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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

MISSIONAL CHANGE: BEGINNING A MISSIONAL TRANSITION  
IN A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONGREGATION

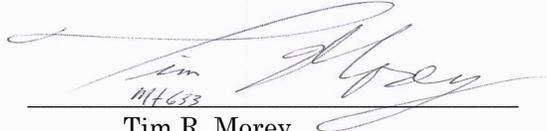
Written by

CAMPBELL PAGE

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary  
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Tim R. Morey



Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: December 10, 2013

MISSIONAL CHANGE: BEGINNING A MISSIONAL TRANSITION  
IN A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONGREGATION

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
CAMPBELL PAGE  
NOVEMBER 2013



## ABSTRACT

### **Missional Change: Beginning a Missional Transition in a Seventh-day Adventist Congregation**

Campbell S. Page

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

The goal of this study is to reconnect God's mission with his church in a Seventh-day Adventist context by providing a viable Seventh-day Adventist missional theology for being God's church to a postmodern Canadian context. The study argues that missional thinking is definitely biblical and also prevalent in the writings of Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, leader, and prophet, Ellen G. White. It maintains that missional thinking is in fact the predominant worldview through which White understood Jesus Christ and the gospel of the kingdom of God. It also explains that the present Seventh-day Adventist Church is not functioning in line with God's mission to the world. This study contends that in order to follow both the mandate of Scripture and the mission God gave to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church must return to functioning in a missional paradigm. Contemporary Christian authors are used to understand contemporary missional theology and also to inform a Seventh-day Adventist missional theology.

This thesis was explored and implemented through a missional transition process in the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. The process was centered on a congregational study of Reggie McNeal's *Present Future* DVD series over a period of nine weeks. It also included the implementation of missional experiences in the community, as well as the formation of missional leaders and communities in the congregation. Overall, these components were successful in terms of the congregation beginning to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles in its everyday practices. This study concludes that missional theology offers Adventism perhaps its only viable lifestyle for making the reign of God visible to a postmodern and secular world. Returning to the missional roots of Adventism is the only way of truly fulfilling the unique mission God has given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

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To my wife, Colleen, who has always believed in me more than I believe in myself and encouraged me to reach higher and higher in my service to God. You are most certainly  
“the love of my life and the joy of my existence.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for their abiding presence and power in accomplishing my ongoing spiritual formation into Christlikeness through this process. I am glad to say, “You changed me.”

I also want to thank Spencer and Dani for all the time they gave up to let Dad pursue one of his dreams. Thank you to the Thompsons and Perrys for becoming our missional community. Thank you to the “doctors who don’t do anything”—Dave Schwinghammer, Sereivudh Ly, Dan Linrud, Dave Baker, and Gerardo Oudri—for all those laughs that saw us through a lot of the hurdles, and for being brothers in Christ when it was very needed. It seems we did something after all!

Thank you to the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church for letting me be a part of your journey for over eight years and being willing to make missional church a part of your thinking. I also want to thank the Ontario and Florida Conferences for their financial support.

Last but not least, thank you to Fuller for a journey that was much more than an academic exercise. I came to this looking for answers for my postmodern heart and its yearnings toward God. Through the teachers, staff, and students I interacted with, God set me on a course with Him that has transformed my view and practice of ministry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT	
Chapter 1. COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE NEW LIFE CHURCH	9
Chapter 2. MINISTRY CONTEXT OF THE NEW LIFE CHURCH	32
PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	
Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	48
Chapter 4. ECCLESIOLOGY	76
Chapter 5. A MISSIONAL THEOLOGY	108
PART THREE: MINISTRY STRATEGY	
Chapter 6. MINISTRY PLAN	139
Chapter 7. IMPLEMENTATION	154
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186

## INTRODUCTION

Sarah<sup>1</sup> is a lifetime Seventh-day Adventist. She has worked extensively in Adventist institutions since she was a young woman. She sent her children to Adventist schools, attended church faithfully, and yet still hungers for a faith that is real and has more impact on her and others. As she nears retirement she is coming to a crossroads where if faith does not become more worthwhile, then she will unplug from it. Still, she is not sure how to make the changes.

Nick and Donna, longtime Christians, have lived in the community for years. They recently came to Adventism and have been extremely involved in ministry and leadership. Donna has led the neighborhood center for three years and made it one of the best in the community. Both are prayer warriors and passionate about helping the community more substantially.

James and Karen represent a lot of the young people in the congregation. They have been connected with the church for years, having grown up within the Adventist Church culture, and have many friends outside the church. They are believers and love God but are more tied to their friendships than the church. They are involved but also struggle with new ideas versus the traditional forms of church they have grown up with. Because of their friendships outside the church, they know some things need to change; but with strong family ties in leadership, they struggle with how the church should move forward.

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

Arthur, a longtime member of the community, is addicted to cocaine, alcohol, sex, and pornography. He is rough, will likely never fully fit into a typical church, and worries about whether God loves him with all that is wrong. He was welcomed into New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church (hereafter, the New Life Church) with open arms about four years ago. He has suffered many relapses but was befriended by the worship band through it all. That friendship and a strong friendship with the pastor have kept him plugged in despite the addictions. Recently, reconnecting with his grown daughter has given him a new motivation for change.

Linda represents a large demographic in the community. She is a single mom, living in a run-down building because it is all she can afford. Her kids are her life, but with three of them it is hard to make ends meet. She needs a community where she feels her kids are safe, and that provides after-school opportunities for them so she can work. She appreciates the food boxes and free breakfasts. However, she will very likely never attend church without a substantial relational connection from someone in the church community.

Jane is probably the most compelling. Having lost her infant son twenty years ago, she turned to drugs to cope. Over-the-counter medications led to harder substances until she found herself addicted to cocaine and crack, and she eventually became a prostitute to pay for her habit. Years of abuse, violence, and the growing sickness associated with crack addiction led her to admit herself to a drug rehabilitation center in Oshawa, Ontario, where she has begun a new life free of the addictions. Her statement

compounds the sadness of her story. She stated that she very likely would have stopped sooner if there had been more support and services in her community.<sup>2</sup>

For each of these people in this Oshawa community, the church is not what it needs to be. In fact it is far from it. Mired in attractional methods of doing church like most of Christianity, and mired in the proclamation evangelism methodology predominant in Adventism, the New Life Church remains significantly separated from its community. For those who are members of this faith group, the church has become focused mostly on looking after its own. Its worship service is contemporary but very attractional. Even then there is little spiritual growth to be noticed and no significant numerical growth in over ten years. The one ministry that is making any significant impact on the community is the neighborhood center. Leadership has realized that change must come and that many traditional forms of evangelism will not work. Positive discontent is fueling changes in methodology, in the whole paradigm of what church is, and how that impacts the New Life Church and its community in downtown Oshawa.

Part One of this doctoral project will describe the context of this ministry concerning both the church and its surrounding community. Both of these are in a perfect place for change and partnering with God to bring transformation to the church and to the Oshawa community. The community context presents a society that has lost hope in most government and human-based service agencies, yet is very open to spiritual help. Their understanding of Christian faith, however, is also very formed by the postmodern and secular characteristics of much of the Canadian population. All of this presents a great

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<sup>2</sup> Jullian Follert, "A Recovering Oshawa Sex Trade Worker Tells her Story," DurhamRegion.com, <http://www.durhamregion.com/article/1113396--a-recovering-oshawa-sex-trade-worker-tells-her-story> (accessed January 16, 2013).

opportunity for a faith group living under missional principles to participate in this community and make it aware of the hope and power available to it through Jesus Christ.

The church itself, at the time of implementation of this project, has spent many years healing from a church split. Long-term pastoral leadership, visioning for a better future, a strong but attractional food-based community center, and promotion of missional living has facilitated a greater passion for helping the church's immediate community. This is also beginning to inspire a transformation in many church members. Against all of this is a dual-edged obstacle. The first obstacle includes the traditional evangelistic approaches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The second is an unhealthy fixation<sup>3</sup> on preserving Adventist identity that compounds the first obstacle to an even greater degree. However, there is an opportunity for change because there exists a high level of positive discontent. The members acknowledge that they have not been growing spiritually in any significant way, and that the New Life Church is not significantly impacting the Oshawa community. They also see that that situation does not correlate with biblical living. Both things together are creating an atmosphere ready for change.

Part Two of this doctoral project seeks to discuss this missional transition in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and its ecclesiology, missiology, and evangelistic mindset. Missional living and theology is clear from Scripture, and also within the writings of Adventist pioneers like Ellen White. However, missional thinking is not well developed in contemporary Adventist theology and practice. It very definitely

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<sup>3</sup> There is a healthy view of Seventh-day Adventist identity that is better understood by viewing the Church and its mission through a missional lens.

needs to be developed to continue the mission that fueled the pioneers of Adventism while also contextualizing the gospel of the kingdom of God to today's culture. Today's culture, in fact, is 160 years removed from the beginning of the Adventist Church. Exploration of mission-based and missional movements and literature in the North American context will help to bring clear missional thinking evident in the Adventist pioneers together with the excellent insights of the greater Christian family. In a Church which prides itself on its distinctiveness from other Christian denominations, this can be a challenge and even an obstacle to change. A missional theology that incorporates the best in missional scholarship today, while being true to the Scripture and Adventism, can have a significant impact on helping more Adventists to embrace missional living in North America.

Ecclesiology is another area that needs greater definition within the Adventist context. The Adventist Church has a very strong identity revolving around Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 14: 6-12. However, this has led, at best, to a passive exclusivity, and at worst to a dangerous exclusion of all things that are not Adventist, including people. This may suggest that as a denomination Adventism has become more focused on the organization than on mission. To be true to its identity, the Church must recover its mission focus. To be faithful to developing the people of the Church into disciples, it must move from a consumerist model to one that engages its people in the full-time ministry that is their lives. A working missional theology can help that be accomplished through understanding the differences between such principles as attractional models versus incarnational models, or being church versus doing church.

The “Great Controversy” theme of Adventism has many parallels with the concept of the *missio Dei* as promoted by other Christians like Lesslie Newbigin. This theme, along with the foundational texts of Matthew 28:18-20, 24:14, and Revelation 14:6-12, seen in the light of missional theology, could revolutionize many churches within the denomination. More importantly, this could release a lot of Church members to be more intentional about sharing their faith with friends, family, and society. Above all, Part Two will seek to be true to the mission of God as found in Scripture. That missional focus will result in defining a missional theology within an Adventist context that informed the beginning of a missional transition in the New Life Church.

The final section of this doctoral project, Part Three, will define the strategy, its implementation, and the results as observed. The implementation of this strategy relied heavily on the work of Reggie McNeal in his book, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, as well as the DVD curriculum by the same title.

Consequently, the principles he uses as the foundation of his discussion were the key focal points for prayer and discussion at the New Life Church as part of this doctoral project implementation.<sup>4</sup> This resource was appropriate and successful in this context because the pastoral leadership sought to listen to where the congregation was in its journey with God and find a resource that could facilitate needed change for the benefit of the church and the Oshawa community. A great part of that listening occurred over the first six years of an almost nine-year pastoral term at the church. This listening part of the process was equally as important as the choosing of the resource. It was a part of the

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<sup>4</sup> McNeal highlights the following principles: the collapse of the church culture in North America; the shift from church growth to kingdom growth; developing and releasing God’s people to live their life as ministry; returning to spiritual formation in the midst of life; the movement from planning to preparing for being the church; and the rise and importance of allowing apostolic leadership.

missional process of observing where God was working already in the lives of people, and then joining him there. It was a key principle for the strategy and implementation.

The final observations of Part Three will be informed by the transitions that resulted in the author's own ministry journey. That journey led him from the position of Senior Pastor at the New Life Church to the position of Senior Pastor of the Apopka Seventh-day Adventist Church in Apopka, Florida, and then back again to Oshawa to begin a new missional work outside of employment in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The work on this doctoral project heavily influenced this personal transition, and therefore this transition itself is relevant to this work. The conclusions drawn from this doctoral project will hopefully provide other Adventist ministers with the theology and tools needed to begin missional change in Adventist congregations, or perhaps to plant new missional Adventist congregations as well.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE NEW LIFE CHURCH

Listening for how God is working in a specific context and where he can direct believers to the efforts he needs accomplished is a crucial component to missional living. An important part of this listening process consists of understanding the demographics of this Oshawa community and the Seventh-day Adventist Church trying to reach it with the gospel. This was done through consultation of the Canadian Federal Census, the work of noted Canadian sociologist, Reginald Bibby, and through personal observations of the church membership by church leaders. What follows is a discussion of how findings from these sources helped inform the context and readiness for beginning a missional transition in the New Life Church.

#### **The Community Surrounding the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Oshawa Ontario is a blue-collar, middle-income city in Ontario, Canada found on the eastern edge of the Greater Toronto Area (hereafter, GTA). The GTA consists of a population of over six million people, roughly 20 percent of Canada's population.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto website, "Demographics," <http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/2011-census-backgrounder.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2012).

Oshawa itself has a population of nearly 150,000 inhabitants. This proximity to the GTA creates a large commuter population travelling into Toronto for work but living in Oshawa for its better affordability. However, the largest workforce in Oshawa is tied to four different local businesses: Lakeland Hospital and Health Services; Durham College; the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (hereafter, UOIT); and the General Motors Plant (hereafter, GM). Each of these four businesses is tied to numerous satellite businesses and supply companies in the area that are dependent on their success. Therefore, these industries have a significant role in the economic stability of the city. The most significant of the three is by far the GM manufacturing plant that is one of GM's largest plants in the world, and until recently was the largest automotive plant in Canada. Oshawa's fortunes are directly tied to these industries, as is the demographic then of its workers, as each industry or school hires or prepares the majority of its workers or students for middle-income professions that support these primary industries in the city.

Using an economic demographic lens, the city itself can almost be divided north and south. The north area of the city is the more affluent. It includes almost all of the new buildings in the booming housing industry, although much of that growth comes from the commuters wanting to live in a more affordable Oshawa, while continuing to commute to downtown Toronto for work. The southern half of the city is the less affluent, with little new housing or growth. One finds there either longtime residents who bought years ago and settled into their homes, or more impermanent people who, for numerous reasons, often financial, live in south Oshawa for a brief time until they can afford something

better. The New Life Church is situated just south of the generally recognized border for this demarcation.

### Longtime Permanent Residents of Downtown Oshawa

The majority of Oshawa's population is between the ages of twenty and sixty-five years of age.<sup>2</sup> A significant portion of this demographic attends one of the technology-based schools, training for occupations within these main industries of Oshawa. However, more than half of this demographic is already employed, especially with GM and its subsidiaries, and has been settled into the community for many years. This population loves Oshawa and has a strong sense of loyalty to the city. Over the years the downtown core of Oshawa, which is in the very center of the north-south divide, has deteriorated and been taken over by many of the more transient population that inhabits a number of the hostels and treatment centers prevalent in this area of the city. The long-term residents have noticed the overall decline of the downtown core and want to claim it back.

This can be seen in numerous ways. The "Creating Our Tomorrow" strategic plan, developed by the Oshawa City Council for developing the Oshawa community, is one.<sup>3</sup> There are also numerous community groups that have begun walking these declining areas to inhibit the prostitution and drug-related activities taking place there. The mindset of these long-term residents is common in any conversation in the community, as is seen in an article in a local paper:

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Census, <http://www12statcan.gc.ca/mobile/2011/cp-pr/table-eng.cfm?SGC=3518013> (accessed January 10, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Oshawa City Council, "Oshawa Strategic Plan: Creating Our Sustainable Tomorrow," <http://www.oshawa.ca/strategic/> (accessed January 16, 2013).

Helen Gingereski's neighbourhood is nothing like she remembers it. Living in the same home that her parents bought in the 1930s, the 80-year-old Oshawa resident remembers when the Simcoe Street South and Olive Avenue area was nice and quiet. Since returning to the home in 1993, Gingereski's come to realize how much the neighbourhood has changed. "I've lived here almost all my life," she says, recalling a time when the area boasted upscale apartment buildings. Now she says those very same apartment buildings are part of the problem, occupied, in some cases, by sex trade workers and drug addicts.<sup>4</sup>

Police note that "one-way streets, nearby social services, inexpensive housing, and zoning that permits rooming houses . . . allowed the neighborhood to become a haven for drug dealers and sex trade workers."<sup>5</sup> Residents have not only noticed the decline but are also taking steps to reclaim the neighborhood. The Celina Albert Street Neighbourhood Association (hereafter, CASNA) was formed through 2009-2010 and has since been making significant strides<sup>6</sup> in reclaiming the community from the strong influences of crime that have been affecting it.

One other long-term group is of interest. This is the group of single men in their fifties and sixties who have been victims of the up-and-down economic issues involved with the automotive industry, especially the local GM plant. GM has terminated this group at points where the plant was downsizing for economic reasons. They do have pensions, but those pensions are small and insufficient to sustain them month to month. They are regular clients of the local food banks and social services. They move often within the community as rents get too high to afford, homes are lost, and many other

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<sup>4</sup> Jessica Verge "Petition Calls for Neighbourhood Cleanup," *The Oshawa Express* Vol. 3, no 8, (2007), <http://www.oshawaexpress.ca/Archives/2007/December/December%2012/December%2012%202007%20-%20Low.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Jullian Follert, "Taking Back Their Streets: Oshawa Neighbours Fight to Reclaim Their Homes from Drugs and the Sex Trade," Durham Region.com, <http://www.durhamregion.com/article/1113395--taking-back-their-streets> (accessed January 14, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

issues occur. They in effect become transient within the community, although they have been in Oshawa for years. They are often responsible, decent members of society who are unemployable because of their age and their skills being specialized to the GM plant. Few companies take them on because of these reasons. They also want a safer community with more stability. This is a commodity they presently have very little of in their lives. They remember the area when they were younger and would like to see it recover its former status as a great place to live.

### Young Families in Downtown Oshawa

According to the Canadian census there are 94,575 family units in Oshawa.<sup>2</sup> Of those, 63,955 have children at home.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 43,000 of those are within the context of a married parental couple.<sup>4</sup> The remaining 26,605 are either common-law couples or single-parent families. In fact, nearly 15,585 of those family units are single-parent families, with 12,515 being single-mother families. Personal interaction by the New Life Church within this community has shown that the majority of families in the immediate community of the church are less than thirty years of age. They are predominantly single-parent family units where the parent is a mother or common law families where the male partner changes frequently. This leaves a lot of young women responsible for the welfare and upbringing of the families in the community of the New Life Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Census, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/famil121c-eng.htm> (accessed January 10, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

There are numerous concerns on the minds of these young families. The most common concerns are a safer community, safer home environments, and greater job opportunities, which would allow the families more financial security and the ability to raise their children in a better neighborhood. The first two needs tie in with the desires of other groups in the community, while the third actually creates an attitude of being less invested in the community as a whole because the hope is to one day get out of it. These young families want change that will result in a better place to live; but not all of them have the same level of commitment of the long-term residents who plan to stay in the community.

One new dynamic within this demographic is that the UOIT has recently renovated a large building in downtown Oshawa that is bringing a lot more young people into the core of the city. The impact of this may have a lot of influence on the local economy, the housing in the area, and the general population makeup of this community within the city of Oshawa. Since this has only taken place very recently, it is too early to know what its impact will be.

#### Transient Population in Downtown Oshawa

The transient population in downtown Oshawa is complex. The city's proximity to Toronto attracts a lot of people seeking employment or a change of scenery, and they come not only from within the province but from many other provinces in Canada as well. Many of these individuals are male. The two hostels in the area are regularly full of members of this demographic. Those seeking just a change of scenery are often not employed, have no substantial ties to the community, and are regularly connected with

the drug and sex trade within the community. This group is neither welcomed nor wanted by most of the residents in the downtown area. This is true despite the fact that many of those passing through and looking for employment hold certain core values similar to the long-term residents.

There is also a large group, again predominantly male, that circulates through the many different cities in the GTA. They stay in one community until their welcome is worn out and then move on to another city in this large metropolitan area. Living this way allows them to stay just long enough in one city that they can skirt the law, and then move to another city before getting caught. They are frequently tied in with the drug and sex trades in these cities. They bring to each of these communities, including Oshawa's downtown core, an attitude that is in opposition to the desires of the long-term residents of the community. This transient population knows that stability, safety, and security in this neighborhood are all obstacles to their taking advantage of the drug and sex trades in the area. These three characteristics will eventually drive this criminal behavior out of the neighborhood. However, if stability, safety, and security are missing or sporadic in downtown Oshawa, it creates an atmosphere more conducive to the transient group continuing this criminal lifestyle, with its ongoing negative consequences to the neighborhood.

An unfortunate circumstance has arisen for the older, single, male, long-term residents fallen on tough times mentioned earlier. Because the unstable transient population is predominantly male, many of these long-term-resident males are often assumed to be part of the transient group. They are then mistakenly seen as a negative

influence on the community. Some of these single, long-term-resident men are indeed customers within the sex trade ring in the area, but most are not.

### Christianity and Postmodernism in the Community

Statistics regarding religion and spirituality in this community are very similar to the general trends in Canada. Canada has no national religion. Although most people in Canada identify with Christianity,<sup>5</sup> people have unplugged from organized religion while still maintaining their belief in God. Bibby defines secularism's advance as follows:

“With industrialization comes institutional specialization and changes in personal consciousness. Simply put, religion loses control over areas such as politics, economics, health care, and education. . . . Religion's role becomes increasingly specialized and is relegated to matters of meaning, morality, and mortality, as well as to performing rites of passage.”<sup>6</sup> Bibby notes that the secularization of Canada has removed organized religion from the center of influence it once had in the country.<sup>7</sup> Yet that secularization has limits. “People are not dropping out of faith; they are just not coming to church.”<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps this is itself a sign of the secularist influence on the Church. The Church, as an institution, has lost its voice and influence even within its own membership, so they drop out. The Church has become irrelevant to a consumer-oriented society that goes to specialized organizations to fulfill its needs. The Church's specialization is perceived as

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s only 4 percent of the population did not identify with Christianity. See Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart Publishing, 2002), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Bibby. *Restless Gods*, 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> This thesis is clearly developed in Chapter 1 of Bibby's *Restless Gods*.

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Lewis Garnsworthy, as quoted in Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 14.

providing rites of passage like funerals and weddings and the cultural celebrations of holidays like Christmas. Ongoing research continues to show that the Church is not answering Canadians' spiritual questions in conjunction with everyday life.<sup>9</sup> Those who are removing themselves from the traditional religious landscape are often parents, both Canadian-born and immigrants, whose children are therefore growing up with no religious affiliation or involvement.

Some research is pointing to the fact that the focus on trying to make religion more palatable to the masses has worked against it.<sup>10</sup> Many people have the mindset that the more a belief system demands, the higher the reward and benefits are in return.<sup>11</sup> Yet secularization has forced religion to be more innovative in helping people reconnect the supernatural component of their lives to their everyday existence.<sup>12</sup>

The community in downtown Oshawa is very open to spiritual conversations. They frequently mention God's help through the different ministries and services offered to them through the churches in the community. However, he is not a clear partner in their daily lives. Faith and belief are relative terms in the postmodern person's tendency to state, "What works for you is great, but don't push it on me." They are more than willing to receive the benefits of the benevolent actions of another's faith. They will talk extensively about spiritual things, yet any perception of seeking more of a commitment to an organized religion brings doubt and can often stop a conversation. Most people in this

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<sup>9</sup> Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of God in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1993). See also Bibby, *Restless Gods*; and Reginald Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back: Religion's Demise and Rise and Why It Matters* (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2011)..

<sup>10</sup> Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

community identify with Christianity. Most are young and have not grown up with any type of faith experience. They have needs related to stability in their relationships and marriages, job security, parenting, addictions, and many other everyday struggles. They often perceive that the Church has no answers or help in these matters. In fact, many perceive that the Church is judging them for their lack of stability and security in these things, and want little to do with organized religion as a result.

### **Permanent and Transient Residents: Issues and Concerns in the Neighborhood**

The permanent and semi-permanent residents of this community want safety to return. They desire more stability in that safety as well, as so often the drug and prostitution rings are driven out for a few years, only to return in a seemingly never-ending cycle. They have many hopes for the community and its residents. They want to beautify it, attract different businesses, and make it an attractive place to live for the many students now attending the UOIT branch campus in the community. Its architecture is historically an important piece of Oshawa's history, and it is slowly being lost due to the lack of care that the more transient residents bring to the community. Although these permanent and semi-permanent residents recognize the need for "cleaning up" the community, they are not without compassion for those within the cycle of drugs or prostitution who want to get out.

However, within the transient residents demographic, there are people who have no concern for the community, other than as a place to deal in drugs and prostitution. The criminal nature of their activities creates instability and lack of safety in the community.

And because the battle with these transient residents has been so cyclical, their presence erodes the hope that the community has for change.

### Raising Families, Great Neighbors, and the Goals of Permanent Residents

The people of this Oshawa community have the same desires as most people: security and safety, and a place to dream with and prepare their families for something better than they have. They want a community where families are able to live and grow in safety. They want a community they can be proud of and where neighbors know each other. They seek a community where they are not worried about what their neighbor is selling, or if their children will find condoms, needles, and other drug paraphernalia on the streets. They want playgrounds that are safe from these items and influences, where the biggest worry might be whether their child got picked for the team instead of pricked by a needle in the grass. They also want the community and its organizations to work together to achieve these lasting results.

### Transient Residents Do Not Fit: Prostitution, Drugs, and Other Elements

It is quite clear from the city administration and community organizations already present that this criminal element cannot stay if the community is to regain its sense of hope, safety, and security. It is also evident that these issues need to be separated from the people themselves. That is, many of the transient residents would change their lives if they felt they could.<sup>13</sup> One example of this is the women involved in prostitution. The epidemic of addiction is not limited to this community, and the solution involves support

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<sup>13</sup> During ministry events to the community throughout my ministry at the New Life Church (2004-2012), I have personally had many conversations with members of this transient population. Often, they have expressed to me that they would like to get out of the drug trade or the prostitution trade, but they do not feel they can.

and treatment for those wanting it. All of this is working together to create an overall atmosphere of compassion, with a firm resolve for stopping the criminal activity as well. Together, despite differences, there is hope that that the changes sought may not be limited to cosmetic changes, but to a community that also seeks to take care of its own.

#### Common Needs: The Importance of Stability, Security, and Hope

It is easy to see connections in the needs of all the groups involved, except perhaps the hardcore criminal element connected with the drugs and prostitution in the area. Both long-term and transient residents need security. The long-term residents need security so they can grow their families in a safe environment, pursuing growth and success. The transient population needs security because it is only in a safe place that they will feel comfortable getting out of a lifestyle they are stuck in, despite the fact that they despise it and ultimately desire change.

Stability also functions to help the transients have a community that does not tempt them back toward a lifestyle they want to escape. For long-term residents, that stability ensures economic blessings, like rising home values. It ensures, as much as possible, the safety of neighborhood homes with less criminal activity to worry about. A stable structure to a community also often works to create a place where people feel secure to dream and hope, and then actually pursue those dreams. The success that follows benefits the community economically, and it benefits the community in intangible ways as well, such as a renewed attitude to give back to the community.

Hope is so crucial to the renewal and restoration of this community. It fosters some of the changes now happening and will fuel the changes to come. It is beaten down,

but evident in both the long-term and transient residents. Both groups have hopes and dreams for their lives. Both groups generally hope for healing, renewal, restoration, and growth. Both groups are approaching the future with similar but different needs. Hope is what keeps them thinking of a better tomorrow, and it is also the door through which the Church can bring the greatest hope of all, God's presence and power in the life of this community. Hope is the most powerful motivator in the community and also the very best resource the Church can share. The story below is evidence of that.

### The Hope for Neighborhood Change (Story of Alex)

Alex first came to know the New Life Church through a conversation as church members walked through the community asking what the church could do to help. His initial response as he sat on his porch drinking a Corona with his friend was, "I don't know." One church member left him thinking with a simple statement, "If you think of anything, let us know."

