

# Church Planting in Unentered Areas in the South American Division

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In a report presented to the executive committee of the South American Division (SAD) in May 2008, the Global Mission Department presented the total number of municipalities throughout the division, the total number of municipalities where Adventist work has been established, and the total number where there is no Adventist presence. Table 1 shows the task remaining.

Based on this information, one can see that out of a total of 9,395 municipalities in the SAD territory, the church has a presence in 59.22 percent of all the municipalities and



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is absent in 40.77 percent of them. This picture presents an interesting perspective concerning Adventist evangelization in South America, because even though the membership growth is significant and robust, the above statistics present a reality concerning the unentered areas that must still be dealt with before the Church can complete its work in this part of the world. Many new churches are still needed.

The number of baptisms has increased, and membership has grown, but the growth has been focused on expanding the existing local churches instead of extending the church into new territories (Viera 1990:98). This does not mean that there are no church extension projects. In fact, many local churches in the SAD are committed to planting churches in neighborhoods without an Adventist presence, but most of these are in municipalities where the church already exists. The problem is that there is less emphasis on planting churches in unentered cities.

Expansion growth—where a church grows numerically, is of

vital importance, but extension growth—where the church is planted in unentered areas is of even greater importance. It was church planting in unentered areas that led to the explosive expansion of the New Testament church as it introduced the gospel into new territories. This article suggests three reasons why extension growth, where the contemporary church plants churches in unentered territories that have not yet been reached by the gospel, is of vital importance.

### **The Great Controversy**

Satan has claimed the kingdoms of this world as his possession, which is why the Scriptures call him the “god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4). His claim that he has full ownership of this planet was revealed when he tempted Jesus in the desert and emphatically stated: “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to

whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). In this scenario, Jesus did not deny the ambitious claims of his archenemy, in fact, Christ himself later referred to him as the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). This world is territory usurped by Satan in which he displays all kinds of diabolical activities contrary to the activities of the kingdom of God.

[Satan] has been the invisible ruler of many of the great kingdoms and empires of the earth. . . . He rules in the hearts of most of its inhabitants (cf. Eph 2:1-2). The world obeys his dictates, yields to his temptations, takes part in his wicked ways and abominations. He is the author and the instigator of all sin and the very embodiment of it. Willful sinners are said to be given over to Satan (1 Cor 5:5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). He is the “god of this world” because of his control, even though limited, of the forces of nature, the elements of the earth, sea, and sky (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary [SDABC] 1957:6:854, s.v. “God of this world”).

Table 1: The Adventist Presence in South America.

SAD Countries	Number of Municipalities	Adventist Presence	No Presence
Chile	354	275	79
Argentina, Paraguay Uruguay	1,194	725	469
Peru	1,744	1,060	684
Ecuador	217	141	76
Bolivia	327	168	159
Brazil	5,559	3,217	2,342
TOTAL	9,395	5,564	3,831

In this sense, John is right when he says that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19, NIV). Satan “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9) and the “spirits of demons, performing signs,” go out “to the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (Rev 16:14). In the time of the end, the beast which is the “masterpiece of Satan’s power” (White 1911:50) in an effort to lead the entire population of the world to worship the dragon (Rev 13:4), will seek to extend its authority over “every tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev 13:7).

end in itself but must be seen as the means by which God seeks to bring glory to his name through the lives of those who were “delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col 1:13). That is the reason why in the time of the end, “as the controversy extends into new fields and the minds of the people are called to God’s down-trodden law, Satan is astir” (White 1911:607). Satan, in an effort to prevent the inevitable, will attempt to halt the progress of God’s people to preach in new places and to plant churches in

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However, God has not given up its sovereignty in this world. The prophet Isaiah shows that his purpose is to fill the earth with “the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). In this context the mission of the church, as stated in the message of the first angel, is defined and directed towards the same area that the enemy has tried to usurp, i.e., “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). In view of this great battle for territory and peoples, planting churches in unentered areas is not an

unentered areas. But the biblical message indicates that Satan is a defeated being (Col 2:15) and that his kingdom is headed for destruction since it was invaded by Christ (Heb 2:14-16). Planting churches builds the kingdom of God and reduces the territory usurped by the enemy. Hence, “at the end of the story of sin (Rev 20-22) the deceived ‘nations’ (*ta etne*), the devil, the beast and the false prophet will be destroyed (Rev 20:7-10). On the other hand, the ‘nations’ (*ta etne*) that have been saved . . . shall bring glory and honor to

the Lord (Rev 21:24-27)” (Rode 2007:20, 21).

