

ARTIGOS

PROCLAIMING THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE: TOWARD A CREATIVE ADVENTIST MISSION RESPONSE¹

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Abstract: This paper deals with the major challenges of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church can more effectively and more broadly channel and use the ‘mission energy’ which is available and ready to serve (i.e. the many thousands of young adults as well as people of all ages that really want to serve God and the Church as missionaries). Important questions to some of the challenges are asked and several possible answers are provided as well. The task of preaching the Gospel to all peoples and nations is still an imperative to the Church, and more than ever it is becoming increasingly difficult and challenging to send larger numbers of people as missionaries to the ends of the earth.

Keywords: Adventist Mission; Strategies; Preaching the Gospel; Types of Missionaries; Methodologies; Modes of Mission; Mission Energy.

PROCLAMANDO O EVANGELHO ETERNO A TODOS OS POVOS: TENTATIVA DE UMA RESPOSTA ADVENTISTA CRIATIVA DE MISSÃO

Resumo: Este artigo trata os principais desafios da Igreja adventista do Sétimo Dia em usar ou canalizar, de forma mais efetiva e abrangente, a energia missionária que se encontra disponível e disposta a servir (por exemplo, os milhares de jovens bem como

¹ Thank you to several colleagues who provided valuable suggestions while this paper was prepared, and also after it was presented and discussed at Global Mission Issues Committee. Although the responsibility of the writing of this article rests on the author, several church administrators, missiologists, as well as theologians engaged and concerned with missions provided valuable input and revision for this article. For various reasons including anonymity and also due to the sensitive nature of some information, names of those who contributed with ideas and suggestions are not mentioned.

² This article was prepared at the request of the chair of the Global Mission Issues Committee (GMIC) and by the directors of the Office of Adventist Mission and the Global Mission Study Centers, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It was presented at the Global Mission Issues Committee of the General Conference on March 24, 2010. The articles (this one included) presented received a great deal of attention and generated serious discussion by the many members of the GMIC. Partially as a result of these papers and other efforts by some members of the GMIC, action was taken during this last GC Annual Council (October 2010), and a “Mission Board” has been established by the General Conference to deal with what needs to be done to more effectively channel the church’s mission energy, the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church.



pessoas de todas as idades que realmente querem servir a Deus e a Igreja como missionários). Perguntas importantes em relação a estes desafios são feitas e várias possíveis respostas são apresentadas. A tarefa de pregar o evangelho a todas as pessoas e a todas as nações é ainda um imperativo para a Igreja, e, mais do que nunca, tem se tornado cada vez mais difícil e desafiador enviar grandes números de missionários aos confins da terra.

Palavras-chave: missão adventista; estratégias; pregação do evangelho; tipos de missionários; metodologias; modos de missão; energia de missão.

We understand well that the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as articulated in the church's mission statement, is to proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. We also believe that the commission of Jesus Christ compels us to lead others to accept Jesus as their personal Savior, to unite with His church, and to nurture them in preparation for His soon return. That's at the heart of the church's mission and is accomplished through preaching, teaching and healing ministries.

In this context, difficult and important questions are asked:

- How will the church accomplish this almost impossible task?
- What more can be done (and in better ways) towards this overarching goal?
- How could the church channel the enormous “mission energy” there is?
- How can the church provide mission opportunities for people who want to serve in the mission field?
- Can new structures and platforms for mission be provided so more missionaries will serve in unentered areas (10/40 window, etc.)?
- How will we reach the urban masses, the urban poor, and the urban rich?
- Can we create more service opportunities on the continuum between IDE and AVS/tentmakers?

These and other questions must be brought before our Lord and Savior in a sincere and humble spirit, with prayer, fasting and supplication, and the One who invites us to lay our burdens upon Him³ will provide the answers we so desperately need. Obviously one person does not have the answers, but as a community of believers, as the body of Christ,

³ See Matthew 11:28-30.



together we can call upon His Name, and He will hear and answer us. Let's us pray that His will be done.

