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ONTARIO CONFERENCE



MISSIONAL
— SMALL GROUP —
MINISTRY

Ontario Highlights

Special Edition

PM40015192

Return undeliverables to: OCSDA 1110 King Street East, Oshawa L1H 1H8

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EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT:

Small Groups for Mission and Discipleship

What happens when ordinary people come together in small, intentional groups to pray, grow, care, serve, and share Christ? When these groups are led by the Holy Spirit and follow God's vision for His church, extraordinary things can happen. Missional small groups can help members grow spiritually, strengthen the church, and advance God's kingdom, especially across the Ontario Conference.

The concept of small groups is not new. Scripture offers compelling examples of God working through smaller communities to accomplish His purposes. Jethro counselled Moses to organise the people of Israel into groups, appointing leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exodus 18:17–27). This structure distributed leadership and provided opportunities for guidance, care, and shared responsibility.

The Passover was celebrated within families and households (Exodus 12:3–4), showing how faith was intentionally nurtured within the context of community and family. Joshua expressed this same commitment when he declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Perhaps the clearest biblical model is found in Jesus' own ministry. He invested deeply in twelve disciples—ordinary people who learned by walking with Him, witnessing His ministry, and experiencing His transforming power. Though they were described as “uneducated and untrained

men” (Acts 4:13), they became courageous witnesses for Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they boldly proclaimed the gospel and participated in the rapid growth of the early Christian church (Acts 2).

The lesson is clear: God can accomplish extraordinary things through ordinary people who are formed by Christ, united in purpose, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. A small group may appear insignificant, but when its members pray, grow, care, serve, and reach others together, God can multiply their influence.

In keeping with the Ontario Conference's growth direction towards discipleship and disciple-making, this special edition of Ontario Highlights offers a practical resource for pastors, elders, ministry leaders, parents, and members. It explores the biblical principles of missional small groups and provides practical guidance for applying them effectively in today's ministry context.



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ONE VOICE 27
MISSION FOR ALL

ALL
THINGS
NEW

As you read these pages, you will discover why missional small groups matter and explore their biblical foundations. You will also learn how prayer connects with mission, what we can learn from the Early Church model, and how the Adventist pioneers understood small-group ministry. Practical guidance is provided for starting and developing small groups, resolving conflict, and creating environments that foster intentional, lasting discipleship.

Most importantly, there is room for everyone. A missional small group should be a place where people belong, build meaningful relationships, grow spiritually, and discover opportunities to serve. Whether young or old, a longtime member or a new believer, everyone should have a place in God's mission.

This vision is particularly relevant as churches across Ontario engage in OneVoice27 and All Things New through in-person and digital ministries. Missional small groups can become natural settings for praying like Jesus, serving like Jesus, sharing Jesus, and following Jesus. They can help transform mission from something the church organises into something ordinary members live out day by day.

A small flame may seem insignificant, but when it is shared, it can light many candles and illuminate an entire room. In the same way, six, eight, or twelve people may seem small compared with a congregation, but when they pray together, grow together, care for one another, and intentionally reach others, God can use them to make a much greater impact.

It happened when Jesus invested in twelve. It happened when believers gathered in homes during the Early Church. And it can happen again as churches across Ontario embrace missional small groups.

May the Holy Spirit ignite that flame in our churches, empower ordinary members for extraordinary mission, and use missional small groups to spark discipleship, evangelism, and transformation across Ontario—all for the glory of God.



■ **Pastor Edwin Martin**
Editor



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Why Missional Small Groups Matter Today

The Christian church has always thrived when it has remained faithful to the mission and method of Jesus. Before His ascension, Christ entrusted His followers with the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19-20). Notice that Jesus did not simply command His disciples to gain converts. He called them to make disciples, helping people grow into mature followers who would, in turn, disciple others. This divine mandate has never changed. It remains the heart of God’s mission and the central calling of His church today.



The early Christian church understood this clearly. The apostles not only proclaimed the gospel but also intentionally invested in people. Acts 14:21-22 tells us that Paul and Barnabas “preached the gospel... and made many disciples,” and then returned to strengthen and encourage those disciples in their faith. Evangelism and discipleship were inseparable. Growth was measured not merely by attendance, but by transformed lives and multiplying believers.

Today, the church faces a familiar challenge. We live in a world marked by loneliness, spiritual confusion, and increasing disconnection. While large worship gatherings remain essential, they alone cannot provide the relational environment necessary for deep discipleship. The church must be intentional in recovering the model that Jesus established and the apostles practised. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously observed, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.” If discipleship is the heart of Christianity, then we must ask: What is the most effective way to cultivate disciples who make disciples?

One compelling answer is found in missional small groups. At a recent Regional

Prayer Breakfast, former NHL player and Stanley Cup champion Ryan Walter shared a powerful insight from his professional hockey career. Having played more than 1,000 NHL games and won the Stanley Cup with the Montreal Canadiens in 1986, Walter reflected on the one skill that players practised repeatedly: how to properly position and control the puck with the blade of the stick. It seemed simple, even ordinary, yet he attributed much of their success — and their ability to win the Stanley Cup—to that “One Thing”: mastering that one fundamental principle.

The church would do well to learn from that illustration. Throughout church history, when God’s people have focused on the fundamentals of disciple-making and spiritual growth through missional small groups, the mission has flourished. Missional small groups may seem simple, but they are among the most powerful tools God has given for nurturing believers and expanding His kingdom.

Christian Schwarz, in *Natural Church Development*, makes a striking observation: “If we were to identify any one principle as the ‘most important,’ then without a doubt it



Written by:
Pastor Jakov Bibulović
 President, Ontario Conference



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would be the multiplication of small groups.”
(Natural Church Development, A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches, p.34.)

His statement reflects a reality discovered repeatedly in healthy and growing churches around the world. While methods and programs may change, relationships remain the primary environment in which disciples are formed, faith is strengthened, and mission is multiplied.

Interestingly, Schwarz also offers one of the simplest definitions of a small group. When

asked what a small group is, he responded, “A small group is a group that is small. (The 3 Colors of Community, p.8.)

While humorous, the simplicity reminds us that small groups are not about complicated structures but about creating spaces where people can know one another, grow together, and participate in God’s mission.

Jeffrey Arnold expands this concept by defining a small group as “a group intent on participating with Christ in building His

ever-expanding Kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and through believers, into the world.” *(The Big Book on Small Groups, Jeffrey Arnold, p. 32)*

This definition moves beyond fellowship alone. A true missional small group exists not only for its members but also for the people God is seeking to reach through them.

The biblical foundation for this ministry is both broad and deep. Throughout Scripture, God works through communities of faith. From Moses and the elders of Israel



“A true missional small group exists not only for its members but also for the people God is seeking to reach through them.”

“Missional small groups may seem simple, but they are among the most powerful tools God has given for nurturing believers and expanding His kingdom.”

to the prophets, from Jesus and the twelve disciples to the house churches of the New Testament, we see a consistent pattern of believers gathering in smaller communities for encouragement, accountability, worship, prayer, and mission. The church was never intended to be merely an audience gathered around a platform. It was designed to be a family on mission together.

The Seventh-day Adventist movement also grew upon this foundation. Ellen G. White strongly encouraged the formation of what she called “small companies.” She wrote: “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.” She continued by encouraging believers to remain united, “pressing together in love and unity,” and strengthening one another through mutual support (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, pp. 21-22). These inspired words remain as relevant today as when they were first written.

In Ontario and across North America, churches are rediscovering the transformative influence of missional small groups. These groups create environments where prayer becomes personal, biblical truth becomes practical, friendships become authentic, and mission becomes natural. They offer a place where new believers can be nurtured, long-time members can be revitalised, and seekers can experience Christian community before ever entering a church building.

The need is urgent. The opportunity is great. The method is proven. Missional small groups matter today because they remain one of God’s most effective ways to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission, strengthen believers, and extend His kingdom into homes, neighbourhoods, and communities.

Perhaps the question is no longer whether missional small groups work. The question is whether God is calling you to join one, support one, or begin one.

“Missional small groups matter today because they remain one of God’s most effective ways to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission.”

BE PART OF SOMETHING

Bigger
THAN YOURSELF

MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS

GATHER. GROW. GO.



“
We don’t
just do church,
we are the church
on mission.

— MATTHEW 28:19-20

YOU’RE INVITED!

Find real community.
Grow in your faith.
Make a difference
where you live,
work, and study.

TOGETHER,
WE CAN CHANGE
OUR WORLD—
ONE LIFE AT A TIME.



GATHER

Build authentic
relationships and
encourage one
another.



GROW

Deepen our faith
through God’s Word,
prayer, and
meaningful
conversations.



GO

Live on mission by
loving others and
sharing the hope
of Jesus in our
everyday lives.



MAKE AN IMPACT

Together we bring
God’s love to our
community and
beyond.

JOIN A MISSIONAL SMALL GROUP
Today!



GET CONNECTED.
FIND COMMUNITY.
LIVE ON MISSION.
WE CAN’T DO LIFE OR
MISSION ALONE.



A Biblical Theology of Missional Community

A biblical theology of a missional community begins with the understanding that God is a missionary God whose purpose is to redeem and restore all creation. Throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, God's mission is revealed as the reconciliation of humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ. The church is therefore not merely a gathering of believers, but a community called and sent to participate in God's redemptive mission. Missional community is rooted in God's character, shaped by the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and directed towards the transformation of individuals and societies.

The foundation of missional community is established in the creation narrative. God created humanity in His image and commissioned them to exercise stewardship over creation and reflect His glory throughout the earth (Genesis 1:26–28). Although sin disrupted humanity's relationship with God, His mission of restoration continued. God's covenant with Abraham demonstrates His redemptive purpose. He promised to bless Abraham so that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1–3, NIV). This covenant reveals that God's blessings were intended to extend beyond Israel to all nations. Israel was chosen to serve as a light to the nations by reflecting God's holiness and justice (Isaiah 49:6).

The mission of God reaches its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly revealed the character of God through His teaching, miracles, compassion, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. Everywhere He went, Jesus endeavoured to build

and restore relationships. His ministry proclaimed the arrival of God's kingdom while demonstrating God's concern for the poor, marginalised, and spiritually lost (Luke 4:18–19). Following His resurrection, Jesus entrusted His disciples with the Great Commission, commanding them to make disciples of all nations by baptising and teaching them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:18–20). This commission establishes the church as a missionary people whose identity is defined by both worship and witness.

The book of Acts presents the earliest model of missional community. The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread while demonstrating remarkable generosity and unity (Acts 2:42–47). Their communal life became a powerful testimony that attracted others to faith in Christ. As persecution scattered believers beyond Jerusalem, they proclaimed the gospel wherever they travelled (Acts 8:1–4).

“The church exists because of God's mission and for God's mission.”



Written by:
Pastor Reynold Hazelwood
 Superintendent of Schools, Ontario Conference



“The church is not merely a gathering of believers, but a community called and sent to participate in God’s redemptive mission.”

This pattern illustrates that the church exists both as a gathered community for worship and as a scattered community for mission.

