

People today search the digital world for truth, community, and spiritual answers. Yet too often, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has struggled to connect with people digitally, unsure how to engage the millions of seekers online. Without a clear digital strategy, the church risks being nearly invisible in the most active mission field of our time.

This groundbreaking book captures a movement that is helping to reshape how we do mission in the Adventist Church. Written by three of the global church's leading digital thinkers, *Digital Strategy for Mission* offers a clear road map for how your church, institution, or region can confidently engage in digital evangelism. Drawing inspiration from the ongoing digital outreach efforts of the global church, the book equips you to:

- Ground your digital efforts in theology and global collaboration, which ultimately seeks to connect the seeker with the local church.
- Understand why less than 2% of spiritual seekers are finding Adventist content.
- Discover proven methods to connect with seekers online, organically and with paid ads.
- Utilize commodity tools to implement hybrid evangelism, with Spirit-driven and data-informed decision-making.

This is more than a manual. It's a call to action for every Adventist leader to be about our Father's business, connecting with people where they are today... online!

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DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR MISSION

A Guide for Adventist Leaders

Stephenson ■ Neves ■ Truman



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Table of Contents

DEDICATION	6
INTRODUCTION	7
Chapter 1: Our Digital Strategy for Mission	24
SECTION 1: MISSION	42
Chapter 2: Urgency	43
Chapter 3: Power	50
Chapter 4: Priority	64
Chapter 5: Opportunity	75
Chapter 6: Communication	85
Chapter 7: Necessity	93
Chapter 8: Courage	104
SECTION 2: STRATEGY	117
Chapter 9: Synergy as Strategy	119
Chapter 10: Process	132
Chapter 11: People	152
Chapter 12: Technology in Mission	165
SECTION 3: DIGITAL CONNECTION	173
Chapter 13: Search Engine Optimization	174
Chapter 14: Content Development	188
Chapter 15: Marketing	202
Chapter 16: Engagement	222
Chapter 17: Data as a Strategic Asset	233
Chapter 18: Hybrid Evangelism	247
Chapter 19: Adventist Cloud	265
Chapter 20: Future Technologies	273

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Pastor Maurice R. Valentine II, who served as a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and was the first chair of the Digital Strategy for Mission Committee—the very body that birthed our digital strategy. Pastor Valentine’s commitment to Agile methodologies was, at its core, a reflection of Jesus’ adaptive and servant-led ministry: ever seeking to meet people’s real needs in real time. Deeply passionate about digital evangelism, he believed in harnessing technology to share the three angels’ messages with greater effectiveness and reach. Tragically, he passed away on October 20, 2023, before he could witness the fruit of our labor and the publication of this book.

Pastor Valentine’s ministry journey began in 1985 and, for nearly four decades, spanned diverse pastoral and administrative responsibilities across different unions and conferences in the North American Division. He inspired those around him to integrate faith and technology in ways that reflect God’s love and compassion. Whether championing digital discipleship in a boardroom or offering earnest prayer with a church member, he consistently radiated warmth, integrity, and mission focus. To many, he was a spiritual giant and a beloved friend, never shying away from offering encouraging words or creative ways to spread the gospel. His unwavering dedication continues to inspire us and reminds us of the human touch essential to any digital strategy.

Though he died at the age of 63, Pastor Valentine’s visionary leadership leaves a mark on our church’s approach to media and digital innovation. His legacy urges us to serve others, adapt swiftly, and keep the mission at the forefront. May his passion for Agile ministry inspire our global church family to advance God’s work with bold faith and Christlike love, until we see him again on the morning of resurrection.

INTRODUCTION

This book offers Seventh-day Adventist leaders a road map for engaging with digital technology. It explores how to use these tools and why they're essential for fulfilling the prophetic mission God has entrusted to our church. The pages that follow draw on our experiences as Adventist leaders. We've aimed to capture the shared wisdom and consensus of administrators, communicators, technology experts, and pastors, presenting a unified vision for how digital technology can advance our mission.

Richard Stephenson's journey with the Adventist Church began in 1998 as a chaplain and campus pastor. His career evolved to encompass technology leadership as he served in various IT roles across church institutions. Since 2022, Richard has served as the associate treasurer of the General Conference (GC), where he oversees Adventist technology and digital strategy. His experience bridges pastoral ministry and technological innovation, reflecting his commitment to integrating faith and modern tools for mission.

Sam Neves serves as associate director of communication at the GC, guiding the church's global branding and digital marketing efforts. Born in Brazil, Sam was led through pastoral work in London for over a decade to his current role in the United States. With a PhD from the University of Westminster, he has been instrumental in shaping the church's visual identity and spearheading its digital evangelism initiatives.

Alyssa Truman, assistant director of communication at the GC, focuses on harnessing social media for the church's outreach. Her background combines marketing expertise with a lifelong connection to the Adventist community, and her work centers on keeping the church's message relevant and engaging across generations. She draws on experiences from a creative upbringing in upstate New York to her current role directing news and leading social media strategies for the world church.

A Word From Richard Stephenson

As I sit down to write this introduction, I'm filled with a sense of awe and excitement. We stand at the precipice of a new era in the history of our church, one in which technology and mission converge in ways we've never seen before. It's a new day, and the possibilities before us are thrilling and humbling—and our need for the Holy Spirit has never been greater.

My journey with technology began long before I understood its potential for mission. As a child, I was fascinated by the inner workings of computers, the logic of programming, and the endless possibilities of the digital world, but it wasn't until I witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit working through technology to connect people, share information, and help to transform lives that I truly understood its potential for God's work.

You see, technology isn't just about gadgets and code. It's about bridging distances, breaking down barriers, and creating opportunities for connection and transformation. In the context of our mission, technology becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to reach people in ways we never thought possible.

Think about the Roman roads of ancient times. These vast networks, built for commerce and conquest, became the very arteries through which the gospel spread across the known world. Today, we have our own "Roman roads"—the internet, social media platforms, and mobile technologies. These are providential opportunities, given to us by God for this specific time in earth's history.

Here's the crucial point: Technology alone is not enough. How we use it, guided by the Holy Spirit and united in purpose, makes all the difference. This book isn't just about adopting new technologies. It's about a fundamental shift in how we approach our mission in the digital age.

So, what can you expect from this book?

Through these pages, we hope you'll find a framework for understanding why and how we should engage with digital technology to fulfill our prophetic mission. As we explore the

biblical foundations for using technology in mission, parallels are drawn between modern digital tools and the communication methods God has used throughout history to reach His people.

You'll discover the importance of harnessing the power of data and analytics to better understand and reach our communities. We also discuss the concept of "digital sovereignty"—owning not just our data but also the platforms we use and even our own data centers. We must ensure we have the infrastructure and capabilities to continue our mission uninterrupted, even in the face of potential future challenges. Our focus must include the sustainability of mission.

As we look to the future, we will explore the transformative potential of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR, respectively) and how each can be used to create immersive, impactful spiritual experiences. Imagine those unable to travel being able to take a virtual tour of biblical sites, or using AI to help personalize Bible study experiences remotely for people around the world.

Perhaps, most importantly, this book is about synergy—about how we, as a global church family, can work together more effectively in the digital space. We'll discuss strategies for breaking down silos and sharing resources and knowledge across divisions and entities. You'll learn about initiatives like Adventist.Cloud, the Adventist Web Engine, and other collaborative platforms helping to unite our efforts and amplify our impact.

We'll also address the challenges and ethical considerations that come with embracing technology in mission. How do we maintain the human touch in a digital world? How do we ensure that our use of technology aligns with our values and respects the privacy and dignity of individuals? These are crucial questions that we'll tackle head-on.

Throughout this book, you'll find practical examples, case studies, and actionable strategies you can apply in your own ministry context. Whether you're a pastor, media professional,

administrator, or church member, you'll find insights and ideas that can help you leverage digital tools more effectively for God's work.

Let me be clear: We don't talk about technology for technology's sake. We talk about technology as a means to an end—and that end is always the advancement of God's kingdom and to prepare the world to meet Jesus. The moment our focus shifts from the mission to the tools alone, we've lost our way.

As we start this journey together, I want to emphasize the urgency of our task. We live in unprecedented times, when the signs of Christ's soon return are all around us. The digital revolution has given us tools and opportunities that previous generations could have only dreamed of, but these opportunities come with great responsibilities.

We must act now, with purpose and unity, to leverage these tools for God's glory. We must be willing to innovate, collaborate, and step out in faith. The world is changing rapidly, and we must be prepared to adapt our methods while holding firm to our message.

My prayer is that this book will inform and inspire you, but will also ignite a movement of tech-savvy, mission-focused believers ready to use every tool at their disposal to share the love of Jesus and the hope of His soon return.

As you read, I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you and your local church or ministry can be part of this digital mission movement. How can you use the principles and strategies outlined here to reach your community more effectively? How can you contribute to the larger, global effort of our church in the digital space?

Remember, in the end, it's not about technology. It's about people—reaching them, connecting with them, and leading them to Jesus. Technology is simply a tool, but a powerful one, in the hands of Spirit-filled believers.

So, let's embrace this new day with faith, courage, and a commitment to use every means at our disposal to fulfill the Great Commission. The time is now. The tools are in our hands. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there's no limit to what we can accomplish for God's kingdom. We must be about our Father's business!

May this book be a source of inspiration, guidance, and practical help as we step into this exciting new chapter of digital mission together. By God's grace, and through our united efforts, we can be a digital force for Jesus, shining the light of God's love into every corner of the online world and ultimately fulfilling the mission God has given us—to prepare people for the second coming of Jesus.

A Word From Sam Neves

When I was 12, my mother, Regina Neves, introduced me to the work of being a colporteur, or literature evangelist. For those unfamiliar with this evangelistic method, I've come to jokingly define it as "selling books to people who don't want to buy books with the money they don't have to buy books." I followed her across the city of Jaraguá do Sul, Santa Catarina, Brazil, and observed intently everything she did and the words she spoke to those she met. After three days, she looked at me and said it was my turn, instructing me to go alone to every house on the next road.

I did not expect this and at first refused. She insisted, explaining to me that these precious books, especially *The Great Controversy*, would be used by God at the end of time to lead people to the truth.

Looking me in the eye, she said, "One day the whole world will be engulfed in darkness, and these books will become a source of light for every family we give the opportunity to buy them."

I still refused.

"I'm scared, Mom . . . and embarrassed."

She said, "The mission is more important than your fear, son. The mission is more important than what people think of you. We are dealing with life and death here. Go."

Because I was more scared of her than the people who lived on that street, I asked her to pray with me and I went.

Content in the Last Days

Though she wrote long before the dawn of the digital era, Ellen White possessed a remarkably forward-thinking vision for the distribution of truth, particularly in the lead-up to Jesus's second coming. Her writings, when viewed through the lens of our modern, interconnected world, offer insights into the role of media and content creation in spreading the gospel message.

Central to White's vision was the idea that truth should be widely and readily available to those seeking it. She emphasized the need for clear, accessible content that addresses the core issues of faith and prophecy:

"Publications should be issued, written in the plainest, simplest language, explaining the subjects of vital interest and making known the things that are to come upon the world."¹

"Unvarnished truth must be spoken in leaflets and pamphlets, and these must be scattered like the leaves of autumn."²

In today's digital landscape, these directives may guide us into creating a wealth of online resources—articles, social media posts, e-books, and interactive content—all to present biblical truths and prophetic messages in ways easy to understand and widely accessible. Just as White envisioned truth-filled literature distributed around the world, we now strive to ensure that accurate, spiritually nourishing content appears prominently in search engine results and on social media platforms.

White also stressed the ongoing relevance of prophetic messages and their role in preparing people for future events:

"The first and second messages were given in 1843 and 1844, and we are now under the proclamation of the third; but all three of the messages are still to be proclaimed. . . . These

¹ Ellen G. White letter 1, 1875.

² E. G. White letter 31, 1897.

messages we are to give to the world in publications, in discourses, showing in the line of prophetic history the things that have been, and the things that will be."³

This guidance calls for the creation of digital content that addresses immediate spiritual concerns but also provides a prophetic framework for understanding past, present, and future events. Such resources will serve as a reference to which people can return as world events unfold. White envisioned this regarding *The Great Controversy* and stated:

The results of the circulation of this book [*The Great Controversy*] are not to be judged by what now appears. By reading it, some souls will be aroused, and will have courage to unite themselves at once with those who keep the commandments of God. But a much larger number who read it will not take their position until they see the very events taking place that are foretold in it.⁴

White foresaw the powerful potential of widely distributed truth to spark spiritual awakenings:

"More than one thousand will soon be converted in one day, most of whom will trace their first convictions to the reading of our publications."⁵

In our digital age, this potential is amplified exponentially. Online content can reach millions instantly, with the potential for widespread spiritual awakening among those searching for truth on the internet. However, for this potential to be realized, we must ensure that truth is readily accessible—appearing on the first page of search engine results and incorporated into the training of AI language models that curate and moderate access to information for online users.

Finally, White saw the work of publishing and distributing truth as central to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy:

³ E. G. White manuscript 32, 1896.

⁴ E. G. White manuscript 31, 1890.

⁵ E. G. White, *The Review and Herald*, November 10, 1885.

"In a large degree through our publishing houses is to be accomplished the work of that other angel who comes down from heaven with great power and who lightens the earth with his glory"⁶ (Revelation 18:1).

Today, this "publishing work" extends far beyond traditional print media. It encompasses the creation and maintenance of websites, social media platforms, and other digital channels that spread information rapidly across the globe. The modern equivalent of White's "publishing houses" might well include the servers and networks that host and distribute digital content worldwide.

Ellen White's vision for producing and distributing truth-filled content resonates powerfully in our digital age. Her emphasis on clarity, accessibility, and widespread dissemination aligns perfectly with the capabilities of modern technology. As we navigate the complexities of the digital landscape, White's guidance serves as a beacon, reminding us of the crucial role that well-crafted, truthful content plays in preparing hearts and minds for the second coming of Jesus. By embracing these principles and leveraging the full potential of digital media, we can work toward fulfilling White's prophetic vision of a world illuminated by truth, readily accessible to all who seek it.

Online Searches

The digital landscape for religious organizations is increasingly competitive. Much effort has been put into the Seventh-day Adventist Church's flagship and most authoritative website, *adventist.org*, but maintaining visibility and reach in this crucial arena remains a struggle. Despite the website being our most authoritative digital asset, its performance in search engine results pages (SERPs) is alarmingly poor compared with other religious websites, for spiritual queries in particular.

An analysis of recent search data paints a dire picture of our digital presence. While other religious organizations are effectively capturing the attention of truth seekers online,

⁶ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 140.

adventist.org falls behind, often failing to appear in the top search results for critical spiritual queries such as the Ten Commandments, for example.

During June 2024, *adventist.org* accounted for a mere 1.68 percent of the total traffic among four major religious websites. In comparison, *churchofjesuschrist.org* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) dominates with 75.84 percent of the traffic, followed by *jw.org* (Jehovah's Witnesses) at 14.82 percent, and *vatican.va* (The Holy See) at 7.66 percent. *This means that for every 100 people searching for spiritual content in the next few seconds, only one or two of them will find the present truth.*⁷

The estimated traffic trends from July 2023 to June 2024 further highlight our digital shortcomings. While *churchofjesuschrist.org* consistently attracts 4 to 5 million visitors monthly and *jw.org* maintains around 800,000 visitors, *adventist.org* struggles to reach 100,000 monthly visitors. This vast disparity in traffic indicates countless missed opportunities to engage with individuals seeking spiritual guidance and truth. People are searching for the truth, but they are not finding us.

When we examine the details, the situation becomes even more concerning. *Adventist.org* has only 22,675 total organic keywords, compared to *churchofjesuschrist.org*'s 499,976 and *jw.org*'s 204,331. This massive gap in keyword visibility directly corresponds with our poor performance in search engine rankings, low traffic numbers, and, consequently, less meaningful relationships built through this massive avenue.

Rank distribution data is particularly alarming. For the coveted first position in search results, *adventist.org* ranks for only 1,110 keywords, while *churchofjesuschrist.org* ranks for 59,791. Even more troubling, for the crucial top 10 positions, we rank for just 7,105 keywords, compared to *churchofjesuschrist.org*'s 202,150 and *jw.org*'s 47,471. This is unacceptable for a movement dedicated to helping people understand the Bible to find freedom, healing, and hope in Jesus.

⁷ Data based on SEO Research conducted by the author using BrightEdge Technology between July 1-12, 2024.

This poor performance is evident across a wide range of important spiritual search terms. For instance:

1. "What happens when you die": churchofjesuschrist.org ranks sixth, while adventist.org is fourteenth.
2. "End times": jw.org ranks second; adventist.org is seventh.
3. "Sabbath day": churchofjesuschrist.org ranks third; adventist.org is twelfth.
4. "Prophecies": churchofjesuschrist.org ranks fourth, jw.org is twelfth, and adventist.org lags at fourteenth.
5. "How to study the Bible": churchofjesuschrist.org ranks first, while adventist.org ranks eighth, despite our emphasis on Bible study.

Even for terms directly related to our prophetic calling, we're underperforming:

6. "What is the mark of the beast": jw.org ranks twelfth, while adventist.org is far behind at fifty-ninth.
7. "What is prophecy": jw.org ranks eighth, churchofjesuschrist.org is fifteenth, and adventist.org trails at thirty-first.

These examples illustrate a critical issue: When people search for answers to life's big questions or seek to understand biblical prophecies—areas in which the Adventist Church has a unique prophetic mandate to communicate—they are far more likely to encounter other religious perspectives first. This situation represents a failure in our mission to spread the three angels' messages and prepare people for Christ's second coming. Each low ranking in a search engine result represents a missed opportunity—to share our unique biblical understanding with those earnestly seeking truth and to prepare them for the second coming of Jesus.

This is no longer a battle for just Google, Bing, or other search engines. Every social media platform and major content aggregator has become a source of truth for platform users. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, closely followed by TikTok,

especially for new generations who would sooner watch a video than read an article to find their answers. We must develop the clearest written, audio, and video content on every platform. The truth must be found in these first results for all those who are looking. There is a cosmic war occurring, and this book is a call to arms for all digital content creators and technologists. We are losing this most important battle, and we need everyone to change this reality.

The digital realm has become the new frontier for evangelism. Our poor performance in this space means we are effectively invisible to many truth seekers. As other religious organizations leverage their online presence to reach and engage with people, we risk becoming increasingly irrelevant in the digital age. This is partly due to our fragmentation. We have many (MANY) websites around the world, but this fragmentation is removing our opportunities to fulfill our mission.

This dire situation calls for immediate and decisive action. We must prioritize our digital strategy, significantly enhance our search engine optimization (SEO) efforts, and create more relevant and engaging content that addresses the spiritual questions people are asking online—on every platform and in every language. Without a major development of our digital approach, we risk continuing to lose ground in the critical mission of sharing God's truth in the twenty-first century.

While Ellen White couldn't have envisioned the internet or search engines, her emphasis on creating clear, accessible, truth-filled content and ensuring its widest possible distribution resonates strongly with modern digital media strategies. What happened on that road when I was 12 years old has shaped my entire ministry. Today, as people increasingly turn to the internet to search for answers to life's deepest questions, it's crucial to ensure that biblical truth is readily available and easily discoverable online. This means continuing to produce physical books and publications and concurrently investing in high-quality digital content that can be easily found by those seeking truth in the digital realm.

Of course, this is expensive, and there are many risks associated with investments in technology and large-scale digital content production. It is easy for administrators to fear

such investment. It is even easier for communicators to be embarrassed by a full proclamation of present truth for every eye to see. However, the mission is more important than our fears. The mission is more important than what others think of us. It's a matter of life and death. We must go.

A Word From Alyssa Truman

From a young age, I developed a love for cooking and baking, though I'll admit my initial motivation wasn't entirely pure. My parents had a simple rule: whoever cooked the meal didn't have to clean up. Since I've never liked washing dishes, learning to cook seemed like a sensible plan to my young mind. As with most things in my life, I went "all in" and quickly started experimenting with recipes from all my mother's cookbooks, eventually creating my own recipes without the need of books at all.

As a young mother, I wanted to instill the same love for the kitchen in my children. Thankfully, my husband was willing to handle the cleanup. We created many memories in the kitchen together. Just as I had learned as a girl, my daughters began to understand that cooking is both an art and a science, requiring precision, patience, and a willingness to learn from mistakes.

My oldest daughter, Moraya, particularly took to baking. One day, she carefully measured out the ingredients to make cookies—flour, oil, sugar, eggs, etc.—or so she thought. Something seemed off, and the texture wasn't quite right. Doing what every good cook does, especially when making cookies, she tasted a little bit and immediately spat it out. Somehow, she had mistaken my container of salt for the sugar. What should have been sweet turned out to be something no one would want to eat.

Today, we still double-check as we cook because we know the right ingredients in the right proportions are crucial in baking. This same approach is essential in digital ministry, as engagement isn't just an extra ingredient—it can change the whole taste of the ministry. It's key to connecting with others and leading them to a deeper relationship with God.

Sweet and Salty: The Theological Basis for Engagement

Sweet and salty—these two distinct flavors, when combined, create a powerful and memorable experience. This combination is essential in more than just baking; it's a metaphor for how we should approach engagement in digital ministry.

In Colossians 4:6, Paul instructs, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." The Greek word *χάρις* (*charis*), translated as "grace," carries a sense of kindness, favor, and unmerited love. Our words should reflect the same grace that God extends to us—grace that is patient, compassionate, and full of love.

When we interact with others online, they should sense the sweetness of our Savior, feeling the compelling love of Christ in our conversations. Sweetness in speech doesn't mean avoiding hard truths; it means delivering them in a way that is accessible, appealing, and restorative. Just as honey soothes and heals, when our words are sweetened with grace, they can penetrate even the hardest of hearts, offering freedom, healing, and hope where there might otherwise be resistance or pain. As Proverbs 16:24 tells us, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones."

Paul doesn't stop with grace but adds that our words should be "seasoned with salt." The Greek phrase *ἁλᾷ ῥητυμένος* (*halati ērtumenos*) implies that our speech should be purposeful, preserving, and full of integrity. In the ancient world, the value of salt was due mostly to preservation—how salt would prevent decay in foods, rather than how it brought flavor to foods. Similarly, our digital engagement should have this salty quality—adding depth, preserving truth, and preventing moral and spiritual decay.

Like in cooking, balance is key. A purely salty approach—focusing solely on truth without grace—can come across as judgmental, driving people away. On the other hand, an approach that is all sweetness with no substance fails to challenge or inspire true transformation. The gospel is about a Love who laid down His life to help us live transformed lives.

The Challenge of Engagement

In the often harsh and impersonal world of digital interactions, the combination of sweet and salty is critical. True engagement must strike this balance—offering the world truth that is challenging and comforting and delivered with the grace that makes it accessible and transformative. Understanding this balance is only the first step. The real challenge lies in applying these principles effectively and undoing the mindsets we have grown accustomed to.

One of the biggest misconceptions I have encountered among many leaders and members is that simply posting content is sufficient. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that if we share a verse, post a thought-provoking image, or upload a video, we've done our part. The truth is, content alone isn't enough. The digital space, especially social media, thrives on interaction. It's not called "social" media for nothing—it was designed to foster connections, conversations, and relationships.

In today's world, people look for more than information; they look for interaction. They want to engage in meaningful conversations, ask questions, and feel heard. If our approach is to merely broadcast content without engaging in the dialogue that follows, we miss a crucial opportunity to build trust and foster community. This is particularly important in the context of spiritual and religious content, where trust is key. People want to know they can find answers and connect with someone who cares. Understanding the need for engagement is crucial, but we must also face the reality of three key challenges hindering our efforts.

The first significant challenge is bandwidth—both in terms of human resources and time. Effective engagement requires timely responses to comments, messages, and questions. Yet many organizations, including the church, struggle to have enough staff or volunteers to manage this aspect of digital ministry.

Recognizing that this (online) community engagement is as important as the work done by Bible workers and local pastors during pastoral visits is vital. Each comment, message, or question is an opportunity to connect with someone on a deeper level, offer support, and share the love of Christ in a personal way. However, this requires a commitment to seeing digital engagement as a ministry in its own right, deserving of the same level of attention, training, and support. We must train our pastors and members alike and invest the resources to support them both technologically and financially.

The second challenge is that, simply put, building trust and relationships online takes time—just as it does in real life. We can be tempted to expect immediate results, especially in the fast-paced world of digital media, but the reality is that meaningful engagement often requires long-term commitment.

Some interactions may yield quick results. For instance, a powerful post may touch someone's heart instantly. More often, however, it takes consistent, thoughtful engagement over time to build the kind of trust that leads to lasting spiritual growth. Just as a pastor in the field doesn't expect immediate conversions, but nurtures relationships over time, we must approach digital ministry with the same patience and persistence.

The third and last significant challenge we face lies in our behavior and that of our members. While we strive to engage positively, sometimes our efforts are undermined by the actions of others in our community. Social media can quickly become a battleground, where disagreements escalate into arguments and harsh words are exchanged without thought.

Unfortunately, these interactions can be a stumbling block for those exploring faith or considering visiting our church. When online behavior contradicts the message of love and transformation we preach, it can cause others to question whether the Christ we talk about really has the power to change hearts. For this reason, it's crucial to encourage and educate our members on how to engage in a manner that reflects Christ—showing love, patience, and humility in all interactions.

In light of these challenges, we must take deliberate steps to ensure that our digital engagement is effective and reflects the heart of our mission. Addressing these challenges requires more than awareness; it demands action, commitment, and a shift in how we approach our digital presence.

Engagement Has Entered the Chat

Deliberate steps must be taken to ensure that our digital engagement is both effective and aligned with our mission. This requires awareness and commitment to action. Our priority must be a shift from merely delivering content to fostering authentic engagement. This means moving beyond the mindset that posting is enough. We must intentionally create spaces for dialogue, encourage questions, and be present in the conversations that follow. Authentic engagement is about consistently showing up, actively listening, and thoughtfully responding. Every interaction—whether a comment on social media, a private message, or a response to a question—is an opportunity to minister and build relationships that go deeper than a single post.

To achieve authentic engagement, we must empower and equip those on the front lines of our digital ministry. This involves providing the necessary resources, training, and support so our teams are skilled in using digital tools and prepared spiritually to engage in meaningful conversations about faith. Training should cover best practices for responding to comments, strategies for fostering positive interactions and guiding people to decisions, and guidelines for managing with grace the challenging situations that arise. By investing in our teams, we ensure that our digital presence is both professional and spiritually enriching.

Finally, we need to look inward and enable the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in our lives. This will enable us to create a culture of love and respect, seasoning our words with both grace and truth. This starts with educating ourselves and our members on the importance of Christlike behavior in digital spaces. As ambassadors for Christ, we must endeavor to

make our interactions online reflect His love and grace. It's time for people to truly say they know we are Christians by our love. True love shares the truth *in love*.

As we navigate the complexities of digital engagement, we must remember that our mission goes beyond sharing information—it's about building relationships that lead to transformation. Our words, whether spoken face-to-face or typed across a screen, have the power to preserve truth, bring healing, and draw people closer to Christ. Like salt and sugar, our engagement should be both savory and sweet—full of grace and truth, conviction and compassion.

We are at a pivotal moment in our ministry. The digital landscape offers enormous opportunities to reach hearts and minds across the globe, but it also challenges us to rise above the noise and be intentional and authentic in how we connect with others. The work we do online is not secondary; it is a vital part of our mission to make disciples of all nations.

To those ready to take on this challenge, I encourage you to engage with both heart and mind. Prioritize real and meaningful engagement. Invest in and equip your teams to handle the demands of this ministry with skill and spiritual depth. Foster a community that reflects Christ in every interaction. Above all, commit to the duration, knowing the relationships we build today may bear fruit in ways we cannot yet see and for years to come.

If you need a little reminder of the importance of the right ingredients, eat a cookie. When the balance is just right, it's a treat that everyone wants to share. My daughter Moraya and I have perfected a pumpkin cookie recipe that's a family favorite—if you ever want it, just let me know.

Chapter 1: Our Digital Strategy for Mission

Richard Stephenson

Throughout my academy and most of my college years, I volunteered with *Insight* magazine's Ultimate Workout, a short-term mission trip coordinated and operated by Maranatha Volunteers International. Each summer a group of us young people would gather in a Central American country to build a church or school.

During one of my later trips, while I served as a construction assistant, the blueprints or building plans somehow never arrived with us. Although the concrete foundation was poured and the rebar was in place, we had no idea about the location of the doors, windows, and interior walls, or even how high the exterior block walls should be. We were lost without those building plans. So, until those plans could be delivered from the United States, each of us would do some random job as we waited (organizing and reorganizing blocks, sifting and resifting the sand, and sweeping the concrete pad for the tenth time). The construction of that precious little church couldn't begin without those plans. We prayed relentlessly, again and again.

Two days later, the building plans were delivered, and we could actually start laying blocks to build God's church. We were so excited and so thankful for those plans—but before laying a single block, we studied the plans, set up story poles for the block walls, assigned teams and roles within those teams based on the blueprint's requirements, and

established goals based on our timeline.

