Introduction

In 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched a global strategy that called for the planting of an Adventist congregation in “1,800 population segments of 1 million people or more that have no Adventist” before the year 2000 (Widmer 1990:5). Nearly three decades later, many of these population segments are still unentered. One major reason for the difficulty in entering these unentered population segments is that they are located in countries that do not issue missionary visas. Consequently, denominational work is difficult to start. In fact, 80% of the least evangelized people groups in the world live in countries where the government prohibits proselytizing (Adams and Lewis 1991:127). Such countries are often called restricted access nations, limited access nations, closed access nations, or creative access countries (127). Many of these creative access countries are in the 10/40 Window.

The 10/40 Window

The 10/40 Window is an imaginary belt between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, and extending from West Africa across the Middle East to Japan in the east. This window is also called the Resistant Belt and includes the majority of the world’s Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists (Johnstone 1999:543).

A majority of the world’s least evangelized countries (53 out of 55) are in this region (Culbertson, 2012a). Half of the least evangelized cities in the world are also in the 10/40 window (Culbertson, 2012b). Yet, only 10% of all missionaries live or work there (2012a).
The 10/40 Window has tremendous significance for Adventist mission. David Trim, in the introduction to the 2011 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists observes that “while net membership has increased significantly . . . the number of SDAs in proportion to the wider population has only marginally increased in the 10/40 Window, while significantly increasing in the rest of the world. Arguably more resources need to be put into this area” (General Conference Annual Statistics 2013:2).

**Bi-vocational Mission—An Innovative Approach**

Today many denominations are interested in finishing the gospel commission by reaching every unreached people groups—both in the rural and urban areas of the globe. In their zeal to accomplish the evangelization of the world in this generation, many mission agencies have launched innovative and creative models of mission. One of the new developments in mission outreach, particularly for creative access cities, is the bi-vocational mission approach. Among Protestant mission literature, this approach is seen as one possible way to reach the unreached. A couple of Adventist scholars also consider this approach as the way forward in the future. (Gungadoo 1993; Onongha 2015).

**Defining Bi-vocational Mission**

Bi-vocation comes from two words, “bi” and “vocation.” The first word “bi” means “two.” The second part, *vocation,* comes from the Old French *vocation,* meaning, “call, consecration; calling, profession”—which in turn, came from the Latin *vocationem,* literally “a call” or “a being called” (from *vocare* “to call”) (Harper 2018). The English word first appeared in writing in the 1550s with the sense of a person’s “occupation or profession” (Harper 2018). In *Collins English Dictionary* (2012) *vocation* connotes “a special urge, inclination, or predisposition to a particular calling or career, especially a religious one,” whereas today, *vocation* simply means, “the work” or job “in which a person is employed. Putting together these two words means the state of having two callings, *professions* or *careers.*

In this paper, bi-vocational mission refers to the approach or model of mission in which a missions-driven, committed Christian supports himself or herself in a mission field through a secular profession with the intention of making “Christ known on the job and in their free time” (Siemens 1997:121). Bi-vocational mission uses “paid employment to gain and maintain entry in cross-cultural setting” (Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell 2005:17).
Bi-vocational missionaries have also been called non-professional missionaries, lay apostolate, self-supporting witnesses, self-supporting missionaries, ambassadors for Christ without a portfolio, and unofficial missionaries. They “work as professionals and engage in ministry activities in addition to their wage-earning work” (Pocock et al. 2005:17). Such non-traditional missionaries are also called tentmakers in the tradition of Paul’s mission work in an “overseas, cross-cultural ministry environment” (Clarke 1997:103).