Initiatives taken within the last two decades

About 20 years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church established a "global mission" strategy aimed at reaching the whole world with the gospel. Thus the mission study centers to foster relationships and understanding with the major world religions--Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam were established by the Global Mission office of the church. Strategies for reaching postmodern and secular people have also been implemented more recently through a fifth center.

In addition, the Global Mission pioneer program began in 1993. Global Mission pioneers are Adventist lay members who volunteer at least a year of their time to establish a new congregation. 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. The mission pioneer receives a small living stipend so the mission is carried forward.

Today, thousands of mission pioneers, student missionaries, tentmakers, contract workers, and IDE missionaries are working around the world, leading the way in taking the name of Jesus to people--often in extremely challenging areas. But the Adventist Church continues to face two major mission challenges today: the opportunities and "impossibilities" in the 10/40 Window area and the growing secular/postmodern population, particularly in urban areas.

Insights from the past: Initiatives to be taken

I believe the history of Adventist missions is a history of Spirit-led initiatives as well as individual and institutional activities. In the past, many 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 needed and implemented. That system/structure has changed considerably since then.

Before 1901, in a few parts of the world, the church established some lines of communication and responsibility and generally some sort of oversight and nurture was



provided, so that mission outreach went forward in limited and semi-organized or structured manner.

About 110 years ago (1901-1903), or some five to six decades after the Adventist movement began (1844), a major re-organization took place that greatly helped the church to better serve the needs of mission. In some places schools and hospitals were established, in other places the publishing work flourished as missionaries and church leaders studied the best approaches in mission work and worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reaching people to Christ. Most efforts of the church were aimed at mission work.

Restructuring for greater possibilities in mission

As we continue with the church's mission in the 21st Century new forms of mission need to emerge. The church will re-think the way it does mission, and if needed, a re-organization for mission will happen. 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 is not possible.

One such example of this form of mission is tentmaking. 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 who seek to share their faith in these new contexts. This is a movement that will only continue and grow in a new globalized, flattened world.

As major shifts and changes are continually occurring in the world and these shifts have a direct impact on the church and the make-up of its resources (human and material) used for mission, the church will endeavor to fulfill its mission by looking at various different approaches and types of mission opportunities. Thus, several questions such as the following ones need to be asked:

- How can short-term volunteers become long-term tentmakers? And how can they be best positioned in order to fulfill a specific purpose?
- What is this major phenomenon called "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 least evangelized areas (10/40 window, etc.)?
- Can we create more service opportunities on the continuum between IDE and AVS/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.” (Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, 466-467).

**Proposing new forms and structures:
Strategically located missionary assignments**

An idea that may have special merit has been suggested. This would be to establish “strategically located missionary assignments”, within specific regions of the world (divisions/unions).⁴ The individuals occupying these mission positions would be tasked with the coordination and oversight of the mission strategy and goals. Such individuals would be a link between the institutional church and the non-traditional missionaries such as tentmakers, pioneers, student missionaries, or Adventist Volunteer Services (AVS) volunteers within that region (example: 10/40 Window). These missionaries would be located at a point where travel throughout the region would be the least expensive and optimally possible. The person would be provided with a reasonable budget to realistically do the work assigned. It would also be well if this position had non-visible or indirect links to ADRA, AWR and Hope Channel.

These individuals, who will coordinate the recruitment and training of various missionaries (AVS volunteers, pioneers, tentmakers) should possess specific and relevant qualifications.⁵ They will also need to be able to work and deal with various mission

⁴ Reconfiguration of some division territories could focus more attention on the massive territories of the 10/40 Window.

⁵ Spiritual sensitivity: They must give evidence of being able to move among and be accepted by spiritual people of all faiths. A biblically-based spirituality must be apparent and clearly operational. A merely “western” spirituality would be insufficient. Mission training: The basic training offered by the Institute of World Mission should be augmented by specific training in the local religious, political, social and economic histories of the area



platforms or structures and types of missionaries, and therefore must be able to identify with them, thus it would be well if the position was funded in a way that is meaningful for each context—taking into account the socio-political, economic, religious, ethnic, and geographic environments. Such approach would also provide them with justification for visa application and for explaining why they are living in the region. This is most often the case in restricted access countries.