We marked off doors and windows, we ran string across the story poles, and then . . . then we *finally* started laying blocks.

When the first course of block was in place, our entire group celebrated. Then we followed the plans. Literally overnight,



our work became coordinated and purposeful, with each team member understanding how their part contributed to the whole. There were even times during that project when we had to change the blueprints—we had to alter the building plans (due to last-minute requests from the local elders to move windows and doors). We adapted quickly, made necessary changes in the plan (the *strategy*), and then kept following it. The result was a sturdy, beautiful church that continues to serve God's people today. With those plans in hand, we had two courses laid, then four, then six, and then eight. The difference between chaos and collaboration was in the building plans.

In much the same way, the church's Digital Strategy for Mission is a set of high-level building plans, or construction blueprints, for how to do digital ministry in the twenty-first century, taking advantage of tools and resources God has made available to His church today. I hope this analogy illustrates the power of strategy, of planning, in our digital mission work. In our increasingly digital age, the church must approach its online presence with a strategic mindset. We must have a plan—a strategy. Our Digital Strategy for Mission serves as the blueprint for building God's kingdom in the vast landscape of the internet.

As we embark on this journey of digital mission, we must remember the words of the apostle Paul: "To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Our Digital Strategy for Mission is not just about technology—it's a calling to reach people, where they are, when they are searching for answers online, guided by a well-designed strategy for online evangelism and ministry.

Finally, in an increasingly digital world, the church must fully integrate these digital strategies into how we spread the gospel. Though the world may become distracted by new tools and techniques, we must be Christ-focused. We must be about our Father's business!⁸

⁸ Luke 2:49.

Digital Strategy #1 - Sustaining Digital Evangelism

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15, NIV).

At the very start—and the heart—of our digital strategy lies proclamation, or public evangelism. Just as Jesus went to where people gathered—the synagogue, the town square, and even taking advantage of the technology of their day at water wells—we must go to the digital spaces where people congregate. Our first strategy focuses on ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of the church's digital evangelistic efforts.

We must develop long-term plans that maintain our digital platforms and tools and ensure our continued presence on prominent social media platforms. By increasing the reach and engagement of our digital evangelistic content, we can sow seeds of truth in the vast fields of the internet. Indeed, we can plant seeds that could bring a harvest during the very end of time, when our voices may otherwise be muted and when with renewed vigor people will be searching for truth. As we explore emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), we must do so with a missional mindset, always seeking ways to use these tools to bring people closer to Jesus, without the tools themselves becoming the focus and detracting and distracting from the mission.

In our contemporary digital age, the church's mission to spread the gospel and support its global community of believers should leverage technology more effectively. The first strategy, ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of digital evangelistic efforts, is paramount. By properly budgeting for needs, and then living within those budgetary constraints, we ensure faithful stewardship of entrusted resources and year-round engagement with those who seek Jesus online. This strategy directly impacts the mission by extending our evangelistic efforts to meet more than 6 billion people visiting the internet each day. Internally, it strengthens the church's ability to maintain a consistent digital presence, ensuring that our message stays engaging and accessible to everyone, from everywhere. From a sustainability standpoint, setting dedicated budgets and using technology to reduce costs and increase efficiencies help ensure that these evangelistic

efforts can be sustained over the long term. And finally, by the different entities of our church coming together as *one* church, normalizing on tools, we can create economies of scale that lower costs.

Strategy 1 Objectives:

1. Develop a long-term budget for sustaining digital outreach and online evangelism.
2. Increase the reach and engagement of digital evangelistic content.
3. As appropriate, encourage the missional use of emerging technologies such as VR, AR, and AI.
4. Encourage active and sustained social media engagement by every church entity.
5. Ensure that the Adventist Church has a presence on the most prominent social media platforms across the world field.
6. Encourage responsible youth and young adult engagement for missional social outreach.
7. Broaden the number of languages that our social media initiatives support.

Strategy 1 Goals:

- A. Implement a regular budgeting strategy to ensure support of digital initiatives. Live within these budgets.
- B. Achieve a 20 percent increase in online engagement (views, likes, shares) within the next year.
- C. Develop a five-year road map for digital technology and its use in supporting the mission of the church.
- D. Expand accessibility features on digital platforms to reach a broader audience, including those with special needs.

- E. Allocate a budget for paid advertising (social media ads, Google ads, etc.) based on goals and the target audience.
- F. Invest in tools and software as needed for search engine optimization (SEO), copywriting, scheduling, graphic design, and analytics.
- G. Consider outsourcing “content creation” or design for high-quality output.
- H. Provide training to church members and staff on how to safely and effectively engage on social media in order to encourage Total Member Involvement (TMI).⁹

Our goal is not to amass followers or likes on various social platforms, but to engage with people, building lasting relationships that ultimately lead them to local church communities. Again, our goal is not to amass online followings, but to lead people to a local church community where the seeds sown with digital content can be nurtured in the local church setting. We must encourage our youth and young adults to engage in missional social outreach, harnessing their digital fluency for the kingdom of God. As we broaden the languages in which we post evangelistic content, may we echo the miracle of Pentecost, speaking the digital languages of the world. By God’s grace, we can reach people where they are, when they are, and as they are!

⁹ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a global initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that encourages every member to engage in evangelism and mission. It emphasizes that all members—regardless of role or title—are called to use their gifts, talents, and resources to spread the gospel and contribute to the mission. TMI is not limited to events or campaigns but is a continuous call to action, ensuring that every Adventist is actively involved in reaching others for Christ.

Digital Strategy #2 - Responsible Data Stewardship

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15, 16, NIV).

Today, people expect, even demand, that their personal information will be safeguarded and not shared extraneously. Responsible data stewardship is the important work of ensuring responsible data use. We can lose people's trust so easily by mismanaging their personal information. In an era in which data breaches are increasingly common, protecting seeker (user) data is absolutely essential to maintaining trust and transparency. This strategy strengthens the mission by safeguarding the personal information of our donors, employees, visitors, and local community, fostering a safe and healthy environment for digital interactions. Internally, it will require strong data governance and data protection practices to protect data as well as improve operational efficiency by ensuring accurate and secure data management. The initial investment in data security infrastructure and training might be significant, but the long-term benefits of enhanced trust and reduced risk of data breaches make it the obvious—and the responsible—choice.

I believe the church's data is one of our greatest assets and also one of our greatest liabilities. In our digital mission, we must be as "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). One of the great expectations—even requirements—of ministry today is to safeguard and protect personal information. This information may come from our visitors online or in person, from guests, church members, employees, contractors, and partners. Our reputation as a faithful steward of this protected data directly impacts our ability to build bridges with people online. I believe the wisdom spoken of in Matthew 10:16 extends to how we handle data. Our second strategy focuses on implementing robust data collection, usage, and security protocols.

As stewards of people's trust, we should establish comprehensive data protection and privacy policies. We are called to foster transparency in how we use data, not only with our church members but also with our employees and the public. In this digital age, we must

remember that data can be a powerful asset, but it can also be a very great financial liability if not managed responsibly.

Strategy 2 Objectives:

1. Establish comprehensive data protection and privacy policies.
2. Foster trust and transparency with church members, employees, and the public with responsible data use.
3. Implement minimization of data. Do not retain what we do not need.
4. Encourage digital literacy among our leadership and staff.
5. Encourage data-driven decision-making, as led by the Holy Spirit.

Strategy 2 Goals:

- A. Implement General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and/or locally compliant data collection and storage practices across all digital platforms within the next six months.
- B. Designate a data protection officer (DPO) to manage the organization's data protection compliance obligations.
- C. Conduct quarterly data security audits to ensure ongoing compliance and security.
- D. Implement an employee cyber training program such as KnowBe4.
- E. Obtain cyber liability insurance where available.
- F. Develop a user data privacy education program for staff and volunteers by the end of the year.
- G. Establish a cyber crisis communication, disaster recovery, and ministry continuity plan for each entity.

Moving forward, we should seek to make data-driven decisions, but always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we assign individuals to oversee data protection, we recognize that this not only is a legal requirement but also should be an operational priority for the church. By establishing cyber crisis communication plans and implementing compliant data practices, we prepare ourselves for the challenges that lie ahead, remaining faithful stewards of the digital resources entrusted to us.

Digital Strategy #3 - Tailored Departmental Strategies

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, ESV).

Just as the body of Christ has many parts, each with its unique function (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), a digital strategy must never be one-size-fits-all, but tailored to the specific needs of each entity, department, and ministry. Our third strategy focuses on developing contextualized digital approaches for each area of our work that are relevant to the local realities of mission.

By meeting with each department to craft their unique digital strategies, we can ensure that every aspect of our mission is supported. We seek to identify similarities across departments, encourage collaboration, and standardize common tools. This approach will increase efficiency and reflect the unity of purpose that should characterize the body of Christ.

Strategy 3 Objectives:

1. Establish a Digital Strategy for Mission administrative committee chaired by senior leadership. This committee will meet regularly to govern and oversee digital evangelism, including infrastructure and initiatives, while looking for opportunities for innovation.

2. Meet with each entity, department, and ministry to craft their own Digital Strategy for Mission. Look for opportunities to encourage collaboration across departments.
3. Align departmental digital strategies with the entity's Digital Strategy for Mission as well as the world church's strategic plan "I Will Go."
4. Ensure the use of common tools and look for opportunities to collaborate while crafting unique strategies. Customize digital tools and approaches to meet the unique needs of each department and ministry.

Strategy 3 Goals:

- A. Complete an assessment of each department's digital needs and capabilities within three months.
- B. Develop and implement tailored digital strategies for at least six departments by the end of the year.
- C. Monitor and report to the local administrative committee (ADCOM) or executive committee biannually on the effectiveness of these strategies to ensure alignment and impact.
- D. Identify opportunities to share and then to normalize tools and solutions across departments.

As we align these departmental strategies with the broader mission of the church, we can ensure that our digital efforts are not isolated initiatives, but part of a cohesive movement to spread the gospel. Regular monitoring and reporting will help us stay on course, always keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Digital Strategy #4 - Adopting Enterprise Services

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23, NIV).

The parable of the talents in Matthew 24:14-30 reminds us of the importance of good stewardship. Our fourth strategy focuses on adopting enterprise services and evaluating the use of Adventist.Cloud for World Church Platforms in order to increase operational efficiency and productivity.

By championing the sharing of tools and services across denominational entities, we can ensure continuity and radically increase efficiency. By evaluating and adopting the World Church Platforms through Adventist.Cloud across the denomination, we can speak with one voice in the digital realm. As we standardize our digital tools and platforms, we not only streamline operations but also demonstrate the unity that Christ prayed for His church in John 17:21.

Adopting World Church Platforms within the Adventist.Cloud suite of solutions—such as ACMS (Adventist Church Management System), 7me, 7vote, ASAS (Adventist Administration Secretariat System), Adventist Web Engine, and Jetstream—is critical to this strategy. This will enable the world church to use common systems and platforms across our entities and organizations, thereby increasing efficiency and lowering the cost per entity for each platform. Support becomes widely available, and as employees move within the organization, their onboarding time will significantly decrease since they will already be familiar with the standard tools and platforms being used. Reports and analytics can be viewed in real time and will encourage more data-driven decisions.

Strategy 4 Objectives:

1. Develop an enterprise technology strategy that seeks to increase operational efficiency and productivity by automating processes and optimizing resources.

2. Promote the sharing of services across the GC, divisions, and all denominational entities to ensure continuity and efficiency.
3. Promote the adoption of World Church Platforms across the world field.
4. Standardize and normalize digital tools and platforms to streamline operations.

Strategy 4 Goals:

- A. Identify and implement at least two enterprise services that can be shared across the entity within twelve months.
- B. Establish standardized protocols for service usage and management within one year.
- C. Achieve a 15 percent reduction in costs associated with digital services by eliminating department redundancies.

Our goal to reduce costs associated with digital services by eliminating redundancies is not just about financial stewardship—it's about freeing up resources that can be redirected toward our primary mission of preaching and teaching.

Digital Strategy #5 - Integration and Centralization of Resources

"All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44, ESV).

The early church was characterized by its willingness to share resources.¹⁰ In the digital age in which we live, we must apply this principle to our evangelistic and ecclesiastical materials. Our fifth strategy focuses on centralizing and integrating the church's valuable resources that are today largely siloed and scattered.

Integrating and centralizing evangelistic and church resources is crucial for maintaining a unified and mission-focused toolbox of resources and materials. This strategy directly

¹⁰ Acts 4:32-35.

supports the mission by providing a centralized hub for all necessary resources, ensuring consistency in branding, identity, messaging, and ease of access. Internally, it simplifies resource management and ensures that all departments have access to the same high-quality materials. The sustainability of this strategy lies in its ability to reduce duplication of efforts and streamline resource distribution, which can significantly lower costs over time. Finally, this strategy will significantly encourage the reuse of materials from other departments and other entities, as permissible.

By creating centralized web repositories for evangelistic content and church materials, we can ensure that our local churches have access to the high-quality resources our departments and entities have. This not only increases efficiency but also allows for the sharing of diverse, culturally relevant content across our global church family.

Strategy 5 Objectives:

1. Centralize evangelistic and ecclesiastic focused materials and resources.
2. Establish and advertise a web repository of these resources and materials.
3. Ensure that there are two categories of materials widely available:
evangelistically focused resources, for use by local churches and church members, and ecclesiastically focused materials and resources, for use by denominational entities and their internal operations.
4. Where possible, consolidate these resources into the next higher organization's repository of evangelistically and ecclesiastically focused resources to maximize diversity of content.

Strategy 5 Goals:

- A. Advertise these web repositories across the field, as broadly as possible.
Track web analytics to ensure relevancy and ease of access.
- B. Develop a centralized resource repository accessible to all departments by the end of the year.

- C. Hold quarterly staff meetings to train staff on how to access and use these resources and materials.

As we make these resources widely available, we must also invest in training our staff and advertising the availability of these materials. By doing so, we equip every member to be a digital disciple, ready to share the hope within them in this digital age.¹¹

Digital Strategy #6 - Anchoring Digital Evangelism to Local Churches

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24, 25, NIV).

Our digital reach may be global, but our impact must always be local. Our sixth strategy ensures that our digital evangelism is relevant, engaging, and—most importantly—anchored to local churches. We must remember that the church (*ecclesia*) is never a virtual concept, but a real community of believers who are regularly meeting together in person.¹²

Ensuring that digital evangelism is relevant, connected, and anchored to local churches is vital for maintaining the authenticity and effectiveness of our outreach efforts. If we create culturally relevant content and strengthen the connection with local congregations, this strategy will enhance the mission by making our digital evangelism efforts more impactful and relatable. Internally, it fosters closer collaboration between the digital and local church teams and promotes a more integrated approach to evangelism. Tailoring content to different regions may require ongoing effort and investment, but increased engagement and support from local communities make it a sustainable and valuable approach.

¹¹ 1 Peter 3:15.

¹² Hebrews 10:25.

By strengthening the connection between digital evangelism efforts and local church activities, we create a seamless journey from online engagement to offline fellowship. To accomplish this, we must ensure that our digital content is culturally relevant and contextually appropriate, reflecting the diverse tapestry of God's global family.

Strategy 6 Objectives:

1. Encourage at least 10 percent—a tithe—of every church's local membership to be digital disciples, connecting and engaging with seekers online.
2. Strengthen the connection between digital evangelism efforts and local church activities.
3. Ensure that digital content is culturally relevant and contextually appropriate.
4. Focus on building and growing online faith communities and integrating those communities into the local church.

Strategy 6 Goals:

- A. Establish a consistent feedback loop between local congregations and digital evangelism teams to ensure alignment.
- B. Create and distribute culturally tailored evangelistic content that speaks to different people groups and belief systems.
- C. Increase local church participation in digital evangelism initiatives by 25 percent within one year.

Our goal is not to build online faith communities, but to integrate these online communities into local churches. By encouraging a portion of every church's membership to engage as digital disciples, we mobilize a global force for digital evangelism, embodying the spirit of Total Member Involvement.

Digital Strategy #7 - Securing the Church's Online Identity

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14, NIV).

In a world of many voices, we must ensure that the Advent message rings clear and true in the digital realm. Our final strategy focuses on securing the church's online identity through effective brand management and search engine optimization (SEO). Christ calls us to be on the hilltop, to be easily found by those looking. This is a direct call to ensure that our online content can be found, and that it remains accessible to all.

Indeed, securing the church's online identity through effective brand management and SEO is essential for maintaining a strong and positive online presence. This strategy supports the mission by ensuring that our message is easily discoverable and our online identity remains consistent and trustworthy. Internally, it involves adopting best practices for digital marketing and SEO, which can significantly enhance our visibility and reach. To accomplish this will require ongoing investment in brand management and SEO practices, but the long-term benefits of increased online visibility and engagement justify the costs, which makes it a sustainable and strategic approach.

Strategy 7 Objectives:

1. Protect and enhance the church's online presence.
2. Improve search engine visibility and brand recognition.
3. Increase organic traffic by focusing on improved keyword rankings and optimized content to help drive more users to our various websites.
4. Work to ensure technical optimization by completing regular audits and making adjustments to create fast loading times, mobile responsiveness, and error-free navigation across websites.

Strategy 7 Goals:

- A. Conduct a comprehensive brand audit and develop a brand management strategy within six months.
- B. Establish high-quality linking by building relevant and authoritative links to enhance credibility and authority. This is especially crucial for generative AI's use.
- C. Optimize website content and structure to improve search engine rankings by 20 percent within six months.
- D. Work to enhance brand visibility and trust, leading to increased recognition by the public and greater familiarity and trust, boosting traffic and conversion rates.

Just as God's people are called to be a light to the nations, our online presence should shine brightly, drawing seekers to the truth.¹³ By protecting and enhancing the church's online presence and speaking with one voice, we increase our visibility and build trust with others.

As we improve our search engine visibility and optimize our content, we open new pathways for people to discover the three angels' messages.¹⁴ Regular technical and content audits will help ensure that our digital doors remain open, welcoming seekers with fast-loading, mobile-responsive, and user-friendly experiences.

We must also be willing to optimize even our older content—having the wisdom to retire older websites and platforms that no longer serve our mission effectively. Just as there is "a time to keep and a time to throw away," we must be willing to let go of digital assets that no longer advance our cause.¹⁵

In conclusion, our digital strategy for mission is not about leveraging technology, but rather about extending Christ's method of reaching people into the digital age. It's about building

¹³ Isaiah 49:6.

¹⁴ The three angels' messages can be found in Revelation 14:6-12.

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:6, NIV.

relationships and praying with the masses, with content available 24/7 online. As we implement these strategies, may we always remember that our ultimate goal is to lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus, the Living Word, who alone can transform lives.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Brand Management: A comprehensive brand audit and management strategy is crucial for maintaining a consistent and effective online presence.
2. Authority Building: High-quality linking is essential for enhancing credibility and authority, particularly in the context of generative AI.
3. SEO Optimization: Improving search engine rankings through content and structure optimization is a key strategy for increasing visibility.
4. Trust and Recognition: Enhancing brand visibility and trust is vital for increasing public recognition and improving traffic and conversion rates.
5. Digital Evangelism: The online presence of the church should serve as a "light to the nations," drawing seekers to the truth in the digital space.
6. Content Auditing: Regular technical and content audits are necessary to ensure a welcoming and efficient digital experience for users.
7. Strategic Retirement: It is wise to retire older digital assets that no longer effectively serve the mission, allowing for focus on more impactful platforms.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively balance the need for a unified brand strategy across our global church while still allowing for necessary cultural and regional adaptations in our digital presence?

2. In what ways can we leverage the power of high-quality linking and SEO optimization to not only improve our visibility but also create meaningful connections with seekers and potential converts?
3. As we consider retiring older digital assets, what criteria should we use to evaluate their ongoing effectiveness, and how can we ensure that valuable content and relationships are not lost in the process?

SECTION 1: MISSION

The digital age presents both opportunities and challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is tempting to focus immediately on the newest technologies, platforms, and strategies, but this section emphasizes the need to first ground our digital efforts in mission. By starting with mission, we reaffirm that our use of technology must flow from our understanding of God's prophetic call and that our digital engagement is a tool to fulfill this larger purpose—not a goal in itself.

A theological framework is essential. Although the Bible does not mention digital technologies, it offers principles that guide how we engage with the world. By wrestling with Scripture, we can gain insights into how God has communicated through different media across history and how He might work through modern technology. Theology reminds us that while technology evolves, human nature and our need for God remain constant.

Moreover, a theologically grounded digital strategy helps preserve the church's distinct Adventist identity. In a space where it's easy to adapt to trends for broader appeal, a strong theological foundation ensures that we don't compromise on our unique calling. This focus also guides us ethically, helping us navigate the pitfalls of the digital world while making sure our message speaks to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Technology may refine the "how" of our outreach, but our core mission stays the same, and our effectiveness in the digital world still depends on spiritual preparedness and reliance on the Holy Spirit. We must continue to be a transformative movement, always taking care that our use of digital tools aligns with our values and advances God's kingdom.

Chapter 2: Urgency

When Seventh-day Adventists lose their sense of prophetic urgency, the same urgency our pioneers once felt, our mission efforts eventually weaken and diminish. Simply put, the impact of our mission hinges on our personal and collective sense of purpose.

This urgent prophetic call must guide our communicators, technology experts, pastors, and leaders, ensuring we maintain the eschatological vision that has shaped our movement, while we continue to recognize the great spiritual battle unfolding around us.¹⁶ As we anticipate the soon return of our Savior, our mission, strategies, and daily decisions must be viewed through this lens of spiritual warfare intensifying all around us.

We are not spectators, but active participants in the final scenes of earth's history, and this should instill in us a sense of great urgency and purpose. As Ellen White wrote, "We are living in the closing scenes of this earth's history. Prophecy is rapidly fulfilling. The hours of probation are fast passing. We have no time—not a moment—to lose."¹⁷

As leaders, we must avoid viewing our work through a purely secular or corporate lens. Our mission transcends a marketing campaign with clever slogans and catchy visuals. Our mission is not about crafting a sales pitch with the perfect angle or emotional hook. Reducing our God-given mandate to mere human methodologies and strategies would remove the power that makes our message unique and transformative. We are not calling people to join a club or buy a product; we are sounding a trumpet call for humanity to choose eternal life.

¹⁶ Eschatology is the study of end times, focusing on the final events in the history of the world and humanity, including the second coming of Jesus, judgment, and the ultimate destiny of souls.

¹⁷ E. G. White, "Sowing Beside All Waters," *The Review and Herald*, July 14, 1903.

Choosing to be a part of the remnant church means total involvement in God's mission. As we embrace this identity, we step onto a spiritual battlefield where the stakes are higher. We have joined a war "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness" that have held this world captive for millennia (Ephesians 6:12). Every sermon, every Bible study, every act of compassion in Jesus' name becomes an assault on the enemy's territory.

As a movement, we must internalize Christ's promise that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against" His church (Matthew 16:18). We quote this verse, yet we may not truly understand it in light of the mission before us. This imagery is so crucial that we do not want you to miss it. Gates do not attack. Gates are used to defend. It is the church that is on the advance, storming the strongholds of darkness with God's love and present truth.

This offensive cannot be conducted in our own strength or wisdom. The power to confront darkness comes only from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We must lead our people in earnest prayer and preparation for this promised latter rain of the Holy Spirit. Only then, when the church is filled with the Holy Spirit, will we see the ultimate fulfillment of our prophetic mission. The strongholds of darkness, however formidable, cannot withstand the power of God working through a fully surrendered and Spirit-filled people.

From the local church board meeting to the General Conference in session, every decision must reflect this understanding. This is not a time for complacency or business as usual. Each choice, policy, and initiative must be weighed against its impact on our divine mandate. Are we advancing the cause of Christ or hindering it? Are we allocating resources in a way that reflects the urgency of our times? Are we fostering unity and spiritual preparedness among our members for the trials ahead?

As we face these challenging times, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. His victory is not in question; it is already secured. The cross and the empty tomb stand as eternal testimonies to His triumph over sin, death, and the devil. Yet before we experience the fullness of this redemption, we must contend with an enemy who knows his time is short

and acts desperately. This desperation to destroy should awaken in God's church an even greater determination to save.

The Enemy's Urgency to Destroy

We must recognize our enemy's frantic tactics to destroy. It is not from a place of strength or calling that drives him, but desperation at the realization that his time is rapidly playing out. The Bible reveals his state of mind in Revelation 12:12: "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." The knowledge of his impending defeat intensifies his fury. Every passing moment brings him closer to his final judgment. This desperation fuels his relentless attacks against God's people and His truth.

Every image-bearer matters to the enemy because of his hatred for God's immeasurable love for us. The apostle Peter also warned believers in 1 Peter 5:8 to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Satan is constantly adapting his strategy in these last days. As Ellen White notes, "Satan's efforts are more powerful now than ever before; for he knows that his time to deceive is short."¹⁸ This urgency is seen in the rapid transformations occurring in our world—financially, morally, politically, socially, environmentally, and religiously. The enemy orchestrates great events, swiftly altering the landscape of our society, often making it difficult for God's truth to be heard and accepted.

Consider the technological advancements of our age. While these can be powerful tools for spreading the gospel, the enemy weaponizes them to distract, deceive, and destroy. The constant barrage of information, entertainment, and stimulation dulls the spiritual senses

¹⁸ E. G. White, *The Review and Herald*, January 19, 1864.

and creates an environment where deep, meaningful engagement with God's Word becomes increasingly challenging.

The enemy continues to sow confusion and doubt regarding God's Word. As Paul warned in 2 Timothy 4:3, 4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." We see this prophecy fulfilled in the proliferation of false teachings and the growing acceptance of moral relativism, even within Christian circles.

Christ's Urgency to Save

Unlike the enemy's frantic efforts to destroy, we find a powerful portrayal of Christ's desire to save humanity throughout Scripture. This divine urgency is not born of desperation, but of an unfathomable love that compels our Savior to seek and redeem the lost before time runs out.

From the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated this. Setting the tone for His mission, Christ declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). In this passage we see an urgent call to liberation and healing that cannot be delayed.

The Gospel of Luke also presents the parable of the great banquet, illustrating this divine urgency. In Luke 14:15-24, the invited guests make excuses for why they cannot come, and the master commands his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind" (verse 21). Then in verse 23 he says, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." This repeated invitation reflects God's heart to fill His kingdom before it's too late.

According to the Gospels, during His final days on earth, Christ's mission intensified. He cleansed the Temple, confronted the religious leaders, and poured out His heart in teaching and prayer. The weight of His impending sacrifice and His desire to prepare His followers shaped His every word and action.

After Jesus' resurrection, His urgency remained, though it changed as He entrusted the mission to His followers. His final words to the disciples in Matthew 28:19, 20 reminded them of this urgency as He commissioned them to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." This Great Commission is not a suggestion, but a mandate to reach the entire world with the gospel message.

The book of Revelation explains that until Christ comes again, His work of salvation will continue until the very end. In Revelation 22:12, Jesus declares, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." This promise of imminent return is repeated three times in the final chapter, emphasizing the urgency of the hour.

As Adventist leaders, we should be compelled by this same conviction in all we do. We are called to emulate Christ's tireless efforts to seek and save the lost. Our strategies, our preaching, our evangelism, and even our digital strategy should reflect this urgent desire to reach souls before probation closes.

Ellen White emphasizes this imperative: "Every day the probation of some is closing. Every hour some are passing beyond the reach of mercy. And where are the voices of warning and entreaty to bid the sinner flee from this fearful doom? Where are the hands stretched out to draw him back from death? Where are those who with humility and persevering faith are pleading with God for him?"¹⁹

¹⁹ E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

Every hour, more than 13,000 people die worldwide, a startling 330,000 or more per day. We must respond with urgency and recognize the potential impact of technology and communication in this spiritual battle.

This priority to save must drive our digital strategies, our community outreach, our educational institutions, and every aspect of our church's mission. We must work with the awareness that every soul reached is an eternal victory, every moment of delay a potential eternal loss.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Prophetic Urgency: The success of the Adventist mission is directly proportional to our personal and collective sense of prophetic urgency.
2. Spiritual Warfare Perspective: Our mission, strategies, and daily decisions must be viewed through the lens of intensifying spiritual warfare as we approach Christ's return.
3. Human Methodologies: Our God-given mandate transcends mere human strategies; it's a spiritual battle requiring divine empowerment.
4. Church on the Offensive: Christ's promise that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" implies that the church is on the offensive, storming the strongholds of darkness with God's love and present truth.
5. Holy Spirit's Empowerment: The power to effectively combat darkness comes only from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the need for earnest prayer and preparation for the latter rain.
6. Enemy's Desperate Tactics: Satan's urgency to destroy, driven by his knowledge of limited time, should awaken an even greater urgency in the church to save souls.
7. Christ's Urgency to Save: Our mission should reflect Christ's tireless efforts and urgent desire to seek and save the lost before probation closes.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively instill and maintain a sense of prophetic urgency in our digital strategies and overall mission efforts without resorting to sensationalism or fearmongering?
2. In light of the spiritual warfare perspective, how can we ensure that our technological advancements and communication strategies are not just innovative, but spiritually empowered and aligned with our prophetic mission?
3. Considering the statistic that more than 330,000 people die worldwide each day, how can we leverage our digital platforms and resources to respond with appropriate urgency in reaching souls for Christ?

