



# Church Evaluation Tool

The opening paragraph of the book *Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White reminds us that “The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.” Simply stated, the reason our churches exist is to further the work of the gospel. Everything we do as a church should be rooted in this mission objective, and this tool was designed to help churches become more effective in reaching that goal.

## STEP ONE: Church Membership & Attendance

Our process begins with a review of local church membership statistics. The percentage of total membership who participate in the main services of the church is a strong indicator of the members’ level of commitment to the mission of the local church. This could reveal a lack of dedication on the part of church members, or a deviation from the original mission on the part of church leaders which contributes to the lack of participation on the part of members.

**Exercise 1.1.** Fill in the following information as accurately as possible:

- Total Church Membership (according to eAdventist.net) \_\_\_\_\_
- Average weekly Worship Service attendance \_\_\_\_\_
- Average weekly Sabbath School attendance \_\_\_\_\_
- Average weekly Prayer Meeting attendance \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 1.2.** In Table 1, arrange your **total church membership** by age groups in the shaded “Members” column.

**Table 1**

Age	Members	Active	Supportive	Inactive
Senior (65+)				
Adult (19-64)				
Youth (13-18)				
Children (≤ 12)				
<b>Totals</b>				

**Exercise 1.3.** In the remaining three columns of Table 1, organize your members into the following categories:

- **active** (involved in ministry either by nominated office or voluntary service)
- **supportive** (not involved in ministry, but attending and/or supporting financially)
- **inactive** (attending once a month or less, with exception of shut-ins).

List the number of members that fit each category and total the categories at the bottom.

## STEP TWO: Core Values

The purpose of this step is to help you determine your church's core values. Core values are standards of behavior that people hold as essential and non-negotiable. Core values common to Christians would include prayer, personal Bible Study, worship and witnessing.

Desired values, on the other hand, are standards of behavior we wish we had, or know we should have, and even intend to have, but do not translate into consistent action.

To determine whether a value is a core value or a desired value, we must ask the following questions –

- Do we assign considerable money to it?
- Do we devote significant time to it?
- Does it involve most of our people?

What ministry in your church involves most of the members, most of the time spent each week, and a considerable amount of expense? No doubt the weekly worship service would be at the top of that list, and therefore a *clearly observable* core value.

Next, consider a church that claims prayer meeting as a core value. Upon investigation, however, only 3% of the members attend. This would indicate that as much as this church may wish prayer meeting was a *core* value, the evidence reveals that it is only a *desired* value.

Refer to Table 2 at the top of page 3. The active ministries are listed in the far left column. Note that the next three columns are divided into the following categories –

- **Outreach:** These are ministries that are primarily reaching out to non-Adventists, such as personal ministries, cooking schools and supper clubs, community services, etc.
- **Administration:** These are usually “behind-the-scenes” ministries that keep the church organized and running smoothly, such as treasury, church clerk, communications, bulletin secretary, etc.
- **Nurture:** These are ministries that primarily seek to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation, such as Sabbath School, visitation of shut-ins, Pathfinders, greeters, women's ministries, etc.

**Table 2**

Active Ministry	Outreach	Administration	Nurture
Bulletin Secretary		1	
Pathfinders			4
Visit Shut-ins			3
Supper Club	5		
Church Newsletter		2	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>

**Exercise 2.1.** In this exercise, list each active ministry in your church in the left column of Table 3 on page 4. Next, list the number of participants involved in *each ministry* in their corresponding *categories* in columns 2, 3, or 4.

Some members will likely be involved in more than one ministry. For example, John Smith may help with the Supper Club and also visit shut-ins, and so would be included in the total for each ministry.

Also, please note that each ministry can *only* represent *one* category. For example, Sabbath School may include outreach elements, but its primary purpose is the spiritual nurture of the members, and so would be categorized as "Nurture". In the same way, while our church schools involve elements from *all three* categories, their *primary* function is to minister to Seventh-day Adventist children, and would therefore be categorized as "Nurture". Your completed table should look similar to Table 2 above.



**Exercise 2.2.** In this exercise, you will fill out Table 4 to reflect how your church is allocating its finances. You will need to refer to your current church budget for this exercise. If your church doesn't have a current budget, you will need to refer to your previous year's expenses as compared with your total expenses for the year. Then list the *percentages* of local church funds that you spend in each category for the year. For example, if your total budget for the year is \$100,000, and you spend \$15,000 on outreach ministries, \$20,000 on administrative ministries, and \$65,000 on nurture ministries, then you would enter 15% under "Outreach," 20% under "Administration," and 65% under "Nurture."

