

“WE CAN’T AFFORD NOT TO HAVE SOMEONE LIKE THIS IN OUR COMMUNITY . . .”

“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 TIME¹ 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.² BELOW IS THE SIXTH IN THE SERIES. THIS ARTICLE WILL FOCUS ON THE EIGHTH “FARMING COMMANDMENT.”

The businessman from Carnegie stood in front of the town council, which was expected to vote down granting the Adventists an occupancy permit to move into a building on Main Street in his town. “We can’t afford not to have someone like this in our community!” he emphatically explains to the members of the council. A local bank manager moves to the podium. She adds, “I work very closely with the Adventists, and they are a wonderful group. They need your support. Please give them their occupancy permit. This town needs them.”

Adventists who responded to a devastating flood in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, USA, had gained the confidence of this hurricane-battered town. What’s the story behind the council chamber story?

On September 17, 2004, Hurricane Ivan caused a devastating flood in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area. The Adventist Church, through Adventist Community Services (ACS), was called in to help the people in this region rebuild their lives. The ACS team worked with the community to develop a system of local volunteers from various organizations as well as from churches of different denominations to clean up and restore the damaged homes, businesses, and churches in the region.

After three months, ACS began to make plans to leave the area, in accordance with usual disaster response policy. Local residents pleaded that ACS remain in the region for the well-being of its communities. The challenge was to find a building in which ACS could settle for a long-term presence. At last, Adventist Church leaders found an appropriate building in Carnegie, a suburb of Pittsburgh. But the local town council members were indicating that they would vote “No” to the proposal that Adventists occupy this building. The council scheduled a hearing and a vote on this matter. An unusually large crowd from the community showed up at the hearing.

The members of the council listened as, one-by-one, community leaders and residents testified of the difference that this

group of Adventists had made in their lives during their time of extreme need. “Adventist Community Services came through and helped my children and me to rebuild our lives. We had nothing, and they helped us with everything.” “We are standing up thanks to these men and women who gave so unselfishly of themselves to help their brethren. . . .” At the end of the three-and-one-half-hour-meeting the council voted unanimously to grant the Adventists their occupancy permit to settle into Carnegie’s Main Street.

Why did Adventist Community Services receive such a positive reaction from the community of Carnegie? They were living Farming Commandment #8: “*Thou shalt earn “Social Capital.”*”

What is Social Capital? “Social capital consists of positive, productive relationships which are just as valuable as money in the bank.”³

Money capital grows when you make investments in your money account. Your social capital grows when you make investments in relationships around you. Indeed, there were many investments in relationships as ACS teams demonstrated the love of Jesus when they mingled with and served the devastated community in Carnegie. ACS steadily gained social capital, preparing the way for God’s Church to have an on-going presence in the community so that it could build up His Kingdom there.

A church and a community are rich when they have a network of positive relationships among themselves—even if they are materially poor. Together, they can do much for the betterment of their community through their assets of creativity, energy, and caring for each other. As social capital grows, the community benefits the church, and the church benefits the community (the community sees the church as valuable to them).

Farmers in many countries have an old tradition of helping each other to harvest their crops, build their barns, etc. This

united cooperation among them is a demonstration of social capital in action, which helps each family to conserve their strength and get the work done more efficiently and quickly than they could ever do alone.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* urges all church members to “be recognized as outstanding citizens in . . . working for the common good of all.” And to “support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent, all proper efforts for social order and betterment.” Adventists are expected to “stand apart from all political and social strife” and “maintain an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs, along with strict adherence to our religious convictions.”⁴

When we build up social capital in our communities we are helping to fulfill the Adventist mission. The Adventist Community Services organization in each church is the usual organizational unit through which this goal is accomplished.

Since ACS usually operates on limited financial resources, and is a volunteer group, social capital is a very helpful asset. The Adventist group in Carnegie made an impact because they didn’t do their compassionate work by themselves. They partnered with other churches and organizations for the common good of the community. Financial and supportive human resources became available which they wouldn’t have had otherwise to reach their goals.

As a church leader, you can go a long way to build your church’s social capital by representing your church at civic organizations, ministerial associations, and town councils and boards. This helps you with networking and with planting Gospel seeds. From these relationships you may discover opportunities to partner with some of them and enable your church to make a greater impact in your community.

You may wonder how much social capital you really have. James Krile suggests making a “social capital map.” Make a chart with four columns. Write the following at the top of the columns: “Organizations/Individuals” (first column); “Strength of Tie” (second column); “Resources” (third column); and “Next Steps” (fourth column).⁵

List the organizations/individuals with which your church has a relationship in column one. In the second column, list whether the tie is strong or weak between you and that organization. (Strong or weak ties are based on the degree of trust, mutual benefit from the relationship, and how long-lasting the relationship has been.) In the third column list what resources that organization has to offer, and in column four list your next steps. As you analyze your list you will now have a better idea of the level of your social capital “account.”

While organizations that have strong relationships with you are easier to ask for resources, community projects that have very large goals may create a need to partner with organizations with whom you have weak as well as strong relationships.

Dear church leader, God calls you and your church to invest in relationships inside *and* outside your church. The group in Carnegie did that. When they needed community support to get their occupancy permit for their building, the community was with them. Why? Because the church was *with* the community, the community was *with* the church. Great things can happen

when your church has social capital. Such social capital opens the way for your church to share more of Jesus and His Gospel in your community.

Is your church rich in social capital? If you are “poor,” how will you change that?

ED

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¹ 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 11th 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)!

² 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); (2) “Our Community Does Not Know Us...” (Jan.-March 2012); (3) “Help, Lord! I’ve Been Asked to Plant a Church!” (July-Sept. 2012); (4) “As I Walked Around and Looked Carefully...” (Jan.-March 2013); and “You’re the First Church That Ever Asked...” (July-Sept. 2013). To access these articles online, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi. Click on “Articles & Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “IICM Community Services & Urban Ministry Certification Program Curriculum.” For a direct link, go to www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acs_iicm.

³ International Institute of Christian Ministries (IICM) Community Services & Urban Ministry Certification Program, CS 02 “Community Assessment and Social Capital,” by Monte Sahlin. This article incorporates some of the main points from this CS 02 module.

⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Chapter 12, “Standards of Christian Living.”

⁵ James Krile, *The Community Leadership Handbook*, (Fieldstone Alliance, 2006), pp. 123-129.

The next article in this series will discuss the ninth “Farming Commandment.”

