Chapter 17
Perceptions of the Mission of the Church as Outlined by Teachers in Seventh-day Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands Mission

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While initially confined to the business world, mission statements have become widespread amongst voluntary associations and churches, where they function as a means of communicating the goal or overriding purpose of the organisation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has followed this trend, stating that its mission is to "Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt 28:18–20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6–12)" (General Conference, 2019–2020). The main methods by which it is expected the mission will be accomplished are listed as "Christ-like living, communicating, discipling, teaching, healing, and serving" (General Conference, 2019–2020).

The ability of an organisation to accomplish its mission is determined by several factors, including the clarity of the mission statement itself, the ways in which it is communicated, and the degree to which the mission is embedded throughout the organisation (Greer & Horst, 2014). The global nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church implies that these ideas also need to be clearly translated across a multitude of cultures.

The multiple factors contributing to the success of a mission statement mean that it is valuable to understand how well it is understood by an organisation's employees, who are responsible for both ongoing communication of the mission statement and its

fulfillment. Studies which measure this dimension are rare (Desmidt, 2015). This chapter fills that gap as it reports on the perceptions of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church held by teachers employed by Adventist schools in the Solomon Islands. The views of this group of employees are particularly valuable as their culture is vastly different from the North American context, where the Church began and where its headquarters are located. An understanding of the mission statement by these employees will thus reflect how well the mission has been communicated cross-culturally.

The details of how this study was carried out have already been described in earlier chapters of this book and will not be repeated here. Three hundred and thirteen educators in the Solomon Islands provided responses to the open-ended questions in the survey.

Methodological Notes

Two survey questions are considered in this chapter. The first, Question 4, was an open-ended question in which educators were asked to write one or two sentences in response to the following: "If I were asked, 'What is the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?' I would say:" The qualitative responses from this question have been analysed using thematic analysis. This form of analysis enables clear organisation and communication of the variety of ideas expressed by participants (Boyatzis, 1998). An inductive approach to the thematic analysis was chosen to allow the themes to emerge from the data itself rather than imposing pre-conceived themes upon it (Rapley, 2016). NVivo software was used to assist the process of analysis, as it provides a set of tools that help manage large amounts of qualitative data. These tools include the ability to sort, link query and visualise data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The information from this analysis is presented by theme in the next section of this chapter. The words of the participants are presented in italics throughout the discussion.

The second question discussed in this chapter is Question 5. This question presented respondents with a series of statements that described various things the Seventh-day Adventist church could be doing. It then asked the educators to find the two they thought were most important, and note for each statement how they rated its importance as a goal of the Church.

What Is the Mission of the Church? (Question 4)

This section addresses Question 4, which focused on what individual teachers thought about the mission of the Church. The question read, "If I were asked, 'What is the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? I would say:"

Question 4 was placed in all branches of the survey and hence all participants were invited to comment on their perception of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A total of 313 responses were received to the open-ended questions. Question 4 was answered by the majority of individuals completing the survey with only 31 respondents failing to provide a response (10%). This missing answer rate is considerably lower than that of the Australian educators, where it accounted for 43% of total responses. A further seven responses (2%) demonstrated that the participant misunderstood the question. These responses were mainly of a personal nature, such as *I will be a good Christian teacher,*[1] or *I should faithfully involve in its mission statements,* or *I want to organize a church so that the church will alive.* There were also two statements which seemed unrelated to the question, such as *the SDA is an organisation run by itself* and *contribute to the work philosophy*.

All themes occurring in 5% or more of the survey responses are listed in Table 17.1. Three main themes emerged from these responses: sharing the good news about Jesus/God, preparation for the future, and leading people to Jesus. Another five themes were present in a much lower percentage of the total responses. These include two themes not found in the top themes of either North American (Jackson, 2019) or Australian educators (see chapter 11 in this book). The first of these themes represents the key wording of a Tell the World Initiative while the second focuses on nurture within the church.

Table 17.1
Themes From the Solomon Islands Responses to Open-Ended Question 4: Goals of Church

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Share the good news about Jesus/God	120	38%
Preparation for the future	88	28%

1 Note: Italics in the text is used to indicate a verbatim citation from a participant response.

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Leading people to Jesus	82	26%
No response	31	10%
Reach out/up/across	24	8%
Biblical teaching	16	5%
Service	16	5%
Nurture within the Church	16	5%
Three angels' messages	16	5%
Misunderstood the question	7	2%

Object of the Mission

Educators in the Solomon Islands provided a wide variety of answers to their perceived object of Adventist mission. The *world* was the most frequent answer (42), followed by *people* (25), *all/everyone* (24), *children* (20), and *others* (11). A small number were primarily focused on non-Christians, with answers such as the *lost*, *sinners*, *those who don't know God*, *those who don't know Jesus* and *those who hunger for truth*. Other responses focused on those they came in their own sphere of influence, such as *students* (11), *the community* (5), *whoever I come in contact with* (3), or *friends* (1). Several also commented on the internal mission noting the object as *us* (3), *each other* (1), and *church members* (1). The main focus on the world is in keeping with the global nature of the mission, of the church. It is, however, heartening to see some mention of people within the participant's own sphere of influence, as these teachers are likely to recognise that they have an active role in the mission of the Church.

