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Needed: A New Metric to Assess Adventist Mission

Why a New Metric Is Needed

From the very beginning the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had the goal to preach the Three Angels' Messages to every nation, tribe, language, and people. This focus on growth and expansion was measured by listing when the various continents and then countries were entered. The church kept track of the total number of countries where the church was actively working. Even before the church was officially organized in 1863 Adventists started work in Canada. By 1875 Adventists were also found in Switzerland and Germany. In 1890 the church had work in 22 countries, by 1900 in 56, by 1930 at the end of the Daniels and Spicer era in 126, by 1950 in 193 (Bauer 1982:244-247), and in 2014 Adventists were working in 215 countries (Adventist Archives 2014). Measuring the progress of Adventist Mission by listing the number of countries where work is on-going might have been an adequate mission measuring stick in the early days of Adventism, but as more and more countries were entered it lost much of its effectiveness.

For example, Adventist leaders challenged those early Adventists to start work in South America, in Africa, in Asia, and then to enter countries where there was no Adventist work. However, even by 1950 Adventists were working in 83.9% of the world's countries (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics 1950) and this only increased to 90.7% in 2014. (Adventist Archives 2014). However, while Adventists work in 90% of the world's countries, they are not working in 90% of the world's languages or people groups. Therefore, measuring Adventist Mission progress by using the number of countries in which the church is working has largely lost its motivating power and helpfulness in assessing the task remaining for the Adventist Church.

Three Different Metrics Proposed in the Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1989)

On October 10, 1989 the General Conference Committee meeting in its annual council voted a "Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." The document mentioned three different metrics to measure the progress of Adventist Mission. First, early in the document a people group strategy was mentioned:

> Evangelizing target populations will be most effective if they are divided into people groups, whose group characteristics facilitate a group approach in evangelism and secure decisions for the gospel. The term "people group" describes groups of people who are bound together in some pattern of familial, regional, linguistic, ethnic, political, economic, and/or religious affiliation. It can apply to a village culture, a professional group, or any other group bound by a common bond. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:473)

The document went on to suggest that there were three types of people groups: Primary Groups because of shared ethno-linguistic affinity, Secondary Groups that are defined by social status, age, class, or caste, and Tertiary Groups based on occupation, residence, common circumstances, or shared interest. It is interesting to note the last two sentences in that section: "No definite figures are available regarding the number of these various categories which are not only overlapping, but also constantly changing. The best estimates speak of about 12,000 primary groups that are largely untouched by the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (473).

The people group concept had existed since 1974—15 years before the Global Strategy was developed—when Ralph Winter introduced the concept at the Congress for World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. The significance of the people group strategy was that it shifted the focus of missions from countries with political boundaries to distinct people groups (Winter 2013). By 1989 significant progress had been made in identifying the number, size, and percentage of Christians in each people group, yet this metric, while mentioned was not the primary metric adopted.

Adventist Mission instead chose a metric that was unique to Adventists—million population segments. Charles Taylor spent months dividing the world's population of five billion into million population segments, then determining whether or not there was an Adventist presence in the segment. It was discovered that 3,200 of the segments had an Adventist presence, while 1,800 were unentered. The General Conference set the goal to "establish by the year 2000 a Seventh-day Adventist presence in

every population segment of one million as identified at the beginning of the decade 1990-2000" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:481). This was a very ambitious goal that would require entering a new segment "of one million every other day for ten years (3 per week, 15 per month, 180 per year)" (482).

So, how did the church do with the new metric? Unfortunately there is very little hard data as to what took place. The million population metric lasted only seven short years—until 1996—and then passed from the scene (for a more detailed history of million population segments, see Morgan 2014:137, 138).

The third metric mentioned in the Global Strategy was languages. The Global strategy document identified 271 languages with more than one million speakers where there was no Adventist presence (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:481).

What Metric Should Adventist Mission Use?

I believe that few would argue against the idea that the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs a mission metric that can measure the task remaining and that can be used to motivate and promote greater engagement in mission. Most people would agree that using a country by country metric has outlived its usefulness and motivating potential; however, there are three possible metrics that could be useful: (1) languages Adventists use in publications and oral work, (2) church members per million population, and (3) unreached people groups. This section will look briefly at the strengths and weaknesses of each of these potential metrics.

