

SETTING THE STAGE

They seemed to appear suddenly out of nowhere. The black-masked militants dramatized the intensity of their cause with sabotage, high-profile beheadings, and the capture of large swaths of territory throughout the Middle East.

At a press conference, the U.S. President was asked about the American military's response. His poor choice of words went viral: "We don't have a strategy yet." What? No strategy? To not have a well-articulated strategy against a threat to global security seemed by many to be an inept if not perilous response. The White House scrambled to do damage control.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is also engaged in a war. The great controversy involves a far more dangerous foe than black-masked extremists. The enemy of all souls is working feverishly to neutralize the church's mission of hope and wholeness to a world in crisis. Far too many youth and some of mature age are leaving the church. Many who stay sit passively on the sidelines.

In the North American Division, Adventist schools are closing, church membership among native-born members is dropping, and ideological squabbles have infected church discourse. All the while, a growing proportion of the public has never even heard of the name "Seventh-day Adventist"! Does our church have a strategy for this war we're in? What about your local church?

Good news! Few forces in life are as powerful as a group of people fueled by a common strategy. A mission-driven church can "turn the world upside down!" (Acts 17:6). Both Nehemiah and his crew in the Old Testament and the early Christians in the New Testament are standout examples!

A robust, Spirit-directed strategy helps the church anticipate and prepare for the future rather than merely react to it. Having a strategy is building the church on a rock; not having one results in building on the sand, leaving the church grossly unprepared for the storms ahead.

Unfortunately, very few church leaders are skilled in strategic leadership. In a recent division-wide survey, North American pastors rated their preparedness to do strategy dead last out of more than 60 pastoral tasks rated. As a result, the work suffers from fragmented efforts, botched opportunities, and poor accountability. It's time for a change!

A Five Step Plan

The Five Step Plan outlined in this book is a strategy for accomplishing mission with excellence. The process, based upon REACH principles, is both Spirit-filled and evidence-based. It aims to be simple enough for any church leader to use. It is based on extensive and ongoing field input and draws liberally on counsel from inspired writings.

Ordinary church organizations may get by without a robust strategy—but not great ones! Churches with a blurred sense of purpose tend to drift along from year to year, barely

Good organizations may get by without a robust strategy—but not *great* ones.



impacting the world around them. A whirl of busy activities and events is often disconnected from an overarching framework that aligns everything to mission. If asked to state the mission of the church, most churches, we think, would either be mum or vary widely in their response. Churches of excellence

operate very differently. For them, strategy is far more than activity. Their mission is laser-sharp. Because their efforts are focused and disciplined, they do less but accomplish far more.

The step-by-step process outlined in the Five Step Plan helps your church congregation organize around a vision and the values and priorities needed for the accomplishment of a clear and compelling mission. Accountability structures are in place to ensure the continuous pursuit of greatness.

We, the authors, feel that most church organizations sense the need for a more robust strategy. Few resources are available, however, that explain to congregations in a succinct, easy-to-understand way just how to reach excellence through focusing on mission.

The resources that support the Steps are “church-tested” for effectiveness in actual congregations. They will be constantly revised and enhanced as better ways of doing things are identified.

Three noteworthy features are found in this book:

1. Habitual practices or “habits”

Each of the Five Steps is composed of two or three habits, which are different than action plans. Action plans lead to the accomplishment of a goal, whereas habits are repetitive processes that lead to the creation of a culture.

The inventory in Chapter 1 allows you to determine how many of the habits found in organizations of excellence are currently functioning in your church organization. Once you get your results, you should attempt to make the habits systematic and ongoing. Each habit is concrete, measurable, and doable.

You will be able to track your progress in putting these habitual practices in place so that they can happen almost automatically from year to year. When these habits become ingrained, your church forms an enduring culture that becomes a part of your congregation’s “DNA.”

2. Web resource bank

This book, *Becoming a Mission-driven Church*, is a living document. Purchase of this book enables you to connect to a number of free downloadable resources that you can use “just-in-time” as you plan and execute your strategy.

