

IT'S TIME

The Urgency of Urban Mission

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ among all people, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14. And in many parts of the world Adventists have made significant advances toward that goal. However:

- For the first time in human history, more than half of the global population now lives in urban areas. By 2050 it is expected that 70 percent of the world will live in cities.
- There are more than 500 cities with a population of 1 million or more, 236 of which are in the 10/40 Window.

These 500 cities of 1 million or more:

- Have an average of one Adventist congregation for every 89,000 people.
- Include 100 cities where there is less than 1 Seventh-day Adventist for every 20,000 people.
- Include 45 cities with fewer than 10 Adventists.
- Include 43 cities without even 1 Adventist congregation.

These figures place a sobering challenge before the church, but they also should help us see the tremendous opportunities lying just before us.

Through the years, the church has given considerable attention to the work in cities and has often experienced God's blessing in establishing its presence there. But it is clear that the volume and pace of ministry in densely populated environments has not kept pace with the global movement towards urbanization. At times the size and complexity and the perceived negative influence of cities on spiritual life have made some people hesitant to fully engage in mission within cities.

And yet, we are continually reminded that Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14, NKJV).

Ellen G. White wrote in 1912, "As the rays of the sun penetrate to the remotest corners of the globe, so God designs that the light of the gospel shall extend to every soul upon the earth....His kingdom will not come until the good tidings of His grace shall have been carried to all the earth." (IHP 340 – RH Nov 14, 1912).

The cities of today are much larger and far more complex than those described in the Bible. However, God clearly loved the people of the cities—even those who were seen to be hostile to His people (see Jonah 4:11). On multiple occasions Jesus demonstrated compassion for the cities (Matthew 9:35-36). He wept over the city of

Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). He ministered to people in a comprehensive manner, which dealt with the whole person—spiritual, social, physical, and mental (Matthew 4:23). The book of Acts in describing the spread of the gospel indicates that most, if not all, of the church planting efforts took place in cities. (Acts 2:5, 8:5, 9:38, 11:19, etc).

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

In September/October 2013, church leaders from around the world, met together for the *It's Time: Urban Mission Conference*. After several days of reviewing data, discussing ideas, and spending much time in prayer, these leaders adopted the following vision and goal for special emphasis through the next quinquennium:

The Vision

That every city will have an influential Adventist presence actively engaged in a comprehensive mission, using Christ's method of ministry.

The Goal

To engage the collective resources of the global church in establishing a Seventh-day Adventist presence and needs-based ministry in cities of 1 million or more that have no Adventist congregation and, in all other cities of 1 million or more, to improve the ratio of members and worshipping groups to population.

And further, to ensure that divisions and their organizations, including local churches, give higher priority to the growing challenge of urban mission in their territory.

The church draws its inspiration for mission from the teaching and counsel of Jesus. It must also look to Him for its model of ministry—a comprehensive ministry that addressed the wide-ranging needs of the people around Him. Ellen White writes: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Well over a century ago Ellen G. White appealed to church leadership to give special attention to the large cities of the world. “The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed.” (*Ministry to the Cities*, p. 10).

She wrote more about working in the cities than about leaving them. She comments that some members should move out but others should be carefully selected and sent into the cities to minister to the people. Major institutions should be established outside of the cities, but churches, primary schools, day care centers, restaurants, clinics, etc. should be located in the cities.

Some will live outside the city and work inside, others will need to live full-time in the city. Mrs. White recommends that outposts—places of physical and spiritual refreshing—should be provided for those living in the cities. These centers may include lifestyle health centers and training schools.¹

It's time to refocus our attention on reaching out to the billions who live in the massive urban areas of the world.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

Processes

In order to accomplish this goal, these resources and procedural steps have been identified:

1. That every division,² in consultation with its unions, conferences, and missions will accelerate and strengthen its current Mission to the Cities strategy by:
 - a) Determining the comparative level of mission challenge among the cities of 1 million or more in their territories (by Annual Council, 2014).³
 - b) Adopting initial time-based goals and mission implementation plans for cities of 1 million or more with no Adventist presence (by Annual Council, 2014).
 - c) Adopting initial time-based goals and plans to improve the ratios of population to disciples and worshiping groups in cities of 1 million or more with an established Adventist presence (by Annual Council, 2014).
2. That General Conference, division, union, conference and mission administrations will have created and begun an effective communication strategy to inform and inspire the whole church for involvement in Mission to the Cities—its challenge, vision, and goals (by Annual Council, 2014).
3. That General Conference and division administrations will annually identify additional resources for use in cities that present the greatest level of urban mission challenge globally (by Annual Council each year, beginning in 2014).
4. That unions, conferences, and mission administrations will annually identify additional resources for use in cities that present the greatest level of urban mission challenge in their territories (beginning year-end meetings, 2014).
5. That the General Conference, in consultation with divisions, will help facilitate cross-division support and sponsorship for ministry in at least 100 of the most unentered cities of 1 million or more.

¹ For further study, a new compilation of Ellen White's writings has been prepared by the White Estate. It is called *Ministry to the Cities*.

² Whenever "division" is used it is understood to include MENA.

³ In areas where there are few or no cities of 1 million or more, plans may focus on smaller cities along with making plans to assist those areas of the world where there are many such cities.

