

## **ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE PUBLISHING MINISTRY**

The local church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole possess a very great potential in evangelism through the circulation of our literature. The following information reveals great opportunities and the means by which the local church can enhance its outreach program through Literature Evangelism.

### **A. INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN LITERATURE EVANGELISM**

#### **1. Divine Counsel**

Ellen G. White counseled that God desires the entire church to become involved in reaching out to all classes of people with the gospel message (see *Review and Herald*, January 17, 1893).

She further said, "*Infidel publications are scattered broadcast throughout the land. Why should not every member of the church be as deeply interested in sending forth publications that will elevate the minds of the people . . . ?*" (*Christian Service*, p. 146).

At the very start of the publishing work, the prophet said that church members were to sell or give away literature (see *Manuscript 126*, 1902). Ellen G. White further said that every Seventh-day Adventist believer is called upon to scatter and broadcast tracts, leaflets, and books containing the message for this time (see *Review and Herald*, November 5, 1914).

*"Churches in every place should feel the deepest interest in the tract and missionary work"* (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 390).

#### **2. Historical Basis**

In the early stage of the church development, literature evangelism was a major function of the local church. It was one of the most effective tools for evangelistic outreach.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the "Tract and Missionary Society" originated at the local church in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, USA, sometime in the early 1860s, after the Seventh-day Adventist Church got a name and was organized.

It was a local church-based organization whose purpose was to plan and coordinate a systematic way of distributing literature for evangelism. Even when the Home and Missionary Department (Personal Ministries Department at present) of the church was later organized, literature distribution by church members took a major part in the church's lay activities, along with home visitation, praying for the sick, community services, and others.

The number of pieces of literature distributed was always a part of the reporting process during the lay activities period of the church service, and a quarterly report was always sent to the conference/mission. Regarding this type of missionary work, Ellen G. White wrote:

*" . . . We believe that kind of labour which first characterized the Tract Society in its work, and in which the large body of our people can and ought to engage, should receive our attention and encouragement"* (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, November 6, 1888, p. 7).

Every Seventh-day Adventist believer is called upon to "*scatter or broadcast tracts and leaflets and books containing the message for this time*" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 27, 1903).

B. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PUBLISHING MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT IN THE -LOCAL CHURCH

1. Publishing Ministries Department

According to the Church Manual, the Publishing Ministries Department is organized to coordinate and promote literature evangelism in the local church under the supervision of the Publishing Ministries Council and the appropriate publishing organization for the territory. It will assist the local church departments in the promotion, sale, and distribution of subscription magazines and other literature. The department is to work with the pastor and departments of the church in planning for systematic ways to involve the church membership in accomplishing these objectives.

*“There are many places in which the voice of the minister cannot be heard, places which can be reached only by our publications,—the books, papers, and tracts filled with the Bible truths that the people need” (Colporteur Ministry, p. 4).*

2. Election of Publishing Ministries Director

The Publishing Ministries Director is elected by the church to provide leadership in literature evangelism activities of the church and in the spiritual nurture of members through literature. His/her duties include the following:

- a. Serving as chairperson of the Publishing Ministries Council and be responsible for implementing the Personal Ministries Council’s decisions.
- b. Recruiting church members to serve as literature evangelists.
- c. Ordering literature supplies, as needed, through the Personal Ministries secretary.
- d. Submitting reports to the conference/mission regarding the Publishing Ministry/Literature Evangelism activities of the church.
- e. Serving as a member of the local church board.

C. APPOINTMENT OF PUBLISHING MINISTRIES COUNCIL

The Church Manual provides the appointment of Publishing Ministries Council in the local church by the Church Board.

1. Membership

Publishing Ministries Department Director - Chairman  
Personal Ministries Leader  
Personal Ministries Secretary  
Adventist Youth Leader  
Communication Leader  
Church Elder(s)  
Church Pastor  
Other Members who can contribute ideas for Literature Evangelism

2. Publishing Ministries Council

The duties of this council may include the following:

- a. Assisting the conference/mission/field, or appropriate publishing organization for the territory, in promoting the Publishing Ministry, recruiting literature workers, and recommending church members who have special gifts to work as literature evangelists.
- b. Arranging with the conference/mission/field Publishing Ministries Department, or appropriate publishing organization for the territory, to conduct literature evangelism awareness seminars in the church and to conduct training seminars for members who have indicated an interest in becoming literature evangelists.
- c. Promoting the purchase and reading of Spirit of Prophecy books for personal spiritual development and nurture.
- d. Assisting departments in the selection and circulation of literature such as missionary books, magazines, and Spirit of Prophecy books.

D. REVIVAL AND EVANGELISM THROUGH LENDING LIBRARIES

1. Church Lending Library

Churches are encouraged to establish a Church Lending Library comprising Spirit of Prophecy (SOP) and other religious books. These books would be used in a lending program, both to church members for spiritual uplift and to neighbors for evangelism.