### **Urgency**

The New Testament presents the event of the *parousia* as an event that is soon to occur (1 Cor 16:22; Heb 10:35-38; Rev 22:7, 12, 20), which is another missiological reason that gives urgency to reach the unreached. “A crisis is right upon us. We must now by the Holy Spirit’s power proclaim the great truths for these last days. It will not be long before everyone will have heard the warning and made his decision. Then shall the end come” (White 1948:24).

Planting new congregations accelerates the preaching of the gospel in unentered areas. “Our aggressive missionary work is to be more abundant than it has been in the past. More territory is to be annexed; the standard of truth is to be planted in new places; churches are to be established; all is to be done that can be done to fulfill the commission, ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations (Matt 28:19)’ (White 1901:2).

It is interesting that a missionary work that is “more abundant” for Ellen White meant that more territory was to be annexed and the truth was to be established in new places in order to fulfill the great commission of Matt 28. It is time for the church to discard small evangelistic plans and instead look at the potential for church growth when new churches are planted

in the major strategic cities that have not yet been reached. God has many people in these cities (cf. Acts 18:10) who will only be reached as more churches are planted. The experience of the apostolic church as recorded in the book of Acts teaches us that the early Christians accepted the great commission of Christ from the perspective of planting new churches, and because they gave themselves to be God’s instruments in this dimension of growth, Paul was able to say that the gospel was “preached to every creature under heaven” (Col 1:23).

### **Church Planting Promotes Spiritual Development**

Regardless of whether a new church is planted by an evangelistic team or is the result of another methodology, it has great potential for both qualitative and quantitative growth. Church growth studies have shown that new churches produce quantitative growth ten times faster than older, established churches (Dudley 1989:203). Conversely, when old churches adopt a church planting strategy, growth is increased and new leaders are developed. This is due to the fact that those members who leave the old church must develop new skills as they support and guide the development of the new church plant. It is possible that some members would never have discovered their personal skills of leadership if they had

not left their old church to work in planting a new one. The old church also benefits as it replaces the departing members, for this too forces members to develop their leadership qualities. Thus, the planting of new churches has a double blessing for the kingdom of God. On the one hand a new church is planted that reaches out to gain people who otherwise would not be reached, while on the other hand old churches that had stagnated are revived and begin to grow again (Gladden 2000:45). This finding agrees

Trees that are crowded closely together do not grow healthfully and sturdily. The gardener transplants them that they may have room to develop. A similar work would benefit many of the members of large churches. They need to be placed where their energies will be called forth in active Christian effort. They are losing their spiritual life, becoming dwarfed and inefficient, for want of self-sacrificing labor for others. Transplanted to some missionary field, they would grow strong and vigorous (White 1905:151, 152).

This is just what the Norte Church in Guayaquil, Ecuador experienced. Guayaquil is a

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with what Ellen White said concerning the planting of churches.

Many professed Christians, in seeking church relationship, think only of themselves. They wish to enjoy church fellowship and pastoral care. They become members of large and prosperous churches, and are content to do little for others. In this way they are robbing themselves of the most precious blessings. Many would be greatly benefited by sacrificing their pleasant, ease-conducting associations. They need to go where their energies will be called out in Christian work and they can learn to bear responsibilities.

commercial, cosmopolitan city, which receives people from all over the country and has experienced major growth in recent years. The northern part of Guayaquil has a population of middle and upper middle class people which usually means that the church does not grow as quickly among such people as it does elsewhere in the city. However, the Norte Church recently planted several churches in the area: the church of Nueva Alborada which in turn planted the congregation of Orquídeas, Vergeles, Atarazana, and Saucos. Each of these

churches started as a result of members splitting off from the Norte mother church. Yet, even though the Norte Church gave up many of its best leaders in order to plant four additional churches, it has continued to develop new leaders from among its membership and still has as many members as it had before it started planting churches (Rainer 1993:207).

The Era Adventist Church in Lima, Peru has had a similar experience as it planted a whole cluster of daughter churches. The Los Pinos Church was planted ten blocks away, while

2001, opposite the university along the river another church was opened. In 2004 the church building project at the mother church was still not finished, but almost all of the daughter churches had their own buildings under construction (Rode 2007:127).