Chapter 3: Power

Just as technology needs electricity to function, our mission requires power of a different nature. This power, essential to fulfilling God's mission, comes from the Holy Spirit. This chapter explores the intricate relationship between our divine mission, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the practical elements of church structure, brand, technology, and resources.

The Mission Had a Church

The early Christian movement began not as an organization, but as a movement with a mission. Long before the establishment of a formal church structure or even a distinct name, Jesus Christ entrusted His followers with a divine mandate. This mission, to make disciples of all nations, predates any organizational framework. It's important to understand that the mission didn't belong to a church; rather, the church arose from the mission. This perspective shift matters as we consider our role as Seventh-day Adventists in the digital age.

In its early years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church focused primarily on sharing the three angels' messages, prioritizing this divine calling over any formal organizational structure or denominational name. For almost two decades, the movement operated without a centralized structure or official name, driven by a shared commitment to the urgency of spreading the Adventist message.

As the movement grew and its message spread, the need for organization became apparent. Our Adventist pioneers recognized the need for organization to fulfill the mission and gradually formed a more defined church structure. They consolidated their resources and established a recognizable brand to strategically advance the mission more effectively. The church, its brand, and its resources were all tools to facilitate the spread of the eternal

gospel. The mission had a remnant church ready to sacrifice everything to fulfill its divine calling.

The early Christian church experienced a similar journey. The Great Commission, shared in each of the Gospel accounts, finds its culmination in Acts 1:6-8. One last time, our Savior reminded us of our mission as His followers and promised the power needed to complete it:

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel reveals their lingering hope for political power and national restoration. Their vision was still limited to earthly dominion, a reflection of the common messianic expectations of their time. Jesus, however, redirected their focus to a far greater power—the spiritual empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This transition from political to spiritual power is fundamental to understanding the nature of God's mission. The disciples thought in terms of ruling; Jesus thought in terms of serving. They focused on a specific nation; Jesus had in mind the entire world. This contrast highlights the transformative nature of the power Jesus promised—a power not to dominate, but to witness and love; not to conquer territories, but to change hearts and minds.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Greek word used for power here is *dunamis*, from which we derive such words as "dynamic" and "dynamite." This is more than ability; it is an explosive, transformative power. Jesus links this power to the presence of the Holy Spirit,

emphasizing that it's not human strength or strategy, but divine power that works within us.

The purpose of this power is clear—to bear witness to Christ. The Greek word for witnesses is *martys*, from which we get "martyr," highlighting the cost and commitment involved in true witness. The geographical progression of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth outlines the strategy and scope of the mission. It starts locally, but expands globally, breaking through cultural and racial barriers.

Throughout the New Testament, we see clear evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of believers. At Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, the visible manifestation of the Spirit's power was so dramatic it drew a crowd and resulted in thousands of conversions. Acts 4:13 records that religious leaders observed Peter and John, though described as *agrammatoi kai idiotai* in Greek (often translated as "unschooled, ordinary men"), speak with remarkable boldness. They recognized that "they had been with Jesus," indicating a transformation attributed to divine empowerment. The presence of the Holy Spirit was not a vague, subjective experience, but a transformative power that visibly changed lives and communities.

The power of the Holy Spirit, at its core, is the power to love as God loves—without limits or conditions. This is why love is listed as the first and preeminent fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23. The Greek word used is *agape*, which means a self-sacrificing, unconditional love that originates from God Himself. This love is not merely an emotion, but an action and state of being. It's the essence of God's character, as stated in 1 John 4:8: "God is love." The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, will lead us to love as God does.

Jesus taught that all the law and prophets hang on the commands to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). The Greek word for "hang" is *kremannymi* and gives the image of the entire law and prophetic writings being suspended from these two commands. The Spirit empowers us to fulfill these commands, upholding love as the driving force and defining characteristic of our lives and mission. Jesus further emphasized

this in John 13:35, saying, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The Greek word for "know" here is *ginosko*, which implies an experiential, intimate knowledge. The Spirit enables this distinctive love that serves as an unmistakable marker of true discipleship.

Our digital mission strategies must emphasize Spirit-empowered love. Our use of technology, communication methods, and online interactions must all be infused with this supernatural *agape* love. It's not enough to have the latest tools or the most efficient systems. Our digital efforts will lack the transformative power that characterizes true gospel witness if the power of the Spirit is not manifested in genuine, self-sacrificing love. Without love, our mission will be ineffective.

As Adventist leaders, we must seek the Spirit's empowerment above all else. Our digital strategies must flow from hearts overflowing with God's love, not just from brilliant minds or skilled hands. Only then will our technological tools become vessels for the same power that turned the world upside down in the first century.

The Naked Truth

Audrey Andersson, a General Vice President of the GC, has spent much of her ministry in various communication roles. During the 2024 GAI Conference, she shared a powerful allegory that captures the essence of our digital mission in today's world:

Truth and Lie met on the road one day. Lie, ever the deceiver, complimented the beautiful day, and Truth, though suspicious, had to agree. As they walked together, they came upon a well. Lie suggested a refreshing bath, and after testing the water, Truth agreed. As they splashed in the cool water, Lie suddenly leapt out, stole Truth's clothes, and ran away. When Truth emerged and found her clothes gone, she went naked to the nearest village. But the villagers, upon seeing the naked Truth, turned their backs in shame. Dejected, Truth returned to the well, never to be seen again. And so Lie continues to roam the world, clothed as Truth.

In a world where falsehoods often masquerade as truth, where "fake news" and "alternative facts" dominate headlines, our task is to present the unadulterated truth in a

way that people will understand it. At the heart of the cosmic conflict described in Adventist theology lies an epistemic battle—a war over truth itself. This struggle for the minds and hearts of created beings forms the core of what Ellen G. White termed "the great controversy" between Christ and Satan. Understanding this conflict reveals the fundamental importance of truth in our digital mission.

The great controversy, as outlined in White's seminal work of the same name, portrays a universe-spanning narrative of rebellion, redemption, and restoration. Central to this cosmic drama is Satan's sustained attack on God's character. From Eden to the final judgment, the adversary has sought to misrepresent the nature of God, His law, and His government.

This epistemic conflict—a battle over what is known and believed to be true—began with a simple yet insidious question: "Did God really say . . .?" (Genesis 3:1, NIV). With these words, Satan introduced doubt about God's trustworthiness into the minds of our first parents. This strategy of deception continues to this day, often amplified by the instantaneous and far-reaching nature of digital communication.

The essence of this epistemic conflict is captured in John C. Peckham's *Theodicy of Love*, in which he argues that the cosmic conflict is fundamentally about competing truth claims regarding God's character and government. Satan's allegations against God cannot be defeated by sheer power or force. Instead, they require a demonstration of character that falsifies these slanderous claims.

This understanding transforms how we view our digital mission. We are not merely disseminating information or winning arguments online. Instead, we are participants in a cosmic courtroom drama in which God's character is on trial before the universe. Our digital strategies must aim to present evidence of God's love, justice, and trustworthiness in ways that resonate with a skeptical world.

The cross stands as the ultimate refutation of Satan's lies about God's character. As Ellen White writes in *The Desire of Ages*, "Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His

administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings."²⁰

In our digital age, misinformation spreads at unprecedented speeds, often outpacing truth. Our challenge is to present the unadulterated truth about God's character in ways that are accessible, engaging, and transformative. This requires more than just innovative technologies or clever marketing; it demands a comprehensive understanding of the issues at stake and a commitment to embodying the very truth we proclaim.

As we develop our digital strategies, we must recognize that we are engaged in more than a battle for attention or doctrinal correctness. We are participants in a cosmic conflict over the nature of truth itself. Our online efforts should aim to dispel the "darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world."²¹

In practice, this means our digital content should prioritize stories and testimonies that showcase God's love in action. It involves addressing difficult questions about suffering and evil with honesty and compassion. It requires us to use modern parables and analogies to make abstract truths tangible and to leverage visual storytelling to bring biblical narratives to life.

Our digital interactions must also be characterized by the very love and truth we proclaim. In a world where online discourse is often marked by hostility and division, our digital presence should stand out as a beacon of grace, truth, and reconciliation. We must embody the loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness that God delights in, including in our online interactions.

The stakes could not be higher. Ellen White notes in *The Great Controversy* that the final struggle will involve charges against God's character before all creation. Satan has claimed

²⁰ Page 761.

²¹ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.

that God's law is unjust and that the good of the universe requires its change. Our digital mission, then, is nothing less than participating in God's self-revelation to the universe.

As we engage in this cosmic conflict through digital means, let us remember that our goal is not just to share information but to invite people into a transformative relationship with a loving God. We must strive to present truth in such a way that it becomes irresistible, not through manipulation or coercion, but through the inherent beauty of God's character revealed.

Ultimately, our digital strategy must be more than a set of tactics or technologies. It must be a faithful witness to the God who is truth, who has revealed Himself in Christ, and who invites all creation to know Him. In a world where lies often masquerade as truth, our task is to present the unadulterated truth in a way that people will understand and embrace. This is the heart of our digital mission in the context of the great controversy.

Fear of the Holy Spirit

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, despite its rich heritage of emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit, has at times exhibited a fear of fully embracing the Spirit's power. This hesitancy comes from various factors, including concerns about fanaticism, desire for doctrinal purity, and perhaps subconscious resistance to the transformative power that a full outpouring of the Spirit would bring.

Ellen White stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers and the church as a whole. In *Gospel Workers*, she states, "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. We must have the holy unction from God, the baptism of his Spirit; for this is the only efficient agent in the promulgation of sacred truth."²² Yet, despite such clear admonitions, there remains a reluctance within many Adventist circles to fully engage with this divine power.

²² Page 370.

This reluctance is concerning given that White also states, "The donation of the Holy Spirit was the greatest gift God could bestow upon finite man."²³ Why does the church seem to approach this gift with fear rather than eager anticipation?

White addressed this issue directly: "We are altogether too indifferent in regard to the Holy Spirit, which is to take possession of heart and character."²⁴ She suggests that this apathy stems from a failure to recognize our total dependence on divine power for genuine spiritual growth and effective ministry.

This lack of concern for the Holy Spirit's work is ultimately self-defeating. As White points out, "Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power."²⁵ If we shy away from fully embracing the Spirit's power, the church risks diminished effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

The cosmic conflict between good and evil unfolds within a framework of divine self-limitation. John C. Peckham, in his works *Theodicy of Love* and *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*, explains this concept through what he terms "rules of engagement." These are not arbitrary restrictions imposed from outside, but the result of God's own commitments and covenants, including His grant of genuine freedom to created beings.

Imagine sitting in a cosmic courtroom where God's character stands on trial. Satan's allegations cannot be dismissed by divine decree; they must be answered in a way that respects the freedom of all involved and convinces the watching universe. This framework transforms our understanding of the great controversy and, by extension, our digital mission.

²³ E. G. White letter 35, 1893.

²⁴ E. G. White, *The Review and Herald*, July 30, 1901.

²⁵ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

In this cosmic drama, the Holy Spirit emerges as the key agent working within agreed-upon parameters. Like a master strategist operating behind enemy lines, the Spirit convicts, guides, and empowers believers within the constraints God has accepted. Our digital outreach, then, becomes a collaborative effort with the divine. We create the platforms and craft the content, but ultimately rely on the Spirit's work to bring truth home to hearts.

This understanding reframes our digital strategies as more than mere information dissemination or brand building. We are creating spaces for divine encounters, stages upon which the drama of redemption unfolds. Every testimony shared, every truth presented, every loving interaction becomes evidence in the ongoing trial, demonstrating the transformative power of God's grace.

God's patience takes on new meaning in this light. The persistence of evil, often a stumbling block to faith, becomes understandable as part of a larger narrative of freedom and vindication. Our digital communication should reflect this divine long-suffering, avoiding the temptation of sensationalism or promises of quick fixes. Instead, we paint on the canvas of eternity each pixel of truth contributing to a larger picture of God's character.

Prayer, in this context, becomes a powerful tool in the cosmic conflict. It may be one of the ways believers can invite God's action in areas in which He has chosen to limit His unilateral intervention. Our digital strategies should not merely talk about prayer but facilitate it, creating virtual spaces where the human heart can connect with the divine within the rules of engagement.

The stakes in this conflict are universal, extending beyond our earthly sphere. Unseen intelligences watch our online interactions, our handling of conflicts, our demonstrations of love. Every comment section becomes a potential testimony to the character of the God we serve. This cosmic audience challenges us to elevate our digital discourse, to embody the very truths we proclaim.

As we develop and implement our digital strategies, we must remember that we operate within the context of this cosmic conflict and its rules of engagement. Our goal transcends winning arguments or gaining followers. We participate in God's self-revelation to the universe, demonstrating the truth of His character and the justice of His government through every post, video, and interaction.

In a digital landscape fraught with misinformation and competing narratives, our task is challenging but inspiring. We present the truth about God in a way that is compelling, respectful, and transformative, not through our own power or cleverness, but in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. As we faithfully engage in this task, bound by love and guided by truth, we become part of the unfolding story of God's vindication.

Our digital mission, viewed through this lens, becomes nothing less than participation in the final chapters of cosmic history. Every click, every share, every online conversation ripples through the universe, contributing to the ultimate triumph of God's love. In a world where truth often seems naked and vulnerable, we clothe it not in the garments of deception, but in the attractive robes of divine love, inviting all to see and embrace the God who is Truth itself.

The Power of Prayer

In the cosmic drama of the great controversy, prayer emerges as more than a devotional practice; it's a strategic exercise of spiritual authority. This understanding, rooted in biblical theology and further expanded on by scholars like Peckham, changes our approach to digital ministry and our role in God's overarching narrative.

The book of Ephesians offers a framework for understanding this concept. Ephesians 1:10 reveals God's ultimate purpose: to bring unity and harmony between heaven and earth in Christ. This reconciliation addresses the separation between these realms since the Fall. In

this cosmic context, Christ is enthroned far above all power and dominion, both in this age and in the age to come.²⁶

Ephesians 2:6 reveals that believers have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. This positioning is not merely honorary; it carries real spiritual authority and responsibility. Like regional rulers under a sovereign king, we receive specific domains of influence and the spiritual authority necessary to fulfill our God-given tasks. This authority extends to our various spheres of influence—our families, workplaces, communities, and even digital presence.

Peckham's work on the "rules of engagement" in the cosmic conflict offers valuable insight here. God, in His wisdom and commitment to creaturely freedom, has chosen to operate within certain self-imposed limitations. These parameters create space for genuine creaturely choice and prevent the conflict from being immediately resolved by divine fiat. Within this framework, prayer becomes a means by which believers can invite God's action in areas in which He has chosen to limit His unilateral intervention.

This understanding transforms our view of prayer from a passive request to an active exercise of spiritual authority. When we pray, we aren't merely asking God to act; we give Him "legal permission" under the rules of engagement to intervene in situations according to our petitions. This concept aligns with Jesus' teaching on binding and loosing (Matthew 18:18), suggesting that our prayers impact in both seen and unseen realms.

Ephesians 6 frames this in the context of spiritual warfare. We battle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Prayer, coupled with the full armor of God, becomes our means of engaging in this conflict. Through prayer, we exercise our spiritual authority to dismantle the enemy's strongholds and invite God's power into our situations.

The power of united prayer gains new significance in this light. When believers come together in agreement, their collective spiritual authority increases. Matthew 18:20

²⁶ Ephesians 1:20, 21.

suggests a special dynamic when two or three gather in Christ's name. From this, we can infer that the more Spirit-filled individuals join in prayer, the more effectively God can act within the parameters He has set. This principle underscores the importance of corporate prayer and unity in the body of Christ.

Unfortunately, our modern, often secularized approach to faith has diminished our awareness of this unseen reality. We've lost sight of the spiritual realm as the true battleground where victories are won. Jesus' practice of rising before dawn to pray (Mark 1:35) was not merely about personal devotion, but about securing victory through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the same power that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19, 20), and it's available to believers today.

As we anticipate the culmination of earth's history, the concept of the "latter rain"—an outpouring of the Holy Spirit—takes on new meaning. This outpouring, prophesied in Joel 2:28, 29 and alluded to in Acts 2, will come as God's people unite, not in uniformity, but in their desire for the Spirit's fullness and their commitment to preparing others for Christ's return. This unity, born of the Spirit, transcends doctrinal differences and focuses on the core mission of the church.

Our primary purpose as Adventists is to prepare people for the second coming of Christ. While knowledge plays a role, the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit is what prepares our hearts for this glorious event. Our digital strategies, therefore, must go beyond information dissemination to facilitate genuine spiritual encounters and foster unity in the Spirit.

In the context of our digital mission, prayer takes on a strategic importance. It's not merely a supplement to our online efforts, but the very foundation of our spiritual authority in the digital realm. As we create content, engage in online discussions, and build digital communities, we must do so prayerfully, consciously exercising our spiritual authority to invite God's transformative power into these spaces.

Our online platforms can become digital prayer rooms, spaces where believers can unite to exercise their collective spiritual authority. Live-streamed prayer sessions, online prayer chains, and digital prayer walls can harness the power of united prayer across geographical boundaries. These initiatives not only strengthen participants' faith but also challenge the spiritual forces that occupy these same online spaces.

As we engage in this prayer-empowered digital ministry, we participate in the unfolding story of the great controversy. Every prayer-backed post, every Spirit-led interaction becomes a step toward the ultimate reconciliation of heaven and earth in Christ. We're not merely sharing information or building a brand; we're exercising divine authority to reclaim digital territories for God's kingdom.

Prayer in the context of the great controversy is far more than a personal spiritual discipline. It is the exercise of our God-given authority, a strategic tool in the cosmic conflict, and the means by which we invite God's power to transform both seen and unseen realms. As we develop our digital strategies, let us do so through prayer and spiritual authority, recognizing that our online efforts are part of a greater cosmic narrative leading to the ultimate triumph of God's love and truth.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Mission-Centric Church: The church arose from the mission, not vice versa. This perspective shift is crucial for understanding our role as Seventh-day Adventists in the digital age.
2. Holy Spirit's Empowerment: The power to fulfill God's mission comes from the Holy Spirit, as promised in Acts 1:8. This divine empowerment is essential for effective witness.
3. Love as Core of Mission: The power of the Holy Spirit is fundamentally the power to love as God loves. This agape love should be the driving force behind all our digital strategies and interactions.

4. Truth in the Digital Age: In a world of misinformation, our task is to present unadulterated truth in a way that is palatable and engaging, without compromising its essence.
5. Prayer as Spiritual Authority: Prayer is not just a devotional practice but a strategic exercise of spiritual authority in digital spaces.
6. Cosmic Conflict Context: Digital strategies should be viewed as part of the larger cosmic conflict over God's character and truth.
7. Unity in Diversity: The latter rain outpouring of the Holy Spirit will come as God's people unite in their desire for the Spirit's fullness and their commitment to mission.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we foster a culture within our digital ministries that prioritizes seeking the Holy Spirit's empowerment and guidance alongside technological expertise?
2. In what ways can we leverage our digital platforms to create spaces for united prayer and the exercise of collective spiritual authority across our global church community?
3. How can we ensure that our focus on technological advancement and digital strategies doesn't overshadow the primary role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in our mission?

Chapter 4: Priority

Sam Neves

As a denomination, our mission is to "Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the three angels' messages in preparation for His soon return." At every Executive Committee meeting and General Conference session, we affirm this as the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Delegates come to a collective agreement that mission should be at the forefront of all endeavors and should receive the majority of resources God has entrusted to us.

The definition of "mission" varies significantly within our church. Some view proclamation through the use of media and sending missionaries as our primary mission. Others believe reaching the world is best achieved through establishing a strong brand reputation—education, health, church growth, and community service. We all agree that each of these efforts is important, but how can we determine which is *most* important?

Treasurers know a budget is the truest documentation of an organization's priorities. We propose that the easiest way to determine our top mission priority is to simply ask a budgeting question: If we had \$10 billion to fulfill the mission of the Adventist Church, where would we allocate 60 percent of these resources as our top mission priority?

- Sharing the gospel (proclamation through media and missionaries)
- Public relations evangelism (through health, education, and community service)
- Church growth (through new methods, church planting, and marketing)

Let's explore the history and merits of each of these areas in relation to our mission.

Church Growth

Imagine if \$6 of every \$10 was spent on church growth. Church growth offers compelling advantages as a top mission priority, transforming many Christian denominations in recent decades. Since the 1980s, the evangelical church planting movement has demonstrated

remarkable success by adopting new techniques and marketing strategies. Leaders such as Bill Hybels and Rick Warren, and organizations such as Hillsong Church, have shown how focusing on growth can lead to a large reach and influence.

By prioritizing church growth, we could establish a stronger presence in more communities worldwide, with the potential to reach individuals who would otherwise never encounter our message. This approach emphasizes nurture and retention, which could lead to deeper spiritual experiences for our current members, creating more mature and committed disciples. The adoption of new methods and marketing strategies could also help communicate our message in ways that resonate with contemporary culture, making our church more accessible to seekers.

Growing churches tend to have a more significant impact on their local communities, providing increased opportunities for service and outreach. As these churches expand, they can generate more resources, both financial and human, to further the mission. This focus on growth often sparks innovation in ministry, leading to fresh approaches in worship, outreach, and discipleship that attract people who may not respond to traditional methods.

Moreover, modern church growth strategies frequently emphasize youth and young adult engagement, which could help address the challenge of youth retention in our churches. A global network of growing Adventist communities could facilitate greater collaboration and resource sharing, amplifying our collective impact. Effective marketing associated with church growth could also enhance our public image, opening doors for greater influence and opportunities to share our message.

If church growth becomes our top mission priority, we have the potential to reach and engage with new communities by adopting an effective marketing strategy. In today's digital age in which people are constantly bombarded with information, these strategies can help cut through the noise and ensure our message reaches those most in need of it. By leveraging data-driven insights and modern communication channels, we can tailor our

efforts to resonate with different demographics, cultures, and personal interests, potentially increasing the relevance and impact of our outreach.

Additionally, well-funded and well-executed marketing campaigns can inspire and mobilize our members, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose within the church. By adopting best practices from the business world, we can steward our resources more efficiently, reach more people, and lead them through our discipleship funnel, which will result in tremendous church growth.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen Adventist Church entities and institutions prioritize church growth. We have attempted the best practices of other denominations and businesses to achieve the same growth as other organizations and businesses. Although these are very important pursuits, our top mission priority should not be informed by other denominations or the market. Our top mission priority must be informed by Scripture.

So we must ask the question, according to the Bible and our eschatological view, should church growth be our top mission priority according to Scripture? To answer that question, we must pause and consider this: Before the second coming of Jesus, will we become the largest church in the world? Based on our understanding of prophecy, the answer is no. So, while every point made so far is important, church growth is *not* our top mission priority.

PR Evangelism

Imagine if \$6 of every \$10 was spent on public relations (PR) evangelism.

PR evangelism offers compelling advantages as a top mission priority—transforming many Christian denominations in recent decades. Since the 1960s, many Christian denominations have emphasized community service as their primary mission due to the influence of liberation theology and as a reaction to the failure of Communism. "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words" became a common slogan during

subsequent decades.²⁷ This approach prioritizes improving lives and alleviating suffering as the primary way to demonstrate Christian love and attract people to the faith.

If we prioritized PR evangelism, we could establish a stronger reach and reputation in more communities worldwide, impacting individuals who might otherwise never consider our message. This approach often emphasizes education, health, and community services, which could lead to improved living conditions for many and create a more positive feeling toward the Adventist Church. Adopting these strategies could also help communicate our values in ways that resonate with contemporary society, making our church more attractive and relevant to those seeking meaning and purpose.

Churches focused on PR evangelism tend to have a greater positive impact on their local communities, providing increased opportunities for service and outreach. As these churches become known for how they serve, they generate more support from members and the wider community, furthering their mission. The focus on reputation often sparks innovation in community service, leading to fresh approaches in education, health care, and social support—attractive to those who might not respond to traditional evangelism methods.

Moreover, modern PR evangelism strategies tackle the challenge of staying relevant in our increasingly secular world by focusing on engagement with current social issues. A global network of Adventist communities known for their positive impact could facilitate greater collaboration with other organizations and governments, increasing our collective influence. The same can be said of our health systems and education network. Effective branding associated with PR evangelism will enhance our public image, potentially opening doors for greater societal influence and opportunities to share our message.

²⁷ Although this phrase is commonly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, there is no documented evidence that he actually said or wrote it. It reflects his emphasis on living the gospel through actions, but the quote as stated appears to be a modern paraphrase of his teachings.

By making PR evangelism our top mission priority, we have the potential to improve our reputation and engage with new communities through an effective branding strategy. In today's media-saturated age in which people are constantly exposed to various ideologies and lifestyles, it could help establish the Adventist Church as a center of hope and positive change in every community. By leveraging our educational and health institutions, along with community services, we can demonstrate our values in tangible ways, increasing the appeal and credibility of our message.

Just like church growth can inspire and mobilize our own members, so too can a well-funded and well-executed PR campaign. By adopting best practices from the nonprofit and social sectors, we can steward our resources more efficiently, improving more lives and leading people to associate positive change with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Over the past few decades, many Adventist entities and institutions have prioritized PR evangelism, hoping to use our reputation in education, health, and community services to attract people to our church. Although these are very important pursuits, we followed the example of other denominations to adopt this approach, and our top mission priority should not be informed by other denominations or societal trends. Our top mission priority must be informed by Scripture.

So we must ask the question, according to the Bible and our eschatological view, should PR evangelism be our top mission priority according to Scripture? To answer that question, we must pause and consider this: Before the second coming of Jesus, will we become the most loved and respected church brand in the world? Based on our understanding of prophecy, the answer is no. So, while every point made so far is important, PR evangelism is *not* our top mission priority.

Proclamation

Our pioneers recognized the top mission priority of the Adventist Church even before it was organized into a church—to share the eternal gospel to prepare a people for Jesus' second coming. Born from a prophetic disappointment, our mission emerged as a

prophetic mandate to "prophesy again" (Revelation 10:11). Our pioneers focused on media and missionaries. They invested in media by buying a printing press before we had a brand or church organization. Why? Sharing the gospel was their priority. Within ten years of establishing the church, they had sent missionaries to the world.

Emphasizing proclamation through media and missionaries aligns with our prophetic mandate. Revelation 10:11 and 14:6 call on God's people to prophesy again and to proclaim the eternal gospel to "every nation, tribe, language and people" (Revelation 14:6, NIV). By leveraging media and sending missionaries, we position ourselves to reach the global audience described in this mandate.

Digital platforms have expanded media's global reach. We can now access regions of the world where physical presence is restricted or impossible, crossing geographical boundaries and reaching every corner of the globe. This accessibility, combined with the 24/7 availability of digital content, allows our message to reach people whenever and wherever they seek it.

Investment in media and missionaries offers a cost-effective approach to maximizing our mission's reach. While media technology requires substantial up-front costs, it often proves more economical in the long run compared to traditional outreach methods. A single piece of digital content can reach millions, making it an efficient tool to share the gospel.

Modern media technologies also enable precise targeting and personalization of messages. This helps customize our approach to different cultural contexts, age-groups, and personal interests, increasing the relevance and effectiveness of our message. Digital media's measurability also provides robust analytics, helping us to adapt and improve our strategies for maximum effectiveness.

Investing in media such as the internet, television, and radio doesn't replace human missionaries, but enhances their efforts. Media can prepare the ground for personal interactions, provide resources for Bible studies, and support ongoing discipleship efforts.

This synergy between media and personal ministry (missionaries) can lead to more effective proclamation.

By focusing on media in our proclamation efforts, we can also connect with younger generations more effectively. This approach not only reaches youth outside the church but also offers engaging ways for young Adventists to participate in and connect with the church's mission.

A strong media presence can promote unity within our global church by providing consistent messaging and a shared vision of our mission. It supports local churches by providing high-quality resources for evangelism, discipleship, and member education. In fact, when media ministry is well executed, local churches often experience a constant influx of visitors who have been reached through media and are ready to experience the present truth.

For 170 years, we've prioritized proclamation through media and missionaries. We have invested in printing presses, radio stations, television networks, and now digital platforms, following the example of our pioneers, who recognized the power of media in spreading the gospel. We have also sent countless missionaries to every region of the world. These are indeed crucial pursuits and align closely with our mission. However, we must ensure that our top mission priority is not solely driven by technological advancements or the strategies we've always used, but remains firmly rooted in Scripture.

So we must once again ask the question, according to the Bible and our eschatological view, should proclamation through media and missionaries be our top mission priority according to Scripture? To answer that question, we must pause and consider this: Before the second coming of Jesus, will we proclaim the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people?

Based on our understanding of prophecy, the answer is a resounding yes. Therefore, proclamation through media ministry and missionary work should indeed be our top

mission priority, as it aligns perfectly with our prophetic calling and the biblical mandate to prepare the world for Christ's return.