The Apostle Paul further develops this theology by describing the church as the body of Christ. Every believer receives spiritual gifts intended for the benefit of the entire community (1 Corinthians 12:4–27). Rather than relying solely on church leaders, each member actively participates in ministry. Likewise, Paul explains that pastors and other leaders are called to equip believers for works of service so that the body grows towards spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11–16). Consequently, mission is understood as the shared responsibility of the whole church.

Biblical missional communities are also distinguished by hospitality, sacrificial love, and intentional discipleship. Paul exhorts believers to practise sincere love, generosity, and reconciliation while overcoming evil with good

(Romans 12:9–21). Similarly, Christians are encouraged to show hospitality to strangers because such actions reflect God’s welcoming grace (Hebrews 13:2). Jesus modelled relational discipleship by investing deeply in a small community of followers, teaching them through both instruction and shared life experiences. Contemporary missional communities continue this biblical pattern by cultivating authentic relationships that nurture spiritual growth while engaging neighbourhoods, workplaces, and communities with the gospel.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for a missional community. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered believers to proclaim the gospel across cultural and linguistic barriers (Acts 2:1–13). Throughout the book of Acts, the Spirit directs missionary activity, equips believers with spiritual gifts, and strengthens the church during persecution (Acts 13:2–4). Therefore, the effectiveness of missional

communities depends not primarily on human planning but on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the biblical vision of missional community points towards God’s ultimate redemptive purpose. John’s vision describes a redeemed multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshipping before God’s throne (Revelation 7:9–10, NIV, 2011). This eschatological picture reveals the fulfilment of God’s mission and serves as the church’s enduring hope. Every local congregation and missional community participates in this unfolding story by proclaiming the gospel and demonstrating God’s kingdom until Christ returns.

In conclusion, a biblical theology of missional community recognises that the church exists because of God’s mission and for God’s mission. From the creation mandate and the Abrahamic covenant to the ministry of Christ, the witness of the early church, and the vision of Revelation,

“The church exists both as a gathered community for worship and as a scattered community for mission.”

Scripture consistently portrays God's people as a community sent into the world. Missional communities are characterised by worship, discipleship, fellowship, hospitality, service, and evangelism, all empowered by the Holy Spirit. As believers faithfully embody the gospel together, they become visible witnesses of God's kingdom and instruments through which His redemptive purposes are revealed to the nations.

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Back to the Altar

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PRAYER AND MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS:

A Call to Spirit-Filled Discipleship

Prayer is not merely one activity among many in the life of the church; it is the spiritual breath of every true disciple and every mission-focused community. Rooted in the biblical revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prayer draws believers into communion with God and sends them into the world as witnesses (Matt. 28:18-20). Since Seventh-day Adventists accept Scripture as the supreme revelation of God's will, prayer must be shaped by the Word, sustained by faith in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and directed toward God's mission.

The Bible presents prayer and mission as inseparable. Before Jesus chose the Twelve, He spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). Before the early church moved outward in witness, believers gathered in united prayer (Acts 1:12-14). At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on a praying community, resulting in proclamation, fellowship, service, generosity, and growth (Acts 2). This pattern speaks directly to missional small groups today. A small group is not simply a social circle, a study class, or a church program. At its best, it is a praying body of believers who open the Word, care for one another, intercede for the church and community, and seek practical ways to reveal Christ.



Scripture provides a strong foundation for this ministry. God calls a people from every nation to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, worship together, serve one another, and proclaim the everlasting gospel (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 10:24-25; Rev. 14:6-7). The Adventist belief in the remnant and its mission (Rev. 12:17) reminds the church that it exists not for itself but for the world—to proclaim the three angels' messages and prepare people for Christ's soon return. The doctrine of spiritual gifts affirms that every believer receives gifts for service (Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11-13). Therefore, missional small groups should not depend on one gifted leader but should equip every member to become a disciple by finding a place in prayer, hospitality, Bible study, compassion, testimony, and outreach.

Ellen G. White's counsels deepen this vision. In *Steps to Christ*, she describes prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend,” emphasising that prayer does not bring God down to us but lifts us up to Him. This counsel is vital because mission cannot be sustained by human enthusiasm alone. Programs may attract attention, but only communion with God produces spiritual life, humility, courage, and love. A missional



Written by:

Edith Missah-Habaradas

Director, Health and Prayer Ministries



small group that prays sincerely learns to depend on God, confess weakness, seek wisdom, and carry others' needs before the throne of grace.

Prayer must also lead to loving action. A group may begin by praying for neighbours, family members, former members, young people, community leaders, and those facing sickness, grief, loneliness, or spiritual confusion. Yet prayer should move the group to visit, encourage, feed, teach, invite, listen, and serve. Intercession becomes missional when it asks, "Lord, whom are You sending us to love and care for this week?"

A healthy missional small group may follow four simple rhythms. First, it gathers around Scripture, allowing the Bible to correct, comfort, and guide (2 Tim. 3:16). Second, it spends meaningful time in prayer through praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and surrender (Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Matt. 6:5-13). Third, it practices fellowship, creating a safe environment in which members are known, supported, and held accountable (Acts 2:42-45). Fourth, it engages in mission through intentional acts of witness and service (Acts 1:8; Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12). These rhythms reflect biblical

discipleship and the conviction that faith is both personal and public, devotional and practical, present-focused and hope-filled.

Prayer also protects small groups from common dangers. Without prayer, groups may become discussion clubs, personality-driven circles, or routine meetings with little spiritual power. Prayer keeps Christ at the centre. It reminds leaders that they are shepherds, not owners; facilitators, not performers. It helps members speak with grace, forgive quickly, bear one another's burdens patiently, and welcome newcomers warmly. Prayer opens hearts to the Holy Spirit, who brings conviction, unity, discernment, and boldness (John 16:8; Eph. 4:3; 1 Cor. 2:14; Acts 4:31). These qualities are essential because the everlasting gospel must be shared not only with sound doctrine but with Christlike character.

Missional small groups are especially important in a fragmented world. Many people are isolated, overburdened, skeptical of institutions, and hungry for authentic relationships. A praying small group can become a living witness to the gospel: a place where truth is studied, burdens are shared, meals are offered, tears are





respected, and hope is renewed. When Adventists open their homes, churches, and hearts in this way, doctrine becomes visible. The Sabbath is experienced as rest, relationship, and fellowship; stewardship becomes faithful generosity; healthful living becomes compassionate care; the second coming becomes a living hope; and God's love becomes tangible through His people.

Therefore, prayer and missional small groups belong together. Prayer connects the group to God; mission connects it to the world God loves. Prayer without mission can become private comfort without outward compassion. Mission without prayer can become activity without spiritual power. But when prayer and mission unite, small groups become centres of revival,

transformation, discipleship, and service. They help the church live out its biblical calling: to know Christ, grow in Christ, and make Him known until He comes.





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PRAYER
MINISTRIES

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LET'S **PAUSE** & **PRAY**™

DAILY @ 12:00 PM



PRAYING FOR:

THE HOLY SPIRIT TO TRANSFORM AND RENEW THE MIND & HEART,
AND TO BRING SOULS TO JESUS CHRIST.

PRAYER.ADVENTISTONTARIO.ORG

MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS IN FAMILY AND MEN'S MINISTRIES

Building Disciples, Strengthening Homes, Transforming Communities

The early church grew with remarkable power, but not because of massive gatherings or impressive buildings. Its strength came from believers who met in homes, ordinary spaces transformed into centres of spiritual growth, fellowship, prayer, and mission. Acts 2:42–47 paints a vivid picture: the disciples devoted themselves to teaching, shared meals, prayed together, cared for one another, and reached their neighbours. As they gathered publicly and privately, “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

This New Testament pattern remains God's strategy for His church today. Healthy disciples build healthy families. Healthy families and spiritually mature men strengthen healthy churches. Healthy churches transform communities. Missional small groups are not simply another ministry option; they are pathways for disciple making and mission.

A Ministry Context Ready for Growth

Across the Ontario Conference, Family Ministries and Men's Ministries have long invested in strengthening homes and nurturing spiritual growth. Retreats, leadership certification, marriage

enrichment weekends, family camps, men's breakfasts, and community outreach have blessed thousands. These ministries have created meaningful experiences and equipped leaders for service.

Yet disciple making requires more than occasional events. It flourishes best in consistent, intentional relationships where believers grow together in Christ and participate together in His mission. Our Conference's most recent Natural Church Development (NCD) profile highlights this reality. Loving Relationships, Holistic Small Groups, and Empowering Leadership remain among our greatest growth opportunities.

“As families open their homes, pray with others, serve their communities, and build Christ-centred relationships, they become powerful witnesses for the gospel.”



Written by:
Pastor Allan Chichester
 Director, Family and Men's Ministries



At the same time, families and men across Ontario face increasing pressures, loneliness, marital stress, parenting challenges, financial strain, mental health concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and the relentless pace of daily life. People are longing for more than another program. They are searching for an authentic Christian community where they are known, nurtured, equipped, and empowered. Missional small groups provide that environment and invite us to create spaces where discipleship can flourish and where people can grow together in Christ.

What Missional Small Groups Look Like

A missional small group may consist of several families, a circle of men, or an intergenerational mix of believers. These groups meet regularly to grow spiritually, care for one another, serve their communities, and intentionally build relationships with people who do not yet know Christ. They naturally reflect the Ontario Conference's Four Foundational Blocks of disciple making:

- Spiritual: Growing through Scripture, prayer, worship, and accountability
- Service: Demonstrating Christ's love by meeting practical needs.
- Share: Building relationships and introducing others to Jesus.
- Servant: Equipping every disciple to become a servant leader who multiplies new groups.

“Missional small groups can become those welcoming communities where friendships form, faith grows, lives are restored, and disciples are made.”



This pattern mirrors Jesus' ministry. He invested deeply in a small group before sending His disciples into the world. Likewise, Acts 2 shows believers gathering publicly while also meeting house to house. These homebased communities became the foundation for discipleship, pastoral care, leadership development, and evangelistic growth.

Ellen G. White affirmed this model:

"The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err."
(*Evangelism*, p. 115)

Equipping Leaders for the Mission

Recognising this need, the Family and Men's Ministries department has intentionally prepared leaders for small group ministry. At the 2025 North American Division Men's Ministries Leadership Certification Retreat at Camp Frenda, leaders completed Module 8: Men of God in Groups, focusing on support and accountability. Family Ministries leaders also received certification training at the 2025 Family Ministries Leaders Retreat, held at Deerhurst Resort, through the NAD Building Homes of Hope and Wholeness curriculum. These initiatives are equipping leaders to prepare families to become

centres of spiritual nurture and mission.

Today, the Ontario Conference's The Great Belong initiative provides another opportunity to strengthen this movement. Loneliness has become one of the greatest challenges facing individuals, families, and communities. The Great Belong encourages every church to create places where people experience genuine belonging in Christ and authentic relationships with one another. Missional small groups can become those welcoming communities where friendships form, faith grows, lives are restored, and disciples are made.

"Missional small groups are not simply another ministry option; they are pathways for disciple-making and mission."