Two months later, Alex was walking home and saw the whole church community outside on a Saturday (which is the day Seventh-day Adventists go to church), worshipping and barbequing burgers and hot dogs for the community. He saw over three hundred of his neighbors enjoying time with the church, being fed by the church, and being heard by the church through numerous conversations about community and individual needs. He decided to stop by. He did not eat, but he found the member who stopped by his home to talk two months before and said, "You guys are serious; you really want to help." He then proceeded to share a need for renovations to the basketball area in the park across from his home. He knew it would cost money, and that the city

would need more than one person's request to take action. So Alex asked if the church would approach the city on the community's behalf. He also offered to go door to door with the pastor to raise money from the community to pay for the repairs to the basketball court.

Alex saw hope in a church willing to step outside the box, listen to his needs, and then go out and do try to meet them. That type of missional activity restores faith in a secular society who wants to believe, but also wants to see God making a difference "right here, right now." Simple steps, like those taken with Alex, can foster faith and greater hope in this community.

### **The Influence of Canada's Secular Postmodern Society**

Many often see postmodernism and secularism as deterrents to faith. Secularism definitely has a stronger influence in this regard. However, the desire that people in Canada have for the metaphysical seems only to have pushed religion and faith out of the public eye, not out of their lifestyle.<sup>14</sup> Even postmodernism has certain components that conflict with a biblical faith at times. However, there are also principles found in postmodernism that might be considered correctives to a Christianity that has been heavily influenced by modernism. What follows is an exploration of those characteristics of postmodernism that would seem to offer areas of connection between this Canadian community and the biblical worldview.

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<sup>14</sup> Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 31.

## Secularism: Living without God, Robbed of the Hope for and Power to Change

There seem to be two types of secularism discussed today. The first is a humanistic version where God is removed from all parts of public and private life, and where God is seen as the reason for all of society's problems. There is then another version that is friendlier toward faith protected by the Canadian constitution. This one understands that the state cannot recognize or promote one faith over another, and so faith is left in the private life of the individual, while removed from the public sphere. Canada exists as a secular state in this second format.

Every citizen's right to practice his or her faith is protected in Canada's *Universal Declaration of Rights and Freedoms*. What is limited is any one person or group's ability to impose their faith system on another. This clearly supports the biblical foundation of free will in the area of belief. Yet, as noted above, through Bibby's extensive research, fewer people are attending church in Canada than ever before, despite the fact that most of the population is intensely interested in spirituality and its place in their lives.

Perhaps it is time to take a different view of what the secularization of Canada has accomplished. Bibby posits that it is neither the presence of secularism nor the absence of religion that will define Canada's spiritual future, but that "the key to Canada's religion and non-religious proclivities will depend primarily on the extent to which people do and do not find value in religion."<sup>15</sup> In other words, secularization is not a relentless force unable to be overcome. In this instance, the plea coming from the Canadian people seems to be to make faith and God more real, more applicable, and more tangible to everyday

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<sup>15</sup> Reginald Bibby, *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada* (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2012), 11.

life. Perhaps God is using secularization in Canada like numerous nations in the biblical story, to create an atmosphere that reminds God's people what a biblical faith is really about. In Canada, church attendance was once the expected norm, regardless of its value. Within the framework of biblical precedents and with the rise of faith interest in Canada, perhaps a religion-friendly secularism could be a corrective, opening doors to greater opportunities of faith expression within the Canadian population.

Secularism is godless, though not of necessity unfriendly to the gods. The example of Cyrus in ancient Medo-Persia seems to offer parallels. Cyrus, a non-Israelite ruler, is used by the Israelite God to bring God's people into a time of captivity. The captivity leads them back to understanding their need for God. This situation is also reminiscent of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy. There, when God's people refuse to live lives of faithfulness to their covenant with God, he withdraws his presence from them. However, as the writer of Deuteronomy states, "When all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse . . . and you call them to mind . . . and you return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart . . . then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you" (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). The withdrawal is not punitive, but rather geared to restore and rehabilitate the people and their relationship with God. The absence of God becomes an acute reminder of the need of his presence.

Bibby notes that secularization has not eradicated religion but simply polarized Canada between those who consider themselves religious (this does not depend on church attendance nor adherence to a specific denomination), and those who consider themselves

non-religious.<sup>16</sup> Even this, explains Bibby, is an ever-changing dynamic, dependent upon the church's ability to meet the needs of the population. Meeting those needs may come from understanding the connections between a postmodern worldview and a biblical worldview.

### Postmodernism: Many Stories, Many Truths, One Community

Joseph Epstein, in his article, "Move It on Down," writes that

the pursuit of individualism has led us to this place of hunger for connectedness, for communities not of blood or nation but communities of choice. The very prevalence of the word *community* itself—is there any sector of society that isn't a "community"? (environmental community, gay community, Muslim community, Christian community)—betrays the absence of and craving for the real thing.<sup>17</sup>

That people are hungering for community can also be seen through the ongoing proliferation of social media and online chat rooms. The popularity of the documentary, *Craigslist Joe*, about a twenty-something young man's search for contemporary community, is another indicator of just how significant the desire for community is in contemporary society.<sup>18</sup>

Each person still brings a strong sense of individualism to the community he or she interacts with. In the context of the meta-narratives of postmodernism, each person wants his or her story to be heard, but not judged. According to postmodern thought, one person's truth is appropriate for that individual, but not necessarily for another. Yet in the

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<sup>16</sup> Bibby, *A New Day*, 380.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Epstein, "Move It on Down," *Times Literary Supplement* (July 23, 1999): 27, quoted in Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 109-10.

<sup>18</sup> *Craigslist Joe: 31 Days, No Money, No Contacts, Endless Possibilities*, directed by Joseph Garner, CLJ Films, 2012.

midst of the many stories and truths, often the desire for community with others is a greater motivating factor for change. Suspending one's own beliefs to hear the spiritual journey of another is an indicator of today's postmodern thinking, as well as the simple but profound hunger for community. The challenge for the Church is that it is often seen as exclusive and judgmental, a view that is too often correct. The Church needs to change that reality to create a community where people are safe to explore Jesus and Christianity; while also recognizing that God is already working in these people's lives and that they, the Church, can learn about God from those outside its doors.

#### Biblical Postmodern Values and Their Common Ground in the Community

Postmodernism carries both dangers and correctives for faith within its philosophical system. Caution needs to be taken with the dangers inherent in this worldview. However, if there are correctives to faith in it as well, it behooves the Church to seek to understand this part of the postmodern mind. Some of these possible correctives in the postmodern Canadian societal landscape are: 1) God is bigger than reason; 2) truth is experienced; 3) spirituality is more important than religion; 4) life must be lived in community; and 5) it is acceptable to be different.

#### **God Is Bigger than Reason**

Lesslie Newbigin notes,

The thinkers of the Enlightenment spoke of their age as the age of reason, and by reason they meant essentially those analytical and mathematical powers by which humans could attain (at least in principle) to a complete understanding of, and thus a full mastery of nature—of reality in all its forms. Reason, so understood, is sovereign in this enterprise. . . . It cannot bow before any authority other than

what it calls the facts. No alleged divine revelation, no tradition however ancient, and no dogma however hallowed has the right to veto its exercise.<sup>19</sup>

According to Hunter, modernity was “a closed system leaving no need for the supernatural and little room for spirituality.”<sup>20</sup> This thinking has held sway since the rise of the Enlightenment. But as modernity fades, postmodernism has brought the recognition that there is a facet of life that reason alone cannot explain, where intuition and feeling and faith are tools to be used in addition to reason. Many Canadians today recognize that there are things going on in the world that reason cannot fully explain; these are often attributed to the metaphysical or supernatural world.<sup>21</sup> Most of them are turning to the faith community to help explain these events as a part of the specialized knowledge that religion provides.

Bibby believes there is a significant place of opportunity for the Church in this area, as the world notices that mystery is also a part of life and God can very definitely be a part of the answer to explain those mysteries. Canadians enjoy and embrace that mystery; a mystery larger than themselves is a possible part of their spiritual lives.<sup>22</sup> For them, God is bigger than reason, though he is not in opposition to it either. That mystery is worth exploring. This is where the Church can come alongside these searchers, incarnating into their broken lives, in order to see where God is working and join him there.

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<sup>19</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 25.

<sup>20</sup> George G Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 97.

<sup>21</sup> Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

## **Truth Is Experienced**

Many people with a postmodern worldview take in their world “through what they see, touch, and experience.”<sup>23</sup> Because of this, absolute truth is doubtful. Dogma about God needs to be replaced by experiences where God is visibly seen. People must see faith lived, with its benefits clearly seen. A life that shows that Jesus cares replaces powerless words that only teach he cares. The medium, the believer’s life becomes the message. In a society that has made a billion-dollar industry of constantly exposing lies and falseness, people have been trained toward skepticism. The truth of Jesus or the reality of Jesus in the believer must become the visible display of God and the presence of his kingdom and reign on this earth.

The other side of the coin of skepticism is that even reason and fact are questioned today. And although biblical faith is not void of reason and facts, or in opposition to either of them, faith cannot be counted or measured. This skepticism can open doors to considering other possibilities, especially those where experience can make a connection between one’s belief and one’s experiential relationship with God.

## **Spirituality Not Religion**

The search for meaning is another area that modernity lacked authority in. Research shows that 90 percent of the questions Canadians are asking concerning faith have to do with meaning and purpose such as, “Why am I here?” and “What happens after I die?”<sup>24</sup> Instead of coming to the Church to find the answers, they are asking these

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<sup>23</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 29.

on bar stools and in coffee shops, in workplaces and laundromats.<sup>25</sup> Christianity has the answers to these questions of purpose and meaning, but many Christians are unwilling to go and meet people where they are, to be incarnational, rather than attractional in nature.<sup>26</sup> The nation of Canada is clearly not attending church, yet it is practicing and wanting a greater level of spirituality. The Church, in order to be relevant to the people and engaged in God's mission, must find a way to meet with the people where they are, and to explore spirituality together without bias. By doing so, believers will build up relationships with others, showing by their actions that God is real, he cares, and he works through his people.

### **Life Must Be Lived in Community**

The presence and proliferation of social media alone should be evidence enough of the desire for people to stay connected. People desire to be connected not only with their own group of friends, but with the global community. One might wonder, however, if the pluralism inherent in postmodernism is not from a desire for greater community itself. For centuries, national and international boundaries were drawn not just on geographical terms but often by what faith defined that region. Even today there are Christian nations, Islamic states, and Jewish countries. To a certain extent, pluralism breaks down those walls, which is probably why people of faith often find postmodernism so disturbing. Freedom to think for oneself with no fear of reprisal is a powerful idea. The fall of the Berlin wall is an apt example where freedom to think and the desire to become a part of the greater experience of the world community led free

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<sup>25</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

people to do what no army had ever accomplished. Plurality may have significant ramifications, then, on the desire for community.

Popular today is the shared-experience, “We’re all in this together” thinking that is so prevalent especially among younger generations. The shrinking of the global community, the desire to not repeat the epidemic of broken homes during the Baby Boomers’ most influential years, and the rise of social media and instant communication across the world—all of these have factored in to a desire in people’s lives today to have some group of people to share that experience with.

The Godhead is a community. The Bible depicts how God’s people in communities throughout history were able to change and transform history, faith, and culture. For much of the last century, Christianity seems to have been focusing on a more rational individualistic faith, where one simply had to believe to belong. People today, in our postmodern milieu, are seeking to belong and then believe. The Church has an opportunity to provide a community for people to belong to. It is inherent in a true biblical faith experience. But the Church must be willing to change and adapt to become relevant in this area while being faithful to God.

### **Being Different Is Okay**

Many Christians, who believe that the gospel is the only way to know God and attain salvation, accuse postmodernism of neutering the gospel, as it embraces plurality and an “everything is relative” philosophy. This often leads to evangelism that is focused on a truth-telling venture. One person’s truth is compared with another in order to decide which is most valid, and therefore should be followed. However, a postmodern mind may

hold both options before it, thinking that what works for one person may hold no value for another. It can then be discarded, or some part of it may be held and tucked away for future reference. The goal of the believer in such an atmosphere is, like Paul on Mars Hill, to have a God-honoring and honest conversation where how God has revealed himself to the other person is given priority. The believer's job is to help the person see where God is at work already.

### **Summary**

Postmodernism holds many principles that are biblical as well as useful in helping believers connect with those outside the faith in God-honoring ways. These ways are often more relevant than what the Church is currently doing, which tends to keep them away from the blessings of being in a biblically functioning community of believers. The New Life Church has rarely connected with this postmodern community during twenty years in Oshawa. As the New Life Church considers missional living, there is a major opportunity for both groups to get to know each other better, with each group benefiting from the relationship. It also offers the New Life Church an opportunity to follow God's command to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. The next chapter will explore the history of the New Life Church and its present-day context within this community.

## CHAPTER 2

### MINISTRY CONTEXT OF THE NEW LIFE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The New Life Church has had an extremely tumultuous journey as a congregation. It began as the North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Church, a disgruntled church plant with an attractional church style. It had immediate and explosive growth focused on a Willow Creek-program-driven model. The focus on growth came at the expense of true discipleship. There was a lack of spiritual depth, which proved unable to handle a major crisis in the church over leadership. The resulting church split ended the North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist congregation, and a few months later resulted in the formation of the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church. The New Life Church quickly moved to downtown Oshawa, feeling God's guidance to minister to the community. The continuing spiritual and emotional baggage from the church split, as well as the lack of long-term pastoral leadership, hindered the healing and growth of this church for many years. These factors also delayed this congregation from ministering with any significance to the community to which God had led it.

## North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Church

The New Life Church is actually the offspring of the North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Church (hereafter, the North Oshawa Church). The North Oshawa Church began in 1990 as a group working on student outreach from the Seventh-day Adventist high school in the Oshawa area.<sup>1</sup> Within a short time this group left the College Park Seventh-day Adventist Church (hereafter, the College Park Church) to begin a ministry they felt would be more safe, contemporary, and relevant to non-believers and former church members in the Oshawa area.<sup>2</sup> The North Oshawa Church was formally organized within the denomination in September of 1992. The North Oshawa group started with a very valid focus, a lot of passion and excitement, as well as one major underlying flaw.

### Starting as a Church Split

Numerous members of the New Life Church were charter members of the North Oshawa Church. This allowed for numerous pastoral conversations with them concerning the history of this group in its twenty-plus years together. Some of the observations shared are colored by the common fault of remembering the past with a little bit more favorable light than it sometimes deserves. A clearer picture becomes evident when this is accounted for and set aside to see a truer evaluation of the church's history.

The North Oshawa Church began with explosive growth numbers, but did not begin with the blessing and support of its mother church, the College Park Church. Good people saw a valid need in the community and chose to step out in faith to meet that need.

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<sup>1</sup> Ladd Dunfield and Leroy Clarke, *North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Church Handbook: A Church in the City*, church manual presented to church members at an annual business meeting, Oshawa, ON, March 27, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

However, they were equally motivated by their own dissatisfaction with the congregation in which they were members. They left the College Park Church without the church's blessing and support. The North Oshawa Church therefore began more as a church split than a church plant. This created a lot of animosity and distrust between the two churches for well over a decade. This animosity has subsided during the past decade, beginning in 2004, as three pastors and numerous leaders from the New Life and College Park churches have worked together to heal the past while building for the future and working together.

### Challenges Presented by Explosive Growth

The explosive growth of the North Oshawa Church was very exciting and energizing for the congregation and its leaders. The church started with a handful of people praying and worshiping together, and in only two years the church had a regular attendance in excess of four hundred people. The church moved numerous times to accommodate the growth. In each of its rented facilities the church sought to partner, where able to, with the congregations whose facilities they were renting. Eventually, some members perceived that renting from another denomination was leading them to compromise Adventist denominational policies and structures.

Christian Schwarz speaks of functional structures as a key characteristic in healthy churches.<sup>3</sup> The Adventist church manual encourages certain structural understandings concerning preparation for baptism, the qualifications for eldership in the Church, and the role and authority of the pastor. Baptism usually consists of a preparation

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 1996), 28.

time that includes taking part in a lengthy Bible study series to familiarize a new convert with both the teachings of Scripture and the Adventist interpretation of the Scriptures. The rapid growth of North Oshawa created an atmosphere where people might walk in off of the street and respond to the Christ-centered message with a desire to be baptized that day. The pastor and some leaders would sometimes follow through that day with the baptism. For numerous leaders, this began to cause concern that the pastor and a small group of leaders were assuming authority that belonged with the church board or the church as a whole in a general church business meeting. It also led these concerned leaders to perceive that Adventist policies regarding baptism and qualifications for leadership were being compromised for the sake of growth.

Concerns over the leadership continued when numerous homosexual members sought to attain eldership positions with the support of the pastor and the small group of leaders surrounding him. This was an even more significant issue for many members as the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes a strong conservative stance toward homosexuality. It would eventually become the precipitating catalyst in the splitting of the North Oshawa congregation.

#### Another Church Split and Its Consequences: The New Life Church Begins

The split of the North Oshawa Church was very public and acrimonious, the end product of which was that the North Oshawa Church was dissolved. However, about 50 percent of the membership of the North Oshawa Church stayed with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, forming the New Life Church in September of 1997. Many of the other people in the North Oshawa Church left the Adventist Church altogether to

fellowship in other Christian churches; while some found a new church home in the many other Adventist churches in the Toronto area. Close friends found themselves on different sides of the issues. Their eventual choice of one side or the other left wounds in the New Life Church that would take years to heal. All of the bitterness and hurt of this second split was now added on top of the disgruntled spirit in the lives of some of those who stayed to form the New Life Church. Significant healing needed to take place before any transition could be attempted. The efforts of two senior pastors at the New Life Church from 2000 to 2010 accomplished meaningful advancements in this healing process. This opened the door for a time of change and transition in late 2010.

### **The People, Values, and Composition of the New Life Church**

Transitions often arise because of a discontentment with what is the present situation versus a perceived future. The tumultuous history of the New Life Church has skewed the values and spiritual desires of this congregation. As a general rule, the majority of the members still hold on to the high days of the North Oshawa Church and want to return to that perceived success. The focal point of that desire is a worship event that is highly entertaining and attractive to a spiritual seeker. This comes with a mindset that evangelism is essentially the work of the pastor. A new pastor, new members, and a core of longtime members who want to move on from the past and reach out to the community as first intended, are creating a catalyst for change.

#### **A Multicultural Congregation**

The ethnic demographics of the New Life Church are quite multicultural. The largest two groups are Canadian Caucasians and Western-Caribbeans who immigrated to

Canada, especially Jamaicans. Other ethnicities include Chinese, First Nations, Australians, and French Canadians. The generational culture of this church has been quite unique in the area. Throughout its history the largest generation present has been Baby Boomers under the age of fifty-five. In and of itself, that is not unique, but there has been an almost complete absence of senior citizens or Builders during the church's existence. There is also often a small portion of Gen-Xers and now Millennials. It is and always has been a church led by and designed for Boomers and their perception of what church should be. For example, the leadership invested heavily in the Willow Creek model of doing church. When Pastor Campbell Page<sup>1</sup> was called as pastor in 2004, many still held to these concepts. As a Gen-Xer and as one interested in bringing missional transition, Pastor Page encountered both opportunities for and obstacles to change in this Boomer-oriented church.

#### Congregational Values: Worship, Openness, and Autonomy

Although evangelism has always been a focal point for the New Life Church, much of it was attempted through providing a seeker-sensitive church service where worship would become the primary evangelistic tool of the congregation. This does not mean that other evangelistic efforts were not attempted, but that the worship event was where the most effort was placed. Following the common attractional model, the congregation saw it as the main program they had to invite friends to attend. This value placed on worship had two different consequences. First, the emphasis on worship came to be more important to most members than evangelism. Secondly, all the effort paid off

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<sup>1</sup> In order to maintain an objective voice, I will refer to myself in the third person in this chapter.

in creating a more contemporary and inspiring worship service that would be very beneficial in making visitors feel safe and inspired.

Openness is also a highly regarded value at the New Life Church. The North Oshawa Church asked of itself, “Are we willing to accept anyone, even prostitutes or drug addicts: I mean people with some serious problems?”<sup>4</sup> The church split exposed the struggle of being open to others in the midst of brokenness, while also trying to be faithful to a conservative stance on Christian beliefs and practice. However, the New Life Church continued to emphasize openness as a fundamental value within the congregation. It succeeds more regularly today than it fails. It is noted within the local community for this value. In the large Adventist community in the Toronto area, most people appreciate this, although there are also those who sometimes oppose its stance on openness.

Like many Canadians, this congregation also values its autonomy. Many members want to be a part of the weekend worship service, but the rest of the week they stick to themselves. There are a few family groups and long-standing cliques that interact with one another, but there is little community beyond that point. This autonomy stems from numerous factors beyond the societal influence already mentioned. The most apparent is the fractures caused by the previous church split. There are also some strong personalities in the congregation that have caused others to distance themselves. This in turn contributes to the congregation’s inability to achieve its vision of a biblically functioning community.

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<sup>4</sup> Dunfield and Clarke, *North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Handbook*, 1.

## Vision: A Biblically Functioning Community Reflecting Christ's Love

The vision of the New Life Church is “to be a biblically functioning community of believers that reflects Christ’s love to everyone.”<sup>5</sup> This vision statement and the partner mission statement are displayed very prominently in the foyer of the church. Even more prominently displayed is a list of the founding members, which is indicative of the mindset of the church. However, the list of founding members so prominently displayed represents the founders of the North Oshawa Church, not the New Life Church. This display reflects the unbalanced focus of the past rather than the future. At one point in the history of the North Oshawa Church, there had been a functioning community, albeit not a biblically functioning community. Therefore, when the trials of leadership came, the church split caused deep wounds that would take years to even begin healing. In those who went on to form the New Life Church, these deep wounds created a serious obstacle to fulfilling this vision.

In the years following, many different programs to build this community were attempted and for the most part failed. The pain of the past split was such a large obstacle. In one illuminating church business meeting, one of the most respected members voiced this pain by stating that he was afraid to pursue a deeper community because it had been so painful to lose many close friends during the church split, and that he never wanted to experience that again. His statement was a major turning point for the leadership in 2008. The voicing of that pain and fear seemed to give permission for the church to openly talk about the wound of the past in what they now felt was a safe place

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<sup>5</sup> New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Vision Statement” (voted on by the congregation during the inception of the church, 1999).

to do so. This then allowed a more honest and realistic opportunity to evaluate whether the church was fulfilling its own vision. The leadership was given a mandate from the church membership to find and explore opportunities to develop greater community within the church. This led to important ramifications for the mission of the church.

### Mission: Becoming Fully Devoted Followers of Christ

The mission of “helping people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ”<sup>6</sup> had the missional intention of helping people inside and outside the church become fully devoted followers of Christ. It had a reasonable focus on both nurture within the church and evangelism outside of the church. Nevertheless, it was all but forgotten in this wounded congregation. There was almost no focus on spiritual formation within the church, and evangelism was sporadic and program-centered rather than organic and lifestyle-centered. A number of pastors had made attempts to vision for more evangelistic efforts, but little progress was made because of the unhealthy state of the church. The church had plateaued in terms of numbers for nearly a decade in 2004 when Pastor Page began his ministry. There was also a seeming plateau in the spiritual growth of the congregation. Church was primarily about consuming and enjoying the contemporary service with little to no commitment beyond that.

### The New Life Neighborhood Centre as an Open Door into the Community

One of the few bright spots in the whole picture was the neighbourhood centre. It consisted of a monthly pancake breakfast for the community, monthly food boxes for

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<sup>6</sup> New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Mission Statement” (voted by the congregation during the inception of the church, 1999).

those in need, a small free clothing depot, and an as-needed furniture store.<sup>2</sup> The neighborhood centre was the New Life Church's best and biggest interaction with the community. However, it was extremely disorganized, and very few church members were involved with it or saw it as a viable ministry of the church. With work and good leadership, it would come to provide many missional opportunities during the missional transition. It has become a ministry that has made the New Life Church invaluable to the community, and the community has come to support it in numerous ways, including financially. The Spirit-led leadership of this ministry has opened up numerous opportunities and connections for the church to truly become missional.

### **The Importance of a Tipping Point**

It is important to understand that the tipping point at the New Life Church was not one isolated event, but rather a series of cumulative points that slowly swayed the momentum toward change. No single one of these events was enough by itself to create the atmosphere for change. All of the following situations had to be present to some degree for the shift in the church's culture to take place. Once that culture began to shift, and once the understanding of the church's mission was embraced, God could direct the transition he had in mind.

### **The Importance of Long-term Pastoral Leadership**

In the context of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, the usual length of a pastoral placement is three years. The longest pastoral placement at the New Life Church

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<sup>2</sup> An as-needed furniture store is one in which the community could make the staff aware of furniture needs, and they would try to find people who would then donate the furniture.

before 2004 was two and a half years. Due to this type of constant turnaround in pastoral staff, most of the New Life Church members had the perception that the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada,<sup>7</sup> which oversees pastoral placement for the New Life Church, saw their congregation as a training ground for pastors. Pastors could spend a short period of ministry at the New Life Church to prepare before moving on to bigger and “better” congregations. In January of 2004, Pastor Campbell Page began pastoring New Life and would do so for the next eight and a half years. This longer pastoral leadership is one of the most significant factors in the opportunity to transition this church into a missional paradigm. Most of all, it gave the congregation time to heal from the pain of the past while beginning to vision anew for the future.

This was a hurting and discouraged congregation in 2004. Up until that point, no pastor had stayed long enough to do much more than focus on new programming, and none dealt thoroughly with the turmoil that was still affecting the congregation from the church split. It was not that they did not want to attempt this, but there simply had not been enough time for them to truly get a sense of how deep the hurt was, and how much of an obstacle it was to growth. With pastoral leadership being unaware of how large an obstacle this church was facing, and church leaders being unprepared to deal with that obstacle, the focus remained on doing church rather than on being the church. This in turn gave a false sense of success in that if Sabbath worship was inspiring and entertaining, then all was fine.

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<sup>7</sup> The pastoral placement for churches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ontario is decided on by the next level of church government above the local church, which is the conference. Specifically concerning the New Life Church, it is the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada.

Long-term pastoral leadership allowed for the congregation and pastor to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses. Through interacting with the church in the formal and informal aspects of ministry and life, the pastor was able to build a large amount of credibility. The lengthy time period allowed for the congregation and pastor to experience many joys and trials together, further cementing an atmosphere of mutual trust. This mutual trust continued to build more credibility regarding the pastor's ability to be the spiritual leader of the church. When the congregation finally began to sense that the pastor was willing to stay, and was invested in the church as a group of people, it created an atmosphere of safety and authentic discussion which allowed the church to begin dealing with its biggest problem: the wounds of the past and the need to let go and to heal.

The long-term leadership also allowed for the pastor and church leaders to identify and plan for dealing with the resistance that would come from other church members and leaders. In the context of the New Life Church, another hindrance to growth was the tight hold of power that a few long-time members held over the rest of the congregation. Time was needed for the pastoral leadership to bank enough collateral with the rest of the leaders and the congregation so that when it came time to face the power struggle that would take place, the pastor would have the credibility to lead the congregation through it. That took approximately five years. The primary catalyst in this change of power was a prayer team formed by the pastor that met every week to pray. This group prayed for God to bring the people and resources that were needed to accomplish his will for the New Life Church, and to remove any people who were a hindrance to his will. Prayer was crucial to every step of the process of change.

## Creating Discontent: The Importance of Preaching and Visioning

In 2006, Pastor Page revisited Dallas Willard's writings on the concept of the kingdom of God as well as books on creating change such as *Culture Shift* by Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro.<sup>8</sup> The kingdom of God as a concept began creating a sense of positive discontent within his journey as a Christian. In 2008, while attending a Doctor of Ministry class with Dallas Willard at Fuller Theological Seminary, the concept imbedded itself permanently in his understanding of God, in the practice of his faith, and in teaching others about the gospel of the kingdom of God.

