

TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD

A Declaration of Spiritual Accountability in the Family of Faith

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is filled with examples of individuals and institutions who have been, and are, vibrant witnesses to their faith. Because of their passionate commitment to their Lord and appreciation of His unbounded love, they all have the same goal: to share the Good News with others. One key Bible text has motivated them. It is a text that fires the souls of Seventh-day Adventists everywhere. It is what is called the Gospel Commission, the mandate from the Lord Himself, as recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The New International Version says: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . ."

This mandate, from the Lord Himself, is simple, beautiful, and binding. It is for every follower, whether member, pastor, or administrator—Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples. This principle ignites the mission of the Church and sets the standard for any measuring, any assessment, of success. It touches all, whatever their responsibility, whether they are laypersons or church employees. It spans all the elements of church life, from the local church to the General Conference, in schools and colleges, publishing houses, health-care institutions, and health-food organizations. The promise is encapsulated in the baptismal vows, in mission statements, in aims and objectives, in policies, and in constitutions and bylaws "to witness to His loving salvation," "to facilitate the proclamation of the everlasting gospel," "to supply the multitudes with the bread of life," and "to nurture them in preparation for His soon return." The four-fold command to go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples sounds wherever Seventh-day Adventists work or come together.

As the Church has grown in size and complexity, more and more members, pastors, and administrators have asked serious questions about how the Church relates to the Gospel Commission. Do the wheels and the gears of the Church just turn out above-average products and services that cannot be readily distinguished from their secular counterparts? Or does the Church make sure its basic products and services reveal to the world the way to eternal life? Nothing should be excluded from these questions, whether it be church worship services or organizational or institutional programs and products.

The time has come for the Church as a whole to ask and answer the hard questions about how the Church is relating to the guiding principle of the Gospel Commission. How can the guiding principle be actualized in the lives of members, pastors, and congregations? How can they measure their progress in fulfilling the Gospel Commission? How can the Church's universities, colleges and academies, health-food factories,

high-tech health-care institutions, clinics, publishing houses, and media centers develop accountability based on the Gospel Commission?

This challenge calls for a frank and analytical approach in determining where the Church is in relationship to the Lord's command. It is not enough to measure success by secular standards, not enough to give those standards priority. Total commitment to God involves, primarily, total acceptance of the principles of Christianity as outlined in the Bible and as supported by the Spirit of Prophecy. Congregations, institutions, individual church employees, and church members can easily find satisfaction in goals reached, funds raised, buildings completed, budgets balanced, accreditation achieved or renewed, and yet fail to be accountable before God to the Gospel Commission. The first and continuing priority for the Church must be this directive from the Lord: **Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples.**

While the Gospel Commission does not change, its fulfillment is demonstrated in different ways. A pastor works within a different context than that of a classroom teacher, a physician, or an institutional administrator. Whatever the personal or institutional role, each one is accountable to God's command. Among the great benefits resulting from an assessment of their effectiveness will be the increasing trust that develops as each member, each pastor, each administrator, and each church institution addresses this priority and gives it proper attention.

The family of God acknowledges that each person is individually accountable to God. At the same time, believers are admonished to examine themselves (see 2 Corinthians 13:5). A spiritual assessment process has its place in the personal life. Just as surely, it has its place in organizational life.

Spiritual assessment, while appropriate, is also a very delicate matter. For humankind sees only in part. The earthly frame of reference is always limited to that which is visible and to a brief span of time surrounding the present. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from careful and thoughtful evaluation of personal and organizational life.

It is possible to identify several principles which can guide such an assessment. While any attempt will be incomplete, the following areas of specific assessment will heighten awareness of and accountability to God and to the mission which is an integral part of the Christian's relationship and commitment to Him. The list is not comprehensive of those identified for attention, but the principles outlined here are applicable also to other individuals, organizations, and institutions. . . .

What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the elementary schools and academies.