**Strengths of Bi-vocational Mission**

What are the strengths of bi-vocational mission? Below are some observations:
1. **It enlarges the Church’s workforce.** Bi-vocational workers fill the ministry vacuum in creative access cities. In fact, some bi-vocational workers eventually become fulltime, fully-sponsored pastors and mission personnel.
2. **It mobilizes the laity.** It does away with the misconception that “missions are . . . exclusively the job of special agents sent out by mission boards” (Wilson 1985:67). It encourages unpaid lay ministry and total member involvement.
3. **It gives entry into restricted access countries.** Many of the unreached people groups live in countries that are closed to regular, church supported missionaries but bi-vocational workers can enter these countries.
4. **It augments the finances of the field.** Not only are bi-vocational workers a source of unpaid outreach personnel, but they also provide income for the church (both in the field and back home) through their tithes and offerings.
5. **It allows poor countries to send foreign missionaries.** Churches in countries that are relatively poor but with a large, educated membership (like the Philippines) are able to “send out” missionaries to creative access countries through the international job market.
6. **It gives flexibility and mobility.** Bi-vocational workers have the potential to reach people that are not reached by traditional missionaries or church workers. They are also more flexible and able to freely “respond to needs which may not be in the program of a mission” (Wilson 1985:71).
7. **It gives credibility to Christian witness.** Bi-vocational workers usually do not have “the stigma of proselytizing” because they are seen as “secular persons with [a] secular calling” (Kane, cited in Wilson 1985:70). Nationals in the host country see them as sharing their faith.
“out of the abundance of the heart” (Luke 6:45)—not “as paid propagandists for their religion” (Wilson 1985:70).

8. **It provides natural and sustained opportunities for witnessing.** Bi-vocational mission provides a natural, sustained contact with non-believers (Siemens 1997:121). They often meet people whom missionaries usually do not reach such as “professional men and women, educated persons, factory workers, university professors” (Wilson 1985:70). Their relationship with them “can provide a very natural setting for sharing the Gospel” (71).

9. **It supplements media ministries.** In many parts of the world, people seldom know any Christian even though they have listened to Christian radio or TV programs. A Christian professional living or working among such people will make the media messages more tangible and practical since they can answer questions and model Christianity in action.

**Towards a Theology of Bi-vocational Mission**

The previous section showed the practical strengths of bi-vocational mission and mentioned several strategic and financial advantages; however, is bi-vocational mission a biblical mission model?

**Bi-Vocational Mission in the Bible**

There are two kinds of bi-vocational mission in the Bible: *involuntary* and *voluntary*. In *involuntary bi-vocational mission*, a person is forced by circumstances to leave his or her home country to live and work in a foreign land. In such situations there was no intention of becoming a foreign missionary but faithfulness to God resulted in the host country’s residents acknowledging God’s sovereignty and power.

Naomi followed her husband to Moab in search of a more prosperous land (Ruth 1). Joseph was promoted from a domestic helper to became governor of Egypt (Gen 41). Esther became queen of Persia (Esth 2). Mordecai and Daniel became high government officials in Persia (Esth 10; Dan 2). And an Israelite maid was instrumental in helping Naaman come to know the true God (2 Kgs 5). All these people held secular jobs in a foreign country and “were used by God . . . in the course of normal duty” to reveal his glory to the heathens (Nunn 1990:7).

In *voluntary bi-vocational mission*, someone receives a call from God to go to a foreign land to be a witness for him. The best example of this kind of mission in the Old Testament is Abraham. He had a clear call from
God to leave his home country and become God’s witness (Gen 12:1-4). In obedience, Abraham left his home country of Chaldea to live and work in Canaan as a shepherd (v. 8). He also intentionally spread his faith by setting up altars in key places.

There are also several New Testament examples of individual followers of God who had a secular job but were used by God to glorify his name. Joseph was a carpenter, Zaccheus a tax collector, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were members of the Sanhedrin, Cornelius was an army officer, Luke was a physician, Lydia was a seller of purple-dye, Zenas was a lawyer, and Erastus was a city treasurer (Wilson 1985:21). This was a common pattern in the New Testament because “most of the disciples had ordinary jobs” (Blocher 1993:17). Jesus himself worked as a carpenter. But the best biblical model of voluntary bi-vocational mission can be found in the ministry of Paul. Like Abraham, Paul had a clear call from God to leave his home country and become God’s missionary (Acts 9:15-16, 13:2, 22:14-15, 21, 24:16-18).

A Model of Self-Supporting Mission Work

How should workers be supported in mission work in creative access cities? Should they support themselves like Paul and his companions, or should they be fully sponsored by churches like Peter and the other apostles? On the one hand, Paul believes in the idea of church or donor-supported mission work. On the other hand, he also subscribed to the concept of self-supporting or bi-vocational mission.

