.

"The best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them", (9T, 82).

"Here is our great sin. We are years behind...What can we expect but deterioration in religious life when the people listen to sermon after sermon and do not put the instruction into practice? The ability God has given if not exercised, degenerates", (6T, 425).

Therefore pastors are, by divine commission, called to work for the growth and the evangelistic mission of each member. God's call for them is for the training of their church members in discipleship and in commitment for the Gospel commission.

For these reasons it is necessary to reformulate the functions of the pastoral ministry: they must become trainers of missionaries. They must be the orchestra's conductors and not just musicians, even if they can play one or more instruments. They must be coaches of the team and not just players in the football field, even if they must know how to play. In one word: they must be a *disciples maker*.

However every pastor must not neglect his personal pastoral care for souls, he must be a soul winner in all circumstances.

C. Practical steps in discipleship and mission management

The Seventh Day Adventist church understands its mission in an integrated, comprehensive and holistic way. As a church we identify several relevant Ministry models whose principles should be applied anywhere:

1 The structural role of the local community of believers.

The local community is the first indispensable reality, Jesus came to build the church. The Bible, the New Testament particularly underline the capital role of the family of God that E.G White call the "Theatre of God Grace" (1888.1554.1).

2 The universal call to discipleship.

Jesus came to make disciple, He chose and made 12 disciples, to the 11 that remained till the end of the of his earthly ministry he bade "go and Make Disciple" (Mat 28:19). For Paul, the ministry was to transform the believer in offering agreeable to God" (Rom 15:15-16). Many biblical texts summarize the fundamental of a disciple in 3 directions:

- A disciple seeks a daily relationship with Jesus Christ through the personal prayer and the meditation of His Word seeking His guidance for every aspect of life.
- A disciple contributes to the building of the church by serving and striving to create a fellowship and unity in solidarity and love.
- A disciple feels the need to serve others in their need and witnessing them his experience of salvation and hope in Christ.

The call to discipleship goes beyond issues related to culture, curriculum school, social level, life standard. This call is for all: men and women, rich and poor, adults, youth and children, it is a call for every new-born Christian.

3 The "small groups" as supporting structure for discipleship.

Jesus choose 12 men and he organize them in a small group, leading them in the love for God, for one-another, for every human been. Today the group dynamic is understood as the first educational transforming structure.

All aspect of the christian life are affected by the small group dynamic. In the divine service the Sabbath school action unit play this indispensable function.

4 The Leadership Development.

The quality of the leader marks the progress of a people, the growth or decline of every possible kind of human institution is directly linked to the quality of its leaders. God said to Moses, choose able men and faithful, put them as leaders (Ex 18:21).

Jesus, the leader - disciple maker gave to them authority, he sent them as Apostles: He gave the gift of leadership. This is a charisma of the Spirit (see Eph 4:11). Training leaders and new ones for the church is the work of the church. To establish and develop leaders should be a fundamental responsibility of the church.

5 The Gospel Mission focused in the community and in the cities

Today the majority of the world population lives in the city, more and more the mission must be achieved in the city. About 100 years ago Ellen White penned on the need to enter into the cities.

6 The planting of new churches.

Because the church is the headquarters of the mission, the vineyard of the Lord, we need churches, we need new churches active working as training school for disciple.

7 The realisation of centre of influence.

Centres of influence placed where people live must be small initiative that follow Jesus' holistic method of ministry. They must face the need of the people and facilitate the contact with them. A "Center of Hope" (or Center of Influence) project must be intended as "the right arm of the mission of a local church" to penetrate the community in the context of a specific area where a church is present, facing the needs of the people, and creating bridges for them to join the church.

In light of these important "ways" and of the above brief remarks and inspired statements some priorities came on the table, some responsibilities challenged us.

Some steps of implementation

The following ideas should be steps to promote the involvement and the mobilization of the members in the mission of the Gospel.

Step 1.

With the leaders: the elders and the pastors.

In every context (social, cultural, political, etc.) the leader plays a fundamental role; the same is for the church, for its growth and for the implementation of the mission. The leaders have the role of disciple trainers. They must lead the church for its mission and in its growth. They must be able to transform the church in a training school for the Christian worker (Ministry of Healing p. 149). To achieve this fundamental objective concerning the need of leaders the Church must organize the training of the leaders themselves. Two fundamental steps can be the following.

1. To envision, to motivate, to equip and to train the pastors as teachers and as coaches.

2. To envision the pastors of their responsibility to motivate, to equip and to train the local leaders as trainers.

Step 2.