Media Ministry

Our proclamation efforts must involve both media and missionaries. Media ministry has three essential components: content creation, distribution, and engagement. Subsequent chapters will go into greater detail, but for now, we will focus on the impact of these components on the Adventist mission.

At the heart of media ministry, content creation requires skilled and Holy Spirit-inspired artists to create powerful messages that resonate with diverse audiences. The process is challenging, as producing content that touches hearts and minds demands vulnerability and creativity.

Our technologists handle distribution and ensure that our message reaches its intended audience through various platforms. These include websites with strong SEO capabilities, mobile apps, and broadcast systems. The goal is to make our content easily accessible worldwide through all available channels.

Engagement is the pastoral element of media ministries and involves interacting with those who consume our content. This is where we connect the digital with the personal, guiding individuals on their spiritual journey and connecting them with local Adventist communities.

As we approach the final events prophesied in Scripture, the role of media ministry becomes even more critical. People will seek truth amid a sea of deception. They won't necessarily come to our churches, but will turn to Google, YouTube, TikTok, or whatever is the newest digital platform at that time. Our mission is to ensure that when they search, they find truth instead of lies.

This is where our investment in media ministry pays dividends. By having a strong digital presence, we can provide answers to the questions of seekers around the world, offering hope in times of confusion and guiding them to the eternal truths of God's Word, allowing

the power of the Holy Spirit to convict their hearts. Our goal is not to have a presence online, but to dominate the digital space with truth, countering every falsity that populates search results.

Missionaries

Media ministry is not meant to replace personal interaction, but rather to enhance it. This is where our professional and lay missionaries play a crucial role. As people engage with our online content, they often seek deeper understanding and personal connection. Our local church members, trained in giving Bible studies, can provide this personal touch, meeting with interested individuals to explore the biblical truths introduced through online content.

For areas of the world difficult to reach with the gospel, full-time missionaries can use our media content as a bridge to initiate conversations and build relationships. Levering digital platforms, they can connect with people in restricted areas, offer Bible studies via messaging apps or video calls, and more. This digital-first approach can pave the way for in-person interactions whenever and wherever possible.

Our media ministry can also provide resources and training for missionaries, equipping them with the latest tools and strategies for effective outreach—downloadable Bible study guides and online training seminars. Our media platforms can serve as a support system for our global mission efforts.

As we invest in media ministry, we're building a global network of truth tellers, ready to meet those who are searching for truth and in desperate need of hope and clarity in these final days. This approach honors our pioneering heritage of using the latest communication methods while embracing the opportunities of the digital age.

We honor and appreciate the vital roles that church growth strategies and PR evangelism play in our overall mission. We must recognize them as important supporting elements rather than the primary focus. Church planting, nurture programs, and retention efforts are crucial for building strong Adventist communities. Similarly, our efforts in education,

health care, and community services, which form the backbone of our PR evangelism, demonstrate Christ's love in tangible ways and build bridges with our communities. This work is invaluable and must continue.

However, our prophetic understanding and biblical mandate compel us to prioritize the proclamation of the eternal gospel above all else. By investing significantly in proclamation through media and missionaries, we position ourselves to fulfill our unique mission most effectively in this digital age. This approach not only honors our pioneering heritage but also embraces the opportunities of the present and future. It allows us to reach more people with the three angels' messages than ever before, preparing hearts and minds for Christ's soon return.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Scriptural Basis for Mission Priority: The top mission priority should be informed by Scripture and our prophetic understanding, not by market trends or the practices of other denominations.
2. Proclamation as Primary Focus: Based on the biblical mandate and Adventist eschatology, proclamation through media and missionaries should be the top mission priority, aligning with the call to "prophecy again" to "every nation, tribe, language and people."
3. Digital Media's Crucial Role: In the current and future landscape, digital media platforms offer unprecedented reach and efficiency in spreading the gospel, allowing access to restricted areas and providing 24/7 availability of content.
4. Synergy of Media and Personal Ministry: While emphasizing media, the chapter stresses that this approach enhances rather than replaces personal interactions, with missionaries and local church members providing the crucial human connection.

5. **Balancing Different Approaches:** While proclamation is prioritized, the chapter acknowledges the importance of church growth strategies and PR evangelism (health, education, community service) as supporting elements of the overall mission.
6. **Stewardship and Efficiency:** Investing in media and missionaries is presented as a cost-effective approach to achieve high missional impact, with the potential for a single piece of digital content to reach millions.
7. **Preparation for End-Time Events:** The chapter emphasizes the critical role of media ministry in providing truth amid end-time deception, stressing the need to "dominate the digital space with truth."

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively shift our resource allocation to prioritize proclamation through media and missionaries while still maintaining the valuable aspects of our church growth and PR evangelism efforts?
2. In what ways can we better integrate our digital media strategies with the work of our missionaries and local church members to create a seamless journey from online engagement to personal spiritual growth?
3. Considering our eschatological understanding, how can we best prepare our media ministry to address the specific challenges and questions that will arise as we approach the final events prophesied in Scripture?

Chapter 5: Opportunity

Richard Stephenson

As I've traveled around the world in my role as associate treasurer of the GC and a leader of digital strategy for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I've noticed a common thread in our conversations about digital outreach. Many of us feel overwhelmed by the rapid pace of technological change. For many in our church family, this new digital frontier can seem daunting, even confusing.

Yet, as I've studied our church's history and God's methods throughout time, I've come to realize that the challenges and opportunities we face today are not entirely without precedent. God has consistently used the cutting-edge technologies of each era to advance His message. From the ancient Roman roads that carried the gospel across empires to the printing presses that ignited the Reformation, the Holy Spirit has always been at work, leveraging human innovations for divine purposes.

The following exploration isn't just a history lesson or a technology guide. I see it as a call to action (CTA) for us all to view the digital realm not as a threat, but as an opportunity for evangelism. Together, we must understand why it's crucial for our church to be present where people gather online, just as the early Christians were present in the marketplaces and along the trade routes of their day.

Roman Roads

In my reading of world history, I've found few innovations that have shaped the spread of ideas and faith as profoundly as the Roman roads. As I referenced in the introduction, these ancient arteries of commerce and communication, stretching across vast expanses of the known world, played a pivotal role in the early spread of Christianity. Today, as we stand at the forefront of the digital age, we witness a parallel phenomenon in the form of social media platforms.

The Roman roads of yesterday are the social media channels of today. At first glance, this analogy might seem far-fetched, but as we examine it closer, the parallels become strikingly clear.

The Roman road network, an engineering marvel of its time, began construction some 300 years before the birth of Christ. By the time of Jesus' ministry, this network spanned an impressive 250,000 miles, connecting northern Africa, the Middle East, parts of Asia, and Europe. These weren't mere dirt tracks but well-constructed, paved highways, typically 15 to 20 feet wide. They facilitated rapid movement of people, goods, and most importantly, ideas.

What fascinates me is how the Bible itself alludes to these roads. In Matthew 7:13, Jesus speaks of the wide road that leads to destruction, which some scholars believe may have been a reference to the expansive Roman highways. Even more intriguing is Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 9 verse 1, which mentions "the way of the sea"—the very name of the Roman road, *Via Maris*, that ran through Galilee, where Jesus would later grow up and minister.

The apostle Paul utilized these roads in his extensive missionary journeys to spread the gospel far and wide. When I look at a map of Paul's travels, I'm amazed at how he traversed the Roman Empire, planting churches and nurturing new believers along these routes. Little did Rome know they were building the very arteries and veins of the gospel. Rome thought they were expanding and securing the empire. Instead, they were building conduits for the kingdom of God.

Fast-forward to our digital era, and we can see social media platforms serve a similar function. They connect people across vast distances, facilitate the exchange of ideas, and provide a space for communities to form and grow. Just as the Roman roads were "where the people were at" in ancient times, social media is where millions spend hours of their day in our modern world.

This parallel isn't just my observation. An article from *The Wall Street Journal* argues that the combination of people and the ability to copy and deliver information cheaply and quickly—the essence of social media—first arose in the Roman Republic over 2,000 years ago, thanks to Roman roads.²⁸

However, I've learned that merely having the technology isn't enough. I remember an attempt to create an Adventist-specific social network called "HisSpace" in the early 2000s. Despite attracting about 2,000 Adventist users, it had virtually no impact on spreading the gospel because it remained an insular community. I often ask, "How can we take the gospel of Jesus to the world if we stay secluded to ourselves?" We must go where people are.

This brings me to a fundamental principle I believe our church must embrace: we must be active where people gather. In antiquity, that meant Roman roads and marketplaces. Today, it means a presence on social media platforms where hundreds of millions spend four to six hours daily. This is where people are at. This is where the gospel can be a message and a light to those looking for Jesus—and to those who don't yet know they're looking for Jesus.

These platforms provide opportunities for outreach, but I always remind myself and others that they are merely tools. It's hard to imagine the early Christians praying for new roads. Instead, I imagine them praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to guide their use of the existing infrastructure. We too must prioritize spiritual guidance in leveraging digital tools. Our mission may use social media, but it depends completely on the power of the Holy Spirit for any success.

The parallel between Roman roads and social media offers us a powerful perspective on the opportunities available to the Adventist Church today. By understanding this historical context, we can better appreciate the potential of digital platforms for spreading the

²⁸ Tom Standage, "History Retweets: How Ancient Romans Created Social Media," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2013. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-SEB-78611>

gospel. As we move forward in our Digital Strategy for Mission, let's remember the lessons of the past: to go where people are, to use the tools at our disposal wisely, and above all, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all our endeavors.

The Printing Press

As we consider the impact technology has on the spread of the gospel, I'm struck by the parallels between historical innovations and our modern digital tools. Another invention that profoundly impacted the spread of the gospel was the printing press. Just as Roman roads paved the way for the early church, the printing press became the vehicle for a spiritual revolution that would reshape the Christian landscape.

I've often pondered the timing of this invention. The printing press was invented some 43 years before Martin Luther was born. I don't think that was an accident. I believe God specifically planned it. By the way, with God I don't think there are many coincidences. I believe God works through Providence, not coincidence.

This providential timing set the stage for one of the most significant events in church history. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg church, and he could not have foreseen the rapid and far-reaching impact his actions would have. Just 17 days later, thousands of copies of the ninety-five theses were being printed in English nearly 600 miles away in London. In those 17 days, an incredible explosion happened. Because of the printing press, the ninety-five theses went everywhere.

This rapid dissemination of ideas was unprecedented. Within a month, every major European capital was printing the ninety-five theses in local languages. Luther became, in my view, the first best-selling author because he sold tens of thousands of copies of the ninety-five theses. This explosion of information marked the beginning of the Reformation, spreading ideas of salvation by faith alone and challenging centuries-old church practices.

I see a striking parallel to our digital age. Just as the printing press allowed for the rapid spread of Luther's ideas, social media and digital platforms today enable information to go

viral in a matter of hours or even minutes. A single post, video, or meme—a piece of humorous or ironic content usually including a popular image—can reach millions across the globe, crossing geographical and cultural boundaries with ease.

This power of rapid dissemination wasn't lost on the early Adventist movement. I find it fascinating that prior to 1844, Advent believers published some 8 million pieces of literature within North America. The Adventist Church recognized the power of the printed word early on, establishing a publishing ministry in 1853, even before the church was officially organized 10 years later in 1863.

Drawing on this rich heritage, we can see that yesterday's printing press has an equivalent today: digital media. This is how we can communicate with the dying world and advance the gospel today.

However, I'm quick to emphasize that technology alone is not the answer. I often remind myself and others of a crucial quote from Ellen White: "Men [and women] are needed who pray to God for wisdom and who, under the guidance of God, can put new life into the old methods of labor and can invent new plans and new methods of awakening the interest of church members and reaching the men and women of the world."²⁹

What do we do first? We pray. What are we praying for? We pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. That is primary if we seek to use a tool to advance the gospel.

This emphasis on spiritual preparation before technological engagement is a critical lesson for our church today. In an age of easy distraction and ever-evolving digital trends or tools, I believe our most urgent need today is not new tools and technologies. The most urgent need of the church today is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As Ellen White wrote, "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. . . . Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than our earthly parents to give good gifts to their children."³⁰

²⁹ E. G. White manuscript 117, 1907.

³⁰ E. G. White, *True Revival*, p. 9.

As we stand at the edge of new digital frontiers, with opportunities that Paul, Luther, and the early Adventists could scarcely have imagined, we must hold fast to this fundamental truth. The power to change hearts and minds doesn't lie in our technologies, no matter how advanced. It lies in the working of the Holy Spirit through willing vessels.

Just as the printing press became a tool in God's hands to spark reformation and revival, so too can our digital media become conduits for a modern spiritual awakening. This can happen only when we, like Luther and our Adventist pioneers, combine the best tools at our disposal with a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Personal Action

As I consider the enormous potential of digital media for spreading the gospel, I'm always reminded that, at its core, faith is deeply personal. It's about individual lives transformed by encounters with Christ. To illustrate this point, I'd like to share a meaningful story from my own family's journey to Adventism—a testament to the impact of personal faith and action, even in the darkest of times.

The year was 1937, and the shadow of war loomed over Europe. In Prague, Czechoslovakia, my grandfather, Joseph, a young Jewish man in his 20s, found himself looking for answers, burdened by fear for his family and his community. Hitler's invasion seemed imminent, and some Jews were already being forced to wear the yellow Star of David. I remember my grandfather telling me as a child, "I was afraid. I was afraid of what was to come."

It was during those times of fear and doubt that a friend, Frank Schriber, introduced my grandfather to Jesus. Frank was also a Jew, but he had found Jesus in the Adventist message. Frank led my grandfather to the Adventist faith, to Jesus, and ultimately to the "House of Prayer" that was the local Adventist church. In my mind I try to imagine what my grandfather must have felt when he first entered the church. Would they betray and report him? Would they accept him? Would they even speak with him? My grandfather was embraced by that local Adventist church in Prague, Czechoslovakia, even as the war raged!

This simple act of acceptance and love opened the door for my grandfather to learn about Jesus, who made the Old Testament scriptures come alive and gave him hope for the future, regardless of the hell on earth that was coming. Jesus did not care about his ethnicity, his background, or what he looked like, but loved him for who he was.

My grandfather was baptized that same year. His newfound faith led him to participate in the church's Ingathering activities, where he met a wealthy widowed woman named Miss Prahuska. Through a series of events that I can only describe as miraculous, my grandfather brought her to Christ as well.

The following year, as Hitler's forces invaded Czechoslovakia and began rounding up Jews, my grandfather was arrested and loaded onto a cattle car bound for an internment camp. It was at this moment of despair that the impact of his individual act of faith became clear.

Miss Prahuska, having heard of my grandfather's arrest, went to the train depot. In an act of incredible bravery, she approached the Nazi lieutenant in charge, declaring, "You have one of my Jews." She then proceeded to barter for my grandfather's life, ultimately exchanging her expensive fur coat for my grandfather's freedom.

I can barely contain my emotion as I recount this moment.

My grandfather heard his name outside the cattle car. "Joseph."

Of course, this was a cattle car filled with Jews. I can imagine half the people raised their hand upon hearing their name.

"Joseph Frank." Perhaps fewer raised their hands.

"Joseph Frank Polach." It must have taken him a moment to respond, for he knew he was already dead.

But death was not my grandfather's fate that day. Thanks to Miss Prahuska's selfless act, he was released, and Miss Prahuska gave a gift to my family that we can never repay. I look forward to meeting her in heaven.

This story serves as a powerful reminder of the impact one person's faith can have, not just on their own life but on generations to come. My grandfather's decision to enter that "House of Prayer" set in motion a chain of events that saved his life, yes, but also brought others to Christ and eventually led to me becoming a chaplain and worker in the Adventist Church, now helping to lead our church's digital strategy. God is so good!

As I consider our approach to digital evangelism, I remember that behind every screen, social media account, and online interaction, there's an individual like my grandfather—someone seeking hope whose life could be transformed by an encounter with Christ.

Our digital strategies, no matter how sophisticated, must never lose sight of this fundamental truth. Each post, each video, each online Bible study is an opportunity to be a welcoming church member who hugged my grandfather, or like Miss Prahuska, risked everything to save his life.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. God Uses Contemporary Technology: Throughout history, God has leveraged cutting-edge technologies of each era for His purposes—from Roman roads to the printing press and now digital platforms.
2. Digital Platforms as Modern Roman Roads: Social media and online platforms serve as today's Roman roads, connecting millions globally and providing opportunities for spreading the gospel.
3. Rapid Information Spread: Just as the printing press enabled Luther's ideas to spread rapidly, digital media allows for instant, widespread dissemination of the gospel message.
4. Technology Alone Is Insufficient: While embracing new technologies, we must remember that our primary need is for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a revival of true godliness.

5. Adventist Legacy of Innovation: Our church has a history of adopting new technologies for evangelism, as evidenced by the early establishment of our publishing ministry.
6. Personal Touch in Digital Outreach: Behind every screen and social media account is an individual seeking hope. Our digital strategies must facilitate personal encounters with Christ.
7. Prayer and Spiritual Guidance Are Crucial: Before engaging with new technologies, we must prioritize seeking God's wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all our endeavors.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively balance leveraging new digital technologies with maintaining our focus on spiritual revival and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
2. In what ways can we adapt our digital outreach strategies to create more opportunities for personal, transformative encounters with Christ, similar to the experiences shared in the chapter?
3. Considering our Adventist legacy of innovation in evangelism, what bold new approaches to digital ministry should we be exploring to reach the current generation?

Chapter 6: Communication

Williams Costa Jr.

In the beginning, communication existed between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It was more than a tool—it embodied the essence of their relationship, a divine exchange of love and purpose. Communication is the means by which angels express their love and admiration for their Creator. Through music and praise, heaven resonates with continuous adoration, honoring God at every moment.

Imagine a dark, formless, empty planet. Into that void, God spoke: “Let there be light.” Instantly, light pierced the darkness, illuminating Earth for the first time.

During that miraculous week, God spoke into existence the sky, separating the waters above from the waters below. He gathered the waters to reveal dry land, sprouting vegetation, plants yielding seeds, and trees bearing fruit. He ordained the sun, moon, and stars to govern day and night, marking seasons and years. He filled the skies with birds and the seas with fish, bringing life to every corner. Then He created all kinds of animals to roam the land. Finally, in the masterpiece of His creation, human beings were formed in His own image.

After creating man and woman, God came daily to talk with them. Walking in the garden in the cool of the day, God was the one to initiate communication. He reached out first, establishing a relationship based on dialogue and His very presence.

Even after Adam and Eve yielded to temptation, God didn’t abandon them. He reached out to communicate a message of hope—a promise that, in the future, Jesus would come to give His life to save humanity. Satan, the serpent, would ultimately be destroyed forever. This wasn’t just damage control; it was the beginning of a redemption story that would unfold over millennia.

Later, communication between God and the prophets became a vital conduit for delivering instructions to guide and protect His people on earth. Moses received the Ten

Commandments and Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah. Yet the communication between prophets and people faced many challenges. Prophets often endured a painful experience, as people misunderstood, ignored, or outright rejected the messages they gave. Prophets were scorned, persecuted, and sometimes killed for the truths they proclaimed.

Tragically, throughout history there were periods when there was no vision or communication from God to the prophets and His people. Why? Because of rebellion and the rejection of His commands. Those were terrible moments—times of spiritual famine—when humanity wandered like a ship caught in a stormy night, not knowing where to go or how to find a safe harbor.

It strikes me profoundly that John began his gospel by referring to Jesus as the “Word.” Think about that—the Word. It’s a powerful communication tool. The Son of God, the Word, became flesh and dwelled among us. By coming to earth, Jesus aimed to communicate who God is—His character, His purposes, His plans for salvation. He didn’t just send messages; He embodied them. Jesus communicated hope to the hopeless, preached with authority that astonished listeners, expelled evil spirits that tormented people, and, using words, healed the sick and even raised the dead.

After enduring an unfair trial and unimaginable suffering, He was crucified. His last words were “It is finished.” These words were a declaration of victory. His communication guaranteed God’s plan to save and redeem each one of us. The path to reconciliation became possible.

After His resurrection, Jesus continued to communicate hope. Walking on the road to Emmaus, He opened the Scriptures to two despondent disciples, rekindling their faith. In His final moments here on earth, He gave His final instructions to His followers. His command to them was clear: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter delivered a message so powerful that it moved 3,000 people to baptism in a single day. The disciples, once a small and fearful group, boldly communicated the message of salvation in Jesus. They faced immense persecution. Satan unleashed fury upon them—imprisoning, torturing, and killing apostles and believers alike. Yet the church didn't just survive; it flourished. The message reached distant lands. Even Thomas, the disciple who once doubted, journeyed to India, carrying the gospel farther than any other apostles.

During the Dark Ages, forces of darkness attempted to obstruct communication between God's Word and humanity. Scriptures were locked away, accessible to only a privileged few. However, light broke through the darkness. Courageous reformers made the Bible increasingly available, translating it into the common language of the people. The printing press became a revolutionary tool to communicate God's message of hope to ordinary people.

After the Great Disappointment in 1844, a group of believers sought to understand their experience. Communication from the Scriptures gradually consolidated the message that would become the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Revelation 10:11 says of the disappointed remnant, "You must prophesy again," emphasizing our mission as an act of communication.

God continued to communicate through visions given to Ellen White. She shed light on the Bible and provided guidance on health, education, mission, church operation, and many other areas. Her writings became a source of inspiration and instruction for millions.

John Andrews became the first official missionary sent by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to share our message outside the United States. His dedication set a precedent for global mission work, emphasizing the importance of sharing the gospel across cultural and geographical boundaries.

The Digital Age of Communication

Fast-forward to today—the world experiences a flood of communication. When I began serving the church as world communication director, communication was relatively straightforward. We had traditional media channels and methods. But in the past few years, I've witnessed drastic changes. The rise of the internet and the expansion of social media, websites, digital platforms, and even online gaming have created a new environment—a dynamic digital landscape.

The COVID-19 pandemic appeared to force us as a church back into isolation. The church instead adapted, leveraging communication tools to continue its mission. We saw the emergence of digital evangelism and the concept of a hybrid church, blending physical and virtual experiences. Today, we strategize how the traditional church can effectively use digital communication tools to finish God's work.

It's time to recognize that in some parts of the world, only through the internet and social media can we reach places impossible to access through conventional means. In regions where physical presence is restricted or dangerous, digital connections are still possible. More than ever, we need to plan and utilize these tools to fulfill the Great Commission.

Yet we often hesitate. Some argue, "This is the devil's kingdom," and shy away from using these digital platforms. This reaction isn't new. History shows us similar resistance. H. M. S. Richards faced significant criticism when he created The Voice of Prophecy to share the message via radio—a medium many considered worldly or even sinful. The early days of Faith for Today and It Is Written were also fraught with misunderstandings. People questioned, "How can the church use secular tools of communication to preach a sacred message?" Even today, there are some who criticize the use of social media and the internet for sharing biblical messages.

But let's consider this: Public evangelism remains a powerful way to communicate. Radio, television, and print will continue to be sources of light in this dark world. They have their place and purpose. However, as a global church, we must embrace the digital world as well.

We cannot ignore the platforms where millions—especially younger generations—spend their time.

This might be unsettling for some. It might seem “confusing” that from the General Conference, we are communicating directly with members and pastors worldwide through digital means. Questions arise about the validity of the church’s structure in this new context. However, integrating our efforts, ideas, and initiatives is crucial to support the rapid dissemination of the gospel message globally. We are not bypassing the established order; we are enhancing it, making it more effective in today’s digital world.

When the latter rain comes—a time prophesied when the Holy Spirit will abundantly be poured out—those filled with the Holy Spirit will use these digital tools to share the message, giving hope to all their social media followers. Our social media accounts, instant messaging platforms, websites, and apps will be ready to connect people with the message of a loving God who has not given up on them. The fields are ripe for harvest. Why don’t we use these tools more widely?

Most people use these platforms for entertainment and personal updates. Now, imagine the impact when these same tools are harnessed to communicate God’s final message to a dying world. I hope and pray that we can awaken to the possibilities—investing time, resources, and creativity in using these inventions, which I believe are inspired by God to finish His work on earth.

Let us claim the power of the Holy Spirit. God did not provide us with the opportunity to use digital evangelism to make us insecure or fearful as a world church. On the contrary, it’s an avenue He’s opened for us. We must support and engage in sharing the message of salvation using these tools. They weren’t given to replace existing methods, but to complement them, to amplify our reach. They are a gift from God, meant to be combined with all the methods and processes that already exist, providing a significant push to share light in this increasingly dark world.

With the challenges we face as a church, traditional tools alone cannot meet our global challenges. More and more people are becoming secularized, living in large, bustling cities where traditional methods may not penetrate. Others live in places where religious liberty is severely restricted, making conventional evangelism impossible.

We must embrace a new world filled with new possibilities and new ways to share the message. Personal ministries, combined with digital evangelism, will shape our church's future. Each member can become a digital missionary, reaching people we might never meet in person.

Our common goal is to see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven. God is orchestrating events to accelerate the dissemination of the message—to draw people to the Bible and to Jesus, guiding them toward baptism and a relationship with Him. Let us boldly advance, fully utilizing our resources, embracing these tools in harmony with methods God has provided in the past. Together, we can build a future filled with hope, light, and the promise of eternal life.

In the thirteenth century, King Frederick II conducted a grim experiment to uncover what language children would naturally speak if they were never spoken to. He took newborn babies from their mothers and placed them under the care of nurses who were strictly forbidden to speak or interact with them beyond basic needs.³¹ The outcome was tragic: deprived of verbal communication and human touch, the infants didn't develop any language—instead they died.

We need communication to live. Not just words, but physical touch and visual interaction. Verbal communication, body language, a comforting touch, a reassuring glance—we require all forms to truly thrive.

³¹ Ty Gibson, "Frederick's Experiment," *Signs of the Times*, September 23, 2018.

Similarly, in 1248 the Italian historian Salimbene di Adam documented observations about infants deprived of affection. He noted that babies could not survive without being held and nurtured. They died from lack of touch and emotional connection.³²

A family without communication is destined to wither. Without open channels of interaction, members become isolated, relationships deteriorate, and unity crumbles. The same goes for the church. Without communication, its members may drift into apostasy, and the cohesive unit we strive to maintain can become fragmented. God's family on earth needs communication to share stories, testimonies, plans, and goals. This sharing helps us build each other up, stay aligned in our mission, and foster a sense of belonging.

The communication within the church serves one paramount purpose: the mission. There is no other reason. This is why we have communication for mission.

Let us embrace this calling wholeheartedly. Let us be innovative, courageous, and faithful in using every means available to us to share the everlasting gospel. The world is waiting. The tools are in our hands. The time is now.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Divine Origin of Communication: Communication is not just a tool but an essential aspect of God's nature and His relationship with creation.
2. Historical Progression: The text traces the evolution of communication in God's interaction with humanity, from direct conversation in Eden to modern digital platforms.
3. Jesus as the Ultimate Communicator: Christ's incarnation is presented as the pinnacle of divine communication, embodying God's message to humanity.

³² Salimbene de Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*. Translated by Joseph L. Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Robert Kane. *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, vol. 40 (Binghamton, NY: 1986), p. 352.

4. **Adaptation to New Technologies:** Throughout history, the church has faced initial resistance but ultimately adapted to new communication technologies for spreading the gospel.
5. **Digital Age Opportunities:** The current digital landscape offers unprecedented opportunities for global outreach, especially in areas where traditional methods are restricted.
6. **Holistic Communication:** Effective communication involves not just words but also touch, visual interaction, and emotional connection, essential for both individual and church health.
7. **Mission-Centric Approach:** All church communication should ultimately serve the mission of spreading the gospel and preparing people for Christ's return.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we harness the power of modern communication technologies to fulfill our prophetic mission of "prophesying again" (Revelation 10), while maintaining the personal, transformative nature of God's communication throughout biblical history?
2. In light of the chapter's emphasis on God's consistent efforts to communicate despite human failures, how can we create a church communication strategy that is both persistent and adaptable, reaching across cultural, generational, and technological divides?
3. Given the chapter's arc from Creation to the digital age, how can we ensure our communication methods evolve with technology while remaining rooted in the timeless principles of God's love and truth, particularly as we prepare for the latter rain and Christ's return?

Chapter 7: Necessity

Throughout history, moments arise that demand more than mere adherence to tradition. These moments may call for a bold embrace of what is available, even when it defies our comfort and challenges our norms. God Himself declared He is doing “a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). As leaders in the Adventist Church, we find ourselves at such a crossroads. The digital age has ushered in a paradigm shift, redefining the landscape of human interaction and, by extension, the arena of our mission.

Our journey begins with a simple but profound verse from the Gospel of John: “But He needed to go through Samaria” (John 4:4). This seemingly innocuous statement carries a revolutionary approach to mission—one that prioritizes necessity over normalcy and purpose over comfort. As we explore this chapter, we will unpack the rich implications of this verse and its relevance to our digital mission strategy today.

