***Ministry to Cities in our Time***

Cities, towns, and populated settlements have been centres of interest in the heart of our Creator and Saviour. From as early as in the book of Genesis, the Lord has expressed His concern in the lives and welfare of inhabitants of cities. We are told (Genesis 19:25) that the Lord’s wrath rained fire on the Cities of the Plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, after snatching faithful members of Lot’s family. The Lord has time and again sent His servants to cities to save His people. One of these cities was Nineveh, that great city, to which the Lord sent Jonah, Son of Amittai, with a damning message: *“…cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me…”* (Jonah, 1:2, NKJV).

We know, from the Biblical account, that after Jonah’s ministry, the Lord, graciously, spared the inhabitants of Nineveh after man and beast covered themselves in sackcloth and cried to God (Jonah 3:8). In Revelation 14:8, a city is metaphorically used to refer to a fallen religious system which *“…has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”* There is a significant number of references to the noun *city* or its plural variant, *cities*, in both the Old and New Testaments. Biblically speaking, repetitive use of words/expressions is a sign of their importance.

***Spirit of Prophecy and Cities***

Ellen G. White, under inspiration, wrote quite a bit about the importance and urgency of ministry to cities, and indicated, in no uncertain terms, that cities are prime contexts for the mission of the church. Her counsel makes more meaning today when hundreds of millions of citizens stay or live in towns and cities. Part of what the Spirit of Prophecy says on cities is as follows:

*The work in the* ***cities*** *is the essential work for this time. When the* ***cities*** *are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed…(Medical Ministry, p. 304).*

*The cause of God in the earth today is in need of living representatives of Bible truth. The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great* ***cities****. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers, and other consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned* ***cities****. Time is rapidly passing, and there is much to be done. Every agency must be set in operation, that present opportunities may be wisely improved (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 158-159).*

The Spirit of God is categorical that we must plan our work and reach city dwellers. There seems to be no two ways.

***Why Cities?***

In this regard and from a philosophical point of view, the Lord’s interest in cities could be on the basis of the following reasons:

1. Cities attract a significant number of the population since they provide job opportunities, they have advanced social amenities, and a host other advantages.
2. Due to high population, cities are likelier, than country settings, to attract diverse social evils including idleness, violence, sexual immodesties, and various forms of corruption.
3. Millions of city dwellers are honest seekers of truth, hungering and thirsting for that which silver nor gold can buy. These, like the Ninevites, need the Lord’s grace.
4. In our time, a strategic feature of cities, additionally, is that their uptake of technology is the highest, and information communication technology presents itself as a dynamic instrument for swift evangelism.

Today, hundreds of millions of people have been born in cities or have moved to stay in cities; sometimes in the long-term, and in other cases for short periods of time. In Kenya, it is estimated that about 28.6 million people are urban dwellers with Nairobi, the capital city, alone accounting for about 5.9 million people. Apart from this population, millions more enter and come out of Nairobi on a daily basis.

Kisii Town, the seat of Kisii Central SDA church, is one of the fastest growing towns in East Africa according to government of Kenya surveys. Part of the reasons for its exponential growth is the relatively friendly climate, availability of food, a friendly local population, a vibrant business community, and educational institutions. Its growth presents an opportunity for church ministry to its various inhabitants; those without affiliation to any religious formations, those affiliated to various religions and denominations, and believers, backslidden due to various factors.

***Kisii Town: An opportunity and an imperative***

The church was started in 1985 following weeks of evangelistic campaigns by an American Evangelist, R. Stafford. From a membership of a few hundreds, the church has grown into a few thousands today. On any average Sabbath, the population outstretches its seating capacity giving a clear indication that there is need of more space or of dividing the church into several independent churches. From a spiritual point of view, the church stands on a thrilling opportunity; precious souls, in their thousands, either live or enter Kisii Town weekly. With numerous health and educational institutions within and in the environs of the town, the opportunity to present the message of hope to thousands is apparent and urgent.

In the book of Ezekiel, the Lord says the following words, *“…Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from my mouth, and give them warning from me: When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die from his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul…”* (3:17-19).

The Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the Three Angels’ Messages (Revelation 14:6-12) and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return. This mission is accomplished in the context of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

Kisii Central SDA Church stands as a watchman in the midst of thousands of souls and so her work is clearly cut out. She has the resources, the personnel, and the opportunities to discharge her God-given responsibility.

But since we live in the information age, when we have an unprecedented flow of knowledge and information coupled with globalization, KCC and the SKC must re-think their approaches to soul winning. We admit that the Bible and the Bible alone remains a document of authority in our faith and that the Holy Spirit is the dynamic agent behind all success in winning souls. But, we also must understand that global movements will have a bearing on the *how* of our mission. We must ask ourselves a number of questions including:

* To what extent are we using technology in reaching tech-savvy youth and adults who do not ordinarily attend our Sabbath or any other services?
* How much success have we had in encouraging collecting of tithes and offerings using CFMS?
* How *equipped* are the men and women and youth that we nominate to church office every year?
* What measures are we putting in place to reach the biggest number possible of the thousands of unchurched people in Kisii and its environs?
* What is our strategy in reaching non-Adventists with the message of Revelation 14:6-12?
* What is our strategy for mission within the next 20 years?

In other words, the Church cannot solely exploit traditional methods to reach a modern audience, a modern mindset, a modern congregation. The church must invest in technology; in soft knowledge on how to reach and reclaim all cadres of human beings in the society; and, most important, in how to encourage generous giving in order to reach all segments of people in the growing city. I suggest that the following be considered critical investments to improve the effectiveness of the church in its mission.

* Let the church invest in the capacities of her members trained in various fields. If they are not nominated to church office, let the church have a system in which they co-opt them in their sub-committees. These could include financial experts, security experts, researchers, legal experts, urban planners, etc.
* Let the church conduct thorough training of church leaders in financial planning, knowledge management, minute-keeping, the constitution, and how these affect the mission of the church.
* Let the church have well-researched, evidence-supported and expert approaches in reaching the unchurched and believers in other churches.
* Let the church re-think her priorities in terms of resource allocation, so that there is more money going into out-of-church projects, i.e. invest more in outreach than in in-reach programmes.
* Let the church train her members in project planning and management.
* Let churches put in place strategic plans and pursue our mission with strict adherence to those plans. It is, actually, unacceptable that churches start and finish any one year without a blueprint.

Going by global movements, we must admit that we are at the very edge of eternity. At every turn, we see and hear what our savior predicted 2,000 years ago. What Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 glares in our eyes constantly. Social and political conditions, scientific advancements, and human depravity all declare, in thunder tones, that we are at the brink of history. Yet we have a huge responsibility to bring millions to our Savior. But we must plan our work in a manner that speaks to the 21st Century mindset.

The church must be awake, the church must think, the church must work. But specifically, individual church members must seize the opportunity that exists; they must stop asking what the church is doing for them, but ask what they will do for the fulfilment of the mission of the church. We are in an emergency; every church member must revive their Bible study, prayer life, and outreach.

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