Church-Supported Mission

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-15, Paul refers to the right of an apostle or missionary (like Peter and the other apostles) to be financially supported by those they minister to. He refers to the apostles’ “right to refrain from working for a living” (1 Cor 9:6, ESV), pointing out that a soldier does not serve at his own expense. He quotes the Law of Moses regarding not muzzling the ox as “it treads out the grain” (v. 9). By so doing, he emphasized “a principle that has a universal application: that those who work have the right to be supported by the fruits of their toil” (Nichol 1957:6:728.5; 1 Cor 9:7; 2 Thess 3:10). He further applies this concept to the gospel ministry. Those who “have sown spiritual things” have a right to “reap material things” from their converts (v. 11). Even the priests and the Levites who...
ministered in the temple were supported by the temple (v. 13). Finally, he concludes with strong biblical support for church-sponsored mission work: “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (v. 14).

In 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 Paul reports that other churches supported him while he was serving in Corinth (v. 8). When he was financially in need in Corinth, “the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied [my] need” (v. 9). This was in reference to Silas and Timothy who arrived from Macedonia (Acts 18:5). The financial support from Macedonia that Silas and Timothy brought “freed him for full-time ministry,” at least for the time being (Karris 1992:1060).

The point is that Paul was supported, at least occasionally, by church donated money. In Philippians 4:9-20 Paul praises the Philippians for their concern for him. While he tells them that he has learned to make do with what he has or does not have, he nevertheless thanks them for their financial gifts that they sent through Epaphroditus (Phil 4:12, 18). He praises the Philippian church for being the only church in Macedonia to enter “into partnership with [him] in giving and receiving” (v. 15). He gives a theological meaning to the financial assistance the Philippian believers sent him. The act of giving is symptomatic of the gospel bearing fruit in a convert’s life (v. 17). In Romans 12:1-2, Paul writes that the giving for the support of missionaries is “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). Then comes another famous verse, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (v. 19). It is interesting to note that the context of this promise is a church that is sending occasional support to self-supporting ministers of the gospel in regions beyond.

**Self-Supporting or Bi-vocational Mission**

Acts 20:34 tells us that Paul worked with his hands “to provide everything” that he and his companions needed. In fact, Paul was not the only one doing manual labor to support their mission. His entire team also labored and worked with their hands (1 Cor 4:11).

The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 9 is a defense of the apostleship of Paul. Paul explains that even though he and Barnabas have the right to be fully supported by the churches, they did not make use of their rights (vv. 6, 15). Instead, to avoid any hindrance to the preaching of the gospel, they worked with their hands (vv. 12, 15, 18).

In 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 Paul reiterates his reason for not asking the churches to support him. He wanted to preach “God’s gospel . . . free of charge” (v. 7). Paul points out that while in the regions of Achaia, he was
not supported by the churches there. Hence, he can boast that he “robbed other churches by accepting support from [those other churches] in order to serve” the people of Corinth and Achaia (v. 10).

In 2 Corinthians 12:12-16 Paul points out that his apostleship was confirmed or attested to “with signs and wonders and mighty works” (v. 12). Then he goes on to say that the only difference between the church of Corinth and other churches is that Paul, their apostle, did not burden them with financial support (v. 13). He explains that he is not after the money of the believers, but their souls (v. 14). As a spiritual father, he would not require them to support him. Instead, he “will most gladly spend and be spent for” their souls (vv. 14, 15).

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 Paul continues the parent-children analogy in describing his tentmaking ministry among the Thessalonians. He and his fellow tentmakers “worked night and day” (v. 9) to avoid becoming a burden to any of the Thessalonian brethren.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 Paul not only explains why he supported himself, but also outlines the principle of “no work—no eat” (v. 10). Paul and his team’s practice of manual labor and self-support was an example to the Thessalonians. He wanted them to see and imitate their industriousness (v. 9). Again, he reminds them that his team did not become a burden to anyone because they “worked night and day . . . with toil and labor” (v. 8).

Pauline Reasons for Engaging in Bi-vocational Mission

Paul was not against the concept of church sponsored mission work. In fact, he encouraged churches to send support for the church in Jerusalem. Yet, he stands as the ideal example of a bi-vocational missionary, pastor, and evangelist. Notice that Paul dealt with finances in three ways: (1) he did not ask for financial assistance for himself, (2) he did not take financial support from those he was ministering to, and (3) he did not manage or control the local church funds (Allen 1962:49-61).

