

Taskforce on Mission/Evangelism Post COVID

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Identifying and addressing potential needs of TED Fields in the context of a post COVID world

Purpose of the document

- This document has been written to stimulate discussion between directors/leaders about how we become, and remain, relevant to the wide-ranging needs of our Unions/Fields in the current context.
- Being relevant starts with listening to the needs of those we serve at every level, from Union/Fields leaders to local church members, and to those who are not yet members (children, youth, friends, potential members, etc.). In order to gain the greatest understanding of the context in which they are serving, each level needs to listen carefully, without assumptions and preconceived ideas, to the needs of all the levels below. We could call this '360-degree listening', where we listen in a range of different directions in order to find out what God is already doing and how best to join Him in His work. (To provide answers before listening is folly and shame. Proverbs 18:13, NIV).
- As we listen carefully to the needs, we will be able to identify a range of priorities. The priorities will be determined on the basis of how they relate to our mission, the resources we have available, and the spread of our spiritual gifts.
- We will respond to these needs and priorities in teams, or as individuals, depending on the requirements. In this document we list some of the anticipated needs of the communities we serve. These are included here to help us be aware of the breadth of needs that we will encounter. We intend to expand this list as we become aware of more specific needs.
- A clear spiritual focus is central to the wide variety of ways in which we will serve our fields in our different capacities, through our different departments, strengths, skills and perspectives. Depending on the needs, this spiritual focus will be more or less obvious, either clearly on the surface of our activities, or embedded in the core of what we do, or the motivation for why we do it.

Working with the communities

- It is important to **listen** to the felt needs and priorities of each community first, and to meet these needs well. All good leadership and missional activities start with responsive listening.
- Effective projects focus on lifting people up and empowering them, rather than increasing their sense of dependency on others. In this way we honour others above ourselves. This is how Jesus treated people who were broken, hurting and disorientated.
- Our goal is to demonstrate God's love, by being light and salt in the communities we serve.
- It is better to do small projects with excellence, than bigger projects that are not very effective.

Preparing leaders to assess their fields

Union and field leaders, together with their teams, may benefit from material to help them facilitate structured discussions around how they serve and lead during and post COVID. It is important for them to identify the needs and opportunities in this new context. This discussion could include:

- An objective assessment of the current 'Big Picture' context of their field, which is informed, where possible, by government statistics.
- A subjective assessment of the everyday challenges and opportunities that their members and communities are facing and experiencing.
- An assessment of the greatest needs of their members, pastors, churches, and communities. This needs to encompass their financial, emotional, relational, social/community, health, practical, environmental and spiritual concerns.

- The identification of short, medium, and long-term goals to address these needs.
- An awareness of what God is calling them to do in their own context.
- An assessment of the resources that they already have for tackling these needs.
- Identifying what the TED and other church entities could do to support, train and resource them in their plans to lead their pastors, members, churches, and in their plans to serve their communities.
- Creating a skilled task-force group to monitor the progress of the projects, and to identify the potential future needs.
- Conducting a mission audit.

GENERAL STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Collaborate with Unions/Fields to compile and create a specific toolbox of resources focused on the key components of disciple-making. This could come under the umbrella of the Adventist disciple-makers initiative.

We could choose 2-3 projects that combine different perspectives from this document and collaborate creatively on these projects before offering them to Unions/ Fields. For example:

- A project focused on Bible Study (small groups, mentor, spiritual partner)
- A project focused on Big questions (general apologetics and Adventist special contribution)
- Various projects focused on practical life issues (Health, Mental health, Environment, Relationships, Justice, Vocation, Finances)

Dissemination of ideas and materials

- Ideas to be shared initially with Union and Conference leadership to assess needs and priorities.
- Short videos could be prepared as adverts to develop wider interest in the projects.
- Online training in English can be provided. This can be recorded, and it can also be presented live so that questions can be asked and discussed.
- Where possible, it would be useful for two or more directors to work together on a presentation, each bringing their own unique perspectives and skills into the topic, to demonstrate/model collaboration and enrich the presentations.
- Unions who require the training in different languages could use the Zoom translation room facility.

Preparing our church communities for mission

Alongside reaching the community, churches need to get settled into the new reality of being a church during and after a pandemic. They need to reflect deeply on what kind of church community they want to be, and can be, in this new context, given their demographic and cultural realities. This needs to be at the foundation of everything that they do in mission.

Many local churches are already exploring how to be a different kind of worshipping and serving community of believers, one that is relevant in this new context of 'churches without walls'. We may need to provide resources to help them adapt to the emerging needs within their congregations, and also in their local contexts, such as:

- An updated seminar, based loosely on the former "Learning to Love" seminar, that helps local churches to establish caring and compassionate communities.
- A local church study/reflection pack to help them reflect on their new reality in a systematic way and explore the fresh possibilities available to them in their local communities.
- Training and tools to help them understand disciple-making in its various facets for different groups.