This vision aligns with the General Conference Family Ministries Department's Mission to the Cities – Families in the City initiative, which calls families to become missionaries in their own neighbourhoods. As families open their homes, pray with others, serve their communities, and build Christ-centred relationships, they become powerful witnesses for the gospel. In a postmodern, post-truth era, evangelism thrives where people first experience belonging.

A Pathway Every Church Can Begin

Every local church can begin this journey. Start with prayer. Apply for The Great Belong subsidy or contact me for additional missional small group study resources. Gather a few committed families or men. Meet consistently for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, accountability, service, and outreach.

As we prepare for the Ontario Conference Missional Small Group Campaign and OneVoice27, imagine every church filled with thriving missional small groups. Imagine fathers and mothers discipling their children, husbands praying with their wives, families and men "connecting like Jesus," men encouraging one another in faith, and ambassadors declaring, "I will go."



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FAMILY
MINISTRIES



Be Loving

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

JOHN 13:34

<https://family.adventist.org/> • <https://adventistontario.org/ministries/family/>

Room at Our Table

Imagine for a moment that you are back in your school cafeteria.

You are carrying your lunch tray, scanning the room, searching for somewhere to sit.

Every table seems full. Every conversation feels closed. You wonder if you should keep walking, pretend you are looking for someone else, or disappear into the nearest corner. The awkwardness grows heavier with every step.

Then, just as you are certain you would rather have the earth swallow you whole than stand there for one more second, you see it.

A hand rises above the crowd.

A smile.

A voice calling your name.

“Over here. There’s room at our table.”

And in an instant, everything changes.

Relief replaces anxiety.

You have a place.

You belong.

You are seen.





Written by:

Patricia Ferreira Lopez
Director, Women's and
Children's Ministries



Perhaps one of the deepest human longings is simply to know there is a place for us—a chair waiting, people who notice when we are absent and celebrate when we arrive.

Maybe that is why Scripture is filled with tables, homes, shared meals, and circles of belonging. Lydia opened her home in Philippi, and the early believers gathered from house to house, sharing meals, praying together, caring for one another, and serving their communities (Acts 2:42–47).

Their faith was deeply relational and unmistakably missional.

Missional small groups are, at their heart, the church raising a hand and saying, “Over here. There’s room at our table.”

Women's and Children's Ministries are uniquely positioned to continue this biblical pattern in Ontario today.

Jesus Himself modelled it. While He preached to crowds, transformation most often happened in smaller spaces, around tables, along roads, and in conversations

where people were known by name. He invested deeply in a small group of disciples, teaching them not only what to believe but how to live, serve, and share their faith with others.

In many ways, Women's and Children's Ministries across the Ontario Conference have already been living this reality.

In 2025, more than eighty churches participated in The Forgiveness Feast, gathering women in homes, churches, and small groups to explore the biblical call to forgiveness. What emerged was more than a series of studies. Relationships deepened. Healing began. Prayer became more intentional. Community formed.

This year, through The Great Belong, Women's and Children's Ministries are continuing that journey by addressing one of the defining challenges of our time: loneliness.

Across Ontario, there are seniors living in isolation, newcomers searching for connection, single mothers carrying overwhelming responsibilities, caregivers experiencing exhaustion, tween girls

navigating identity, and children quietly wondering if anyone notices them.

Many are asking the same question:

“Is there a place for me?”

Missional small groups may be one of the church's most powerful responses to that question.

When people gather intentionally to pray together, study Scripture together, serve together, and care for one another, belonging begins to replace isolation. Hospitality becomes ministry. Friendship becomes discipleship. Community becomes mission.

Children's Ministries offers equally exciting opportunities for this kind of missional community.

Vacation Bible School gathers children, youth volunteers, parents, and church members into smaller communities that learn, worship, serve, and grow together over the course of a week. Children's Sabbath initiatives bring together intergenerational teams who pray, create,



mentor, serve, and lead alongside one another.

These experiences can become more than annual events. They can become entry points into ongoing relationships and discipleship communities that continue long after the decorations come down and the closing program ends.

Missional small groups are not simply another ministry initiative; they are a way of rediscovering how Jesus built His church—through nurtured relationships, belonging, service, and shared mission.

As the Ontario Conference launches this movement, perhaps the invitation is simpler than we imagine.

Create a seat at your table.

Raise your hand.

Notice who is standing alone.

Open your home.

Share a meal.

Pray together.

Make room for one more.

Because sometimes the Kingdom grows one chair at a time.

And perhaps it all begins with someone willing to say:

“Over here.

There’s room at our table.”



Tackling **loneliness** in your church and community?

Join **THE GREAT BELONG** and get funding
to start your own small group today!



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"THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER
AND BUILD EACH OTHER UP..."

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11



THE EARLY CHURCH:

A Missional Small Group Movement

A revolutionary book by George Barna and Frank Viola titled *Pagan Christianity?* begins by citing church historian Philip Schaff: “That the Christians in the apostolic age erected special houses of worship is out of the question... apostles and their successors down to the third century preached in the streets, the markets... and in the homes of their converts.” The Early Christian Church grew not by investing in bricks and mortar, but by investing in people. The authors point out that Christianity was the first non-temple-based religion. The people, not architecture, constituted the sacred space. The transition to church structures occurred after Constantine made Christianity the state religion and handed over pagan temples for Christian use, a move that violated Deuteronomy 12:2–5.

The remarkable growth of the New Testament church was not the result of impressive buildings, sophisticated programs, or large public gatherings. It was the work of ordinary believers who lived in close fellowship and made disciples in homes, neighbourhoods, and marketplaces. The Early Church was, in every sense, a missional movement sustained by small groups.

Donald McGavran, in *Understanding Church Growth*—a book that has seen many editions and helped launch the contemporary Church Growth movement—emphasises that Christianity spreads through existing social relationships and points to the Acts model of church growth. Acts 10 tells us that Cornelius gathered “his relatives and close friends” (Acts 10:24). Lydia was baptised, “and her household” (Acts 16:15). The Philippian jailer believed, and his household followed (Acts 16:31–34). Crispus believed “with all his household” (Acts 18:8).

Many more examples could be given. Aquila and Priscilla hosted a church in their home (Romans 16:3–5). Similar house churches met in the homes of Nympha (Colossians

4:15) and Philemon (Philemon 2). Based on his analysis of church-growth patterns around the world, McGavran asserts that Christianity does not spread merely one socially isolated convert at a time. Rather, the gospel advances along existing networks of family, friendship, language, ethnicity, and community.

The Early Church model is sometimes called the “Antioch Model” because Antioch was the first city in which the name “Christians” came into use (Acts 11:26). Numerous books have been written that show how the network of house churches during times of persecution fueled the rapid spread of the gospel.

Russell Burrill, who passionately advocated church planting throughout his ministry and during his years as a seminary professor, wrote several books for Adventists, calling the church to return to the Mission as practised in the New Testament era. He outlines a strategy in which church plants established by small groups represent a proven model for church growth—from the days of the apostles through the early Adventist pioneers to the present.



Written by:

Alex Golovenko

Lead Pastor, Windsor Seventh-day Adventist Church



Among his many references to Ellen White's counsel is her description of the "social meeting"—not simply the preaching-centred formal worship service, but the social gathering of believers where testimony, discussion, and interaction led to personal commitments.

The Early Church movement eventually became institutionalised and plateaued. Yet every time a reformation of spirituality occurred, there was a return to the house-church and small-group model. One such example is the Methodist movement started by John Wesley. The whole denomination came to be called "Methodist" because Wesley practised a deliberate "method" of discipleship that included small groups. The Mission disconnected from the Method cannot produce disciples.

Ellen White grew up Methodist, and the small-group method was organic to her spiritual experience. Hence, she called for this kind of intentional discipleship through small companies, where every believer could be accounted for and accountable.

Yet when a movement becomes a system—an organisation—the method

of small groups is often the first thing to go. Corporate gatherings remain. The performance of the institutional production model continues. But the groups where spiritual growth and personal discipleship take place gradually disappear.

For a movement to return to Small Groups, therefore, there must be systemic change—an infrastructure that supports Small Groups rather than merely supporting the departmental operations of a large corporate church.

Today, we are called to recover this simple biblical model. I am emphasising the word "simple," as Milton Adams calls such a movement in Adventism. Milton Adams produced a training manual after completing his Doctor of Ministry at Andrews University in 2010. His inspiration goes back to the small-group method established by Jesus before Pentecost and even before the church was formally organised.

Rather than gathering crowds alone, Jesus intentionally invested His life in twelve disciples. Although Jesus often preached to thousands, His deepest teaching,

mentoring, correction, and leadership development took place within this small community.

The disciples learned by observing Christ's daily life. They prayed together, travelled together, ministered together, and were gradually entrusted with increasing responsibility. Jesus sent them out two by two, teaching them that mission is both personal and collaborative. Long before they became apostles, they were participants in a missional small group.

This model reveals an important principle: **disciples are not merely taught; they are formed through relationships.**

As the church grew after Pentecost, the life of the believers was described as "breaking bread from house to house" (Acts 2:46). The church gathered publicly for worship and privately for spiritual formation. These two expressions complemented rather than competed with one another.

The home offered something the larger assembly could not: meaningful relationships. People were known by name, cared for personally, and equipped to serve



according to their spiritual gifts.

One of the defining characteristics of the Early Church was that mission belonged to every believer, not merely to church leaders. Following the persecution that arose after Stephen's martyrdom, many Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Luke records: "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4).

Not Apostles, But Ordinary Believers!

As they travelled because of persecution, they carried the gospel into new communities. Christianity expanded because every day disciples understood themselves to be ambassadors for Christ.

The movement today happens not because of persecution alone. Economic circumstances, wars, migration, education, and employment move people from place to place, and believers often enter territories where there is no church. When we practise the New Testament model, every house has the potential to become a church.

Perhaps real systemic change will begin

when all leaders of the corporate church—leaders of our current infrastructure—begin to see their own homes as house churches, recognising that their children are their first disciples and opening their homes for small-group meetings.

I had an experience at a particular church where parents were holding a small-group meeting, while their children were having a night out at the movies. Something is wrong with that picture. Our attitudes must change regarding what the discipleship method really is.

Let's Not Divorce the Method from the Mission.

The Mission of disciple-making will work only when we employ the Method of Jesus and the Early Church.

Paul described the church as one body with many members, each possessing different spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). Every member had a ministry. Every believer contributed to the mission. This remains the biblical foundation for missional small groups today. They are not designed merely to create fellowship but to mobilise every

disciple for ministry and witness.

The multiplication of the Apostolic Church was organic rather than institutional. Churches reproduced because disciples reproduced. Leadership developed naturally as mature believers mentored others. Missional small groups follow this same biblical principle. Their purpose is not simply to grow larger but to multiply disciples, leaders, and new groups that can reach additional people for Christ.

The Early Church consistently demonstrated four characteristics that remain essential for every missional small group:

- Spiritual Formation. Prayer, Bible study, worship, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit formed the foundation of the believers' lives.
- Authentic Fellowship. Christians cared for one another practically and spiritually. They shared meals, supported those in need, rejoiced together, and suffered together.
- Missional Living. The gospel was proclaimed naturally through everyday relationships. Evangelism was not merely an event but a lifestyle.



