Chapter 12
Australian Adventist Teachers' Perceptions of and Contributions to Mission: School, Self, Church

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This chapter presents the results from nine questions posed in the Australian Teachers' Survey. The questions explore the teachers' understanding of the mission of their school and its relationship to the mission of the wider church; their contribution to that mission, both within the school and beyond the school, in their church and community; and their perceptions of the success of their school in fulfilling its mission.

The responses given by participating Australian teachers to closed Questions 31, 32, 33, and 35, and to open-ended Questions 34, 57, 58, 71, and 72, are presented in this chapter. Not all of these questions appear across all the surveys, as some appear only on certain branches (see Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of the survey instrument). In this chapter the questions will sometimes be addressed individually with the relevant data from the survey, and sometimes in groups by topics. For the open-ended questions, i.e., Questions 34, 57, 58, 71, and 72, participants answered in their own words. The researchers have used these exact words and phrases to identify common themes and to assign headings. As with the other open-ended questions from this survey, reported in earlier chapters in this book, NVivo was used to code and recode the data, thereby identifying emerging themes. Italics are used throughout this chapter, as in the other chapters, to identify direct quotes from participants.

Mission of the School

When asked in Question 31 how well they knew the mission statement of the school, more than three-quarters of the respondents to Branch 1 on the Australian Teachers' Survey asserted they knew the mission statement of their school. Only one third of these respondents claimed they knew the statement very well. Although on the surface this seems quite a positive response, it highlights the challenge of mission statements being more than just a document and the need for them to be simple, visible, memorable and measurable.

It would have been of interest to ask the respondents to state the actual mission statement of their school so that their claimed knowledge could be verified. The mission of an organisation, in many cases, is often understood in generalities rather than being a specific statement with measurable indicators of effectiveness. This is why there is a growing trend in the charity sector, to which religious schools and churches belong, to demonstrate the impact that an organisation has in fulfilling its purpose or mission (International Federation of Accountants [IFAC], 2015).

Table 12.1

Australian Responses to Question 31: "How well do you know the mission statement?"

Question	Response	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Q31: How well do you know the Mission Statement of the Organisation for which you work?	*Not at all* 0	2	2.0%
	1	2	2.0%
	2	18	18.0%
	3	17	17.0%
	4	34	34.0%
	Very well 5	27	27.0%
Total		100	

When asked in Question 32 how the mission of the school contributed to the overall mission of the Adventist Church, only 86 respondents for Branch 1 of the Australian Teachers' Survey—the

smallest number of responses in this cluster—answered the questions on this theme. Of those who responded, more than four in every five believed there was a connection between the mission of the school and the mission of the wider Adventist Church. Almost four in every ten of the positive respondents asserted that there was a strong link. Considering that Adventists have historically approached mission with a four-dimensional strategy—preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling (Kuhn, 2016)—it is encouraging to see that today's teachers affirm that schools contribute positively to the mission of the Church.

Table 12.2
Australian Responses to Item 32: Mission Statement's Contribution to Mission of Church

Item	Response	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Q32: How well do you think the Mission Statement of your Organisation contributes to the Overall Mission of the Adventist Church?	*Not at all 0*	0	0.0%
	1	1	1.2%
	2	12	14.0%
	3	20	23.3%
	4	25	29.1%
	Very well 5	28	32.6%
Total		86	

Personal Contribution to the School's Mission

When the conceptual aspect of schools being a key part of the mission of the Church is brought to the personal level, almost nine out of every ten respondents to Branch 1 of the Australian Teachers' Survey were positive about their contribution to the mission of the school. However, it is interesting to note that only one in four of those who responded positively also thought they contributed a great deal to the mission of the school, the smallest percentage in these three closed questions.

Table 12.3
Australian Responses to Item 33: Your Contribution to Mission of School

Item	Response	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Q33: How much do you think you personally contribute to the overall mission of your organisation in the work that you do for it?	*Not at all* 0	0	0.0%
	1	3	3.0%
	2	10	10.0%
	3	24	24.0%
	4	42	42.0%
	Very well 5	21	21.0%
Total		100	

When one examines the open-ended responses to the following question (Q34), in which teachers report the range of specific activities to which they personally contribute, it appears that there is a sense of modesty in the way teachers evaluated the significance of their contribution in response to Question 33. The range of activities reported, and the priorities within these activities, demonstrate the significant commitment and contribution to the mission of the school.