### **Pauline Model: Church Planting in Strategic Cities**

One of the goals of Global Mission is the establishment of Adventist work among every geopolitical and ethno-linguistic group of one million people (Santos 2008:5). However, one

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the El Inti Church was planted five blocks further in the same direction. Four blocks in another direction is the El Faro Church and five blocks towards the hills is the Monte Sinai Church, while in another direction just five blocks up the hill is the Adevenir Church and a little further in the same direction is the congregation of Monte Horeb. But that is not all, for on the other side of the hill, about ten blocks away is the Colinas Church, and in 2000, just five blocks from this church, the congregation of Redemption was opened. In

must remember that the Pauline model for establishing churches as found in the book of Acts was not focused on the number of inhabitants in the cities of the Greco-Roman world, but rather on the strategic position that key cities held for the propagation of the gospel. Paul's hope was that from those key cities missionaries would take the message of salvation to the surrounding unreached territories (see 1 Thess 1:8). This shows that while there were cities and towns where Paul did not personally preach the gospel,



those cities where he went were “important political and commercial centers, and therefore in the mind of Paul, were strategic sites from where the gospel of Christ would spread throughout the empire” (Hale 2006:560).

### **First Missionary Journey**

Paul and Barnabas were not directly responsible for bringing the gospel to Antioch in Syria, but as soon as work started in that city, Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to minister to the needs of the new believers (Acts 11:22). Later, he recruited Paul to join him in his missionary activities in Antioch (Acts 11:25, 26). From this time on, the two apostles were closely related with the progress and growth of the church in that city. From a geographical standpoint Antioch was an important city because after Rome, Alexandria, and Ephesus, it was the largest city in the Roman Empire (SDABC 1957:6:262, s.v. “Antioch”). The church in Antioch went on to become one of the important centers of Christianity and a base for missionary church planting in areas that had never heard of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:1-3).

The time that Paul and Barnabas worked in Antioch could well be viewed as a time for clarification and formulation of a strategic model that would be replicated over and over again as they established churches in other important cities of the em-

pire. Antioch “had a large colony of Jews, whose religion had numerous converts or ‘proselytes.’ It was almost like an oriental Rome, where there were representatives from all the civilized life of the empire, and during the first two centuries of the Christian era Antioch was what Constantinople later became—“the door of the East” (Jamieson 2002:2:256). The city had developed an extensive trade that “brought to the city many people of various nationalities” (White 1911a:155), being “a resort for lovers of ease and pleasure, because of its healthful situation, its beautiful surroundings, and the wealth, culture, and refinement to be found there” (White 1911a:155, 156).

When the Holy Spirit chose Paul and Barnabas for their first mission trip, he chose men who had developed a strategy that they could use in other cities which would allow the gospel to be established in the great strategic centers of the empire.

As Paul and Barnabas left Antioch they carried out their missionary efforts in cities like Paphos, an important port that was the Cyprus headquarters of the Roman governor. Subsequently, they sailed to Perga of Pamphylia and from there into the southern part of Galatia, reaching the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

### **Second Missionary Journey**

The second trip was not only used to encourage the churches

established during the first missionary journey, but it also focused on planting churches in key cities. An example is Philippi, a city that was strategically connected by roads that funneled all trade from both east and west through it and that was also becoming an important military center. From Philippi Paul travelled to Thessalonica, without stopping at Amphipolis or Apollonia, for his strategy was to “select major cities, and turn them into centers for the spread of the gospel” (SDABC 1957:7:223, 224).

courage of believers and instructing them. He stayed three years in the city of Ephesus which is considered the religious and administrative center of the Roman province of Asia and was where one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—the famous temple of Diana—was located. Paul established a strong church in Ephesus. Again, Paul’s strategy, which I believe was prompted by the Holy Spirit, is instructive for us in planting churches. Our church should also focus on reaching the major cities with

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Later on, he went to Berea, then to Athens and finally to Corinth. The latter two cities were secular and materialistic urban centers that presented some of the greatest challenges that Paul faced in his eagerness to preach the gospel. But he knew that by planting churches in both towns that two outposts for the gospel would be established in strategic cities where there was a constant influx of people from the surrounding areas.

