

# WHERE IS GOD ALREADY ACTIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

## AND HOW CAN YOU JOIN HIM?

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

The members of the Newport, Tennessee, Seventh-day Adventist Church wanted their church to make a difference. They decided to partner with their community to bring comfort and joy to abused and hurting children.

Newport Church member Carole Colburn directs an outreach ministry called “It’s My Very Own” (IMVO). Fifteen women from churches of various denominations in the community join Newport members at the Adventist Church on Monday mornings to produce “Bags of Love” for the IMVO ministry. The IMVO project is done in partnership with Child Protective Services in their neighboring 10 counties.

These ladies lovingly make beautiful quilts and large, colorful cloth bags for the quilts. They also add toys, stuffed animals, personal care items (comb, hairbrush, toothbrush, toothpaste), books, etc. The bags are then delivered to Child Protective Services.

When children are forcefully removed from their homes, they generally can’t take anything with them to foster homes. Receiving a “Bag of Love” from Child Protective Services gives them something to call their very own. Each quilt has a tag that reads:

*“It’s My Very Own” Bags of Love  
Made for you by the hearts and hands of the people of your  
community*

*Sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church*

So far, the ladies have made over 1,600 quilts and bags. Because of confidentiality issues, they may never know most of the reactions to their loving work. But some statements have reached their ears: “These bags make such a difference to the kids. They come into our office scared to death. But the minute they are given these bags that are their very own, it’s like Christmas.” “Even the teenage boys come into the office with their quilts thrown over their shoulders.” A foster parent telephoned Carole Colburn and said: “I’m so glad to reach someone who is involved in making these quilts and bags. Just recently we were given two children to keep—a boy, age 6, and a girl, age 9. When they came to us, they brought these bags with them. And now they will hardly let the quilts out of their sight. Even though the weather is warm, every night they insist on sleeping with them. And the little boy is apparently really missing his father—because he calls his teddy bear ‘Daddy’ and sleeps with him every night.” Over and over, this foster mother repeated, “You don’t know what a difference these bags make to these children. What a difference, what a difference! Now they have something they can call their very own.”

Carole commented, “Any good we’re doing here can only be credited to the Lord. He has sent the right people to help and has given us a very rewarding little mission with the needed church and community support. We just pray it will mean souls saved in the kingdom.” Some of the ladies from the community who are involved in IMVO are attending the Newport church regularly. Carole rejoices that the Lord impressed Barbara

Neher in Kentucky, USA, to start the IMVO work several years ago, and to share it through ASI (Adventist-laymen's Services & Industries).

This touching IMVO story leads right into Farming Commandment 10: "Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate." Since I presented this commandment in the "How to be A Good Farmer—Even in a City" article in the January–March 2011 issue of *Elder's Digest*, I have thought of a better way to express Commandment 10: "Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Thou shalt join Him by collaborating with community organizations."

From a leadership standpoint, what is the difference between "cooperate" and collaborate?"

To "cooperate" implies "co-operating"—operating at the same time but not necessarily together. It could imply operating in a hierarchal mode—at different levels—one person above or below another. Also, it could be territorial: "Don't cross the line into my territory!" "This is my portion of the pie, and that is your portion of the pie. Who gets the bigger portion?"

To "collaborate," on the other hand, implies "co-laboring"—working together for a common goal. There is no hierarchy with one person above the other. Organizationally, it is like a "flat circle"—with everyone working together at the same level—no one above or below the other. For example: "How can we work together (combine our resources and people power) to make one better pie?"<sup>3</sup>

The Newport Church "collaborates" with various entities in its community: churches of other denominations and Child Protective Services. They work together for a common goal—and combine their resources and people power to accomplish the goal of bringing comfort and joy to abused children in their community. Together they accomplish more than each could alone.

It is encouraging to realize that your church need not work alone in ministering to your community. When your church partners with the community, you build bridges of friendship and trust. You increase your "social capital."<sup>4</sup> If you follow Farming Commandment 8 and become aware of and network with organizations in your community, you will be more likely to spring into action in collaboration with these organizations. Here are some possible types of relationships in your community through which you can partner and collaborate:

- Businesses
- Public schools
- Community coalitions
- Churches
- Community organizing coalitions
- Public boards and committees
- National organizations
- Government, urban/suburban church partnerships

What other community relationships can you add to the list?

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). The purpose of salt is to mix with other ingredients and enhance their flavor. Salt does more good when it is out of the saltshaker and collaborating with other ingredients. Are your church members following the example of the Newport Church and getting out of the church "saltshaker" and collaborating with the "ingredients" of your community to transform it for the better—in Jesus' name?

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The last article in the series will discuss a bonus "Farming Commandment"—the eleventh.

<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 eleventh 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 . . ." (October–December 2011); (2) "Our Community Does Not Know Us . . ." (January–March 2012); (3) "Help, Lord! I've Been Asked to Plant a Church!" (July–September 2012); (4) "As I Walked Around and Looked Carefully. . ." (January–March 2013); (5) "You're the First Church That Ever Asked . . ." (July–September 2013); (6) "We Can't Afford Not to Have Someone Like This in Our Community . . ." (October–December 2013); and (7) "Strategic Ministry Planning So Your Church Will Make a Difference" (January–March 2014). To access these articles online, go to [www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org](http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org). Click on Adventist Community Services, and "Articles & Media." To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on "Resources" and "ICM Community Services and Urban Ministry Certification Program Curriculum." For a direct link, go to [www.sabbathschoolpersolministries.org/acs\\_iicm](http://www.sabbathschoolpersolministries.org/acs_iicm)

<sup>3</sup> Explanations of "cooperate" and "collaborate" are adapted from presentations by Sung Kwon, Executive Director, Adventist Community Services, North American Division.

<sup>4</sup> As explained in a previous article in this series ("We Can't Afford Not to Have Someone Like This in Our Community . . ." [October–December 2013]), "Social Capital consists of positive, productive relationships which are just as valuable as money in the bank." The eighth "Farming Commandment" emphasizes mingling/networking with community organizations so that your church can form positive relationships in the community. Networking obtains "Social Capital." The tenth "Farming Commandment" emphasizes springing into action (acting on your strategic ministry plan—ninth commandment) and accomplishing community transformation in partnership/collaboration with organizations with whom you have positive relationships. Collaborating spends the "Social Capital." Commandments 8 and 10 overlap somewhat.

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