

## MINING THE MANUAL

Total Member Involvement | Session 5  
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### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SDA CHURCH MANUAL

**1878:** Discussions regarding the formation of a Seventh-day Adventist church manual began in earnest.

**1882:** At the General Conference session, it was recommended that a subcommittee be commissioned to write “a manual of instructions for church officers.” A three-man committee prepared documents that were intended to be reviewed at the upcoming General Conference session. These documents were published in a series of thirteen articles in the *Review and Herald* during the next summer ahead of the 1883 session.

**1883:** A committee of thirteen appointed to review the proposed manual voted unanimously against it. General Conference president, George Butler, was commissioned to write an article in the *Review* explaining the committee’s thinking. Elder Butler’s article (tersely titled “No Church Manual”) commended the author’s work in preparing the proposed manual, even stating that it contained “much excellent matter” and gave “many valuable directions.” The concern wasn’t that particular manual, but the notion of having “*any manual whatever*.” Elder Butler felt so confident in the church’s position against the notion of having a manual that his concluding line was, “It is probable it will never be brought forward again.” He explained that the GC committee’s reasons for rejecting the manual were “of a broader character,” namely:

- Use of a manual might lead away some, especially of the younger ministers, from seeking guidance directly from Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Over time, a manual would be regarded not merely as a guide book but as a rule book. This perception would tend to make men shallower in their thinking and less original and less self-reliant.
- Since Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible, a manual could be understood as the first step away from that simple position and toward a creed like other denominations have.
- We’ve organized the denomination well by God’s grace this far without a manual—why start now?

**1932:** The first official Seventh-day Adventist Church manual was adopted by the General Conference in session.

### RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO THE CHURCH MANUAL

There are a variety of views regarding the existence and authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual. This presentation is not intended to be an excursus on every concern that could be addressed.<sup>1</sup>

For our purposes today, it should suffice that:

1. The SDA Church Manual is not inspired. It undergoes regular revisions and is of an entirely different nature than the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White—both of which are inspired and spiritually authoritative.
2. The SDA Church Manual does, however, harmonize with General Conference working policies and reflects the best practices current in local church governance.
3. Thus, the church manual provides sound practical guidance for local church functions. Its purpose is not to add to or replace the inspired sources of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, or the leading of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the SDA Church Manual is simply a helpful aid for church members and pastors in the routine functions of local church life.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive study of the development of the SDA Church Manual, see chapter thirteen, “A People of the Book,” in Dave Fiedler’s *Hindsight: Seventh-day Adventist History in Essays and Extracts*.

**From the *SDA Church Manual* (2010), pp. 126-127**

The gospel commission of Jesus makes evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the gospel, the primary function of the church (Matt. 28:18-20). It is, therefore, also the primary function of the board, which serves as the chief committee of the church. When the board devotes its first interests and highest energies to every-member evangelism, most problems are alleviated or prevented, and a strong, positive influence is felt in the spiritual life and growth of members.

1. The most important item on the agenda should be planning the evangelization of the outreach (missionary) territory of the church. In addition, once each quarter an entire meeting should be devoted to plans for evangelism. The board will study conference recommendations for evangelistic programs and methods and how they can be implemented locally. The pastor and the board will initiate and develop plans for public evangelistic campaigns.
2. Coordinating outreach programs of departments. The church board is responsible for coordinating the work of all church departments. Each department develops its plans for outreach within its own sphere. To avoid conflict in timing and competition in securing volunteers and to achieve maximum beneficial results, coordination is essential. Before completing and announcing plans for any program, each department should submit its plans to the board for approval. The departments also report to the board on the progress and results of their outreach programs. The board may suggest how departmental programs can contribute to the preparation, conduct, and follow-up of a public evangelistic campaign.
3. Encouraging the personal ministries department to enlist all members and children in some form of personal outreach (missionary) service. Training classes should be conducted in various lines of outreach ministry.
4. Encouraging the interest coordinator to ensure that every interest is personally and promptly followed up by an assigned layperson.
5. Encouraging each department to report at least quarterly to the board and to members at business meetings or in Sabbath meetings.
6. Receiving regular reports. The board should consider details of church business and receive regular reports of the treasurer on the church's finances. The board should study the membership record and inquire into the spiritual standing of all members and provide for visits to sick, discouraged, or backslidden members. Other officers should periodically report.

**From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 130: "Discipleship"**

The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally disciple members, so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church.<sup>2</sup>

Discipleship is based on an ongoing, lifelong relationship with Jesus. The believer commits to "abiding in Christ" (John 15:8), to being trained for fruitful discipleship by sharing Jesus with others, as well as to leading other members to also be faithful disciples.

The Church, individually and collectively, shares responsibility for ensuring that every church member remains part of the body of Christ.

**From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 131-132**

The board is responsible to:

1. Ensure that there is an active, ongoing discipleship plan in place, which includes both spiritual nurture and outreach ministries. This is the most important item for the board's attention.
2. Study membership lists and initiate plans for reconnecting (reclaiming) members who have separated from the church.
3. Train local church leadership in how to encourage intentional spiritual growth in themselves and others.  
[4-9 are identical to the entire list, 1-6, from the 2010 edition]
10. Promote Adventist education.

Fortunately, both recent editions of the manual conclude "The Work of the Board" section with the following statement: "The board should permit no other business to interfere with planning for evangelism. Should other business be too time-consuming, the board should appoint committees to care for specific areas of church business, such as finance or church building projects. Such committees will then make recommendations to the board."