**Table 4**

Outreach	Administration	Nurture

**Exercise 2.3.** Compare the number of total active members in Table 1 with the sum total of the three columns in Table 3. If your church is like most churches, the sum total from the columns of Table 3 will be greater than the number of active members from Table 1. This simply indicates that a few of your members are doing multiple jobs, and are therefore doing most of the work in your church. Our goal moving forward should be to get every member involved in some aspect of church work.

**Conclusion.** In evaluating the results of the exercises in Step 2, you should gain a clearer indication of your church's core values, and whether or not the mission of the church is one of them. Because churches vary in size of membership and financial means, there is no set percentage for the categories listed above. Furthermore, due to the costs associated with church buildings (administrative costs) and church schools (nurture costs), it is not expected that a church's budget will be equally divided between the three categories. However, if the percentage in the outreach column falls below 10% of the total budget of the church, it is clear that the mission of proclaiming the Three Angels' Messages to the world has ceased to be a priority of your church.

### **STEP THREE: Church Growth Indicators**

The purpose of this exercise is to evaluate the growth potential for your church, and to enable you to maximize your strengths and strengthen your areas of weakness.

**Exercise 3.1.** Rate each question on a scale of 1 to 10, with ten being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

1. Our congregation is passionate about the growth of God's kingdom and places priority on growth. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Our church board consistently places the growth of God's church at the top of our board meeting agenda. \_\_\_\_\_
3. We have an effective prayer ministry with organized prayer groups regularly meeting to pray for lost people. \_\_\_\_\_
4. We are intentional about growth and are consistently equipping our members to use their spiritual gifts in a variety of multi-faceted outreach activities. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Our church is actively reaching out with regular programming targeted to meet the needs of the community. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Each year we plan a variety of reaping events to share the Biblical truths understood by Seventh-day Adventists. \_\_\_\_\_
7. We have a plan in place to nurture new converts and a strong program of social activities. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Our church is a center of warm, loving fellowship and once you have come once you want to return again. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Our worship services are biblical, relevant, and inspiring with a unique Adventist flavor. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Our church has a carefully thought-through strategic plan for growth that has been mutually agreed upon by our church leadership, voted by our church board and understood by our members. \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 3.2.** Tally the scores from each of the questions above and grade your church on the following scale:

- 50 or below – declining in membership
- 50 to 60 – maintaining but not growing
- 60 to 70 – experiencing low growth
- 70 to 80 – experiencing excellent growth
- 80 or above – experiencing explosive growth

Our church score: \_\_\_\_\_

Based on this exercise, the \_\_\_\_\_ Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **STEP FOUR: Your Pastor and You**

Historically, in both the New Testament Church and the early Adventist Church, the role of the pastor was quite different from what we see today. The pastor served more as an evangelist, church planter and church trainer than one who simply cared for a particular local congregation.

In a somewhat startling vision, Ellen White received and related a divine rebuke for the pastor that spent too much of his time “hovering” over his congregation rather than training his members for acceptable service. She wrote

“The owner of a large mill once found his superintendent in a wheel-pit, making some simple repairs, while a half-dozen workmen in that line were standing by, idly looking on. The proprietor, after learning the facts so as to be sure that no injustice be done, called the foreman to his office, and handed him his discharge and full pay. In surprise the foreman asked for an explanation. It was given in these words: ‘I employed you to

keep six men at work. I found the six idle and you doing the work of but one, and your work could have been done just as well by any one of the six. I cannot afford to pay the wages of seven for you to teach the six how to be idle.' This incident may be applicable in some cases, in others not. But many pastors fail in not knowing how, or in not trying to get the full membership of the church actively engaged in the various departments of church work. If pastors would give more attention to getting and keeping their flock actively at work, they would accomplish more good, have more time for study and religious visitation, and also avoid many causes of friction." Review and Herald, July 24, 1883

Please don't miss the serious implication of this story! The "foreman" represents the local pastor; his "workmen" the church members; and the "proprietor" the Lord. The Lord fired the pastor because he was "teaching" the members "how to be idle" by not getting "the full membership of the church actively engaged" in the various lines of church work. Let's consider how this may apply to our own local church as we move into the next exercise.

***Exercise 4.1.*** Read through the following Q & A, "Your Pastor and You," together.

# Your Pastor and You

## **Q. How was the role of the pastor different in the early days of the Adventist Church from what we know today?**

"We have no settled pastors over our churches; but our ministers are all missionaries, as were the early ministers of Jesus Christ." J. White, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, June 9, 1859

## **Q. What exactly is a "settled pastor"?**

"It does not appear to have been the design of Christ that His ministers should become stationed, salaried preachers..." J. White, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, Apr. 15, 1862

## **Q. What was the reasoning behind this model of ministry?**

"When I was baptized, and later became a young preacher, we looked upon churches that had to have settled pastors over every flock as being decadent. Most of our preachers were out on the firing line, holding meetings, winning men to Christ, and raising up new churches. Then every few months they would come around and visit the churches that had already been established. This seemed to be according to our view of it, the plan of the apostolic church." H. M. S. Richards, Sr., as quoted in Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, pp. 172, 3