This led to a significant change and focus in the pastor's preaching and visioning beginning in late 2009 and continuing through 2010. The kingdom of God concept as found in Scripture and described by Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy* became the foundation for nearly every Sabbath message at the New Life Church. The visioning process had two goals. The first was to help people truly understand the invitation God is giving to people as he asks them to become followers of Christ. Specifically, God is offering all of the resources of God and heaven so that people can begin living eternal life today with God's power and authority, for all parts of life here and eternally. The second goal of the visioning process was to make the vision of the abundant life God promises here so tangible and desirable that members of the church would be discontent with the status quo and would consider changes that would see this vision become real. The visioning was also done, where appropriate, through personal visits by the pastor, small groups, prayer meetings, and Sabbath School. It was crucial to begin this process before

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<sup>8</sup> Dallas Willard's books, *The Divine Conspiracy*, *Renovation of the Heart*, and *the Spirit of the Disciplines*, had the greatest influence concerning kingdom theology; Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro's *Culture Shift* was influential in creating a process for implementing change.

moving into the missional component of living in God's kingdom, simply because the concept of the kingdom of God is not frequently preached or taught in Adventism. Its parallels with the foundational Great Controversy theme in Adventism will be discussed in Chapter 4, but it will suffice to note here that the spiritual power of this essential teaching of Jesus' gospel has been missed in much of Adventist everyday life. The New Life Church would need to understand Jesus' view of what they were being offered so that they, in turn, could offer the true gospel of the kingdom of God to the people in their lives, in a missional context.

In late 2010, Pastor Page began a study into missional church that led to more visioning in 2011. This was more specifically focused on the connection between kingdom living and missional living. The same goals carried through this component of the process with an even greater response from the church leadership.

#### The Desire for Transformation in the New Life Church

Over this extended period of visioning, a substantial portion of the congregation began experiencing the desired positive discontent. They began to understand that their Christian experience could be more in line with the biblical experience than it was presently. The members started believing that the kingdom of God was more accessible than they previously imagined. Amid the increased hope this initiated, there was also a growing understanding of how much more hope God wanted to offer to others through them. This positive discontent originated the beginnings of a more dynamic and outwardly focused culture. This led to the congregation's desire to allow leadership to explore how the New Life Church could pursue transformation as a church body. The

theology, strategy, and implementation of a process to begin a missional transformation of the New Life Church are the subjects of the chapters that follow.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order for missional principles to be established, embraced, and embodied by the New Life Church, it is crucial to develop a biblical missional theology that is also informed by Seventh-day Adventist theology and history. At the same time, this theology must take into account the changed spiritual landscape in Canada, which, once being a predominantly Christian nation, is now strongly ensconced in both secular and postmodern worldviews. The first section of this literature review will specifically look at Adventist ecclesiology as well as missional theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The second section will discuss ecclesiological insights from other Christian traditions, and the third section will concentrate on missional theology in contemporary Christian thought. The main thread tying this entire chapter together will be striving to understand how these insights would inform a missional theology to a secular and postmodern community.

#### **Evangelism and Ecclesiology in Adventism**

There are a huge number of resources in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that emphasize evangelism and evangelistic strategies. However, there are very few works

that develop a strong ecclesiology for Adventism, and even fewer that look at both. Russell Burrill's *Recovering and Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Church* accomplishes this, and it will be the focus of this section.

*Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church,*  
by Russell Burrill

Burrill's book is based on his doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary. It is specifically focused on the North American Seventh-day Adventist Church and the need to return the ecclesiastic and evangelistic structures in the Church back to a mission-based model. Burrill makes the point that Adventism must return to its biblical and historical roots of being "a church that is mission driven, lay empowered, and independent of clergy for pastoral care."<sup>1</sup> He argues that the basis of this for any Christian must be a restoration of the Great Commission to the centrality of Christian life and mission.<sup>2</sup> He highlights how it is the Great Commission, centered in the authority of Christ, which defines the Church's core nature and existence as living the mission of God.<sup>3</sup> According to Matthew 28:18, this authority is given to Jesus by God the Father. Burrill then sees Pentecost as the event that reveals the Holy Spirit as the source of power enabling the Church to fulfill the commission God has given to it, thereby realizing that it is only in the triune presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that the Church can

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Burrill, *Recovering and Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

experience its origin, mission, and restoration.<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 is the foundation for the Christian Church, and therefore the foundation for the Adventist Church as it chooses to define what it means to be the Church.

Burrill notes that a crucial understanding of the Great Commission is that there are three components within the commission that define the mission of the Church. They are making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them all that Jesus has commanded.<sup>5</sup> Mission is not being done unless all three components are being accomplished. Burrill's evaluation is that the Church has been faithful in proclaiming the Great Commission and in baptizing, but has fallen very short in the discipling process. He asserts that any Church that is not accomplishing all three components is not truly fulfilling the Great Commission.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically dealing with the Adventist Church, Burrill discusses the denomination's movement toward installing settled pastors over settled congregations,<sup>7</sup> which occurred during the early twentieth century. Burrill views this as the most influential factor in the slowing of the missional theology of early Adventism. It allowed members to give away their ministry to the paid clergy and settle into a consumer-based Christianity. In the early 1900s, as this shift was occurring, the two biggest supporters for keeping the missional model of Church were A. G. Daniells, the president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1901-1922), and Ellen G. White, one

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> This is opposed to the previous norm, which was to have itinerant clergy who ministered to several congregations on a rotating basis.

of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who is also seen as a modern-day prophet to the Church. Burrill goes as far as to say that when White died in 1915 and Daniells lost his presidency in 1922, “the Adventist Church in North America then abandoned the missional model of church and began to move toward the traditional model of church, which the Adventists had so definitively abandoned upon their organization in the mid-nineteenth century.”<sup>8</sup> This can be seen today, according to Burrill, in the fact that non-Westernized nations are exploding with 10 to 15 percent growth, while the Adventist Church in North America is experiencing less than 2 percent growth.<sup>9</sup> It is understood by the majority of leaders in the North American Adventist Church that even this 2 percent is mostly comprised of immigrants who join the Church when coming to America. This only further emphasizes the inability of the Adventist Church to reach most North Americans today.

The Adventist Church must return to its missional roots to function biblically and be faithful to its history. With hope, Burrill shares how Adventism, unlike many other Christian denominations, does not have hundreds of years of this type of ecclesiological apostasy to overcome, but just seventy-five.<sup>10</sup> It will take a lot of hard work. But if the Church wants to be faithful to its historical and biblical roots while adapting those to the obstacles facing the contemporary Adventist Church, then it must return to a mission-based ecclesiology and evangelism. This will ensure that the physical, mental, and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 253.

spiritual restoration of God's children will be occurring as they prepare for his soon return and that they will be reaching the world for Christ.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ecclesiological Insights from Other Traditions**

Beyond the ecclesiological insights from Adventism, this project seeks to consider insights from other Christian traditions as well. Adventism believes it has a special place in the work of God before the Second Coming of Christ. However, it also realizes that it is a part of God's continuing work on earth and therefore indebted to God's leading in the history of the Church and in the numerous Christian denominations that influenced and informed the formation of Adventism. This project also believes that Adventism can enter into a mutually beneficial learning experience as it dialogues with other Christian denominations. Therefore, the following section will seek to dialogue with works by Stanley Grenz, Jurgen Moltmann, and Lesslie Newbigin, and their view of what God intended the Church to be.

#### *Theology for the Community of God*, by Stanley J. Grenz

In *Theology for the Community of God*, Stanley Grenz offers insights from an evangelical tradition on defining what the Church is and its place in the world today. This ecclesiology is well researched through both historical and biblical means. In fact, a major section of this work is an apologetic for theology itself, while the majority tends to be more focused on an applied theology for God's Church.

Grenz recognizes the importance of the need for sound Christian theology today in the midst of so many other choices. He states,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 267.

For some people, this proliferation of rival beliefs is but another intellectual problem that makes the Christian truth claim highly suspect. For others, however, the spiritual aridness of our intellectual climate has produced a new thirst for the divine. As a result, we are witnessing a rebirth of interest in the supernatural among the children of the Enlightenment. Yet the new supernaturalism is not necessarily informed by the Christian tradition. This suggests that we may once again be entering into an era akin to that faced by the biblical community, who proclaimed the reality of the God of Abraham and the Father of Jesus the Christ in a context of the rivalry of many gods.<sup>12</sup>

He further notes that the reality of God as an intellectually focused “credible apologetic” must be seen in the “living demonstration” of God’s people.<sup>13</sup> This incarnation lies “beyond the purview of theology. . . . Nevertheless, it is not beyond the concern of theology.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the goal of theology must be the application of an informed faith living in such a way as to bring glory to God.

Grenz adds an important thread to the Christian discussion concerning the kingdom of God and its role in contemporary Christian society, as well as the establishment of God’s mission in his people. He understands that it is a central theme in the synoptic gospels as well as clearly evident in the theological sources that are foundational to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Grenz defines the kingdom as “that order of perfect peace, righteousness, justice, and love that God gives to the world.”<sup>16</sup> Kingdom theology also “reminds us that ultimately we engage in the theological task—we address theological questions—from the vantage point of the consummation of God’s activity in establishing

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<sup>12</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle e-book, location 829 of 10903.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, location 839.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Stanley J Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle e-book, location 602.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, location 611.

his will and program for the world.”<sup>17</sup> Although it has extreme eschatological significance, the life-changing power of this future and certain kingdom of God is already at work, breaking into today through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Grenz then adds what is truly the most important element of the discussion; he states that the kingdom of God must have its basis and fulfillment in the founding of community. Community between God’s people, and between God and his people, has been broken by sin. The restoration of community is therefore connected to the restoration of God’s sovereignty as seen in the theology of the kingdom of God. As Grenz states, “History is directed toward one goal—the kingdom of God or the presence of the will of God throughout the earth (Matt. 6:10). The concept of community fills the idea of the kingdom of God with its proper content. When God’s rule is present—when God’s will is done—community emerges.”<sup>18</sup>

That community must come from the first community, the Trinity. From creation forward it is the “trinitarian community of love” at work. Creation is a joint venture flowing from a Triune God who is love.<sup>19</sup> All three persons of the trinity are at work in the creation and each act of God-directed re-creation and restoration since. As Grenz notes, “The Father creates the world, through the son, by his Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Any paradigm of church that seeks to be true to Scripture must establish itself with this same assertion. God is triune. Each Person of the Godhead is eternal and has always existed; yet each has

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., location 628.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley J Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle e-book, location 1687.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., location 1696.

its role in creation and redemption. Creation and everything else exists by the will of the Father. He is the source of creation. Jesus, the Son, while an active agent in the creation, exhibits the proper role of the creature to the Creator, continually submitting his will to the will of the Father, ultimately at the cross. The Spirit is the “divine power active in creating the universe,”<sup>21</sup> as well as the redemption of humanity. This self-giving community becomes the example for any community of believers who choose to let the kingdom of God break into their present. God is community. To submit to his sovereignty is to exist in community as well. It is the natural product of the presence of God. Grenz brings the Trinity, community, and the kingdom of God themes together in this important statement for understanding and forming a proper ecclesiology:

We must understand the church in the context of the kingdom not only because the kingdom is broader in scope than the church, but also because the church is dependent on the kingdom. God’s right to rule declared and demonstrated by Jesus produces the church. As the message of Jesus’ lordship is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit creates an obedient human response, which includes building the corporate fellowship of the people of faith. The church therefore, is called forth by the proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is the *product* of the kingdom produced by the obedient response to the announcement of the divine reign.<sup>22</sup>

*The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, by Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* is an unequivocal call to the Christian Church to return to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church. In building his theology, he emphasizes numerous missional principles espoused in this project. He sees the kingdom of God as central to the Church’s

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., location 1761.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley J Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle e-book, location 7101.

understanding of its mission and not simply an abstract exercise.<sup>23</sup> The restoration of community, through Christ, is at the forefront of God's goal for his Church and the world. The Holy Spirit as God's active agent in the world is the crucial component for restoring God's kingdom, now and future, while being God's servants to the world. This missional living should be the essence of what church is. In the preface, Moltmann describes the goal of this work in messianic ecclesiology as pointing

away from the pastoral church, that looks after the people, to the people's own communal church among the people. I do not believe there is any other way in which the church can proclaim the gospel responsibly, theologically speaking. . . . There is no other way for the church to exercise its office, its charge, and its ministry, in the congregation, with the congregation and through the congregation. Missionary churches . . . do not stray into social isolation but become a living hope in the midst of the people.<sup>24</sup>

In echoing Lesslie Newbigin's journey, Moltmann states, "The experiences of the churches in other countries have confirmed for me in my theological conviction that this is the church's proper form."<sup>25</sup> While expanding on this thinking by looking at how modern missionary work arose during and after the Enlightenment, Moltmann succinctly sums up the core of missional thinking and what the Church today most needs to learn:

What we have to learn from them is not that the church 'has' a mission, but the very reverse: that the mission of Christ creates its own church. Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood. The preaching of the gospel does not merely serve to instruct Christians and strengthen their faith; it always serves to call non-Christians at the same time. The whole congregation has 'spiritual' and charismatic gifts, not merely its 'spiritual' pastors. The whole congregation and

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<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xviii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

every individual in it belong with all their powers and potentialities to the mission of God's kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

The result of this is that the Church becomes spread out through every aspect of society. The Church is where God's people are. Their mission is being a living demonstration of the hope and grace of God in absolutely every gamut of life. The *missio Dei* becomes central to understanding a missionary way of life in the secular Western world. Moltmann writes,

*Mission* comprehends the whole of the church, not only parts of it, let alone the members it has sent out. To proclaim the gospel of the dawning kingdom is the first and most important element in the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of the church; but it is not the only one. Mission embraces all activities that serve to liberate man. . . . The all-embracing messianic mission of the whole church corresponds to Christ's messianic mission and to the charismatic sending of the Spirit "which shall be poured out on all flesh." If the church sees itself to be sent in the same framework of the Father's sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, then it also sees itself in the framework of God's history with the world and discovers its place and function within this history. . . . It follows from this that the church understands. . . . It is an element in the history of the kingdom of God. The real point is not to spread the church but to spread the kingdom. The goal is not the glorification of the church but the glorification of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

According to Moltmann, the messianic mission of Jesus is only realized through his death and resurrection respectively, and in these it gains its full power.<sup>28</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ participates in this mission by participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Living this mission brings one in conflict with society because the rules of that kingdom are at odds with the rule of God's kingdom. Moltmann explains, "In so far as the church participates in his mission, it is drawn into his fate and will experience 'the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 83.

power of his resurrection' in 'the fellowship of his sufferings.'"<sup>29</sup> It becomes the picture of God's kingdom. He adds, "The church of Christ is simultaneously the people of the kingdom."<sup>30</sup> The believers' role, then, is not to draw away from the world for protection, but as Christ did, to enter into the world around them for the sake of bringing freedom to every sphere of their lives and the lives of others. By doing this they become the present fulfillment of the kingdom and the ongoing anticipation of its full realization at the *parousia*.<sup>31</sup>

All of this is accomplished through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As Moltmann states, "We are already living in indestructible fellowship with God. It is not faith that makes Jesus the Christ; it is Jesus as the Christ who creates faith. It is not hope that makes the future into God's future; it is this future that wakens hope. Faith in Christ and hope for the kingdom are due to the presence of God in the Spirit."<sup>32</sup> This understanding reveals the Church's place in God's mission. The Church's role is not to seize the Spirit so that the Spirit might conform to its ministries, but rather to create a willingness to listen to the Spirit's promptings and to encourage people to follow those leadings of the Spirit. If God's future kingdom is to break in to the present through the Church, then the Church must allow not only the Spirit's presence, but also the Spirit's power to lead the Church of Christ. To neglect this is to neglect being the Church of Christ. When the Church is living in the power of the Spirit, Moltmann astutely shares

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. See pages 189-196 for a fuller treatment of this theme.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 197.

how this new demonstration of faith, hope, discipleship, and kingdom fellowship “affects the whole world and puts Christ’s church at the service of the manifestations of the world freed by Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, by Lesslie Newbigin

Understanding the cultural context of the New Life Church is crucial to any process aimed at transitioning the church. The Canadian philosophical and spiritual landscape offers a plurality of different ideologies heavily influenced by postmodern and secular thinking. However, as Newbigin states, “The witness of the church has always taken place within a pluralistic milieu. During recent years, however, new perceptions of this milieu have emerged, and pluralism is fast assuming the character of an ideology.”<sup>34</sup> This is where Newbigin’s *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* intersects with the process of this project and informs it on numerous levels.

Newbigin emphasizes how opposite the culture of God’s kingdom is to the cultures of the world. He asserts that

the gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel. The Church, therefore, as the bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and which calls in question, those that govern all human cultures without exception. The tension which this challenge creates has been present throughout the history of Western civilization.<sup>35</sup>

But it is this point of tension that is the opportunity for the embodiment of the gospel to be seen. It is at this point that the new and radical plausibility structure be seen as

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>34</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), vii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 9.

questioning, but in the cognizance of the interchange of faith experiences. While clearly supporting the primacy of the gospel, Newbigin reflects on this:

It is therefore natural that the missionary, the evangelist, with his confident assertion of a truth to be accepted in faith, should be the object of suspicion or at least of skepticism. . . . Must we not all accept that truth is larger, richer, and more complex than can be contained in any one religious or cultural tradition? Is it not more fitting that we adopt the attitude of a humble seeker after truth, keeping an open mind, ready to listen to all that comes from the varied religious experience of the human race? Is it not more honest as well as more humble to stop preaching and engage rather in dialogue, listening to the experience of others and offering our own, not to displace theirs but to enrich and be enriched by the sharing of religious experience?<sup>36</sup>

There is in this the realization that truth is best understood in light of Christ and his life, death, and resurrection, yet at the same time, that the fullness of God cannot be contained, nor explained solely in one faith experience. Therefore believers must be willing to listen for where God is working around them and enrich others, while being enriched as well.

Newbigin's view of the kingdom of God adds another important facet to missional living. He asks and then answers affirmatively if the New Testament is suggesting that the kingdom of God is what gives history "meaning."<sup>37</sup> Through this understanding, believers are given a vision of both their past and their future. The kingdom of God, and how God intended life to be, has been altered by sin. The gospel of the kingdom of God is the story of the person, plan, and means by which that kingdom is and will be restored. This is also similar to the Adventist theme of the Great Controversy. In this "bigger picture" narrative, the followers of Christ live "in this new day and rejoice in it, knowing that Jesus reigns, yet knowing that this reign is hidden from the world;

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 109.

[they] are not impatient but patient and watchful, redeeming time and using it to set forward until its completion the work of bearing witness to that hidden reign.”<sup>38</sup> When history has this type of ultimate meaning and purpose to it, believers bear witness by pursuing that same goal of bringing meaning and purpose to the lives of those around them. Newbigin writes, “Our actions in the public life of the world are acted prayers of the kingdom. They don’t themselves lead directly to the kingdom. They are acted prayers for its coming and as such they act as signs of its reality and so enable others to act in hope.”<sup>39</sup>

Newbigin’s insights into the *missio Dei* are invaluable to the foundations of creating a missional community of believers. He correctly identifies a major flaw in much of today’s evangelistic strategies and ideology. He conveys that when the Church forgets that its mission is God’s mission, it loses its focus and power. In this mindset, which would maintain that the Church “must save the unbelievers from perishing,”<sup>40</sup> the Church falls into a pattern of trying to justify its existence, but not really living God’s mission. Newbigin continues by emphasizing that salvation of unbelievers is the mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He asserts that “the mission of the Church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the trinitarian model.”<sup>41</sup> In one of his most profound statements he provides a missional principle that should simultaneously bring both humility and power to the missional believer and community:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

The mission of the Church to all nations, to all human communities in all their diversity and in all their particularity, is itself the mighty work of God, the sign of the inbreaking of the kingdom. The Church is not so much the agent of the mission, as the locus of the mission. It is God who acts in the power of his Spirit, doing mighty works, creating signs of a new age, working secretly in the hearts of men and women to draw them to Christ. When they are so drawn, they become a part of a community which claims no masterful control of history, but continues to bear witness to the real meaning and goal of history by a life which—in Paul’s words—by always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus becomes the place where the risen life of Jesus is made available for others (2Cor. 4:10).

It is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power.<sup>42</sup>

### **Missional Theology**

Missional living is a mandate of true biblical discipleship. Missional living was very evident in the theological discernment process of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its formational years, and it is evident today in the Christian Church at large. Missional church should be a paradigm that the New Life Church seeks to understand in order to be faithful to its mission. The role of the Church is to join the God of mission as he continues his work of redeeming the world. At this point, with little or no contemporary Adventist theology on this subject, this project will explore the insights for missional living found in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, edited by Darrell Guder; *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Become One*, by Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren; and *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*, by Reggie McNeal.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 119.

*Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America,*

edited by Darrell L. Guder

In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, editor Darrel Guder begins a discussion on missional ecclesiology with the vital observation that the biggest current crisis in the Christian Church is how the Church understands or misunderstands its place in the *missio Dei*. As he puts it, “It has to do with who we are and what we are for. The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological.”<sup>43</sup> After Newbigin returned from India, he assessed the struggles of Western Christianity. Guder summarizes his conclusions when he writes that “what had once been a Christendom society was now clearly post-Christian, and in many ways anti-Christian.”<sup>44</sup> No longer will the majority of people respond to the overused and manipulative evangelistic efforts focused on correct doctrine or preparation for the end of the world. To ask the question, “If Jesus were to come tonight, would you be ready?” does not recognize that the context of contemporary society makes the question moot. The question makes no sense with people who are less concerned about a coming judgment and more concerned with what difference Jesus would make in the present. This type of evangelism also assumes that people know who Jesus is to begin with, which most do not. However, Guder and the other contributors to this extremely valuable work have recognized this change in a now post-Christian North America.

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<sup>43</sup> Darrell L. Guder, editor, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

One of the ways in which this issue of evangelism is addressed is by understanding the role of culture as the Church seeks to live the kingdom reality today. In Chapter 2, contributor Craig Van Gelder asserts,

The gospel is always conveyed through the medium of culture. It becomes good news to lost and broken humanity as it is incarnated in the world through God's sent people, the church. To be faithful to its calling, the church must be contextual, that is, culturally relevant within a specific setting. The church relates constantly and dynamically both to the gospel and to its contextual reality.<sup>45</sup>

In discussing the Church being culturally relevant without succumbing to culture, another contributor, George Hunsberger, maintains, "Before the church is called to do anything, it is called and sent to be the unique community of those who live under the reign of God . . . the firstfruits of the forgiven and forgiving people of God . . . the harbinger of the new humanity that lives in genuine community, a form of the companionship and wholeness that humanity craves."<sup>46</sup> The reign of God is what is seen and heard through the Church, but each context has the opportunity to accomplish that in Spirit-led ways that may be very distinct and different from one another. Mission in this framework is always about revealing the grace and power of God. The Church is simply the sign of his presence and reign now, and in what is to come. Lois Barrett, who also contributes a chapter to Guder's book, writes, "The church exists as the community, servant, and messenger of

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<sup>45</sup> Craig Van Gelder, "Missional Context: Understanding North American Culture," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 18.

<sup>46</sup> George R. Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 103.

the reign of God in the midst of other kingdoms, communities, and powers that attempt to shape our understanding of reality.”<sup>47</sup>

It is at this point that the authors take a critical turn to describe these communities and the principles they would exist under. Barrett emphasizes how the Church is sent into the world: “The church’s particular communities live in the context of the surrounding culture, engage with the culture, but are not controlled by the culture.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, the Church must be able to critique the cultures around it while fostering and developing the culture of God’s kingdom in the world. Trying to paint a picture of what these missional communities might look like, contributor Inagrace Dietterich expresses that

missional communities are called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God. The distinctive characteristic of such communities is that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains them. Their identity (who they are), their character (how they are), their motivation (why they are), and their vocation (what they do) are theological, and thus missional. That is they are not formed solely by human intentions and efforts, individual or collective, but instead by God’s empowering presence.<sup>49</sup>

Alan Roxburgh’s attention to the actual practice of missional church and missional communities is very informative to the New Life Church setting of transitioning a traditional church into a missional church. Understanding the difference

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<sup>47</sup> Lois Barrett, “Missional Witness: The Church as Apostle to the World,” *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 110.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>49</sup> Inagrace Diettrich, “Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit,” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 142.

between the centered and bounded sets<sup>50</sup> allows for inclusion of the first-adopters in the congregation, as members of the bounded sets, to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles into their lives. Then, at the same time, the rest of the congregation and those exploring the church—the centered set—have a safe place to journey with others as they delve into life with God, together.

*Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One,*  
by Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren

*Introducing the Missional Church* by Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren is a much more accessible version of Guder's *Missional Church*. It simplifies much of the theory of Guder's work, making it more user-friendly, while Roxburgh and Boren also add important ideas to the ongoing missional discussion from their firsthand knowledge and practice in this paradigm of church. Immediately, the authors make the reader aware that it is extremely difficult to define missional church. As they explain later in the book, "Successful missional life in one context may be an utter failure in another. Even when shifting from one neighborhood to another within the same city, the way we go about being God's missionary people will change. Missional engagement is not homogenous; there is no one-size-fits-all pattern."<sup>51</sup> How they attempt to bring understanding to this is through the use of the term "missional imagination." A missional imagination operates under numerous assumptions. First, a church with missional imagination is more about

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<sup>50</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 206-7.

<sup>51</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 85.

being than doing. In other words, it is more about who the people of God are, rather than an event they take part in or a building they use. Second, the authors emphasize that the words “church” and “mission” have been misrepresented from God’s intention for them, and that inventing a new word like *missional* has allowed for a conversation to take place where the Church can re-imagine the use of “church” and “mission” to be better focused on the *missio Dei*.<sup>52</sup>

Roxburgh and Boren use three core principles to bring a fluid definition to missional church: mystery, memory, and mission. They explain,

In the desert God shaped a people with an imagination that couldn’t be taught or defined in Egypt. What might be involved in a change of imagination for us in order to get inside the missional conversation?

It’s as though missional life is discovered out on a wide, wild river. How do we learn to navigate the river as it twists and turns and widens out into spaces where we have never been before? First we need to understand the nature of this river. It has been shaped by the confluence of three powerful currents we call *mystery*, *memory*, and *mission*.

Entering the missional waters is not about strategies or models; it is about working with the currents that shape our imagination of what God is doing in the world.<sup>53</sup>

Mystery, the first of the currents, revolves around the fact that God has chosen to act in human history and that he does not owe humanity reasonable or rational explanations for what he chooses, nor how he acts. Those chosen by God embrace the very biblical mindset that God is sovereign and above all things. They also believe that through relationship with this God that is so far beyond their reasoning, “they are called to be a sign, witness, and foretaste of God’s coming kingdom.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 27-34.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 42.

Memory becomes a shared memory of God's acting in history, past, present, and future, for his people. It understands it is his story that his people are a part of, and that through remembering his story in the past and grasping his story for our future, the Church lives his story in the present. Roxburgh and Boren explain, "Missional church is about a people of memory being continually formed in practices that shape us as an alternative story in our culture."<sup>55</sup> This helps give the Church both its correct identity as well as a better understanding of its mission.