Language

From the very beginning of Adventist missions the church has kept track of the number of languages in which they have publications. The 1910 *Annual Statistical Report* mentioned that the Adventist Church had publications in 67 languages (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1910:2), whereas by 2013 Adventists had publications in 366 languages and had oral work in an additional 581 languages for a total of 947 languages (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2016:85-87). Work in 947 languages seems impressive until one contrasts that with the 7,097 living languages in the world today (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016).

It would be fairly easy for each union to ascertain the number of languages in their territory and then compare that list with the languages the church is already working in. The *Ethnologue* also provides an accessible source for the names and numbers of languages in each country and

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the number of speakers for each language—important information when developing strategies to start new work among unentered groups. Much of the information can be accessed on-line such as table 1 which lists the distribution of the world languages by area of origin.

Table 1. Distribution of world languages by area of origin

Area	Living Languages		Number of Speakers	
	Count	Percent	Total	Percent
Africa	2,139	30.1	847,791,487	13.0
Americas	1,062	15.0	49,090,069	0.8
Asia	2,296	32.4	3,929,931,706	60.4
Europe	287	4.0	1,672,591,291	25.7
Pacific	1,313	18.5	6,854,607	0.1
Total	7,097	100.0	6,506,259,160	100.0

Source: Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016.

The advantages of using languages for a metric include the fact that the church already gathers this type of information so no additional data would be needed to begin tracking the languages where Adventist work is in progress. Another advantage is that the *Ethnologue* provides language lists for each country and lists the number of speakers in each language—again providing essential information needed for strategic planning to begin work among unentered language groups. Revelation 14:6 mentions that the eternal Good News will be proclaimed to every language, so there is a biblical rational for using languages as a measure of the task remaining.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of using languages as a metric (table 2) is that in the large language blocks such as Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian,

Table 2. Most widely spoken languages in the world (first-language speakers)

Language	Approximate Number of Speakers
1. Chinese	1,197,000,000
2. Spanish	414,000,000
3. English	335,000,000
4. Hindi	260,000,000
5. Arabic	237,000,000
6. Portuguese	203,000,000
7. Bengali	193,000,000
8. Russian	167,000,000
9. Japanese	122,000,000
10. Javanese	84,300,000

Source: Infoplease 2016.

Japanese, and Javanese—the ten largest language groups in the world—the groups are too large for strategic planning purposes and too diverse to be helpful in developing specific church planting strategies to reach the various groups within those languages. Therefore, while using languages would be an improvement over what the church uses at present to measure progress in missions, I believe there is a better metric that could contribute more information and be more helpful in planning strategies for church planting purposes.

Church Members per Million Population

In the 2015 *Annual Statistical Report* the Global Mission (table 2) lists each country of the world and has a column that reports the number of members per million population. The next column lists the population per member ratio. Both of these statistics are helpful in tracking growth within specific countries (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2016:81), but there are also serious weaknesses in using these as the only metrics to gauge the success of Adventist mission. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the weakness is to pick a country that has a high percentage of Adventists but has many neglected and unentered groups.

Take Kenya as an example. Kenya had 795,161 members at the end of 2013. There were 17,997 members for every million people in Kenya and a population per member ratio of 56, which is extremely healthy. However, the greatest weakness of only using these two types of information to inform the status of Adventist Mission in Kenya is that whole tribes and

language groups can be completely ignored and remain untouched by the Three Angel's Messages.

The Joshua Project lists the total population of Kenya as 46,881,000. However, of that population 5,391,000 or 11.5% is unreached. There are 111 people groups in Kenya with 32 or 28.8% of them unreached (Joshua Project 2016a). Samuel Lumwe did a study based on 2009 figures where he listed 95 people groups based on languages in Kenya with 39 of those languages not having even one Seventh-day Adventist (Lumwe 2009). Therefore, the greatest drawback of using church members per million population and population per member ratios is that language groups and people groups can be completely overlooked.

People Groups

A third possible metric to measure the progress of Adventist Mission is to chart whether or not the church is working among the world's 16,475 people groups. The Joshua Project lists 6,664 of those people groups as currently unreached, which is 40.4% of all people groups representing 3,076,658,000 or 42.2% of the world's population (Joshua Project 2016b). I am sure that the Seventh-day Adventist Church would discover an even larger number of people groups where there are no Adventists, so our task is even more challenging.