These resources will be continuously updated as new and improved versions are validated through ongoing field testing. They are presented in Microsoft Word format so that you may easily change and adapt the forms. Find them at www.ReachNAD.org/resources.

3. Diagnostics

In addition to the first inventory, each of the Five Steps contains an inventory that will help you determine how well your organization performs on each of the Five Steps. Copies can also be downloaded from the Web resource bank.

These same diagnostic ratings scales can help you gauge your church’s progress in implementing the Five Steps. Any church organization with all Five Steps in place is eligible for recognition as a demonstration project for the entire North American Division.

What This Five-Point REACH Strategy Is Not

This strategy is not merely a program, flavor-of-the-month, or a bag of tricks. Nor is it theoretical fluff. It is a practical resource for conducting church life decently and in order. It is a flexible approach and not one-size-fits-all. Church organizations can use it and alter it as appropriate to fit their local situations.

The REACH strategy is not a top-down mandate from church leadership. Rather, it is a statement of mission and values officially adopted almost unanimously on October 28, 2011, by representatives from all portions of North America. It is also a set of time-tested processes—based upon inspired writings, research, and best practices—that church organizations are using to accomplish mission with excellence.

Although church organizations are free to use or not use these principles, we are struck by the number of church organizations that are looking for a distinctively Adventist approach that encourages collaboration, rather than “reinventing the wheel.” More and more leaders realize that always working independently foolishly drains the church of scarce resources and expertise. We appeal to you to give these principles a chance to work in your organization.

Conclusion

Welcome to what can be an exciting journey for you and your church organization! Although you will likely notice positive changes almost immediately, the total process outlined in this book will take months if not years. Genuine culture change is never a quick fix, but the rewards of pursuing excellence God’s way far exceed the effort required.

CHAPTER 1

What Drives Your Church?

As you begin, try this activity:

Is *Your* Church a Mission-driven Church of Excellence?

INSTRUCTIONS: To find out if your church is mission driven, take this inventory. Read each item below, and check the boxes that describe what your church does on a regular basis.

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1. Does your church conduct anonymous surveys of the congregation each year to assess its true spiritual and social climate?
- COMMENT: In an anonymous survey, people can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts honestly. It's important to know members' true thoughts and feelings in order to effectively plan and operate a mission-driven church.*
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2. Has your church developed a short mission statement that everyone (even children) knows by heart?
- COMMENT: Only if the congregation is aware of the church's mission can they work collaboratively toward accomplishing it.*
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3. Has your church leadership made available to church officers and members a one- or two-page version of your church's strategic plan in order to help guide everyone's efforts in accomplishing your church's mission?
- COMMENT: Church officers especially need such a document as a reference guide for planning their ministries.*
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4. Does your congregation follow through to ensure that all of the church's departments and ministries implement the designated strategy in a disciplined, unified way?
- COMMENT: Without follow-through, a strategy is only a piece of paper.*
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5. Is your church a well-known demonstration site that other churches routinely visit in order to learn how to become a mission-driven church of excellence?
- COMMENT: Churches that are truly mission driven are unusual. It is much more common for churches to be activity driven, event driven, crisis driven, or even leader driven. A church that is mission driven to the core is a powerful example of church-at-its-best.*
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HOW DID YOU DO?

ALL FIVE checked: This is extremely rare. Your church may not need this book.

TWO to FOUR checked: Although your church is strong, this book can help it improve.

ZERO to ONE checked: Most churches (even good churches) score here. But to become a *great* church, begin following all Five Steps outlined in this book.

The young couple were stopped at a red light in Washington, D.C., when a car rammed into the rear of their new Acura. When the husband got out to inspect the damage, a man jumped into the car. Brandishing guns, the man and his accomplice ordered the occupants out and proceeded to careen dangerously down the street with their lovely Acura. They had been carjacked!

Has Your Church Been Hijacked?