Mission is then the natural result of mystery and memory. However, that result is not just increased programming or outreach activity; instead, it pervades the entirety of the life of the church, both individually and corporately. Mission is not what the church does, but it is the essence of what the church is because it is the essence of who God is. Therefore, explain Roxburgh and Boren, missional church "is more than a new word for *evangelism*, church planting, or meeting someone in a coffee shop for conversation. It is not about restructuring or a new program. Missional church is about an alternative imagination for being the church. It is about this transformation toward a church that is shaped by mystery, memory, *and* mission."<sup>56</sup>

There are definitely obstacles in partnering with God in missional endeavors. One that Roxburgh and Boren astutely consider is whether or not missional fits every context. They note how most often this question is geared to simply "becoming a better attractional or attractional-missionary church."<sup>57</sup> The two biggest obstacles arise from the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 55.

modern and postmodern worldviews. Modernism tries to eliminate mystery from life and objectify everything to observable facts. It seeks to measure everything to explain and control. Modernity's focus on continual creation to create a better world slowly erodes the value of the past, thereby replacing memory within the community. History is displaced for a new future. Finally, modernity also individualizes and reduces mission to a journey of personal wholeness.<sup>58</sup>

Postmodernity, which the authors correctly interpret as continuing to exist alongside modernity,<sup>59</sup> also provides obstacles to those in the Church who still view faith through modernist eyes. Postmodern spirituality values experience over the rational and cognitive preference of modernity.<sup>60</sup> Many modernists see these postmodern values in opposition to their own values, and by transference, God's values. This view in turn creates obstacles to helpful dialogue and possible change.

The reconnection to memory occurs more within postmodernism, yet it is often not the shared story but the "nostalgic experiences in the moment."<sup>61</sup> These nostalgic moments are often characterized by experiencing events that are planned to lead people to a spiritual high. They focus on an individual experience, even if it is taking place in a large group. The nostalgia of these moments creates a shared experience that often lacks long-lasting depth or formative influence. Memory, on the other hand, enters the story of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 57-59.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 61.

the biblical narrative, remembering and reliving it so that it actually becomes the alternative story of the life of the believer.<sup>62</sup>

Under the influence of postmodernity, mission loses its big-picture focus, and instead it emphasizes these nostalgic local group experiences. If this obstacle is allowed to continue, it derails mission from giving the Church its meaning for existence.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, these obstacles must be addressed in order to enter into the missional imagination and its relevance to each church setting.

Boren and Roxburgh also make significant contributions to the need for and creation of missional communities. Their missional practices of presence, love, and engaging the neighborhood are foundational to building missional communities. For the authors, “a missional strategy is shaped through dialogue and engagement with the contexts and neighborhoods in which we live.”<sup>64</sup> Re-imagining the Church in a missional way means “seeing ourselves as theologians who are learning to talk about God in our local contexts.”<sup>65</sup> The authors also realistically look at how to begin this process within a congregation where both the innovators and the traditionalists live. These questions need to be components of any strategy for transformation into a missional church.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 92.

*Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church,*

by Reggie McNeal

In the first chapter of *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*, Reggie McNeal highlights his thesis:

We are witnessing the rise of a new life form in the taxonomy of the North American church. Though it contains the DNA of the movement Jesus founded, its expression is different from the institutional church that has developed over centuries. It is church in a new way for a new day—our day—a period that can be described as the post-congregational era of Christianity. This new church life form is the missional community.<sup>66</sup>

He then goes on to use actual missional communities to describe the varied ways in which missional communities can exist and function. Certain core teachings arise out of this perusal of different missional communities. Those especially relevant to assisting the New Life Church congregation to transition into a missional paradigm are discussed below.

*Missional Communities* begins by discussing how the early Church had gatherings, but that “the gatherings were not the point or focus of Jesus-follower spirituality. Christianity was primarily a practice, a way of life.”<sup>67</sup> This goal—to establish, embrace, and embody that Christianity is a way of life—summarizes the desire for transformation at the New Life Church. Each of the expressions McNeal describes in this work represents that kingdom of God lifestyle of early Christianity that was “so radically different from its cultural surroundings while being radically committed to the

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<sup>66</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle e-book, location 361.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, location 378.

well being of the people in the culture.”<sup>68</sup> Jesus is thereby persistently incarnated into the world today through his Church. However, asserts McNeal, this is not where the North American Church is today. While he is not against congregational expressions of church, McNeal explains how the congregational approach itself, despite the resources poured into it, “has entered its declining period. . . . A variety of indicators all point to the same conclusion: we have entered an era that is ripe for and needs a post-congregational church.”<sup>69</sup> McNeal also interprets the state of North American Christianity in the context of its attractiveness to the general public. Clearly a large majority of the population believes spirituality is important, but is not “turning to institutional, traditional church as part of their spiritual journey.”<sup>70</sup>

One of the biggest obstacles to considering other options to traditional church is “whether or not we are going to insist that people first become church people in order to experience the gospel of Jesus.”<sup>71</sup> This is a major issue within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the Church has a strong sense of identity, and new believers are encouraged to participate in this sense of corporate uniformity. The New Life Church will need to address this issue as a part of its transitional strategy.

McNeal promotes a very incarnational approach to developing believers for the ministry that is their lives. Noting how so many people today are interested in spiritual things, yet disinclined or unable to modify the rhythm of their lives to attend church, he

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., location 384.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., location 447.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., location 462.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., location 489

suggests that missional communities are a way to connect with others while living the gospel. McNeal writes,

A post-congregational culture requires a strategy of engaging people right where they already live, work, play, go to school, and pursue their hobbies and passions. It's incarnational. It lets them live more intentionally, learning to love God and their neighbors more, making a contribution to their community, all with people they know and are known by. This is the recipe for a new church life form—missional communities.<sup>72</sup>

In trying to define missional church, McNeal takes the view that beyond the Great Commission, the Church should also be including the call and mission to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations.<sup>73</sup> McNeal's point in this is that the world should sense that it is better off because of the influence of Christianity upon it. Beyond that, he goes directly back to creation to stress that it is God who is mission, that his mission existed before there was a Church, and therefore, "the church does not have a mission; the mission has a church."<sup>74</sup>

A very important missional principle arises from his discussion of mission. That principle revolves around the idea that believers are partnering with God and his mission when they become believers. Through this partnership and through the life of Christ, it is clear that when God seeks to reveal his nature and his intentions, he prefers incarnation. God desires to work through people to reveal himself and his kingdom.<sup>75</sup> This holds major implications for the life of every believer and the structure of how the Church might stop "doing church" in order to "be the church."

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., location 523.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., location 589.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., location 605.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., location 607.

The rhythms of life in the missional communities stand out as a significant foundational principle for their ongoing life and success. These communities are not just thrown together. They must be built on shared values and life rhythms, and have an intentional strategy for establishing, embracing, and embodying missional living. As McNeal states, “They require a shared mission—vision and values—to thrive.”<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps his biggest contribution to understanding missional communities lies in his unwillingness to propose a model of missional church. Like many others in the missional conversation, he recognizes that if it is in fact God’s mission, then the expression that living missionally will take, in any given context, will be different from all others. It is a partnership with God where the congregation involved enters into the missional imagination with God. They are the sign of the kingdom of God in the places they inhabit, and where God is already at work ahead of them.

### **Conclusion**

Each literary resource reviewed has aided the process of creating an Adventist missional theology, as well as a specific strategy of transition for the New Life Church. Missional principles were foundational to the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. These works endorse this paper’s perception that the gospel of the kingdom of God is central to the mission of God. They also exhibit that the struggle between modernism and postmodernism is an ongoing challenge for the Church and God’s mission.. At the same time, these works inform the missional transition process of the New Life Church in the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., location 1111.

midst of its Canadian context, which is so heavily influenced by the ideologies of secularism and postmodernism.

## CHAPTER 4

### ECCLESIOLOGY

This chapter discusses the ecclesiology of the Adventist Church. It will become clear that the characteristics and strategies of the first forty years of Adventism have strong correlations to what today is termed *missional church*. However, this is not what the general practices of Adventist ecclesiology and evangelism are today. This discussion will also develop how modern Adventism's ecclesiology concerning mission and identity has strayed from the roots of both Scripture and Adventist history. This is done to prepare for Chapter 5, in which an Adventist missional theology will be developed to inform the New Life Church missional transitional strategy.

#### **Seventh-day Adventism**

Contemporary Adventist ecclesiology presents a challenge to missional thinking in that, for all intents and purposes, the regular Adventist membership has allowed identity as a Seventh-day Adventist to have priority over mission with God. However, this is not in line with the historical roots of Adventism and its practice as a movement beginning in the 1860s. Nor does it correlate with the missional principles found in Scripture. What follows is an exploration of mission-based ecclesiology in the early

Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is accomplished through seeing the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a movement, a recognition that the Church as the locus for God's mission is how the Seventh-day Adventist Church began and should always operate; and finally, that Ellen White's own missional heart is clear in her book, *Ministry of Healing*.

### The Church as a Movement

While discussing the beginnings of the Adventist Church in *Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement*, Burrill states,

Having discovered a clear line of biblical truth, the believers finally began to realize that this great message of biblical truth must be shared with the world. . . . Today their descendants number more than ten million. How did this happen? Solely because those early Adventist pioneers realized that their church was to be a mission-driven church. . . . As a result, their whole organization was designed to support a church in mission. All that the church did was centered around the fulfillment of the mission which they felt God had called them to fulfill.

As a church ages, it has a tendency to lose sight of the vision that propelled it in its early days. Other things take the place of that which should be the church's top priority. These things are good, and many times are the means to fulfill the church's mission, but sometimes they become an end in themselves, with the ultimate result that the church no longer majors in its mission.<sup>1</sup>

Burrill goes on to show that for the first fifty years of its existence, the Adventist Church operated and organized as a church planting movement.<sup>2</sup> This also had the full support of Ellen White, the Church's prophet, right up until her death in 1915. She saw this mission mindset as the "primary function of the Adventist church."<sup>3</sup> She explains in her book, *Evangelism*, "This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyards. The circle is to extend until it

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1999), 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

belts the world. From town to town, from city to city, from country to country, the warning message is to be proclaimed, not with outward display, but in the power of the Spirit, by men of faith.”<sup>4</sup>

The Church’s mission was to reach the world with the everlasting gospel. Clergy would work as church planters, raising new churches in new areas, while lay members would assume the responsibilities of the mission in their local areas. The pastor was an unpaid local member given the task of shepherding that local congregation. The paid clergy had the apostolic work of entering into the new territories and raising up new groups of believers. The success of this structure as a movement even caught the attention of the Seventh-day Baptists, who attributed Adventist growth, which was surpassing their own, directly to this mission-based model. In 1908, the *Seventh-day Baptist Sabbath Recorder* stated, “All Seventh-day Adventist clergymen are missionaries—not local pastors—and are busy preaching, teaching, and organizing churches the world over.”<sup>5</sup>

However, this apostolic role for Adventist clergy began to erode in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Members wanting to be like most other denominations were making strong calls for a settled clergy. This was in spite of the very clear counsel from White that the Church should never have a settled clergy, as it would bring the work to a halt and prevent the spiritual growth of church members. Burrill notes the strength of her opposition in *Rekindling a Lost Passion*:

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen White, *Evangelism* (1946, repr., Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Seventh-day Baptist Sabbath Recorder*, December 28, 1908, reported in *Review and Herald*, January 14, 1909, quoted in Burrill, *The Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 172.

Ellen White clearly understood that the organization which they had created was to be mission-centered and she was not about to stand idly by as its mission was destroyed. The Adventist church was not created to copy other Protestant denominations; it was unique. It was to be forever a church in mission, giving the last warning message to the world. . . . It was to be organized to support a church planting movement, and it was to be a mission organization, not an organization to babysit existing Adventists, who should have the spiritual maturity to exist on their own.<sup>6</sup>

Adventist history demonstrates that its original structural organization had two key components. The first was mission. God had raised this group of believers and guided their formation for the express purpose of accomplishing his mission. The contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church, seeking to be true to the reason for the Church's identity and existence, and to White, whom Church considers to be a prophet to Adventism, should do all it can to ensure that mission is at the center of its structure. The second component was to fulfill the Great Commission's call for making disciples of believers and non-believers alike. With this in mind, leadership in the Adventist Church must do all in its power to return to church planting movement principles. In doing so, God's mission can be restored to the center of all the Church does, at all its levels.

### Church as Mission: Evangelism in Early Adventism

Ellen White is seen as giving prophetic insight to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. as a result, her writings have held considerable influence on the ongoing formation of Adventist belief and practice.<sup>7</sup> Evangelism was the overlying principle in

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<sup>6</sup> Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion*, 57-58.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen White's place in Adventism holds significant influence. There is no one person who has had more influence on the Church than Mrs. White. Her writings, by her own counsel, were never to supersede the authority of Scripture. Over time some members have chosen to prioritize her works above Scripture; however, this is not the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Church's position is that the Bible is the sole authority for the Christian life, and that Ellen White's writings are counsel from

almost all of what she wrote. The compilation of her work in this area is entitled *Evangelism*, and it reflects her insights into sharing the gospel with others. Another work from Ellen White is *Ministry of Healing*, which emphasizes how in a truly biblical worldview, the good news influences all aspects of life, including health; this will be addressed in the next sub-section of this chapter.

Burrill states that a biblically functioning church must be both a community agency as well as an evangelistic agency. He emphasizes that this is not only the New Testament model, but that it is also the model of the Adventist pioneers as they practiced a relationally focused evangelistic church.<sup>8</sup> Mission was the driving force of church structure as well as personal efforts to share the gospel. As Burrill notes, it is in losing this mission focus that the Church endangers itself, potentially becoming irrelevant and even unbiblical. Burrill notes, “Seventh-day Adventism is a mission movement. It is founded, grounded, and nurtured in a mission mentality. As the church has grown and matured, it is in danger of losing this mission mentality. To do so at this time in her history would be disastrous. God has not called us to failure, He has called us to the faithful accomplishment of His mission.”<sup>9</sup>

In saying this, Burrill is simply echoing the thoughts of the primary Church leadership in early Adventism. In *Christ’s Object Lessons*, Ellen White describes how the

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God, but should never be interpreted as above the authority of the Bible. It is because of this significant influence that her writings are discussed in this final project.

<sup>8</sup> Burrill, *Recovering and Adventist Approach*, 253.

<sup>9</sup> Russell Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1996), 116.

New Testament Church saw their lives in the light of the Great Commission, and that the modern Church should as well. She writes,

Every Christian saw in his brother the divine similitude of benevolence and love. One interest prevailed. One object swallowed up all the others. All hearts beat in harmony. The only ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character, and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom. . . . These scenes are to be repeated, and with greater power. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be more abundant. The Spirit awaits our demand and reception. Christ is again to be revealed in His fullness by the Holy Spirit's power.<sup>10</sup>

In *Medical Ministry*, Ellen White impresses upon the believer that all are called to minister for Christ:

Upon all who believe, God has placed the burden of raising up churches, for the express purpose of educating men and women to use their entrusted capabilities for the benefit of the world, employing the means He has lent for His glory. He has made human beings His stewards. Gladly and generously they are to use the means in their possession for the advancement of righteousness and truth. They are to employ His entrusted talents in building up His work and enlarging His kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

She saw the duty of believers as simply being disciples. She explains, "The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within when the sun shine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance."<sup>12</sup> In *The Desire of Ages*, White also states, "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900; repr., Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 120-21.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen White, *Medical Ministry* (1932, repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1963), 315.

<sup>12</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 384.

spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”<sup>13</sup>

White spoke so strongly about evangelism by every believer because she knew it not only accomplished reaching others with the gospel, but that it also was the lifeblood of a believer’s journey with God.<sup>14</sup> Her passion and thoughts for a missionary movement, planting churches all over the world, caught on with many other leaders. A.G. Daniells, the longest serving president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (from 1901-1922), warned the Church that if it was to abandon the mission-based paradigm and allow pastors to settle over churches, the membership would lose its missionary focus, and that the Church would slowly forget its mission and die.<sup>15</sup>

It is crystal clear that evangelism was the lifeblood of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its pioneers. Mission, specifically God’s mission to his Church as given in the Great Commission, was the central driving factor in the passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the first sixty years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The prophetic insights of White and the practices of the Church exhibit the desire of this fledgling Christian denomination to be true to the principles of the New Testament Church, while also accomplishing the unique portion of the *missio Dei* that Adventists believe God gave to them.

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (1898; repr., Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 8 (1904, repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 244.

<sup>15</sup> A. G. Daniells, *Ministerial Institute Address* (speech given in Los Angeles, CA, March 1912), as quoted in Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion*, 54-55.

## The Culture of Evangelism: The Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14

Two passages of Scripture are the basis for the unique portion of the *missio Dei* which Adventists believe God specifically called them to. These passages are the three angels' messages in Revelation 14:6-12 and Matthew 24:14. Revelation will be dealt with here and Matthew 24 in the following section. Both should be considered deeply missional in nature, even if the Adventist Church does not treat them this way.

The three angels' messages of Revelation 14 are what give Adventists their distinct identity and their *raison d'être*. The prophetic importance of the Church and its creation and ongoing existence hinges on these three messages. The Church asserts that it began in the midst of the proclamation of these messages in the mid-1800s. Without this passage, there is no reason for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to exist. This is the mission statement for the denomination. Burrill claims, "Adventist mission cannot be understood apart from the three angels' messages."<sup>16</sup> This project is not attempting to deny the validity of that claim, but to support it by looking at it with fresh eyes. Perhaps by doing so, Adventists will return to the faith and passion of the Church's pioneers as they reordered their lives around how this passage pointed them to Jesus and their partnership with him. Revelation 14:6-12 reads as follows:

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured

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<sup>16</sup> Burrill, *Recovering and Adventist Approach*, 53.

full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.” This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The first angel, in verses 6-7, carries the message to return to a true worship of God through understanding the eternal gospel. The second angel, in verse 8, presents the message that there is a false gospel in the world as well, but that with the re-emergence of the eternal gospel at the end of time this false gospel is exposed and overcome, thereby creating the fall of Babylon. The third angel’s message, in verses 9-12, then brings to light that if one understands that there is an eternal gospel, and chooses to respond to that call to worship the true God of Scripture, then those believers will be following God’s call when he commands, “Come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:4). The “her” in this passage refers to Babylon, or any false system of belief that teaches something other than the eternal gospel. The context of this passage is that of the Parousia. Therefore there is an urgency to these messages in light of the fact that Jesus is expected to return very soon. Inherent in being a Seventh-day Adventist is that all one does is done in preparation for the Advent, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. To be an Adventist is to see, as one’s mission, the preparation of the world and all of its people for the coming of their Lord. However, and this is perhaps where the missional aspect of this passage has been lost, Revelation 14 must be read through the lens of the Great Commission.

Burrill astutely observes that Revelation 14 begins with the description of the people of God, who follow him through time and are saved for the kingdom (v. 1-5). He

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical references will be taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

goes on to say how the goal of the three angels (v. 6-12) is not to spread a message, but to give a message that has as its end goal the discipleship of God's people. Only then does it stay connected with the Great Commission, which commands believers to make disciples. Revelation 14 is not as much a passage about proclamation, although that is involved, as it is about the development of the people of God. The first few verses of Revelation 14 describe these people, and the reader sees in them the fulfillment of the Great Commission. These are the true disciples of Christ. They have their Father's name, symbolizing their commitment to God; they have been redeemed and now belong to God; they possess a pure faith; they follow Jesus all the way; and they stand without fault before the throne of God because of Christ's righteousness for them.<sup>17</sup>

If one partners this passage with the Great Commission, then numerous missional principles arise. First, when one includes the context of Revelation 14:1-5, it is clear that the passage is about developing people and joining them in building God's kingdom. They are the demonstration of what his kingdom looks like when lived out on this earth. One may even assume that as the first angel proclaims this message of restoration, it is through this symbolic group of 144,000 that the proclamation happens. This group does not signify any special class of professional preachers either, but the entirety of God's Church, all of his people, from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and people fully engaged in being and making disciples. All see themselves as missionaries in their contexts.

The message, lived as a demonstration in God's people and clothed in the culture of the kingdom of God, sheds light on both the true and the false gospels. God's people are visible examples of life in God's kingdom, and therefore they naturally paint a picture

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<sup>17</sup> Burrill, *Recovering and Adventist Approach*, 54-55.

of what is real and available through Christ. As they live in a missional attitude of being disciples sent to where they live, work, and play, they are constantly living God's call, "Come out of her, my people." Others see life in the kingdom through them, and the kingdom makes that call through those who have been sent into the midst of the needs of others.

Therefore, if one sees the three angels' messages through the lens of the Great Commission, one understands that these are people living as missional disciples in the midst of a world in need. They are engaging the culture and people around them to bring honor and glory to God. In so doing, they are accomplishing the work of these three angels.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses in Adventist Theology**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has strayed from a mission-based paradigm of church. In so doing, three very important teachings have lost their missional importance in the daily practice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Looking at these teachings through a missional lens can revitalize the mission of the Church. The first deals with the problem of a divine passive in Matthew 24:14, while the Church is practicing a very anthropocentric view of this passage today. The second relates to the challenging parallels between the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Great Controversy theme and the *missio Dei*. The third relates to the missional heart of Ellen White in the work *Ministry of Healing* and how important this statement is to the Church that is reaching a postmodern world today.

## The Problem of Matthew 24:14

If Revelation 14 is the foundational passage for describing the identity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, then Matthew 24:14 describes how this mission will take place. The passage states, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

This verse has become just as important to the identity of the Church as Revelation 14 in many ways. However, what happened with Revelation 14 has also happened with Matthew 24:14. This passage is not being read through the lens of the Great Commission. It is often exegeted without this overall context in mind. When this takes place, the Church has done two things that are detrimental to God’s mission. The Church assumes that “this gospel of the kingdom [being] preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” is the church’s work. The focus then becomes when the Church reaches that last person who needs to hear the gospel; it is at that point that the end will come. There is a subtle shift here whereby humanity becomes responsible for the completion of the mission, rather than the locus in which God accomplishes the mission. This attitude is contrary to the work being God’s work, and once again derails the Church from biblical faith. In fact, it leaves the Church in the very dangerous place of believing it is accomplishing the mission when it is not.

What also happens, when one neglects to read Matthew 24:14 through the Great Commission’s call for making disciples, is that the Church mistakenly believes that all it needs to do is proclaim the gospel. As Burrill claims in *Radical Disciples in Revolutionary Churches*, “If Adventists focus exclusively on Matthew 24:14, our understanding of mission will be primarily proclamation. In this sense, as long as the

gospel is proclaimed, regardless of whether it is accepted or rejected, mission will be accomplished.”<sup>18</sup> However, nothing could be further from the truth. Burrill continues, “Yet Matthew 24:14 cannot be isolated from the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19—making disciples. . . . Giving the message is not the goal of our mission—the focus of our mission is making disciples who are ready to meet Jesus when he comes.”<sup>19</sup> Burrill hits the mark in observing that

early Adventism was motivated by the desire to fulfill the Great Commission. The evangelistic strategy which those early Adventists developed, similar to that of the New Testament church, has been all but lost in present-day North American Adventism. . . . The Adventist mission has been nurtured more by Matthew 24:14 than by the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20. The church has not ignored the Great Commission, but its focus has been on Matthew 24:14.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, Matthew 24:14, as presently practiced in the Adventist Church, diverts the Church from its true mission, which is created, empowered, and completed by God. A reading of Matthew 24:14 without seeing it through the lens of the Great Commission puts completing the *missio Dei* in the hands of humanity. That contradiction leaves the Church empty, powerless, un-discipled, and deceived. The Great Commission is God’s mission, and he is already at work throughout the entire world already, asking his followers to join him in that mission.

### The Divine Passive and God’s Mission

A reading of Matthew 24:14 that is focused on proclamation alone is not being true to the Great Commission, nor is it being true to a correct interpretation of the

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<sup>18</sup> Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 76.

passage. Matthew uses a future passive form of κηρυσσω (“I proclaim”). The future passive is seen by different scholars as a divine passive. As Ranko Stefanovic describes the use of the divine passive in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, he writes, “When talking about God or his actions, they [Hebrews] usually used what is called a divine passive. For instance, ‘You are blessed’ meant clearly ‘God has blessed you.’”<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Kittel, in his *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, also alludes to how the use of κηρυσσω in a passive voice should regularly be understood as Christ proclaiming the kingdom of God, while the instrument of that proclamation will be his followers.<sup>22</sup> The follower of Christ has the very important commission in God’s plan of salvation of proclaiming the kingdom of God. However, the proclamation is not dependent on humankind, but on God. God is the agent behind accomplishing the action of proclamation. In this case, then, κηρυχθησεται (“will be being proclaimed”) is a declaration that when God, as the agent of proclamation, is proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom throughout the entire world, then the end will come. As Adventist leader and scholar Dwight Nelson wrote,

Consider another familiar text that suddenly radiates with hope when we factor in the divine passive: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world . . . and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). The verb “will be preached” is passive. But why the passive here? In giving this sign of His second coming, Jesus could very clearly have declared: “And you shall preach [active] the gospel in all the world.” But He didn’t. Instead he chose a passive verb without any actor delineated for the action described. And what does the divine passive signify? That the action will ultimately be accomplished by God Himself. . . . But factor in the *divine passive*, and suddenly we are confronted with the stunning truth that

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<sup>21</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: a Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 300.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), s.v. “κηρυσσω.”

God Himself completes it! All He asks is that we share His mission until it is finished.<sup>22</sup>

Understanding this passage correctly as a divine passive, reinforces the missional understanding of faith where the reader knows that God is already working on the hearts of all humankind before any believer ever arrives in their midst. It reinforces that this mission is God's mission, and that the Church gets the indescribable joy of joining with God in each neighborhood of the globe, as he completes his work in and through believers. White shares in this sentiment of the Church's mission being God's mission first. She states,

Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins into His own hands."<sup>23</sup>

The Adventist Church needs to return to its roots and the clear teaching of Scriptures like Matthew 24:14 if it wants to work from a biblical worldview. The missional implications of verses like this could go a long way to informing evangelistic efforts to the secular and postmodern worldviews predominating in the West. The Adventist Church was heavily influenced by the Restorationist movement of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In the spirit of these beginnings, the Church needs to continue

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<sup>22</sup> Dwight K. Nelson, *The Chosen: God's Dream for You* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 281.

<sup>23</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923; repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 2003), 300.

<sup>24</sup> George Knight, *Searching for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD, Review and Herald, 2000), 30-32.

restoring its faith practice to the principles of the Bible. One of the key components of that return would be restoring the teaching of the *missio Dei*, which emphasizes that it is God's mission and not the Church's. It would also restore to the Adventist theme of the Great Controversy the rightful focus upon God rather than upon the Church.

### The Challenge of the Great Controversy

The Adventist Church believes there is a meta-narrative at work in Scripture that describes the story of redemption from before the creation and into the future after the Second Coming of Christ. This narrative is known as the Great Controversy theme, referring to the great controversy between God and Satan. This theme describes the origin of evil, the final destruction of evil, and the restoration of God's original purposes for the world through the salvific mission of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, which provides a synopsis of the Adventist Church's main doctrines, defines the Great Controversy this way:

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 113.

Many Adventists are challenged by the word *missional*, and feel it would have no place in helping to bring further, or even renewed, understanding to the Great Controversy theme. This comes from a common Adventist tendency to distrust anything that is not Adventist in origin. Therein lies the challenge, because with a few minor distinctions, the Great Controversy and the *missio Dei* are very much the same idea using different words.

Lesslie Newbigin defines the *missio Dei* as a cosmic view of the world. He often discusses the restoration of the kingdom of God, and that Christians are the people who ultimately are the sign and foretaste of this kingdom. Christians are the visible proof of the eternal and salvific power of God. Referring to the Bible, Newbigin writes,

It is in structure a history of the cosmos. It claims to show us the shape, the structure, the origin, and the goal not merely of human history, but of cosmic history. . . . Rather it sees the history of the nations and the history of nature within the large framework of God's history—the carrying forward to its completion of the gracious purpose that has its source in the love of the Father for the Son in the unity of the Spirit. The first announcement of the good news that the reign of God is at hand can be understood only in the context of this biblical sketch of a universal history. . . . Mission is concerned with nothing less than the completion of all that God has begun to do in the creation of the world and of humankind. Its concern is not sectional but total and universal.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly Newbigin is stating that God and his mission are a much bigger meta-narrative than just the human situation, and that the Church is a part of that mission, but not the whole. He also states how there are principalities and powers that have rebelled against God and have been defeated, while they yet remain for the Church to struggle against until these powers are ultimately destroyed after the Second Coming.<sup>28</sup> These powers are

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<sup>26</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 30-31, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 204.

behind the evil of the different dysfunctional societal roles and structures that continue to work on principles not in line with the principles of God's kingdom, thereby making that evil a part of everyday life.