Resources

The following resources have been identified as having special relevance for the work in the large urban areas of the world:

- **Spiritual:** Ellen White says, “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.” (1SM 121). Without the mighty power of the Holy Spirit the task is impossible (Zechariah 4:6). The immense challenge of reaching the cities calls for a united body of Christ to seek the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, Bible study, and service.
- **Human resources:** The Bible clearly calls every believer to a life of selfless serving, sacrificial giving, and active sharing of Christ’s love. The Apostle Paul instructs the early believers to use their spiritual gifts in faithful service as living witnesses. Every disciple of Jesus is called to be a partner in advancing His mission. The task of reaching the people of large urban areas will never be finished if we rely solely on pastors and professional evangelists.

Preparing people for comprehensive ministry in the cities will require careful attention to the following:

- Involving church members in planning for, and engaging in, urban mission and providing a supportive environment for their creative initiatives.
 - Equipping church members to use their spiritual gifts in wholistic urban ministry, and helping to establish practical outlets for member-based ministry in every city through small groups, churches, and centers of influence.
 - Carefully selecting and preparing people in urban areas to become involved with their community in avenues of needs-based ministry.
 - Recruiting, training, and placing church planters to establish worshipping and witnessing groups in the least-reached people groups of each city.
 - Encouraging each department and institution, at every level, to focus attention on processes, training, and resources for work in cities.
 - Developing leaders for the church in the cities through academic and experienced-based programs with emphasis in cross-cultural training and understanding principles of sharing faith with those who come from other world religions.
- **Financial Resources:** Responding to the challenge of urban evangelism will require careful and prayerful prioritization of the church’s resources. It also calls for sacrificial sharing of means by church entities and members.

Further, in order to stimulate urban mission everywhere each division is requested to encourage its field units and church membership to participate in a range of mission activity such as the following:

- Identifying and developing ways of reaching the least-reached people groups within each city.
- Participating in community services.
- Encouraging personal witnessing.
- Embracing comprehensive health ministry.
- Developing integrated media evangelism.
- Empowering, equipping, and inspiring disciples for mission
- Establishing centers of influence.
- Enhancing small group ministries.
- Distributing literature.
- Conducting public evangelism.
- Developing relationships with public authorities.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Because the Bible encourages good stewardship and accountability, and in order to learn from experience, it is essential that our work in the cities has a careful plan of evaluation and accountability.

Such evaluation and accountability will be based on the shared goals defined above and will include:

1. A twice-yearly reporting and assessment system that informs the church about urban mission objectives, activities, and progress.
2. Regular quantitative and qualitative evaluations of goals and processes.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

The responsibility for sharing the good news rests with all who are disciples of Jesus. Primary responsibility for planning, implementation, and evaluation rests with the leaders of the church at each level. The General Conference Office of Adventist Mission will assist the world church in this special focus on urban mission by coordinating with division leaders, General Conference departments and institutions.

HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED?

In order to reach the cities, the commitment and involvement of every member, church, and organization is needed.

Imagine the impact if millions of Seventh-day Adventists answered God's call to mission and if every church entity aligned itself with the goal to reach the billions in the cities around the world.

What if Seventh-day Adventists:

- Planted 10,000 new worship and ministry groups in cities of 1 million or more.
- Initiated wholistic ministry in at least 100 of the most unentered cities of 1 million or more.
- Established at least 5,000 centers of influence including, one in every city of 1 million or more.
- Distributed 1 billion pieces of literature focused on urban areas.
- Involved 2 million members in some form of health ministry in cities.
- Involved Adventist churches in community service ministries in every city.

What if, in the 100 cities presenting the greatest mission challenge, the church:

- Placed 2,000 Global Mission pioneers.
- Initiated ministry in the major media types and languages used.
- Established early learning centers or primary schools.
- Trained 2,000 people in the major languages of these cities.
- Developed a plan to start or strengthen ADRA and church-based community service work.
- Developed and maintained a database of at least 25,000 potential workers in order to respond to the rapidly changing opportunities that are developing in these cities.
- Analyzed and reconfigured staffing requirements, at every administrative unit, to make available personnel and resources.
- Encouraged and supported the development of creative new ministries.

As Seventh-day Adventists consider the world's vast cities, we are inspired by our Lord's passion for souls and by our pioneers' boldness in going "into all the world." We are moved by the billions of people living in large urban areas who have never heard of Jesus. We acknowledge that it is time that the Three Angels' Messages be proclaimed in all the big cities of the world. We dedicate ourselves to be active partners with Jesus Christ and His instruments for this immense task.

We recognize that this mission is challenging—but no more than the risk and challenge encountered by the apostles, the early church, and the Adventist pioneers.

We have a vital task to carry out, and we resolve to proclaim the message of the kingdom in every metropolis on earth—no matter the cost.

As church leaders, we commit ourselves to supporting the full use of the God-given talents of every church member in this pressing task, and we urge all Seventh-day Adventists to find ways to share Jesus in large urban areas. We encourage each member to ask God if He is calling him/her to minister in one of the great cities of the world. We ask church members and leaders at every level to prayerfully consider what they could do to support workers in large cities through prayer and giving.

The vision of a world that does not know Jesus compels us to make every possible sacrifice to cooperate with the mission of Jesus to reach His precious children in the cities.

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening,” writes Ellen White. “The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close.” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 611).

Our Lord’s commission in Matthew 24 and John’s prophetic vision in Revelation 14 are the heartbeat and hope of Seventh-day Adventists, and they urgently call us to recognize—*It’s time!*