Sharing Good News

The highest-ranked theme emerging from the open-ended question about the mission of the Church was the need to share the good news about Jesus or God. This was expressed in four main ways. The first expression focused on the word *gospel*. Fifty-four respondents believed the mission of the Church included the sharing of the gospel in some way. The church was called to *preach* (18), *share* (15), *proclaim* (12), *spread* (7), *teach* (5), or *communicate* (1) the gospel. Some responses went on to further clarify what they meant by the gospel. Eleven responses noted that the gospel being shared was the

everlasting gospel, while seven described it as the *gospel of Jesus* or *Jesus Christ*. Other words used to describe the gospel included *saving*, *loving*, and *eternal*. On three occasions the everlasting gospel was equated with the three angels' messages. The reasons given for sharing the gospel were to prepare people for the second coming or to prepare them to meet Jesus.

The second expression of the theme of sharing the good news of Jesus/God used the phrase *good news.* Twenty-two responses included this phrase. The Church was to *share* (9), *preach* (6), *spread* (3), *tell* (3), *proclaim* (2), and *teach* (1) the *good news*. Again, two responses used more than one verb to describe what the Church needed to do with the good news. What was the content of the good news? Thirteen responses noted that it was the *good news of Jesus,* while others noted it was the good news that *Jesus will return soon*, or that *Jesus died to save us*. One response described a multifaceted good news that encompassed *our truth, the seventh day sabbath, that Jesus will return soon to try to get those who faithfully obey his commandments (including the 4th).*

The third form of expression talked about sharing Jesus or God without specifically using the words gospel or good news. Thirty-seven respondents prioritised the mission as sharing Jesus or God. As in the other expressions of this theme they used a variety of verbs to describe this process; these included *tell* (14), *share* (10), *teach* (6), *preach* (2), *proclaim* (2), and *uplift* (3). Thirty of the responses focused on sharing Jesus or an aspect of who he was or what he had done, while seven focused on God and his character. Sixteen responses mentioned sharing the *love of Jesus* or God, while others mentioned sharing that Jesus was *saviour* (2) and that he rose from the dead (1).

The final expression of the theme mentioned the gospel commission. Seven educators referred to the mission of the Church as the *gospel commission* or the *commission of Jesus to preach the gospel*. In three instances, the Church was to *fulfill* the commission. The remaining responses said the Church should *carry out*, *proclaim* or *spread* the gospel commission. One took the time to write out the text from Matthew 28:19–20.

Preparation for the Future

The second most prominent theme arising from the answers to Question 4 was the idea of preparation for the future. A total of 88 educators focussed on the future in their discussion of the mission

of the Church. Sixty-three responses mentioned the importance of the *second coming of Jesus*. Of these responses, 28 wrote that the church needed to *prepare* people for the second coming, and another 10 said that it was important *to get people ready for* or *be ready* for the second coming. Other comments noted the importance of *proclaiming* the second coming *before* it happened (6), *working faithfully until* it happens (1), and *saving lives for the second coming* (3). Some noted that information needed to be conveyed about or prior to the second coming using the verbs *tell* (10), *share* (9), or *teach* (3). The idea that the return of Jesus was coming *soon* was mentioned by 20 of the responses.

The remaining responses in this theme focused on preparation for *eternity* (9), *heaven* (7), *God's kingdom* (7), *life to come* (2), *the new earth* (1), and *the new Jerusalem* (1). Mention of preparation for the future was rarely isolated and most frequently mentioned in conjunction with the theme of sharing the good news about Jesus.

Interestingly, little thought seems to have been be given to the opposite idea of the Church preparing people for this life. Only three responses mentioned improving people's life now, with only one of these associated with preparation for this life.