- **Leadership Development.** Mature disciples intentionally mentored others, preparing future leaders who would continue the mission.

These same priorities continue to provide a framework for contemporary small-group ministry. Postmodern society is increasingly characterised by loneliness, isolation, and spiritual uncertainty. Many people are searching not only for biblical truth but also for authentic community.

Missional small groups provide an environment where both can be experienced. Within a small group, people can ask questions openly, build lasting friendships, receive personal encouragement, discover their spiritual gifts, and learn to participate in God's mission. New believers are nurtured, mature believers continue growing, and seekers encounter the love of Christ through genuine relationships.

Public worship remains essential to the life of the church, but lasting discipleship often develops most effectively in smaller relational settings where people are known, valued, and encouraged to serve. This is

what has sometimes been called the **“two-winged” bird**—the balance of the larger worshipping community and the smaller community where personal spiritual growth takes place. A bird needs both wings to fly.

The Early Church changed the world because it was obedient to Jesus' **Model and Mission**—to Christ's design for the church, where every believer was a disciple-maker and every home was a centre of mission.

The church of the twenty-first century is invited to embrace the same mission. Missional small groups are not a modern innovation but a rediscovery of the New Testament pattern.

References:

- ¹ Frank Viola & George Barna, *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Barna, 2008), pp. 9, 11.
- ² Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).
- ³ Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), pp. 186–187.
- ⁴ W. Milton Adams, *Simple Church Phase ONE Training Manual* (self-published, 2011)



AI-Generated Image

Ellen G. White on Missional Small Groups and Mission

The concept of holistic small groups serving as a means of keeping the Seventh-day Adventist Church growing and glowing is not a recent one. Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, clearly advocated small groups as a foundational strategy which is central to the mission and growth of the church. In many aspects of her writings, she emphasised that “small companies” should serve as catalysts for Christian mission and effort, providing spiritual nurture to members while actively reaching out to unbelievers through community service and evangelism.

In her book *Testimonies for the Church*, she stated:

“The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 21)

When Ellen White wrote these words in 1902, she had no knowledge of contemporary cultures and their changing needs. However, it is clear that this vision was given to advance the church’s mission, and its principles remain relevant today. For her, the purpose of small companies or groups was not only to provide support and fellowship for church members but also to

equip believers to work effectively for the salvation of unbelievers.

Ellen White used the terms “small companies” and “companies” to describe what are now commonly referred to as holistic or missional small groups. In one of her admonitions and counsels to the youth of the church, she wrote:

“Young men and young women, cannot you form companies, and, as soldiers of Christ, enlist in the work, putting all your tact and skill and talent into the Master’s service, that you may save souls from ruin? Let there be companies organized in every church to do this work.... Will the young men and young women who really love Jesus organize themselves as workers, not only for those who profess to be Sabbath keepers, but for those who are not of our faith?” (*Christian Service*, p. 34.1)



Written by:

Pastor Joel Nembhard

Director, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries



Mrs. White also used the term “cottage meetings” in reference to small groups as a means of advancing the mission of the church. The terms “little companies” and “small companies” appear to refer to these cottage meetings. She envisioned them as small group meetings held during the week, consisting of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and the sharing of testimonies. Great emphasis was placed on Bible study. Normally, these groups would meet in the homes of believers and, at times, in the homes of unbelievers as part of their outreach to both church members and the wider community.

In one of her articles, she wrote:

“The holding of Bible readings, the opening of the Scriptures in cottage meetings, will be a means of presenting the truth to a large number. In this manner men and women may do a great work. Some of those engaging in personal, house-to-house labor will by the improvement of their talents develop into workers capable of filling higher positions of trust.” (Letters and Manuscripts, vol. 17, 1902, par. 5)

The ministry of small groups significantly impacted the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From the early years of her ministry, Ellen White emphasized the positive spiritual benefits of small group ministry. It is therefore not surprising that she wrote:

“Preach less, and educate more, by holding Bible-readings, and by praying with families and little companies. To all who are working with Christ, I would say, Wherever you can gain access to the people by the fireside, improve your opportunity. Take your Bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses, is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in halls or churches.” (Gospel Workers, p. 193)



Ellen G. White strongly advocated for small groups, viewing them as a foundational strategy for both church nurture and evangelistic outreach. Therefore, from her writings, we can conclude that small groups or companies:

- Build an authentic biblical community.
- Provide spiritual nurture and accountability.



- Encourage every member to become involved in ministry.
- Create opportunities for outreach and community service.
- Offer a safe environment for spiritual growth and discipleship.
- Support seekers and believers in their journey with God.
- Serve as an effective evangelistic strategy for church mission.

Ellen G. White viewed small groups as far more than fellowship gatherings. She saw them as a vital means for discipleship, leadership development, pastoral care, evangelism, and mission. Her vision was for every believer to participate in a small, Christ-centred, mission-focused community that would strengthen the church and reach the world for Christ.



Small Groups, Big Mission: The Legacy of Luther Warren and Harry Fenner

In 1879, Luther Warren, 14, and his friend Harry Fenner, 17, began a young people's missionary band in Hazelton, Michigan. Believing Jesus was coming soon, they were eager to share the good news while growing spiritually and preparing for His return.

Inspired by Ellen White's counsel to form "small companies" (Christian Service, p. 34.1), sunshine bands emerged as a practical way for young people to grow in faith and serve others. With "Not I" as their password, First Corinthians 10:31 as their motto, and the guiding principle, "Do something for somebody every day," they combined personal and group Bible study with active missionary work.

Their example reminds us that small groups can be powerful instruments for ministry. Today's youth and young adults can follow their lead by building spiritual community, serving others, and sharing the Advent message with the world.

This image of Harry Fenner and Luther Warren is an AI-enhanced rendering of the original painting by artist Russell Harlan, reproduced on page 3 of The AY Story, published by the General Conference Youth Ministries Department.



How to Start and Multiply a Missional Small Group

A Practical Step-by-Step Guide with a 90-Minute Meeting Format

Missional small groups are more than Bible studies or fellowship circles—they are training communities where ordinary believers are formed into extraordinary witnesses of Christ's reconciliation, love, compassion, and leadership. If you feel called to start such a group, you are not simply starting a program; you are building a disciple-making environment.

Below is a simple, practical guide to getting started, built around the Ontario Conference's four foundational blocks and four core roles for every member.



1

Step 1:

Clarify the Four Foundational Blocks

Before you invite anyone, be clear about the kind of group you are building. A missional small group rests on four foundational blocks:

SPIRITUAL

- A life rooted in worship, prayer, Scripture, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

MISSION

- A lifestyle of witness—sharing the gospel, embodying reconciliation, and engaging those who do not yet know Christ.

MINISTRY

- Practical acts of compassion, service, and care that address people's physical, emotional, and relational needs.

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

- Simple, reproducible structures that help the group stay focused, organised, and ready to multiply.

Write a short one-page vision that explains these four foundational blocks in everyday language. This becomes your “why” when you invite people to join the group.

2

Step 2:

Invite a Small Core (4–12 People)

Start small and be intentional.

PRAY

- Ask God to bring people who are eager to grow and willing to be stretched.
- Explain the vision. When you invite them, say clearly: “This group will train us to live as Christ’s messengers, missionaries, ministers, and mentors.”

SET A TIME FRAME

- Commit to a 9- or 12-week cycle. People are more willing to join when they understand the group's rhythm and duration.
- Your first cycle is your “pilot.” You will be learning just as much as they are.

3

Step 3:**Introduce the Four Roles of Every Member (God's Ambassador)**

In a missional small group, every member is being formed to become God's ambassador by growing in four essential roles:

MESSENGER – Ambassador of God's Reconciliation (Spiritual Infant)

- Someone who can share the gospel and their personal testimony clearly and lovingly.

MISSIONARY – Carrier of God's Love (Spiritual Child)

- Someone who intentionally builds relationships with nonbelievers and engages their world.

MINISTER – Channel of God's Compassion (Spiritual Young Adult)

- Someone who serves others, prays for people's needs, and responds to suffering with practical compassion.

MENTOR – Developer of God's Ambassadors (Spiritual Parent)

- Someone who helps others grow, asks thoughtful questions, and walks alongside newer believers.

Tell your group:

"We are all learning these four roles. Each week, we will practice them together."



Written by:

Pastor Sereivudh Ly

Director, Church Planting, Revitalisation, and Evangelism

4

Step 4:**Use the 90-Minute Meeting Format**

Each meeting is 90 minutes long and is divided into four sections. Each section develops one of the four roles.

WORSHIP (UP) – Messenger (about 20–25 minutes)

- Focus: Prepare each person to become a Messenger of God's reconciliation.
- Content: Simple worship songs, thanksgiving, short testimonies, and prayer.
- Practice: One participant facilitates this section by guiding worship and inviting brief testimonies of how God is at work.

WITNESS (IN) – Missionary (about 20–25 minutes)

- Focus: Prepare each person to live as a Missionary of God's love.
- Content: Sharing about friends, neighbours, or coworkers who do not yet know Christ; planning intentional contact, hospitality, or acts of love.
- Practice: The facilitator asks, "Who is God putting on your heart this week?" and helps the group plan concrete steps.

WORK (OUT) – Minister (about 20–25 minutes)

- Focus: Prepare each person to serve as a Minister of God's compassion.
- Content: Identifying needs within the group and the wider community; praying and planning practical responses such as visits, meals, assistance, or advocacy.
- Practice: The facilitator leads intercession and coordinates simple actions: "Who can visit? Who can call? Who can help?"

WORD (FORWARD) – Mentor (about 20–25 minutes)

- Focus: Prepare each person to become a Mentor of God's ambassadors.
- Content: A focused Scripture passage, short teaching, and discussion on how to live it out and pass it on to others.
- Practice: The facilitator serves as the "host" of the meeting for that cycle—guiding the Word section and modelling how to help others grow.



5

Step 5: Rotate Facilitators and Train Couples

This format is not leader-centred; it is member-equipping.

Each participant is both a facilitator and a trainee:

- Every week, different members lead one of the four sections. Over the course of the cycle, everyone gains practice in each role.

For Couples:

- If a couple is present, one partner leads a section while the other observes and prepares to facilitate the same section the following week. This builds confidence, develops empowered leadership, and strengthens shared ministry at home.

Mentor as Host:

- The person facilitating the Word/Mentor section serves as the host for that 9- or 12-week cycle—coordinating logistics, communication, and the overall flow.

6

Step 6: Focus Each Cycle on One Role

To go deeper, each cycle can emphasise one role more intentionally.

Choose a Focus:

- For example, Cycle 1 might focus on the Messenger role. During that cycle, you might give extra time (around 40 minutes) to the Worship/Messenger section, while the other three sections share the remaining 50 minutes.

Rotate the Focus Over the Year:

- Over four cycles, you can emphasise each role once: Messenger, Missionary, Minister, and Mentor. This creates a balanced formation process.



7

Step 7:

Plan for Multiplication from the Beginning

Missional small groups are designed to lead and multiply, not simply maintain themselves.

Identify Emerging Leaders:

- As people facilitate sections, pay attention to those who demonstrate faithfulness, teachability, and love for others.