With the believers:

To envision the believers on their status of priests: that they are members of God's Royal Priesthood. That they are the Lord's disciples who live a daily relationship with their Master through His Word and in Prayer.

To guide them to the call to be missionaries. Trained to make disciples; equipped by the leaders of the church to serve the church, to love their fellow brethren, to witness their experience of salvation to their neighbours, their friends and their relatives, to serve their fellow men in their needs.

This means to re-understand the priority of each organizational level of the church, from the administration to the pastors re-focusing their ministry on training and teaching the members of the people of God.

This means to review the Sabbath Morning worship and preaching focused not only in Jesus as the Lamb of God but even in Jesus as Lord and model DISCIPLE for *all disciples*.

To envision the *disciples-members* of their duty in a redeemed, transformed and effective spiritual growth. To grow not only in discipleship but even in the skill of ***disciples maker's***. This means to study Jesus' methods in making disciples, to follow His steps as master in soul winning.

Step 3.

Some possible steps to implement a plan of discipleship:

1. In order to realize this goal we must follow some pathways:
 - a. To organize a complete Plan of leadership training, continual education for leaders.
 - b. To train specifically for the small group leaders.
 - c. To train for and implement the concept of small groups.
 - d. To set up specific activities for family, youth, children.

2. To set up a plan of activities according the spiritual gift of the community in short – medium – long term.
 - a. Short term:
 - i. To study the plan in the Board of elders: the pastors and the local leader
 - ii. To explain the project in every detail in the local community.
 - iii. To inform and delegate to each responsible person their respective tasks.
 - iv. To motivate and engage the leaders to be ***motivators*** in their churches.
 - v. To plan the creation of the "supporting structures".
 - b. Medium term:
 - i. To establish reach across plans to develop revival and reformation in the local community reaching former Adventists and backsliders.
 - ii. To plan and organize reach out activities as seminars, small groups, bible studies, street activities, etc. ...
 - c. Medium and long term:
 - i. To organize reaping activities .

Step 4.

To create the “supporting structures”.

A “supporting structure” is a body that facilitates the implementation of the “agencies” responsible for the achieving of the set objectives. This type of body can be useful in almost all fields, especially those where the objective is to promote human resources.

This idea is more and more in use and is currently also called an “infrastructure”. This term refers to a set of elements which are arranged so that together they form a structure which functions for a precise purpose.

Supporting structures are talked about more and more in ecclesiastic circles, first of all in the field of discipleship. Two Adventist studies explicitly discussed on supporting structures. One is “Pattern for Progress: the Role and Function of Church Organization”, by Raymond and Bert B. Beach. The authors examine the models, concepts and functions behind the church departments and structures.

Another book is “The Power of the Spirit” by Neal Wilson and George Rice. In this book the two authors discuss the concepts, the experiences and the results of revival, of growth and of renewal observed in various parts of the world. Neal Wilson writes, “*The church needs support structures to facilitate re consecration, revival, commitment to service and witness*”.

At every level in many areas the fundamental “supporting structure” is the “small groups”. It is the development lab, the “working unit”, in the small group the dynamics of development and training find the best support. In our setting, for the features it has, for its *raison d'etre*³, and for the dynamics that we've noticed can develop the Sabbath School Action Unit may be the ideal supporting structure. In July 2007 Adventist Review published an article penned by Thom S. Rainer, entitled “7 Secrets of Healthy Churches” in which it stated: “The healthy churches have the structure of small groups. For many churches, the primary small group structure is the one of Sunday School (our Sabbath School).

Conclusion

Many years ago E. G. White wrote: “*One of the most effective ways for the propagation of light is the private and personal effort. In the family, in the neighbour's home, at the bed of the sick you can read the Scriptures and say a word of witness on Jesus and on the truth. You will then throw the precious seed that will give its fruit.* (T6 p. 428, 429).

The ideas above expressed are a priority and they have principles drawn from the Bible, from E.G.W. writings and from studies done in the field of missiology and ecclesiology. When these principles are applied and are in progress, we are in the best condition to organise seminars, lectures, evangelistic campaigns, sowing and reaping programs and public activities. But the experience done in several parts around the World and even in Europe shows us clearly that when the church members have got the vision and engage themselves in soul wining the results arrive naturally.

³ The Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department endeavors to motivate all members to dynamic Christian service with the conviction that “The church of Christ is organized for service” (MH 148), and “Every son and daughter of God is called to be a missionary; we are called to the service of God and our fellow men” (MH 395). *GC Working Policy* **FR 05**