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Adventist Mission: From Awareness to Engagement—Part 2

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Adventist mission: *From awareness to engagement—* Part 2 of 2

In part 1 of “Adventist Mission: From Awareness to Engagement” (July-August 2015), we considered Adventist mission from its inception to the present. We now want to consider ten trends we believe should lead the missionary efforts of the church in the coming years:

1. Essential personal involvement. As Gottfried Oosterwal reminded us 40 years ago, “The Adventist missionary movement stands, or falls, with the concept that mission is always reaching out to those who do not know Christ, not by proxy, but by personal involvement among all the kindreds and peoples and tribes and tongues.”¹ This principle applies everywhere in the world; lately, perhaps even more so, in the West.

The Adventist Mission office at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been developing new initiatives to bring awareness about mission opportunities to church members and leaders, such as the recent launching of the magazine *Mission 360°*. Other programs have existed for a while, such as the Global Mission pioneer program, which began in 1993. Pioneers understand the culture, speak the local language, and live and work within their own culture to establish new groups of believers. They extend the healing ministry of Jesus by helping people with physical and spiritual needs.

In a larger sphere, every church member should be involved in a spiritual “prayer watch” for world mission. The Moravian prayer vigil for missions that lasted uninterrupted for 100 years reminds everyone of the spiritual nature of the battle in which mission finds itself and the power of a community that relies on God through prayer.

2. The global scope of Adventist mission. The scope of Adventist mission is to “every nation, people, tribe, and tongue.” About 25 years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church established a global mission strategy aimed at reaching the whole world with the gospel. This work included study centers geared to foster relationships and understanding with the major world religions. The Global Mission office of the church established such centers for Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam. Strategies for reaching postmodern and secular people, along with the urban masses, have also been implemented more recently through a fifth and a sixth center.

Global Mission has established a goal to place a church among each one million of earth’s population. This trend was seen in recent General Conference decisions to empower laypeople and fund projects in areas with little or no Adventist presence, such as Pakistan, Myanmar, and Brunei.² Bruce Bauer, chair of the World Mission department

at Andrews University, remarks that “much is employed where the church has been working for a hundred years or more and little is directed to the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist/Chinese worlds. Very few missionaries are working where there is no or only a few Christians of any denomination. It is time to redirect our resources to the 10/40 window where 63 percent of the world population live, but only 20 percent of Adventist missionaries work and only 20 percent of Adventist volunteers are located.”³

3. Flexible mission structures. The Adventist Church continues to face two major mission challenges: the opportunities and “impossibilities” in the 10/40 window area and the growing secular/postmodern population, particularly in urban areas. The history of Adventist missions includes a history of Spirit-led initiatives as well as individual and institutional activities.

In the past, many interdivision employees (IDEs) as well as non-IDEs were called and sent from the developing world to work for the denomination in underdeveloped places, answering to other developing-world-type administrators, and so various approaches for mission were implemented. That system/structure has changed considerably since then. Before 1901, in a few parts of the world, the church established lines of communication and responsibility so

that mission outreach went forward in a limited and structured manner.

More than 110 years ago (1901–1903), close to six decades after the Adventist movement began (1844), a major reorganization greatly helped the church to better serve the needs of mission. In some places schools and hospitals were established; in others, the publishing work flourished. Missionaries and church leaders studied the best approaches in mission work and worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reaching people for Christ. Most efforts of the church were aimed at mission work. Structural adaptations that favor Adventist indigenous movements and expressions in traditionally challenging areas have been implemented in order to foster missionary activity.

The Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENA), created in 2011, shows us an example of this flexibility in recent times. Another example is the Adventist Church in China. As G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, points out, this is not an unorganized territory, but one based on “mother churches.” Under those churches (34 in 2012) exist a group of smaller churches and groups. Among different activities, mother churches become missionary-sending bases in those other areas.⁴

4. Mission from everywhere to everywhere. The shift in membership concentration is beginning to produce a reverse missionary movement from the Southern to the Northern Hemisphere that redefines the previous notions of missionary “sending” and “receiving” countries.⁵ Mission from everywhere to everywhere fosters traditional mission (North-South), reverse mission (South-North), and parallel mission (South-South), according to different diaspora mission patterns.

As we continue with the church’s mission in the twenty-first century, new forms of mission need to emerge. The church needs to rethink the way it does mission. New forms and platforms for mission will be developed to mobilize the laity in serious mission, particularly in some of the more challenging regions

of the world—places where access to more traditional types of mission has become impossible.

One such example of this form of mission is tentmaking.⁶ Not only are tentmakers being recruited, they are also being developed from among the hundreds of Adventist laypeople who have already moved to emerging job markets and seek to share their faith in these new contexts.