### **Third Missionary Journey**

Paul traveled across Galatia and Phrygia, confirming the

the gospel. Major cities are not necessarily the biggest in terms of population, but they will have socio-political significance within the territory where they are located. It is also true that the church should not just concentrate on large cities, for many smaller towns are places where people congregate who would never be able to hear the gospel in the big cities.

Thus one can say that the Adventist force for evangelism should not focus too much attention on those areas that are not strategically important. Like Paul, we can expect that once



the major cities of our territory are reached, the churches in those areas, if well trained and managed, will ultimately share the gospel with the surrounding villages that could be considered non-strategic.

Given the way most countries are organized the church can continue with a strategy very similar to Paul's to plant churches in each of the significant and influential municipalities. This must never be seen as a disregard for smaller towns, but it must be remembered that when human and financial resources are limited, the church must accomplish its strategies which produce the most fruit possible. Jesus himself said: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans" (Matt 10:5). Jesus was not showing discrimination; obviously there was a purpose and context, for Jesus had a strategy to reach his own people with the message first, and then to use them as a base of support to reach other surrounding groups. Strategies always prioritize so that in the long run more can be accomplished with the resources available.

### **Challenges, Insights, and Vision in South America**

If reaching the non-entered municipalities is a key for rapidly spreading the gospel in the SAD, it is even truer in areas of our world where there are few if any Christians or where the

church grows at a much slower rate. If each district within the SAD could intentionally commit to reach one unentered municipality each year, it would not take too long to enter all 3,831 unentered municipalities in South America. This strategy would require the commitment of each mission president, local pastors, and church members to recognize that church planting in unentered areas is a prerequisite to fulfill the evangelic mission of the church. This is where visionary pastors are needed who can be catalysts for local churches and their members. Many parts of our world are ready for the harvest (John 4:35). The question is, Will Seventh-day Adventist churches respond positively to give the peoples of the world an opportunity to hear the good news.

The vineyard includes the whole world, and every part of it is to be worked. There are places which are now a moral wilderness, and these are to become as the garden of the Lord. The waste places of the earth are to be cultivated, that they may bud and blossom as the rose. New territories are to be worked by men inspired by the Holy Spirit. New churches must be established, new congregations organized. At this time there should be representatives of present truth in every city and in the remote parts of the earth. The whole earth is to be illuminated with the glory of God's truth. The light is to shine to all lands and all peoples. And it is from those who have received the light that it is to shine

forth. The daystar has risen upon us, and we are to flash its light upon the pathway of those in darkness (White 1948a:24).

According to Ellen White, shepherds of the flock are to teach the existing churches “how to labor successfully. Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching” (White 1948b:20), but as soon as the church learns to depend on Christ and not on the pastor, the instruction is that

Our ministers are not to spend their time laboring for those who have already accepted the truth. With

church planting projects where new churches are being planted. There is the Caleb Project in the Northeast Brazilian Union, where young people, 15 to 30 years of age, spend an entire month carrying out public and personal evangelism. There is also the Antioch Project developed by theology students from IAENE (Northeast Brazilian College) who must plant a church as a requirement for their pastoral training. Global Mission in Ecuador has a project involving theology students who spent six weeks each year helping to plant churches in

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Christ’s love burning in their hearts, they are to go forth to win sinners to the Saviour. Beside all waters they are to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches, and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields (White 1948b:19, 20).

This requires planning, investment of time and resources, and total dependence on the Holy Spirit because he is the greatest strategist in the task of winning souls. Presently in the South America Division the Holy Spirit is raising up various

unentered cities. With enough financial resources this latter project could reach the remaining 76 unentered municipalities in Ecuador in six years. There is also the Macedonia project in the Northern Peruvian Union which brings pastors and lay people to hold evangelistic seminars that result in the planting of new churches.

**Conclusion**

In order to fulfill the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church it will be necessary to work in those unentered areas where there is no Adventist pres-

ence. Following the apostolic model our church must focus on those territories or municipalities where the present truth has not yet been preached. Although Satan claims those territories as his own, Christ defeated the great usurper and now sends the church to plant monuments in those places where the gospel has not yet been heard and where there are no worshipers who enjoy the “blessed hope” of his soon return.

Membership in the SAD is growing rapidly largely through expansion growth, but if the church in this part of the world—and in the rest of the world—wants to finish the preaching of the gospel, it must come to understand that planting churches in unentered areas is vital to accomplishing that goal.

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