

One day my husband, Gaspar, and I were celebrating a rare moment of leisure by making banana bread together. As I was putting in the salt, he unexpectedly remarked, "We are the salt—not the whole recipe." I asked, "What do you mean?"

He replied, "The church often organizes around itself rather than around the mission in its community. We need to come to a point where we nurture a close relationship with Jesus and each other, while equipping ourselves to function in the outer community." As I pondered Gaspar's sudden "irrelevant" outburst in the midst of our banana bread project, it gradually dawned on me what he was trying to say.

We "salt Christians" need each other within the church saltshaker to be strong enough for seasoning the world. We need our Savior, Jesus, to give us our savor—and to keep us from losing it (Matt. 5:13). But salt doesn't exist for the sake of itself. It is for mixing with and enhancing something different from it. It does more good outside the saltshaker. Even though it is still salt, it vanishes within the food it is flavoring. "Every worker who deals with souls successfully must come to the work divested of self."¹

Jesus modeled the role of salt. "As one who desired their good,"² He lost Himself in the needs of those around Him. He mixed Himself with people who were different from Him (winebibbers, tax collectors, fishermen, business people, harlots, lepers). He practiced the ministry of presence—incarnational ministry.

Contamination Danger?

Phillip Samaan reminds us that Satan cleverly plays on our fears of being contaminated by the world. Thus he tempts us to isolate ourselves comfortably from involvement with a dying world.³

How many friends do you have from the world "out there"—in comparison to those inside the Adventist church? A speaker asked a group to tell how many non-Adventist friends they had. Various people were sharing the answer to his question. One man in the back of the room stood up, straightened his body to his full height, and proclaimed, "I'm proud to say, NONE!"

Jesus has called us, the members of His church, to be "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). But with what—or whom—should church members mix?



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Before He died, Jesus prayed to His Father that He would not take His disciples out of the world. Instead, He "sent them into the world" (John 17:15, 18).

We should mix with humanity.

Spiritual Introverts

In my travels I have noticed that some Adventist churches appear to be somewhat introverted and focus primarily on their "insiders." But church members also need to become "insiders" with organizations in the community—just as the salt mixed inside the banana bread dough transforms it.

Salt

Is Not the Who le Recipe

By MAY-ELLEN COLÓN



Practicing the ministry of presence in our communities

Isaiah 58 addresses a self-centered "it's all about me" religion. Our church's mission is to the world, "not unto itself."⁴ If we looked at past board minutes of your church and mine, would the majority of the discussions and votes be focused on issues inside the church, or the needs of the community around the church? If your church and mine moved away, would the community around it notice?

A world survey of the Seventh-day Adventist Church revealed that 29 percent of church members are involved with their community outside their church walls. The "Tell the World" initiative introduced by the General Conference is urging a mind-set that will change this statistic. Between 2005 and 2010 the Adventist world church is challenging each member to have a part in increasing the percentage of church members involved in community service from 29 percent to at least 40 percent.

What About You—and Your Church?

Robert Linticum describes three positions that a church can take in its community.⁵

- 1. The Church in the City.** This refers to the location of a church. Usually the members are not from the community. This church has little or no involvement in the community.
- 2. The Church to the City.** This church senses its responsibility to do something for the community. It decides unilaterally what the community needs. It does not consult the community about its perceived needs. It then invites the community to participate. There is a risk that the community won't be interested in what the church thought it needed.
- 3. The Church With the City.** This church sees its mission to the community as a partnership. It consults the community leaders to find the burning issues, and brings the ministry of the church out into the community.

"The church with the city" mentality helped the Adventist Church membership to double in the 1890s. During that decade, church members were involved in

the community and focused on ministry to the needy.

We must be close to—mixed in with—the people of the community before we can effectively tell them anything! When we have won their confidence and trust, they will be more likely to listen to and embrace what we attempt to tell them for Jesus' sake. There may be a place for shouting the gospel message from a distance, but there is also great value in whispering a message of hope to a friend.

How Can It Happen?

How can we more effectively "salt" (not assault) our communities? For starters, here are a few hints:

- Focus on a certain territory in your community.
- If possible, have a demographic analysis done on the chosen territory.⁶
- Early on, drive around the chosen territory and note the types of homes, stores, churches, and people.⁷
- Talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them.⁸ Don't

try to guess what their needs are in some cloistered church boardroom.

- Join civic clubs, such as Rotary International, Lions, etc., to network with community leaders and business people. Pastors can join the local ministerial association.
- Develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs you have discovered.
- Pray and ask God to show you where He is already working within that community.

After consulting with community leaders, the Summerville (Virginia, USA) Adventist Church sponsors the only child care center in the county, as well as after-school programs in several public schools. In Australia, the Central Coast Community Church, in conjunction with the Red Cross and Sanitarium Health Food Company, feeds breakfast to at-risk children five days a week at the local primary public school.

Members of this church sign a covenant that includes commitment to community involvement—preferably assisting other organizations in the community. The Seoul (Korea) Central Church runs a popular vegetarian restaurant from Monday to Friday in their church. They also provide haircuts, free health diagnoses to aged people in their community, and Sabbath meals. Three hundred aged people from the community are coming to church, and 50 to 60 people are baptized each year through these activities.

The above vignettes show that community service is not just Dorcas and disaster relief (although these are doing much good). Community service is a mind-set that is holistic, and seeks to restore the image of God in humanity. Sometimes people will accept Jesus because of our contact with them. Sometimes they won't. But we serve with no strings attached—just because that's what Jesus would do.

Look Out! Get Out!

I hope this shakes you up—and out of the saltshaker. That's what saltshakers do. They get shook. "Go and make disciples of all nations [and communities].... And surely I am with you always...."⁹

It's not only about us. We are the salt, but not the whole recipe. It's about Jesus and the world that He loves. 🍷

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 168.
² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 14 (emphasis supplied).
³ Phillip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1990), p. 43.
⁴ Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community* (Lincoln, Neb.: Center for Creative Ministry, 2001), p. ii.
⁵ Robert C. Linticum, *Empowering the Poor: Community Organizing Among the City's Rag, Tag, and Bobtail* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC Publications, 1991), pp. 21-30.
⁶ See *Understanding Your Community*, chapter 4.
⁷ This is sometimes called a "windshield survey." See *Understanding Your Community*, pp. 29-34.
⁸ See *Understanding Your Community*, pp. 91-120, for interview strategies and questions for community leaders.
⁹ Matthew 28:19, 20, NIV.