After 9–12 Weeks:

- Invite one or two emerging leaders to host a new group. Some members may go with them, while others remain and help you train the next cycle.

Keep the Format Simple and Reproducible:

- The same 90-minute structure, the same four roles, and the same four foundational blocks can be used in every new group.

Starting a missional small group is not complicated, but it is intentional. If you commit to these four blocks, practice these four roles, and remain faithful to this simple meeting format, you will not only build a healthy group—you will be forming ambassadors of Christ who carry God's reconciliation, love, compassion, and mentoring into every corner of your city.

MISSIONAL SMALL GROUP VISION

A simple, everyday explanation of our “why”

A Missional Small Group is a gathering of ordinary people learning to live out the extraordinary life Jesus designed for His disciples. It is not just a Bible study, not just fellowship, and not just a prayer circle. It is a training community—a place where we grow into ambassadors of Christ who carry His reconciliation, love, compassion, and leadership into our homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and cities.

This vision rests on four simple building blocks that shape everything we do:



1. SPIRITUAL – Learning to walk closely with God as a spiritual infant

We begin with the heart. A missional life flows from a spiritual life. In this group, we learn how to worship simply, pray honestly, listen to Scripture deeply, and depend on the Holy Spirit daily. We help one another develop deep spiritual roots—because mission without spiritual depth becomes activity without power. Our goal is to become people who reflect Jesus because we have been with Jesus.

2. MISSION – Learning to love the world the way God loves it as a spiritual child

Every believer has people in their lives who need hope, healing, and reconciliation. In this group, we learn how to see them, pray for them, build relationships with them, and share Christ naturally and lovingly. Mission is not a program—it is a lifestyle. We help one another take small steps of courage: a conversation, a meal, a prayer, or an invitation. Over time, mission becomes part of who we are, not something we simply “do.”

3. MINISTRY – Learning to serve people with compassion as a spiritual young adult

Jesus did not just preach; He touched, healed, fed, and comforted. In this group, we learn how to notice needs and respond with practical love. Ministry can be as simple as visiting someone who is lonely, helping a family in crisis, praying for someone who is hurting, or offering support during a difficult season. We practice compassion together until it becomes natural. Ministry is love with sleeves rolled up.

4. LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT – Learning to guide others with simplicity and clarity as a spiritual parent

Missional groups multiply. That means every member learns simple leadership skills: how to facilitate a conversation, host a meeting, encourage others, and keep things organised without becoming complicated. Leadership here is not about titles—it is about helping others grow. We keep everything reproducible so anyone can start a group, lead a section, or mentor a new believer.



Our “Why” – The Heart Behind the Vision

We believe every follower of Jesus can become a Messenger of God’s reconciliation, a Missionary of God’s love, a Minister of God’s compassion, and a Mentor of God’s ambassadors. These four roles are not for “special Christians”—they are for all of us. A Missional Small Group is the training ground where we practice these roles together until they become part of our everyday lives.

MEETING FORMAT

We meet for 90 minutes each week, divided into four simple sections:

- WORSHIP (Messenger)
- WITNESS (Missionary)
- WORK (Minister)
- WORD (Mentor)

Each person takes turns facilitating one section and learns by doing. Couples learn together. New believers grow quickly. Experienced believers grow deeper. Over

time, new groups form as people are prepared to lead.

Our vision is simple:

A movement of small groups that form disciples who make disciples, ambassadors who raise ambassadors, and everyday believers who carry Christ into every corner of their world.

This is why we gather. This is why we train. This is why we multiply.



Missional Small Group

90-Minute Meeting



MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS IN THE ONTARIO CONFERENCE:

Benefits and Relevance

Breakfast by the Sea

Former President Ronald Reagan of the United States, in his “Farewell address to the Nation” on January 11, 1989, said, “All great change in America begins at the dinner table.”

I believe this statement is not limited to the United States; it is true and relevant in every society. It was also true during Jesus’ life and ministry.

The last chapter of the Gospel of John recounts an important encounter that took place shortly after the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Some versions of the Bible call it “Breakfast at Sea.”

John 21:15–17 records it as follows:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again, Jesus said, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

While on earth, Jesus modelled discipleship through friendship. Although He ministered to thousands during His ministry, He chose twelve disciples whom, according to John 15:15, He called friends. Through these friends, He would change the world through friendship evangelism. Even among these friends, He had an inner circle of three disciples: Peter, James, and John.

To the twelve disciples, Jesus modelled effective ministry and demonstrated how the church throughout history could multiply by making disciples and developing meaningful relationships.

We are told that today there are approximately 2.4 billion Christians in the world, making Christianity the world’s largest religion. How did it all begin? It began with twelve ordinary individuals who accepted the call of a Stranger—Christ—to become His friends by spending quality time together, getting to know one another, embracing His teachings and way of life, and becoming His ambassadors to the world.

At the centre of this small group of thirteen individuals, with Christ as the Head, we see a nucleus—the central control centre of a living cell or the dense core of an atom—poised to multiply and produce other cells. In a similar way, this small group would become a living organism, characterised by quantum multiplication to infinity, as expressed in Matthew 28:16-20.

The four Gospels record that it all began with twelve disciples. The book of Acts records that about three thousand souls



Written by:

Pastor Emile Maxi

Vice President for Administration/ Executive Secretary

were added to the church after Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

Though large in number, the three thousand who were added to the church were nurtured in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer (Acts 2:42). This reflects Christ's words to Peter in John 21:17: "Feed my sheep."

This leads me to the question: How did the church of the twenty-first century grow? By feeding or nurturing the sheep. By this, I mean "feeding both the believers and the soon-to-be-believers." When they are well fed, they become healthy cells, and healthy cells naturally reproduce.

It is highly unlikely that a church of any size will grow simply by meeting for Sabbath worship services unless it divides its membership into small groups to minister to members' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs throughout the week.

Small Groups: Their Benefits and Relevance

An effective small group fosters a sense of belonging and ultimately encourages its members to remain part of the larger church family during corporate worship services. Simply put, a small church with an effective small-group structure that meets the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of its members is bound to grow over time, whereas a large church without an effective small-group structure to "feed the sheep" during the week will eventually shrink.

Small Groups: Their Relevance and Keys to Success

One may ask, "What makes a small group effective?"

The simple answer is relevance. People often hesitate to start a small group because of past failures or limited support. The key is to understand the interests of those you hope to reach and to meet them where they are. Jesus did this with His disciples. He knew their interests and where to find them: "at the Sea of Tiberias, fishing." There, He met them and shared breakfast (John 21:1).

So, the first key to starting or maintaining a successful small group is to invite people with similar interests to do what they enjoy or are passionate about, and to invite these kindred-spirited people to join.

The second key to starting a successful small group is to share responsibilities. While you may be passionate about the small group's mission and vision, if you are the leader, avoid doing everything yourself. Delegate. This will help prevent burnout. When you delegate responsibilities, do not micromanage. Avoid pessimism and perfectionism. Always encourage others.

The third key to a successful small group is a timeline. Schedule a specific time each week, usually once a week, for a maximum of 90 minutes per meeting. Start and finish on time. Also, set a fixed meeting period for the small group. The overall duration could range from 8 to 12 weeks. This helps those who want to join your small group better manage and budget their time.

The fourth key to a successful small group is its content. You will need to answer the following questions: What do we want to accomplish? How will we accomplish it? Who

can help us accomplish it? What resources do we need to make the small group effective? How will we recruit people with similar interests?

The fifth key to a successful small group is its venue. As you recruit people for your small group, you will want to explain how you will meet—online or in person, or through a combination of both. Your objective should help determine how and where you meet.

The sixth key to a successful small group is food and fellowship. Acts 2:42 gives us the gist of why the first-century Christian church grew: sound doctrine, good fellowship, and the breaking of bread (meaning Holy Communion, preceded by a fellowship meal).

What happens in Acts 2:44-47 is a by-product of what happened in Acts 2:42.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere

hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Their worship experience in the temple on Sabbaths stemmed directly from their fellowship in homes during the week. Their small groups were healthy, beneficial and relevant. Hence, Acts 2:47: “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The seventh and final key to a successful small group is multiplication. As you meet week after week in your small group, it is imperative that you identify potential leaders, empower them, and train them to start their own small group once your small group’s cycle ends.

Conclusion

As we have come to the end of this article, here is a good discipleship model that I have found to be very effective in training others:

1. I do; you observe me.
2. I do; you assist me.
3. You do; I assist you.
4. You do; I observe you.
5. You do; someone else watches.

I hope the tips I have shared with you will inspire you to start a small group soon. If you had a bad experience in the past, don’t let that discourage you. Follow the keys I have shared with you. Put them into practice and leave the rest to God!





BE A MEDICAL MISSIONARY FOR JESUS

PRAY & STUDY

Pray for the Holy Spirit's power. Study God's Word and humbly seek His guidance as you minister. Pray for wholistic health – physical, mental, and spiritual – of others and self, recognizing Jesus as the Great Physician.



GIVE

Give with a cheerful heart to advance God's mission by funding medical missions and financially supporting Seventh-day Adventist health and lifestyle/wellness centres, and providing direct relief to the poor, vulnerable, and suffering.



INVITE

Invite family, friends, neighbours, and coworkers to health presentations, cooking classes, and small group health & wellness meetings, among other things. Use health ministry as an “entering wedge” to welcome people into deeper Bible studies and church fellowship.



TAKE PART

Take part by following Jesus' example: mingle with people, desire their good, sympathize with them, and lovingly minister to their needs. When their confidence is won, bring them to Jesus.

SHARE

Share personal testimonies of improved or continued health through practicing a healthy lifestyle (8 Laws of Health–**RESTORED™**) and share health literature or materials.



REFLECT

“What can I do to help out more?”
Ask God for direction and guidance.



Navigating Conflict in Small Groups

Most individuals perceive conflict as undesirable and strive to avoid it entirely. However, despite its ubiquity in human interactions, including within diverse groups, conflict can be managed effectively and produce beneficial outcomes. This article will define conflict, present a biblical perspective on the subject, distinguish between functional and dysfunctional conflict, and explore strategies for managing conflict within groups.

What is Conflict?

Conflict is defined as a struggle involving two or more interdependent individuals over perceived differences in beliefs, values, goals, or desires related to esteem, control, and connectedness. An examination of this definition reveals four essential components of conflict. First, the dispute involves at least two opposing parties or forces. Second, there is an element of interdependence or interaction between the parties. Third, during the manifestation of conflict, emotions such as anger, sadness, or hostility may be present. Finally, conflict originates from organisational and relational sources, including beliefs, values, goals, status, and the desire for control.



A Biblical Perspective of Conflict

From a biblical perspective, the origin of conflict can be traced to heaven prior to its manifestation on planet Earth. Scripture indicates that the conflict began with Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 14:12-19). Following the emergence of this mystery with Lucifer, Christ (Michael the Archangel) became involved in the conflict, thereby shifting it from intrapsychic conflict (within Lucifer's mind) to interpersonal conflict (between Lucifer and Christ). Subsequently, the conflict extended to the Earth (Revelation 12:7-12). Certainly, the conflict originated on the vertical plane and has since manifested on the horizontal plane. Conflict among individuals within a group is referred to as intra-group conflict, whereas conflict between two distinct groups is known as inter-group conflict.