All of these are parallels to the unifying theme that Adventists call the Great Controversy. Ellen White, in her book, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*, made numerous statements that there was a unifying theme in Scripture that brought to light the origins of life and sin, the beginnings of evil, God's plan to restore humankind into his image, the reasons for suffering and death, and the ultimate vindication of himself as a God of love. In the *Signs of the Times* publication, she writes,

God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of His creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent Him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which He could set and keep men right was to make Himself visible and familiar to their eyes. . . . The Father was revealed in Christ as altogether a different being from that which Satan had represented Him to be. . . . The whole purpose of His own mission on earth [was] to set men right through the revelation of God. . . . When the object of His mission was attained—the revelation of God to the world—the Son of God announced that His work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.<sup>29</sup>

In another place she explains,

The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, [which is] the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise in the Revelation, "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads," [Rev.22: 4] the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme man's uplifting, the power of God "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 Cor. 15: 57]. He who grasps this thought has before him an infinite

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<sup>29</sup> White, "God Made Manifest in Christ," *Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890.

field of study. He has the key that will unlock to him the whole treasure-house of God's Word.<sup>30</sup>

These statements are just a few of many similar thoughts expressed by White. Combining these with her understanding that God's mission was the lifeblood of the Church leaves a strong parallel between her insights and those of many missional leaders today like Newbigin. But it also begs the question of whether the term *missional* really describes her thinking.

#### “Christ's Method Alone” and Ellen White's Missional Heart

Ellen White clearly saw mission as the central focus of the Church. Three passages from her books will be quoted in this section to illustrate how her words hit right at the heart of missional theology. Each quote, emerging through her prophetic insight, offers hope and direction to a denomination that is, like many others, quickly becoming irrelevant to the society around it, and unable or unwilling to return to a focus on God's mission.

The first of these statements is an excerpt from White's writings that is the most often quoted but least followed in Adventism:

The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.

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.”

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing

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<sup>30</sup> Ellen White, *Education* (1903; repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 125-26.

and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the fact that she states, “Christ’s method alone will give true success,” the Adventist Church continues to place its financial and human resources, with a few exceptions, in the traditional proclamation style of evangelism, which is increasingly irrelevant and unproductive. This would seem to support Burrill’s earlier assertion that the Adventist Church is nurtured more by Matthew 24:14 than Matthew 28:16-20, and even then by an incorrect understanding of the Church finishing what is clearly God’s work in Matthew 24:14.

One might assume that if the goal is to just proclaim the gospel to every human being on earth, then one would invest in the options for proclamation that would reach the largest amount of people in the shortest amount of time. Some of these options might include building publishing and media empires and focusing on evangelistic proclamation events in churches. There is nothing wrong with these options per se, unless they become methods to professionalize evangelism, thereby removing it from the sphere of the personal ministry of everyday believers. Despite the numerous good intentions involved, these options could result in moving the Church from the mindset of every believer being an incarnational missionary, which is found in Scripture and early Adventism, towards an attractional mode that has been increasingly irrelevant for decades.

The Adventist Church has fallen into the attractional model of church, while its own prophet has stated and described over and over again an incarnational approach to

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<sup>31</sup> White, *Ministry of Healing*, 143-44.

ministry. In this short but very important statement, she clearly offers missional principles, such as: developing the people of the Church as disciples; recognizing that their lives are their most important ministries; incarnational living by every believer; and that the Church that follows the gospel of the kingdom of God must have a strong emphasis on blessing the society in which it lives. It is imperative for the Church to understand that its mission priority is not to make proclamations of the gospel of the kingdom, as much as it is to make disciples of the kingdom of God who live and teach the gospel of the kingdom in all that they do.

The second excerpt from White's writings comes from the same book as did the first quote, *Ministry of Healing*. White continues to emphasize her missional heart when she writes, "True education is missionary training. Every son and daughter of God is called to be a missionary; we are called to the service of God and our fellow men; and to fit us for this service should be the object of our education."<sup>32</sup> She then goes on to explain that whether it is in the home, or any sphere of occupation in which believers live, "All are alike called to be missionaries for God, ministers of mercy to the world."<sup>33</sup> Every believer is to see themselves as missionaries for God to the communities in which they live. This is the primary tenet of missional church. When North America is considered one of the largest mission fields in the world, then the Adventist Church must restructure its thinking, its theology, its methodology, and even its leadership structures if it seeks to live in harmony with Scripture and with the Church's declared modern prophet, Ellen

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<sup>32</sup> White, *Ministry of Healing*, 395.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

White. Clearly, her heart was in tune with the missional heart of God, who sent his own Son as the first missionary.

The third excerpt from White's writings that reveal her thoughts in regards to missional church comes from her book, *Desire of Ages*. White continues the missional thinking by clarifying, "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary."<sup>34</sup> She is emphasizing the importance of believers thinking of their lives in a missionary context. They are now a part of God's kingdom, being transformed to become disciples who read, engage, and ultimately transform the cultures around them through Christ. This is an immediate action commencing with entry into God's kingdom through accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. White's statement from *Ministry of Healing* about "less time [being] given to sermonizing, and more time [being] spent in personal ministry" gives the model by which a new believer can do that. It is not by withdrawing from the world, but by being led by Christ to engage the needs of the people around them. In this action, opportunities will arise for sharing the gospel in more direct ways.

Ellen White had a missional heart and a missional understanding of being the Church. As the most influential leader in the Church, then and today, she expected the Church to be structured according to a missional paradigm and impacting as such. That paradigm would be reflected in the Church's practice of core missional characteristics.

### **Missional Church Characteristics**

When studying Ellen White and other Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneers, it becomes clear that they lived missional lives and could be described as a missional

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<sup>34</sup> White, *Desire of Ages*, 195.

emerging church in the nineteenth century. There are parallels between early Adventism, the writings of Ellen White, and contemporary missional theology. It is visible in certain basic missional principles, such as the Church being a witness to the kingdom of God; the understanding that God's people are apostolic; the fact that the Church is an incarnation of Christ into the world; and the reality that the Church is on earth to be a blessing to all nations. The following section looks more closely at these parallels.

### Church as Witness to the Kingdom of God

The late Lesslie Newbigin was one of the contemporary proponents for the missional church. He was instrumental in enlightening the Western Church to the fact that it is in dire need of “re-missionizing” if the gospel of the kingdom is to have any effect.<sup>35</sup> His understanding of how that would be made visible was through the people of God exhibiting God's love and character to the world. In *Foolishness to the Greeks*, he writes,

The church is the bearer to all nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God. It calls men and women to repent of their false loyalty to other powers, to become believers in the one true sovereignty, and so to become corporately a sign, instrument, and foretaste of that sovereignty of the one true and living God. . . . It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God's kingship.<sup>36</sup>

The Church becomes the living demonstration of the present and future reality of the kingdom of God. They are the evidence that what God has promised is true. Moltmann

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<sup>35</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996), 124.

reminds his readers that mission of God, and thereby the mission of the Church, is not to spread the Church, but to expand the kingdom of God.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White discusses the gospel of the kingdom of God being the foundation of Christ's message and mission. She believes it is all a part of the complete plan of redemption, and that there is only one God and therefore one "kingdom of God." Yet to understand the "now and not yet" aspect of this foundational teaching, she divides the present and future aspects of this message by designating the "kingdom of grace" (now) and the "kingdom of glory" (not yet). The kingdom of grace was instituted as soon as humankind sinned, but was not established until Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The kingdom of glory is the full realization of the kingdom of God after the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>38</sup> It is also the same "gospel of the kingdom of God" that Christ's followers live and proclaim today.<sup>39</sup> Adventist scholar Orlando Costas, in his book, *Liberating News: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization*, states, "The goal of evangelization is not simply to promote the growth of the church or merely to help individuals come to salvation. Rather, the all encompassing goal of evangelization is to make known God's kingdom as embodied in Jesus Christ and made present by the Holy Spirit. In so doing, evangelization prepares the way for the revelation of the kingdom of glory."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (1911; repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 347-48.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>40</sup> Orlando Costas, *Liberating News: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 82.

In *Christ's Object Lessons*, White continues to focus on the importance of the kingdom of God. She notes that when the disciples began to understand the power and authority that were Christ's, and that he was now giving freely to them through the Holy Spirit,

every Christian saw in his brother the divine similitude of benevolence and love. One interest prevailed. One object swallowed up all others. All hearts beat in harmony. The only ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character, and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom. . . . The Spirit of Christ animated the whole congregation; for they had found the pearl of great price. These scenes are to be repeated, and with greater power. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be more abundant. The Spirit awaits our demand and reception. Christ is again to be revealed in His fullness by the Holy Spirit's power.<sup>41</sup>

It is also clear from White that the power of the kingdom of God, like Newbigin and others also assert, will be in the living demonstration of God's people. White contends,

We are not to feel that the work of the gospel depends principally upon the minister. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker. . . . Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.

To His church God has committed the work of diffusing light and bearing the message of His love. Our work is not to condemn, not to denounce, but to draw with Christ, beseeching men to be reconciled to God. We are to encourage souls, to attract them, and thus win them to the Saviour. If this is not our interest, if we withhold from God the service of heart and life, we are robbing Him of influence, of time, of money and effort. In failing to benefit our fellow men, we rob God of the glory that should flow to Him through the conversion of souls.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6 (1900, repr., Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 427.

## Church as God's Apostolic People

Recognizing the spirit of the apostolic gift is important in missional church.

However, this does not designate all believers as apostles, a title reserved for a few who lived and ministered with Jesus face to face. Rather, recognizing this spirit designates the command of Jesus in John 20:21, which states, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." It is also common in both White's writings as well as the writings of many missional leaders today.<sup>43</sup>

White writes of believers being sent as missionaries both to foreign lands and to the cities and villages in which they live. In a fascinating discussion in *Ministry of Healing*, she writes the following about believers:

Transplanted to some missionary field, they would grow strong and vigorous. But none need wait until called to some distant field before beginning to help others. Doors of service are open everywhere. All around us are those who need our help. The widow, the orphan, the sick and the dying, the heartsick, the discouraged, the ignorant, and the outcast are on every hand. . . . We should feel it our special duty to work for those living in our neighborhood. Study how you can best help those who take no interest in religious things. As you visit your friends and neighbors, show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare.<sup>43</sup>

Then she uses the phrase, "self-supporting missionaries," to describe this apostolic sentness of believers into the vocations they already do as a living, as missionaries of the kingdom of God. It is an explanation founded in the tent-making ministry of Paul that could be taken out of almost any contemporary missional work.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> A few of these are: Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*; Guder, *Missional Church*; Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, and Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future*.

<sup>43</sup> White, *Ministry of Healing*, 152.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

In his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, David Bosch discusses the mission of the Church, and he reinforces this apostolic theme of God sending all believers: “The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”<sup>46</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, sum up this apostolic practice of faith well:

At its core is the reality that God’s people are a sign to the world of who God is. This missional nature cannot be subdivided into internal activities for insiders and external activities for outsiders. All the church does and is should live out God’s life in the midst of the world; missional people should practice God’s life before a watching world. . . . Being missional is about all of it, not part. This is the missional imagination. All of God’s people are on a mission to engage their surrounding neighborhoods, not just a few who are sent outside the church to do something called missions.<sup>47</sup>

We can see in this statement the connection between what the people of God are commissioned to do and how they then accomplish that mission. Not only are the people of God apostolic, but they are sent as the incarnation of Christ into the world around them.

### Church as the Incarnated Christ

In *Gospel Workers*, White explains the practice of incarnational ministry when she highlights that all believers are to be missionaries, that they will regularly come into contact with all kinds of people in their daily lives, and that it is through the building of relationships in these social interactions that the world will come in contact with Christ

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<sup>46</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390, as quoted in Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 54.

and his love.<sup>48</sup> She also encourages believers to “strive to place themselves where they will come in direct contact with those needing help.”<sup>49</sup> Of course there is no more incarnational view of ministry than her passionate statement, as already noted, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as the one who desired their good.”<sup>50</sup>

This incarnational thinking so passionately lived in the mission and life of the Adventist pioneers is also gaining emphasis in the rest of Christianity. In his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, Alan Hirsch beautifully describes incarnational living:

If God’s central way of reaching his world was to incarnate himself in Jesus, then our way of reaching the world should likewise be *incarnational*. To act incarnationally therefore will mean in part that in our mission to those outside of the faith we will need to exercise genuine identification and affinity with those we are attempting to reach. At the very least, it will probably mean moving into common geography/space and so set up a real and abiding presence among the group. But the basic motive of incarnational ministry is also *revelatory*—that they may come to know God through Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

Hirsch also mentions in another of his books, *Permanent Revolution*, that “incarnational approaches also require that we go deep, take culture seriously, and go to the heart of the matter. Furthermore, incarnational ministry requires prophetic patience and attentiveness to what God is already doing in neighborhoods and people’s lives.”<sup>51</sup> Based on the teachings of both White and other Christian authors, it is clear that incarnational ministry

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<sup>48</sup> Ellen White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are Laborers Together with God* (1915; repr., Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1948), 480.

<sup>49</sup> White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 8, 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, *Ministry of Healing*, 143-44.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 133.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, Kindle e-book, location 2291.

is the primary method God desires his followers to use in fulfilling his promise through Abraham to be a blessing to all people.

### Church as God's Way of Blessing People

Reggie McNeal ties the Great Commission to the commission given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, which emphasizes that one of the joys and responsibilities of being the people of God is that this has a positive influence and impact on the rest of the world.

The Church is to be a blessing to all nations. In his book, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, McNeal writes,

The role of the church is simply this: to bless the world. In doing this, the people of God reveal God's heart for the world. . . . The point of that blessing [from God through Abraham] was its external focus. "I'm going to bless you," God said, "so you can be a blessing to everybody else." This included people not in Abraham's tribe, people not like Abraham, people who didn't know God or were even looking for him—everybody, period. The emphasis on the scope of this blessing highlights two things: the unlimited reach of the blessing and its unqualified nature. Followers of Jesus have inherited this blessing, meaning we are free to bless everyone and responsible for blessing everyone.<sup>52</sup>

White is no less impressed that God's design for mission is for the people of God to be a blessing to all nations. In 1890 she wrote,

Christ's church is to be a blessing, and its members are to be blessed as they bless others. The object of God in choosing a people before all the world, was not only that he might adopt them as his sons and daughters, but that through them he might confer on the world the benefits of divine illumination. When the Lord chose Abraham it was not simply to be the special friend of God, but to be a medium of the precious and peculiar privileges the Lord desired to bestow upon the nations. He was to be a light amid the moral darkness of his surroundings. Whenever God blesses his children with light and truth, it is not only that they may have the gift of eternal life, but that those around them may also be spiritually enlightened. . . .

God has given you precious privileges and advantages in sending you the

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<sup>52</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 46-47.

light of his truth, and you are to improve these blessings, and let others share your mercies. What large missionary fields there are right around your homes, what opportunities every day for you to speak of the value of God's promises, to revive poor souls who are compelled to labor hard for small wages, to encourage the hearts of those who are struggling with poverty, who have scarcely the bare necessities of life! The children of God are called upon to show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light; for they are to be Christ's representatives. They should ever seek to teach those with whom they come in contact, of higher, holier truths than the questions of commonplace life. The Lord says through the prophet Ezekiel, "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The *missio Dei* and the partnering of God and his people in his mission is one of the most crucial themes in White's writings. In looking forward towards how to reach unreached people she states, "New methods must be introduced. God's people must awake to the necessity of the time in which they are living. God has men whom He will call into His service, men who will not carry forward the work in the lifeless way in which it has been carried forward in the past."<sup>55</sup> Then, concerning the role of the entire Church, she asserts, "If the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them."<sup>56</sup> It would appear that over one hundred years ago, White was seeing the difference between the consumerist "come and see" structure of Church in most of Christendom, and the need for missional living on the part of all believers, including Seventh-day Adventists. If she is the prophet

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<sup>54</sup> White, "God Made Manifest in Christ," *Signs of the Times*, February 3, 1890.

<sup>55</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 70.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 381.

the Church teaches that she is, then it is imperative for Adventists that the *missio Dei* and missional living are foundational truths to be lived today.

Moving beyond the writings of White, two of the foundational texts that define Seventh-day Adventists and their view of the mission God has given them are Revelation 14 and Matthew 24:14. This text in Revelation could not be more important to the Adventist identity. Without these three angels, there is no distinctness to Adventist mission. Coming out of the Second Great Awakening, and with strong Anabaptist and Restorationist roots, the sole purpose for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the restoration of the everlasting gospel (first angel), the denouncing of false worship of God (second angel), and the work or call to go to people in order to bring those people into a right relationship with God (third angel). This is then added to the command in Matthew 24:14, which calls believers to join God in his proclaiming of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. These two passages together are the very foundation that should drive believers into the world “to glorify God by cooperating with Him to save sinners.”<sup>57</sup>

However, Adventists in Canada have continued to be more concerned about preserving the Church than being the Church. Most evangelistic methods used today exist only to grow churches, rather than to develop people for the reign of God here and in the age to come. Adventists must return to their missional roots, transferring the core principles of Scripture and White’s counsel to today’s context. This should be done in conjunction with modern Christian writers who have utilized God’s wisdom to inform the

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<sup>57</sup>White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 143.

process of missional living in a contemporary context. If this is done, the Church can return to being a mission-based movement of God's people, passionate about partnering in his mission to restore the image of Christ to a hurting world.

## CHAPTER 5

### A MISSIONAL THEOLOGY

Missional church can be somewhat hard to define because, unlike many paradigms, it never suggests any one specific model that all can reproduce. The word *missional* is also often incorrectly employed by churches trying to keep up with the newest thing, to give a fresh spin to more traditional and modern evangelistic methodologies. This has the effect of stripping the missional paradigm of its power and also its very distinct differences that distinguish it from other methodologies. Roxburgh and Boren, in trying to deal with this, emphasize what missional is not in order to better define what missional is. They explain,

[*Missional* is] not a label to describe churches that emphasize cross-cultural missions . . . not a label used to describe churches that are using outreach programs to be *externally focused* . . . not another label for church growth and church effectiveness . . . not a label for churches that are effective at evangelism . . . not a way of turning around ineffective and outdated church forms so that they can display relevance in the wider culture . . . not a label that points to a primitive or ancient way of being the church . . . not a label describing new formats of church that reach people who have no interest in traditional churches.<sup>1</sup>

The most basic premise of missional church is that the Christian life is not about the Church, but about God. It is now and always will be about God's desires for humanity and his actions in the history of this world on their behalf. The children of God live,

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<sup>1</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 33-34.

therefore, to bring glory to God by making everything they do about displaying God to the world. To live a missional life, explain Roxburgh and Boren, means one understands that “God is up to something in the world that is bigger than the church even though the church is called to be sign, witness, and foretaste of God’s purposes in the world.”<sup>2</sup> The missional believer humbles himself or herself by living with the comprehension that “it is not the church of God that has a mission. It’s the God of mission that has a church.”<sup>3</sup> In an article titled, “Send Me: A Vision for Mission to North America,” the author of this project wrote, “The very nature of God is mission. Therefore, those who profess to follow him will also be mission-al in their nature. This will have direct influence on how they interact with the world around them. Missional life is joining God in what he is already doing in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Being missional is also recognizing that the Western world is no longer predominantly Christian, and therefore is a mission field itself needing to be re-introduced to the Christian God. The Church, as the people of God, is the vehicle through which God intends to do that; but instead of vilifying the culture of the West, the Church must engage the culture in an ongoing conversation between God, believers, and the people of North America and Europe. Their role is to go into the lives of the people of their communities as disciples, as a living demonstration of God and the gospel of the kingdom of God in the midst of a fallen culture. That is a part of what it means to be missional. Where traditional church has been more about attracting more of the world

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell Page, “Send Me: A Vision for Mission to North America,” *Journal for Adventist Mission Studies: Creative Ministries in the West*, vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 73.

into the church, missional church is about getting more of the church into the world. The rest of this chapter will expand on this principle in trying to form a missional theology for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

There are certain principles in the missional paradigm that help to define what it means to be missional. It is evident that these missional principles are present in both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White. The Seventh-day Adventist Church must begin establishing, embracing, and embodying these biblical principles in order to join God in offering the gospel of the kingdom of God to a secular and postmodern Western world that it is no longer reaching. This chapter will attempt to coalesce the missional theology of early Adventism with other contemporary proponents of this paradigm.

### **Missional Theology and Principles in Scripture**

The authority of Scripture must be held up as the basis for any Christian theology. This parameter must be followed while also implanting the word of Scripture into the context of the denomination a person inhabits in order that correct theology can be practiced in the life of a believer. The same is true of defining a missional theology in a Seventh-day Adventist context. The question from an Adventist perspective will be, “Is this Adventist?” But the answer to that question must first be subservient to the answer to the question, “Is this biblical?” If it is biblical, then Adventist theology should adjust to ensure it is a part of the practice of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. The question of whether missional church is Scriptural can be answered with a resounding “yes” from Scripture as seen below.

## God and His Mission: Genesis 3

God is mission. Page writes,

He has one clear mission, to redeem humanity from sin and restore humanity to God's original intention for them. It was God who created the world and all that is in it. When humanity chose not to trust God as Creator, a separation (Isaiah 59:2) was caused between humanity and God that God has been seeking to restore ever since. Sin has placed humanity in a situation where, despite the noblest of efforts, humanity can never remedy the problem by themselves.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to understand that in the opening chapters of Genesis, humanity is provided perhaps the most important of all messages. God desires and enjoys the companionship of humanity. He created people, in his image, for eternal fellowship. That was and is God's intention for humankind. It is visible right from the fall of Adam and Eve (Gn 3:7). It continues to be visible in the fact that God has not stopped working on the earth for the redemption of humanity since humanity chose to destroy relationship with him. Humanity was created in God's image (Gn 1:26-27). His mission is to restore that image back to its original state, while also eradicating sin forever. It is in these first passages of Scripture where one begins to understand the connection between the *missio Dei* and the Great Controversy. It is here that humanity can also appreciate that God himself is the first missionary. God knows that humanity not only faces the destructive force of sin in their lives, but also that there is a real adversary in Satan, who is compounding the struggle by his efforts to destroy and discredit God.

However, it is in the very nature of God to seek and save those who have been separated from him. He desires to give them the resources they need to grow into his image while facing sin and Satan. When any person recognizes his efforts and allows

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 75.

God's power and authority to have primary influence over his or her life, that person receives the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is fully God and now lives within them. Therefore, God's mission-based nature begins working from the inside out of those who choose to allow him to work in their lives. Believers become missional in how they approach life, because God is missional. His nature is a growing force within them. His mission becomes their mission. They willingly experience the joy and responsibility of partnering with God in his mission.

Scripture is also the place where the Church learns that the Church is not for the Church. Not only does God seek out the people on this earth who have chosen not to follow him, but he asks the Church to follow in his seeking footsteps with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to help them. The natural consequence of God's nature living in the life of a believer is for that same nature to start developing in the thinking and practices of that same believer. Thereby believers enter God's mission, becoming missional in their nature because the God in them is missional in his nature. McNeal explains, "The church was created to be the people of God to join him in his redemptive mission in the world. The church was never intended to exist for itself. It was and is the chosen instrument of God to expand his kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

#### God's People and His Blessing Strategy: Genesis 12:1-3

According to Genesis, God blesses people by his creation of humankind, and by giving them the ability to create, to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:27-28). They are blessed by being created in his image, but they are also blessed because God has given

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<sup>4</sup> McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003), 15-16.

them a part of his image in that they too have the ability to create. God's original intention for humanity was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:28). It was part of his original blessing, and includes within it the promise that this fruitfulness would bring positive benefits or blessings to all they were given to rule over. Their act of worship toward God was to be faithful in both the receiving and forwarding of his blessing to them. God's original purpose for humanity, which was to be blessed and to be a blessing to others, was marred by sin. However, it continues through Scripture to be a part of the strategy of God and his mission to redeem the world. Genesis 12:1-3 is perhaps the next most important commission to the Great Commission, and in it readers find that God's blessing, through humanity, is the core.

Undoubtedly, if God is a blessing God, then the natural byproduct of his presence in his believers would be for them to be a blessing to others. Where sin marred this, God seeks to restore it. In Genesis 12, Abram is called out of Haran and sent to a "land that I [God] will show you" (Gn 12:1-3), to be made a blessing to all nations. God makes this an unqualified blessing: "all nations" of the earth will be blessed through his people. This simplifies the work of the believer. No one needs to get involved in that inner struggle of deciding who deserves to be blessed. The answer is an unqualified, everybody. "Of course," McNeal writes, "none of us deserves it! That's the good news of the Good News—that we get the undeserved blessings of God. We don't own the blessings of God, and we sure don't get to decide who deserves them. The clear biblical teaching is that God blesses everyone because that's just who he is and what he likes to do."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 47.

What begins here in Genesis 12 has a continued emphasis throughout the rest of Scripture. The nation of Israel is set up in such a way that it is at the crossroads of that part of the world. It is given the mandate and ability to bless the nations that would have to travel through it and do commerce with it. The main blessing is that these other nations would get a true picture of the god, Yahweh, and what life in the kingdom of God was like. Deuteronomy lists the covenant curses and blessings of following God. In the beatitudes of Matthew 5 is given a description of the different character traits of those who follow God. This blessedness that belongs only to God (*makarios* in Greek) seems to be both the catalyst and result of the formation of these traits. In Revelation there is a seven-fold blessing on God's people, culminating with the blessing of living face to face with God forever.<sup>7</sup> It is not a coincidence that Scripture begins and ends with God's acts of blessing. It is a part of his nature and therefore is something to be expected from those who choose to follow God. For many Adventists, rethinking their outreach from an evangelism strategy to a blessing strategy would make them much more open to being a positive influence on others. Most people would find it a much simpler way of living in faithfulness to God. It demands that one sincerely enters into the joy and pain of people's lives with no other strings attached than that the believer cares for and hopes to bring God's blessings to bear somehow. McNeal writes,

To practice the blessing life, you will need to believe God, not just believe *in* God. Abraham just didn't believe in God; he believed God—he staked his life on what God said. We have to believe that God has the ability to draw people to himself through these blessing encounters. We must have the conviction that God is always at work in the lives of people (even if they don't recognize it) and will continue to be. We have to believe God enough to put him on the line, trusting

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<sup>7</sup> The seven-fold blessing to the Church in history is found in Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14.

him to show up and show off in their lives. I think God is waiting on us to do just that.<sup>8</sup>

White emphasizes this missional principle in *Christ's Object Lessons*: "Our mission to the world is not to serve or please ourselves; we are to glorify God by cooperating with Him to save sinners. We are to ask blessings from God that we may communicate to others. The capacity for receiving is preserved only by imparting. We cannot continue to receive heavenly treasure without communicating to those around us."<sup>9</sup>

The Church is blessed, not to bless itself, but to bring honor and glory to God by blessing others. By doing so the Church begins to live by both biblical and missional principles. The Adventist Church needs to listen to the words of Scripture, and its most respected leader, in order to make God's blessings evident to the world through his people. In doing this the Church will return evangelism to a natural by-product in the life of the believer instead of a program to be trained for, and the world will see a group of believers who truly care with no strings attached.

#### Learning to Love the World Like God Does: John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" is perhaps the most well known verse of Scripture. This statement by Jesus is found in the context of a somewhat clandestine meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus. However, the Apostle John's description of what God's love is like is expanded on through the whole of this gospel.

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<sup>8</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 142-43.