Another example is nonresident missionaries, or people and/or groups that focus attention, funds, and materials to creatively access people groups, yet still live at “home.” One instance could be where specially trained people work among students in North American, Latin American, or European universities. Another instance is where people focus on helping the thousands of refugees living in border areas, ministering to those with psychological trauma, spiritual displacement, and physical needs. Imagine a conference sponsoring a “one-day school” in a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey. This may also include relocation services. This movement will only continue to grow in a new globalized, flattened world.⁷

5. Active missionary partnerships. The fact that the biggest tithe contribution still comes from the global North and the largest concentration of human resources seems to be in the global South leads to different types of partnerships. No longer can this be called mission *to* or mission *for* but mission *with*. “Never has the missional task been more pressing, or the need for meaningful partnership between North and South been more urgent.”⁸

As major shifts and changes are continually occurring in the world and these shifts have a direct impact on the church and the makeup of its resources (human and material) used for mission, the church must endeavor to fulfill its mission by looking at various approaches and types of mission opportunities.

Thus, several questions, such as the following, need to be asked: How can short-term volunteers become long-term tentmakers? How can they be best positioned to fulfill a specific purpose? What

is “short-term mission” and how can it be used to create long-term commitment for cross-cultural mission work? How can a multitude of people in a variety of occupations be trained for missions? What specific mission will they be sent for, and involved in? How can they best be organized for strategic mission? How can we coordinate pioneers, tentmakers, and institutional positions for the most effective sharing of the gospel? Can new structures and platforms for mission be provided so more missionaries will serve in the least-evangelized areas (10/40 window, for example)? Can the church create more service opportunities on the continuum between IDE and Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) and/or tentmakers? What methods should the church use to recruit specific people for specific mission tasks? “Why should not the members of a church, or of several small churches, unite to sustain a missionary in foreign fields? If they will deny themselves, they can do this.”⁹

A hybrid form of tentmaker/pioneer/Waldensian student/AVS could be an attractive and viable way for the church to continue its mission outreach. Financial costs could be reduced significantly, and more people of various backgrounds deployed for mission service. This form (hybrid) would involve a partially funded tentmaker or pioneer who already works in a certain region. He or she would establish the “platform” for mission service through his or her professional skills or employment. The church would support this endeavor with a partial salary, so this person could recruit, support, and nurture others in the same or various other types of mission.

6. Intentional cross-cultural communication. Communication is at the core of evangelization. In order to be effective and reach out to many, as part of a larger plan, the church will continue to use new media to evangelize. The first two decades of this century have witnessed the emergence of new ways to communicate. There are already some very dynamic Adventist television and Internet ministries around the world, but these ministries will have to become more integrated with the overall

strategy. Consequently, this should lead to a discussion about the shaping of the message to reach different audiences.

Annual Council delegates, in October 2013, gave one more step in a five-year process that aims at communicating the church's core beliefs, using "clearer—and frequently more inclusive—language."¹⁰ Clearer and more inclusive language in a world as diverse as ours would mean being able to articulate the Adventist faith across generations, ethnic groups, languages, and geopolitical borders.

7. Wholistic mission. The health message has been a part of Adventist mission understanding from the beginning, but neglected often in practice. Missiologists have stressed the need of an approach consistent with the wholistic Adventist view of human beings. Recently, the church has announced the first phase of a comprehensive approach to health outreach. Mark Finley provoked this by asking, "What would happen if 70,000 Seventh-day Adventist churches opened their doors to . . . teach wellness?" He believes "this will broaden the base for an evangelistic approach that goes beyond preaching—addressing spiritual, mental, and physical modalities."¹¹

8. Academic reflection on mission. Graduate programs on mission studies are being implemented in continents where Adventist colleges and universities traditionally had little to offer. Doctoral programs offered by the World Mission department at Andrews University are partly responsible for these new opportunities. The doctor of missiology (DMiss) program, a new doctoral degree in mission, aims at fostering that discussion and making this more accessible to those who will not necessarily follow an academic career. The *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* has also been an arena for sharing Adventist missiological thinking.