Leading People to Have a Saving Relationship with Jesus

The third-highest theme emerging from the responses of educators to the question about their perception of the mission of the church is the concept of leading people to accept Jesus as their Saviour. This group of responses differs from theme one in that it moves beyond simply telling people about Jesus, to actively leading them to Jesus and helping them develop a saving relationship with him. Forty-one responses emphasised the development of a relationship with Jesus. Some of the active verbs associated with helping people develop a saving relationship with Jesus included *lead* (15), *bring* (11), *teach* (3), *assist* (3), *help* (3), *guid*e (1), and *point to* (1). For example, one stated the mission of the church was *to win souls and lead them to know Jesus as personal Saviour to them*. Another noted that it was *to teach people to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour in [their] lives and to nurture them*. There was an emphasis on the personal nature of the relationship in about a third of the responses.

A further 41 responses emphasised *salvation* or *winning souls* rather than using the word relationship. For example, one response noted that the mission of the church is *to carry out the Great Commission (Matt.*

28) and to preach the Three Angels' Messages (Rev. 14) to bring souls to God for his plan of salvation. Other typical responses included *help everyone be saved for God's kingdom,* and *to seek and help those who want to be saved,* or *to win souls for God's kingdom.* The frequent use of the word *souls* (13) rather than people was noticeable in responses classified in this theme.

Reaching Out/Up/Across

The remaining themes were much less prominent than the three themes described so far; nevertheless, the recurrence of statements using combinations of the ideas of reaching out, reaching up, or reaching across were frequent enough to stand out. These ideas come from the Tell the World Initiative adopted by the General Conference session in St Louis for the 2010–2015 quinquennium. In all, twenty-four educators included this idea using one, two, or all three of the directions the Church needed to concentrate its efforts. The most remembered aspect was *reach out* (20); however, 14 responses included all three aspects of the initiative. For instance, one educator wrote that the mission of the Church is to *reach up, reach across and reach out to all people with the message of hope.* Another response attempted to define what was meant by these statements by adding qualifiers. They believed that the mission of the Church was *to reach up—quality of life, reach across—unity of the church, to reach out—growth of the schools and thus the church*. A third considered that the Church's programs should have each of these three aspects. While the ideas of the initiative have obviously stayed in the minds of some educators, the connections between the various types of reaching were muddled at times. For instance, one person connected reaching up with *preaching to fulfill the mission of Jesus*. Another suggested reaching down rather than across. But overall, it is good to see that a worldwide Adventist Church initiative has made an impact on the thinking of this group of educators.

Biblical Truth

The importance of teaching biblical truth was mentioned by 16 teachers. Six focused simply on *sharing* (3), *teaching* (1), *preaching* (1), and *proclaiming God's word* (1). Three responses mentioned the idea of truth. These responses considered the mission of the Church is *to teach and help people to know and fully understand the truth of God.* The remaining responses grouped in this theme focused on biblical

truth from a Seventh-day Adventist viewpoint. These responses considered the mission of the Church was to *share our truth (1), the Adventist message* (4), *Adventist teachings* (1), or *Adventist doctrines* (1) with the world. Specific doctrines were rarely mentioned, other than the second coming, with only one mention of Sabbath and one mention of the Adventist health message.

Nurture Within the Church

Sixteen participants suggested the mission of the Church should have an internal focus. For some this was the only idea of mission mentioned, while others combined it with statements that were more externally focused, suggesting they understood the Church needed both an internal and an external focus. Six responses mentioned the idea of *encouraging or encouragement* while other responses implied it. For instance, one considered the mission of the Church was *to prepare, remind, and strengthen change in people to maintain Christianity.* Three responses included the word nurture, noting that the mission was *to nurture those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour* or *to nurture those united to His Church*. Others included similar ideas in their suggestions that the mission is *to help us personally*, *to lead each other to grow spiritually, to oversee the well-being of the Church family,* or to help people *hold onto faith in God.* The remaining internally focused ideas relating to the mission of the Church ranged from the need to provide *advice* or *correct us in whatever things we do wrong*, to its ability to *keep us away from bad influences* and to *provide meaningful worship services.*

Service

The Adventist Church has been known for its focus on service, so it is not surprising that service arises as a theme amongst discussions about the mission of the Church. The theme of service arose in the answers of sixteen participants, which is comparable to the number of responses to the previous theme. Four responses use some form of the word service, suggesting that the mission of the Church is *to serve humanity*. A further seven responses talk generally about *helping* (5) or *caring* (2) for others. One noted that we are called *to touch as many lives as possible*. Five responses zeroed in on *helping* (2), *caring for* (2), or *reaching out to the needy* (1). Little further explanation was provided in any of these responses.