This statement of Jesus is important as it emphasizes that it is not just God's followers who are loved, but it is the whole world that is the object of the Father's love. This love is not conditional. There is a desired response, but the love is not provisional on any return in response. In fact, Jesus goes on to emphasize in verse 17 that he has come to save the whole world and not condemn anyone. Not only does God love the world, but he "so loves" the world. It is important that there is the added qualifier here. It as if Jesus is trying to portray to Nicodemus that God's love for all people abounds, and not only abounds but goes beyond even that because he is willing to send his one and only son to accomplish this. Although there is only the allusion to the cross event in this passage, Jesus, through John, will describe just how far this love of the Father will go in order to portray to the world how much he loves them.

Paul, reflecting on the life, death, and resurrection of God's son, adds another dimension to how much God loves the world:

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Eph 3:16-19, NLT)

Even the use of the word "whoever" In John 3:16 emphasizes the magnitude of God's love expressed through his son. The term is so general that it becomes extremely specific. Jesus is conveying a life-altering message in a very specific way. "Whoever" means no one is left out. This means that God is speaking specifically to every person who has and will live on the earth. He specifically targets every person with his love so that this love

might begin the process of reversing the separation sin has worked in humanity. That process, willingly chosen by a person, becomes the process of salvation and discipleship.

It is in that process of discipleship that the comprehension and experience of God's love should grow as the believer continues to submit his or her life to Christ. The natural byproduct of this recognition of the extent of God's love (Eph 1:3) is the desire to show others how much God loves them. In this process, explains White, "we are to ask blessings from God that we may communicate to others. The capacity for receiving is preserved only by imparting. We cannot continue to receive heavenly treasure without communicating to those around us."<sup>12</sup> Robert Mulholland, in his book, *Invitation to a Journey*, shares that believers who enter this process of discipleship are being conformed into the image of Christ, not for themselves, but "for the sake of others."<sup>13</sup>

The Church of God must love the world as God loves it. If God is within the heart of every believer, it will be his love that loves the world through the Church. The part of the believer is to simply get out of the way. Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, believers can learn to let God form their thoughts and practices, and thereby willingly come under the subjection of Christ. If God is given this authority and power in the inner lives of believers who partner with him, then his love will be seen outwardly through them to the world. That love, coming from God, will be unconditional. In other words, it is not qualified by any expected response. That love will be given without reservation to "whoever" God brings into their lives. This must be what the Church, individually and

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<sup>12</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 142-43.

<sup>13</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 17.

corporately lives in front of a watching world. It is God's method of giving a visible picture of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

God's People, Living Examples of the Kingdom of God: Matthew 28:18-20

God's desire is the redemption and restoration of humanity into his image.

Through Scripture he unwraps a way of living in which a person can be both redeemed and restored from sin. The New Testament believers, following the example of their master, call this process being a disciple. In this process Jesus is essentially creating an apprenticeship program.<sup>14</sup> In asking for these apprentice-disciples, Jesus is mobilizing people to partner with God in the *missio Dei*. He wants his followers to follow him in the abundant life that comes only from living in the redemptive and restorative power of God's kingdom. Biblically, anyone who accepts the atonement of Christ on their behalf is also accepting his mission and purpose as well. This person is then called a disciple and is envisaged to participate with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and mission.

Following his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ confers on his eleven disciples his mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). This Great Commission has become the mission statement for the Christian Church through the last two thousand years. The primary focus of this commission, making disciples in the "going" of everyday life, is accomplished by comprehending why Jesus came. That is

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<sup>14</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 277-310.

understood by seeking for what Jesus spoke about most often. The message he taught the most was what he termed the “gospel of the kingdom of God,” also spoken of as “the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.”

The *kingdom of God* is a phrase used to describe the system of how the universe really works, Page writes,

God’s effective will created and sustains everything in the universe, whether it is animate or inanimate. Without God reigning over the universe life would cease to exist. The kingdom of God is the operating system of life. People who choose not to live under the sovereignty of God live fragmented and discordant lives. Those who recognize its availability and enter into it experience the “abundant life” Jesus promised. Heaven is not so much a place as it is the result of the undiluted and uninterrupted reign of God. That is why the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the heavens, can be within us. Heaven, or God’s uninterrupted reign, can be the order under which our life with God is lived.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus understood his life to be the kingdom of God entering into the history of the world in the form of humanity. Christ’s life was a living demonstration of a life aligned with God in his redemptive mission. Page adds, “God gives the church his mission of living and proclaiming this kingdom reality in all that they are. With this gospel in mind, Jesus, both the living picture and proclaimer of this good news of the kingdom of God, says to every believer, ‘As the Father has sent me, so send I you’ (John 20:21).”<sup>16</sup>

Guder writes, “Jesus believed it was his mission to embody the reign of God by living under its authority.”<sup>15</sup> *Mission* is not something the church does; that is *missions*. Mission is who the Church is because it is who God is. Ephesians calls the Church to be imitators of Christ (Eph 5:1) in all things. This includes letting the reign of God be

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<sup>15</sup> Page, “Send Me,” 78.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 103.

embodied in the life of every believer. The kingdom of God is God describing to the world that all people would be closer to living God's ideal future if they would accept his sovereignty over their lives, regardless of whether they themselves rule over large or small "kingdoms" of their own. All of the parables and stories of how the kingdom works are there to describe all the heavenly resources that are at one's disposal today. As Willard so aptly puts it,

Jesus came among us to show and teach the life for which we were made. He came very gently, opened access to the governance of God with him, and set afoot a conspiracy of freedom in truth among human beings. Having overcome death he remains among us. By relying on his word and presence we are enabled to reintegrate the little realm that makes up our life into the infinite rule of God. And that is the eternal kind of life. Caught up in his active rule, our deeds become an element in God's eternal history. They are what God and we do together, making us a part of his life and him a part of ours. . . . He inducts us into the eternal kind of life that flows through himself. He does this first by bringing that life to bear upon our *needs*, and then by diffusing it throughout our *deeds*—deeds done with expectation that he and his Father will act with and in our actions.<sup>17</sup>

#### Apostolic Believers: John 20:21 and Acts 1:8, a Church That Is Sent

All believers in the missional church should understand that they have an apostolic ministry. They need to be taught that life is their ministry and not just a program they participate in at church on the weekend. Roxburgh and Boren explain,

At its core is the reality that God's people are a sign to the world of who God is. This missional nature cannot be subdivided into internal activities for insiders and external activities for outsiders. All the church does and is should live out God's life in the midst of the world; missional people should practice God's life before a watching world. . . . Being missional is about all of it, not part. This is the missional imagination. All of God's people are on a mission to engage their surrounding neighborhoods, not just a few who are sent outside the church to do something called missions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 54.

In missional thinking, the priesthood of all believers should be viewed through John 20:21, which states, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.” This apostolic sending is not an addendum, or something done by religious professionals or the religious elite. This too is in the nature of God.

A Church that is thinking apostolically realizes that it must equip its fellow believers to become disciples sent into their own neighborhoods and the lives of those around them. As believers are drawn to the God who sent his son to redeem them, they then are prompted by the Holy Spirit to be aware of where God is working around them. It is then that God sends his people to bear witness of his presence and grace in those places. There is a crucial knowledge needed here, which is that the people of God are the Church, and where they live, work, and play is where the Church exists and interacts with others, on God’s behalf. There is power for amazing change in this missional principle. If a local church is able to assist its members in claiming this key principle of missional living, it will allow the people to be released from supporting the church through time and money into the ministry that is their lives, and where they can be the church.<sup>19</sup>

Bosch also understands the sent-ness of God’s people. He observes that Scripture demonstrates how “the classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”<sup>20</sup> In this statement is a recognition that God’s people have always been sent. Abram was sent from the Land of Ur to a “land that I will show you” (Gn 12:1). When God calls out

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<sup>19</sup> McNeal, *The Present Future*, 43-68.

<sup>20</sup> David Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390, as quoted in Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

the question, “Whom shall I send?” it is Isaiah who replies, “Here I am, send me” (Is 6:7-9). Jesus, God’s own son, is sent from heaven for the redemption of all humankind (Jn 3:16). Once Jesus has accomplished his mission, he lays out the plan for his followers who will come. Christ’s followers, filled with the presence of God in the Holy Spirit, are sent out to be “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). His people are sent on his mission because they are following Christ; just as the Father sent him, he sends his disciples (Jn 20:21).

God wants his people to be the demonstrations and catalysts for the change that the kingdom of God brings to life. They are to become agents of change in the communities in which they live. For many this will include even the churches in which they worship, as this apostolic style of living is very contrary to most of Christianity today. McNeal captures the idea that a church is sent to give itself away to people, and to desire their good:

Instead of “Come and see!” it was “Go get ’em!” Instead of withdrawing from people for fear of contamination, he ate with them. This was horrifying to the Pharisees. They shrieked their charge against him: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2, NIV). Instead of insisting that people clean up in order to come to God, Jesus preached that God accepts people as they are so that, in the light of his love, they can come to their senses and clean up their act. . . . Instead of advancing religious institutionalism, Jesus talked about experiencing abundant life based on personal relationship with God. He gave himself away to poor people, sick people, unclean people, the disadvantaged, and disenfranchised from the religion of the privileged.<sup>21</sup>

Following the imperative sent-ness of biblical discipleship, these types of people intentionally engage the culture and communities in which they live. They look for where God is already at work, engaging God in conversation, together with others to discover

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<sup>21</sup> McNeal, *Present Future*, 28-29.

how he wants them to proceed. They are missionaries sent to those in need, living demonstrations of the kingdom resources and the ability of God to transform the worst of sinners in his redemptive mission to the world. They do not just believe in God, but they believe God.

Living in the culture, power, and authority of Christ and his kingdom, they live their lives knowing that Christ is all powerful and that they are the ones to influence the world and not vice-versa. Discussing the missional church and its role as influencer, Guder states that the Church being missional will “translate the gospel so that the surrounding culture can understand it.”<sup>22</sup> As White has said, the majority of the Church is not sent to foreign countries, but into their own neighborhoods as missionaries.<sup>23</sup>

#### Being the Church: Incarnational Living, Good News in a Postmodern World

If the Church is going to fulfill its apostolic mandate, it must follow again in the footsteps of Jesus and live incarnationally in the world. The Apostle Paul encourages believers to

be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Phil 2:3-8)

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<sup>22</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> White, “God Made Manifest in Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, February 3, 1890.

Paul is specifically connecting the character of Christ, as seen through his willingness to set aside his divinity and incarnate into the form of a human being, with the desired character and practice of a follower of Christ.

Christ was willing to give up all of heaven to enter in to the sin of a fallen world, in order that through that incarnation the plan of redemption could be accomplished. His life is recorded as a constant deconstructing of the mindset of the Church and culture of his day. Where the Church's practice had become, "the church for the church," Christ came to reconstruct and visibly show that God was for the world, and that his people, the Church, should be for the world too. Christ's incarnation into human flesh through his ministry to others was also a continuous incarnation and investment into the lives of those whom the religious elite considered unworthy.

If God's methodology for reaching a lost world was to become a missionary, incarnated into the midst of this world, the methods of the Church should follow his example. Guder contends, "Therefore, the church's own mission must take its cues from the way God's mission unfolded in the sending of Jesus into the world for its salvation. In Jesus' way of carrying out God's mission, we discover that the church is to represent God's reign as its community, its servant, and its messenger."<sup>24</sup> Christ's mission is to unfold through the incarnational living of his people.

In a world filled with the rubble and devastation of emotional, spiritual, and physical sin and depravity, there is a desperate sense of seeking for a true wholeness in life. It is in that void, writes Guder, that "the church displays the firstfruits of the forgiven and forgiving people of God who are brought together across the rubble of dividing walls

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<sup>24</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 102.

that have crumbled under the weight of the cross. It is the harbinger of the new humanity that lives in genuine community, a form of companionship and wholeness that humanity craves.”<sup>25</sup> The Church—that is, the people of God—themselves become the promise of the gospel.<sup>26</sup> This living demonstration of a loving, all-powerful, and life-transforming God in their midst will break even the hardest of hearts that Jesus may bring healing and life within. This is the power of incarnational living.

### **Missional Theology and Ellen White**

Ellen White is the most influential leader in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Any theology or practice under consideration for adoption by the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be cleared through her writings. Sadly, a “thus saith the Lord” is not enough for most Adventists. Although the official stance of the Church is *sola scriptura*, the daily practice is often not the same. Therefore, this section of this discussion will focus on White’s contributions to missional thinking.

It is clear from the writings of White, as presented in Chapters 3 and 4, that she had a clearly missional mindset, despite the fact that the term *missional* did not exist during her lifetime. In most of her writings, the comparative word would have been *missionary*. When observing her use of this word, one must take care to understand where she uses it to refer to foreign missions, and where she uses it to refer to the equipping of church members as they are exhorted to take up their own God-given ministry. Although this is something of an over-simplification, contemporary missional thinking breaks down to the basic idea that North America is now one of the largest mission fields in the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 104.

world, and that churches need to use missionary philosophies, principles, and practices to re-missionize the West. What follows is a perusal of some of her statements that reveal an extreme passion and support for missional living and ministry.

### Every Member a Missionary

No theme is clearer when reading White's writings than that she considered every believer as having a part to play in joining God in accomplishing his mission. She emphasizes that one's own growth as a believer is directly connected to one's missionary work for others and the kingdom of God. She writes,

A precious experience may be gained by one who engages in this [missionary] work. He has upon his heart the burden of the souls of his neighbors. He must have the help of Jesus. How careful he will be to walk circumspectly, that his prayers may not be hindered, that no cherished sin may separate him from God. While helping others, such a worker is himself obtaining spiritual strength and understanding, and in this humble school he may become qualified to enter a wider field.<sup>27</sup>

The believer's own spiritual strength is tied to the mission of God played out in his or her life. As Christ grows in each believer, God's mission becomes more of the believer's mission. Not embracing and embodying that mission is to deny the nature of the God that dwells in the heart of the believer. It would also be working directly against the work of the Spirit in transforming the life of a believer.

White also strongly implies the missional principles of God's people being the living demonstration of the kingdom. She writes,

It is not the purpose of God that His people should colonize or settle together in large communities. The disciples of Christ are His representatives upon the earth, and God designs that they shall be scattered all over the country, in the towns, cities, and villages, as lights amidst the darkness of the world. They are to be

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<sup>27</sup> White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 245.

missionaries for God, by their faith and works testifying to the near approach of the coming Saviour.<sup>28</sup>

White is contending, then, that believers are sent in an apostolic ministry to each town and home, living incarnationally as missionaries in the communities in which they dwell. She goes on in numerous statements to support the missional characteristic that every believer is a missionary to the people and cultures around them. In *The Desire of Ages*, she writes, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”<sup>30</sup> Here she is focusing on the natural consequence of people being developed as disciples. The nature of God is to be a missionary. His presence in believers flows out of them as a “fountain of life.” The believer’s life becomes an unambiguous and fascinating living demonstration of God in the midst of humanity, fulfilling the promise of John 12:32, in which Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

White also articulates in another place in the book, *Evangelism*, “This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyards. The circle is to extend until it belts the world. From

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>30</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 195.

town to town, from city to city, from country to country, the warning message is to be proclaimed, not with outward display, but in the power of the Spirit, by men of faith.”<sup>31</sup> Her emphasis on the success of the whole Church following a missionary model is noteworthy. It has in it echoes of her injunction concerning “Christ’s method alone,” which was quoted at length earlier in this chapter. She is not mincing words. It is this type of missional living by every Seventh-day Adventist, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that will accomplish God’s mission to proclaim the gospel of his kingdom to the whole world. It is in fact how she lived her own life.

#### Ellen White: An Incarnational, Apostolic, Missional Believer

Without a doubt, Ellen White was a missional believer, and she was calling the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be missional too. She believed that everything about the Church should center on the mission of God. White regularly spoke and taught that the Church must be focused on and structured for mission above everything else; that every believer was to live as a missionary where God placed him or her; and that the Church must be willing to follow the example of Christ and be sent wherever God determines, whether across an ocean or to the neighbor across the street. White’s most famous evangelistic quote expounds on incarnational living as well as any missional author today. Reviewing her life and writings, White was an incarnational, apostolic, missional believer who unmistakably called the Church to follow her example as she followed Christ’s. She sought to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles in the Seventh-day Adventist movement. The Seventh-day Adventist Church today needs to

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<sup>31</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 19.

make a serious evaluation of this focus in her writings if it truly desires to reach a postmodern and post-postmodern society today.<sup>32</sup>

### **Being the Church: Imagining a Missional Seventh-day Adventist Theology**

God is mission, and Jesus Christ embodies this characteristic of God in all that he did and continues to do, for the salvation, redemption, and character transformation of the world. Any denomination that seeks to follow Jesus must itself establish, embrace, and embody his mission in everything that it does. The present state of the Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly implies that as a whole the church has forgotten this foundational principle for the sake of perpetuating an organization. This is true despite the fact that the most respected leader in the history of the church, Ellen White, throughout her entire life spoke passionately and repeatedly in support of continuing a mission-based structure and practice in the Church. This is, of course, something the Church has chosen to disregard. She saw missional principles—such as incarnational ministry, building the kingdom and not the Church, apostolic ministry for every believer, and the Church existing in order to be a blessing to its communities for the sake of the world—as vital to accomplishing God’s mission. This section will seek to take Scripture and White’s thoughts and define a simple missional theology that would help inform any Adventist individual or congregation seeking to transition to missional living.

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<sup>32</sup> It is generally understood today that *postmodernism* is a designation of a transition period from the modern worldview to what follows it. Hence, it is “post” modernism or “after” modernism. As this new worldview is taking form, society is moving into a period and worldview that is after, or “post,” postmodernity. That worldview is still being defined and thus is usually referred to as *post-postmodernism*.

## Restoring Mission: The Best Opportunity to Reach a Postmodern World

The North American Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to put the majority of its resources into evangelistic modalities with diminishing returns, in terms of souls saved. Proclamation evangelism has no attraction for the majority of Western society. Neither does proclamation evangelism help build disciples of those already in the Church, as believers are able to pass off their own God-designed ministries to the paid professionals, whether evangelists or pastors.

In point of fact, proclamation evangelism has created a false sense of success, whereby millions of dollars are put toward proclaiming the gospel, while the majority of people are not even aware of its happening. At the same time, it portrays following God as an assent to a set of doctrines rather than a life commitment of discipleship to the person of Jesus Christ. Proclamation evangelism has been one of the biggest factors in continuing to perpetuate the unbiblical practice of placing evangelism and the Great Commission in the hands of a select few professionals, and out of the hands of the most powerful force God has ordained for world transformation—the Church, as the whole people of God.

This has happened because the Adventist Church has mistakenly been more focused on preserving Adventist identity than advancing the kingdom of God. It has been more focused on preserving truth that defines that identity than on living the mission of the God who gives the Church its identity. Adventists have prioritized a mission to save the Church, rather than God's mission to save the world. Even with all of the counsel from White to keep the structure and practice of ministry in the Church mission-based, apostolic, incarnational, and kingdom-focused, after her death the leadership succumbed

to being like most other denominations, settling the pastors over the churches and removing the process of discipleship and outreach from the lives of the laity. This also resulted in the Church losing its original missional focus.

Through this change, the people of God lost their mission focus, with dire consequences to the kingdom. They retreated from society instead of engaging it through the kingdom. They sent others to do missions while abdicating their own missionary responsibilities to their neighbors and communities. They have replaced living a life filled by the culture of God's kingdom with perpetuating Adventist culture. They have learned to live their lives thinking the Church is for the Church, rather than living with God's understanding that the Church is for the world.

However, the simple but difficult journey of restoring Adventism to a mission-based movement would have eternal significance, for the Church and for the world. In a world facing an epidemic of brokenness, the relational, no-strings-attached, demonstration of missional living would have an effect perhaps not seen since Pentecost. In order to do this, the Church must establish, embrace, and embody the biblical principles of missional living. The Adventist Church must restore its mission to God's mission. Roxburgh and Boren write, "It is not the church of God that has a mission. It's the God of mission that has a church."<sup>34</sup> The Adventist Church must embrace the fact that while the Second Coming of Christ creates an urgency for saving people, the incarnational ministry of Christ is the only method that will have true success in reaching the people.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 143-44.

## Kingdom Living and the Great Controversy Theme

God came to build and restore the kingdom of God, not to build the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Adventist Church was and is one of the movements of God that he intends to use to accomplish his mission. His mission is so much bigger than the Adventist Church alone. Roxburgh and Boren write, “God is up to something in the world that is bigger than the church even though the church is called to be sign, witness, and foretaste of God’s purposes in the world.”<sup>36</sup> Seventh-day Adventists need to take an honest look at who they are, rather than who they purport to be, and come to the realization that for many decades the Church has been building more of an Adventist culture than a kingdom culture. There has been little significant growth in reaching the North American population in decades, and almost no true discipleship taking place. The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to maintain its identity in Christ and its place in history, while not usurping God’s mission by growing the denomination.

The Church would do better to take another look at the Great Controversy theme and understand its important place in the *missio Dei*. The Church also needs to come to terms with the fact that a believer’s focus ought to be on God, not the Adventist Church, or any other Church for that matter. The Church’s role is to simply be that living demonstration of the love, mercy, and justice of God to the world. The Church is the living evidence of God’s existence, as well as of his beautiful, matchless love with which he “so loves the world.”

To be the people God intended, the Church must return to and embrace living in the kingdom of God. For too long the Adventist Church has practiced the belief that the

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<sup>36</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 20.

kingdom is yet to come, while neglecting that Jesus also said the kingdom is already here, and in the hearts of believers. Missional agents of change and transformation must move from an intellectualized faith to the internalized authority and power of living under the reign of God. The laity must be taught that all the power and glory of that future kingdom is breaking into their lives today through the presence of the Holy Spirit. With that power and authority, they then face the challenges and struggles of everyday life. They should be taught that they have all of heaven at their disposal as they seek to join God in being a blessing to the world.

#### Blessing Others while Fulfilling Matthew 24: Everyday Missional Living

The divine passive of Matthew 24:14 leaves no doubt that it is God who accomplishes all aspects of the salvation process, including the final proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. Yet in Adventism, Matthew 24 has been used as a passage that puts the mission of the Church ahead of the mission of God. It is often read as though people are the ones who will finish the work, with God's help, rather than as God completing what he started, while including people in the joy of the mission. However, there is a proclamation that humankind is in control of in this process. That proclamation is in being an alluring, visible, and tangible experience of God and his kingdom. This is most easily accomplished by learning to be a blessing to all nations, as God asked of Abram, and as he reminds Adventists through their prophet. Caring for and seeking to be a blessing to others is the simplest yet most influential experience there may be. This change alone will release the people of God from the mindset that only trained and paid professionals are capable of winning souls for God. It will enable them to assume their

places in partnering with God with the simple yet powerful lifestyle of truly caring for others without having to convince them of the truth. It allows the people of God to lay aside the impossible task of convicting people of sin and truth, so that the Spirit of God can do his work. It is in this authentic and honest missional lifestyle that they will be led by God into genuine friendships with pre-believers. In those real relationships, God's people will gain a growing influence on others whether they are modern, postmodern, or even post-postmodern in their worldviews.

#### Incarnational Ministry through the Three Angels' Message of Revelation 14

It is interesting and sometimes humorous to visualize the theology the Church practices. One such visualization in Adventism is how the last days before Christ's Second Coming will occur in conjunction with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. Often times the picture painted by Adventist evangelists and pastors is that at the end of time Adventists will be standing on the outside looking in, calling for all true believers to "come out" of apostate religions and non-religious systems, based solely on an intellectual assent to truth. There is this misguided perception that the world will listen to Adventists because they are Adventists, and they have the truth. However, a savvy world has come to realize that all truth, at one time or another, has been manipulated by humans to their own profit. Therefore, all truth is suspect. The only truth with any validity is that which they can experience for themselves, or in the visible and audible life of someone they trust who has been transformed by practicing those truths. Revelation 14 is about developing people, not truth, in the image of God and in preparation for heaven. The

Church needs to focus on developing people by being the living demonstration of the person who is truth, Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6).

It is only in this type of incarnational living that the Adventist Church can return to its scriptural roots and the counsel of its pioneers. Although each evangelistic modality has its place, incarnational ministry must be a foundational practice of any missional church. It is in this practice that the local church moves from just doing church as an event, to being the church wherever the members work, live, and play.

#### Missional Adventists: Joining God in His Mission to a Postmodern World

The Adventist laity must reclaim its partnership with God in his mission to reach the contemporary postmodern world. One reason for this is for the laity's own much-needed spiritual growth as disciples of Jesus. In order to reclaim this partnership, Adventist believers need to be open to God's method of teaching them through others, or as Roxburgh explains, through "the other."<sup>37</sup> In his book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood*, Roxburgh discusses the practice of believers putting themselves in places where they need help from someone—"the other." This idea is to go beyond just welcoming the stranger to recognizing that God may have sent the stranger with something for the believer to learn.

This practice is extremely important to the Adventist Church that has historically maintained an attitude of superiority to other faiths and Christians because of the truth God has given to Adventism. Joining God in his mission would release Adventism from this burden the Church has placed on itself, in order to engage the people it needs to

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), Kobo e-book, location 9: 8 of 11 and 10:5 of 10.

minister to, as equals, even as people from whom the Adventist Church can learn. Of Elijah and the widow in 1 Kings 17, Roxburgh writes, “Elijah, with nothing, dwells in the house of the widow and, in that context, discovers again what God is calling him to do. Elijah must dwell with the other to discern God’s purposes.”<sup>38</sup>

To join God, Roxburgh writes that the Christian Church often objectifies people when evangelizing. Roxburgh writes, “They are not the other who . . . we must dwell among and be present to, but they are a category, for which we have plans. When this is our focus, we can’t listen to the person who stands before us as a human being—he or she is the object of our plans.”<sup>39</sup> It is a de-humanizing process that robs people of the value God has placed on them. Roxburgh continues,

But in the boundary-breaking work of the Spirit, this is precisely where we need a different approach. We cannot ask the questions of what God is up to in our neighborhoods and communities when we think we already know. . . . When our assumptions about how it was all supposed to turn out are no longer viable, then we must take a radically different road. We must leave our baggage [preconceived ideas of how God works] behind and be willing to become like a stranger in need of a welcome and care for the other if we stand any chance of answering the question. What is God up to in our world today?<sup>40</sup>

If God has raised the Adventist Church for this time in earth’s history, then the Church needs to embrace that identity while always keeping before it that it is God’s mission and God’s work. It is God who started the work of redemption and it is God who will finish his work. The Church’s role is to partner with God that it might be transformed into his image. In that transformation, it will be a living demonstration of the kingdom of God. Joining with him in the lives of all these “others,” he is already

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., location 9:7 of 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

working. The world will not experience a Church, but rather a God who loves them above all else, and who offers them all they need for today and the future to come.

### **Conclusion**

Through the study and discussion of biblical ecclesiology in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a number of important elements have become apparent. First, the foundational missional principles being put forth today by numerous Christian writers are both true to Scripture and to the pioneers of the Adventist movement. Second, the Adventist leader, Ellen White, strongly lived, taught, and promoted a missional paradigm of being the Church joined with God in his mission, and that the Adventist Church should never stray in practice or structure from this mission-based paradigm.

Understanding the needs of both the New Life Church and its surrounding community, while also having the support of Scripture, Ellen White, and the general Christian Church at large, the next section of this final project will create a strategy for beginning a missional transition in the New Life Church. For the sake of the church and its community, the goal of this strategy will be to assist the church in establishing, embracing, and embodying the core missional principles in the lives of church members and the ministry of being the church.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 6

### MINISTRY PLAN

In 2010, the journey of the New Life Church had brought it to a place where it had essentially lost its mission. At the same time, it found itself in a Canadian culture that, while extremely postmodern in its thinking, was also very open to a spirituality that is personal, practical, service oriented, and transcendent. Missional church is the paradigm best suited to reaching this community for Christ, and restoring a proper mission-based faith to the New Life congregation. There are very clear missional principles in Scripture and early Adventism, promoted and lived by the Church's prophet, which have been ignored or forgotten in contemporary Adventism. The ministry plan put forth in the next two chapters presents the plan that was carried out at the New Life Church between 2010 and 2012. This plan focused on assisting the congregation in establishing, embracing, and embodying these missional principles from Scripture and Adventist history.

