

TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD— A DECLARATION OF SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE FAMILY OF FAITH

Every member and every organisation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is compelled, under Divine unction, to find the most effective ways to fulfil the mission of the Church, as outlined in the *Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. This declaration of *Total Commitment to God* details in practical terms what Total Commitment involves for individuals and organisations of the Church. It provides a process of orientation to the mission of the Church.

Its placement between the *Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* and the *Working Policy* section of this book positions it to serve as a bridge, reminding the Church of its purpose in the world, and maintaining a clear direction for the Church as it applies and administers the many directives found within the *Working Policy*.

A 15 Total Commitment to God—A Declaration of Spiritual Accountability in the Family of Faith

A 15 05 The Divine Mandate—The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is filled with examples of individuals and institutions who have been, and are, vibrant witnesses to their faith. Because of their passionate commitment to their Lord and appreciation of His unbounded love, they all have the same goal: to share the Good News with others. One key Bible text has motivated them. It is a text that fires the souls of Seventh-day Adventists everywhere. It is called the Gospel Commission, the mandate from the Lord Himself: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19, KJV). The New International Version reads: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .”

This mandate from the Lord Himself is simple, beautiful, and binding. Every follower—whether member, pastor, or administrator—is to Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples. This principle establishes the mission of the Church and sets the standard for any measuring, any assessment of success. It touches all, whatever their responsibility, whether they are laypersons or church employees. It spans all the elements of church life from the local church to the General Conference—in schools and colleges, publishing houses, healthcare institutions, and health food organisations. The mandate is encapsulated in the baptismal vows, in mission statements, in aims and objectives, in policies, and in constitutions and bylaws. It is stated as “to witness to His loving salvation;” “to facilitate the proclamation of the everlasting gospel” “to supply the multitudes with the bread of life;” and “to nurture them in preparation for His soon return.” The four-fold command to Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples sounds wherever Seventh-day Adventists work or assemble together.

As the Church has grown in size and complexity, more and more members, pastors, and administrators have asked serious questions about how the Church relates to the Gospel Commission. Does the Church just turn out above average products and services that cannot be readily distinguished from their secular counterparts? Or does the Church make sure its basic products and services reveal to the world the way to eternal life? Nothing should be excluded from these questions, whether it be church worship services or organisational or institutional programmes and products.

The Church as a whole must ask and answer the hard questions about how it is relating to the guiding principle found in the Gospel Commission. How can this principle be actualised in the lives of members, pastors, and congregations? How can they measure their progress in fulfilling the Gospel Commission? How can the Church's universities, colleges, academies, elementary schools, health-food factories, healthcare institutions, clinics, publishing houses, and media centres develop accountability based on the Gospel Commission?

This challenge calls for a frank and analytical approach in determining where the Church is in relationship to the Lord's command. It is not enough to measure success by secular standards. Total commitment to God requires total acceptance of the principles of Christianity as outlined in the Bible and as supported by the Spirit of Prophecy. Congregations, institutions, church employees, and church members can easily find satisfaction in goals reached, funds raised, buildings completed, budgets balanced, and accreditation achieved or renewed, and yet fail to be accountable before God to the Gospel Commission. The first and continuing priority for the Church must be this directive from the Lord to Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples.

While the Gospel Commission does not change, its fulfilment is demonstrated in different ways. A pastor works within a different context than that of a classroom teacher, a physician, or an institutional administrator. Whatever the personal or institutional role, each one is accountable to God's command. Among the great benefits resulting from an assessment of their effectiveness will be the increasing trust that develops as each member, each pastor, each administrator, each church institution addresses this priority and gives it proper attention.

The family of God acknowledges that each person is individually accountable to God. At the same time, believers are admonished to examine themselves (2 Cor 13:5). A spiritual assessment process has its place in the personal life. Just as surely, it has its place in organisational life.

Spiritual assessment, while appropriate, is also a very delicate matter. For humankind sees only in part. The earthly frame of reference is always limited to that which is visible and to the brief span of time surrounding the present. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from careful and thoughtful evaluation of personal and organisational life.

It is possible to identify several principles which can guide such an assessment. While any attempt will be incomplete, the following specific areas of

assessment will heighten awareness of and accountability to God and to the mission which is an integral part of the Christian's relationship and commitment to Him. The list of those who should evaluate their commitment to God is not comprehensive, but the principles outlined here are applicable also to other individuals, organisations, and institutions.