The Three Angels' Messages

The final theme to reach the level of 5% of the respondents was the theme of the three angels' messages. Sixteen responses mentioned this phrase. Two simply listed the phrase without qualification. The others noted that the Church should *preach* (7), *proclaim* (5), *share* (1), or *spread* (1) *the three angels' messages*. In three responses this theme was linked to the *everlasting gospel*. One suggested that the everlasting gospel was the three angels' messages by putting it in brackets after the words everlasting gospel. Another suggested that the Church should preach the *everlasting gospel of the three angels' messages*, while the third suggested preaching the *everlasting gospel in the context of* the messages of the three angels.

Other

A variety of other ideas were mentioned in response to Question 4 but did not reach the level of 5% of respondents. These included ideas of baptism, increasing Church membership, becoming Christlike and making disciples.

Aims of the Church (Question 5)

Question 5 provided a variety of statements about the aims of the Church and asked respondents to rate their importance. Table 17.2 summarises this data by listing the goals in ranked order based on the percentage of Solomon Islands educators (SIM) who thought each statement should be listed in the top two or three goals of the Church. The table also includes the comparative percentages collected from teachers in the schools in Australia (AUC).

These rankings suggest that the educators in the Solomon Islands, like their Australian counterparts, view the leading three goals of the Church as "preparing people for the soon return of Jesus", "leading people to accept Jesus as their personal saviour", and "share the message and teaching of Jesus with the world". The three goals identified in this question match the top three themes emerging from the open-ended question, although there is a minor change in order.

While the goals of "teach an ethical viewpoint" and "provide a meaningful worship service" are ranked in the middle of the chart, a much higher percentage of Solomon Islands teachers see these as worthy of being in the top three goals than do their Australian

counterparts. The importance placed on meaningful worship services correlates well with responses to the open-ended question, where the theme of nurture ranked amongst the top eight themes. However, the idea of teaching an ethical viewpoint did not emerge as a theme in responses to the open-ended questions.

Table 17.2
Ranking of the Goals of the Church (SIM)

Possible goals of the Church	Should be one of the top two or three goals of the Church		Should not be a goal of the Church or doesn't apply to the Church	
	SIM	AUC	SIM	AUC
Prepare people for the soon return of Jesus	73.6%	54.4%	2.7%	2.7%
Lead people to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour	72.5%	74.9%	2.7%	27%
Share the message and teaching of Jesus with the world	65.8%	71.0%	2.1%	3.2%
Teach an ethical viewpoint	61.1%	36.8%	5.1%	1.6%
Provide meaningful worship services	53.9%	37.5%	3.1%	2.0%
Persuade people to join the Church through baptism	38.1%	12.5%	15.0%	10.7%
Convince people of the teachings of the Church	37.7%	14.0%	6.1%	11.9%
Increase the numbers who attend church on a regular basis	29.0%	16.1%	11.3%	7.0%
Reduce poverty, disease and ignorance	28.0%	38.3%	15.2%	2.9%

Persuading people to join the Church through baptism is clearly controversial. On one hand, nearly three times as many Solomon Islands teachers think this should be one of the top goals of the Church as compared with their Australian counterparts. On the other hand, it ranks sixth in importance below the goal of meaningful worship services. It also missed the 5% cut-off in the definition of themes in the open-ended question and ranked nearly the highest of any goal in relation to the statement that this should not be a goal of the Church.

Also of interest is that the lowest ranking is given to reducing poverty, disease, and ignorance, along with the highest number of teachers who believe that this is does not apply to the Church or should not be a goal of the Church. By comparison, this ranked in the middle of the listing of goals for Australian teachers. Given the low level of wages and high level of need in the Solomon Islands this is at first surprising. However, this finding may simply reflect a culture that is not driven by ownership of material things.

Conclusion

An examination of both the responses to the open-ended question and ranked goals of the Church in this study reveals that teachers in Adventist schools in the Solomon Islands understand the mission of the Church to be primarily focused on spreading news of the gospel story, leading people to Jesus, and preparing them for the future, especially the second coming of Jesus. All three areas are key components of the official Church mission statement articulated in the *Working Policy* of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Most of the other elements of the official mission statement emerged in the remaining themes identified in the open-ended questions. This is reassuring in that it indicates that the mission statement is being translated reasonably accurately across cultures. However, while elements of discipleship were clearly present in the themes, the word disciple was curiously infrequent, occurring in just four responses.

Also of interest is the observation that most of the open-ended themes focused on sharing information rather than practical aspects of Christianity. This was also reflected in the ranking in Question 5 where reducing poverty, disease, and ignorance ranked the lowest in priority of the various goals of the Church.

Overall, this study has revealed that many teachers employed in the Adventist schools in the Solomon Islands have a clear understanding of the need to proclaim the gospel message and lead people to Jesus. However, it would be valuable for the Church to invest more effort in communicating the ongoing process of discipleship.

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