9. Relevant mission in the large cities. Most of the people live in urban settings, but those contexts are not where, traditionally, our churches are located. One of the consequences of urbanization has been economic inequality, which is seen in the development of luxurious skyscrapers towering over massive

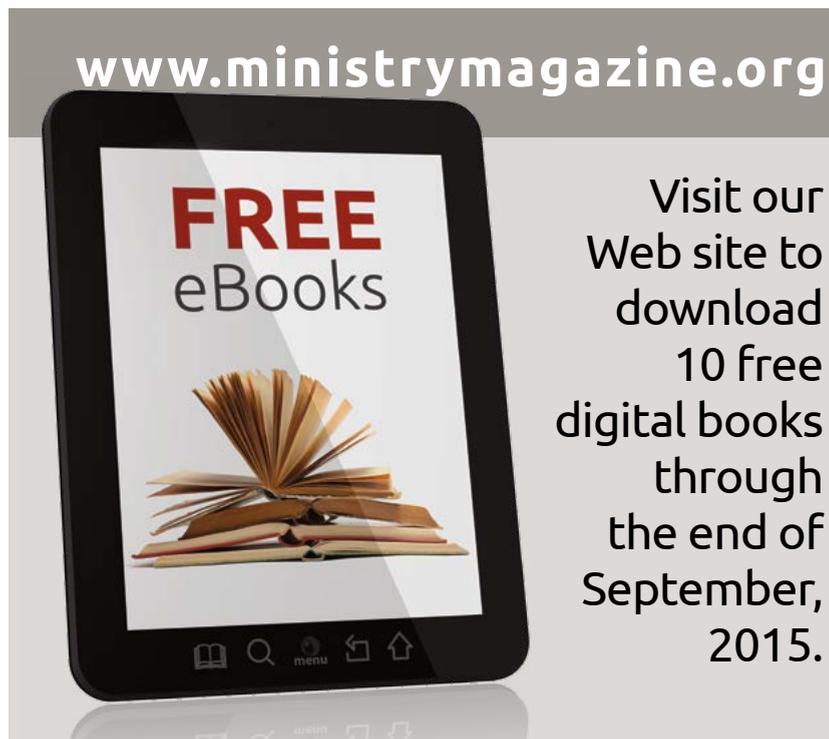
slums. Both settings represent challenges to traditional mission strategies. "Fewer than 1 in 500 Christian foreign missionaries work in slums."¹² Ellen White described centers of wholistic ministry, which she called centers of influence, that should be established in large cities around the world. They had the objective of giving opportunities for church members to serve their own communities. Adventist urban mission cannot concentrate exclusively on the attempt to attract people, as a spiritual magnet, from the streets to the church buildings. The main initiative of the church should be to inspire, train, and deploy church members from their pews to their communities.¹³ Workplaces, offices, factories, shops, must be seen as "sacred sites" where the Spirit is alive and operational. We cannot enjoy the luxury of bemoaning postmodernism; we must, instead, learn to understand it as a legitimate culture and learn how to communicate Jesus within that culture. Mission must focus on the experiential as well as the traditional cognitive experience.

10. Persecution. More Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than

all previous centuries combined, and recent statistics show a rise in religious persecution. Cases of Christians killed for their faith doubled in 2013 (2,123 cases) compared to the year before.¹⁴ This confirms a trend as the number of countries with religion-related terrorist violence has doubled over the past six years; the number of countries with a very high level of religious hostilities has increased.¹⁵ Missionaries in many parts of the world are facing major opposition. Fundamentalist forms of religions have emerged, sometimes giving birth to terrorist groups. This must be factored into the calculus of mission.

Conclusion

Clearly, much still has to be done in terms of mission awareness in the Adventist Church. Globalization has made of everyone a world citizen, but a question remains: have you become a world Christian? Adventist leaders of a hundred years ago sacrificed to send missionaries to faraway places, while they could easily have justified their staying in their own countries since there were many local needs. Because they sent them out, today



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the Adventist Church is widespread around the world.

Are you brave enough to do the same and send workers to the 10/40 window? Or to go yourself?¹⁶

Other suggestions include:

1. Continue to promote a Seventh-day Adventist mission-coordinated strategy—a long-term strategic plan for mission that is theologically and biblically sound, missiologically appropriate, and structurally practical.

2. Create fresh guidelines and policies to help coordinate and set parameters for missionary sending and receiving.

3. Carefully choose, train, and strategically send mission-visualization teams.

4. Establish some advisories where the church intentionally seeks input and advice, and connect them with specific ways of implementing the new ideas.

5. Establish and welcome new partnerships with “supporting ministries” in order to enlarge the mission vision and work.

6. Invite mission practitioners to work in closer cooperation with church missions, conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference, so their input will affect day-to-day plans and decisions in regard to mission service.