1. Financial concerns:

- Increased poverty and financial challenges
- Loss of employment
- Potential loss of home
- Loss of financial security and sense of disorientation
- Loss of income for the church

Government poll: When considering their future, nearly half of all adults (44.3%) expected their financial position to get a little or a lot worse over the next 12 months. The main concern amongst these people was reduced income (72.9%), with 31.9% having needed to use savings to cover living costs and 22.1% saying they were struggling to pay bills (<https://www.ons.gov.uk>)

Opportunities:

- Need for community food projects – locals growing their own produce – becoming more self-supporting as a community
- Food banks and food distribution projects
- 'Happy Hands' shops in some cultures
- Money management workshops
- Debt management services (like Christians Against Poverty www.capuk.org)

2. Mental health concerns:

- Bereavement
- Other types of loss
- Increase in depression, anxiety and other mental health issues
- Shame and guilt, forgiveness
- Dealing with disruption
- Hagar#MeToo (Women's issues, domestic abuse issues, etc.)
- Gov poll: Nearly half of adults (46.9%) reported high levels of anxiety
- <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-only-9-of-britons-want-life-to-return-to-normal-once-lockdown-is-over-11974459>

Opportunities:

- Bereavement support groups such as the model provided by www.griefshare.org
- Telephone listening services (see the training created by TED directors on the live:kind page of the website (<https://ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources/ministerial-families/1543-live-kind> - scroll down the page to find the video))
- Befriending networks
- Emotional well-being groups and workshops
- Helping people to build resilience as people need to manage a changed world
- Organise small groups based on supporting people through their various kinds of grief and loss. Different sizes of churches will need to do different types of projects, depending on what is doable and manageable for them, rather than copying what is being done elsewhere. Thinking too big or too small may be discouraging. We could help to prepare some materials for this kind of group and train group leaders online. Groups can meet by Zoom, etc. and build small caring and listening communities to help them with their immediate emotional needs. Other methods besides Zoom (screen) need to be considered to avoid Zoom fatigue.

3. Relational concerns:

- Families stressed by bereavement, other losses, illness, being locked down together, and abuse

Opportunities:

- Marriage mentoring, counselling, family counselling
- Relationship seminars such as Top Ten Relational Needs seminar (Great Commandment Ministries)
- Toucan Together (www.toucantogether.com - free relationship app for couples).
- Low-cost family activity days with fun, relationship-building activities
- Toddler groups (contact kholford@ted.adventist.org for materials and training on running toddler groups); support groups for mothers; dads and kids' groups (such as 'Who let the dads out?' <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses/training/who-let-the-dads-out-training>); women-to-women and men-to-men mentoring/support/social groups, etc.
- Adopt-a-grandparent and other social groups to help reduce the loneliness of older people.

4. Social/community concerns:

- Isolation and loss of relationships
- Desire for more connectedness
- Because of physical distancing, the possibility of online communication is increasing
- Instead of asking "is there any good reason to do this in person?" People may ask "is there a way to do this online?" How do we maintain human contact, and the heartfelt need for connection, whilst meeting the real and perceived needs of people in the current situation and beyond?

Opportunities:

- Providing low-cost opportunities for social connection
- Providing creative ways to strengthen community relationships/neighbourliness through various projects (see live:kind resources <https://ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources/ministerial-families/1543-live-kind>)
- Caring for those who have become more vulnerable due to loss of resources, impaired physical and mental health, and loss of work
- Mobilising people to support each other, or to target specific needs in the community
- Provide safe, socially-distanced craft and hobby groups for well-being and friendship
- Provide outdoor youth clubs and safe activities for young people
- Deploy community chaplains to meet the spiritual needs of people in the community
- Create community cafés where there is a focus on social connection and low-cost healthy food
- Community prayer4 project. (<http://www.thewateringhole.org.uk/prayer/>)
- Provide a revised 'Learning to Love' type seminar to help people develop caring and compassionate relationships
- Start and 'Open Homes' project (providing safe hospitality – possibly in gardens and parks when indoor hospitality is not allowed)
- Start 'Love our City' projects, caring for the environment and promoting caring communities

5. Health concerns:

- People may be interested in becoming healthier
- People may be interested in strengthening their immunity
- People may need to learn how to eat healthy food on lower incomes
- UK Gov poll: 42% say the outbreak has made them value food more, and one in 10 have shared food or shopping with a neighbour for the first time.
- (<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-only-9%of-britons-want-life-to-return-to-normal-once-lockdown-is-over-11974459>)