A Seventh-day Adventist elementary school/academy creates a climate that nurtures the

student spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially, and instills confidence in the relevance, role, message, and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The schools provide excellence in Adventist education by . . .

- developing, for the institution, a comprehensive spiritual master plan and curricula for all subjects that, in addition to academic excellence, support the Seventh-day Adventist world view and integrate faith and learning,

- employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning as they nurture their students in being good members and citizens of both church and society,

- working with parents and local congregations to ensure that each student is presented with the claims of Christ and is given opportunity to decide for Him and be baptized,

- transmitting to students an understanding of the biblical role of the last-day people of God and how they can participate in fulfilling the mission of the Church,

- involving staff and students in outreach initiatives in ways appropriate to student age and planning community opportunities for witness, and

- participating systematically in a division-developed, and a union- and conference-implemented, spiritual assessment process which provides annual reports to the school board and its various constituencies.

What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the colleges and universities.

A Seventh-day Adventist college/university offers academically sound, tertiary and/or post-graduate education to Seventh-day Adventists and to students of nearby communities, who welcome the opportunity to study in an Adventist environment, by . . .

- developing a comprehensive spiritual master plan, proposed by the faculty and approved by the board, that identifies the spiritual truths

Continued on page 11

Editor's Note: The "Total Commitment" document, excerpted above, was presented during the Annual Council in 1996 and served as the basis for addresses at the March 1997 Adventist Higher Education Summit in Loma Linda, California, several of which appear in this issue of the JOURNAL. In addition to the recommendations for the church's educational system, the document also includes guidelines for assessing the spiritual accountability of church members, pastors, congregations, hospitals and health-care institutions, institutions of mass communication, food industries, conferences/missions and unions, and the General Conference/divisions. Copies of the document may be obtained from the JOURNAL office. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD

Continued from page 4

and values, both cognitive and relational, which the institution is committed to share with its students and to comprehensively identify the opportunities through which those values will be communicated during a given period of time in campus life,

- maintaining a classroom and overall campus environment which ensures opportunities for both academic instruction and Gospel encounters that produce graduates who are recognized by both the Church and society for their excellence in both the academic and spiritual aspects of their lives; men and women who are well-balanced spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially; men and women who love their Lord, who hold high His standards in their daily lives, who will help build strong, thriving local congregations, and who will be salt and light to their communities both as laypersons and as church employees,

- affirming unambiguously in classroom and campus life the beliefs, practices, and world view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sharing the joy of the Gospel, demonstrating confidence in the divinely established role of the Advent movement and its continuing significance in God's plan

for these last days, facilitating activities for faculty, staff, and students to engage in Gospel witness and Christian service, and encouraging the faculty and staff to a consistency of life-style which is manifested in nurturing, compassionate faculty/staff relationships with students,

- employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning in the context of nurturing their students to be productive members of both society and of the Lord's Church, and who interact with parents and other constituents in order to understand and to fulfil their high academic and spiritual expectations for educational programs serving the youth,

- evaluating the achievement of the objectives outlined in the spiritual master plan by a faculty-developed, board-approved, comprehensive assessment program, designed with sufficient specificity to evaluate each element of campus life, to guide the college/university administration in taking affirming or corrective measures, and to serve as the basis for annual reports of the spiritual health of the institution to the governing board

and various constituencies, and

- submitting the proposed spiritual master plan and assessment program to a General Conference-appointed, international panel of highly qualified educators who will provide the college/university board with a written evaluation of the spiritual master plan and the assessment program. . . .

Truly, the spiritual mandate is simple. **Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples.** Responsible Seventh-day Adventist Church members and all church employees must remember that each one will be held accountable before God for this principle. Someday, at the great judgement bar, the Lord will ask, "What have you done, relying on My grace, with the gifts, talents, and opportunities I gave you?"

As He did 2,000 years ago, the Lord commands His Church today: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." **Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples.** Total commitment to God mandates the fulfillment of this commission, which is still the only and true measure of success. ☞

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