2. Personal Lending Library

Church members who are financially well-off usually can afford to purchase SOP books and other evangelistic books and magazines to establish their own personal lending library. These books can be shared with their friends who are non-Seventh-day Adventists for witnessing. Every church member is encouraged to own SOP books, at least a set of *The Conflict of the Ages* series.

3. Counsels from the Prophet

In *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 390, Ellen G. White calls for churches to develop an organized plan for literature distribution and to place the Spirit of Prophecy and Testimonies in the library of each family so they may be read thoroughly.

She also instructed the church members to lend their neighbors some smaller books. Then if the neighbors' interest is awakened, they are to take larger books and encourage them to buy copies for themselves (*Review & Herald*, November 6, 1888).

E. DEVELOPMENT OF PLANS FOR FREE LITERATURE CIRCULATION

1. Evangelistic Literature Resource Center or Display Rack

Every local church shall serve as an Evangelistic Literature Resource Center. Unions, conferences and missions will work with local churches to secure these literature materials for the church. Our publishing houses shall cooperate in this program.

- a. Each local church is encouraged to make a display rack in the church where evangelistic literature can be placed. This will be taken care of by the Church Literature Evangelism Council.
- b. Visitors will be encouraged to take or be given copies of the outreach literature.

2. Missionary Books Sponsorship Program (Tell The World)

- a. In this concept of lay involvement, the church members are encouraged to sponsor a certain number of copies of the annual missionary book and other small evangelistic literature.
- b. **“Missionary Book of the Year”** - Each year the General Conference (GC) or division assigns a missionary book of the year to be printed in large quantity and circulated by members through personal sponsorship.

The books, with the church’s address, can then be placed by the church members in hotels, schools, banks, and other offices.

They can also be shared by members with their neighbors, friends, officemates, classmates, and others, all throughout the year and especially during the annual “Literature Evangelism Emphasis Week.”

3. Sponsorship of Magazine Subscription

In this concept of Lay Involvement the publishing house shall offer a discounted “Global Mission Subscription Promotion” for religious and health magazines. Any church member who will subscribe for one full year shall receive one copy of every issue and another copy mailed to his friend or neighbor.

4. Systematic Tract Distribution

- a. Appropriation from our various church organizations shall make possible the development and printing of evangelism tracts in large quantities.
- b. These tracts shall be developed in the context of various beliefs (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others) to avoid religious prejudices. Health evangelism tracts will also be valuable.
- c. Each local church shall identify unentered areas. And church members shall be assigned to each area who will then be responsible for the tract distribution. These tracts can facilitate easy access to home visitation.
- d. Voice of Prophecy (VOP), religious, or health enrollment drive can also be easily facilitated through this visitation process by carrying VOP Lesson 1.

5. Dedicating a Pocket to the Lord

This can be done by every church member. This concept encourages every Seventh-day Adventist member to carry tracts or literature in his or her pocket every time they travel or to every place they go (market, work, and others) and share the gospel through this literature.

F. SUPPORTING THE LITERATURE MINISTRY PROGRAM

Other important areas whereby the church can help God's work through Literature Evangelism are the following:

1. Recommending Names for the Literature Ministry

The Church Board can help in encouraging members who have the spiritual gift of communication to join the Literature Ministry and recommend them to the conference or mission Publishing Ministries Department.

2. Giving Moral Support to Literature Evangelists in the Church

This is a very valuable assistance that local churches can give to boost the morale of literature evangelists (LEs) in their churches. The LEs are self-supporting workers of the church, relying fully by faith upon God for their livelihood. They need constant encouragement and moral support from our members.

3. Holding and Sponsoring LE Fellowship Meetings

Once a quarter the LE group holds weekend fellowship meetings in local churches. A local church can sponsor at least one LE weekend fellowship meeting a year. Many local churches are already doing this gesture of support toward the Literature Ministry and our literature evangelists. With these meetings the church members are also blessed and revived.

4. Regular Prayers for LEs and Their Ministry

The prayers of our church members for the literature evangelists and the Literature Ministry are always a great source of power and success in conducting God's work.

G. ENGAGING IN LITERATURE EVANGELISM THROUGH SELLING

Our church members can participate in evangelism through the circulation of our Seventh-day Adventist literature through selling or subscription. The church provides a program whereby members can be literature evangelists in different categories.

1. Special Literature Evangelists

- a. "Big Week" Literature Evangelists - Church workers and members who engage in canvassing during the "Big Week" in conjunction with the annual "Literature Evangelism Emphasis Week" designated by the division.