The Greek translation of “He needed” in this verse is *edei*, which carries the weight of divine necessity. It wasn’t just convenient for Jesus to go through Samaria; it was imperative. This divine imperative challenges us to reassess our approach to mission in the digital age. Are we willing, like Jesus, to travel the uncomfortable terrain of unfamiliar digital platforms? Are we ready to engage with online communities that might seem as foreign to us as Samaria was to the Jews of Jesus’ time?

As we stand on the precipice of a new era in mission, we must ask ourselves: Are we clinging to the familiar shores of traditional methods, or are we willing to sail into the uncharted waters of digital mission? The call to embrace the necessary echoes through time, urging us to step beyond the boundaries of what is normal and into the realm of what is divinely mandated for our time.

To fully grasp the revolutionary nature of Jesus' going through Samaria, we must understand the cultural and religious context of His time. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was deeply entrenched, rooted in centuries of religious and ethnic disputes. For a Jewish rabbi to willingly enter Samaritan territory was not just unusual—it was scandalous.

Yet Jesus, driven by the divine necessity of His mission, chose this path. His journey through Samaria wasn't merely a geographical shortcut; it was a deliberate missional strategy. By engaging with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus further demonstrated that the bounds of His mission extended beyond the comfortable confines of Jewish society.

This bold move serves as a powerful model for our approach to digital mission today. Just as Samaria represented unfamiliar and even hostile territory for biblical Jews, today's digital landscape can seem alien and daunting to many church leaders. Social media platforms, online communities, and digital technologies might seem like uncharted and potentially perilous territories.

However, just as Jesus recognized the divine appointment awaiting Him in Samaria, we must discern the missional opportunities lying before us in the digital realm. The woman at the well, marginalized and avoided by her own community, found acceptance and salvation through her encounter with Jesus. In the same way, there are countless individuals in online spaces—perhaps isolated, seeking answers, or feeling marginalized—who await an encounter with the transformative message of the gospel.

As leaders, we must ask ourselves: Where is our "Samaria" in the digital world? What online spaces or communities are we avoiding because they seem uncomfortable or unfamiliar? What divine appointments might we miss by sticking to what's normal and comfortable in our mission strategies?

The journey through Samaria teaches us that sometimes, the most fruitful mission fields lie beyond our comfort zones. This account challenges us to reevaluate our preconceptions about where and how we should engage in the mission. In the digital age, this might mean venturing into social media platforms we've previously ignored, engaging with online communities we don't fully understand, or adopting new technologies that feel foreign to us.

Beyond Normal

As we grapple with the challenges of digital mission, we can find wisdom and encouragement in the words of Ellen White. She wrote, "New methods must be introduced. God's people must awaken to the necessity of the time in which they are living."³³

This call to innovation is not a departure from our core mission, but a recommitment to it. White understood that while our message should remain unchanged, our methods must evolve to meet the needs of each new generation. She urged believers to "reach the people where they are," a principle that takes on new meaning in our digitally connected world.³⁴

In this context, "reaching people where they are" will mean engaging with them in digital spaces. The online world is not just a tool for communication; it has become a habitat for many, especially younger generations, who were born digital natives. Social media platforms, online forums, and digital communities are the new gathering places. Here is where *billions*—not millions—of people share ideas, form relationships, and seek meaning daily.

White's emphasis on using "new and untried methods" challenges us to move beyond our comfort zones in digital mission.³⁵ This may mean leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) for

³³ E. G. White manuscript 5, 1902.

³⁴ E. G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 84.

³⁵ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 125.

Bible study tools, producing engaging video content for platforms like TikTok, or using data analytics to better understand and meet community needs.

Recognizing the need for innovation in mission does not mean abandoning our principles or compromising our message. Rather, it's about finding new ways to present timeless truths. Just as Jesus used the familiar concept of living water to introduce the Samaritan woman to spiritual truths, we can use the language and tools of the digital age to introduce people to the living Christ.

Moving beyond what's normal and comfortable also requires critical evaluation of our current methods. Are we clinging to traditional approaches out of comfort or habit rather than effectiveness? Are we fully utilizing the digital tools at our disposal to spread the gospel? These are uncomfortable questions, but they are necessary if we are to fulfill our mission in the twenty-first century.

The Necessity of Digital Mission

In our rapidly evolving digital landscape, our toolbox for missions is filled with an array of tools. Social media platforms, AI, video sharing sites, and data analytics are powerful instruments for spreading the gospel and nurturing faith communities.

For many, these digital tools represent modern-day "Samaria"—territories unfamiliar or even intimidating but necessary fields for mission. Just as Jesus recognized the divine necessity of engaging with Samaria, we too must acknowledge the importance of digital engagement in our mission strategy.

Social media platforms, for instance, are more than channels for personal connection. They are virtual town squares where ideas are shared, worldviews are shaped, and communities are formed. By establishing a thoughtful and engaging presence on these platforms, we can meet people where they are, sharing hope and truth in spaces where many search for meaning.

Video sharing platforms like YouTube and TikTok have become modern-day pulpits, reaching audiences far beyond the walls of any physical church. We can share the gospel message in ways that resonate with digital natives by creating compelling, Christ-centered content for these platforms.

Artificial intelligence offers remarkable opportunities for personalized ministry, but it's often misunderstood and feared. AI-powered chatbots can provide 24/7 access to Bible study resources, answer common spiritual questions, or help connect seekers to members for prayer support. Machine learning algorithms can help identify trends and needs within our communities, allowing us to tailor our outreach efforts more effectively.

Data analytics, when used ethically and responsibly, can provide valuable insights into the spiritual needs and interests of our communities. This information can guide our ministry efforts and help us be more intentional and effective in our outreach.

Embracing these digital tools requires more than technical know-how. It demands a shift in mindset. We must see these platforms not as threats to traditional ministry, but God-given opportunities to expand our reach and deepen our impact.

We cannot simply transfer our offline methods to online spaces. Effective digital mission requires just as much creative thinking, human connection, spiritual truth, and gospel power as went into our traditional methods.

As we navigate this digital Samaria, our goal is not to chase after every new technological trend, but to discern how we can use these tools to fulfill our unchanging mission—to share the love of Christ and the hope of His soon return with a world in need.

Leading by Example

Jesus' approach to the Samaritan provides a master class in leadership for digital mission. His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well was more than an isolated act of

kindness—it was a teachable moment for His disciples, challenging their preconceptions and expanding their vision of mission.

When Jesus chose to go through Samaria, He didn't just tell His disciples about the importance of crossing cultural boundaries—He showed them. He modeled a radical inclusivity that defied social norms, engaging in deep, transformative conversation with someone His culture deemed unworthy.

This example holds implications for our leadership in digital mission. As leaders, we cannot merely delegate digital engagement to younger team members or tech-savvy volunteers. We must step into these spaces ourselves, being willing to learn and navigate them with grace and purpose. As leaders, we must push past our discomfort and lean into digital platforms, learning to navigate social media effectively, engaging in online discussions, and even creating digital content ourselves.

In a digital age in which interactions can feel impersonal or superficial, we must work to bring the same depth and authenticity to our online interactions that Jesus brought to His conversation at the well. His interaction with the Samaritan woman demonstrates the power of authentic, personal engagement in mission that is still needed today.

We can also learn from the disciples' transformation in this story. Jesus' boundary-crossing actions shocked them at first, but they ultimately embraced the mission in Samaria. This reminds us that leading by example isn't always comfortable and may challenge our assumptions and push beyond our comfort zones.

As leaders, we have the responsibility to prepare our teams for an effective digital mission even when it means more than technical training. It will require a mindset that sees digital spaces as legitimate and crucial mission fields—a mindset we must nurture as leaders. It means fostering creativity and innovation in our approach to online ministry. It demands a Christlike approach to digital engagement—and one we must model as leaders—an

approach that prioritizes genuine connection, respectful dialogue, and unwavering commitment to our message.

Stop Doing What Is Normal

The call to embrace digital mission is, at its core, a call to stop doing what is normal and start doing what is necessary. We cannot just adopt new technologies. Embracing digital mission demands a fundamental reorientation of our approach to leadership and mission.

Normal leadership in the church often focuses on maintaining the status quo, preserving traditions, and catering primarily to those already within our faith community. While these aren't inherently negative, they can become limitations if they prevent us from fully engaging in the mission fields of the digital age.

Necessary leadership, on the other hand, is mission-focused and forward-thinking. It is willing to do what must be done for the mission and willing to challenge comfortable norms for the sake of reaching the unreached. This kind of leadership recognizes that a rapidly changing world needs a changed approach because what worked yesterday may not be effective today.

Reallocating resources from traditional outreach methods to digital initiatives may be necessary. Creating dedicated teams for online engagement or investing in training to enhance our digital literacy may be necessary. It may be necessary to reevaluate communication strategies, such as moving from one-way broadcasting to interactive or dialogue-based approaches that are more suited to digital spaces.

Necessary leadership in the digital age means being willing to take calculated risks because that's what is necessary. Not every digital initiative will succeed, and that's OK. What's important is we're willing to try, learn, and adapt.

As leaders, we must also confront our own discomfort with digital spaces. Perhaps we've avoided certain platforms because they feel foreign or because we're unsure how to

engage effectively. Now is the time to step into these spaces, to learn, and to lead by example—because it's never been more necessary.

This challenge echoes Jesus' own ministry. He consistently challenged the religious norms of His day, not for the sake of rebellion, but to more effectively reach those who needed the message of God's love. His willingness to go to Samaria, to touch the untouchable, to eat with sinners—these were all examples of doing what was necessary rather than what was deemed normal.

Doing what is necessary might mean engaging on platforms we've previously dismissed. It might involve adopting communication styles that feel less formal and connect us with digital natives. It could mean reimagining our church services to be more accessible to online audiences.

The shift from normal to necessary is not always comfortable, but it is crucial. We must not decrease our usefulness by continuing in the same old ways, hoping they will work today. The digital age presents unprecedented mission opportunities. The question is: Are we willing to embrace what is necessary to seize these opportunities?

The Centrality of Mission

It is time for our church to return to the heart of her calling. Embracing digital tools and platforms is not an end in itself, but a means to fulfill the Great Commission in our time. Just as Jesus' journey through Samaria was driven by His mission to seek and save the lost, our forays into digital spaces must be guided by our commitment to share the everlasting gospel.

The urgency of our mission in this digital age cannot be overstated. Information and misinformation spreads at great speeds online, and the need for the clear, hope-filled message of Christ's soon return has never been greater. The same technologies that can distract and divide also offer unparalleled opportunities to connect, teach, and inspire.

As we enter these digital Samarias, let's do so with the courage and compassion of Christ. Let us be willing to cross the cultural and technological boundaries we know exist, engage in meaningful dialogue, and share the living water of the gospel with those who thirst for truth and meaning.

Remember, Jesus continued steadfastly for us—through ridicule, rejection, and ultimately death at the cross. It is our turn to continue on for Him. In the face of technological challenges, cultural shifts, and personal discomfort, we press on. We innovate and adapt, but we never waver in our commitment to the unchanging truth of God's love and His soon return.

The call to embrace what is necessary in digital mission is a spiritual one. It's a call to trust God's leadership as we venture into new territories, to rely on His wisdom as we navigate complex digital landscapes, and to embody His love in every online interaction.

The digital age is our Samaria. The time is now. The message is eternal. And the God who calls us is faithful. May we, like Jesus, recognize the divine necessity of our digital mission and boldly step forward in faith.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Divine Necessity in Digital Mission: Just as Jesus "needed to go through Samaria," the church has a divine imperative to engage in digital spaces, even if uncomfortable or unfamiliar.
2. Beyond Comfort Zones: Effective digital mission often requires venturing into unfamiliar online territories, mirroring Jesus' boundary-crossing engagement with the Samaritan woman.
3. Innovation in Methods: While our message remains unchanged, our methods must evolve to meet the needs of each new generation in the digital age.

4. Digital Tools as Mission Fields: Social media, AI, video platforms, and data analytics are not just tools, but modern-day "Samarias"—necessary fields for mission.
5. Leadership by Example: Leaders must personally engage in digital spaces, modeling authentic online interactions and fostering a mindset that sees digital realms as crucial mission fields.
6. From Normal to Necessary: Embracing digital mission demands a shift from maintaining the status quo to doing what's necessary, even if it challenges comfortable norms.
7. Mission-Centric Approach: Digital engagement should always be driven by our commitment to share the everlasting gospel, not merely adopting technology for its own sake.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we identify and engage with our "digital Samarias"—online spaces or communities that we might be avoiding but where significant mission opportunities exist?
2. In what ways can we shift our leadership approach from maintaining the status quo to embracing necessary changes for effective digital mission, and how might this impact our resource allocation and training priorities?
3. How can we ensure that our digital mission efforts remain deeply rooted in our core message and mission, while also being innovative and relevant to digital natives?

Chapter 8: Courage

The biblical account of King Saul and the Israelites losing the capability to metalwork is a powerful historical example of the dangers of technological complacency. This true story from Israel's past vividly illustrates the costly consequences that can arise from a leader's failure to address critical technological needs and strategic vulnerabilities.

As recorded in 1 Samuel 13, the Philistines had systematically stripped Israel of its ability to forge and maintain its own weapons and tools. "There was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel," the Scripture tells us, forcing the Israelites to rely on their enemies for even the most basic agricultural implements (verse 19). This technological subjugation was not a sudden development, but a gradual erosion of autonomy that occurred under Saul's 42-year reign.

Saul's neglect resulted in far-reaching and severe consequences. Israelite farmers were forced to pay outrageous fees to have their tools sharpened by Philistine blacksmiths, effectively paying a "technology tax" to their oppressors. More critically, when it came time for battle, the Israelite army found itself woefully underarmed, with only Saul and his son Jonathan possessing proper weapons.

This disparity compromised Israel's national security and economic well-being. Unable to produce their own weapons, the Israelites were at a severe disadvantage in conflicts with neighboring powers. Because they had no domestic metalworking capabilities, agricultural productivity and economic growth were hindered and farmers struggled with inefficient and poorly maintained tools.

Saul's example speaks to a broader problem often seen in leadership: the tendency to focus on immediate, visible concerns while neglecting long-term, strategic investments. In Saul's case, he may have been preoccupied with consolidating his power, managing

internal politics, or addressing more immediate threats. However, his failure to see the strategic importance of technological self-sufficiency was a critical mistake.

The parallels between ancient and modern-day technological complacency are striking. In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, organizations and institutions that fail to invest in and adapt to new technologies risk finding themselves in a position similar to that of ancient Israel. Like the Israelites turning to Philistine blacksmiths for their livelihood and survival, many modern organizations rely on external entities for critical functions, ill-equipped to fulfill their mission effectively.

Saul's failure is a warning to leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The price of technological complacency in our rapidly evolving digital landscape is steep and varied. Let's explore the main lessons we can learn from Saul's failures.

First of all, dependency on external providers looms as a primary threat. Just as the Israelites found themselves at the mercy of Philistine blacksmiths, the church risks surrendering its technological autonomy to outside entities. This dependence could severely compromise the church's ability to act independently and fulfill its divine mission.

Outdated or inadequate technology poses another significant danger. It acts as a drag on the church's efficiency, hampering its ability to spread its message and serve its community effectively. In an era in which speed and reach are paramount, technological backwardness could render the church's efforts frustratingly ineffective.

The digital age brings many new vulnerabilities. Cyber threats and data breaches loom large, and the church must be prepared to face these challenges head-on. Falling behind more tech-savvy organizations is not merely a matter of pride, but a real threat to the church's relevance and effectiveness in its ministry.

Another lesson is that failure to embrace new technologies could result in missed chances to reach new audiences, enhance services, or pioneer innovative approaches to fulfilling the church's mission. In a world where digital fluency is the norm, especially among

younger generations, technological stagnation risks alienating the very communities the church aims to serve.

While the initial cost of investing in technology may seem daunting, the long-term financial implications of inaction are far more severe. Inefficiencies compound over time, draining resources that could be better used in service of the church's mission. The choice is clear: invest wisely now or pay a much steeper price in the future.

Though technology advances and changes, it is not new, and how we navigate it should remain the same. As the digital world may change quickly and often, the fundamental principles of strategic leadership remain constant. This is where we, as Adventist leaders, must lean into these principles to move the mission forward.

The story of Saul's neglect highlights the importance of proactive leadership in technological matters. Leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church must not only be aware of current technological trends and challenges but also have the foresight to anticipate future needs and invest accordingly. This requires a willingness to allocate resources to areas that may not show immediate returns but are critical for long-term success and sustainability.

David's Strategic Preparation

In stark contrast to Saul's technological neglect, we find in King David a model of visionary leadership and strategic foresight. In 1 Chronicles 22, it is recounted that David took decisive action to prepare for the construction of the Temple, a project he knew would extend beyond his own reign. David recognized the critical importance of technological self-sufficiency. Unlike Saul, who allowed Israel to remain dependent on Philistine blacksmiths, David took steps to ensure that Israel had the necessary skills and resources within its own borders. Scripture tells us, "So David commanded to gather the aliens who were in the land of Israel; and he appointed masons to cut hewn stones to build the house of God" (verse 2).

David's foresight is a powerful blueprint for Seventh-day Adventist leaders navigating today's technological developments. His actions underscore the critical importance of anticipating future needs and preparing for them well in advance. Investing in technologies and skills that may not show immediate returns requires vision and courage. However, these investments are crucial for the future vitality of the church's ministry. Leaders must look beyond the horizon, considering the immediate challenges and the technological requirements of the next decade and beyond.

Developing internal technological capabilities is paramount. Rather than relying solely on external vendors or solutions, the church must cultivate these skills within its own community. Resource allocation in this context becomes a strategic imperative. Leaders must recognize that investing in technological development is not an optional extra, but a core component of preparing the church for future effectiveness. This may require difficult decisions about prioritizing resources, but the potential returns in terms of mission fulfillment are immeasurable.

David's example also highlights the value of diversity in addressing technological challenges. By utilizing the skills of foreign workers, David demonstrated the power of bringing diverse perspectives to bear on complex problems. Today's church leaders would do well to embrace this approach, drawing on the rich tapestry of skills and insights of the global Adventist community to drive technological innovation.

David's foresight extended beyond assembling a skilled workforce. The Bible records that he also amassed vast quantities of materials for the Temple's construction: "And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails of the doors of the gates and for the joints, and bronze in abundance beyond measure" (1 Chronicles 22:3). David's stockpiling of resources demonstrates his understanding of the scale of the project and his commitment to ensuring its success.

The path to digital sovereignty for Seventh-day Adventist leaders demands a comprehensive strategy. First and foremost, a thorough audit of current technological dependencies is essential. Leaders must identify areas where the church relies heavily on

proprietary technologies and pinpoint opportunities for open-source alternatives. This assessment forms the foundation for a strategic shift toward greater digital autonomy.

Developing internal expertise emerges as a critical priority. This goes beyond mere training; it requires a fundamental commitment to building a robust team capable of managing and customizing open-source solutions. Such an investment in human capital will pay dividends in the form of increased flexibility and reduced dependence on external providers.

A gradual, phased approach to adopting open-source technologies is advisable. By starting with less critical systems, the church can build confidence and expertise, paving the way for more ambitious projects. This measured approach allows for learning and adjustment, minimizing risks while maximizing long-term benefits.

Collaboration with other Adventist organizations facing similar challenges also presents a powerful opportunity. By pooling resources and knowledge, the church can accelerate its journey toward digital sovereignty. This collaborative approach improves efficiency and strengthens bonds within the global Adventist community.

Engaging the broader church community in this technological transformation is crucial. The diverse skills within the church membership represent an untapped resource for contributing to open-source projects that advance the church's mission. This engagement not only accelerates progress but also promotes a sense of ownership and participation among members.

Throughout this journey, maintaining a balance between security and openness is paramount. While embracing open-source solutions, the church must implement robust security measures to protect sensitive data and systems. This balance ensures that the pursuit of digital sovereignty does not come at the cost of compromised security.

We can see that David's approach highlights the importance of leadership in driving technological change. While God delegated the Temple construction to David's son Solomon, it was David who took personal responsibility for the preparatory work. As leaders we don't need to be technological experts, but we play a crucial role in setting the

vision. We may lead teams of technological experts to advance God's mission. We may allocate resources through programming we don't ourselves run. We may create a thriving environment that values technological advancement simply due to our willingness to step forward and say "Yes."

David said "Yes," and his actions demonstrate the courage it takes to make a substantial investment. In a time when Israel was still consolidating its power and faced numerous external threats, David's commitment of resources to a long-term project like the Temple was a bold move. Similarly, Seventh-day Adventist leaders today must have the courage to invest in technological infrastructure and capabilities, even when faced with competing priorities and immediate challenges.

Italo Osorio shared a perspective that aligns perfectly with David's approach: "Whatever we do here is for the new generation to have a better world for the mission of the church."³⁶

By preparing for the Temple's construction, David laid the groundwork for future generations to continue and expand Israel's worship of God. Similarly, the technological investments we make today in the Seventh-day Adventist Church will shape the tools and capabilities for future generations of believers as they carry forward the church's mission.

David's visionary approach to technological preparation is an example for Adventist leaders today. His foresight, strategic planning, and willingness to invest in the future provide a blueprint for addressing the technological challenges and opportunities facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our digital age. By following David's example, we can ensure that the church remains technologically equipped and spiritually focused on its mission, both now and for generations to come.

Digital Sovereignty

There has been a growing push toward digital sovereignty, especially among nonprofits and governments. Osorio shared, "Recently a German province with 330,000 employees

³⁶ "Open Source as Part of Your Digital Strategy," Digital Strategy for Mission Conference, Adventist Technology Summit, Chiang Mai, Thailand. <https://ats.adventist.org/schedule/>

decided to stop using Microsoft Office and replaced it with LibreOffice and open-source software."³⁷ This dramatic move is part of a growing trend among businesses and organizations worldwide to regain control over their digital environments.

Over the past few years, digital sovereignty has emerged as a critical consideration within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well. Digital sovereignty, at its core, is about maintaining control over one's digital assets, data, and technological infrastructure. This concept reflects the biblical principles of stewardship and independence that we see exemplified throughout Scripture.

Paul Douglas, treasurer of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, emphasized the urgency of this matter in his keynote address during the 2024 Adventist Technology Summit. He stated, "Data must be mobilized for mission. The church must own the data. The church must own the platforms. The church must own its own data center. We need to mitigate as much as possible the risks that we face. Some of the things that we cannot do, we cannot do—but the things that we can do, we must do."³⁸ The time has come for us to focus on digital sovereignty.

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, embracing digital sovereignty through open-source solutions offers a transformative pathway to technological empowerment. This approach grants the church great control and customization capabilities, enabling it to tailor digital tools to its unique mission and values. By reducing dependence on proprietary software from tech giants, the church safeguards its digital autonomy, charting its own course in the digital realm.

While not without cost, open-source solutions present a financially prudent alternative to proprietary options. This fiscal efficiency allows for more strategic resource allocation,

³⁷ Michael Kan, "German Province Ditches Microsoft Office, Windows for Open-Source Alternatives," *PCMag*, April 4, 2024. <https://www.pcmag.com/news/german-province-ditches-microsoft-office-windows-for-open-source-alternatives>

³⁸ "Synergy as a [Digital] Strategy," Digital Strategy for Mission Conference, Adventist Technology Summit, Chiang Mai, Thailand. <https://ats.adventist.org/schedule/>

amplifying the church's ability to fulfill its mission. Beyond mere economics, the open-source ethos resonates deeply with the church's collaborative spirit, fostering a culture of shared development and collective problem-solving.

Transparency, a cornerstone of open-source philosophy, aligns perfectly with the church's commitment to maintain trust with its members and adhere to data protection regulations. This openness in data handling and processing reinforces the church's integrity in the digital age. Furthermore, the adoption of open-source technologies future-proofs the church's digital infrastructure, liberating it from the whims of a single vendor's product decisions, policy shifts, or pricing strategies.

However, embracing open-source and digital sovereignty is not without challenges. It will require training, infrastructure, and potentially custom development—investments for the future. The true value of open source lies not in its cost, but in the control and flexibility it offers.

The journey toward digital sovereignty for Seventh-day Adventist leaders begins with a comprehensive assessment of current technological dependencies. This crucial first step involves identifying areas where the church heavily relies on proprietary technologies and pinpointing opportunities for open-source alternatives. Such an evaluation lays the groundwork for strategic technological transformation.

Developing internal expertise emerges as a cornerstone of this transition. It requires a committed investment in training and recruitment to build a skilled team capable of managing and customizing open-source solutions. This internal capacity building is essential for truly harnessing the potential of digital sovereignty.

A measured, gradual transition serves as a prudent approach to adopting open-source technologies. By initiating this shift with less critical systems, the church can build confidence and expertise, paving the way for more ambitious implementations. This methodical strategy allows for learning and adaptation, minimizing risks while maximizing long-term benefits.

Collaboration with other Adventist organizations facing similar challenges presents a powerful opportunity for accelerated progress. By pooling resources and knowledge, the church can navigate the complexities of digital sovereignty more effectively, while strengthening bonds within the global Adventist community.

Engaging the broader church community in this technological transformation taps into a wealth of diverse skills and perspectives. By inviting members to contribute to open-source projects that advance the church's mission, leaders can foster a sense of ownership and participation in this digital evolution.

Throughout this journey, maintaining a delicate balance between security and openness is paramount. While embracing the transparency of open source, the church must implement robust security measures to safeguard sensitive data and systems. This equilibrium ensures that the pursuit of digital sovereignty enhances rather than compromises the church's digital integrity.

By charting this course toward digital independence, Seventh-day Adventist leaders position the church to harness the full potential of technology in service of its divine mission, while maintaining the agility to navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex digital landscape. Paul Douglas, in his keynote address at the Digital Strategy for Mission Conference, shared this:

We serve a big God that does big things. Let us therefore do big things with our big God. As we approach the second coming of Jesus Christ, things are going to get more difficult. Things are going to challenge our ability to operate as a church. And if data needs to be mobilized for mission, then we need to mobilize it within the context where we own the data, we own the data center, and we own the platforms upon which that data also resides and operates.³⁹

Douglas concluded his address with a powerful call to action: "If all Seventh-day Adventists, if all church entities, if we as a body of believers, were to act in concert, moving forward as

³⁹ "Do What Is Necessary," Digital Strategy for Mission Conference, 2024 GAI N Conference, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

one, under the direction of one power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, we would move the world." This is exactly the goal of our digital strategy for mission.

Courage

In the face of rapid technological changes and the urgent need for digital sovereignty, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is called to demonstrate courage in its investment strategies. This courage is about strategic vision and commitment to long-term goals.

Douglas emphasized this point in his address: "We need to do all that we can for as long as we can, and we need to find ways to prudently invest, prudently find the information and intelligence that we need, prudently work together in synergy and integration, and prudently make the investments that we need, that are both smart and strategic."

The courage to invest in the face of rapid technological change is a calculated, faith-driven approach to securing the church's future. At its core, this courage is anchored in a mission-driven focus. Every investment decision must be weighed against its potential to advance the church's fundamental purpose. As Douglas succinctly puts it, "If it is not about mission, it should not matter."

Furthermore, long-term vision is the hallmark of this courageous approach. It requires looking beyond immediate returns and recognizing the crucial role of digital infrastructure and open-source solutions in future sustainability. This foresight allows the church to plant technological seeds today that will bear fruit for generations to come if Jesus doesn't return by then.

Risk management also plays a pivotal role in this courageous investment strategy. While significant technological investments carry inherent risks, the greater danger lies in maintaining the status quo. Leaders must weigh these risks carefully, recognizing that inaction in the face of technological change poses an existential threat to the church's effectiveness.

The principle of stewardship underpins this courage to invest. Wise technological investments are not merely expenses but strategic allocations that enhance the church's efficiency and effectiveness. By embracing this perspective, leaders can make bold decisions that maximize the impact of every resource entrusted to the church.

The courage to invest also means a willingness to reallocate resources from traditional areas to new technologies. It may involve difficult decisions about reducing investments in some areas to increase funding for digital initiatives, especially in cases where traditional methods won't yield better results with the same resources. We do serve a big God, as Douglas stated, and perhaps serving His mission into the future will require big changes in the present.

The courage it will take to make big changes requires leadership to cast a vision, build consensus, and move forward with conviction. The courage to invest in digital sovereignty and open-source solutions is a critical component of the church's strategy for future mission work. It embodies the spirit of faith and forward-thinking that has characterized the Adventist movement since its inception. As the church faces the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, this courage will be essential in ensuring that it remains effective in its mission to spread the gospel to all the world.

The parable of the talents, as told by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-30, offers valuable insights for the Seventh-day Adventist Church when approaching digital strategy and investment. In this story, a master entrusts his servants with different amounts of money before departing. Upon his return, he finds that two servants have doubled their investments, while the third, out of fear, simply buried his talent in the ground.

The servant who buried his talent was motivated by fear. Similarly, fear of technological change or potential failures should not paralyze the church into inaction. In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, such fear may lead to missed opportunities and diminish our effectiveness in spreading the gospel.

Douglas's call to action reflects the parable's message: "Let us therefore do big things with our big God." The church should think boldly and act courageously, trusting in God's guidance and provision. It's a reminder that while prudence is important, it should not lead to timidity or inaction.