Question 34, "In what ways do you personally contribute to the overall mission of your School/Organisation?", was posed to Australian teachers answering Branch 1 of the Australian Teachers' Survey. In total, seventy-seven of the participants had the opportunity to answer this question. However, thirty-eight of these participants (49%) chose not to answer this question and one participant stated, *not much*. Other than this last comment, no reason/s were provided by participants as to why they did not answer this question. The reason/s why participants left this question blank would be very interesting and could provide an understanding of why they did not address this question, but this was not asked of the participants and is therefore not included in this report. An addition to this question on the survey is recommended for its future use in other Divisions. Seven themes were identified from the responses to this question and are listed in descending order of popularity in Table 12.4, below.

Table 12.4
Themes From the Australian Responses to Item 34: "Ways you contribute to the mission of your school"

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Teach about Jesus	17	22%
2. Encourage others in their relationship with Jesus	9	12%
3. Show Jesus	9	12%
4. Care for students	6	8%
5. Participate in church programs	6	8%
6. Pray	5	6%
7. Teach	5	6%

Each of the themes identified will be presented together with the data from the surveys sharing how these teachers personally perceive their contributions to the overall mission of their school. The first four themes link together and show that these teachers believe that they personally contribute by their direct involvement and active sharing of Jesus and portraying Him to others.

Teach About Jesus

Seventeen of the Australian teachers were clear that their personal contribution to the overall mission of their school was to *teach about Jesus*[1] daily in their classrooms. Participants also used other verbs such as *share Jesus* (five participants) and *show Jesus* (two participants) daily in their classrooms. The fact that these teachers are intentionally teaching and sharing about Jesus in their classrooms every day links directly with the mission of Adventist schools. These teachers are focused on and clear about their mission to teach about Jesus and then to lead others into a relationship with Jesus.

Encourage Others in their Relationship with Jesus

Nine Australian teachers reported that they encouraged others in their relationship with Jesus. Responses included statements such as *encouraging and creating opportunities for students to build* or *grow*

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

a relationship with Jesus (six participants). Five of these teachers mentioned *discussions* and *conversations* about a relationship with Jesus, often including their own relationship with Jesus. Two teachers specifically mentioned *mentoring their students*. The act of discipleship as part of the mission of Adventist schools is to lead students to Jesus and to foster their relationship with Jesus. Clearly these teachers are actively involved in this process. In conjunction with teaching about Jesus and encouraging others in their relationship with Jesus, these teachers are also involved in showing Jesus to their students.

Show Jesus

This theme also reveals a very engaging personal involvement by nine Australian teachers. These teachers *show who Jesus is* by *being a Christian example* and *reflecting the values and mission* of the school. One teacher stated that they *treat others the way Jesus would have*. Another teacher said, *by living Jesus*. Two more teachers stated that *I demonstrate love and compassion to those around me*. This aspect of personal witness is integral to the mission of Adventist schools. The fact that these Australian teachers are showing Jesus to their students demonstrates their commitment.

Care for Students

Six teachers identified their contribution as caring for their students. Teachers identified this by making statements that included *providing support and care* (four participants) and *nurturing students* (one participant). This theme again showed the teachers' personal and active involvement with their students.

The remaining three themes emerging from the data in response to Question 34 present the individual contribution that the teacher makes to the overall mission of their organisation.

Participate in Church Programs

Six teachers identified their participation in church programs as their contribution to the mission of their organisation. These church programs included: *conducting worship* (two participants), *running home churches* (one participant), *involvement in StormCo* or *Asian Aid* (two participants), *church participation* (one participant), *tithing* and *donations* (three participants). These areas of personal contribution

are all important and active areas for these teachers to support the mission and play a role.

Pray

Prayer is a powerful contribution and five teachers particularly identified this as their personal contribution to the overall mission of their organisation. Prayer is not limited to time, people, or place and so these teachers are able to contribute wherever they are. This theme is the only stand-alone contribution that is not measureable but significant.

Teach

It was not surprising to find that five teachers identified their personal contribution to the overall mission of their organisation as their teaching. These teachers are working at an educational institution and teaching is their profession and skill. The fact remains that they *work with children every day* (one participant) and use their *classroom to provide holistic education opportunities* (two participants).