"We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. ... We have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work, and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors." A. G. Daniells, *The Church and Ministry*, General Conference Ministerial Association, p. 34

"All Seventh-day Adventist clergymen are missionaries - not located pastors - and are busy preaching, teaching, and organizing churches the world over." *Seventh-day Baptist Sabbath Recorder*, Dec. 28, 1908; re-printed in the *Review & Herald*, Jan. 14, 1909

## **Q. What were the members to be doing while the pastors were "preaching, teaching and organizing churches the world over"?**

"We cannot expect that ministers will be permanently located in settled charges, as they are located in other denominations; but each church member must individually learn to bear responsibility, and become a worker, making the advance of the cause of truth the first and highest interest of his life." Ellen White, *Review & Herald*, Oct. 22, 1889

"There should not be a call to have settled pastors over our churches, but let the life-giving power of the truth impress the individual members to act, leading them to labor interestedly to carry on efficient missionary work in each locality. As the hand of God, the church is to be educated and trained to do effective service. Its members are to be the Lord's devoted Christian workers." Ellen White, *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, Jan. 8, 1902

## **Q. In laboring in other fields, was the minister called to abandon his church?**

"Many members of the church have been deprived of the experience which they should have had, because the sentiment has prevailed that the minister should do all the work and bear all the burdens. Either the burdens have been crowded upon the minister, or he has assumed those duties that should have been performed by the members of the church. Ministers should take the officers and members of the church into their confidence, and teach them how to labor for the Master. Thus the minister will not have to perform all the

labor himself, and at the same time the church will receive greater benefit than if he endeavored to do all the work, and release the members of the church from acting the part which the Lord designed that they should." Ellen White, *Review & Herald*, Jul. 9, 1895

### **Q. Just how effective was this "apostolic" model?**

"In an interview with a local newspaper in 1886, G. B. Starr, an Adventist evangelist, explains the reason for the rapid growth of Adventists: 'Well, in the first place,' replied the Elder, 'we have no settled pastors. Our churches are taught to take care of themselves, while nearly all of our ministers work as evangelists in new fields.'" Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, pp. 158, 9

### **Q. Did all our churches appreciate this model of ministry?**

"Many churches, collectively and individually, have been so far removed from God, so separated from His Spirit, that they have left souls to perish all around them, while they have been calling for workers to labor in the church. This labor has been granted them, and the impenitent and the sinner have been robbed of the messages which the Lord would have given to them." Ellen White, *Review & Herald*, June 11, 1895

"The churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them. They should be taught to bring a faithful tithe to God, that he may strengthen and bless them. They should be brought into working order, that the breath of God may come to them. They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again." Ellen White, *Evangelism*, p. 381 (1901)

### **Q. What cautions were given against drifting to a pastor-centered model?**

"Our ministers are not to hover over the churches, regarding the churches in some particular place as their special care. And our churches should not feel jealous and neglected if they do not receive ministerial labor. They should themselves take up the burden, and labor most earnestly for souls. Believers are to have root in themselves, striking firm root in Christ, that they may bear fruit to His glory." Ellen White, *Australasian Union Conference Record*, Aug. 1, 1902

"If the ministers would get out of the way, if they would go forth into new fields, the members would be obliged to bear responsibilities, and their capabilities would increase by use." Ellen White, *Evangelism*, p. 382 (1901)

"When we cease our forward movement work and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and to lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized and our work will be on a retreat." A. G. Daniells, *The Church and Ministry*, General Conference Ministerial Association, p. 34

"When Adventists were a movement – that is, when they had no temples and institutions – we Catholics feared them; but they have settled down and are organized and talk a great deal about organization and money... It is a fact that when a movement ceases to move and settles down, not only in its organization but also in its thinking, it is high time to watch out [for decline]." French Catholic Priest on the decline of the Advent Movement, as shared by Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, pp. 172, 3

"A serious and perhaps unsuspected hindrance to the success of the truth is to be found in our churches themselves. When an effort is made to present our faith to unbelievers, the members of the church too often stand back, as if they were not an interested party, and let all the burden rest upon the minister. For this reason the labor of our most able ministers has been at times productive of little good. The very best sermons may be preached, the message may be just what the people need, and yet no souls be gained as sheaves to present to Christ. In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church-members for acceptable co-operation. Let him labor for them individually, endeavoring to arouse them to seek for a deeper experience themselves, and to work for others. When they are prepared to sustain the minister by their prayers and labors, greater success will attend his efforts." Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 196 (1892)