Jesus' parable in Matthew 25 does not endorse reckless risk-taking, but encourages calculated, faith-driven boldness. In the context of the church's digital strategy, this might mean conducting thorough research and planning before making major investments, implementing pilot projects to test effectiveness, and continuously learning and adapting based on outcomes.

The parable's conclusion, which includes a stark warning to the overly cautious servant, reminds us that inaction can be just as detrimental as recklessness. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church navigates the complexities of digital strategy and investment, this parable offers valuable guidance. It calls for a balance of prudence and boldness, encouraging the church to wisely steward its resources while also taking calculated risks for the advancement of its mission.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Technological Complacency Is Dangerous: The story of Saul's neglect of Israel's metalworking capabilities serves as a warning against technological complacency in the church.
2. Visionary Leadership Is Crucial: David's preparation for the Temple construction exemplifies the importance of proactive, visionary leadership in technological advancement.
3. Digital Sovereignty Is a Priority: Owning and controlling the church's data, platforms, and infrastructure is crucial for mission continuity, especially as we approach end times.

4. Open-Source Solutions Offer Advantages: Embracing open-source technologies can provide the church with greater control, customization, and independence in its digital strategies.
5. Courageous Investment Is Necessary: Bold, strategic investments in digital infrastructure and capabilities are essential, even if they don't show immediate returns.
6. Balance Prudence and Boldness: The Parable of the Talents teaches the importance of balancing prudent stewardship with bold, faith-driven action in technological investments.
7. Mission-Driven Focus is Key: All technological investments and strategies should be aligned with the church's core mission of spreading the gospel.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we assess and address areas of technological complacency within our church structures, and what steps can we take to develop greater digital sovereignty?
2. In light of the parable of the talents, how can we strike the right balance between prudent stewardship and bold investment in our digital strategies? What might this look like in practical terms?
3. How can we foster a culture of visionary leadership within our church that anticipates future technological needs while remaining firmly grounded in our mission? What strategies can we implement to develop and support such leadership?

SECTION 2: STRATEGY

Given the urgency and scale of our mission, it is crucial that we develop a strong, flexible strategy to advance our digital efforts. This section will introduce the concept of synergy through our brand positioning architecture and a strategy framework focusing on people, process, and technology.

In the past, our Adventist communication ministries have been geographically bound and clear on their expertise and mandate. Print, radio, and television ministries knew and understood their role and executed it with excellence for many years, with each entity complementing the others to further the mission together.

The advent of digital communication and global online communities has unwittingly created competition among our media ministries, duplicated our content and efforts, and created confusion of our purpose and scope. To meet the demands of digital communication, our organizations, once bound geographically and financially, must now produce text, images, audio, and video for instant distribution globally. Then we expect immediate engagement at scale.

These challenges demand a better conceptual model for understanding the interplay between our global media entities. The opening chapter of this section will explore synergy as a strategy by outlining the difference between a brand and an organization and the new brand positioning architecture, which simplifies our digital media efforts to end our internal competition, duplication, and confusion.

In the following chapters we will turn to a powerful, yet elegantly simple tool: the PPT framework. PPT, standing for people, process, and technology, is a widely recognized model used in business, project management, and organizational improvement. Its broad applicability across various fields makes it an ideal choice for structuring our digital mission strategy. It emphasizes the importance of balancing these three key elements for successful outcomes:

1. **People:** This encompasses all human aspects, including leadership, employees/contractors, stakeholders, and the communities we serve. In the context of the church, it involves considering the needs, skills, and roles of church members, leaders, and those we are working to reach with our message.

2. **Process:** This element focuses on the methods, procedures, and systems that govern how work is done and decisions are made. For our digital strategy, this includes developing systematic approaches to content creation, community engagement, and online evangelism.

3. **Technology:** This component covers the tools, systems, and infrastructure that support our mission. In the digital realm, this ranges from our web presence and mobile apps to data analytics and communication platforms.

The strength of the PPT framework lies in its versatility and ability to promote holistic thinking. By considering these three elements in tandem, we develop strategies that are not only technologically sound and organizationally feasible but also—and more important to our mission—human-centered.

As part of our digital mission, the PPT framework helps us ensure that our digital initiatives align with the skills and needs of our diverse global staff and membership (people). It also helps us develop efficient and effective processes for creating and disseminating digital content (process). Finally, it helps us select and implement appropriate technologies that enhance our reach and impact (technology).

Chapter 9: Synergy as Strategy

Richard Stephenson

In the quiet hours before He was betrayed and crucified, Jesus offered what I consider to be the most profound prayer in all of Scripture. Found in John 17, this prayer reveals the depths of Christ's heart and mind as He faced His impending sacrifice. Of all the concerns He could have voiced, Jesus chose to focus on us—His followers, His church, you and me. He prayed for our unity, not just in Spirit but in purpose, mirroring the oneness He shares with the Father.

I'm convinced that as Jesus uttered these words, He envisioned His remnant church—a body of believers united not by circumstance or convenience, but by an unshakeable commitment to mission. In John 17:20-23, we find these powerful words:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Here is the blueprint for true unity—a unity to transcend mere agreement or cooperation. Jesus reveals the formula: "I in them, and You in Me." We must go beyond superficial harmony into a spiritual interconnectedness achieved only when we allow Christ to dwell within us, just as the Father dwelled in Christ. We can discuss unity endlessly, but until each of us experiences and re-experiences Jesus daily through the Holy Spirit's power, we'll fall short.

As Christians, we know that the unity Christ envisions for us is ideal, yet we find ourselves in a world that seems to move in the opposite direction. Despite unprecedented connectivity due to the internet, we face increasing isolation and division. We're categorized and separated by geography, politics, ethnicity, and income. The irony is

palpable—never have we been more connected technologically, yet so disconnected relationally.

As we stand on the precipice of a new era—a *new day*—one truth is abundantly clear: Our greatest achievements as a church are born not from individual efforts, but from individuals of all languages, nations, tribes, and people uniting to tell a dying world that Jesus loves them and is coming to rescue them if they are only willing to be rescued! This is the essence of synergy—a force so potent it can transform the impossible into the certain and the ordinary into the extraordinary.

A New Day!

In July of 2024, in the heart of Chiang Mai, Thailand, a remarkable gathering took place—the inaugural Digital Strategy for Mission Convention. This event was more than a meeting of minds, but heralded the dawn of a new age in strategic thinking. Here, some 700 treasurers, technologists, communicators, media experts, writers, filmmakers, and leaders from every division converged with one shared purpose: to harness the power of digital technologies and collaborative thinking to create a Digital Strategy for Mission. The inaugural Digital Strategy for Mission Convention in Chiang Mai marks a pivotal moment in our collective journey. This gathering was not merely a confluence of minds but a harbinger of a new day in synergistic thinking and spiritual cooperation. Today is the day to harness the power of digital technologies and collaborative strategies for advancing God's mission.

The establishment of the Digital Strategy for Mission is built on synergy. This is not a peripheral initiative but a mission-first, enterprise-level approach that recognizes technology not as an end in itself, but as a powerful accelerator of mission. By elevating this effort to an administrative priority, we wish to send a clear message: Digital evangelism and digital discipleship are not just mission tools but vital priorities that require our collective effort.

This new collaborative approach extends beyond our internal structures and national boundaries. We're seeing a paradigm shift in how we view and utilize our resources. The South American Division decided to turn over the intellectual property rights of four mission-critical programs to the GC, on behalf of the world church—a shining example of this new collaborative spirit. We see the South Pacific Division, the Inter-European Division

and Hope Media Europe, and the North American Division doing the same. We see Hope Channel International donating advanced multimedia tools to the world church. I believe the timing of this is not coincidental, but providential. These acts of organizational generosity have inspired other divisions to follow suit, offering resources like Adventist.Cloud, Adventist Web Engine, and APS.net for the benefit of the global church. These actions embody the essence of our new collaborative dawn—a willingness to share, pool resources, and think beyond the things that separate us, all for uniting in mission.

As we embrace this new era of collaboration, we're redefining what it means to be unified in mission. Like a grand orchestra in which each instrument plays its unique part to create a magnificent symphony, our varied talents and resources, when harmonized under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can produce results far beyond what any of us could achieve alone. This new dawn of collaboration calls us to think bigger, reach further, and dream bolder, knowing that together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can prepare a world to meet Jesus.

The time to do this is today! We must have urgency in our collaboration!

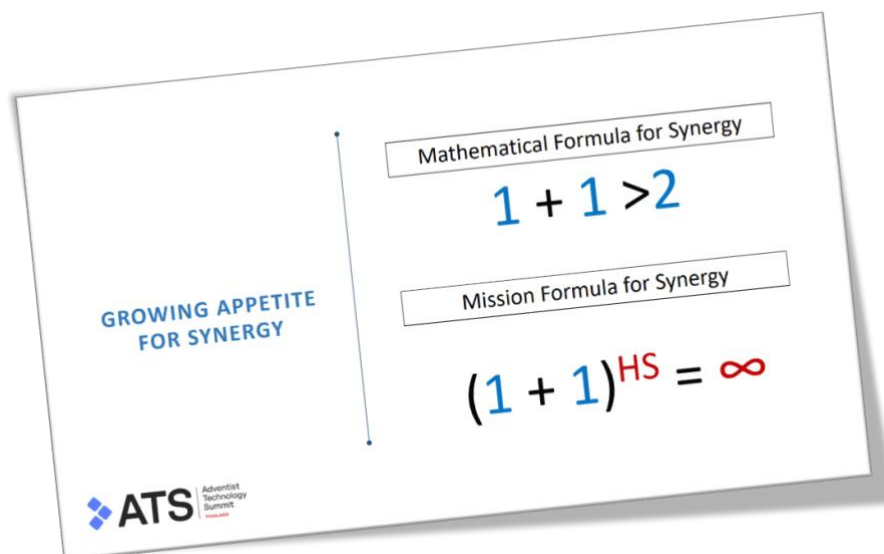
Synergy: More Than the Sum of Its Parts

At its core, synergy is the phenomenon in which the combined effect of parts working together is greater than the sum of their individual efforts. This concept goes beyond simple cooperation. In the context of our mission, we see this principle reflected in both mathematical and spiritual terms.

Paul Douglas, General Conference treasurer and chief financial officer, has spoken of the unique mathematical formula: $1 + 1 > 2$. This seemingly simple equation encapsulates the essence of synergy. When two combine their efforts, *the result isn't just additive; it's multiplicative*. In our mission-driven context, we take this concept even further. Douglas often speaks of what can be called a "missional formula for synergy":

One plus one—you plus me, technology plus the preaching pastor—raised to the power of the Holy Spirit.

This combination has the potential to achieve infinite, glorious things for the kingdom of God. It's not just about addition or even multiplication; it's about exponential growth through divine empowerment.



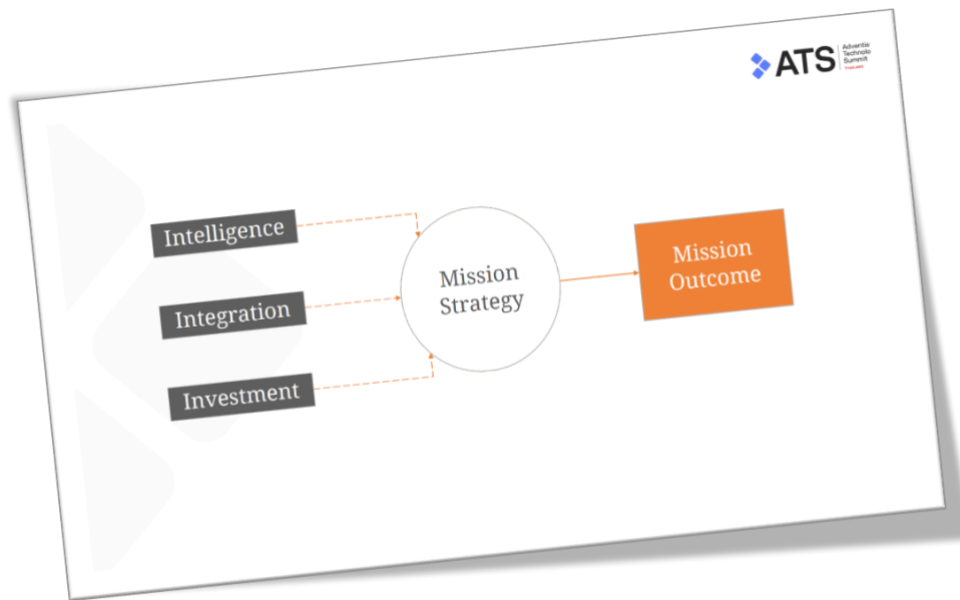
The power of synergy is beautifully illustrated in nature. Consider the murmurations of starlings, thousands of birds flying in intricate, fluid formations. Each bird follows simple rules of interaction with its nearest neighbors, but the result is a breathtaking display of coordinated movement that no single bird could ever achieve alone. In the context of the church, we create a similar "murmuration effect" when we align ourselves with the Holy Spirit and with one another in mission, capable of adapting to challenges and seizing opportunities with grace and Holy Spirit power, regardless of the headwinds!

Moreover, synergy in our mission isn't just about efficiency or effectiveness; it's about transformation. When we truly work in synergy, we don't just accomplish tasks but partner with our Father in changing lives, including our own. As the apostle Paul described in Ephesians 4:16, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*" (emphasis added).

This is a biblical mandate for synergy, reminding us that true collaboration isn't just about what we do but about who we become in the process. As we work together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we advance mission but also grow in unity, love, and spiritual maturity.

Brothers and sisters, I believe it's precisely when mission becomes secondary to us that we begin to splinter and fracture. The Holy Spirit uses mission to bind us together!

The Three Pillars of Synergistic Strategy



During the Digital Strategy for Mission Convention in 2024, Paul Douglas also introduced the three pillars of synergistic strategy: intelligence, integration, and investment.

The first pillar, **intelligence**, is the foundation on which we build our synergistic approach. It's about gathering and analyzing information, or data, in order to understand our mission field more comprehensively. In today's data-driven world, this means leveraging advanced analytics and digital tools to identify opportunities for mission. It involves studying cultural nuances, language preferences, and media consumption habits to tailor the gospel message more effectively. As the landscape of global communication evolves, so must our methods of gathering and interpreting this data—this *intelligence*. This pillar challenges us to be researchers and innovators, constantly seeking new insights that inform our mission strategy. We can only accomplish this as ONE church!

Integration, the second pillar, is where the true power of synergy comes to life. It's about breaking down silos (organizational, platform, and people) and fostering collaboration across all levels of our church—from divisions, unions, and conferences working together,

right down to local churches working with other local churches. This synergy is more than organizational and must ultimately result in people working with people to save other people! How can we say that our entities are working collaboratively if our people are not? This integration goes beyond mere cooperation; it's about creating a seamless network where diverse talents and resources flow freely between us to empower the mission. It means treasurers working alongside artists, technologists partnering with pastors, and media experts collaborating with evangelists—each bringing their unique gifts and skills, but all united under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this integrated approach, we recognize that every role, every person, no matter how seemingly small, is crucial to the overall mission.

The third pillar, the pillar of **investment**, is what transforms our vision into reality. The investment required is multifaceted, encompassing not just financial resources but also time, effort, and technological assets. It's a commitment at the highest levels. An example of this commitment is the dedication of the General Conference Session 2025 offering to fund the creation of local Digital Strategies for Mission. This is one example, as investment goes beyond monetary contributions. It's also about investing in people, in training and equipping our members with the skills needed for twenty-first-century ministry. It's about investing in infrastructure, owning and developing our own data centers and platforms. It's about digital sovereignty. This pillar challenges us to be strategic stewards, allocating our resources wisely to areas that will yield the greatest impact for our mission.

Together, these three pillars—intelligence, integration, and investment—form a robust framework for synergistic strategy. They are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. *Intelligence* informs where and how we should integrate our efforts and invest our resources. *Integration* allows us to pool our collective intelligence and maximize the impact of our investments. Strategic *investment* enhances our ability to gather intelligence and facilitate integration. By embracing these pillars, we create a dynamic ecosystem where synergy can flourish, enabling us to tackle the complex challenges of our global mission with unprecedented effectiveness and efficiency.

Overcoming Barriers: From Proprietary Thinking to Collective Ownership

In our quest for true synergy, one of the most formidable obstacles we face is the deeply ingrained habit of proprietary thinking. For too long, we've operated under the assumption that our individual resources, data, and intellectual property are assets to be guarded rather than shared. This mindset, while understandable in a competitive landscape, becomes a significant barrier when we're striving toward synergy for mission advancement. The shift from "my data" to "our data" is not just semantic, but a fundamental reimagining of how we approach our collective mission.

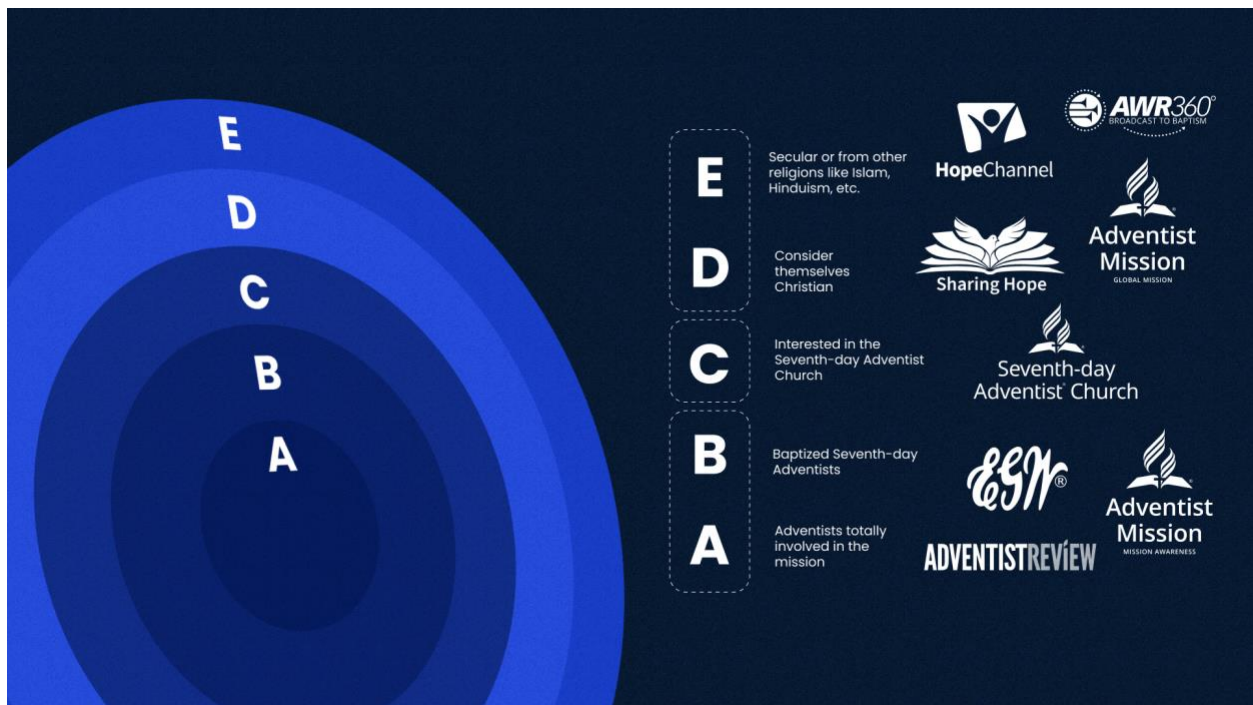
However, the journey from proprietary thinking to collective ownership is not without its challenges. It requires us to confront and overcome deeply entrenched organizational cultures, regulatory constraints, and sometimes personal attachments to "our" projects or "my" data. The key lies in reframing our perspective and seeing our resources not as personal or local assets, but as tools entrusted to us for the advancement of our shared mission. This shift demands both courage and humility—the courage to share what we've developed and the humility to recognize that our individual efforts gain exponential power when combined with others.

As we move forward, we must create systems and cultures that facilitate this new paradigm of collective ownership. This means developing clear protocols for data sharing, establishing collaborative platforms such as Adventist.Cloud that transcend organizational boundaries, and fostering a mindset that celebrates mission. It also requires us to be mindful of regulations while finding innovative ways to share resources within those constraints. This is not a call for us to be noncompliant with legislative mandates in the fields in which we minister. In fact, it's the opposite. We must be compliant with privacy and data protection regulations, but it's a call for us to work together, creating scenarios in which we can share resources and data in a way that respects privacy while still advancing the mission. It can be done! By embracing this collective approach, we not only enhance our missional efficiency but also embody the very spirit of unity that Christ prayed for in John 17. In so doing, we transform our church from a collection of separate entities into a powerful, synergistic force—God's remnant church—to change the world for Jesus!

The Symphony of Collaboration

Imagine an orchestra in which each instrument plays its unique part. Alone, a violin or a trumpet can produce beautiful notes, but when all instruments play in harmony, guided by a shared score and conductor, they create a symphony that can move hearts and stir souls. This is the essence of denominational synergy—each part distinct in its function, yet seamlessly integrated into a greater whole. As Ellen White writes, "The work of God's people may and will be varied, but one Spirit is the mover in it all."⁴⁰

We see this symphony come to life in our General Conference media entities. Adventist Mission, Hope Channel, Adventist World Radio, Review & Herald Publishing Association, and others now work together in a brand architecture that guides individuals from first contact to conversion. Each media entity plays its unique role, yet all are harmonized in our shared mission. This collaborative approach allows us to leverage the strengths of each organization, creating a seamless journey for those we seek to reach. It's a powerful example of how diverse parts can come together to create something far greater than the sum of their individual efforts.



⁴⁰E. G. White manuscript 83, 1899.

The beauty of this symphonic collaboration lies in the efficiency as well as ability to adapt and respond to changing needs. Like a skilled gospel ensemble, our entities must learn to work within the structure of our shared mission, which requires a deep understanding of our individual roles and a keen awareness of how we fit into the larger picture. Ephesians 4:11, 12 reminds us that God gave various gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. In our modern context, we might add technologists, communicators, and administrators to this list.

Embracing Digital Synergy

In our rapidly evolving digital landscape, technology plays a crucial role in fostering synergy. As emphasized in the Digital Strategy for Mission conventions, we must take bold steps to own our technological future. This means owning not just our data but also our data centers and strategic platforms. By taking these steps together, we create a robust infrastructure that supports our collective efforts and ultimately mission. This digital synergy not only enhances our efficiency but also fortifies our resilience in the face of future challenges that may threaten our ability to minister freely.

The concept of digital synergy extends beyond shared ownership. It's about creating an ecosystem in which our various technological tools and platforms work seamlessly together through a normalization of platforms and solutions used across the church, thus amplifying each entity's capabilities. For instance, when we integrate our church management systems with our outreach platforms and our internal communication tools, we create a powerful synergy that can dramatically enhance our mission effectiveness. This integration allows for better data flow, more informed decision-making, and a more cohesive approach to our global mission.

Moreover, embracing digital synergy means fostering a culture of integration, innovation, and collaboration among our entities and members. We need to create spaces—both virtual and physical—where our technologists can come together to share ideas, solve problems, and create new solutions. This could involve church technology conferences such as the Digital Strategy for Mission Convention, collaborative coding projects across entities, or open-source initiatives that allow us to leverage the collective expertise of our global church community. By doing so, we not only enhance our technological capabilities but also engage our sister entities in meaningful ways.

Finally, as we pursue digital synergy, we must be mindful of the ethical implications and potential risks of this endeavor. We need to ensure that our use of technology aligns with our shared values and respects the privacy of individuals. We need to ensure that these efforts never become a distraction from ministry, but are always viewed as tools of mission. The church cannot become “about technology.” The church must always be “about Jesus.” We can and should use technology and digital tools to advance the gospel, helping to extend the reach of the gospel. Additionally, we should implement robust data protection measures, strive for transparency about our data use, and always prioritize the spiritual and emotional well-being of our members and employees over technological efficiency. We can embrace digital synergy, and we can do so in a thoughtful, ethical manner. We can create a powerful tool for advancing our mission while staying true to our core principles.

The Urgency of Now

The urgency of our mission has never been more palpable. We find ourselves in what theologians and scholars often refer to as “end times”—the period leading up to the culmination of history in Jesus’ second coming. The signs that surround us in the political, natural, and societal realms all point to the imminence of Christ’s return. Careful not to fall into the trap of setting timelines—a misunderstanding that led to the Great Disappointment in the past—we cannot ignore the clear indicators that we are living in earth’s last days.

This sense of urgency compels us to think and act differently. We can no longer continue with the same approaches or settle for slow, gradual changes. The challenges we face, both at the local church and as a global community of believers, demand bold, innovative approaches. We must ask ourselves hard questions.

Are our current methods effective in reaching a rapidly changing world?
How can we leverage technology and synergy to accelerate our mission?
What barriers—organizational, cultural, or technological—stand in the way of our united effort, and how can we dismantle them?

The digital revolution has transformed every aspect of human life, and it presents both unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the church and her mission. As

governments and corporations increasingly control digital spaces, we should act swiftly to sustain our own robust digital infrastructure. Owning our data, strategic platforms, and even our data centers is not just about efficiency or cost saving, but about ensuring our ability to continue our mission for as long as possible, to be an uninterrupted voice online—even in the face of potential future restrictions. We must be proactive, not reactive, in our approach to technology and mission.

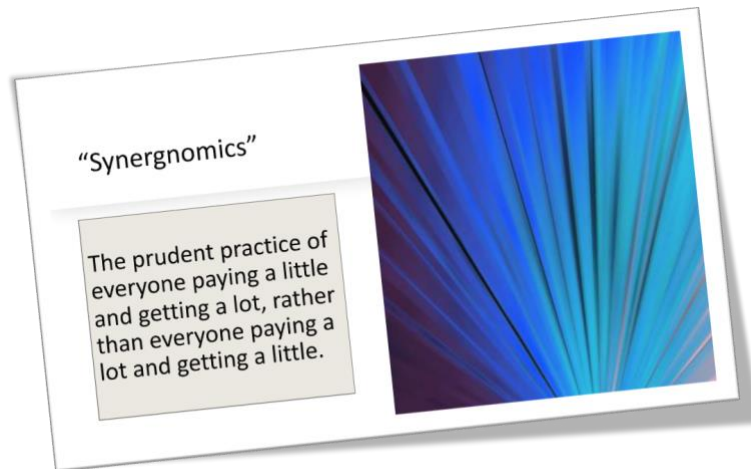
This urgency is not a cause for fear or panic, but rather a call to focused, purposeful action. As Martin Luther King Jr., the great American civil rights leader, famously said, "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."⁴¹ For us, this *urgency of now* is not just about organizational change, but about understanding that we must be about our Father's business. We must put aside every hindrance and eliminate distractions and divisions in order to reach people, both online and offline, wherever they are.

We are entrusted with a message of hope for a world in desperate need of it. The time for hesitation is past. The time for synergy, united action, leveraging every resource and technology at our disposal for the sake of our mission—that time is now. Let us embrace this urgency with faith, courage, and unwavering commitment to our calling.

A Call to Synergistic Action

As we conclude our reflection on the power of synergy, I recall a word Paul Douglas coined. He explained that *synergynomics* is "the prudent practice of everyone contributing a little to gain a lot collectively." *Synergynomics*, then, stands in stark contrast to the inefficient model in which each entity invests heavily for minimal individual returns. In our rapidly changing world, this *synergynomic* approach is not just beneficial but essential. By pooling our resources, talents, and efforts, we create a force multiplier that can tackle challenges far beyond our individual capabilities.

⁴¹On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom became the largest gathering for civil rights of its time, with an estimated 250,000 people in attendance. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described a "fierce urgency of now" during his famed speech at the peaceful protest that day.



The words of Ellen White resonate powerfully in this context: "If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world."⁴²

She also wrote:

All the work done for the Master is to be connected with the great whole. The workers are to labor together in concert, each one controlled by divine power, putting forth undivided effort to draw those around them to Christ. All must move like parts of well-adjusted machinery, each part dependent on the other part, yet standing distinct in action. And each one is to take the place assigned him and do the work appointed him. God calls upon the members of His church to receive the Holy Spirit, to come together in unity and brotherly sympathy, to bind their interests together in love.⁴³

Let's extend this vision to our Seventh-day Adventist community. Imagine the impact if our more than 23 million worldwide members acted in perfect harmony, united in purpose and empowered by the Holy Spirit. What seems an impossible task suddenly becomes attainable through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit when combined with you and me working together. Suddenly, with the Holy Spirit on our team, reaching a world of 8 billion isn't such a daunting task.

⁴²E. G. White manuscript 107, 1908.

