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Viewpoint: Supporting Ministries, Self-supporting Ministries, or Independent Ministries

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has all types of ministries that contribute in various degrees to the work of God in our world. All one has to do is attend the annual ASI (Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries) convention and spend some time on the exhibit floor to realize the diversity and scope of those ministries.

From 1997 to 2001 I had the privilege of being the president of the Cambodia Adventist Mission. The mission was blessed with several supporting ministries that contributed to what the Adventist Church was able to accomplish. International Children's Care had a thriving orphanage, Adventist Southeast Asia Projects supported local pastors and Bible workers, Adventist Frontier Missions worked for several unreached people groups, and Salt Ministry operated an orphanage and a K-12s school system in Siam Reap. In addition, they trained the church planters in three-month sessions that the mission then used to enter new areas. Without these supporting ministries the work of the Adventist Church would have been significantly reduced.

In 1984 I was asked to become the president of the Guam Micronesia Mission. The mission was basically bankrupt, so had very little money to do creative things in ministry. However, I was able to partner with Eden Valley Institute in Colorado to begin a ministry to the Asians living on Guam. Eden Valley paid for the travel and shipping of goods for two Korean families to come as self-supporting missionaries. One of the spouses was a nurse and was quickly employed by the Adventist clinic. One of the men was hired by the Toyota dealership. The other two spouses spent full time in meeting people, establishing friendships, holding Bible studies, and soon started a church plant.

When I went to Singapore for the year-end meetings, I was excited at what was happening—already 15-20 Asian people were meeting each Sabbath. The only expense to the mission was the duplex rent. I was sharing my excitement with the other leaders when the General Conference representative cautioned that I needed to be careful since “you can’t control people you don’t pay.” I replied that they were good, dedicated Seventh-day Adventists and I was comfortable letting the Holy Spirit control them. Needless to say, he did not like my answer.

Let’s face it, there is and often has been tension between the denomination and lay-led organizations; therefore, I have found it helpful to make a distinction between the various types of organizations found in Adventism.

Supporting Ministries

The great majority of those ministries I would call supporting ministries. They work to support the goals and objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They are led by dedicated Adventists and share the beliefs of the Church. Many of them are members of ASI Missions Inc. Notice the mission of ASI: “ASI—the organization of Seventh-day Adventist lay persons involved in professions, industry, education, and/or services—exists to provide challenge, nurture and experience in Sharing Christ in the Marketplace as well as support the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (ASI 2022).

In order to become a member of ASI, individuals or organizations go through a vetting process by their local church and conference to ascertain that they are members in good and regular standing, support the work of the denomination, and are not critical and disruptive towards the Adventist Church. It is also interesting that ASI members and I would also add supporting ministries do not solicit tithe and if tithe is knowingly received by those organizations it is usually returned with the statement that tithe should be sent to the local church.

Self-Supporting Ministries

Another type of ministry found within the Adventist community is what I have termed, self-supporting ministries. These seem to spend the majority of their time and effort in supporting themselves, with very little outreach. They often live isolated from the evil influences of urban areas, grow as much of their own food as possible, and do not have much interaction with the larger Seventh-day Adventist Church.

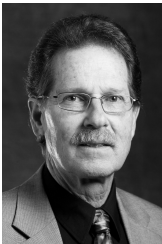
Independent Ministries

The third type of ministry is what I call independent ministries. They are usually totally independent of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, are often critical of Adventist leaders, and too often openly call for Adventists to send their tithe directly to them. Sometimes they go so far as to label the Adventist Church Babylon.

I believe that more could be done to partner in even greater ways with the supporting ministries of Adventism. The leader of Salt Ministry in Cambodia was a member of the mission committee. Later, he led in the development of a media center where the students and orphans were trained to produce radio and television programs in the Khmer language—something that the mission lacked funds to do. The challenge is for leaders at all levels to seek opportunities to build bridges and partnerships to work together to accomplish God’s mission in this world.

Works Cited

ASI. 2022. Mission. <https://asiministries.org/about-asi/>.



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