A 15 10 What Total Commitment to God Involves for Each Church Member—Each Seventh-day Adventist, whether a denominational employee or layperson, is promised the gift of the Holy Spirit which will enable spiritual growth in the grace of the Lord and which will empower the development and use of spiritual gifts in witness and service. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is demonstrated when one:

1. Maintains, where possible, a Christian home where the standards and principles of Christ are both taught and exemplified;
2. Experiences a life that rejoices in the assurance of salvation, is moved by the Holy Spirit to effective personal witness to others, and experiences in Christ a gracious character that is consistent with God's will as revealed in His Word;
3. Uses the spiritual gifts God has promised each one;
4. Dedicates time, spiritual gifts, and resources, prayerfully and systematically, to the Gospel proclamation and, individually as well as part of a church family, becomes the Lord's salt and light through sharing His love in family life and community service, always motivated by the sense of the soon return of the Lord and His command to preach His Gospel both at home and afar; and
5. Participates in a plan for systematic spiritual growth and assessment of one's personal walk with God by forming mutually accountable spiritual partnerships where the primary objective is to prayerfully mentor one another.

A 15 15 What Total Commitment to God Involves for a Church Pastor—A Seventh-day Adventist pastor, called and empowered by the Holy Spirit and driven by love for souls, points sinners to Christ as Creator and Redeemer, and teaches them how to share their faith and become effective disciples. He or she regularly shares a balanced spiritual diet fresh from communion with God and His Word. The pastor shows the saving grace and transforming power of the Gospel when he or she:

1. Strives to make his or her family a model of what the Lord expects in marriage and families;
2. Preaches Bible-based, Christ-centred sermons that nurture the members, support the world Church, and teaches the fundamental beliefs with a sense of urgency rooted in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophecy;
3. Appeals to all to submit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit so that the Gospel may be validated in the compassionate life of the faith-directed believer;
4. Leads the local congregation in a strong evangelistic outreach that both increases membership and establishes new congregations, while maintaining strong support for the local and world-wide work of the Church;

5. Evidences effectiveness in ministry as the family of God increases numerically and grows in spiritual experience and worship, thus hastening the return of the Lord; and

6. Affirms the priority of personal spiritual growth and mission effectiveness by regularly participating in a spiritual outcome assessment process.

An assessment model, developed by the division, will be implemented by each union/local conference and will include a self-assessment module as well as elements addressing the pastor's responsibility to the congregation(s) and to the world Church organisation.

A 15 20 What Total Commitment to God Involves for a Congregation—

A Seventh-day Adventist congregation creatively and self-critically functions as a witnessing and nurturing community, facilitating the Gospel proclamation locally, regionally, and globally. It lives in this world as the body of Christ, showing the same concern and positive action for those which it touches as the Lord did in His earthly ministry. The congregation:

1. Demonstrates an abiding assurance in the saving grace of Christ and a commitment to the distinctive teachings of the Word;

2. Understands and accepts its role as part of an end-time movement with a local, regional, and global responsibility for the spread of the Gospel;

3. Develops strategic plans for sharing the Good News in its community, with the goal of ensuring that all persons understand how Jesus can change their lives, preparing them for His soon coming and helping to establish new congregations;

4. Nurtures the lives of members and their families so they will grow spiritually and continue confidently in the mission and truths expressed through God's last-day Church;

5. Acknowledges the privileges of being a Seventh-day Adventist congregation and the concurrent accountability to the world family of Seventh-day Adventist congregations, as outlined in the *Church Manual*, by accepting and implementing broad plans that empower the spread of the Gospel in wider contexts, and by participating in the organisational, financial, and representative system designed to facilitate a global outreach; and

6. Participates in an assessment plan that leads the congregation to awareness of its strengths and weaknesses and the progress it has made in its mission to go, teach, baptise, and make disciples.

The assessment plan will normally be a self-assessment programme conducted annually by the entire congregation meeting as a group; but, periodically, it should include an assessment of the congregation's participation in and responsibility to the broader organisation. Each division, in association with the unions and the local conferences/missions, will facilitate the development of the assessment process that will be used within its territory.

A 15 25 What Total Commitment to God Involves for Elementary and Secondary Schools—A Seventh-day Adventist elementary/secondary schools

creates a climate that nurtures the student spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially, and instills confidence in the relevance, role, message, and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The schools provide excellence in Seventh-day Adventist education when they:

1. Develop a comprehensive spiritual master plan and curricula for all subjects that will support the Seventh-day Adventist worldview, integrate faith with learning, and uphold academic excellence;
2. Employ fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning as they nurture their students in being good members and citizens of both church and society;
3. Work with parents and local congregations to ensure that each student is presented with the claims of Christ and is given opportunity to make a decision for Him and to be baptised;
4. Transmit to students an understanding of the biblical role of the last-day people of God and how they are to participate in fulfilling the mission of the Church;
5. Involve staff and students in outreach initiatives in ways appropriate to student age and plan opportunities for witness to the community; and
6. Participate systematically in a spiritual assessment process developed by the division and implemented by the unions and conferences which provides annual reports to the school board and its various constituencies.

