

“HOW TO BE A GOOD FARMER—EVEN IN A CITY: CREATING A COMMUNITY-BASED MINISTRY” APPEARED IN THE JANUARY – MARCH 2011 *ELDER’S DIGEST*. THIS ARTICLE PROPOSED “TEN FARMING COMMANDMENTS” WHICH SYSTEMATIZED JESUS’ MINISTRY METHOD INTO 10 INTENTIONAL ACTION STEPS FOR OUR TIME,<sup>1</sup> AND SERVED AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A SERIES OF *ELDER’S DIGEST* ARTICLES IN THE COMING MONTHS THAT WILL UNPACK THESE 10 COMMANDMENTS IN MORE DETAIL.<sup>2</sup> BELOW IS THE THIRD IN THE SERIES. THIS ARTICLE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOURTH AND FIFTH “FARMING COMMANDMENTS.”

# HELP, LORD! I’VE BEEN ASKED TO PLANT A CHURCH!

A local conference asked Frank, a young church leader, to plant a church in a section of a large city that had virtually no Adventist presence. This was a new thing for him, and he prayerfully considered what steps he would take to carry out this assignment. First, he consulted a map and determined the boundaries of that section of the city. Wanting to know more about the people he was planning to serve, he visited the local library to research demographic information about them. He was able to discover the area’s major cultural groups, average income, religious affiliations, etc. Then he parked his car in the busiest part of the neighborhood and began going from business to business asking questions about life in that area. He visited with political, business, and social agency leaders, asking questions about the greatest needs in that community. He made friends with some of the local residents, who invited him to join the local Rotary club.<sup>3</sup> In that setting he discovered other community leaders who opened the way to rent the annex of a local Presbyterian church. Rotary Club members provided seed money to buy paint and cleaning supplies to refurbish the annex to use for community services. Interviews with community leaders indicated that health was an important felt need in the community. Therefore, Frank brought together a team of volunteers who ran in the annex various health screening programs and follow-up meetings for community residents. Those who benefited from the screenings and programs paid a modest fee, which helped pay the expenses. Almost immediately a branch Sabbath school was started and some of the residents began to attend. This community-based

ministry eventually spawned a church that currently has 140 members—an example of planting a ministry first, and growing a church out of that ministry. When you plant a ministry first, meeting real needs in the community, the resulting church will likely be more focused on ministry/outreach and not just on the church itself.

Frank’s true story introduces more steps in our “Farming Commandments” series. This time, we will explore ways to carry out “Farming Commandments” four and five.

## 4. THOU SHALT CHOOSE AND NARROW DOWN THY TERRITORY.

After you have determined approximately where to focus your ministry efforts, how do you decide the boundaries of your target territory? First, get a good map that shows the larger region and specific neighborhood(s) where you will focus your ministry. Look for a map that also is marked with boundaries of towns, cities, counties, and postal codes (e.g.



ZIP Codes in USA). Such maps can be found in some bookstores, city/regional planning departments, etc. Mark on the map the location of your church or proposed ministry. Also indicate where other Adventist churches and institutions are located. Ask yourself what kind of neighborhood is your target area. Is it in the center of a large city, an old industrial area, in a suburb, in a small town, or a rural area? To define your ministry area draw a circle on your map that is based on the distance the people are likely to commute to your community outreach events. Research shows that people will commute only 15 minutes at first to visit a new church. Use the location of your building/church as the center point. (1) If your building/center of operations is in an urban community, this circle should only be about three miles out from this building/center. In a more densely populated urban community—maybe only 20 blocks. (2) If your building/center of operations is in a suburban community, draw a circle nine miles out from the center. (3) If your building/center of operations is in a small town or rural area, this circle should be about 15 miles out from the building/center.

Once you have drawn the circle on your map, notice what postal codes/Zip Codes are largely in the circle. If the line runs through the middle of a Zip Code/Postal Code, you will have to use your judgment. For example, the Zip Code may cover a large area, but only a small portion may have lots of streets. If this densely populated area is within your circle, include all that Zip Code/Postal Code as part of your territory.<sup>4</sup> You also should factor in the location of other Adventist Churches and institutions when finalizing on your territorial boundaries. Once you have determined the Zip Codes/Postal Codes that are in your territory, you are ready to carry out “Farming Commandment” number five:

## 5. THOU SHALT DO A DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS ON THE CHOSEN TERRITORY.

Demographics are about documenting people. When Frank was laying the groundwork for his church-planting project, there were so many unknowns. Since he wanted his connections with and ministry to the community to be relevant, he was wondering: How many people live here? How many households and what kinds? What is their median age? What about gender, ethnicity and immigration? How do people make a living? What is the economic situation of the people? How much poverty? How much education do they have? What kind of houses do they live in? What religions are they affiliated with? Frank’s trip to the library provided him with information available at that time. Now demographics are much more accessible and detailed. In addition to the census or official statistics provided by your national government, or using Google or Yahoo to research your target area, websites such as the following are helpful:

[www.statoids.com](http://www.statoids.com) (This website is good for international demographics).

[www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com) (Useful within the United States).

[www.sdacmm.org](http://www.sdacmm.org) (This is the website for the Center for Metropolitan Ministry [CMM]. If your territory is in the USA or in other countries, you can order from CMM detailed printed demographics and maps analyses based on the Zip Codes or postal codes of your chosen territory).

[www.Link2Lead.com](http://www.Link2Lead.com) (Information about Percept, a resource that specializes in supplying churches with demographics and other resources for planning within their mission context).

So, there you have it: two more important steps in planting a relevant ministry in your community. If your Social Action Leadership Team (SALT)<sup>5</sup> follows these steps, they will be off to a good start in positioning your church for effective Gospel Farming. As elders, you have a major role in supporting this intentional and crucial process of preparing the soil of your target community to receive the seeds of the Gospel.



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*The next article in this series will discuss the sixth and seventh “Farming Commandments.”*

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<sup>1</sup> The 10 Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus’ ministry method and pray for...; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a **Social Action Leadership Team (SALT)**; (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn “Social Capital;” (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the resources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate.... AND an 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to *Reap* where thou hast farmed and *keep* what thou doest reap (disciple—preserve the harvest)!

<sup>2</sup> So far, these follow-up articles have appeared in *Elder’s Digest*: (1) “Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand...” (Oct.-Dec. 2011); and (2) “Our Community Does Not Know Us...” (Jan.-March 2012). To access these articles online, go to [www.sabbath-schoolpersonalministries.org/acsi](http://www.sabbath-schoolpersonalministries.org/acsi). Click on “Articles & Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “ACSI Curriculum.”

<sup>3</sup> Go to [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) for more information.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, Version 2, (Lincoln, Nebraska: Center for Creative Ministry, 2004), 29-31.

<sup>5</sup> See “Farming Commandment” number three. SALT is a team of four to six members in your church who will help implement the 10 Farming Commandments in your community, launching your current church into relevant community-based ministry—or planting a new church.