Denominational support for these missionary supervisors would be a cooperative effort between the General Conference, other possible supporters, and the host region where the person will be assigned. Such missionary assignments or positions could be a process of “direct action” strategy of the General Conference.

Integrating and supporting new forms of mission

A hybrid form of tentmakers/pioneer/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/pioneer who is already working in a certain region. He/she would establish the “platform” for mission service through his/her professional skills or employment. The church would support this endeavor with a partial salary, so this person could recruit and support, nurture others (tentmakers, AVS, etc.) in the same or various other types of mission.

*Examples or cases where direct action is needed:*⁶

- T. and W. have been operating a school in Cambodia for the past 10 years. They serve as the family life directors voluntarily for the local mission, in addition to their busy schedule. They have a school with 350 students, 6 children’s homes, dormitories, a lay training program and various support for church planters in Cambodia. T. recently shared with an IDE colleague of mine, I love our church,

they will be located. An entrepreneurial worldview: These people will be dealing with the working world of non-traditional missionaries and must not be limited by a traditional, institutional worldview. Psychological training: These missionaries must be able to deal with people who are often living in spiritually oppressive and physically dangerous situations and must be prepared to do critical debriefing and referral. The individuals must be emotionally stable. Seriously committed to the mission of God: These people and their families will be living and working in difficult and often isolated environments.

⁶ Other examples are the following:

a) Brunei is still waiting for a strong witness, again a very difficult nation to enter.

b) In many countries tribal barriers exist within nations, that even if Global Mission pioneers are sent who share the same language, would have a more difficult time sharing the gospel than someone from outside the culture altogether. The barriers to a national with a different tribal background make a new focus on tentmakers more necessary.



but the mission structure has no place to recognize us as missionaries. We are proud to be Adventists, but there is no place in the structure for volunteer missionaries who have no financial ties to the church—except for AVS which is usually for 1-2 years.

- At a recent planning meeting there was a heightened awareness of need to place a witness in B. A. [place], the place hardest hit by the 2004 Tsunami. After searching for some answers for witnesses, the local church officials said that no Global Mission pioneers would be willing to go to A. [place] because it is predominately Muslim. While an IDE budget sounded good, it would take a year to process and place someone. An Adventist who has worked in A. decided to go immediately, self funded, rather than wait for the long processes to take place.
- Myanmar is one of the World's hardest to access nation, with a population that is very resistant. Over the past few years Korean tele-dramas have become wildly popular in Myanmar, along with anything to do with Korean culture. Korean restaurants have blossomed in Yangon. While Evangelical Korean businessmen are setting up a tactful and respectful witness in Yangon, we wait for a chance to send a foreign IDE, but unless chosen carefully will not see or be able to capitalize on the recent fascination with Korea that much of Asia is experiencing.

Are we as Seventh-day Adventists doing enough?

If the Mormons, who have far fewer members than the Adventist Church, have at any given moment 50,000 missionaries serving in various places around the world,⁷ why couldn't the Adventist Movement have at least 100,000 pioneers serving in the mission field in various capacities and forms of mission service? We have an integrated church structure and system that should facilitate the training and sending of tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of all kinds of missionaries, paid and non-paid, skilled and non-skilled, highly trained or not.

This past December (2009), I witnessed two young Mormon missionaries—an American and a Brazilian—working side by side in my home town in Brazil. They were going from house to house in mission service, and in a way I was proud of them. I felt urged to do more for Christ, to do more with our church, to engage in mission teaching more intentionally, and to be able, if at all possible, to see our church creating tens of thousands of mission opportunities.