So why did Paul prefer to earn a living to support himself and his ministry team?

1. **Consideration.** He did not want to be a burden to anyone. Several times he repeats this as his foremost reason for supporting himself (1 Cor 9:12, 15-16; 2 Thess 3:8). In Acts 20:33-35 Paul emphasized “how he supported himself and did not drain the church to which he ministered” (Karris 1992:1060).

2. **Identification.** He wanted to identify with the people he was trying to reach. He has indeed become a servant to all by doing manual labor for his support. He also wanted to identify with Jesus who also labored manually as a carpenter (1 Cor 9:19-21; Rom 1:14-16; 2 Cor 8:9; cf. Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).
3. **Credibility.** He wanted to show that he was not preaching the gospel for financial reasons. Paul set himself apart from those who preached God’s Word for financial gain “by relying on his tentmaking work and receiving only voluntary gifts from other churches” (Ott and Wilson 2011:182; 2 Cor 2:17; 1 Cor 9:12, 17-18; 2 Thess 3:8).

4. **Modeling.** Self-supporting work offers a model of integrity, work ethics, and a pattern for lay evangelism (1 Cor 3:10-15, 6:10,11, 7:7-28, 11:1; 1 Thess 1:5-8, 3:8, 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6-18; 1 Cor 6:10, 11; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 5:8).

**Theological Foundation for Bi-vocational Mission**

As I observed the ministry of a number of expatriate workers in six Middle Eastern countries, I realized that there are several key theological beliefs that serve as a foundation for an effective—even spontaneous—bi-vocational mission in creative access cities.

**The Missio Dei**

Bi-vocational mission works best when based on an understanding of God’s purposes and activities in and for the entire universe (Kirk 2000:25). Missiologists call this the *missio dei*. The central idea of *missio Dei* is that “God is the One who initiates and sustains mission. At most, then, the church is God’s partner in what is God’s agenda. . . . Mission is God-centered rather than human-centered, but without neglecting the important role that God has assigned to the church in that process (Moreau, Corwin, and McGee 2013:17).

The beauty of bi-vocational mission in countries with no existing denominational administrative offices has to do with the relative absence (or minimal presence) of pressure to produce baptisms in a very short time! That is how it should be. Bi-vocational mission is not about statistics or mission-metrics. Bi-vocational mission is about God working through his faithful, normal, ordinary, children in business places, in universities, and even in private homes, where they serve as “God-supported” missionaries.

The success of bi-vocational mission ultimately belongs to God. God does not require anyone to succeed—he requires them to be faithful witnesses. Yes, the “field is the world” and we are “God’s fellow workers,” but God is “the Lord of the Harvest”—not us (Matt 13:38; 1 Cor 3:9; Matt 9:38, ESV). It is God who “will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth” (Rom 9:28, KJV). Success is up to him—he will bring it about in his own time.
When talking of mission, one needs to remember that behind it are two problems that God is seeking to solve. One is the rebellion of Lucifer who started a *counter kingdom* and stole the allegiance of a large number of angels. The second is human defection and fall into a state of sin and personal degeneration, which left God’s kingdom partially dissected and usurped (Ellisen 2009:18).

God devised a plan through which he will be victorious over the counterfeit kingdom and at the same time be able to provide salvation for fallen humanity. The final destruction of Satan and those who side with him is postponed until Jesus has redeemed humankind and reclaimed his partially lost kingdom.

The Bible shows the progressive development of God’s plan to overcome this double rebellion. First, he sent patriarchs and prophets to teach people about his plan to redeem the earth. Later, when the people of the earth had multiplied to include 70 nations (Gen 10), God formed a people, Israel, to be his witness in the midst of the nations. Then at the right time, he sent his Son “to die for the ungodly” so that they may receive reconciliation through his death (Rom 5:6, 11, ESV). The story continues as God sends a new people—the church—to become his agents in inviting people to join his kingdom. Finally, the story will end triumphantly with the return of Jesus. He will ultimately establish his kingdom and once and for all defeat evil, with everyone confessing that he is indeed Lord (Phil 2:9-11).