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<sup>2</sup> *Christian Service*, p. 69 Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them,--the burden of leading souls into the truth. Those who are not fulfilling their responsibility should be visited, prayed with, labored for. Do not lead people to depend upon you as ministers; teach them rather that they are to use their talents in giving the truth to those around them. In thus working they will have the co-operation of heavenly angels, and will obtain an experience that will increase their faith, and give them a strong hold on God.

## PERSONAL MINISTRIES

### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 100-101**

“Personal ministries provides resources and trains members to unite their efforts with those of the pastor and officers in soul-winning service. It also has primary responsibility for programs assisting those in need.

Personal Ministries Council—The personal ministries council guides the outreach (missionary) efforts of the church and works under the direction of the board. The council should meet at least once each month and should consist of the pastor, an elder, the treasurer, and leaders of the other departments and auxiliary services functioning in that congregation. The personal ministries council may assign subcommittees for specialized tasks. All subcommittees report to the personal ministries council. The personal ministries council and leader are responsible for organizing small group ministries. ...

The [Personal Ministries] leader trains and directs members in outreach (missionary) service and chairs the personal ministries council. The leader reports in the monthly church outreach (missionary) Sabbath service and business meetings about total outreach (missionary) activities of the congregation. Assistants may be assigned to coordinate the Bible correspondence school, Bible evangelism, literature distribution, Ingathering (or equivalent appeals), small group ministries, member training, and other soul-winning programs.”

## BIBLE SCHOOL COORDINATOR

### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 101**

“The Bible school coordinator organizes and coordinates the church’s Bible school outreach ministry to the community. The coordinator should work closely with the pastor, the interest coordinator, and the personal ministries leader.”

## INTEREST COORDINATOR

### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 86**

“An interest coordinator should be elected to make sure that interests developed through the church’s missionary outreach are cared for promptly. This person is a member of the board and the personal ministries council and works directly with the pastor and chairperson of that council. Duties of this office include:

1. Keeping an organized list of all interests received by the church.
2. Assisting the pastor and chairperson of the personal ministries council in enlisting and recruiting qualified members for follow-up service.
3. Presenting to the board a monthly report on the number of interests received and followed up. When an interest is sufficiently developed, it should be shared with the pastor.”

## OUTREACH SERVICES

### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 122**

“The first Sabbath of each month is the Church Outreach (Missionary) Sabbath. This worship service focuses on lay evangelism and may feature plans and activities of various departments.”

### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 182**

“In order to strengthen and develop the outreach (missionary) spirit among our members, auxiliary personal ministries meetings might be conducted in one or more of the following ways:

- a. The ten-minute weekly personal ministries meeting held each Sabbath, usually following the close of the Sabbath School and preceding the preaching service.
- b. A midweek meeting combined with the weekly prayer meeting. On this occasion, the first part of the service may be given to a devotional message, followed by a season of prayer, remembering that worship is vital in spiritual growth and preparation for service. The remainder of the time may be devoted to training for lay evangelistic service. Instruction in soul-winning methods is presented, and the members are given opportunity to present and discuss problems they have met in lay evangelism.”

## MEMBER CARE

### Pastor and Elders

#### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 73-74**

If the conference committee assigns a pastor or pastors to the congregation, the pastor, or senior pastor if more than one, should be considered the ranking officer and the local elders as assistants. Since their work is closely related, they should work together harmoniously. The pastor should not assume all lines of responsibility, but should share these with the elders and other officers... The pastoral work of the church should be shared by the pastor and the elders. In counsel with the pastor, the elders should visit members, minister to the sick, foster prayer ministries, arrange or lead out in anointing services and child dedications, encourage the disheartened, and assist in other pastoral responsibilities. As undershepherds, elders should exercise constant vigilance over the flock. ...

Because the pastor is appointed to the position in the church by the conference, the pastor serves the church as a conference employee, is responsible to the conference committee, and maintains a sympathetic and cooperative relation to and works in harmony with all the plans and policies of the local church. Elders, who are elected by the church, are responsible to that body and to its board.

#### **From the *SDA Elder's Handbook* (2013), p. 123**

Planning for home visitation should be a regular part of the elders' meeting. Visitation can be assigned to leading church members gifted and trained in the particular ministry. Such programs are often called a parish or under shepherd plan, where membership is usually divided into geographic zones. An elder, assisted by a deacon or deaconess, could be in charge of a parish zone. The pastor and elder[s] lead out in the visitation plan and other programs that build spiritual strength in the church.

### Deacons and Deaconesses

#### **From the *SDA Church Manual* (2015), pp. 79-80**

"In many churches visitation is arranged by distributing membership by districts and assigning a deacon to each district with the expectation that he will visit each home at least once a quarter." ...

"If a church elects several deaconesses, it should organize a board of deaconesses chaired by the head deaconess and another deaconess serving as secretary. This board is authorized to assign duties to individual deaconesses and cooperates closely with the board of deacons, especially in welcoming members and visitors and in home visitation."

## INSPIRED COUNSEL

#### **From *Christian Service*, p. 68-69**

"Preaching is a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls. God's Spirit convicts sinners of the truth, and He places them in the arms of the church. The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do."

"Ministers may preach pleasing and forcible discourses, and much labor may be put forth to build up and make the church prosperous; but unless its individual members shall act their part as servants of Jesus Christ, the church will ever be in darkness and without strength."

"The minister should not feel that it is his duty to do all the talking and all the laboring and all the praying; he should educate helpers in every church. Let different ones take turns in leading the meetings, and in giving Bible readings; in so doing they will be calling into use the talents which God has given them, and at the same time be receiving a training as workers."

"The best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. Give each one something to do for others. Help all to see that as receivers of the grace of Christ they are under obligation to work for Him. And let all be taught how to work. Especially should those who are newly come to the faith be educated to become laborers together with God."