⁷ See Mormons, Missionary Work (<http://www.mormon.org/mormonorg/eng/basic-beliefs/membership-in-christ-s-church/missionary-work>). Accessed, March 18, 2010.



Could the church create an Adventist “Peace Corp” to send carefully selected and trained young people into the difficult areas for two years with mentors and to work with experienced nationals or missionaries?

Last week, while visiting an IDE family in Monterrey, Mexico, someone knocked at the door of the house. The visitors were Jehovah’s Witnesses offering quite intentionally their message. Sure, there is a strange feeling as issues of theology and their legitimacy comes to mind, but one cannot help admire and appreciate their zeal and commitment for Christ as they endeavor to witness.

Frustration and discouragement grows

Ten days ago I was in Montemorelos University (March 10-14) teaching 150 university students who want to be involved in mission service. Several of these talented students inquired of the possibilities of serving as missionaries. What could I offer? What should I answer them? When I tried to explain about the different structures that deal with mission possibilities many of them mentioned that others have said the same thing. I suggested that a medical student contact the AVS office, and she told me of her story of frustration in trying to find an opportunity to serve. And, adding insult to injury, my balanced and diplomatic answer only added to her frustration.

Cases such as this are common—in fact, there are hundreds and thousands. I believe that we all can share in the frustration that comes because we cannot help, because the church cannot provide opportunities for talented and capable, willing young people. The more you are part of the system, the more you feel the frustration of not being able to refer someone who would like to become a missionary and work with the church somewhere in the world.

Many share this same experience, which reflects a level of frustration that continues to grow as we endeavor to help others to be part of God’s mission, but find ourselves oftentimes incapable of helping. In many ways it is very difficult to become a missionary. Few possibilities exist and thus only a selected group will eventually go to the mission field. It’s easier to say to potential candidates: “I’m not responsible for recruitment,” “this is not my area of expertise or involvement,” and “it is better that I do not interfere with the responsibilities of others, like GC secretariat, Adventist Volunteer



Services, division secretary, etc. It has been suggested that many become cynical, tired and discouraged along the way.

What is the answer to this problem or frustration? Suggestions and recommendations to these challenges

*Please provide your suggestions based on the following observations:*⁸

- What are new, practical, and concrete ways that tens of thousands of people can be sent as missionaries?
- What will re-organizing the church for mission look like in practice?
- What new structures, forms and platforms for mission can you suggest as a way to send thousands of more missionaries?

Sharing our Ideas and suggestions

(These suggestions were given by various individuals, church administrators, former and current missionaries, and officers of the General Conference)

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church needs to:

1. Establish a Seventh-day Adventist Mission Coordinated Strategy – “Strategic Plan” for mission (long-term): Theologically and biblically sound, missiologically appropriate, and structurally practical.
2. Establish a coordinating mission body/board - for the Adventist Church worldwide.
3. Create fresh guidelines and policies that will help coordinate and set parameters for missionary sending (and receiving).
4. Carefully choose and strategically send mission-visioning teams.
5. Establish some advisories where we actually seek input and advice (think tanks) and not just make reports to them.⁹
6. Assign a portion of the delegates to GC Session based on population instead of membership (and hopefully do the same at divisions and unions later). Even if it was just 100 of the 300 delegates the GC can assign.¹⁰

⁸ A church leader suggested some ideas by asking these questions: “Is it possible that one major problem we have is that we don’t do mission strategizing from a world perspective much anymore? Could it be that we pretty much leave it all up to the divisions and unions whose leaders are wonderful but generally have not being exposed with a global experience or perspective? Should we vision mission from the GC with the input from division and union leaders?”

⁹ Suggestion: “There could be some made up of young people, others of returned missionaries, retired leaders, supporting ministries. Maybe even have one ADCOM a quarter where the whole time was spent on brainstorming. How about a day at Annual Council spent in brainstorming and visioning?”