- b. Holiday Literature Evangelists - Members who do canvassing during holidays.
- c. Organized Children Literature Evangelists - Small children in the church can be organized into witnessing teams as follows:
  - i. Pathfinders can be trained to do literature selling for outreach and to earn “AY Honors.”
  - ii. School children can be organized and trained to do literature selling for outreach and to finance church projects as well.
- d. Participation in “Magazine Campaign” - Each year the union assigns a “Magazine Campaign” month when members can participate in selling Seventh-day Adventist magazines, like *Signs of the Times*, health magazines, and others.
- e. Participation in Annual SOP Campaigns - Once a year the division or union designates one week or one month when the church members are encouraged to go out and sell SOP books to their non-Seventh-day Adventist friends and neighbors. Examples of these books are:
  - i. Alpha & Omega Set (*The Conflict Set Series*)
  - ii. Family Growth Series Set (Abridged edition of the books *Adventist Home*, *Child Guidance*, *Education*, *Ministry of Healing*, and *Christ’s Object Lessons*)

## 2. Global Mission Literature Evangelists

In coordination with the union and the local conference/mission, large churches can send and support LE missionary teams to unentered territories.

- a. LE missionary teams are sent to unentered territories for a specified period of time until interests are developed.
- b. This program may be financed through global mission funds. Financial subsidies may also be arranged between the union, local conference or mission and the local church sponsoring the global mission LE team.

## 3. Student Literature Evangelists

- a. Local church students studying in non-Seventh-day Adventist schools can be organized to do part-time canvassing. Literature Evangelism can also be a part of the AMICUS’ activities.
- b. Students in every Seventh-day Adventist school are encouraged to join the canvassing work during their school vacations. The Student LE Program in our Seventh-day Adventist schools provides three-fold blessings for the church.
  - i. It helps the student financially to obtain a Christian education
  - ii. It provides the school good financial revenues paid by the Publishing Houses and ABCs in cash remittances in behalf of the Student LEs.
  - iii. The Literature Ministry work provides the students an excellent vision, training, and

experience for personal evangelism.

- c. Many of our Seventh-day Adventist schools (universities, colleges, and academies) have organized the Student LE Club or Student Association of Literature Evangelists (SALE) inside their campuses to coordinate this Student LE Program.
- d. Encourage out-of-school youth in the church to join any student literature evangelism program with the aim of earning money toward attending our Seventh-day Adventist schools.

4. Regular Part-time Literature Evangelists

- a. Church members are encouraged to engage in part-time Literature Evangelism under the coordination of the Church Literature Ministry Leader (Coordinator) and the Literature Ministry Council. The church needs more part-time literature evangelists.
- b. The Publishing Ministries Departments of the union and the local conference or mission shall be in charge of providing the necessary training to these church members who are working as part-time LEs.
- c. Part-time LEs can form themselves into teams. Each “team” shall be composed of at least two members. A definite territory shall be assigned to each team for better territorial coordination and coverage.
- d. While having a house-to-house visit, the following outreach or witnessing activities can be accomplished by the teams:
  - i. Sell small religious books, health books, and magazines
  - ii. Give free tracts or literature
  - iii. Enrollment to the Voice of Prophecy
  - iv. Invite people to attend church services
  - v. Offer prayers for the people
  - vi. Develop interest for Bible studies
- e. The church publishing director shall coordinate with the local conference/mission Publishing Department, ABC/HHES office, and the Personal Ministries Department for literature supplies.

5. Full-Time (Career) Literature Evangelists

The church has its doors open to welcome any member who will devote his or her life, time, and talents to full-time Literature Evangelism. The local Church Board is encouraged to recommend names to the local conference or mission publishing committee, who are fit for the literature ministry.

Full-time literature evangelists are self-supporting workers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who derive their income from commission through the sale of literature and products approved by the denomination.

They are given some benefits by the church if they meet the requirements stipulated in denominational policies—such as medical assistance, educational subsidies, retirement benefits, etc. In some divisions or countries they receive the same benefits and allowances with that of the pastors.

6. God's Call for Literature Evangelists

In 1900, Ellen G. White testified that from the light given her, God is calling for more workers. She said that where there is one literature evangelist in the field, there should be one hundred (see *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 315).

- a. A Call for a Literature Evangelist from Every Church – *“God calls for workers from every church among us to enter His service as canvasser evangelists [literature evangelists]. God loves His church. If the members will do His will, if they will strive to impart the light to those in darkness, He will greatly bless their efforts”* (*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 20).
- b. Call for Men and Women – *“Jesus is calling for many missionaries, for men and women who will consecrate themselves to God, willing to spend and be spent in His service”* (*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 18).
- c. Call for the Youth – *“The Lord calls upon our youth to labor as canvassers [literature evangelists] and evangelists, to do house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth”* (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 16, 1912).
- d. Who can Be a Literature Evangelist? – *“Both the youth and those older in years will be called from the field, from the vineyard, and from the workshop, and sent forth by the Master to give His message. Many of these have had little opportunity for education; but Christ sees in them qualifications that will enable them to fulfill His purpose. If they put their hearts into the work, and continue to be learners, He will fit them to labor for Him”* (*Education*, pp. 269-270).