⁴³E. G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 7, 1900.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Unity in Mission: Jesus' prayer in John 17 emphasizes the importance of unity among believers, not just in spirit but in purpose, mirroring the oneness Christ shares with the Father.
2. Synergy as a Powerful Force: The concept of synergy, in which the combined effect is greater than the sum of individual efforts, is crucial for achieving the church's mission.
3. Three Pillars of Synergistic Strategy: Intelligence (data-driven understanding), integration (breaking down silos), and investment (resources, time, effort) form the foundation for effective collaboration.
4. Digital Strategy for Mission Convention: The inaugural congress in Chiang Mai marks a new era in organizational thinking, prioritizing digital evangelism and discipleship as vital mission tools.
5. Overcoming Proprietary Thinking: Shifting from "my data" to "our data" is essential for true synergy, requiring a fundamental reimagining of how resources are shared and utilized.
6. Media Synergy: General Conference media entities working together in a brand architecture demonstrate the power of harmonized efforts in guiding individuals from first contact to conversion.
7. Urgency of Action: The current times demand bold, innovative approaches and swift action to leverage technology and synergy to accelerate the church's mission.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively implement the three pillars of synergistic strategy (intelligence, integration, and investment) within our own organizations and across the global church to enhance our mission effectiveness?

2. What specific steps can we take to overcome proprietary thinking and foster a culture of collective ownership and resource sharing within our church structure, while still respecting necessary boundaries and regulations?
3. Given the "urgency of now," how can we rapidly adapt our current methods and organizational structures to better leverage technology and synergy for reaching a rapidly changing world with the gospel message?

Chapter 10: Process

Sam Neves

In our ongoing conversation about People, Process, and Technology (PPT), *process* is the way our *people* use and create *technology* to serve. In the church, we often emphasize structured methods and predictable outcomes. Yet in a world that changes faster than ever, following carefully crafted blueprints can keep us from adapting to new realities—and from ministering effectively.

When we talk about process being flexible and adaptive, we're not championing chaos; rather, we're advocating for a dynamic way of thinking and organizing ourselves that remains grounded in our mission while continually evolving to meet real needs. This is where Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum come into play. These methodologies have transformed our global digital landscape, fueling inventions from social media platforms to on-demand services and applications. They thrive on empathy, rapid iteration, collaboration, and continuous feedback.

Yet many of us in the Seventh-day Adventist Church find these approaches unsettling because they don't promise exact timelines and costs up front. As we'll see, our tendency toward certainty—knowing precisely how much a project will cost long-term, what it will look like, and when it will be delivered—often stands in the way of creativity and responsiveness, both essential in the digital age. Ironically, our desire for order can hamper our ability to minister effectively in a changing world.

As you read through this chapter, you'll discover that Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum are underpinned by principles that the Adventist Church values: serving others, working together, learning from mistakes, and maintaining a clear focus on our mission. They offer tools for turning lofty plans into flexible, responsive processes capable of connecting with individuals in meaningful ways. More importantly, these approaches mirror the biblical call

to servant leadership and continuous growth—reflecting what it means to follow Jesus, who constantly adjusted His words and methods to the context and people He served.

In the sections that follow, we'll explore why Agile and Scrum, born from the spirit of innovation, now power so many of the digital experiences we take for granted. We'll see how Design Thinking opens our eyes to the real needs of people, urging us to build solutions they truly value. But first, let's look at a familiar challenge—our longstanding preference for rigid, sequential planning—so we can recognize how it may be holding us back.

We Have a Waterfall Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, like many long-established organizations, often operates under what's known as the “waterfall” approach. Think of a construction blueprint: the plan is drawn, each stage is calculated, and budgets are locked in before the first brick is laid. This tried-and-true method makes sense for projects with minimal surprises—like building a new church hall—where you benefit from precise timing, firm costs, and predictable outcomes. If you have ever built a new church hall, you might be smiling by now because even these predictable projects often don't go according to plan.

In the realm of digital ministry, however, waterfall planning can become a major hurdle. When developing an app, website, or online campaign, we must recognize that customer needs and technological possibilities change rapidly. By the time a big plan is finally executed, the platform or audience expectations will have shifted, leaving us with a beautifully executed but outdated product. Our church culture tends to resist Agile methods because they appear vague—lacking the up-front certainty we crave. We want to know “How much will it cost?” and “What will this look like, exactly?” before we take a single step.

This longing for certainty stems from our well-intentioned desire to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us. We feel safer detailing a plan that outlines each phase, each

dollar, and each deliverable from the start. That approach works fine for stable environments or short-term initiatives. But in the hyper-fast world of digital innovation, waterfall can stifle our best creative ideas. Worst of all, we have often tried to serve people without knowing them or their problems effectively. Why? Because once we lock in the plan, our ability to pivot in response to real-world data is severely limited.

While waterfall has its place—particularly for clear-cut, stable projects—digital strategies moved beyond it more than two decades ago. Silicon Valley giants such as Google, Amazon, and Apple didn't revolutionize the world by methodically following long, sequential project plans; instead, they embraced iterative, flexible processes that allow them to respond to customer feedback and experiences with their products at lightning speed.⁴⁴ When an Adventist organization prioritizes safety and risk aversion over agility, it inadvertently places process above people. We end up serving the plan instead of serving real human needs in real time.

Over time, this choice to stay “safe” in a waterfall mindset ensures that our digital presence lags behind. In practice, that means stale online campaigns, outdated technologies, and missed opportunities to share the Adventist message in fresh, relevant ways. Ministries committed to waterfall above all else rarely thrive in digital spheres because the online landscape is constantly evolving. If we refuse to adapt to the people we serve, we risk irrelevance.

Agile principles, on the other hand, embrace uncertainty not as a threat, but as a chance to innovate. They encourage small, frequent experiments—an approach that echoes Jesus' parable of the talents, where those who took risks were rewarded and the one who buried his resources was not. Fear of failure can keep us from achieving meaningful success. In

⁴⁴ Surobh Ghosh and Andy Wu, “Iterative Coordination and Innovation: Prioritizing Value Over Novelty,” *Organization Science* 34(6) (2023): 2182-2206.

digital ministry, it can prevent us from reaching people in ways that truly resonate with today's needs.⁴⁵

As we'll soon explore, Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum formed the backbone of modern digital transformation.⁴⁶ By leaving behind our waterfall problem, we can harness these methods to honor both our mission and our audience. What follows is a deep dive into how Design Thinking awakens us to empathy, Agile fosters responsiveness to change, and Scrum brings it all together in a structured framework. Prepare to see how these best practices can be adapted for the Adventist context, offering not only a technical solution but a spiritual and missional advantage as we share the gospel in the digital realm. Let's venture forward.

Design Thinking

Design Thinking has evolved from its roots in design practice to become a widely adopted method for innovation across many disciplines. Its history can be traced back to the 1960s, and each subsequent decade has contributed to its development and refinement.

The concept of Design Thinking began to take shape with the work of Herbert Simon. In his seminal book *The Sciences of the Artificial*, Simon laid the groundwork for understanding design as a way of thinking and problem-solving. He defined design as "the transformation of existing conditions into preferred ones" and distinguished it from natural sciences and humanities, positioning it as a unique approach to creating artifacts.⁴⁷

The 1980s saw a significant shift toward user-centered design, largely influenced by Don Norman's work. His book *The Design of Everyday Things* popularized the concept of user-

⁴⁵ Louis Giboin, "Was Jesus Christ the First Agile Coach." Available at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/jesus-christ-first-agile-coach-louis-giboin/> [Accessed April 2025].

⁴⁶ Julio Cesar Pereira and Rosaria Russo, "Design Thinking Integrated in Agile Software Development: A Systematic Literature Review." *Procedia Computer Science* 138 (2018): 775-782.

⁴⁷ Ulla Johansson-Sköldberg, Jill Woodilla, and Mehves Çetinkaya, "Design Thinking: Past, Present and Possible Futures," *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 22(2) (2013): 121-146.

centered design, advocating for products that are intuitive and meet the needs of users. This period also saw the introduction of complex and challenging problems in design theory, a concept explored by Richard Buchanan in his 1992 article "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking."⁴⁸ Buchanan applied Design Thinking to these difficult, ill-defined issues, expanding its potential applications beyond traditional design fields.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Design Thinking gained traction in the business world. IDEO, a design consultancy, played a crucial role in popularizing Design Thinking as a structured methodology for innovation. Their human-centered design approach, documented in "The Human-Centered Design Toolkit" (2009), emphasized empathy, collaboration, and iterative prototyping.⁴⁹

The mid to late 2000s marked a period of academic integration and refinement of Design Thinking principles. Business schools, notably the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (d.school), began incorporating Design Thinking into their curricula. The school's methods, such as the "Bootcamp Bootleg," popularized teaching Design Thinking principles to students from various disciplines.⁵⁰

Today, Design Thinking is recognized as a powerful tool for addressing complex challenges across various fields. Its human-centered, iterative, and collaborative nature makes it a versatile method for creating impactful solutions in an increasingly complex world.⁵¹

While various models of Design Thinking exist, most share common elements. The Stanford school model, popularized by IDEO and widely adopted, outlines the following five stages:⁵²

⁴⁸ Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8(2) (1992): 5-21.

⁴⁹ Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, and Çetinkaya, "Design Thinking."

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Tim Brown, "Design Thinking," *Harvard Business Review* 86(6) (2008): 84.

1. **Empathize:** This stage involves gaining a deep understanding of the user's needs, wants, and challenges through observation and engagement. It's about setting aside one's own assumptions to gain genuine insight into users and their needs.
2. **Define:** In this stage, the information gathered during the “empathize” stage is synthesized to define the core problems. The goal is to develop an actionable problem statement that focuses on insights and needs of a particular user or user group.
3. **Ideate:** This is the stage in which ideas are generated. The goal is to generate a wide range of creative ideas that address the problem statement defined in the previous stage. Brainstorming and “worst possible idea” sessions are common techniques used.
4. **Prototype:** In this stage, scaled-down versions of the product or specific features are created. This is an experimental phase aimed at identifying the best possible solution for each problem identified.
5. **Test:** The prototypes are tested with users, and their feedback is used to redefine problems and inform the understanding of the users, their conditions, their behaviors, and the problem. This often results in alterations and refinement of the prototypes and sometimes even a return to previous stages to make further iterations.

It's important to note that these stages are not necessarily linear and often involve iterations and loops. As researchers Thomas Beyhl and Holger Giese point out, the Design Thinking methodology does not prescribe any specific order to these design steps, allowing

innovators the freedom to choose the most appropriate steps for their current situation within the overall design flow.⁵³

However, as Johansson-Sköldberg et al. note, it's important to recognize the distinctions between the more rigorous academic discourse of "designerly thinking" and the more popularized management discourse of "Design Thinking." Understanding these nuances can help in applying Design Thinking more effectively and avoiding oversimplification of complex design processes.

Design Thinking isn't just a methodology, however. It also serves as a development framework that prioritizes the following principles.

1. **Human-Centered:** Design Thinking starts with a deep empathy for user needs and experiences. This focus on the human perspective sets it apart from other problem-solving approaches.
2. **Collaborative:** It encourages multidisciplinary teamwork and co-creation with users. This collaborative approach helps to bring diverse perspectives to the problem-solving process.
3. **Experimental:** Design Thinking promotes a "fail fast, fail often" mentality, emphasizing rapid prototyping and iteration. This allows for quick learning and adaptation.
4. **Holistic:** It considers the broader context and system in which a problem exists, rather than focusing on isolated components.

⁵³ Thomas Beyhl and Holger Giese, "The Design Thinking Methodology at Work: Capturing and Understanding the Interplay of Methods and Techniques, *Design Thinking Research: Taking Breakthrough Innovation Home*, pp. 49-65.

5. **Visual and Tactile:** Design Thinking relies heavily on visual thinking and tangible prototypes to communicate ideas. This helps to make abstract concepts more concrete and accessible.

As Design Thinking has gained popularity, it has been adopted and adapted across various fields beyond design, including business, education, and social innovation. The Adventist Church should employ Design Thinking as a valuable tool for addressing complex, ill-defined problems in many contexts, appreciating its flexibility and focus on human needs. It is crucial to note that Design Thinking isn't intended for software development only but can be used to solve any problem and help the Adventist Church be as effective as possible in our mission.

Agile

Agile is a set of principles and practices for software development that has revolutionized how teams approach project management and product creation. Its roots can be traced back to the challenges faced by software developers in the 1990s, but its formal inception occurred in 2001 with the publication of the Agile Manifesto.⁵⁴

The seeds of Agile were sown in the 1990s when software developers began to recognize the limitations of traditional, plan-driven approaches to software development. These traditional methods, often referred to as "waterfall" approaches, were characterized by lengthy up-front planning, sequential phases, and minimal flexibility to change once a project was underway. As projects grew more complex and business environments became more dynamic, these rigid methodologies often resulted in delayed deliveries, exceeded budgets, and products that no longer met user needs by the time they were completed.

⁵⁴ David Cohen, Mikael Lindvall, and Patricia Costa, *Agile Software Development: A DACS State-of-the-Art Report* (Rome, NY: Data and Analysis Center for Software, 2003).

In response to these challenges, several lightweight software development methods emerged in the 1990s. These included Scrum (developed by Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber and initially published in 2010),⁵⁵ Extreme Programming (created by Kent Beck),⁵⁶ and others. These methods emphasized iterative development, customer collaboration, and the ability to respond to change.

The formal birth of Agile occurred in February 2001, when 17 software developers met at a ski resort in Utah to discuss these lightweight development methods.⁵⁷ This meeting resulted in the creation of the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, which outlined four key values:

1. Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
2. Working software over comprehensive documentation
3. Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
4. Responding to change over following a plan

Along with these values, the manifesto also laid out 12 principles that underpin the Agile philosophy. These principles emphasize customer satisfaction, embracing change, frequent delivery of working software, close cooperation between businesspeople and developers, trust and support for team members, sustainable development pace, technical excellence, simplicity, self-organizing teams, and regular reflection and adjustment.

Since its inception, Agile has grown from a set of practices specific to software development to a broader philosophy that has been adopted across various industries and functions. Its emphasis on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement has made

⁵⁵ Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland, *The Scrum Guide*, <https://scrumguides.org/docs/scrumguide/v2020/2020-Scrum-Guide-US.pdf>

⁵⁶ Kent Beck, *Extreme Programming Explained: Embrace Change* (Addison-Wesley Professional, 2000).

⁵⁷ Cohen et al., *Agile Software Development*.

it particularly well-suited to the fast-paced, ever-changing business environment of the twenty-first century.

While Agile is more a philosophy than a prescriptive methodology, several frameworks have emerged that embody Agile principles. One of the most popular is Scrum, but others include Kanban, Extreme Programming (XP), and Lean Software Development. Regardless of the specific framework, Agile processes generally share several key characteristics:

1. **Iterative Development:** Instead of trying to deliver the entire project at once, Agile breaks the work into small, manageable chunks called iterations or sprints. Each iteration typically lasts 1-4 weeks and results in a potentially shippable product increment.
2. **Continuous Planning:** While there is an initial high-level plan, the details are planned on an ongoing basis. This allows teams to adapt to changing requirements and new information.
3. **Evolutionary Development:** The product evolves based on feedback from users and stakeholders. This contrasts with traditional approaches in which the entire product is specified up front.
4. **Early and Continuous Delivery:** Working versions of the product are delivered frequently, allowing for early feedback and value realization.
5. **Self-Organizing Teams:** Teams are empowered to make decisions about how to accomplish their work, rather than having processes dictated from above.
6. **Continuous Improvement:** Teams regularly reflect on their processes and look for ways to become more effective.

Several key characteristics define the Agile approach, setting it apart from traditional methodologies. Flexibility is at the core of Agile processes, which are designed to

accommodate and even embrace change, recognizing that requirements and priorities can shift during a project's life cycle. This adaptability is complemented by a strong emphasis on transparency, with Agile promoting open communication and visibility into the project's progress, often through tools like task boards and burndown charts.

The Agile approach is inherently customer-centric, with the customer or end user heavily involved throughout the development process, providing regular feedback that guides the product's evolution. This customer focus goes hand in hand with a collaborative ethos, as Agile promotes close teamwork within the development team and with stakeholders, effectively breaking down silos between different functions. The methodology is also fundamentally empirical in nature, with decisions based on what is known now, rather than on extensive upfront planning. This approach relies on observation and experimentation, allowing teams to adapt quickly to new information and changing circumstances. Finally, Agile maintains a sharp focus on value, aiming to provide benefits to the customer as early and as often as possible by frequently delivering working increments of the product. These characteristics combine to create a methodology that is well-suited to complex, dynamic environments where traditional, plan-driven approaches may fall short.

In practice, an Agile project might look something like this: A team begins by creating a high-level plan and a prioritized list of features or requirements (often called a product backlog). They then work in short iterations (often called sprints), during which they plan, develop, test, and potentially release a small increment of the product. At the end of each iteration, they demonstrate their work to stakeholders, gather feedback, and plan the next iteration. Throughout this process, they hold daily short meetings (often called daily stand-ups) to coordinate their work and identify any obstacles.

While Agile originated in software development, its principles have been successfully applied to various other fields, including marketing, human resources, customer services, and even nonprofit management. Its emphasis on adaptability, continuous improvement,

and customer focus makes it particularly well-suited to environments characterized by uncertainty and rapid change.

However, it's important to note that adopting Agile often requires a significant shift in organizational culture and mindset. It challenges traditional notions of control and prediction, emphasizing instead the ability to respond effectively to change. This will be a particular challenge for our most common decision-making process: committees. It is ideal for committees to make high-level strategic and financial decisions that approve projects and define objectives and limitations.

From that point onward, an Adventist department or entity will be responsible for setting up a team that will use the Agile methodology to deliver on the decisions of the committee. This team should report back to the committee that established it for validation and continual input. A successful implementation of Agile often involves not just new processes, but a fundamental shift in how organizations think about and approach their work.

Scrum

Scrum is an Agile framework for project management that emphasizes teamwork, accountability, and iterative progress toward well-defined goals. The term "Scrum" comes from rugby, where it refers to a method of restarting play, emphasizing teamwork.

The history of Scrum dates back to 1986 when Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka published a paper in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "The New New Product Development Game." They described a holistic approach in which a cross-functional team worked together from start to finish, similar to how a rugby team passes a ball back and

forth as it moves up the field. This approach contrasted with the traditional sequential approach to product development.⁵⁸

In the early 1990s, Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber independently developed similar processes for software development. They combined their ideas and presented Scrum at the OOPSLA conference in 1995. Since then, Scrum has become one of the most widely used Agile methodologies.⁵⁹

Scrum is built around the idea of empirical process control, meaning decisions are based on observation and experimentation rather than detailed up-front planning. This aligns closely with the iterative nature of Design Thinking, where solutions are continuously refined based on user feedback and testing.

The Scrum framework consists of several key elements. The Scrum Team is a small, cross-functional group typically consisting of a Product Owner, Scrum Master, and Development Team. A sprint is a time-boxed period (usually 1-4 weeks) during which a specific set of work is completed and made ready for review. Sprint Planning is a meeting where the team decides what to work on during the upcoming sprint. The Daily Scrum is a brief, daily meeting where team members synchronize their work and plan for the next 24 hours. At the end of each sprint, there's a Sprint Review to evaluate the work completed and a Sprint Retrospective to reflect on the team's processes and identify improvements.

Two crucial artifacts in Scrum are the Product Backlog, which is a prioritized list of features and requirements for the product, and the Sprint Backlog, a subset of the Product Backlog that the team commits to completing in a sprint.

Scrum emphasizes several key principles that set it apart from traditional project management approaches. Transparency is fundamental, with all aspects of the process

⁵⁸ Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka, "The New New Product Development Game, *Harvard Business Review* 64(1) (January 1986): 137-146.

⁵⁹ Schwaber and Sutherland, *The Scrum Guide*.

visible to everyone involved. This openness fosters trust and enables effective collaboration. Inspection is another core principle, with frequent check-ins and reviews, allowing for early detection and correction of issues. Adaptation is the third key principle, with the team constantly adjusting their plans and processes based on what they learn through inspection.

The Scrum framework promotes a self-organizing, cross-functional team structure. This approach empowers team members to make decisions and take ownership of their work, leading to increased motivation and productivity. It also encourages a holistic view of the product, with team members collaborating across different skill sets to deliver a complete, working increment of the product at the end of each sprint.

Scrum's iterative nature allows for frequent reassessment and adaptation of both the product and the process. This makes it particularly well-suited for complex projects where requirements may change or where the optimal solution may not be clear from the outset. By delivering working increments of the product at regular intervals, Scrum allows for early and continuous feedback from stakeholders and users, ensuring that the product remains aligned with their needs and expectations.

While Scrum originated in software development, its principles have been successfully applied in various other fields, including marketing, education, and even some aspects of manufacturing. Its emphasis on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement makes it adaptable to many different contexts.

However, implementing Scrum effectively often requires a significant shift in organizational culture. It challenges traditional hierarchical structures and command-and-control management styles, instead promoting a more collaborative and self-managed approach. This can be particularly challenging in organizations with deeply ingrained traditional management practices.

For the Adventist Church, adopting Scrum could provide a powerful framework for managing complex projects and initiatives. Its emphasis on regular delivery of value, continuous improvement, and close collaboration aligns well with the church's mission-driven approach. Scrum is already used by Adventist development teams around the world. However, its use could be expanded to areas such as developing new evangelism projects, creating digital content, or managing community service projects.

It's important to note that while Scrum provides a framework, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. The church would need to adapt Scrum principles to fit its unique context and needs. This might involve adjusting the sprint length to accommodate volunteer schedules or modifying the role definitions to align with existing church structures.

Bible-Based Process

It's worth noting that these modern methodologies reflect core Christian values and principles embodied by Jesus and the early church. This alignment validates these methods in our context and provides a familiar process through which we can understand and implement them.

At the heart of Design Thinking lies a user-centered approach that emphasizes empathy and understanding of user needs. This focus on the individual and their specific circumstances mirrors Jesus' own ministry. We see this clearly in Mark 10:46-52, where Jesus, despite being surrounded by a large crowd, stops to address the specific needs of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. Jesus' question—"What do you want Me to do for you?"—illustrates an empathetic, user-centered approach that Design Thinking advocates. Similarly, Agile and Scrum focus on delivering value to users, much as Jesus' ministry consistently provided spiritual value rather than empty words. Matthew 4:23 describes how Jesus went throughout Galilee "teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all." In this way He demonstrated His commitment to meeting the needs of people and delivering value to them in various forms.

Central to Agile and Scrum methods is the concept of iterative improvement and continuous learning, which aligns closely with our understanding of spiritual growth and sanctification as an ongoing process. In Philippians 1:6, Paul is confident that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ," which suggests a continuous process of improvement in the Christian life. This progressive approach to growth is also evident in Jesus' relationship with His disciples. In Luke 11:1, we see the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, illustrating their ongoing learning process under His guidance. Just as Agile teams hold regular retrospectives to reflect and improve, we see Jesus and His disciples regularly reflect on their experiences and lessons learned.

Collaboration and cross-functional teamwork are key aspects of modern approaches that complement the biblical model of the church. Paul's description of the church as a body with many parts in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 beautifully illustrates this concept. Each member has a unique role and gift, yet all work together for the common purpose. This mirrors the cross-functional teams in Agile and Scrum, where members with diverse skills collaborate toward a shared goal. Peter reinforces this idea, encouraging believers to use their various gifts to serve others "as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10, NIV).

The ability to adapt to change is a cornerstone of the Agile method, and we see this quality exemplified in Jesus' ministry. Mark 4:33, 34 shows how Jesus adapted His teaching methods to His audience, speaking to the crowd in parables but explaining everything in private to His disciples. This flexibility in approach depending on the context and audience is a key feature of Agile methodology. Furthermore, Jesus sending His disciples to minister and return with feedback, as described in Luke 10:1-17, mirrors rapid prototyping and testing—advocated in Design Thinking. This approach allowed the disciples to learn, adapt, and improve their ministry methods based on real-world experience.

Perhaps one of the most striking similarities between these modern methodologies and Christian principles is the emphasis on servant leadership. In Agile and Scrum, leaders

called Scrum Masters are seen as servant-leaders, facilitating the team's success rather than commanding from above. This concept is modeled by Jesus throughout His ministry. In Mark 10:43, 44, Jesus teaches this principle, saying, "whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all." He exemplifies this teaching most poignantly in John 13:12-15, when He washes His disciples' feet, a task usually reserved for the lowest servants. This radical demonstration of servant leadership perfectly aligns with the supportive, facilitative leadership style promoted in modern Agile methodology.

Transparency and open communication, vital components of Agile and Scrum practices, also find resonance in Jesus' approach to His relationships. In John 15:15, Jesus tells His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." This demonstrates a commitment to openly share information, a concept that mirrors the transparency in Agile approaches. Additionally, the practice of reporting back to Jesus after the apostles' missions, as seen in Luke 9:10, 11, reflects the regular review and feedback sessions that are integral to Agile and Scrum processes.

Finally, the way modern methodologies emphasize prioritization and focus aligns with Jesus' approach to His ministry. In Scrum, the Product Backlog helps teams prioritize tasks based on value, which ensures that the most important work is tackled first. Similarly, Jesus demonstrated a clear sense of priority in His mission. In Luke 4:42-44, we see Jesus prioritize His preaching ministry, telling the people who wanted Him to stay, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent" (verse 43).

Jesus also distilled complex teachings into core principles, as seen in Matthew 22:36-40, where He summarizes the greatest commandments. This ability to focus on what's most important and communicate it clearly is a valuable skill in both spiritual leadership and modern project management methodologies.

As we implement Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum in our digital ministry efforts, we can draw confidence and inspiration from their parallels with Christian principles. These methodologies not only align with our values but also provide structured approaches to embody these values in our work. By embracing these methods, we don't just adopt modern business practices, but in many ways, we return to the collaborative, adaptive, and people-focused approach modeled by Jesus and the early church. This alignment allows us to refine our methods while staying true to our foundational principles, enabling us to more effectively spread the gospel in the digital age.

Failing Forward

Considering the application of Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum in shaping our processes for digital ministry, we encounter a significant cultural challenge: the principle of "failing forward." This concept, which is integral to these modern approaches, clashes with our deeply ingrained aversion to failure.

In the Adventist Church, as in many traditional organizations, we prefer the safety of inaction to the risk of failure. Our desire for perfection and our fear of mistakes can lead to paralysis, hindering innovation and growth. However, if we are to improve and adapt in our rapidly changing digital landscape, we must cultivate the courage to learn from our mistakes—which requires courage to make them in the first place.

The principle of "failing forward" finds a powerful parallel in the parable of the talents. In this story, Jesus tells of three servants entrusted with their master's wealth. Two servants take risks, investing the money and yielding returns. The third, driven by fear, buries his talent, preserving it but gaining nothing (Matthew 25:14-30).

Interestingly, this third servant acts with what he perceives as great integrity, ensuring he doesn't lose what was entrusted to him. Yet the master's response is severe: "You wicked, lazy servant! . . . You should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest" (Matthew 25:26, 27, NIV).

This parable challenges us to reconsider our approach to risk and failure in our digital ministry efforts. We may be tempted to play it safe like the third servant, avoiding any possibility of failure. However, the parable suggests that such an approach does not align with God's expectations for how we steward the resources and opportunities He provides.

The methods and frameworks we're exploring—Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum—provide structured approaches for calculated risk-taking. By adopting these approaches, we can learn from our failures and continuously improve, testing ideas early and often and viewing setbacks as learning opportunities rather than final verdicts. Ultimately, it is better to eliminate a project that isn't working than continue to fund it for the sake of our image as perfect stewards who insist on burying our resources.

As we apply these approaches to our digital ministry processes, we must cultivate a culture that values learning and growth over perfection. This doesn't mean we become reckless or careless, but through God's wisdom, we move boldly forward, taking calculated risks and learning from both our successes and our failures.

We must remember that our mission—to spread the gospel and prepare people for Christ's return—is too important to be paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes. There will always be risks in our endeavors, and we should certainly do our best to mitigate them. However, we must never allow the fear of failure to prevent us from innovating and advancing our mission.

These methods and frameworks, when applied judiciously, align with our values as Christians. They encourage stewardship of resources, continuous improvement, and a focus on serving others effectively. By embracing the principle of “failing forward,” we position ourselves to become more efficient and effective in our mission, always learning, growing, and striving to better serve in our digital ministry efforts.

It is time to draw inspiration from the faithful servants in the parable—not afraid to take risks, boldly and wisely using what God has entrusted to us. In doing so, we open ourselves

to the innovation, growth, and impact that these modern methods can bring to our processes, ultimately enhancing our ability to fulfill the Great Commission in the digital age.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Integration of Modern Methodologies: Design thinking, Agile, and Scrum offer valuable approaches for enhancing digital ministry efforts, aligning with Christian principles and Jesus' ministry methods.
2. Human-Centered Approach: Design Thinking's emphasis on empathy and understanding user needs mirrors Jesus' approach to individual ministry.
3. Iterative Improvement: Agile's and Scrum's focus on continuous learning aligns with the Christian concept of ongoing spiritual growth and sanctification.
4. Collaborative Teamwork: These methodologies promote cross-functional collaboration, reflecting the biblical model of the church as a body with many parts working together.
5. Adaptability: The flexibility emphasized in Agile methods resonates with Jesus' adaptable teaching approach to different audiences.
6. Servant Leadership: The servant-leader role in Scrum aligns with Jesus' model of leadership, emphasizing facilitation rather than top-down control.
7. Failing Forward: Embracing calculated risks and learning from failures is crucial for innovation in digital ministry, as illustrated in the parable of the talents.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively implement Design Thinking, Agile, and Scrum methodologies in our digital ministry efforts while maintaining our core Adventist values and mission?