Written by:

Pastor Anthony Reid

Director, Stewardship and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty



Differentiating Between Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict

Functional conflict encompasses the beneficial outcomes of conflict situations. For instance, when group members A and B agree to share a specific resource, this collaboration facilitates the achievement of the group's objectives or the effective management of limited resources, ensuring that benefits are directed toward the group rather than solely to individual members. In this regard, conflict is regarded as productive when approached constructively. It is not circumvented; rather, it is utilised to support the development and goal attainment of both the parties involved and the organisation or group as a whole.

Conversely, dysfunctional conflict diminishes group productivity and fosters destructive patterns that hinder growth and progress. Conflict is a natural phenomenon, and an appropriate level of conflict can enhance a group's identity. Nonetheless, the manner in which conflict is managed ultimately determines whether its effects are functional or dysfunctional, positive or negative.

Identifying Strategies to Navigate Conflict in Groups

While there is no universal solution for managing conflict within small groups, two approaches are briefly presented through which conflict or contention (Greek *eris*), disunity or division (Greek *schisma*) can be addressed to achieve constructive and productive outcomes. The two models for conflict management are the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Style Model (TKCSM) and the Peacemaker Model. Regardless of the type of conflict—substance, values, process, misunderstanding, or personality—these models can provide valuable guidance.





The TKCSM is a behavioural problem-solving approach to handling differences. The application of this model depends on the specific conflict situation and the objectives of the parties involved.

In employing the TKCSM, one party must determine the extent to which they wish to satisfy their own concerns—referred to as assertiveness—or the concerns of the other party—referred to as cooperativeness. This model operates through a five-level structure, which includes competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

The competing style is used when quick decisions are necessary, such as during cost-cutting measures or enforcing unpopular rules. Collaborating, regarded as the opposite of competing, signifies that opposing views may be significant enough for parties to learn from one another and listen to each other to reach a consensus on a resolution. The compromising style involves cooperation to attain a 50/50 benefit or a temporary middle ground. The avoiding style allows conflicted parties time to cool down, gain perspective, and conduct further investigation when issues appear less significant or unrelated to the primary

concern. Lastly, the accommodating style is helpful when prioritising another person's needs over one's own in order to maintain cooperation. Using accommodation helps maintain harmony while learning from our mistakes. Avoid overusing or underusing these five styles. A balanced use is key. The Peacemaker approach complements the TKCSM by integrating a biblical framework for conflict resolution. It aims to address the root causes of conflict and seeks long-term solutions. The Peacemaker model comprises four steps:





1. Glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31): Parties should view conflict as an opportunity to demonstrate character, forgiveness, and love rather than focusing on self-vindication.

2. Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye (Matt. 7:5): This step involves taking responsibility for one's own contributions to the conflict before addressing the faults of others.

3. Gently Restore (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1): This involves addressing another person's faults in a constructive, private, and empathetic manner, while avoiding gossip, accusations, or personal attacks.

4. Go and Be Reconciled (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:23-35): This phase includes negotiating to find mutually beneficial and reasonable solutions and offering genuine forgiveness to establish a lasting resolution.

Regardless of the nature of the conflict encountered, effective communication remains the primary means to facilitate resolution. Communication fosters understanding, satisfaction, and transformation. Effective communication should include active listening, awareness of individual personalities, and the application

of emotional intelligence. The manner in which we perceive and manage conflicts, disagreements, or divisions can produce valuable outcomes that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Conflict within a group presents an opportunity for divine intervention, allowing God to manifest His presence and power when individuals submit their circumstances and hearts to Him.



¹ Wilmot, W. W., & Hocker, J. L. (2011). *Interpersonal conflict* (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

² Thomas, K., & Kilmann, R. H. (2009). *Conflict Workshop Facilitator's Guide: For the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument* (3rd ed.). Huntsville, AL: CPP.

³ Sande, K., & Raabe, T. (2002). *Peacemaking for families: A biblical guide to managing conflict in your home*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House.

MOUNT ZION FILIPINO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: The CareGroup Journey

A Personal Journey with Small Groups

I am a product of small group ministry. More than thirty years ago, during my theology college years, I discovered that Christian growth happens best in the context of relationships. It was in a small group where I learned that faith is not only taught—it is caught. Since then, I have remained convinced that seekers and new believers are best nurtured in their faith, develop a genuine sense of belonging, and are equipped for ministry and evangelism through the kind of small-group community that Jesus modelled with His

twelve disciples.

From Biblical Vision to Local Mission

When we launched our small groups—called CareGroups—at Mount Zion Filipino Seventh-day Adventist Church in April 2024, I first preached a six-part sermon series during the first quarter of the year that answered the basic questions: Why small groups? What is their biblical foundation? What do they do? How do they function? Most importantly, how do they contribute to building up the church and advancing its mission?

The primary goal of CareGroups is both holiness and harvest — helping believers grow toward spiritual maturity in Christ while also reaching others through evangelism.

At the conclusion of the series, I invited those whom God was calling to become CareGroup leaders or simply volunteer to open their homes as hosts. Many responded immediately. That very Sabbath, we dedicated them in prayer, and twenty CareGroups were established.





Written by:

Pastor Ardison Bernardo

Mount Zion Filipino Seventh-day Adventist Church

In the weeks that followed, our CareGroup Coordinator, Emicil Dela Cruz, continued recruiting leaders and encouraging members to join a group. Although the groups were initially organised geographically, members were free to participate in whichever CareGroup best fit their needs and relationships.

Building a Culture of Care and Connection

To help make that vision a reality, we intentionally created opportunities for our CareGroups to flourish in fellowship,



discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism.

1. CareGroup Feast - Building Community One Meal at a Time

Since 2024, every third Sabbath of the month has become our CareGroup Feast. Inspired by Acts 2:46-47, our CareGroups gather around the table to share meals, stories, laughter, and faith. New members quickly discover they are more than visitors—they are family. Guests are warmly welcomed, friendships are formed, and conversations often continue long after the meal has ended.

Our simple tagline captures the spirit of these gatherings: “Bringing our community together through connection and friendship—one meal at a time.”

Because Mount Zion is a large congregation, staying connected can be challenging. To strengthen communication, we launched a church WhatsApp Community where members can connect with prayer ministries, CareGroups, ministry teams, testimonies, and church resources. We also look forward to transitioning to the North American Division's Thrive ministry platform to further strengthen communication and member engagement.

“We believe every believer is called to make disciples.”

“Through CareGroups, people are no longer simply names on a membership list. They become family.”



2. Bible Study by CareGroups - Growing Together in God's Word

We encourage every CareGroup to meet regularly for Bible study outside the church throughout the week. More recently, we also restructured our Sabbath School program so that CareGroups rotate in leading the weekly Sabbath school service—including the program, prayer, testimonies, mission spotlight, and ministry emphasis. Instead of language-based Sabbath School classes, members now gather by CareGroups in different areas of the church.

This simple adjustment has encouraged greater participation, developed new

“Our goal is not merely to be a church with small groups, but a church of small groups.”



teachers and discussion leaders, and created a more relational environment where members learn, ask questions, and grow together in God's Word.

3. CareGroup Community Church—Taking Church into the Community

One of our most meaningful initiatives began in 2025 when our church family approved two CareGroup Community Church Sabbaths.

Instead of gathering for our regular corporate worship service, we closed our worship facility, and our various CareGroups met throughout the Greater Toronto Area. Each group conducted its own Sabbath School, worship service, fellowship meal, outreach activity, and, on designated Sabbaths, Communion and the ordinance of humility.

Members are given the freedom to plan their worship creatively while using their spiritual gifts. Leaders emerge. Members become actively involved. Rather than simply inviting people to come to church, the church, in many ways, goes into the community.



4. Community Outreach Sabbath - Every Member in Mission

Our church has designated the second Sabbath of every month as Community Outreach Sabbath.

During our annual planning session, our church leaders intentionally left the second Sabbath afternoon free from regular meetings and church activities so our members could focus on ministry and evangelism.

Rather than prescribing one outreach model, each CareGroup is encouraged to serve according to the needs of its community and the passions of its members. Some visit nursing homes. Others conduct Bible studies, visit inactive or sick members, distribute literature, minister in parks, or simply perform acts of kindness within their neighbourhoods.

Every CareGroup discovers its own mission field.

5. Pentecost & Beyond Evangelism- Called to Be Disciple-Makers

We believe every believer is called to make disciples.



Through our Pentecost and Beyond emphasis, our Personal Ministries Department, CareGroup Ministry, and Greeters Ministry have conducted seminars on giving Bible studies, friendship evangelism, digital evangelism, hospitality, and welcoming guests.

We have also provided Bible study resources, sermon materials, outreach ideas, and our own CareGroup newsletter (see accompanying link - <https://bit.ly/4fHe799>) to encourage and equip our leaders with practical tools for disciple-making and community engagement.

The Greatest Impact: People Becoming Family

Perhaps the greatest impact of CareGroups, however, cannot be measured by numbers.

Through CareGroups, people are no longer simply names on a membership list. They become family.

People pray for one another, celebrate birthdays together, visit one another in hospitals, share meals, encourage one another through life's challenges,



and rejoice together when prayers are answered. Members are cared for by people who genuinely know them personally.

Bible discussions have become more interactive. Members participate more. People arrive earlier for Sabbath School because they look forward to meeting with their CareGroup. New leaders are emerging. Members are discovering their spiritual gifts. Several CareGroups have developed regular outreach ministries, inviting neighbours and friends into genuine Christian fellowship.

From Church Members to Disciple-Makers

Looking back over the past two years, I have realised that the greatest transformation has not been our programs but our people. CareGroups have helped shift our mindset from simply attending church to being the church.

We are still learning. Some CareGroups meet more consistently than others. Some are stronger in outreach. Every group continues to grow.



Yet one truth has become unmistakably clear: healthy churches are built one relationship at a time. Missional movements begin not in large crowds but around living room couches, dining tables, and circles of prayer where disciples make disciples.

CareGroups did not simply create another church program. They helped us become a church family on mission together.

After all, our goal is not merely to be a church with small groups, but a church of small groups—where every member belongs, every member grows, and every member is sent to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

“CareGroups have helped shift our mindset from simply attending church to being the church.”

IMMANUEL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:

Growing Together Through Small Groups

It cannot be overstated that one of the cardinal methods of soul-winning and church growth in the first-century Christian church was gathering in homes for worship and fellowship. This is the concept of Small Groups.

The New Testament, especially the Book of Acts, is punctuated with accounts of believers gathering in homes, sharing meals, and worshipping together with gladness and genuine devotion (Acts 2:46–47; 5:42; 20:20; Rom. 16:3–5; Col. 4:15). The picture we gain from examining these passages is one of intimate, relational gatherings centred on faith development and mutual care.

The Immanuel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Toronto believes that by employing this biblical method, we can build and strengthen relationships among members, demonstrate genuine care, and deepen our faith in God through the study of His Word.

Currently, there are two functioning Small Groups at the church. One is a general Small Group that meets on Sabbath afternoons, and the other is a Young Adult Women's Small Group that meets on Tuesday evenings. The goal is to develop a few groups and then, as members sense the need, expand by establishing additional groups.