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is the so-called “Magna Carta of the Christian church” (Burrill 1996:11). It gives an all-encompassing direction to all Christians, both individually and corporately. So, what are the key elements of the Great Commission that needs to be clear to would-be bi-vocational workers?

First of all, the authority behind this commission is Jesus. Jesus, as “the universal Lord, gives a universal commission” (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010:36).

This is not just Jesus giving the command, this is “the authoritative Jesus,” “the chief executive officer of the universe” who issues the Great Commission. God’s people dare not take the command lightly (Burrill 1996:14, emphasis added).

Second, the heart of this commission is the command to disciple all nations. The *task* includes an intentional going, baptizing, teaching but the...
goal is to call people to life transformation and full obedience to Christ—
every aspect of their lives submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Third, the scope or focus is all the nations. We are to “go” and launch the
expanding force of mission to all the nations. The preaching of the gospel is
not to be done “without actually going to the places where people lived”
(Hawthorne 2009:129). The Lord wants us to be prepared to change local-
ity to accomplish this task.

Fourth, underlying this Christian mission to the nations is the promise
that Jesus will make available all his power and authority in the accom-
plishment of the mission. This is an assurance Jesus gives disciples of all
gerations as they execute the Great Commission.

Finally, there is the duration of the commission. Neither the promise nor
the command ended with the death of the original disciples. Both promise
and command continue “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20, ESV). In
the same way that Jesus was with his “discipling disciples” until the end
of the world, all of his disciples (down through the end of time) are to
continue discipling the nations until Jesus comes.

Understanding the Great Commission along with the idea of the Priest-
hood of all Believers is foundational to an effective bi-vocational mission.

The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It
includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to
suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained
minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in
trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained
to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church
was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are
thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ. (White 2005:822, emphasis
added)

Priesthood of All Believers

The distinction between clergy and laity has kept the majority of the
church from becoming fully involved in mission. The clergy (pastors or
church-supported workers) are often the only ones expected to do minis-
try. Ordinary church members are expected to merely “pay, pray and stay
out of the way” (Rundle 2009:763).

One of the basic principles of the Protestant Reformation is the idea of
the priesthood of all believers based on 1 Peter 2:9, which identifies the
entire church (clergy and the laity together) as “a chosen people, a royal
priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (NIV).

Belief in the priesthood of all believers—in contrast to the Roman Cath-
olic “concept of priesthood,” which “draws a sharp line of demarcation
between the laity and the clergy”—is a logical consequence of “belief in salvation by faith alone” (Edwards 1995:13; Dolson and Dolson 1995). It is the belief that “every person can approach God directly, without the services of an intermediary human priesthood” (1995).

For bi-vocational mission to flourish, a redefining of the role of the laity is crucial. The laity needs to see themselves as God’s ministers to a dying world. As Edwards observes, “The New Testament clearly teaches that all Christians are to be ministers. Anything else clearly violates the demands of discipleship which our Lord presented” (1995:13). Ellen White clearly points out that “the responsibility of going forth to fulfill” the Great Commission does not rest only “upon the ordained minister. . . . Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellowmen” (White 2005:110).

Bi-vocational mission thrusts business people unto the playing field, just like during the Early Church. They are to serve as lay pastors, lay evangelists, and lay church leaders in countries where professional ministers are not allowed to function. In order to reach creative access cities, “pastors” may now have to become “laymen”—earning their keep and doing ministry on the job and during their spare time. This reality redefines the word “layman.”

Theology of Work

Closely related to the concept of the priesthood of all believers is the theology of work. Similar to the dichotomy between lay people and clergy, there is a misperception concerning “sacred and worldly professions that has long sidelined so many Christians” (Rundle 2009:763). One of the negative effects of the Enlightenment era is the artificial distinction between what is sacred and what is secular. This concept when “carried over into the realm of work implied that there were certain kinds of work that were sacred, such as the functions of the clergy, while other types of work were labeled secular” (Onongha 2015:190). This dichotomy needs to disappear if the laity are to be encouraged to integrate work and ministry.