7. Establish and welcome new partnerships aiming at integrating and working with “supporting ministries” – to enlarge the mission vision and mission work.
8. Create a virtual volunteer network which would allow people with skills in marketing, PPT preparation, databases, photo editing, graphic design, etc. to volunteer to help the church in various parts of the world (or even the GC) with projects we either don’t get done or spend a lot of precious funding on.
9. Invite mission practitioners to work in closer cooperation with GC so their input affects day to day plans and decisions in regards to mission service.
10. Appoint a full time coordinate for the tentmaker program—to recruit people, find openings for interested individuals, coordinate training, mentor and support those who go.
11. 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/local church/conferences.
 - d. Missionaries sent by church-affiliated institutions such as publishing houses/departments, Adventist Health International, ADRA, etc.
 - e. Relatively young, but just retired, Adventist lay professionals that would go as missionaries on a volunteer basis.
12. Use returned missionaries as mentors for new ones (may require a phone budget and even one trip a year to go visit).
13. Have a system of tracking former IDEs, volunteers, and people who have expressed interest so we can quickly fill positions when they come open.¹¹
14. Require GC traveling staff to use a percentage of their travel and department budget on things that directly support the 10/40 Window (and other regions), so they begin to see and think about those needs.
15. Train a group of long-term missionaries with advanced skills for cross-cultural mission service among the least evangelized peoples.

¹⁰Suggestion: “We may not even find people who could be delegates from an area but then would assign someone else to be the delegate from that place and they would have to study and be prepared to speak and vote for that area. If a few of them ended up on the executive committee based on population instead of membership that would be great too. You might start to see some distributions of resources being different since there would now be someone who was thinking about the fact that they represented those unreached areas.”

¹¹ An example is the excellent “Adventist Employment” system that SPD is implementing.



16. Examine GC or Division staffing and see if there is a way to release 10 budgets that GC would continue to fund but would send to the 10/40 Window.¹² Adequate and effective use of resources needs to be taken into account as the church plans for mission work in various least evangelized and 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” (*Medical Ministry*, 330).
17. Require division officers to spend 2-3 months each quinquennium shadowing their counterpart in another division. It would help to widen our eyes to opportunities and needs, help to create mission partnerships, and foster unity as we share and learn with each another.¹³
18. The specific mission¹⁴ given by God to the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be placed as priority by the worldwide church leadership in planning, supporting, and implementing the work of the church.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Overall, this paper proposes that a commission/group/study committee prepare a comprehensive proposal/recommendation to GC ADCOM on what needs to be done to more effectively channel the church’s mission energy.

As we plan for the future, let us contemplate the promises of God in expectation that through His guidance, wisdom and power, more workers will be sent out into His harvest field, responding to His call and fulfilling the church’s assigned mission.¹⁵ God is with us, He will fulfill His promise!¹⁶

¹² A church administrator commented that “we need to relook at all the project giving we are sponsoring from here at the GC. I am not saying it is wrong, but again, it isn’t being strategically aligned with a global view of what needs to be done. It is a case of who can get to the donors first and with the most heart tugging message, not necessarily the needs that are the greatest. Maybe we need to start some listserves that connect people with parts of the world and have returned missionaries monitor what goes up on them. That would keep people’s identities secure but allow an exchange of ideas, reporting, pictures, etc with those who have an interest in a particular area.”

¹³ Suggestion: “Give each division 2 fully funded IDE positions (total of 26). These would not be to replace a national division or union officer but to allow them to add an officer (assistant to the president, associate secretary, associate treasurer, etc). The agreement would be that the GC would choose someone to fill that slot in consultation with the division leadership. The purpose would be to give someone the GC felt had promise as a world leader some international experience. Right now we have VERY few potential leaders we can draw on for the GC who have a global perspective. They are wonderful people but have served their entire lives in their areas. Many of them don’t even understand the rest of their own division let alone the rest of the world.”

¹⁴ See Revelation 14:6-12; Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁵ See Matthew 9:38.

¹⁶ See also Revelation 7:9-17: God’s Promise: the Great Multitude in White Robes.