A 15 30 What Total Commitment to God Involves for Colleges and Universities—A Seventh-day Adventist college/university offers academically sound, tertiary and/or post-graduate education to Seventh-day Adventists and to students of nearby communities who welcome the opportunity to study in an Adventist environment. This is accomplished when the administration of the college/university:

1. Develops a comprehensive spiritual master plan, proposed by the faculty and approved by the board, that identifies the spiritual truths and values, both cognitive and relational, which the institution is committed to share with its students and comprehensively identifies the opportunities through which those values will be communicated during a given period of time in campus life;
2. Maintains a classroom and campus environment which ensures opportunities for academic instruction and Gospel encounters that produce graduates who are recognised by the Church and society for their academic and spiritual excellence; who are well-balanced spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially; who love their Lord and hold high His standards in their daily lives; who will help build strong, thriving local congregations; and who will function as salt and light to their communities, both as laypersons and as church employees;
3. Affirms unambiguously in classroom and campus life the beliefs, practices, and worldview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; shares the joy of the Gospel; demonstrates confidence in the divinely established role of the

Advent movement and its continuing significance in God's plan for these last days; facilitates activities for faculty, staff, and students to engage in Gospel witness and Christian service; and encourages the faculty and staff to a consistency of life style which is manifested in nurturing, compassionate faculty/staff relationships with students;

4. Employs fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers who are actively involved in their local church and who integrate faith and learning in the context of nurturing their students to be productive members both of society and of the Lord's Church, and who interact with parents and other constituents in order to understand and to fulfil their high academic and spiritual expectations for educational programmes serving the youth;

5. Evaluates the achievement of the objectives outlined in the spiritual master plan by a faculty-developed, board-approved, comprehensive assessment programme, designed with sufficient specificity to evaluate each element of campus life, to guide the college/university administration in taking affirming or corrective measures, and to serve as the basis for annual reports of the spiritual health of the institution to the governing board and various constituencies; and

6. Submits the proposed spiritual master plan and assessment programme to a General Conference-appointed, international panel of highly-qualified educators who will provide the college/university board with a written evaluation of the spiritual master plan and the assessment programme.

A 15 35 What Total Commitment to God Involves for the Hospitals and Health-care Institutions—A Seventh-day Adventist hospital/health-care institution provides the highest quality, whole-person health-care to the community it serves by developing a comprehensive spiritual assessment plan in which it:

1. Creates a well-planned, positive atmosphere that focuses on the healing presence of the Lord;

2. Develops a professionally competent, mission-orientated, and compassionate staff who sensitively ministers to patients from the context of their Christian faith as well as distinctive Seventh-day Adventist beliefs;

3. Ensures that all those within the institution's sphere of influence are aware that the health-care facility is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church by developing staff orientation and community witnessing programmes that positively portray both the hospital and the Church to those who are served;

4. Sensitively stimulates spiritual inquiry and systematically responds to such inquiry;

5. Allocates such financial and personnel resources as may be possible to the local, regional, and global soul-winning, educational, and/or health-care mission of the Church; and

6. Demonstrates accountability for fulfilment of its mission through participation, at least triennially, in a comprehensive evaluation process

developed, planned, and overseen by the respective division executive committee to assess progress toward achieving specific, measurable, mission outcomes.

A 15 40 What Total Commitment to God Involves for the Institutions of Mass Communication: Publishing Houses, Media Centres, Adventist Book Centres, and Radio Stations—A Seventh-day Adventist institution of mass communication provides quality productions that enhance the mission of the Church and the commitment of its members to mission when it:

1. Encourages initiatives and the distribution only of that which contributes to the Gospel proclamation and the nurturing of church members within the context of the last-day message;
2. Plans or supports evangelistic activities which may lead to personal contacts and involves the local congregation wherever possible;
3. Uses technology and media in a way that is sensitive to available funds so that resources are maximised for the mission of the Church;
4. Co-ordinates initiatives with other church entities to ensure interaction with and support of related programmes and projects;
5. Provides such staff as may be possible or appropriate to assist pastors and congregations in the follow-up of those responding to outreach initiatives, and operates a feedback system for product development or modification; and
6. Establishes, under the direction of governing bodies, systems for periodic review of materials and programmes, both for members and for the general public, thus providing management and governing bodies with an analysis of the institution's effectiveness in meeting mission goals, ensuring concurrence with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and practices, and preparing reports for presentation to each regular meeting of the constituency and annually to the board.