The starting point for a theology of work comes to us “through the example of God Himself” who is “depicted as a craftsman” who used his hands (not just his word) “to bring all things into existence” (Gungadoo 1993:134; Gen 1:1; Ps 19:1, 8:3). Genesis offers the idea that God took pleasure in his work (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21). God works and never stops working because “that which he created, he is still busy sustaining” (Gungadoo 1993:135; Col 1:17). Contrary to what many people think, work is not a curse. Genesis says that God gave humans work even before the fall (Gen 1:28, 2:15). Ellen White wrote, “God appointed labor as a blessing to man,
to occupy his mind, to strengthen his body, and to develop his faculties. . . . And when, as a result of his disobedience, he was . . . forced to struggle with a stubborn soil to gain his daily bread, that very labor . . . was a safeguard against temptation and a source of happiness. (1890:50.1)

Bi-vocational mission entails a change in perception about the so-called “spiritual-vocational hierarchy” which treats some professions as “more God-pleasing and honorable than others” (Rundle 2009:757). Such a hierarchy of vocation needs to be revised. Ellen White notes that

> those who regard work as a curse, attended though it be with weariness and pain, are cherishing an error. The rich often look down with contempt upon the working classes, but this is wholly at variance with God’s purpose in creating man. . . . Our Creator, who understands what is for man’s happiness, appointed Adam his work. The true joy of life is found only by the working men and women. . . . The Creator has prepared no place for the stagnating practice of indolence. (1890:50.1)

Those who call themselves Christians should perform work faithfully. Faithful work is in reality bi-vocational work. “Let the businessman do his business in a way that will glorify his Master because of his fidelity. Let him carry his religion into everything that is done. . . . Let the mechanic be a diligent and faithful representative of [Christ] . . . Let everyone who names the name of Christ so work that man by seeing his good works may be led to glorify his Creator and Redeemer (White 1925:27).

**Lessons for Bi-vocational Mission in Creative Access Cities**

When it comes to effective bi-vocational mission strategy, the views and example of Paul is instructive. Notice some Pauline lessons for bi-vocational mission work in creative access cities today.

**Targeting Big Cities**

Most of Paul’s bi-vocational mission targeted big cities. This is not to say that he did not minister in smaller centers. He did. For instance, Athens only had 10,000 people as opposed to Corinth that had as many as 250,000 free people and about 400,000 slaves (Wood and McGhee 2002:236). However, “big cities were Paul’s favorite targets for the gospel” (236). Corinth was also a center for travelers, traders, and pleasure-seekers. It was the most important trade city in ancient Greece (Youngblood, Bruce, and Harrison 2005:46). It was “the connecting link between Rome, the capital of the world, and the East” (467). Since it was “a great commercial
center, situated within easy access of all parts of the Roman Empire, it was an important place in which to establish memorials for God and His truth” (White 2005:243). In fact, “all the cities, or towns, in which he [Paul] planted churches, were centres of Roman administration, of Greek civilization, or of some commercial importance” (Allen 1962:13). The places Paul focused his ministry in “were located on major trade routes oriented towards Rome” (Hesselgrave 1980:97). Focusing on large central cities as a strategy is also relevant today, considering that more than half of the world’s population lives in big cities (Wood and McGhee 2002:235).

Finding Financial Support

When Paul arrived in a new location, he looked for a source of support and a place of residence (Acts 18:2-3). Paul’s practice of manual labor and self-support is instructive. Too often, the failure of church planting efforts is attributed to a lack of funds (either for the support of workers or for facilities). Paul’s ministry was not dependent on outside financial help because he had a vocational skill that was in demand in those days. Thus, he was able to provide for his financial need as well as for the needs of his ministry. This is not to say that Paul never lacked anything. To the contrary, he wrote about his financial needs and the needs of churches that were in distress (1 Cor 16; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 4). “Tentmaking did not bring returns so quickly as some other occupations, and at times it was only by the strictest economy that Paul could supply his necessities” (Nichol 1956:6:1063.3). There were times when he had enough and there were times when he did not have enough (Phil 4:12). Yet, for the most part, he was able to provide for his and his team’s needs (Acts 20:34-35; Phil 4:16; 1 Thess 2:9). This is where learning a vocational skill comes in very handy.