Stories and Testimonials

From the Young Adult Women's Small Group

Individuals from the Young Adult Women's Small Group were interviewed. Here are a few of the questions that were asked, along with an overview of their responses.

When asked, "How have you enjoyed your experience in the Small Group so far?" individuals responded that it has been a beautiful and spiritually enriching experience. They acknowledged that participating in the Small Group has given them the opportunity to study the Bible with women at different stages of life and gain insights into the Word of God in ways they had never experienced before.

One participant, with great passion in her voice, said, "We have been able to build deep and meaningful relationships with the other members of the group through sharing various aspects of our lives, praying together, laughing together, and encouraging one another."

Other responses included comments such as: "Being in this Small Group helps me talk about the challenges I am facing, both at



Written by:
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 Immanuel Seventh-day Adventist Church



work and in life. This encourages others to open up and share their own challenges as well. I realise that I am not the only one going through similar experiences.”

Another question posed to the group was, “What is your Small Group doing for you?” Several individuals indicated that they felt supported and encouraged. For them, “it’s a place where we can express ourselves freely, where we can cry if we need to, where people listen to us, pray with us, and, above all, where we are not judged.”

Others indicated that it is a wonderful place to engage in Bible study and dig deeply into the Word of God. One individual even shared how she is learning what it means to be a leader and facilitate a group after being given the opportunity to lead one evening’s discussion.



Questions and Responses from the General Small Group.

The General Small Group meets on Sabbath afternoons. When asked about their experience in the group, participants consistently described it as positive. One person stated, “I like the relaxed atmosphere that this Small Group provides. It is so welcoming that attendees are not afraid to participate. I can share my blessings and challenges without feeling judged.”

Several individuals also expressed appreciation for the format used in the Small Group. They said it is easy to follow and simple to facilitate, making it possible for anyone to lead the discussion.

It was encouraging to hear members respond to the question, “What are the features of this Small Group that you appreciate most?”

In general, participants appreciated the group’s format. One person explained, “The Bible discussions are not merely intellectual conversations but allow the group to share on a personal and emotional level.

Listening to the insights of others often creates ‘aha’ moments for me because they open new perspectives—things I had never considered before.”

When asked about the benefits they have gained from participating, several individuals shared that the Small Group gives them a genuine sense of belonging. They feel heard and seen without having to strive for acceptance. Participants also admitted that they have come to know fellow church members in ways that would not have been possible through regular church attendance alone.

As a pastor, I am excited to witness the spiritual growth individuals experience through their participation in Small Groups. Despite the challenges, we remain committed to strengthening and expanding this biblical method of church growth.

OneVoice27 and Missional Small Groups

OneVoice27ⁱ is a strategic initiative to unite and mobilise Seventh-day Adventists worldwide to proclaim the gospel through personal ministry and across all media platforms. With one voice, we lift up Jesus Christ—the One who makes **All Things New**.

The year 2027 marks 2,000 years since Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of His public ministry. Notably, “Jesus’ first act of public ministry” was to call Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become His disciples and “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). This highlights Jesus’ missional approach to discipleship through a small group.

Four Ways to Live the Mission

The North American Division has embraced the OneVoice27 strategy, with **All Things New** as its Christ-centred message, expressed through four practical areas of emphasis:

- Pray Like Jesus
- Serve Like Jesus
- Share Jesus
- Follow Jesus

Missional small groups provide a natural setting for these four areas to become a way of life. Whether meeting in homes, online, on college campuses, in restaurants, churches, or other community settings, small groups can help people grow into fruitful disciples of Christ. (See page 55 for suggested activities.)

Meeting People Where They Are

As disciples and “fishers of men,” we are called to go where people are. Today, that means meeting people not only in our communities but also in the digital spaces where they live, connect, learn, and seek information.

As of April 2026, approximately 6.8 billion people—73.8% of the world’s population—were using the internet, while 5.79 billion—69.9% of the global population—were social media users.ⁱⁱⁱ

This reality calls the church to invest in both in-person and digital ministry. By using available media platforms alongside personal ministry, churches can reach people who may never set foot in our places of worship.

The Toronto Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventist Church marked the global launch of OneVoice27 on September 5, 2026 with 13 baptisms—the first fruits of its renewed evangelistic mission.





Written by:

Pastor Edwin Martin

Director, Communications and Media Ministry



Social Media as a Social Ministry

Too often, churches use social media primarily as a digital bulletin board to announce events. But social media can be much more. It can become a ministry that builds relationships, encourages conversation, provides spiritual support, and creates community.

As Nona Jones explains, social media can “connect people to one another to foster a sense of community through conversation and engagement.”^{iv}

This means moving beyond announcements to meaningful engagement—listening, encouraging, praying, responding, and sharing Christ with people where they are.



Know Where People Are

Social media usage varies across generations. A 2025 Statista survey, cited by Sprout Social, reported the following worldwide usage patterns: ^v

- Gen Z: YouTube (91%), Instagram (86%), TikTok (79%), Facebook (77%)
- Millennials: YouTube (90%), Facebook (89%), Instagram (81%), TikTok (69%)
- Generation X: Facebook (88%), YouTube (83%), Instagram (60%), TikTok (46%)
- Baby Boomers: Facebook (88%), YouTube (69%), Instagram (39%), TikTok (20%)

These figures demonstrate why churches need a social media strategy. YouTube has a broad generational reach; Facebook remains particularly important for older generations, while Instagram and TikTok offer strong opportunities to engage younger audiences.

The goal is not simply to be present on every platform, but to use each one strategically to build relationships, encourage discipleship, and advance the mission.

Building Missional Online Communities

1. Clarify our identity.

Use social media to communicate who we are, what we believe, and what we stand for. Consistently use the official Seventh-day Adventist Church name, logo, and visual identity. A clear identity builds trust and ensures that our digital presence reflects our church's faith and mission.

Our message should be more than “This is who we are.” It should communicate, “This is what God is doing—and you are welcome to be part of it.”

2. Create and curate content.

“Content is king.”^{vi} Quality content gives people something to watch, read, share, discuss, and act on.

Every Sabbath, churches produce valuable content—sermons, children's stories, music, testimonies, Bible studies, and small-group activities. Capture these moments with compelling photos and short videos, then edit and share them online. Also, share curated content from others that supports the church's mission and adds value for your audience.



3. Post consistently and invite engagement.

Consistent posting helps sustain engagement and establish a recognisable digital presence. Scheduling tools can make this easier to manage. Where appropriate, post “at least once per day on Facebook and Instagram, and once per week on YouTube.”^{viii}

Every post should have a purpose and, whenever possible, a call to action—invite someone to worship, join a Bible study, participate in an online group, request prayer, or connect with the church.

Use #OneVoice27, #AllThingsNew, #AdventistOntario, and an appropriate church-specific hashtag to connect local content with the wider mission.



4. Organise online missional groups.

Like other online communities, a Facebook group can serve as “a digital living room”^{ix}—a welcoming space where people can ask questions, share experiences, pray, study Scripture, encourage one another, and build meaningful relationships.

When intentionally organised, online missional groups can extend ministry beyond regular Sabbath worship, foster genuine connections, and draw people closer to Jesus. The suggested activities on page 55 can also be adapted for these digital communities.



From Viewership to Discipleship

OneVoice27 reminds us that we are called to proclaim Christ with one voice. Missional small groups—both physical and digital—offer practical ways to follow Jesus’ example in making disciples. Together, let us use social media and online communities to lead people to Christ, moving them from viewership to discipleship and, ultimately, to a deeper relationship with Jesus.

ⁱ Visit www.onevoice27.org and www.allthingsnew2027.com for more details.

ⁱⁱ Caleb J. Lines, *The Great Digital Commission: Embracing Social Media for Church Growth and Transformation* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021), 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://datareportal.com/global-digital-overview>

^{iv} Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 37.

^v Sprout Social, “Social Media Demographics,” <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/>

^{vi} Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 42.

^{vii} Graphic design and video editing websites, such as Canva, can be used to enhance and prepare content for publication. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok also provide built-in editing tools for creating posts, carousels, and reels.

^{viii} Lines, 86.

^{ix} Jones, 57.

Missional Small Groups

Homes | Online | College Campuses | Restaurants | Garages | Churches | Other Settings



Pray Like Jesus

in Small Groups

- Study Jesus' prayer life in the Gospels
- Open and close with prayer
- Practice ACTS prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication)
- Keep a group prayer journal (record answered prayers)
- Pray for the "empty chair"



Serve Like Jesus

in Small Groups

- Study Jesus' ministry of healing and compassion
- Choose a local service project
- Visit, support, and encourage people in need
- Pray for healing and restoration
- Host a healing prayer night - invite neighbours and friends



Share Jesus

in Small Groups

- Share personal testimonies with group
- Practise gospel conversations with secular people
- Create "100 People" list - each member writes names of people they want to reach
- Host a "Come Back" dinner in group - invite someone who left church
- Invite others to come back to Jesus



Follow Jesus

in Small Groups

- Invite group members to make a decision for baptism
- Plan for the whole group to attend each other's baptism
- Pair new believers with mentors
- Train future group leaders
- Multiply groups to reach more people



HEAVEN REJOICED:

Two Lives Surrendered to Christ Through Baptism

On Sabbath, June 20, 2026, the members of North Shore Seventh-day Adventist Church witnessed a beautiful demonstration of God's saving grace as two precious souls, Kim and Meghan, publicly surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ through baptism.

Kim, a resident of Espanola, Ontario, had been experiencing the gentle yet powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit. With a sincere desire to know God and follow His will, he approached Suzanne Mainville, a faithful Seventh-day Adventist Christian, as she was walking through the parking lot of a shopping centre.

With earnestness in his voice, Kim asked, "What can I do to be baptised?"

Filled with joy, Suzanne replied, "Receive Bible studies and learn more about Jesus and His Word."

That simple conversation became the beginning of a life-changing journey. Week after week, Kim studied the Scriptures, discovering God's love and truth. As he studied the Holy Bible, he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and embraced the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Holy Spirit continued to work in his heart, preparing him for this important decision.

At the same time, God was working in another life.

One day, Suzanne's granddaughter, Meghan, approached her grandmother with a heartfelt request:

"Grandma, I want to learn how to return tithe and be baptised in the faith that Grandpa loved before he passed away three years ago."

Those words filled Suzanne's heart with gratitude and joy. Meghan, a bright young master's degree student, wanted to know more about God and honour the faith that had been so meaningful to her grandfather and had begun to touch her own heart. Suzanne gladly began studying the Bible with her granddaughter. Through those





Written by:

Pastor Raul Gonzalez

Associate Ministerial Secretary & Multilingual Coordinator



studies, Meghan came to know Jesus more deeply and decided to dedicate her life fully to Him by following God's commands and the teachings of the Bible.

As their faith journey progressed, both Kim and Meghan decided to be baptised in the river near North Shore Adventist Church.

On June 20, Pastor Raul Gonzalez had the privilege of conducting the baptismal ceremony. Family members, church members, and friends gathered along the riverbank to witness this sacred event. As Kim and Meghan entered the waters of baptism, there was a deep sense that heaven was rejoicing.