Opportunities:

- Health groups and seminars
- Health expos
- Cookery groups/demonstrations – eating well on low-incomes
- Online/Zoom participation cooking classes

6. Practical needs

- Possible loss of work, loss of employment opportunities, loss of own business that failed during the pandemic
- Need to learn make-do-and-mend skills to maintain existing resources and save money

Opportunities

- Workshops and classes to learn new skills that will help people to adapt to their new social context/work/etc.
- Sewing classes, car maintenance, decorating, or any other practical workshops

7. Spiritual concerns:

- People are likely to have questions about God, faith and prayer.
- There is likely to be a need for people to know who God is, and to discover more about His loving and gracious character, rather than a desire to understand our doctrines.
- People may be struggling to make sense of what has happened when their lives have changed so rapidly and unexpectedly.
- People may have fears about the future.
- People may have an increased desire to search for purpose and meaning, and explore spirituality.

Outreach opportunities

Personal witnessing opportunities

These encounters need to be serendipitous and not contrived. They should flow naturally - not based on feeling guilty. Therefore, we need to train members with the simple skills that will help them to open up spiritual conversations with their friends. Members need to be reassured that God can use them to have spiritual conversations, even if they feel inadequate, because the Holy Spirit works best when we acknowledge our own weaknesses. It is 'God confidence' not 'self-confidence' that makes these spiritual-awareness conversations effective.

Members need to know:

- How to listen to the beliefs and questions of their friends, and how to identify any of the obstacles that might be preventing their friends from exploring spiritual issues.
- How to be aware of their friend's practical and emotional needs and find ways to show they care (being 'salt' and providing opportunities for others to 'taste' the experience of God's love in their lives).
- How to ask questions that open up their friend's spiritual thinking.
- How to share the truth in warm and attractive ways.
- How to let their friends glimpse the difference that God makes in their life (being 'light' and providing opportunities for others to 'see' God at work).
- How to use their social media in effective ways to open up other people's curiosity about their faith.
- A short training programme could be designed (if such a programme does not already exist) to help members have these meaningful conversations with their friends.
- Resources could be created, such as sample questions to ask in the current pandemic context that could invite their friends to reflect on spiritual issues.

Group evangelism opportunities

- Seeker-type groups, Alpha-type groups
- Discovery Bible reading small groups
- Disciple-making pathways/mentoring groups/disciple groups (<https://adventistdisciplemakers.org>)
- Prayer groups/workshops such as 'Ways to pray toolbox' resource
- Prophecy seminars; How to read/understand the Bible and be changed by the process
- Chaplaincy and pastoral counselling
- Public proclamation as part of a process to foster decision making for Jesus. Relevant mini-series focusing on aspects important for Adventist Identity, i.e. Sabbath, patterns of prophecy, meaning and purpose of life, second advent of Christ, the Gospel story through the Sanctuary which can address the important questions of life, exploring Christianity.
- Apologetics
- Training in Church@home/Simple church <https://www.simplechurchathome.com/>
- Digital church
- Digital discipleship
- Pop-up church
- Reaching out to children
- Intergenerational Worship (see Intergenerational Worship training videos and workbook - to be uploaded to the TED website shortly)
- Creative ways of doing Pathfinders (Zoom classes for honours)
- Engaging Youth (Youth Alive)
- Short video clips on relevant Biblical topics
- New Mark Finley Missionary Book of year distribution (GC initiative)
- B.E.L.L.S Disciple-making challenge (Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn, Sent)
- Church planting in our contemporary context (Peter Roennfeldt's latest book)
- Community mapping for prayer, care, share strategy
- Mobile Phone Evangelism (AWR but using Bible study series that we choose, e.g. Ty Gibson's 'Truth Link'; or 'Ten Questions to God' by Grenville Kent etc.)
- Evangelistic series dealing with all concerns mentioned in this document, Biblical perspective on Health, Emotions, Relationships, Finances, Environment... (e.g. 2 short video clips from two different presenters on the topic + 4 discussion questions for small groups + organized network of small, disciple-making groups).

8. Environmental concerns

(Joining a cause attracts involvement)

UK Gov poll: 'British people are increasingly aware that the health of people and planet are inseparable and it's time for radical environmental, social, political and economic change.'

(<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-only-9%of-britons-want-life-to-return-to-normal-once-lockdown-is-over-11974459>)

Future planning

It is vital to develop a church planning and preparedness guide (for possible future situations of a similar nature), which will share insights and best practices from the collaborative work that has been developed through responding to this crisis. This could also include a checklist of ways in which churches can become more crisis-ready in anticipation of future pandemics, disasters and emergencies.

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