Throughout the seven themes that emerged from the data, a clear personal commitment is evident among the Australian teachers. They are actively involved with their students to witness and share Jesus with them.

Working for the Church

When asked what they liked about working for a Church organisation, the Australian teachers identified three significant themes. These teachers liked sharing the same values and beliefs, being able to share Jesus freely, and working with colleagues who care. These themes were identified in the participant responses to Question 57 on the survey, which asked: "My School/Organisation is connected with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If I were asked what I liked about working for a Church organisation, I would say: …" This question was posed on Branch 2 of the survey, which was answered by 80 participants.

Table 12.5
Themes From the Australian Responses to Question 57: "What do you like about working for a Church organisation?"

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Same values and beliefs	22	28%
2. Freely share Jesus	17	21%
3. Colleagues who care	13	16%

As with all the open-ended questions on the survey, participants had to provide their own responses. Thirty-two participants (40%) elected to leave this answer blank. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is an area that needs to be addressed in the survey in future in order to understand why participants are intentionally not answering a question. At this stage there is no evidence to provide a reason for this and only assumptions can be made. The three significant themes emerging from the data came from the responses of 60% of the total participants.

Same Values and Beliefs

The feature that Australian teachers most often said they liked about working in their Church organisation was the fact that the others in their workplace shared the same values and beliefs. Twenty-two teachers expressed this theme. The most common statement was *working for an organisation that shares my beliefs* (eight participants). Another eight teachers stated, *I am able to work within the same values*. More teachers found that the workplace *aligns* (four participants) with their personal ministry and *we have a common purpose* (four participants). Other expressions used by participants grouped under this theme included *part of something unique* and *connectedness and solidarity of working towards a life/living goal*. This theme clearly portrays a group of people who like working together. There is a common thread bonding the staff at their core and which involves their beliefs and values. The fact that these teachers can be themselves at work is significant and links directly to the next significant theme emerging from the responses to Question 57.

Freely Share Jesus

Seventeen participants stated that they liked working for their organisation because they could freely share Jesus. The fact that these

teachers can confidently and openly contribute to the mission of their school was an aspect they really liked. Teachers felt that Jesus was at the centre of everything they did. Within their working environment they had the *opportunity to witness* (seven participants) and *freedom to share Jesus* (four participants) with their students. Three teachers liked the fact that they worked in *an environment where spiritual and deep discussions about being human are facilitated and encouraged*.

Colleagues Who Care

This third theme emerging from the data was supported by thirteen teachers. These teachers felt that they were *supported, strengthened, understood, upheld, and cared for by the other staff* at their Church organisation. One participant said *how much like-minded peers can be supportive*. Five teachers talked about the *family feeling* that is created in their workplace. Other teachers mentioned *the network* (two participants) and *sense of community among staff* (four participants). Altogether, emphasis was on care and how teachers valued this in their workplace.

These three significant themes highlighted why the Australian teachers liked working in their Church organisation. All three themes show teacher engagement and the personal worth that they have placed on their teaching and contribution to the mission of their school. These themes align well with the mission of Adventist education.

Negative Aspects

The next question on the survey focused on the negative aspect of working in a Church organisation. Despite the outstanding positive aspects, these teachers also presented the not-so-great aspects of working in a Church organisation. They were asked: "If I were asked what frustrates me about the fact that my organisation is a Church organisation, I would say: …" (Question 58). This question was available only on Branch 2 of the survey and, as in the previous open-ended question above, eighty participants had the opportunity to answer. Only 35 responded to this question. More than half of these teachers (45, or 56%), chose to leave this question blank without giving a reason. There could be any number of reasons for participants' choosing not to answer this question. Assumed reasons could be that they fear a reaction from the Church organisation in response to their answers, or that participants could have felt that they did not actually have the freedom to express their frustrations. Another possibility could be that the teachers did not experience any

frustrations, or that they experienced too many frustrations and did not wish to begin presenting them. There are many more potential reasons that could be suggested, but because there is no evidence from the participants, this aspect will only be noted but not examined further. Of the thirty-five participants who responded to this question, four stated that they had no frustrations and that *all was ok* or there was *nothing*. The three themes shown in Table 12.6 emerged from the responses of the remaining thirty-one participants.