The ceremony was a powerful reminder that the Holy Spirit is still drawing men and women to Christ today.

The impact of the baptism did not end there.

Among those attending was another young woman named Angel. As she witnessed her cousin Meghan and Kim publicly commit their lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit spoke to her heart. Moved by what she saw, Angel expressed her desire to begin Bible studies

and prepare for baptism herself. Her journey of preparation is already underway.

What a testimony of God's continuing work!

The story of Kim and Meghan reminds us that many people around us are searching for hope, truth, and purpose. Often, all it takes is a simple invitation, a Bible study, a caring conversation, or a faithful witness to help someone take the next step toward Christ.

The Holy Spirit continues to move in North Shore Seventh-day Adventist Church. As members faithfully share God's love, new doors are opening, and new lives are being transformed.

May we never forget that God is already preparing many people around us. Our mission is to pray for them, invite them, study the Bible with them, and love them into His kingdom.

As Ellen G. White wrote:

"Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in." (Evangelism, p. 292).

May the Lord continue to use North Shore Seventh-day Adventist Church as a beacon of hope, faith, and salvation until Jesus comes.



A CHURCH REBORN:

Thunder Bay Celebrates Five Baptisms

On July 4, 2026, the Thunder Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church celebrated one of the greatest joys a church can experience—five precious souls publicly entered into a covenant with Jesus Christ through baptism. It was more than a ceremony. It was a powerful testimony that God is still transforming lives and building His church.

Only a few years ago, the entire congregation could fit on just two pews. Humanly speaking, the future seemed uncertain. Today, however, the picture is remarkably different. Last year, ten people were baptised. This year, five more have already made their decision for Christ. More than one hundred people now gather for worship each Sabbath, including approximately 30–35 children, teenagers, and young adults. What we are witnessing is nothing less than a second birth for the church, as God is powerfully bringing new life where hope once seemed small.

These baptisms were not the result of rapid growth through immigration. They are the fruit of the church's local ministry and mission in the Thunder Bay community. Behind every baptism is a personal story, countless prayers, faithful members, and the quiet work of the Holy Spirit in human hearts.

Preparation for this baptismal service took place over many months. Each candidate participated in regular Bible studies, became involved in a small group, and experienced intentional discipleship. The



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Pastor Leonid Rutkosky

Thunder Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church



church sought to follow Christ's model: first making disciples, then baptising them, and continuing to help them grow in faith. Baptism was not viewed as the finish line but as the beginning of a lifelong journey with Jesus.

One of the greatest joys has been seeing these newly baptised members become active participants in the life and mission of the church. They are already serving in ministry, building relationships, and inviting their own friends to discover Christ. This is the biblical pattern of healthy church growth—disciples making disciples.

Following the baptismal service, the church family gathered for a joyful celebration. A fellowship potluck, a beautifully decorated cake, and a spirit of gratitude filled the room. There was genuine joy, warm fellowship, and a deep sense of unity. Moments like these remind everyone that every baptism is a victory worth celebrating—not only for those being baptised, but for the entire church family.

Such celebrations also inspire others. They encourage visitors to explore faith, strengthen the commitment of existing members, and remind the congregation that God continues to work in powerful ways. A growing church is a hopeful church, and every transformed life becomes a living testimony of God's grace.

Ultimately, every baptism is a miracle. No program, strategy, or human effort can change a heart. Only the Holy Spirit can

draw people to Christ, awaken faith, and lead them to surrender their lives to Him. For that reason, all glory belongs to God.

As Thunder Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to grow, the congregation remains committed to its mission of making disciples, serving the community, and sharing the hope of the gospel. The celebration on July 4 was not simply the conclusion of one journey—it was the beginning of many more. With gratitude for what God has already done and faith in what He will do next, the church looks forward to seeing many more lives transformed by His amazing grace.

“A growing church is a hopeful church, and every transformed life becomes a living testimony of God’s grace.”

WHEN SEVEN BECAME NINE:

A Sabbath Led by the Holy Spirit

There are moments in ministry when you realise that your well-laid plans are completely secondary to what the Holy Spirit wants to do. On June 20, 2026, the London Seventh-day Adventist Church witnessed one of those unforgettable moments. What began as a beautifully planned celebration transformed before our eyes into a breathtaking movement of God's grace, culminating in the baptism of nine young people who publicly committed their lives to Christ.

For several months, I had the privilege of studying the Bible with six incredible young people from the London Adventist Church: Karen John, Fortune Eleleme, Rex Eleleme, Keone Carvalho, Jaiden Munro, and Kibwe Williams. At the same time, Church Elder Nudson Llagas was leading Bible studies with three wonderful youth from the London Filipino-Canadian group: Leicel Jaxyn Maestre, Janine Llagas, and Jace Lawrence Dinampo.

Together, these nine young people were digging deeply into God's Word, asking

meaningful questions, and preparing to publicly embrace the biblical teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baptism.

As the Sabbath worship service began, our hearts were filled with gratitude. Seven baptismal candidates were ready to take this significant step of faith. Yet God had something even greater in store.

The Moment the Spirit Led

During the worship service, it was time to introduce the baptismal candidates. I





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invited the youth to come forward onto the platform, where they stood before a sanctuary filled with their smiling families and friends.

As I stood beside them and looked across the congregation, I sensed a strong and unmistakable prompting from the Holy Spirit.

I extended an open invitation to anyone who had been wrestling with the decision to be baptised—anyone whose heart had been stirred and who was ready to publicly confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Then came a moment none of us expected.

Two more young people—Jaiden Munro and Kibwe Williams—rose from their seats. Without hesitation, they walked down the aisle and joined the others on the platform.

In that instant, seven became nine.

It was a powerful reminder that while we plan, God leads. Witnessing such spontaneous, courageous faith is a moment I will treasure for the rest of my ministry.

A Community United in Joy

As the baptismal service unfolded, the sanctuary was filled with joy, praise, and anticipation. Yet one of the most moving sights came as I looked from the baptistry toward the congregation.

With each baptism, parents, siblings, relatives, and friends gathered on the platform to surround their loved one with prayer, encouragement, and love. Tears of joy flowed freely. Smiles filled the room. Warm embraces celebrated lives made new in Christ.



It was a beautiful picture of the body of Christ in action.

The church was not merely witnessing a sacred ceremony; it was affirming its commitment to walk beside these newly baptised believers, encouraging them as they continue their spiritual journey.

To our nine newly baptised young people: you have made the most important decision of your lives. May you continue to grow in God's grace, remain firmly anchored in Christ, and experience the daily joy of walking with Him.

To our church family, thank you for creating a community where young people feel safe, deeply loved, and inspired to say "Yes" to Jesus.

On that Sabbath in London, we witnessed more than a baptismal service. We witnessed the Holy Spirit at work. Heaven touched earth, seven became nine, and everyone present left with a renewed confidence that God is still calling hearts—and people are still answering His call.



Are We There Yet?

This is a question frequently asked during a family trip. The journey may have begun with excitement and anticipation, but as the miles stretch on, impatience sets in.

There is, however, no doubt in my mind that God's urgent desire is to see His bride ready to receive the powerful help of His Spirit. In fact, Ellen White states, "The dispensation in which we are now living is to be, to those that ask, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit" (Review and Herald, March 2, 1897, par 13). It seems to me that we should be inviting and ensuring that the Holy Spirit is actively working in our hearts, our homes, and our churches.



On the night of the Passover, a few hours before His crucifixion, Christ promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would sustain them through the darkest days ahead. "I will ask the Father", Jesus said in John 14:16, 17, "and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever... the Spirit of truth...He will abide with you and shall be in you".

Theologians generally agree that Jesus most likely asked the Father to give the Holy Spirit to His disciples on the morning of the resurrection (John 20:1, 15-17). That very evening, when He appeared to the disciples, He pointed them to the fulfillment of His earlier promise, declaring that He was now "...sending forth the promise of the Father" (Luke 24: 49).

In John 14, Jesus also promised His disciples the Holy Spirit—the Comforter. The Greek word *parakletos* literally means "one called alongside." Today, we use words derived from the same root, such as *parallel*, which means something that runs alongside something else. It gives us a beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit as our constant Companion, walking alongside us. This is a blessed assurance! We are not

alone! He is with us, ready to assist, ready to comfort, and available to strengthen us.

Another remarkable detail is the amazing preposition Jesus uses to illustrate how deeply the Holy Spirit works in our lives. Jesus did not merely say that the Holy Spirit would be with us; He said that the Holy Spirit would be in us.

I have had the privilege of observing my wife's pregnancies with our two boys. Our sons are with us now, but for her, they were each in her womb at one time. This process of bearing a child changes a mother forever. Her children are both with her and were in her. Even so, the privilege of receiving the Holy Spirit in us is intended to change us forever.

Do not be deceived. Even God's people can drift too far from Him. We must be careful. By the time of the Babylonian captivity, approximately 500 years before Christ, God's people had become pagan. Through Ezekiel, God promised a change. He said that He would "vindicate the holiness" of His "great name which has been profaned among the nations...." God said that He would give His people a new heart, put a



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new spirit in them, and cause them to walk in his statutes (Ezekiel 36:23, 25-27).

God's call through Joel was clear: "Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). Now return to the Lord your God.

What if the church could recommit itself to complete dependence on the Holy Spirit? Ellen White says, "It is the absence of the Spirit that makes the gospel ministry so powerless."

The honest answer to the question, "Are we there yet?" is: Not yet!

But God's urgent desire for His church is that we return to Him and become fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. He desires more than mere church membership or attending a service out of habit. He desires a people whose hearts, homes, and churches are all filled and transformed by His Spirit.

This is especially important as we implement Missional Small Groups across the Ontario Conference. Our success will not ultimately depend on how well

we organise, plan, train, or promote this ministry. Programs and strategies have their place, but only the Holy Spirit can transform small groups into genuine missional communities—communities where people pray together, grow together, serve together, share Jesus together, and become disciples who make disciples.

When the Holy Spirit is welcomed and allowed to lead, our small groups can become places where lives are changed, relationships are restored, gifts are discovered, members are equipped for ministry, and God's mission moves forward. The Holy Spirit is not simply an addition to our strategy; He is the power behind the mission.

As we proceed with Missional Small Groups in the Ontario Conference, let us make every effort not to place our trust in our own abilities, experience, or the strength of our organisation. Rather, let us kneel down and ask God to pour out His Spirit upon us. If we are to see missional small groups succeed, then we must first become people filled with the Spirit.

Are we there yet? No!

But we can get there—not by human strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The time for readiness is NOW.

The time for prayer is NOW.

The time to seek the Holy Spirit is NOW.

And the time to become a missional people is NOW.





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are worth
passing down

Nana's Ginger Snaps

1 c butter/shortening	1 tsp salt
1 c brown sugar	1 tsp baking soda
1 large egg, beaten	1 tsp ground cloves
¾ c fancy molasses	1 tsp ginger
4 c all-purpose flour	2 tsp cinnamon

Beat butter until creamy and smooth. Add sugar, egg, molasses and mix well. Then stir in remaining ingredients. Bake until just

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