There are several advantages of using a people group approach to measure mission progress:

1. A people group approach is biblical. Matthew 28:19 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (*panta ta ethne*). A better translation would be to go make disciples of all ethnic groups or all people groups.

2. A people group approach is reasonable. It provides a workable strategy that helps church leaders see the various segments in our communities. It helps the church develop specific strategies for the various groups in our communities.

3. A people group approach is manageable. Consider the difference in evangelizing 3 billion unreached people versus evangelizing 6,664 unreached people groups. Consider the difference in evangelizing a city of 250,000 people versus evangelizing 15 or 20 people groups in that city.

4. A people group approach is helpful not only for church administrators who are developing strategic plans at the macro level, but the approach is also helpful for pastors and those working at the micro level in helping them better develop strategies for cities and districts.

5. A people group approach comes with extensive research data already provided by several organizations that is constantly being updated and enhanced. In addition to the Joshua Project, Global Research also provides an excellent data base on the people groups of the world.

6. In an era of globalization, vast numbers of displaced people, immigrants, and refugees have arrived in our countries and cities. A people group metric keeps track of these shifts in population.

The biggest disadvantage of using the people group approach for Seventh-day Adventists is that the church would have to begin using a completely new metric which would involve changes to the way information is gathered and documented in the annual statistical reports.

Another challenge is to decide which definition to use for an unreached people group since there have been a variety of attempts to identify exactly what is meant by an unreached people group. For example, in the early days of people group research an unreached people was defined as a people group with less than 20% of its members who were followers of Jesus Christ (Wagner and Dayton 1981:26, 27).

Global Research uses the term "Unengaged Unreached People Group (UUPG) with the following definition: "A people group is unreached when the number of Evangelical Christians is less than 2% of its population. It is further called unengaged when there is no church planting strategy consistent with Evangelical faith and practice under way. A people group is not engaged when it has been merely adopted, is the object of focused prayer, or is part of an advocacy strategy" (Global Research).

The group that has done the most research on people groups is the Joshua Project. Notice their definition: "An *unreached* or least-reached *people* is a *people group* among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this *people group* without outside assistance. Joshua Project uses the terms *unreached* and least-reached to mean the same thing" (People Groups Resources).

This definition is widely used and could easily be adapted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church could consider any group unreached that does not have adequate numbers of Adventists and the needed resources to evangelize the rest of the people group without outside assistance.

This fits with another concept that was in the original Global Strategy document when it spoke of the need for "Direct Action" areas of the world. "Direct action, where needed, occurs when a higher organization takes the initiative, in consultation with any existing subsidiary organizations, to achieve Global Strategy objectives. It may also occur where no subsidiary exists" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:474). This would allow unions, divisions, and the General Conference, in consultation with subsidiary organizations, to initiate work among unreached people groups in their territories.

Recommendations

Charting the number of countries and languages the Adventist Church is working among should be continued. However, in view of the need for a comprehensive mission metric to better measure the progress and growth of Adventist Mission I propose the following be approved by the Global Mission Issues Committee and recommended to the Adventist Mission Board:

1. Recommended that Adventist Mission adopt as its primary metric a people group approach for measuring the task remaining.

2. Recommended that the Adventist Mission Board adopt the following definitions:

   a. *People Group:* A people group is a significantly large sociological grouping of people who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of shared language, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, occupation, education, or patterns of social interaction.
   b. *Unreached People Group:* An unreached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance.
   c. *Reached People Group:* In order for a people group to be considered reached, the following criteria must be considered: (1) There are adequate numbers and resources to evangelize the groups without outside assistance, (2) people worship in their first language or heart language, not in a trade language or in translated worship services,[1] (3) people have access to the Bible and other evangelistic materials in their first language, (4) the people group has indigenous church leaders who can evangelize the rest of the people group without working through a translator.

3. Recommended that the Joshua Project data on people groups be used as the primary source for developing an Adventist list of unreached people groups in each division, union, and conference.

4. Recommended that Adventist Mission work with Adventist Membership Services to develop reporting criteria for the people group approach.

Notes

1 Worshipping in a trade language is not adequate for the following reasons: (1) a person's first language is the heart language, the one a person was born into, and is the language that communicates at the very deepest level with individuals, and (2) often only the adults, especially those who work in the market place speak the trade language, while the women and children speak their first language in the home. If worship is conducted in the trade language it is difficult for whole families to worship together in meaningful ways.

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