Table 12.6
Themes From the Australian Responses to Item 58: Frustrations About Working for a Church Organisation

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Closed-minded	15	19%
2. Lack of support from organisation	11	14%
3. People make mistakes	4	5%

Closed-Minded

The greatest frustration presented by the Australian teachers working in a Church organisation was the fact that it was *closed-minded*. One participant expressed this view well, describing *the expectation to conform to a strict and bounded way of thinking that discourages authentic journey, doubt, and progress*. Other participants used words such as *not accepting, judgemental, self-righteous, dogmatic, hypocritical, limited, resistant to change,* and *rigid*. One participant stated that they were frustrated by *being watched outside of school hours*. Clearly these frustrations collectively present a negative aspect of the organisation being linked with the Church identity.

Lack of Organisational Support

The teachers identified that they were frustrated with the organisation. The fact that there was a *lack of organisational support systems* (four participants) or *the leadership is poor and needs major improvement* (four participants) were sources of frustration. Resentment was expressed over *staff not being treated well* (two participants) and there was frustration over *so many inconsistencies* (one participant). One participant expressed the view that the

organisation *expects a bit too much ... beyond healthy amounts of time*. The frustrations expressed show that these teachers feel that they are not supported well by management.

People Make Mistakes

Although only four participants made comments along this line, the theme does link with the previous theme. People do make mistakes and these contribute to frustrations within the work environment. One participant acknowledged that *people make mistakes and are human and I have to remember that God is in control*. A *lack of professionalism* and a *lack of honesty in a Christian workplace* were additional frustrations.

The three themes expressed by the Australian teachers grouped here as frustration all relate to the behaviour of other people and their contribution into the workplace. Teachers expressed disappointment in colleagues and leaders and the resultant distraction from the mission and ethos of the organisation not just for the students in their care but especially for the staff employed in the Church organisation.

Contribution to the Mission of the Church Beyond the School

On Branch 4 of the survey, teachers were asked about their contributions to the wider mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Two questions, 71 and 72, asked participants to provide their own assessments of how their work contributes to the wider mission and how they contribute outside of their work duties to the wider mission of the Church. Each of these questions is addressed individually below. These questions link with Question 34, posed on Branch 2, and reported earlier in this chapter.

Question 71 asked, "In what ways do you think the work you do as an employee of your school/organisation contributes to the wider mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" Seventy-two participants had the opportunity to respond to this open-ended question. Twenty-eight of these participants (39%) chose not to respond to this question. From the responses of the remaining 44 participants (61%), three themes emerged.

Table 12.7
Themes From the Australian Responses to Question 71: How does your work as a teacher contribute to the mission of the SDA Church?

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Provide the opportunity for students to choose God	29	40%
2. Model Christianity	20	28%
3. Explicitly teach	12	17%

Provide the Opportunity for Students to Choose God

Most of the teachers (29 out of 44 participants) who responded to Question 71 stated that their work contribution to the mission of the Church was to *provide the opportunity for students to choose God*. This is a significant work contribution as, within their daily work, they were *leading students into a relationship with Jesus* (two participants), *sharing Christ with students and winning them to Him* (five participants). Other participants used similar expressions: for example, *encourage students to develop a personal relationship with God* (two participants), *allows me to build students' relationships with God* (three participants) and *making disciples in my classroom* (one participant). All the expressions provided by the Australian teachers show what they consider to be their active personal contribution to the mission of their organisation through their daily work environment. These teachers are clearly committed to assisting their students in getting to know God and building a relationship with Him. As part of this process, the teachers are very aware of their own lives and how these may have an impact on the students that they connect with in their classrooms.

Model Christianity

Actively being a model Christian was identified by 20 teachers as their personal contribution through their work to the wider mission of the Church. The teachers were aware that they needed to be a *positive example* (four participants) to their students and others expressed it as, *explicitly reinforce and demonstrate Christian teachings in the*

classroom (seven participants), *live a life/role model for students/ to live the Christ-life* (one participant), *show them Jesus* (three participant) and *service with a cheerful spirit and excellence* (two participants). Another teacher said, *living practising Christian who witnesses to my clients*. *Displaying a Christian worldview* or *setting a Christ-like example* were other expressions used by the participants. Overall, within this theme the teachers described how they were actively presenting a model of a Christian in order to attract their students to God.