#### **Theological Implications of Missional Church on the New Life Congregation**

One of the most immediate theological implications of the missional church model for the New Life Church is the understanding that the mission of the Church is not

decided on by the Church, but by God. It is the work of the Church to learn how to listen for where God is working in and out of the Church. As this is done individually and corporately, God informs his Church regarding how to accomplish his mission in its context.

The New Life Church, like many churches, had implemented an abbreviated version of this mission-defining process without consulting the community, and without believing that God may already be working there. The church had, for the most part, fallen into the attractional model of putting on programs that the church determined the community needed, hoping that the community would come and see what the Church was doing. The mission statement of the New Life Church in 2010 had not been achieved in fifteen years because the Church had been confused by thinking it was *their* mission, as opposed to God's mission. A key step in this process has been establishing that God is mission, and that the work of redemption is his mission, thereby it is God who creates and empowers the Church to join him in his mission. It is in this biblical relationship that transformation of the Church and the community can take place.

This theological implication was rarely practiced at the New Life Church during the first several years of its existence. God's mission, and all that the people of God do in joining him in mission, is not only for the benefit of the Church. "God so loved the world" means that God's mission must be a benefit to the world. Contextually, this means that the mission of God through the New Life Church should have noticeable benefits for the Oshawa community. If it does not, then there is a strong chance that it is the church's mission being promoted and not the mission of God.

Another focus of this project was to establish within the New Life Church that the church's work is to develop people and their ministries as living demonstrations of the kingdom wherever they are. The New Life Church must embrace the fact that its greatest ministry is not supporting the programs of the church, but supporting each other in the lives God has given them, and in which together they are the Church. In a postmodern world where relationships are so highly valued, this type of incarnational living will have many benefits for the Church and the world.

Samir Salmanovic aptly describes the attitude that members of the New Life Church had toward "the other." In *It's Really All About God: How Islam, Atheism, and Judaism Made Me a Better Christian*, he writes,

My experience has been that we religious people, particularly Jews, Christians, and Muslims, have been hedging our bets. We say we believe in the God of all people. But we really don't. We find it difficult to accept that others have anything significant to teach us about what we hold sacred, about our God. We tend to nod our heads at others only when they simply mirror what we already know.<sup>1</sup>

Many people at the New Life Church, like many Adventists, have approached others with the mindset that they are bringing God to that person. The problem that arises with this superior attitude is compounded by the strong intellectual side of the Adventist faith, and the result is that most Adventists are focused on bringing "truth," rather than a visible picture of a loving and compassionate God. This may be the most difficult component of missional thinking for the New Life Church to establish, let alone embrace and embody. Fortunately, prior to the start of this project, the Spirit of God had been growing a sense

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<sup>1</sup> Samir Salmanovic, *It's Really All About God: How Islam, Atheism, and Judaism Made Me a Better Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 17.

of discontentment in a core group of people who wanted the church to be more intentionally involved in bringing the gospel to the community.

This project was launched with the hope that the church would be exposed to an approachable and simple understanding of the biblical injunction for missional disciples. It was also hoped that in the future beyond this project, the majority of the New Life membership would establish, embrace, and embody being a missional church, and that they would live missional lives as they fulfill the Great Commission together. Establishing missional principles to live by is laying a foundation built on Scripture and Ellen White. Embracing these principles is visioning a preferred future where these same members internalize the *missio Dei* in their own lives.

The next desired outcome would be the natural embodiment of missional life in their lives, as God becomes more real to them, and his mission is worked out in the context of their lives, of the church, and of the community. The missional church structure would not only meet the needs of the New Life Church for a deeper discipleship; but it would also help set the downtown Oshawa community free from the cycles of brokenness and dependence on human solutions to fix these issues. Missional church enables the New Life Church to put God back in control of the mission so the church can receive “its cues from the One who has sent it, rather than from the powers that appear to run the world.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barrett, “Missional Witness,” 110.

## Goals

The New Life Church exists in the context of a secular and postmodern Canadian milieu. The proposed strategy sought to give members of the church a better understanding of the culture in which they live so that they might engage that same culture instead of shrinking back from it in fear of being spiritually contaminated. The proposed strategy encouraged members of the church to transition their thinking to understand that God desires them to be the influencers in society and the community. The goal was to empower them with information that would help them to deconstruct the culture in order to reconstruct, for the community, what life looks like powered by God and his kingdom's culture. The strategy also sought to empower the church by clearly presenting the fact that the power of God can overcome all things; that this power is available to all who ask; that it is accessible through such avenues as the spiritual disciplines; and that this power is available to them as they are missionaries to their communities.

In accomplishing these goals, it was crucial to ensure that a missional living strategy—for each believer and for the church as a whole—was presented as being simple and easy to live out. If it was to be embraced, then it needed to be delivered in the most efficient method possible for people to be able to easily incorporate it into their lives. Churches have had enough programs, whether they are based on “seven-steps” or “ten irrefutable laws,” which have not brought lasting success. Simple goals were needed to teach the congregation that leadership comes from God, and that their biggest goal is to learn simple basic ways of practicing connection with God in everyday life situations.

In order to help the New Life Church embrace missional living, one of the goals of this project was to instill a desire to do more than just one outreach project. Missional thinking must lead to missional actions. There must be ongoing opportunities for the members to both explore and practice the theology of missional church. There must be regularly scheduled opportunities for missional interactions with the community. There also must be regularly meeting small groups as development centers for members and their missional ministry.

One idea for these initiatives to be launched was to have certain leaders—those who had grasped missional thinking—take the lead in the first attempts. However, it was also clear that for this thinking to take a strong hold, the membership as a whole must search out God together for his direction, not just the leaders. If this could be accomplished, the embodiment of missional principles would also be evident.

One of the final goals was the interaction of the church and the community for the mutual benefit of the other. This is not often easily accomplished. The fault lies in both groups being hesitant in knowing the other. George Hunter, in his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, describes members of the secular culture that he refers to as the “new barbarians.” He could very easily be describing the community of downtown Oshawa when he describes his *New Barbarians*:

Many of them are “secular”; that is, they have never been substantially influenced by the Christian religion; they have no Christian memory and no church to “return” to. Many have never acquired a “church etiquette” (they would not know when to stand, or where to find Second Corinthians, or what to say to the pastor after the service), and they are not “civilized” or “refined” enough to fit and feel comfortable in the church down the street. Often, they are thought to lack “class.” They may have un-shined shoes or body odor or grease under their finger nails; in conversation, they might split an infinitive or utter an expletive. Many New Barbarians are addicted, and their lives are at least sometimes out of control

around some substance, such as alcohol or cocaine, or some process, such as sex or gambling. Many Western cities appear, at least at times, to be taken over by the New Barbarians.<sup>3</sup>

These goals of the proposed strategy were determined because they are real, achievable, sustainable, simple, and most importantly, about people. God is for people, and his people must be for people because they belong to God and that is his mission. This God-led and God-designed mission is best achieved through the missional church paradigm.

### **Content**

To accomplish this initial project and the ongoing goals of a missional transition, the primary focus was a nine-week worship and visioning process. First, there was a series of nine Sundays during which the structure of Sunday mornings was altered in order to provide for visioning time within the congregation. In partnership with the worship team, the pastor developed a missionally formatted worship event that was inclusive of all the ages present, and also facilitated a place of visioning and discussion for the future of the church. There was no Sabbath School during the nine weeks of this visioning time. Instead the children were part of the community of believers through the process. The starting time of church during these nine weeks was moved to 10 a.m. instead of 11 a.m., but church still ended between 12:30 and 1 p.m. This was to allow for a time of discussion to follow the message.

Part of the structural change prior to the nine-week event included removing the pews of the church and replacing them with chairs that could be utilized in numerous

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<sup>3</sup> George G. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 96

configurations to facilitate an atmosphere of community and openness. The pews needed to be removed for renovations, so the change was able to coincide with that timing. Once the pews were moved, tables were set up around the back of the sanctuary, where the children could be assisted by children's ministry volunteers and willing parents in crafts and other activities during the discussion time.

The actual worship event began with a music set by the contemporary band, as usual, followed by DVD messages from Tony Evans, Erwin McManus, and primarily Reggie McNeal, all on topics concerning living a missional lifestyle. The idea behind this was to keep the traditionalists mostly content, while adding nearly an hour of time to discuss and explore what each message means to the context of the New Life Church. Once the discussion was done, the congregation finished the worship time with one or two more songs to bring a mission unity back to the group.

Once this nine-week event was complete, the pastor and leaders held a church-wide business meeting where the discussion focused on the reactions to the DVD series by Reggie McNeal. This meeting also included a time of prayer, when the pastor and leaders asked God to show the congregation how to begin interacting with the community of Oshawa. The primary goal was to get the church seeking God together so that it could accomplish his mission.

As the process unfolded, the pastor and elders also observed the congregation to see who would be the first adopters in the process. They looked for those who were grasping the concepts quickly. They were also intentional about not limiting their search by any factors such as age or even church membership. This was done in order to listen to God's call regarding a missional leadership team. This team would be responsible for

learning more about missional church, and then passing on this learning through personal interactions with other church members, missional communities, and other teaching opportunities. This team would become the integral component of the continual and long-term process of establishing, embracing, and embodying the missional life in the church and in the community.

Another component in this transition process was the establishment of missional communities within the congregation. This was slated to take place months after the nine-week visioning time. The time distance was arranged as such so that the missional leadership team, the pastor, and the elders would have a significant amount of time to assist the congregation in experiencing other missional opportunities. It was hoped that more hands-on experience would encourage a greater desire to embrace the principles of missional life, including community. The missional communities would be able to capitalize on the community already arising from the missional efforts by the church as a whole. These missional communities would become training centers where people from the church and the community could learn how to be disciples in all aspects of life. This would take place in the context of a safe, accountable, and encouraging group of people.

Throughout 2011, the pastor continued to keep missional life before the congregation through sermons, testimonies, visitation, and other communication opportunities that arose. The pastor also integrated the elders and missional leadership team, as it was formed, in visiting members in order to further cast the vision and to answer questions and doubts that were raised. During these personal visits, a main emphasis was on the members' personal application of the missional principles and how the church could assist them. It was communicated to members that the church was

focusing on developing people, not programs; therefore, members were asked how the church could best assist them to accomplish this, while not weighing them down with some of the traditional burdens found in the demands of proclamation evangelism.

Leadership was important during this transition. Thus, the pastor, elders, and other leaders were encouraged, trained, and assisted in having conversations with the community. Community walks each week began this process. These walks were done to engage people in the community in conversations. Starting at this grass roots level was crucial in establishing some of the needs. The goal was to discover which needs frequently come up in conversations, so that the congregation could narrow down one or two opportunities that could be created to help those needs. It was also hoped that these conversations would build good will in the community and cause the church to become visible through these caring, non-proselytizing conversations.

The next level after this was to include conversations with the city and a school in the area to see if the church could help them in their efforts to bless the city. It was hoped that through these conversations, the city and school leaders could then assist in creating further opportunities for the church to interact with and bless the community. This regular interaction would create a greater mutual respect between the church and the community, as well as an opportunity to see how the relationship could be mutually beneficial to each other.

All of this was to be done with no strings attached, yet the church anticipated that there might be positive responses to the God as a result of this effort, which would result in the church receiving new visitors or even new members. It was hoped that this growth, and the blessing of serving others through the missional events for the community, would

reignite the passion and desire to follow Christ that some of the members had lost. That re-ignition would continue to fuel the church for even greater efforts in transitioning into a full missional church and not just a church with missional types of programs.

### **Leadership and Target Groups**

It was imperative to the success of this project that there be a core team of leadership that had bought into the missional paradigm in belief and practice. This was the first target group for the pastor. Its level of buy-in was instrumental to success. Once the elders began to buy in to a missional transition, it was then equally important that they understood their role in encouraging and facilitating a missional transition in the congregation at large. At this point, this pastor-led core would focus their energies on the congregation as their target group.

To accomplish this component of the ministry strategy, the following format for change was pursued. The board of elders began to meet in a quasi-small group format. It desired that this team would have a safe atmosphere to receive and grasp a missional vision for the New Life Church, while discussing the merits of such a vision openly and honestly. A small group atmosphere was determined to be the most conducive to this, although one older elder had previously expressed a negative opinion of small groups, so it was anticipated that the individual might offer some obstacles to the dynamics of the discussion. However, from this beginning stage, it was important for everyone to be able to ask any and all questions. Concerns needed to be adequately addressed, just as much as hope and passion needed to be fostered. This group was and is the main leadership group in the New Life Church. If principles for missional living could be established in their

lives, then the subsequent hope and passion they would have for a perceived missional future would translate to support for missional transition in the congregation itself.

Once this was accomplished to a satisfactory degree, three vital components would be needed for the foundation of the transition and its ongoing viability. The first was that there needed to be a clear and simple understanding of missional theology in the congregation as well as the leadership. This was to be achieved through a series of ongoing discussions. Those discussions would happen corporately, as in the outlined process of this project, but also through personal conversations and visits to the members by the leadership of the church. There was a concerted effort here from the leaders to contextualize missional theology to each believer and the context in which God has each person. This required a serious level of commitment from the leaders in their own personal understanding and practice of missional life, as well as learning to hear God's work in the lives of others. The continual work of the pastor was fostering and equipping these abilities in the leaders.

Second, there needed to be opportunities to experiment with the new ideas and methods of being the church. Once again, the majority of the success of this part of the project depended heavily on the personal work of the leadership—visioning and giving practical insights during personal visits with the congregation. At this point, this work that would normally be accomplished within missional communities needed to be modeled and fostered by the leaders.

It was important for the leadership to strictly adhere to the missional concept of the church equipping and developing disciples for their life ministries, rather than how the members might best serve the church. This was critical in order to help cultivate the

changing reality in the congregation that the church is there to invest in them, and to help them be and make disciples. The church also needed to provide larger corporate opportunities for experimentation, as well as encourage smaller, more personal experiments. Preaching was an avenue by which the pastor could give concrete and practical examples of personal missional experiments as well.

The third vital component was the establishment of missional communities within the congregation. This takes time but would be crucial to success. It was hoped that these missional communities would become centers for training in Christ-likeness and missional living. The communities were to become the places where each member receives that sense of deep community in Christ, yet they should provide a safe place to learn to live missionally together. These are places where life is done together, in a missional framework. They should be places where non-believers could also take part so that they too might be able to explore what the journey of a life with God looks like.

This project began in 2010, but many of these missional principles and experiments were designed to happen only as the congregation was led to embrace them. Planned items, such as missional communities, were a desired part of the congregation embodying missional principles. However, for these to take place, the church needed to first establish and embrace missional living as a way of life, not just another method for doing church. Strong, passionate, missional leadership was needed to bring about this type of change. That type of leadership was crucial from the pastor and elders. It was equally important for the pastor and elders to intentionally watch for that same type of leadership to arise in different members of the congregation. It was important for these first adopters to be selected, trained, and equipped for serving as missional leaders. This

is a process that never stops and should be a focus of the leadership throughout the life of the church.

It is important to realize that the entire leadership team needed continued training and equipping in missional living. Being missional is not another program, but a new worldview and way of life. The leaders needed to learn and continue doing missional life together. This would be done through ongoing small groups meetings, and their own personal missional experiments. The leaders would then find and choose their own smaller missional projects they do as a group, about which they can then report back to the church. As the leadership continues to pursue and practice missional living, their testimonies and stories will give them insights and vision for spreading missional blessings through the congregation.

All of this was designed to have a primary focus of occurring in contact with the communities in which the members live, work, play, and go to church. Even though the New Life Church and downtown Oshawa are the two main communities of this project's focus, each member inhabits and influences numerous other communities. In fact, it is in these other communities in which they spend the majority of their time. The target group for leadership is the congregation. However, it is in the context of their lives that they would initially establish, embrace, and embody missional living. Therefore, the leaders needed to work in the juxtaposed communities of a member's life and his or her ministry to the downtown Oshawa community. Missional living occurs in both. Each would inform the missional life of the other. Each is a training ground for the other. The New Life Church leaders would provide numerous and regular opportunities within the

downtown community. They would also seek, through personal visits, to help influence and develop members in the other communities they inhabit as God's church in mission.

### **Summary**

This strategy intended to assist the congregation in understanding the secular and postmodern context that is the reality of Canada today. It also sought to provide insights into missional principles that would enable the church to join God in reaching their specific predominantly postmodern community in Oshawa, Ontario. The desired outcome was that the establishment, embracing, and embodying of core missional principles would also be set in motion in the New Life Church. The strategy was implemented from late 2010 through to 2012. Chapter 7 will present its implementation.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION

All of the research and study into missional theology in Adventism and the Christian Church, as well understanding the secular and postmodern influences in Canadian society, formed the strategy and project outlined in the previous chapter, and its eventual implementation as outlined in this chapter. The first section of Chapter 7 will give an overall summary of the pilot project. This will be followed by a timeline of events in beginning the transition process covering the period from late 2010 to early 2012. The last two parts of this chapter will take a look at the role of leadership in the process, and the main resources used in completing this project and its evaluation.

#### **Pilot Project Summary and Timeline**

The implementation of missional principles in this congregation was a process with four different components. The first was pre-series preparation, which involved preaching on the concept of missional church for eighteen months prior to the visioning process. The second and most crucial component was a nine-week worship and visioning process, primarily utilizing the DVD seminar resource, *The Present Future*, by Reggie

McNeal. This laid the foundation for the congregation beginning to establish missional principles in their understanding of themselves as the church, and their place in God's mission. The third component involved community events, including informal discussions with community members and two community barbecues. These were designed to offer the church opportunities to experiment with missional living in the community. The fourth component was the establishment of a missional leadership team to continue to provide leadership to the needs of a transition that would need to continue through the next few years.

### Pre-Visioning Preparation

In 2009, eighteen months before the nine-week visioning process began, the author of this project and pastor of the New Life Church<sup>1</sup> began a very intentional effort to promote an understanding and experience of God through three topics. This was achieved primarily through the Sabbath morning preaching event. The first topic was the kingdom of God as a present and future reality.<sup>2</sup> The second topic was spiritual formation as a process in which a person can interact with and be transformed by God. Finally, the third topic was discipleship as a process of submitting to God in such a way that his kingdom and its authority become the power for living the abundant that life Jesus promises, both for the believer and the world.

This foundation for a preferred future for the New Life Church was built on further by an eight-part missional series from November 2010 to January 2011. During

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<sup>1</sup> In order to maintain an objective voice, I will refer to myself in the third person in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> This relied heavily on the writings of Dallas Willard and the experiences involved with attending his Doctor of Ministry course titled "Spirituality and Ministry" in Sierra Madre, CA in 2008.

this missional series, the pastor shared the book, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, with the congregation. The first message, “Be the Church,” cast the kingdom vision of what it would look like as the church joins God in his mission. It answered the question of how to move from doing church to being the church. The next message, “Hitting the Streets,” focused on the Samaritan woman and the need for the church to go to those in need as Jesus did. This message asserted that the Church is a sent Church and that ministry is where the church is, not where the church building is. The focus was on what the New Life Church could be if members were living as missional believers. The third message, “Releasing God’s People,” discussed how the Church culture has collapsed. The message encouraged the congregation to dream about the New Life Church recognizing this and choosing to develop and then release God’s people to be an alternative culture for the kingdom, in the midst of their lives. The fourth sermon, titled “Be the Blessing,” took the church forward by going back to the Abrahamic promise of being a blessing to all nations, so that New Life could figure out how to be that blessing today.

The fifth message moved personally to Jesus. “Incarnation” emphasized the willingness of Jesus to leave heaven and all its benefits to come live with humanity. It concentrated on the idea that God wants his followers to imitate him by living incarnationally among nonbelievers. The sixth message, “Change . . . Duh!,” highlighted the fact that everything is always changing, and that change is a normal part of life and an essential component to being transformed by God. Change is a good thing when God directs it. The seventh message came back to the life of Jesus. However, “Friend of Sinners” emphasized that God’s people must be willing to get their hands dirty to help

those in need, and that helping the lost is often a very messy proposition. This message asked the New Life Church members to put their reputations aside to do what is right, and be a friend to sinners like Jesus was. The eighth sermon used a poem called “The Parable of the Orange Trees” to reemphasize the message of John 4: the harvest is ready, and God is looking for people to join him in collecting that harvest of souls for the kingdom.

Simultaneously with this sermon series, *The Present Future* book was shared with the elders, who were given one month to read the book. An initial small group meeting followed this, where the principles presented by McNeal were discussed and any concerns from the elders were addressed. It was clear from this first meeting that the elders were not all grasping the concepts. The pastor chose to adapt to this situation at the next meeting by showing one of the DVD sessions based on McNeal’s book. The reaction to this was emphatically supportive.

The elders immediately saw the value and wanted to present the DVD sermons to the church. The pastor suggested a series of Sabbath afternoon meetings over successive weeks, but the elders felt the process was too important to relegate to an afternoon program. They suggested a format where the regular morning study time would be moved from before the service and would follow the DVD presentation during the main service. The main service would start an hour earlier to accommodate the change. The focus of that study/discussion period would be the content of the DVD presentation and its relevance to the New Life congregation and community. The elders voted to begin this nine-week worship and visioning process in February 2011.

## Nine-Week Worship and Visioning Process

The visioning process began on February 12, 2011. The overall format proceeded in the following description. The usual contemporary music set would start the main Sabbath worship period at 10 a.m. This would be followed by the DVD presentations by Evans, McManus, and McNeal. An hour would be set aside following the DVD presentation for the discussion mentioned earlier, led by the pastor. A song or two was used to end each Sabbath, with the church continuing to worship and praise God for how he was working in their midst. With this format, the hope was that the whole congregation would participate, thereby encouraging a greater opportunity of establishing the missional principles in their theology of God and the church. One other desire behind the format process was that this refocusing the church for mission and possible missional transition would itself be seen as an act of worship.

On February 12, 2011, the first of two DVD sermons from the *Right Now: Lead beyond Your Walls* missional resource kit began the pilot project.<sup>3</sup> These were chosen to ease the church into the overall format change for the next two months. These sermons also highlighted the role of the Church in joining God to redeem the world, and the idea of developing and releasing people to do the ministry God has called them to in the world. The first, “The Role of the Church,” by Tony Evans, is part of the *Right Now Conference* resources.<sup>4</sup> Erwin McManus’s sermon, from the same resource, titled “Work

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<sup>3</sup> *Right Now Lead Beyond Your Walls Conference: Mission Development Kit for Church Leaders*. (Richardson, TX: Right Now Ministries, 2011), Session Seven DVD.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Evans. “The Role of the Church,” *Right Now Lead Beyond Your Walls Conference: Mission Development Kit for Church Leaders* (Richardson, TX: Right Now Ministries, 2011), DVD.

as Worship,” followed this on February 19, 2011.<sup>5</sup> These were used in order to have other voices emphasizing the messages being heard in the previous three months from the New Life Church pulpit, primarily based on McNeal’s work.<sup>6</sup>

After these first two weeks, the *Present Future* DVD series followed, taking place on the Sabbaths from February 26 to April 9, 2011. The term “joining God in the neighborhood”<sup>7</sup> became the catchphrase used by the New Life Church to describe the missional experiments of the church. On March 30, 2011, the “Joining God in the Neighborhood Walk” took place. This was a community prayer and conversation walk, where willing congregation members started to engage the community by walking through it. The members prayed over the homes and intentionally sought to start conversations with members of the community. Those conversations were encouraged to be listening experiments where the church could come to know who lived in the community, and the community could begin to see a church willing to listen.

#### Post-Visioning Process: Missional Experiments

On the evening of April 9, 2011, which marked the end of the nine-week worship and visioning process, the congregation held a business meeting. The agenda of that meeting was to choose missional experiments that the church could participate in and explore the missional paradigm. Two community barbeques were planned for May and September of 2011, and a community walk in place of the Sabbath service was chosen for

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<sup>5</sup> Erwin McManus, “Work as Worship,” *Right Now Lead Beyond Your Walls Conference: Mission Development Kit for Church Leaders* (Richardson, TX: Right Now Ministries, 2011), DVD.

<sup>6</sup> Because there were other speakers who had previously been asked to come to the New Life Church, these eight messages were preached over three months instead of two.

<sup>7</sup> This term is borrowed from Alan Roxburgh’s book, *Joining God in the Neighborhood*.

June. The church also voted to allow the pastor to begin the process of choosing a missional leadership team through the summer as people experienced the missional experiments and missional leaders began to emerge.

On May 22, 2011 the church relinquished the normal Sabbath worship event for a 20-minute session of praise worship. Church members then left the church for a “Joining God in the Neighborhood Walk” that included most of the congregation. A small group of people stayed behind to pray over the rest of the members as they were walking the neighborhood. This walk was also used to engage the community in conversation about the community barbecue happening on Saturday, May 29. It was during this walk that the initial interaction took place between the pastor and Alex, the young man described in the Introduction. Many church members came away from this event excited, sharing stories of the different conversations they had had with people in the community.

On May 29, 2011 the church held its first community barbecue, which began at 11 a.m. and continued until 3 p.m. The worship teams set up outside in the smaller parking lot adjacent to the barbecues and eating area. Over three hundred community members came out to enjoy the food and music. Some went home and then returned with instruments, wanting to join the band as it played. All were amazed and thrilled with the event. Many conversations took place between members of the church and members of the community. Two questions were repeatedly asked by the community that day: “Why are you doing this?” and “When is the next one?”

The huge success of this missional experiment began to establish within the hearts of most church members that the missional principles presented in the previous three months were in fact the way to begin reaching the community. An extremely interesting

highlight of this day was that it all took place without the pastor of the New Life Church present. He was required to be at a Conference-sponsored event, but the church knew this in advance and chose to move forward with this date, with his encouragement and guidance in missional thinking, but without his presence.

Throughout the summer on numerous Tuesday evenings, some church members began regular community walks to continue the conversations with members of the community. Many ongoing connections were made and the community began to be more comfortable in sharing their needs. A second community barbecue took place in September of 2011, where the same format was followed as the May experiment. Just over three hundred community members attended again. More conversations ensued and this barbecue was established by the church as an annual event from 2011 forward.

It was also in September that another Adventist church, excited about what the New Life Church was doing, chose to gather together about thirty people in order to assist the New Life Church in making major strides towards finishing a large renovation project needed to bring its older building up to city codes. Members of this other church expressed the desire to assist with this so that the church could stay focused on its missional work. A number of other partnership events took place with this church as well.

The New Life Church also began to develop other partnerships with agencies and individuals in the community of Oshawa. The New Life Neighbourhood Centre embraced missional life. During this period, this ministry of the church made significant changes in its annual Christmas food program for the community—these changes reflected a more missional approach. This event traditionally provided needy families with Christmas dinner, a week's worth of food, and gifts for children sixteen and under. In the past, a

large part of this ministry was funded by the church. But by December of 2011, the whole event, costing thousands of dollars, was funded by non-members and community businesses. Almost half of the forty volunteers needed to run this event were non-members as well. Those who gave were encouraged to come and take part in the face-to-face aspect of their giving.

One of the needs arising during the barbecues and community walks was help for youth in the community. As a result, during the fall of 2011, the New Life Church partnered with the Youth Refuge, a ministry to homeless teenagers. This ministry sought to keep the teenage homeless in the area stay warm and fed, and to offer some practical direction to overcoming the struggles in their lives. The New Life Church became the hosting place for their first annual Coldest Night of the Year Walk event and fundraiser. The event was designed to bring awareness to this very pressing need and to raise funds for the continuing ministry of the Youth Refuge to these at-risk teens.

#### Missional Leadership Team Formed

It was also during the fall of 2011 that a missional leadership team was formed. This team began to meet in October 2011, and it concentrated on receiving more training in understanding missional church. One of the team's mandates was to foster the creation of missional communities. They found the majority of the church somewhat resistant to this small group-based system. Previous experiments with small groups before the present pastor's tenure had not ended well, and this made them cautious. It was decided to keep focusing on missional experiments and to let some of the missional communities begin to form without intentional connection to the church at this point. The unexpected

death of the leader of this group seriously hindered its effectiveness through the winter of 2011 and 2012.