Paul was highly educated, and was admired for his genius and eloquence. He was chosen by his countrymen as a member of the Sanhedrin, and was a rabbi of distinguished ability; yet his education had not been considered complete until he had served an apprenticeship at some useful trade. He rejoiced that he was able to support himself by manual labor, and frequently declared that his own hands had ministered to his necessities. While in a city of strangers, he would not be chargeable to anyone. When his means had been expended to advance the cause of Christ, he resorted to his trade in order to gain a livelihood. (Nichol 1956:6:957:1063.1)
Looking for Witnessing Opportunities

Once Paul settled in a city, he intentionally looked for opportunities to witness to people. Even though Paul’s commission was to preach to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7), he usually visited the synagogues. There are six verses in Acts that show Paul going to where the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles met every Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42, 44, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4). This “practice of visiting synagogues” (Hesselgrave 1980:166) is not just about his Sabbath-keeping custom. In other words, he was not just concerned about going to church. It was a strategic decision to go where he could find opportunities to witness.

Finding Seekers

Acts 18:6-7 gives insight into Paul’s evangelistic approach. When the Jews in the synagogue “opposed him and said evil things about him, he protested by shaking the dust from his clothes” (v. 6, GNB). Paul declared: “If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it! I am not responsible; from now on I will go to the Gentiles” (v. 6). This is reminiscent of Jesus’ command to the disciples to “shake the dust off” one’s feet and leave a home or town that will not welcome them or listen to them (Matt 10:14). Siemens calls this the “selective approach” (1998:6). Paul was looking for seekers or “people on whom the Holy Spirit was already working” (6). When people showed that they were not receptive to the message, Paul moved to those who were more open. Thus, when the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul “moved from the synagogue to the neighboring house of Titus Justus, a God-fearing Gentile” (Karris 1992:1060). Paul’s evangelistic approach was not an “indiscriminate personal evangelism” type that forced people to listen whether they wanted to or not. He had “a strategy of contact that involved a degree of selectivity” (Hesselgrave 1980:158).

Establishing House Churches

In the Old Testament, people largely worshipped at the tabernacle and later the temple. In the New Testament when Christians met opposition in local synagogues, they started meeting in homes (Ott and Wilson 2011:109). This approach was not only necessitated by “persecution or lack of alternative meeting places” but also by a new understanding regarding the locus of worship (109). Jesus taught that the place was not the important factor in worship, but one’s attitude (John 4:23, 24). He also promised that “where two or three are gathered in [his] name,” he would be there among them (Matt 18:20, ESV). The new locus of worship was
Jesus and no longer the temple. Thus, from the very start and throughout the history of the Early Church, “house gatherings were [the] common feature of Christian corporate life” (Hesselgrave 1980:290). Indeed, “there were no church buildings as we know them for the first 150 years of the Church’s existence” (290).

Multiplying Bi-vocational Workers

A final observation concerning Paul’s bi-vocational mission strategy is his practice of multiplying bi-vocational missionaries. In Acts 18:11 it says that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half “teaching the word of God among them” (v. 11). A lexical study of the verb used in verse 11 (comparing it with v. 4) suggests that this verse refers to Crispus, his household, and the other converts in Corinth. In other words, Paul discipled his converts in obedience to the Great Commission to “teach them to obey everything” (Matt 28:20, GNB). **Disciple-maker multipliers** are needed in today’s churches. Paul not only taught his converts the message, he also showed them how to work for others. His one and a half year stay in Corinth did not just focus on evangelism and winning new converts, but also involved on-the-job training for bi-vocational mission work by his companions. The principle of multiplication can be seen in Paul’s advice to his younger co-worker: “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2, ESV).

Conclusion

Bi-vocational mission is not only an innovative and useful model to use in creative access cities. Even though this approach may not be for everyone, and even though Paul himself saw the need for church-supported mission, this chapter has shown that the model itself is biblical. In order for this approach to be effective, however, it needs to be grounded on a strong belief in the mission of God, an understanding of the Great Controversy, willingness to obey the Great Commission, an implementation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and a sound theology of work.

Notes

1Much of the material in this paper first appeared in *Beyond Barriers: Adventist Professionals with a Mission* by Abner P. Dizon Copyright 2014 by the Middle East & North Africa Union. Used by permission.
Works Cited


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