“The church,” wrote Ellen White, “is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. . . . Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”¹ It has always been God’s plan that His church should show the world what God is really like. “The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory.”²

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the imminent return of Jesus Christ to Planet Earth. As end-time events unfold, our mission takes on added urgency. Our message of hope offers an eternity of joy in the very presence of God! What could be a greater mission than that!

The enemy of all souls constantly devises ways to hijack the church from its noble purpose. Mission drift happens when the church loses sight of its intended mission and replaces it with poor substitutes. Instead of reaching the world with the end-time message of hope, such churches may center their time and attention on entertainment, church politics and power grabs, status-seeking, social cliques, and numerous other digressions. Do you know churches like that?

It has been our experience that the central mission of Seventh-day Adventist churches is particularly at risk for being hijacked in three areas:

1. Event-driven churches

Is your church one of these? The event-driven church is a beehive of activity—potlucks, retreats, choir rehearsals, board meetings, departmental councils, Agape feasts, and any number of special Sabbath celebrations. It isn’t that any of these activities is wrong or sinful. It’s just that their cumulative effect drains away energy from the central reason why churches exist.

So much busyness eventually takes its toll. Those members who are most committed to leadership positions within the church find themselves taking on numerous responsibilities, while others sit on the sidelines, content to watch from a distance. As nominating committee time rolls around, faithful but exhausted church leaders are tempted to beg off all activities. Significant offices of the church go unfilled for lack of takers.

2. Leader-driven churches

What congregation doesn’t appreciate a personable, sensitive, charismatic pastor who visits members and preaches inspiring sermons! Some pastors are legends. Wherever they go, churches spring to life, attendance spikes, and financial problems evaporate!

The power of the pastor is legendary. Ellen White wrote, “Generally, the people rise no higher than the minister.”³ Just as churches reflect great leaders, they just as easily reflect poor leadership. This leaves churches at the mercy of the church pastor—in a constant state of ebb or flow, depending upon who’s at the helm.

Many pastors are affirmed if not flattered by knowing they make a difference to their congregations. Some go to great lengths to define a vision for the church—their vision, that is. And when they leave, other pastors come in, desirous of leaving their mark. Like a yo-yo, the congregation finds itself in a continual state of flux, up and down at the mercy of the pastors assigned to them.

3. Crisis-driven churches

When mission takes the back seat in a church, other forces tend to take its place. One of those other forces is likely to be polarization around some emergent event. Crisis-driven churches spend inordinate amounts of time putting out fires wherever they identify them. These fires might be the result of genuine emergencies such as a building catastrophe or a severe financial shortfall. Or fires may emerge from personality conflicts and hurt egos.

The energy of crisis-driven churches is directed toward the source of the current crisis. Because these churches have invested so much time and attention in solving church problems, they have little energy to focus on the wider world around them—to look outside their borders to a world that is hurting and in such need of the wonderful gospel of Christ.

Without vigilance, emergency events are liable to obscure a church’s mission and ultimate purpose. Congregations must never allow the tyranny of the urgent or the divergent to commandeer time and attention from the ultimate destination—mission!

The Power of a Mission-driven Church

Mission-driven organizations are focused. Every muscle and nerve is bent toward accomplishing the mission. From time to time, any number of issues will come upon the scene to distract or divert the attention from those things that are most important. But in the words of one anonymous sage, “Things that matter most must never be at the expense of things that matter less.” Mission-driven organizations do not allow themselves to be hijacked. They’re committed to a mission!

In the case of the project to place a man on the moon, all parties came together as one in pursuit of the mission and did what many thought would be impossible in the amount of time specified. Ellen White expressed the idea of a passionate mission this way: “Success in any line demands a definite aim. He who would achieve true success in life must choose and keep steadily in view the aim worthy of his endeavor.”⁴ Mission must continuously guide the direction of the church. It is our compass that leads us in the direction God would have us go.

¹ *General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1902, art. C, par. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 9:168.

⁴ *General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1902, art. C, par. 1.