### **Q. What effect does a pastor-centered model have on the church members?**

"It is evident that all the sermons that have been preached have not developed a large class of self-denying workers. This subject is to be considered as involving the most serious results. Our future for eternity is at stake. The churches are withering up because they have failed to use their talents in diffusing light.... Many who possess real ability are rusting from inaction because they do not know how to set themselves at work in missionary lines." Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 431, 2 (1900)

"God has not given His ministers the work of setting the churches right. No sooner is this work done, apparently, than it has to be done over again. Church members that are thus looked after and labored for become religious weaklings. If nine-tenths of the effort that has been put forth for those who know the truth had been put forth for those who have never heard the truth, how much greater would have been the advancement made! God has withheld His blessings because His people have not worked in harmony with His directions. It weakens those who know the truth for our ministers to expend on them the time and talent that should be given to the unconverted. In many of our churches in the cities the minister preaches Sabbath after Sabbath, and Sabbath after Sabbath the church members come to the house of God with no words to tell of blessings received... They have not worked during the week to carry out the instruction given them on the Sabbath. So long as church members make no effort to give to others the help given them, great spiritual feebleness must result. The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers. Let them learn to work as Christ worked. Let them join His army of workers and do faithful service for Him." Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 18, 19 (1902)

"The elders and those who have leading places... should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act... according to their several ability. It is in working for others that we forget ourselves, but those who do nothing for their fellow-men, become morbid and self-centered, and time hangs heavily upon their hands. It is very essential that such an education should be given to the members of the church that they will become unselfish, devoted, efficient workers for God; and it is only through such a course that the church can be prevented from becoming fruitless and dead. It is those who are not engaged in this unselfish labor who have a sickly experience, and become worn out with struggling, doubting, murmuring, sinning, and repenting, until they lose all sense as to what constitutes genuine religion. They feel that they cannot go back to the world, and so they hang on the skirts of Zion, having petty jealousies, envyings, disappointments, and remorse. They are full of fault-finding, and feed upon the mistakes and errors of their brethren. They have only a hopeless, faithless, sunless experience in their religious life. This is the condition of the church of which Christ speaks when He says, 'I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.'" Ellen White, *Review & Herald*, Sept. 2, 1890

## Q. What is God's vision for each local congregation?

"Careful instruction should be given which will be as lessons from the Master, that all may put their light to practical use.... Let someone who has ability lay out before these inactive ones the line of work they could do. Let small missions be established in many places to teach men and women how to use and thus increase their talents. Let all understand what is expected from them, and many who are now unemployed will become true laborers."

Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 431, 2 (1900)

"I entreat you whom God has favored with a knowledge of the truth, Go to work; there is work to do everywhere. The fields are all white unto the harvest. Sowers and reapers are needed just now. The time you devote to imparting constantly to those who understand the message of warning will not give one tithe of the strength which they would receive in taking hold of the work to communicate life to save perishing souls. Angels are waiting to bless the consecrated workers. The parable of the lost sheep should be a lesson to every soul who has been rescued from the snare of Satan. We are not to hover over the ninety and nine, but to go forth to save the lost, hunting them up in the wilderness of the large cities and towns. In this work the laborers will be led to feel their weakness and they will flee to the stronghold. The divine presence will be with them to give strength and courage and faith and hope. The truehearted workers will be laborers together with God." Ellen White,

*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 232 (1895)

"Many would be willing to work if they were taught how to begin. They need to be instructed and encouraged. Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give Bible readings, how to conduct and teach Sabbath school classes, how best to help the poor and to care for the sick, how to work for the unconverted. There should be schools of health, cooking schools, and classes in various lines of Christian help work. There should not only be teaching, but actual work under experienced instructors. Let the teachers lead the way in working among the people, and others, uniting with them, will learn from their example. One example is worth more than many precepts." Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 149 (1905)

### **Exercise 4.2.** Reflecting on the reading, discuss the following questions:

1. Is our local church currently following the model of ministry outlined in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy?
2. How might the role of our minister look different from what it presently is?
3. How might the role of our lay leaders look different?
4. How might the role of our members look different?
5. How could *all of our roles* work together more effectively?

**Conclusion.** Most churches using this tool will discover that they are not currently following the model of ministry outlined in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Too many pastors spend too much time doing the work the members should be doing, thus robbing the members of the experience the Lord wants them to have. And too few pastors spend enough time training their members for effective missionary service, thus robbing the world of the message it desperately needs to hear.

In the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, we continue to pray for revival, recognizing that all true revival must be accompanied by reformation. There must be a change. Inspired counsel reminds us that “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.... The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do” (*Christian Service*, p. 68).

The accomplishment of this goal will require a commitment of all our resources – our time, our talents and our energy – to the service of God. More than this, it will demand earnest prayers for the special outpouring of the Spirit of God, untiring labor in the cause of Christ, and indomitable faith that God will fulfill His Promise to us.