Explicitly Teach

The last theme identified from this question is not surprising, as these participants are employed to teach. Twelve participants identified this theme as their contribution to the mission. These teachers expressed that they *explicitly teach from a Christian perspective* (eight participants). Two participants said that they *ministered through teaching,* while another two participants stated that they *teach Bible*.

These three identified themes link and confirm the themes identified in response to open-ended Question 1, from all survey branches, and Question 34, Branch 2, reported earlier in this book and in this chapter. There is a strong intent among these teachers to be involved actively in the mission of the Church within their work environment and to incorporate it in their classes.

Question 72 extended this concept to see what the teachers considered to be their personal contribution to the wider mission of the Church beyond their work: "In what ways do you contribute to the wider mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church outside of your work duties?" Australian teachers were also asked this question on Branch 4 of the survey. Again, seventy-two teachers had an opportunity to address this open-ended question in their own words. Thirty-seven responded, but a significant proportion of these teachers (thirty-five, or 49%) chose to leave this question blank. As with Question 71, no reasons for not answering the question were asked and so this report will not investigate that further, but it is noted that this is a large number of non-responses and contributes to the results presented in this chapter. The themes presented in Table 12.8 emerged from responses of the remaining 37 participants.

Table 12.8
Themes From the Australian Responses to Question 72: Ways contribute to mission of Church outside of work duties

Theme	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Involved at church	29	40%
2. Everyday life	9	13%

Involved at Church

The most common theme that emerged from the teachers' responses to this question is that of being involved at church (29 respondents). The teachers referred to *active membership* (eight participants) as well as leading in various church areas, for example, *StormCo* (two participants), *children's church* (four participants), *Pathfinders* (four participants), *music ministry* (four participants), *audio/visual ministry* (one participant), *church elder* (three participants), *youth leader* (one participant), *CHIP* (one participant) and *treasury* (one participant). Two participants stated that they were involved in church by giving *offering, tithe, donations to ADRA and registered support ministries of the SDA Church*. Ten participants were actively involved in the community and service projects run by the church, which included *short-term mission trips*, *church planting*, *soup kitchens,* and *vacation Bible schools*. These teachers are certainly personally involved in their local SDA churches across multiple and varied ministries contributing widely to the overall mission of the church.

Everyday Life

The second theme to emerge from the data in response to Question 72 does not mention the SDA Church but focuses on what the teachers are doing personally to contribute to the wider mission of the SDA Church. Nine participants highlighted their everyday life as their personal contribution to the mission. Each of these teachers expressed a different aspect of everyday life, and these varied from *looking after family* to *showing God to others*. Other expressions included *teaching the Bible*, *seeking Christ and walking in His ways*, *sharing Jesus's love*, *focusing on Jesus*, *setting a positive example*, *making contacts*, *spreading the three angels' messages,* and *witnessing*. These aspects are directly linked to the Bible and are all connected to these teachers and what they do on a daily basis across their everyday life.

The responses to these questions show that more than half of the Australian teachers who responded to these questions are committed to the mission of their organisation and are actively involved in the SDA Church ministries, as well as including the overall mission within their everyday lives. This overall mission is part of their lives and is linked across everything that they do. These teachers are aware that they are Christian models and need to present Christ in all they do.

Conclusion

When asked about the success their school has in fulfilling its mission, almost all the respondents were positive, even though two-thirds of these responses reported only qualified success. Naturally, it would be of interest to know what the teachers thought were the indicators of success and their reasons for reporting the school was only *somewhat* successful. However, this question was not asked and could be considered in any follow-up research.

Table 12.9
Australian Responses to Question 35: Success of Organisation in Fulfilling Mission

Question	Response	Number of Participants	Percentage
Q35 How successful do you think your organisation is in fulfilling its mission?	*Very successful*	29	30%
	Somewhat successful	64	65%
	Not very successful	3	3.1%
	Not successful at all	2	2.0%
Total		98	

What is apparent is that teachers in Adventist schools in Australia see education as an integral part of the mission of the Church. Their personal contribution, both within the school and in the wider church and community, demonstrates a commitment to mission. They are focused on uplifting Jesus, modeling by example what it means to be a disciple, and inviting those entrusted in their care to know the transforming love and power of God and to commit to serving him in their communities.

References

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