### **Leadership and Target Groups**

In the many months before and during this process, a lot of time was spent with the elders' team of the church. As the project occurred, two of the five elders came to truly embrace the missional church paradigm. These two became core members of the missional leadership that continues at the New Life Church. There were also about six members of the congregation who were starting to embrace the missional principles, per the observations of the pastor. However, one of the elders with strong traditional thinking convinced the church board that the board should choose the missional team so that it could make it diverse in terms of culture, gender, and age. The effect of this was that the missional leadership team included members who were not fully committed to embracing missional church. As one might expect, this hampered the efficiency and abilities of this team to truly lead a missional transition.

Despite this obstacle, the process continued. These official leaders, as well as the unofficial leaders noticed by the pastor, were included in the planning and implementation of the different missional experiments. The inclusion of the unofficial leaders was done with the understanding that there are always people of influence in the church who may never hold a church leadership position. These individuals still hold a lot of power in the church and sometimes have more influence than the official leaders. The influence of these unofficial missional leaders was enough to offset those in the missional leadership team who were less passionate about the missional transition. In this

way, the official missional leadership team and the unofficial spiritual leaders both had influence in the continuing transition.

### **Resources**

The greatest resource of this project was the New Life congregation itself. Missional church is about equipping and releasing God's people into the ministry that is their lives, and this group of people was the main resource to accomplish that. The pastor's long-term commitment to them over eight years built a sense of trust in his leadership that extended their influence as a resource. The strength and weakness of God's Church is its people, but his mission is about people and developing them into kingdom ambassadors. His greatest resource for accomplishing his mission, besides himself, is people. So it is with this project. God was the power behind all that was accomplished, and the New Life congregation and pastor were his resources. Their willingness to explore God's leading allowed them to begin interacting with and influencing the community, and each other, in ways not previously experienced.

The somewhat more tangible but also important resources were *The Present Future* DVD seminar and curriculum by Reggie McNeal, and the *Lead Beyond Your Walls* DVD missional training kit produced by Right Now Ministries. There were significant amounts of beef burgers and hot dogs, member-provided barbecues, and many other food items that made this a success. Hundreds of volunteer hours were given in the preparations, in the events, and in the clean-up afterwards as well.

The evaluation resources were originally intended to be personal interviews and online surveys. However, due to the pastor's move to Florida, only the personal

interviews were completed. In addition, and in lieu of the online surveys, observations were also recorded in regards to what missional principles would continue to be evident in the church under new pastoral leadership.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of the project is based upon personal feedback provided during and after the visioning process, as well as interviews with church members in 2013, two years after the launch of the missional transition. It was originally planned for online surveys to be conducted, but these were not included due to Pastor Page's move to Florida in 2012. The first section here presents the observations based upon personal feedback from participants during the nine-week visioning process. The second section presents the assessment gleaned from the personal interviews. These interviews were conducted to assess how strongly the missional principles had been established, embraced, and embodied by members of the New Life Church.

#### **Personal Feedback of Members during the Nine-Week Visioning Process**

The overwhelming feedback from the majority of church members was extremely positive. Certain aspects of the presentations seem to have a larger influence for change than others. Those with the biggest visible impact were Tony Evans's message on the role of the local church, Erwin McManus's message on work as worship, and McNeal's emphases on releasing God's people for ministry, kingdom growth versus church growth, a blessing strategy, and the collapse of Church culture and the rise of generational cultures.

In a very real sense, McNeal's description of releasing God's people for ministry could be tangibly observed. People who had never spoken in the church before were suddenly standing up in the discussion portion, excited about how God was actually using them to bless others. This was in contrast to the guilt they had previously felt because they were not being evangelistic.

Embracing a strategy of blessing others visibly changed Lorna, who had grown up in Adventism and was now a senior citizen.<sup>8</sup> For years, Lorna had grown up in an abusive Christian home, which led her to practice a very guilt-ridden Christianity. She always felt like she was never really touching people's lives evangelistically. This guilt had caused her to be very withdrawn and non-participatory at church. Whenever the pastor preached on a vision of the abundant life God gives when one lives under the power of the gospel of the kingdom, Lorna would often mention how much she hoped life could be that way, but she always hesitated in embracing these powerful truths.

However, during the sessions on God's people being released to bless others, Lorna suddenly saw a picture of what she had thought in her heart was true, but had been too indoctrinated with false, or at least incomplete, understandings of evangelism to believe before this point. During the time of open discussion, she heard others struggling with feelings similar to hers. When Lorna embraced this idea of God using her to bless others, and that God had already been partnering with her in this, she regularly began participating in the discussions and excitedly gave numerous testimonies before the whole church of how God was using her to bless others. It rekindled her journey with

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<sup>8</sup> This story is based upon the author's personal conversations and observations with this individual during February-April 2011. All names referred to in these interviews have been changed for privacy concerns.

God to a place in which even her grown children noticed a change in her demeanor toward them and others.

Melissa shared how years of a burden of guilt had been lifted by different components in the series by McNeal.<sup>9</sup> She lived with her mother and father, caring for them in their senior years. Melissa had felt guilt for years because her father was not a believer, and she seemed to be having no positive influence on him. She also constantly worried that she was having no influence on her neighbors. This was mainly due to her feeling that she needed to be careful not to be influenced by them, so she just avoided them for the most part.

However, many of McNeal's emphases had a cumulative effect of bringing Melissa out of her shell. She has regularly begun to interact with her neighbors with no strings attached. She is simply looking for where God is working and trying to be a blessing as he directs her in their midst. Her relationship with her father has improved considerably. She has released herself from trying to convert him and instead is seeking to enjoy getting to know him and bless him. More than a year after the series, Melissa has said her relationship with her dad is better than it has been in years, and she has experienced a significant decrease in her guilt and stress level.

One other story is indicative of the evidence that missional principles that are being established in the congregation.<sup>10</sup> The non-Adventist but Christian husband, Murray, of a church member, Mary, had been attending the New Life Church for over a

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<sup>9</sup> This story is based upon the author's personal conversations and observations with this individual during February-April 2011, as well as in April 2012.

<sup>10</sup> This story is based upon the author's personal conversations with and observations of this individual from February 2011 through early 2013.

year when this project took place. Murray was very likeable, but had not been allowed to really have much influence or position at the church because he was not yet an Adventist. As the series progressed, Murray gave numerous testimonies of his missional life, as he had been living in a missional way for many years. His passion and excitement for seeing the church start to embrace what he was doing all the time began to ignite excitement in others. Every week he had a story of what God had done through him that week. It became evident to everyone that God was working through Murray as much as anyone else in the church, and this changed their thinking about church growth and kingdom growth. During the two years since the visioning process took place, Murray has been given numerous influential positions in the church, even though he is still not a baptized Adventist. He is also one of the most influential leaders in regards to missional living.

Another overarching observation made during the visioning process itself is that three different groups emerged as a consequence of this project. The goal of this process was to start a transition that would encourage the congregation to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles in their lives and in the church. The first group, the “traditional group,” included those who immediately found this process threatening to their theology, their view of Adventism, or their place of influence in the church. This was the smallest group, but these individuals did present obstacles to the transition, and they continue to do so.

The second group, the “middle group,” was the largest. This group responded very favorably to what was presented and they have been supportive of the different missional experiments. They are still trying to reconcile church as they have always known it with a missional worldview, which makes so much sense when they look at the

reality of life and church today. They are not first adopters, but they have definitely begun to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles. Most will be permanently changed by this process to live more missionally, but some will probably slip back to how things have always been done simply because they find it easier.

The third group, the “missional group,” immediately identified with the missional principles as pertinent to both their personal discipleship and the paradigm for reaching the secular postmodern Canadian culture. They have intentionally begun to change their lives to incorporate missional principles. They are not as small as the first group, but they are not large enough to influence the ongoing transition without growth in this core. This group was very influential in the success of the series and the missional experiments. The ongoing success of the transition will depend heavily on this group influencing both the leadership of the church, as well as the second group of members, toward further steps in missional living as a church.

#### Results of Interviews with Leaders and Members

In August and September of 2013, personal interviews were conducted by the author. About 10 percent of the congregation of the New Life Church participated in these interviews. The content of the interviews suggests that there is still a core of people who are committed to further missional transitions at the New Life Church. In an interview with Murray, he said to Pastor Page, “Whatever you are doing in missional church here in the area, I want to be a part of it.”<sup>11</sup> In interviews with six other church members, similar sentiments were communicated; to Pastor Page, they said, “Let me

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<sup>11</sup> Murray, interview with the author, Oshawa, September 2013.

know if you are starting something missional.”<sup>11</sup> These interviews reveal that missional living still has a strong influence after two years, and yet they also reveal that for some, like Murray and the other members interviewed, the congregation may not be progressing as quickly as they would like.

Other members of the church are committed to the church itself becoming more missional. Kirk and Darlene, two core members, have taken over the New Life Neighborhood Center ministry and are running it with strong missional principles.<sup>12</sup> They are very focused on continuing the church’s transition to missional living, using the center as the main way of offering continued missional experiments. Kirk and Darlene are also very intent on starting a missional community with Pastor Page as a way of fostering missional growth in the area. They have also been very instrumental in helping Pastor Rudy Alvir, who replaced Pastor Page at the New Life Church, in integrating new members into the neighborhood center ministry. Kirk and Darlene have been able to mentor these new converts with biblical principles of missional living right from the start of their church experience.

Two new members, Barb and Jennifer, were also interviewed in September 2013. Regarding the community BBQ, they said, “This is exactly what church is supposed to be about.”<sup>13</sup> They explained that “this” meant the interaction with the community and the desire to address the daily and pressing needs of the community. Their buy-in to

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<sup>11</sup> Six members of the New Life Church, interviews with the author, Oshawa, September 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk and Darlene, interviews with the author, Oshawa, August and September 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Barb and Jennifer, interview with the author, Oshawa, September 2013

missional church should continue to increase the opportunity for the missional transition to continue to gain ground at the New Life Church.

But there is also the traditional group that continues to try and keep the New Life Church as a solely attractional-model type of church. These two groups are continuing to work together, but the transition has lost traction in the church in general. The traditional group is seeking to relegate the missional work only to the neighborhood center, and leave the evangelistic work to evangelists and pastors. The “middle group” discussed above is still seeking to live missionally. However, their friendships with members in both the “missional group” and the “traditional group” leave them passively seeking to make everyone happy. The result is that the transition is stalled, while the church is also doing more missional events. At this point, the New Life Church is not a missional church, but an attractional church with a few missional programs.

The community has responded very favorably to the transition. The neighborhood center offers a monthly food box to those in need as well as a free pancake breakfast for the community. Since the transition began and the church started doing actual missional events in the community, the willingness of the community to talk about its needs has risen exponentially. During the year that followed the visioning process, each new event led to more conversations.

In September of 2013, the missional core of the church led the third annual “Joining God in the Neighborhood” barbecue. Over five hundred community members attended, including members of the city and provincial governments, who were on hand to announce a partnership between the New Life Neighborhood Center and the Trillium

Foundation.<sup>14</sup> Trillium had noticed the work and blessings that this ministry was bringing to the community, and donated \$150,000 to the ministry to completely remodel the entire kitchen and install an elevator in the building to increase access for the disabled in the community. It was the largest donation that this multi-million-dollar organization had ever made to an agency not attached to the larger, well established non-profit organizations in the Greater Toronto Area.

As the church continues to run this ministry under more intentional missional principles, the community has noticed its value and philosophy and is responding very positively. Two years after implementing the series and beginning missional experiments, the community is seeing the church as an agent of change in downtown Oshawa. The community perceives that the church is able to help the community bring healing and restoration to its members and the community itself.

### **Interpretation of the Results**

Out of three of the desired outcomes of the missional transition strategy, two were achieved through this process. First the majority of the congregation began to establish, embrace, and embody missional principles in their lives and the ministries of the church. The pilot project was successful in accomplishing this, as well as creating within the membership a new way of looking at who they are as a church in their postmodern community. Second, the majority of the congregation also came to understand that there

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<sup>14</sup> The Trillium Foundation was an arms-length agency created by the provincial government of Ontario in 1982 in consultation with numerous provincial charities. An economic recession in the 1980s had many of these social agencies struggling to exist and assist the communities of Ontario. The foundation was created to allow the government to assist the social needs of the communities in Ontario through the many social agencies and charities already in existence. Trillium is funded primarily from the funds raised by the Ontario government through provincial lotteries and lottery license revenues. Trillium presently administers an annual fund of over 100 million dollars.

is an Adventist missional theology that allows them to be both Seventh-day Adventists and missional believers. In this respect, the majority of the project was successful.

The one element that was not successful, and contributes to the ongoing stagnation of the transition, involves the failure to establish a lasting missional leadership team and missional communities. The leadership team needed to become the driving force in creating opportunities for exploring missional principles even further. This team also needed to provide more regular missional experiments for the congregation. There are three factors that contributed to the lack of success of this team. The first was the change of leadership in 2012 when Pastor Page moved to Florida. It was hoped that the strong core would be able to influence this team's continuing ministry. The second was the board's decision to allow this team to be elected by consensus rather than appointed by their visible commitment to missional life. The third factor was the work of the "traditional group" in the church to undermine, both openly and privately, the work of this team and the pastor.

The inability to establish missional communities was another component that contributed to the lack of success of the missional transition. Essentially, missional communities were not formed due to a strong aversion in Adventism for people to open up to others in confidence. Historically, the denomination has been very diligent in encouraging its membership to display a proper Adventist lifestyle. The theology of the Adventist Church is not legalistic; however, because most members and leaders alike have emphasized an extremely strong gospel of sin management, the everyday practice of many Adventists focuses on the outer behavior and appearance of the individual, as opposed to the inner transformation of one's character. In other words, most Adventists

practice a legalistic faith out of sync with the actual theology of the Church and Scripture. This has created an atmosphere where people do not feel safe in sharing anything of their lives that would cast doubt on their ability to display that proper picture of what a Seventh-day Adventist should look like. This attitude, of course, is toxic to viable small groups of any type, including missional communities. Without these communities for spiritual growth and training in missional living, the transition is stalled and in danger of being lost altogether.

### **Report on Results**

Sustained success was not achieved with this project. In that sense, it was not completely successful in its entire scope. At the same time, there were numerous successes that give insights for forming missional churches in the Seventh-day Adventist context.

The first of those is the format and content of the *Present Future* and *Lead beyond Your Walls* resources. Both of these were an appropriate level of communication for the congregation to grasp the ideas being presented and enter into a discussion of their ideas in the specific context of the New Life Church. In addition, the overall framework of the strategy was sound and would function well in other contexts.

There were parts of the strategy, however, that needed to be more intentionally explored before being implemented. Leadership was one of those parts. Sustaining the transition needed to have more weight in the strategy, and right leadership was essential to that. In retrospect, the pastor should have been more adamant about how the formation of the missional leadership team took place. This team definitely needs to be appointed

based upon observations of people in the congregation who are demonstrating natural or growing missional traits and characteristics. People passionate about this type of Christian experience must be chosen. Concerns over possible agendas or favoritism being employed may arise and need to be dealt with, but the sustainability of a missional transition makes passionate and committed leadership a necessity.

The need in the church for theology and practice to be “Adventist” is also something that was undervalued in this process. It was undervalued in the sense that the pastor should have taken more opportunities to share the missional principles that are so apparent in early Adventism and especially the writings and lifestyle of Ellen White. This may have been more influential in swaying the traditional members to be more supportive of the transition.

That said, there is also a non-biblical Adventist culture that has arisen, and which defines the daily practice of many Seventh-day Adventists. This is a culture steeped heavily in family and church traditions and holds more authority in members’ lives than the most well developed of theologies. Adventism has developed a certain fascination with being peculiar in contrast with other Christian denominations. For many members, this is worn as a badge of honor. To preserve that peculiarity by preventing the possible influence of other denominations on the theology and practice of Adventism becomes the motivation for how many church members approach change in the church. Anything that is not a part of how Adventists have always done something is then suspect, and should be prevented by this “watchman on the walls” mentality. In the end, a stronger effort in clarifying the missional nature of the roots of Adventism would have helped a few of the traditionalists in the congregation, but not the truly hard-core traditionalists who have

internalized this “watchman” mentality so deeply, for so long, that they will never change.

Another dynamic occurred that only a deep-seated commitment to a true discipleship process would change. This dynamic revolved around the “middle group,” those who loved the concept of missional church and began practicing some of its principles, but have yet to fully commit to the transition. Even though, at the time of this pilot project, Pastor Page had already spent more than seven years as the senior pastor of the congregation, the members knew that at some point he would leave, and they would be left to live with, and go to church with, those who opposed the transition. The power of this realization on the part of this group held more significant influence than the validity of the missional theology itself, and any collateral and trust Pastor Page had built in their lives. Although the missional core had already decided that the pain of change and its consequences far outweighed maintaining the status quo, this group had to be compelled to the same place of decision. All of these factors together are the main reasons why this project achieved the majority of its desired outcomes, but not the long-term sustainability it needed.

### **Conclusion**

The visioning process itself, along with the events that took place before and after the project, was intended to begin a missional transition in the New Life Church. The implementation of the project faced some opposition, but overall it is considered a success, as it did help to begin the church establishing, embracing, and embodying missional principles in their lives and how they live as the Church. Members of different

ages, cultures, and genders began seeing themselves as the Church and their lives as their ministries.

Although not all of the desired outcomes arose from this process, it has begun something that is still guiding many members and their ministries at the New Life Church in 2013. There continues to be a core that is living missionally, predominantly through the New Life Neighborhood Center, who is very intentional and hopeful about a long-term transition. The conclusions for this final project and implications for the missional church paradigm, as well as for the New Life Church and the Adventist denomination as a whole, will be covered in the Summary and Conclusions.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this project was to introduce missional principles into the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church for the purpose of assisting this congregation to begin to establish, embrace, and embody core missional principles into their lives and experience of being the church. This had a twofold desire behind it. The first was to give the congregation a better understanding of its place in God's mission, thereby deepening members' own experiences and relationship with God. The second desire was that out of a missional partnership with God, the church would desire to join God in his mission to the downtown Oshawa neighborhood; in so doing, the church would bless others as the power of Christ and his good news would be lived out in the midst of the community, through the church.

The three most significant facets for the success of this project were the nine-week worship and visioning process, the formation of a missional leadership team, and the formation of missional communities within the church. Although each of these could be successful in its own right, a sustained transition would need all three to be present and functioning well. However, the thesis of this project was to begin establishing, embracing, and embodying missional principles in the congregation for the purpose of, and in the context of, a missional transition. This conclusion will reflect most on whether that beginning was achieved, but it will also consider future needs and developments in the context of sustaining the transition.

The *Present Future* seminars during the visioning process were extremely successful in stimulating a church-wide conversation about evangelism and discipleship

in a postmodern context. In this conversation, the church began to understand many issues in the secular postmodern Canadian society, as well as how ineffective the church has been in sharing the gospel with society in a way that draws people to God and also brings him glory. The majority of church members embraced the idea that with such a predominantly non-Christian worldview outside of the church, the New Life Church needed to re-consider its theology and practices in reaching out to this society, more specifically the downtown Oshawa community in which it is physically situated. As the congregation grasped this fact through the “Collapse of the Church Culture” segment of McNeal’s presentations, the first steps in establishing the need for a missional theology and practice were embraced. Throughout the rest of this nine-week process, this same majority began to embrace many missional principles in their lives, such as restoring God’s mission in the church, living in the power of God’s kingdom, incarnational ministry to others through a strategy of blessing, and focusing on kingdom growth over church growth. About two thirds of this group also started trying to embody these principles to varying degrees. A small core was much more intentional in doing so.

To this extent, the first facet of beginning the transition was successful. Missional principles began to be established, embraced, and embodied by a significant number of the congregation during the series, and the Joining God in the Neighborhood community walks and barbecue that took place. This barbecue has been held at least once each year since the pilot project, with an increased community attendance in 2013 of over five hundred people. It has also created an opportunity for the congregation to partner with local agencies like the Trillium Foundation, Oshawa City Hall, the Durham Police Force,

the local major-junior hockey team, and others to begin having a greater missional influence.

This is led most predominantly by the church's neighborhood center, which is run by three of the most influential leaders in the core group that is so strongly committed to living missionally. This center is the largest and most influential ministry in the church. Its embracing and embodying of missional principles is fostering the ongoing transition, albeit slower than desired due to opposition. McNeal's *Present Future* series was definitely instrumental in the beginnings of missional principles being established, embraced, and embodied. It was more successful than the other two facets: the missional leadership team and missional communities. McNeal's *Present Future* DVD and curriculum would be a very valuable resource in any future attempts at transition in other churches. The leadership team at the New Life Church should also continue to review it each year to keep their understanding of missional church growing.

The missional leadership team was formed and had initial success. The lack of sustainability of this group can probably be directly tied to its being elected by the board instead of appointed by the pastor and informal missional leaders. It was also affected by the death of one of its key members, and then the pastor's move to another church within fourteen months of the pilot project. This component was only partially successful, and its lack of traction has meaningfully affected the sustainability of the transition. In the future, it should be understood from the outset that the pastor, in consultation with other leaders, would choose this team, but that the pastor would have the final say in the matter. This team is essential to missional change. The long-term success of any missional transition will hinge on this component, as it will with the formation of

missional communities in the congregation. It is helpful that there is a strong core still committed to furthering the transition. This is in fact an informal missional leadership team, and this group would have been the team chosen by the pastor. These individuals need to be given the resources to understand their place, and to receive the tools and understanding that is needed to assume the missional leadership mantle.

The inability to form missional communities within the continuing sustainability of this project is the most disappointing part of the entire process. At the same time, because of the Adventist aversion to most efforts to establish small-group types of community, it was expected to be the hardest facet to achieve. But missional change must have these smaller communities that foster growth and training in missional living, in order for the Holy Spirit to achieve the spiritual transformation of believers through the biblical process of discipleship. It is only out of this type of Spirit-led transformation that believers will then become powerful agents of change and ambassadors of the kingdom in their communities.

The cultural aversion in Adventism to small groups and sincere biblical community can only be addressed by two options.<sup>1</sup> The first is probably the least likely to succeed. That method is to begin missional communities within an established congregation, while being prepared to battle against the immense opposition or outright indifference that will be found in most congregations. The more successful plan would be to plant missional churches by planting missional communities. One of the foundational components of such a church plant would have to be a commitment to living life together

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<sup>1</sup> This perspective is based solely on the author's own twenty years of experience in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including fifteen years in ministry within the Church.

through a missional community paradigm. In this way it would be built into the DNA of the church plant. For the majority of Adventist congregations, this would probably offer the only hope of success in creating a missional work in their context. Otherwise, most congregations wind up existing in a traditional attractional model with some missional programs. This would not be a fully missional church.

Before moving on to how this project informs the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large, it is important to summarize that even with some shortcomings in desired results, the intended purpose of assisting the New Life Church in establishing, embracing, and embodying missional principles in the lives and ministries of the church members was achieved. This therefore sets forth different portions of the project as learning opportunities for other congregations that might desire a missional paradigm for their own churches. It also provides the New Life Church with achievements to celebrate and insight into what still needs to occur for the continued success of the transition.

Focusing beyond the local church, there are also learning opportunities for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in general. Some of these insights would also be helpful to any conservative evangelical Christian church trying to help its members adjust to and engage with a postmodern or secular society. The insights that follow are some of the final conclusions from this project.

Prayer is the foundation. This may seem to be common sense as Christians, but too often prayer is a tacked-on method of asking God to bless what one has already decided to do, rather than a searching of him until he shows what it is that he wants to do. A selected prayer team was chosen years before this project actually took place, or even was thought about. The team's sole purpose was to pray for revival and a willingness to

change in the congregation. They met weekly to do this, and it is these prayers that assisted the pastor and other leaders to be listening for God's direction as to the timing of this transition. This level of prayer continued throughout the project and beyond.

Another insight is that transitioning an Adventist church into a missional paradigm is not the ideal for creating a missional church in an Adventist context. There is too much emotional baggage tied to the Adventist culture in most Adventist churches. Most Adventists see engaging the culture as akin to working directly with Satan. The phrase "missional church" is already a phrase that will usually inflame most conservative Adventists to protect the church from "apostasies" like this. Those with this mindset often spiritually immobilize those who do not see it so drastically. The amount of energy that will need to be expended to achieve even the smallest of inroads would be better used on a new church plant. Missional transitions are not the most efficient way of returning Adventism to its clearly missional roots.

Missional church plants will be the most efficient and effective way of creating missional Adventist churches. Burrill has already convincingly shown the Adventist Church that church planting would be the best use of the Church's resources and returning it to its mission-based roots.<sup>2</sup> However, although Burrill's works contains many missional principles, these principles were written before the missional church paradigm was fully developed. Missional church as presented in this project, and the works of the numerous Christian authors referenced here, is the best paradigm to plant new churches that are seeking to reach their postmodern and secular communities. At the same time, in

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<sup>2</sup> See the Russell Burrill books in the bibliography for his work in the area of restoring mission and true discipleship to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

the midst of a missional church planting movement, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that some congregations will not change and do not want to change, and that is alright. Missional principles should be a part of the daily life of every believer, but this does not mean that every church should be a missional church.

In either a missional transition or a missional plant, leaders must be prepared for adversity. Living a missional life will reach secular and postmodern people, probably more than any other evangelistic method. This will be loved by God and hated by Satan. Satan will raise adversity and obstacles to the process, through love-filled Christians, through hate-filled Christians, and even through community members and agencies that feel threatened by change, or by Christ. It is important that the leadership stay together in prayer and mission as this happens. Overcome through Christ, the adverse people or situations confronted will become more places to celebrate God's victories in the process.

As a Canadian with a postmodern worldview, the Christian Church and specifically the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been abysmal in reaching the Canadian population with the gospel. There are times as a postmodern thinker where I myself feel extremely uncomfortable, and even attacked, in a church so predominantly modern in its thinking and practice. Yet, the gospel of the kingdom of God has captured my heart and instilled me with a passion for sharing Christ with the as yet unreached children of God in secular and postmodern Canada. I am convinced that only committed disciples living missional lives will have any significant success in introducing these people to Jesus as the God who wants to fill their lives with power, healing, and hope. The traditional Adventist Church has abdicated this responsibility by focusing too heavily on the organization and its religious trappings, and not enough on its God-given mission.

Yet the amazing message of Adventism, combined with its original way of living missionally, offers eternal hope to the Church and the world. Hunsberger perhaps best summarizes the hope that initiated this project:

The calling of the church to be missional—to be a sent community—leads the church to step beyond the given cultural forms that carry dubious assumptions about what the church is, what its public role should be, and what its voice should sound like. Testing and revising our assumptions and practices against a vision of the reign of God promises the deep renewal of the missional soul of the church that we need. By daily receiving and entering the reign of God, through corporate praying for its coming, longing for its appearance, and in public living under its mantle, this missional character of the church will be nourished and revived.<sup>3</sup>

If the Adventist Church would establish, embrace, and embody this type of missional life, revival and reformation would take place, people and communities would be transformed, the gospel of the kingdom of God would be lived and preached, and Christ would be lifted up in glory. Then we would be ready to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . come and share your master’s happiness” (Mt 25:21).

This is my hope. In fact, through the process of this Doctor of Ministry degree, God has led me to make a major change to my ministry. In August of 2013, I left paid ministry and Florida, and returned to Canada. Missional church has resonated deeply within my own desires for Christian living, and I know it is one of the most important Christian worldviews in a long time that holds the possibility to truly allow the Canadian society to see a truer picture of Christ through his Church. My goal is to re-enter the secular workforce while at the same time starting a missional community in Oshawa, Ontario. I sincerely hope that God will develop this effort into a missional movement within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada and, God willing, beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 109.

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