7. Create new categories between IDE missionaries, on the one hand, and AVS volunteers, on the other. For example: (a) volunteers who also get service credit and retirement benefits; (b) missionaries with a hybrid contract arrangement (shared costs); (c) missionaries sent to a different territory/division and supported by home and/or local churches and/or conferences; (d) missionaries sent by church-affiliated institutions such as publishing houses or departments, Adventist Health System, or ADRA; and (e) relatively young, but just retired, Adventist lay professionals who would go as missionaries on a volunteer basis.

8. Assign returned missionaries as mentors for new ones.

9. Have a system of tracking former IDEs, volunteers, and people who have expressed interest so positions can be

filled quickly and appropriately when they become available.

10. Train a group of long-term missionaries with advanced skills for cross-cultural mission service among the least evangelized peoples.

11. Employ resources adequately and effectively as the church plans for mission work in various difficult or unentered areas of the world, such as the 10/40 window. Ellen White states that “to send missionaries into a foreign field to do missionary work, unprovided with facilities and means, is like requiring bricks to be made without straw.”¹⁷

God has blessed the Adventist movement, and many people around the world have been reached with its message of hope. This is primarily the result of Seventh-day Adventists who have engaged in a way of living that is credible to those who are watching and witness their faith, which includes their prophetic understanding, passion for God’s justice, and missionary zeal. In order for this experience to be perpetuated, the specific mission (Rev. 14:6–12; Matt. 28:18–20) given by God to the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be placed as priority by the worldwide church leadership in planning, supporting, and implementing the work of the church. But above all, it has to be engaged by everyone who claims Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commits to being His disciple. ❏

- 1 Gotfried Oosterwal, “Adventist Mission: After a Hundred Years,” *Ministry* (September 1974): 26.
- 2 Elizabeth Lechleitner, “Adventist Treasurer Makes Case for Inclusion of Young Adults,” *Adventist News Network*, accessed July 20, 2015, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6748/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-annual-council-treasurer-s-report. “The ten countries listed as receiving the most missionaries per million population averaged 2,634 per million people. Because of their large Christian majorities, however, together they received one international missionary for every 32 non-Christian in 2010.” Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020*, June 2013, 77.
- 3 Bruce Bauer, “O Desafio Restante,” *Foco na Pessoa*, 2013, no. 4, 47. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the authors.
- 4 “The Beiguan Church in Shenyang, for example, was started in 1985 with just one church with a few believers. Today it is a conglomerate of eight mother churches and 130 daughter churches with a

membership of more than 7,000. The mother churches operate three old folks’ homes, one kindergarten, one primary school, and two high schools with dormitories. In recent years Shenyang has become a local, church-based mission agency sending young self-supporting missionaries to ten localities, two of which are in foreign countries.” G. T. Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission: The Shifting Landscape,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 2012, no. 2, 40.

- 5 Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission,” 39. “Of the ten countries sending the most Christian missionaries in 2010, three were in the global South: Brazil, South Korea, and India. The second top ten included six Southern countries: South Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, China, Colombia, and Nigeria (making nine of the ‘top 20’ from the South).” Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020*, 76.
- 6 Tentmakers are missionaries who use their own profession and abilities to work and be a witness in areas of the world that are not open to traditional missionaries in order to make disciples and start congregations. Tentmakers collaborate with the church organization in order to help establish a Christian presence even though they do not work for the church. They are not dependent on church-based funding because they access unreached areas and peoples by finding jobs that match their education, skills, and experience.
- 7 Thomas L. Friedman popularized the idea the world is flat in his international best-selling book, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005). In his analysis of globalization, he uses a metaphor to describe the world as a level playing field in terms of commerce.
- 8 Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission,” 45.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 466, 467.
- 10 Elizabeth Lechleitner, “Annual Council Delegates Review Suggested Wording Changes to 28 Fundamental Beliefs,” *Adventist News Network*, last modified October 22, 2013, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6749/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-annual-council-delegates-review-suggested-changes-to-28-fundamental-beliefs.
- 11 Ansel Oliver, “First Phase of Comprehensive Health Ministry Will Promote Future Work,” *Adventist News Network*, posted October 18, 2013, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6751/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-first-phase-of-comprehensive-health-ministry-will-promote-future-work.
- 12 Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020*, 85.
- 13 Gary Krause, “Centros de Influência,” *Foco na Pessoa*, 2013, no. 2, 14, 50.
- 14 Tom Heneghan, “Christian Persecution Doubled in 2013, Reports Annual Survey by Open Doors,” *Huff Post Religion*, last modified January 23, 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/09/christian-persecution_n_4568286.html.
- 15 Angelina Theodorou, “Key Findings About Growing Religious Hostilities Around the World,” *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/17/key-findings-about-growing-religious-hostilities-around-the-world/.
- 16 Bauer, “O Desafio Restante,” 49.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1963), 330.

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