A 15 45 What Total Commitment to God Involves for the Food Industries—A Seventh-day Adventist food industry develops products that contribute positively to health and provides a resource to assist the giving of the Gospel in these last days when it:

1. Manufactures and sells only those products which are consistent with the divine principles of diet and health;
2. Trains personnel to inform the public on sound health practices and assists the Church in developing increasingly better health among its members;
3. Provides low cost vegetarian food to the world's developing countries;
4. Implements programmes under which those influenced by the health message may receive further information about the Church;
5. Budgets financial assistance for the mission of the Church on a basis established by the division executive committee; and
6. Periodically evaluates performance in terms of efficiency, return on investment, and contribution to the mission of the Church, based on a system administered by the board and established by the division committee, in consultation with the International Health Food Association.

A 15 50 What Total Commitment to God Involves for a Conference/Mission, or Union—A Seventh-day Adventist conference/mission or union, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, motivates members, pastors, teachers, and all other denominational employees to present to their neighbours and communities the saving truth as it is in these last days, and oversees and prioritises its plans, initiatives, and finances to give first place to continuous soul-winning and nurturing ministries when it:

1. Identifies and promotes the spiritual objectives, both evangelistic and nurturing, of the conference/mission or union and, through a strategic planning and financing process, involves the collective participation of its membership and organisations;

2. Demonstrates through the personal example of its leadership that the Church is continuing, without wavering, its divinely appointed role as a witness to this dying and needy world;

3. Nurtures and supports pastors, members, and congregations so that they may grow as disciples and experience ways of fulfilling the Gospel Commission;

4. Exercises administrative leadership in institutions and entities under its direction to ensure that the mission of the Church is kept clearly in focus, and develops and implements initiatives to establish new congregations in communities and areas where needed;

5. Assures that budgetary provisions for local, national, and global evangelistic endeavours are carefully balanced against the resources allocated to the nurture of the believers, and that both are demonstrated to be of the highest priority; and

6. Co-operates with the division in developing and implementing assessment processes, which may be evaluated by a committee designated by the General Conference, by which members, pastors, congregations, institutions, and the conference/mission or union itself may ascertain their commitment to and effectiveness in carrying out the Gospel Commission and reporting their findings to the respective constituencies.

A 15 55 What Total Commitment to God Involves for the General Conference/Divisions—The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and its divisions, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, provide overall global direction to the spiritual life and mission of the Church, develop strategic plans and policies, generate initiatives and programmes, and allocate financial and human resources in ways that demonstrate urgency in completing the mission of the Church and subordination to the command to Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples when they:

1. Give priority at Annual Councils and Spring Meetings of the General Conference and division executive committees to nurturing the spiritual life of a growing Church with a clear mission to carry the eternal gospel to all the world, in the end-time setting of the Three Angels' Messages;

2. Appoint small committees with international representation as may be necessary to evaluate and make recommendations to appropriate boards or executive committees concerning assessment programmes being developed;

3. Ensure that administrations and boards of institutions and agencies under their direction establish spiritual accountability processes that give evidence of their commitment to the last-day mission of the Church, and demonstrate their effectiveness in accomplishing it;

4. Require that initiatives and activities of limited focus, while having some merit of their own, are in fact subordinated to the broader, co-ordinated mission goals of the Church, and govern the disbursement of budgets to promote the promulgation of the Gospel to all the world;

5. Ensure that the mission of the Church is clearly understood and implemented through assessment processes that review progress in meeting mission objectives involving both nurture of members and evangelistic outreach; and

6. Develop a spiritual master plan and assessment programme, to be monitored by a committee appointed at each level by the General Conference/Division Executive Committee, for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the General Conference/Division in terms of the mission of the Church and assisting all levels of church organisation and all institutions to assess the effectiveness of their spiritual master plans and assessment programmes.

A 15 60 True Measure of Success—Truly, the spiritual mandate is simple. Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples. Responsible Seventh-day Adventist Church members and all church employees must remember that each one will be held accountable before God for this principle. Someday, at the great judgment bar, the Lord will ask, “What have you done, relying on My grace, with the gifts, talents, and opportunities I gave you?”

As He did 2,000 years ago, the Lord commands His Church today: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19, KJV). Go . . . teach . . . baptise . . . make disciples. Total commitment to God mandates the fulfilment of this Commission, which is still the only true measure of success.