2. What cultural shifts are necessary within our church organization to embrace the concept of "failing forward," and how can we promote a balance between risk-taking and responsible stewardship?
3. How can we leverage these modern methodologies to better engage and serve our diverse global audience in the digital space, ensuring that we're meeting their spiritual needs effectively?

Chapter 11: People

Alyssa Truman

“In the beginning God created . . .”

These five words in Genesis 1:1 are how God introduces Himself to those who open the Bible to understand who He is and their purpose on this earth. He doesn't introduce Himself as our redeemer, intercessor, or judge. He introduces Himself as a creative.

Creativity is at the heart of our Creator. Just imagine a world with only one type of tree, one type of bird, or one type of fruit. Instead, God filled our planet with stunning variety—inviting us to experience life beyond anything we could have envisioned.

But His magnum opus was humanity—you and me—handcrafted with care, formed in His image, and brought to life by His very breath. I believe that part of being created in His image includes bearing a spark of His creativity.

According to a NASA-led longitudinal study, 98 percent of 1,600 children ages four and five tested at the “creative genius” level. Five years later, that number went down a staggering 68 percent, with only 30 percent of the same group scoring that high. By the time the children reached ages 14 and 15, that number dropped to only 12 percent. When adults were tested, only two percent reached the creative genius mark.⁶⁰

Our environment and education often teach us to fit into systems, to focus and mold our thoughts, unintentionally pushing creativity into a far corner of our mind—where it eventually seems to fade away. Yet some people keep their creative spark alive. Perhaps their parents encouraged it, or maybe it was part of their unique calling. While many let

⁶⁰ Rohini Venkatraman, “You’re 96 Percent Less Creative Than You Were as a Child: Here’s How to Reverse That,” Inc., January 18, 2018. <https://www.inc.com/rohini-venkatraman/4-ways-to-get-back-creativity-you-had-as-a-kid.html>

those corners of their minds become cobwebbed, these individuals brim with ideas, wonder, and innovation.

Creativity isn't just an accessory to the Adventist mission; it's essential. In a world of constant change, with diverse audiences to reach, creative individuals bring an indispensable element of ingenuity. Whether through visual art, music, writing, or technology, they have the unique ability to translate timeless truths into today's language.

Creatives are visionaries, always looking beyond the present to imagine fresh ways of connecting with hearts and minds. A graphic designer doesn't just create eye-catching images; they craft visual narratives that can convey complex spiritual concepts in an instant. A musician doesn't simply compose melodies; they create emotional bridges that can lead listeners to profound spiritual experiences of worship and grace.

Though creatives are often misunderstood, they are always needed. Their minds typically don't operate like those of administrators, causing tension in structured settings—including within the Adventist Church. But each creative is a gift from God, reflecting a part of Him that is often easily forgotten. So the question isn't whether we need creatives—it's how do we, as leaders, guide and nurture them effectively?

Creativity Within a Framework

Within the Adventist Church, as in many organizations, we find a natural tension between the free-flowing nature of creativity and the structured environment administrators often prefer. Neither extreme—absolute chaos nor rigid control—allows creativity to flourish. Instead, creativity grows in an environment that strikes a balance between clear direction and enough freedom to explore new ideas.

A helpful way to understand this is by picturing a multilane highway. We let them know their end destination and give clear guidance (our mission, doctrines, administrative policies), and these act as guardrails to keep everyone safe. Within these lanes, different vehicles (our creatives) can move at varying speeds, shift lanes when needed, and still head

toward the same destination. The key is to recognize that while creatives need structure, they also need room to innovate and adapt.

For instance, when asking a creative team to develop a new youth evangelism program, administrators and department directors might define the target age-group, core message, and available resources. These form the “lanes” of our highway. Within these constraints, creatives are then free to explore various approaches—perhaps a social media campaign, a YouTube series, a series of local events, or even a combination of all of them. The structure provides direction without stifling creativity.

Maintaining this balance often requires leaders to shift from viewing structure and creativity as opposing forces to seeing them as complementary. When administrators provide an environment where creatives have both direction and freedom, our mission moves forward in powerful and unexpected ways.

Seven Ways to Lead Creatives in Mission

Having led creatives both inside and outside the church for more than 15 years, I've learned that leading them well honors the gifts God has given them. Here are seven strategies I've found especially helpful.

1. Provide clarity and vision.

One of the greatest challenges I often see creatives struggle with is ambiguity. Creatives thrive on open-ended exploration, but if a project's overall direction is ambiguous, it can quickly lead to frustration and misaligned efforts. As a leader, one of your most critical tasks is to bring vision and clarity. Think of it as providing a “North Star”—the guiding light that ensures everyone knows where they're headed, without restricting how they get there.

Start by clearly defining project goals. What do you hope to achieve with this project? Whom exactly are you trying to reach? Which key messages do you want to communicate?

Be as specific as possible with these foundational pieces; they act as the guardrails on the highway, helping creatives move forward freely on their own with the rest of the vision. If, for example, you're launching a youth evangelism campaign, begin by laying out its purpose, target demographic, and core message, while leaving the creative decisions—such as design choices, themes, or story angles—in the hands of your team.

Clarity doesn't equate to micromanaging every step of the creative journey. Instead, it's about giving creatives a well-defined canvas on which they can paint. They need to understand the scope, timeline, and overarching goals, but should have latitude to determine the "how." This approach frees them to experiment, innovate, and ultimately produce work that resonates deeply with your audience—while ensuring the final output remains consistent with the project's objectives.

2. Manage chaos and structure without micromanaging.

We've already covered the multilane highway analogy, where the guardrails provide structure while creatives have room to explore different "lanes." Once you've clearly shared your vision and goals, it's time to step back and trust your team to navigate those lanes. They know the destination; your role is to give them the space they need to find their own route.

Early on, your creatives might function on a "single-lane highway," where you're more hands-on. But as they consistently deliver on the vision, give them more freedom—open up more lanes. This progression not only respects their expertise and God-given talents, but also cultivates deeper investment in the project. Leaders often make the mistake of micromanaging under the guise of "ensuring quality," but in reality, excessive oversight puts creativity in a box. Remember, your job is to steer the ship, not row every oar.

When I first started a project in our communication department, I was given clear objectives—and then my leader stepped back. At first, I struggled with this kind of creative freedom; it felt foreign not having someone outline each step for me. I kept returning to

my boss for approval and ideas, but he would simply ask what the problem was and how I thought I might solve it, affirming my instincts along the way. Having that kind of supportive but hands-off leadership opened doors for my professional growth. I began to allow myself to be more creative and threw myself into learning new things so I could give my very best to the project. Ultimately, I grew in both my capacity to lead the project and my confidence in delivering results that aligned with our goals.

Instead of dictating every step, set clear deadlines, outline major milestones, and hold regular check-ins. Encourage your team to self-organize and take ownership of their tasks, fostering greater responsibility and enthusiasm. When people feel the project is truly “theirs” and not just “yours,” they’re more likely to pour their best ideas and energy into it—ultimately leading to more innovative and impactful outcomes.

3. Value creatives beyond their outputs.

Creatives aren’t just production machines—they are people with unique perspectives, life experiences, and spiritual journeys. If we measure them only by their deliverables, we miss the richness they bring to our work and to the mission itself. By taking time to connect on a personal level—learning about their families, challenges, and spiritual lives—we create a culture of trust and belonging that encourages them to use their talents for God’s glory.

A hurricane was barreling toward the island that one of my creative team members was living on. Concerned about his deadlines, he sent me a message, clearly worried I’d be worried about the possibility of delays. My first response was to see if he and his family were safe. I assured him that he was the priority and that work could wait. Over the following days, I checked in not about tasks, but about how he was doing. Once the storm passed, he knew that I cared for him as a person, not just as a producer of content. This recognition fueled a stronger commitment on his part and deepened our mutual respect.

When creatives feel genuinely supported and valued beyond their output, their loyalty, motivation, and sense of calling rise exponentially. We should not invest in them to make

them more productive—we must truly care about them as people. We should pray for them daily and remember that God has entrusted us with not only their gifts but them as His children. Investing in the person behind the work will pay great dividends, both in their lives and ours.

4. Listen to and respect creative ideas.

Innovation often emerges from the unlikeliest places. If your team isn't comfortable sharing out-of-the-box or random ideas, you risk missing out on breakthroughs that could transform your ministry. By cultivating a "safe to share" environment, you give creativity permission to breathe. In our department, we have cultivated a philosophy that in creativity there is no hierarchy. Every idea needs to be heard. Even if an idea sounds far-fetched at first, it may be exactly what your audience needs or what God can use in surprising ways.

A creative once suggested posting text-only content on Facebook, rather than always using images. My initial reaction was hesitation; I believed visuals were essential to catching the eye in a crowded social feed. But his reasoning made sense, and we decided to A/B test text-only posts for a month. Much to my surprise and delight, these posts often received quadruple the engagement. Variables like better visibility in certain algorithms and faster load times worked in our favor, and what started as a long-shot experiment became a regular practice on our Facebook feed.

Encourage your team to put every thought on the table, no matter how unconventional it seems. If an idea shows potential but isn't immediately convincing, try running a small-scale trial or A/B test like we did, rather than dismissing it outright. This low-stakes experimentation can reveal unexpected opportunities for reaching people more effectively.

When you honor and are open to your team's suggestions—no matter how unusual—you not only unlock fresh ideas but allow the Holy Spirit room to move among them. Over time, this collective willingness to try new things fosters a culture of creative confidence. It

signals that everyone's voice has value and encourages people to listen to the Spirit and share what He has put in their hearts and minds. By listening closely, you might discover the next big innovation that propels your mission forward.

5. Balance control with trust.

Leaders often grapple with balancing control and trust in creative settings—especially in a church environment where accountability carries extra weight. Yet holding the reins too tightly can stifle the very innovation you're trying to foster. Trust is the very thing that empowers people to take risks, explore new ideas, and feel genuinely invested in the work they produce.

A practical way to show trust is through delegation. Rather than dictating every detail, let your videographer choose the best shooting locations or give your writer the latitude to shape the tone of a message. Clearly define deadlines and objectives, but allow your creatives the freedom to innovate. When team members sense that their expertise is valued, they'll rise to the occasion with greater creativity and commitment.

Naturally, mistakes will happen in any environment that encourages experimentation—but rather than viewing these missteps as failures, treat them as opportunities for growth. When you provide a safe space for creative risk-taking, you free your team to push boundaries, learn from errors, and refine their craft. The result is a culture of continuous improvement, where each project builds on the last and the collective trust between leaders and creatives grows stronger over time.

6. Invest in mentorship and growth.

Mentorship is one of the most effective ways to nurture creative talent and keep it aligned with the church's broader mission. Yes, pairing experienced creatives with newer team members is part of it, but it also means fostering a culture where everyone is encouraged to grow—spiritually, personally, and professionally. Offering access to online courses,

encouraging and even sponsoring attendance at industry conferences, or holding workshops in-house can all help your team sharpen their skills and deepen their understanding of how their work serves God's kingdom.

I remember spotting great potential in a new creative. She was brimming with ideas, but lacked the confidence and knowledge of the church structure to implement them. After interacting with me for a while, she asked if I would mentor her. I didn't just tell her *what* to do; I explained *why* we did it that way. I would walk her through my decision-making process. With each project, I gave her more ownership as she mastered the guiding principles and mission. Over time, she took charge of major tasks and could lead others as needed, carrying forward the same principles and values that we had as an organization. Seeing her grow into a capable leader was a testament to the power of intentional mentorship.

When people feel you're truly invested in their growth, they're more inclined to invest wholeheartedly in the mission. They develop new skills and fresh perspectives, and their sense of purpose grows. However, it's not a one-sided relationship. We as leaders also grow exponentially as we learn how to truly lead and not just be administrators. Both the mentor and mentee grow in their sense of calling and spiritual purpose, propelling both to serve more passionately.

7. Celebrate wins in meaningful ways.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, we are told to "encourage one another and build each other up" (NIV). Genuine words of affirmation are so important—especially for creatives who pour their hearts into their work. Too often, we assume that good work is simply part of the job and only offer a passing "good job" or a quick high five. But when you highlight specific things someone did well, it shows you truly see and appreciate their effort.

I once sat in a meeting where the leader thanked someone for a particular project, which was a great start. But then, in an attempt not to leave anyone out, they offered generic

praise to everyone else. The impact on the first person was lessened, and the rest of the team also felt underappreciated because it came across as superficial. Instead, find intentional moments of affirmation for each person—share them individually, in real time, rather than lumping everyone together for a one-size-fits-all acknowledgment.

As you learn more about your team, you'll discover how each person prefers to be recognized. Some creatives thrive on public applause, while others may value a private "thank-you" or a personal note. This takes time and intention as a leader to learn about your people, but it allows you to tailor your approach and affirm team members in ways that resonate with them most deeply.

When projects wrap up, remember to celebrate both the big and small wins. Find ways that truly connect with your team members—whether it's a casual team lunch, a quick stand-up applause, or a simple email shout-out. The key is to show up, be involved, and demonstrate that you value their efforts. This builds unity and boosts confidence for the next challenge.

And don't limit the celebration to the final outcome. Recognize the entire journey—every twist of innovation, every collaborative brainstorm, every lesson learned. Maybe that means highlighting a particularly inventive design concept during a meeting or sharing a note from someone positively impacted by the project. Even celebrating smaller milestones along the way can keep spirits high, reinforcing that every step forward is worth acknowledging.

By integrating these seven strategies, you'll foster an environment where creativity flourishes, all while remaining grounded in the Adventist Church's mission. Remember, leading creatives isn't about controlling their every move—it's about inviting them to use their God-given talents in ways that further the gospel and inspire others.

Three Foundational Principles for Leading Creatives

When it comes to leading creatives in the Adventist Church, these seven strategies ultimately rest on three foundational principles: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Popularized by Daniel Pink in his book *Drive*, these three pillars capture the essence of what motivates people—especially those called to use their God-given talents for ministry. By offering freedom within a framework (autonomy), encouraging growth in skill and character (mastery), and consistently connecting each person's gifts to our larger gospel mission (purpose), we set the stage for meaningful, Spirit-led work.

Autonomy

Autonomy in a creative context is about giving people the freedom to innovate, experiment, and make decisions without being micromanaged. As we've discussed, this doesn't mean the absence of structure; rather, it's the space to steer within the guardrails of the church's mission and values. Creatives need clarity about the project's vision, but they also thrive when they can chart their own course in how to bring that vision to life. This principle is grounded in recognizing that each person's gifts and talents come from God and can be trusted when aligned with our shared mission.

A key component of autonomy is ownership. When someone feels they truly "own" a project, they invest more deeply in its success, often going above and beyond what's required. This sense of ownership also fosters a culture of accountability; team members are more likely to take responsibility for their decisions and outcomes when they've had the freedom to make key choices. By allowing latitude in the "how," leaders signal trust in the individual's judgment, creativity, and spiritual discernment. In turn, this trust paves the way for innovative solutions that can uniquely further the gospel—solutions that might never have surfaced under strict top-down control.

Mastery

Mastery speaks to our God-given responsibility to grow in the abilities He has entrusted to us. As leaders, it means creating environments where creatives can refine their talents for the glory of God and the service of others. It's about much more than just technical skills—although workshops, conferences, and online courses can be pivotal. It's also about spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth. When people see that you're committed to their development, they're more likely to embrace challenges, persist through setbacks, and strive for excellence in every aspect of their craft.

Mentorship plays a critical role here. By pairing newer team members with experienced creatives or by offering personal guidance, leaders can accelerate growth and solidify each person's sense of calling. Think of it as stewardship. If God has blessed someone with a gift—writing, design, technology, music—it's our privilege to nurture that gift. Allow them to make mistakes, but also provide the feedback and resources they need to improve. When creatives experience this continual development, their work becomes a form of worship—an ongoing offering of their best skills, honed and polished, back to the One who first inspired them.

Purpose

Purpose is the deepest motivator, and in the Adventist context, it's tied to our understanding of God's calling to each of us—the gospel commission. Creatives who understand their role in the bigger story of redemption are more likely to approach each project with conviction. They're not merely “designing a flyer” or “editing a video”; they're participating in God's work to reach people's hearts. This sense of purpose transforms everyday tasks into sacred responsibilities, fueling a passion that goes beyond any paycheck or affirmation of their talents.

As leaders, it's our responsibility to keep this at the center of our own lives, as well as in our conversations with our teams. We need to share stories of how a post touched someone's

life or how a piece of music sparked deeper worship. Remind your team that every creative endeavor—whether it's a social media post or a church-wide campaign—has the potential to influence someone's faith journey. Help them see that they're a vital part of the body of Christ, working together with pastors, teachers, and lay members to spread the hope of Jesus. When creatives realize the eternal implications of their contributions, the mundane gains new meaning. Their gifts aren't just used to meet deadlines; they're employed to reflect God's love and advance His kingdom in powerful and meaningful ways.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Creativity as Core Component: Creativity is not an accessory but a core component of the Adventist mission, essential for translating timeless truths into contemporary languages.
2. Balancing Structure and Freedom: Effective leadership of creatives requires balancing structure (clear objectives and boundaries) with creative freedom.
3. Clear Vision and Autonomy: Providing clarity and vision while allowing autonomy is crucial for inspiring creatives to produce their best work.
4. Valuing the Whole Person: Recognizing creatives as individuals with unique perspectives and spiritual journeys, beyond their outputs, enhances their dedication and contributions.
5. Fostering a Safe Environment: Creating a space where creatives feel safe to share unconventional ideas promotes innovation and growth.
6. Investment in Growth: Mentorship and ongoing learning opportunities are powerful tools for developing creatives and aligning their work with the church's mission.
7. Motivation Through Purpose: Connecting creatives with the deeper purpose of their work, especially in relation to the church's mission, is a powerful motivator.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. What specific steps can we take to create an environment that balances the need for structure with the freedom required for creative innovation in our various ministries?
2. How can we better identify and nurture creative talent within our church community, especially among youth and young adults, to support our digital ministry efforts?
3. In what ways can we adapt our leadership styles to better support and empower creative individuals, enhancing their sense of purpose and motivation, while still maintaining alignment with our Adventist mission and values?

Chapter 12: Technology in Mission

Richard Stephenson

We have been called to take advantage of every opportunity, evaluating the available tools and technologies to help fulfill our divine mission. We find recorded in Daniel the following: "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). Today, we find ourselves in an era of unprecedented knowledge expansion and unparalleled mobility among peoples. As an Adventist, I do not believe that these conditions today are coincidental or accidental. I believe it is providential that the Lord has called us to take advantage of these advancements in order to advance His kingdom. It is our responsibility, even our duty, to take advantage of these tools that can exponentially create efficiencies in mission.

Jesus' words in the parable of the talents resonate deeply with the tools we have available to us today: "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the Joy of your lord'" (Matthew 25:21). We are called to be faithful stewards of not just the finances of the church but the technological resources God has made available to us. Let's explore a few examples of how we can use these various technological tools and resources to multiply the impact—as God multiplies tithe—to spread the gospel, nurture our church communities, and ultimately bring glory to God.

1. Online Content Management: Building Digital Foundations

Scripture tells us God commanded Habakkuk to make God's message clear and accessible: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2, ESV). With this in mind, we too must ensure that our digital content is well-organized and easily accessible and available.

Content Management Systems (CMS) like our own Adventist Web Engine or third-party solutions such as WordPress, Drupal, or Joomla, serve as our modern-day tablets, allowing us to share God's message clearly—and accessibly.

For deeper spiritual education, Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as the Adventist Learning Community, Moodle, and Canvas provide platforms for online Bible studies and educational courses. These tools enable us to fulfill Jesus' command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20, emphasis supplied).

2. Generative AI: Amplifying Our Reach

Generative AI, if used correctly, can be a tremendous asset in ministry. By generating text, graphics, audio, and video—as well as topics for articles, sermons, and study materials—we can produce more content faster that reaches more people with the three angels' messages. However, as we have discussed before, we must remember that AI is a tool, not a replacement for the Holy Spirit's guidance—an assistant, but certainly not the Conductor!

Data analysis through AI can provide insights into membership data, attendance patterns, and community needs, helping us to "shepherd the flock of God" more effectively (1 Peter 5:2). GenAI tools such as Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini all have their unique place in content production and idea generation. If you have not yet begun to use GenAI, then start today!

3. Administrative Systems: Stewarding Resources Wisely

"So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Church Management Software (ChMS) such as our own ACMS (Adventist Church Management System), ASAS (Adventist Secretariat Management System), 7me, and VividFaith, as well as third-party products like Planning Center, Elvanto, and Breeze, help us to steward our resources wisely. These tools assist in planning, organizing, and executing church activities, allowing us to do all things "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Financial management tools such as SunPlus, ACMS Treasury, 7me, *APS.net*, and the North American Division's *AASl.net*, as well as third-party tools such as QuickBooks and Aplos, aid in handling church finances responsibly, reflecting the principle that "whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much" (Luke 16:10, NIV).

Membership databases like ACMS, eAdventist, and third-party products like FellowshipOne and Church Community Builder help us care for and know our flock, echoing Jesus' words: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" (John 10:14).

4. Communication and Collaboration Tools: Uniting the Body of Christ

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet enable virtual Bible studies and prayer meetings, encouraging "not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another," even when physically apart (Hebrews 10:25, NIV).

Team collaboration tools such as Slack and Microsoft Teams facilitate coordination among church staff and volunteers, embodying the principle that "two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor" (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

Mass communication tools like Brevo, Mailchimp, and Constant Contact help spread announcements and newsletters, fulfilling in the digital age the call to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

5. Mobile Applications: The Gospel in Your Pocket

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Church-specific apps for scheduling, event information, and resources allow members to carry both the teachings of God's Word and the fellowship of the church community with them wherever they go—right in their pockets. 7me is one excellent example of a local church mobile app. Bible study apps with Adventist-specific content help fulfill the command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

What's more, apps for prayer requests and community support, such as 7me, can enable us to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2), fostering a spirit of unity and support within both our physical and online church communities.

6. Social Media and Digital Outreach: Fishing in Digital Waters

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Threads, and YouTube allow us to cast our nets wide, sharing content and engaging with a broad community. Social media management tools such as Brandwatch (merged with Falcon.io), Hootsuite, and Buffer help us to coordinate digital outreach efforts, ensuring we "walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

7. Live Streaming and Podcasting: Proclaiming From Digital Rooftops

Live streaming services like our own Jetstream, as well as commercial services such as YouTube, Vimeo, OBS, and Wirecast, allow us to broadcast our services to a global audience, while podcast hosting platforms such as Anchor and Libsyn enable us to share sermons and discussions far and wide. Most important in today's age of 24/7 streaming services, our podcasts too are "on demand" so that anyone can listen anytime, anywhere. These tools help us fulfill the command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

8. Virtual and Augmented Reality: Immersive Spiritual Experiences

New technologies offer the possibility of virtual tours of biblical sites or Adventist historical locations—bringing unseen realities to life. Augmented reality apps can allow interactive Bible study experiences that deepen our understanding of Scripture. These technologies can help the subject matter come alive—where we can interact and where learning is a byproduct of our experience.

9. Data Analytics and Visualization: Discerning the Signs of the Times

"From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders . . . All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take" (1 Chronicles 12:32, NLT).

Tools like Google Analytics and Tableau help us to understand website traffic and engagement and predictive analytics can aid in mission planning and resource allocation. These insights can help us to be like the men of Issachar, understanding the digital "signs of the times" and discerning the best course for our ministry, while we continue to rely on the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

10. Cybersecurity and Privacy Tools: Guarding the Flock

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Web Application Firewalls (WAFs), antivirus programs, encryption software, and identity management systems help protect sensitive church data and provide secure access to church resources. These highly technical tools help us fulfill our duty to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers" in the digital age (1 Peter 5:2). Care must be taken to perform our due diligence in securing not only the church's data but also the platforms that the church relies on.

11. Cloud Computing and Storage: Preserving Our Digital Heritage

Services like our own Adventist.Cloud as well as commercial alternatives such as Microsoft Azure and Office 365 enable collaborative document creation and storage, while cloud backup solutions help preserve important church records. These tools allow us to steward our digital resources wisely, remembering that "each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10, NIV).

12. Online Giving and Fundraising Platforms: Digital Tithes and Offerings

"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Internal online giving platforms like AdventistGiving and 7me as well as third-party solutions such as Tithe.ly, Pushpay, and custom solutions for online tithes and offerings make it easier for members to give cheerfully and consistently. Crowdfunding platforms for specific mission projects or initiatives can help us "sow bountifully" in our digital fields (2 Corinthians 9:6).

13. Digital Bible Study Tools: Diving Deeper Into God's Word

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Bible software like Logos or Accordance—integrated with Adventist resources, along with online concordances and study guides specifically tailored to Adventist teachings—helps us explore God's Word more deeply. These tools assist us in fulfilling the command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16).

As we harness these technological tools for God's mission, let us remember they are a means to an end, not the end itself. Our ultimate goal remains unchanged: to glorify God and lead people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Too often the tools can become a distraction, or we get caught up in the "cutting-edge" rat race of technology. The moment these tools become as important as the mission, it's time to abandon the tool and reorient our priorities!

In all our digital endeavors, may we keep in mind the words of the psalmist: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" (Psalm 115:1, ESV). Let us use technology wisely and prayerfully, always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Divine Providence in Technology: The rapid technological advancement of our era is seen as providential, providing tools to further God's kingdom.
2. Stewardship of Digital Resources: We are called to be faithful stewards of technological resources, using them to multiply our impact in spreading the gospel.
3. Balancing Technology and Spirituality: While embracing technology, it's crucial to remember that these are tools, not replacements for the Holy Spirit's guidance.
4. Comprehensive Digital Strategy: A holistic approach to technology in ministry includes content management, AI, administrative systems, communication tools, mobile apps, and social media outreach.
5. Data-Driven Ministry: Analytics and visualization tools can help leaders understand engagement and plan missions more effectively, akin to the men of Issachar understanding the signs of the times.
6. Digital Security as Pastoral Care: Cybersecurity and privacy tools are essential for protecting the digital "flock" and sensitive church data.
7. Technology as Means, Not End: The ultimate goal remains unchanged—to glorify God and lead people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, not to chase cutting-edge technology for its own sake.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively integrate these various technological tools into our ministry while ensuring they enhance rather than detract from our core spiritual mission?
2. What strategies can we implement to train and equip our church leaders and members in using these technologies effectively, especially considering the diverse technological literacy within our congregations?

3. How can we leverage data analytics and AI in our ministry efforts while maintaining the personal, Spirit-led approach that is central to our faith and mission?

SECTION 3: DIGITAL CONNECTION

Our ability to forge meaningful digital relationships and guide them toward local church communities has become crucial to our mission as a remnant church. This section explores the strategies and systems needed to transform online interactions into lasting spiritual connections. Digital connection encompasses more than just having an online presence—it requires sophisticated search engine optimization to ensure that our message is findable, compelling content that resonates with users, strategic marketing to reach those searching for truth, and effective engagement practices to nurture digital relationships. Most importantly, it demands a hybrid approach that successfully bridges the digital and physical realms of ministry.

The chapters that follow examine each of these elements in detail. We begin by analyzing our current search engine performance and outlining strategies to improve our visibility in an increasingly crowded digital landscape. We then explore the art of creating content that attracts attention while speaking to the deepest needs of our audience. The section continues with insights into digital marketing approaches that align with our mission and values, followed by practical guidance on engaging with online audiences in ways that build genuine relationships. Finally, we examine the hybrid evangelism model that has shown remarkable success in connecting digital seekers with local church communities.

Throughout these chapters, we emphasize that digital connection must always serve our core mission of preparing people for Christ's return. While we embrace modern tools and techniques, our focus remains on leading people to Jesus and integrating them into communities of faith where they can grow spiritually and participate in the mission. As we navigate this digital frontier, we must remember that technology is not an end in itself, but a means to fulfill our prophetic calling to reach every nation, tribe, language, and people with the eternal gospel.

Chapter 13: Search Engine Optimization

Sam Neves

I still remember the moment I realized our church’s digital presence had far more potential than we ever imagined. It was back in 2008, during my time as pastor at the Wimbledon International Seventh-day Adventist Church in London. My team and I had launched several ambitious outreach initiatives—community events, evangelistic series, and all kinds of local projects. We were full of enthusiasm, but we began noticing diminishing returns, largely because advertising methods such as printed flyers and bus ads had become too costly, and knocking on doors in a bustling city felt increasingly ineffective. At the same time, something else caught my attention: people were actively searching the internet for answers to spiritual questions. There were major opportunities online that were easily overlooked if we focused on traditional methods alone.

This realization showed me that our church could seize those moments of sincere searching and direct people to a living, biblical faith. Yet that would require a better understanding of how search engines connect people to content. I did not start with the term “SEO” in mind—it was more about making sure we were present in that critical moment when someone typed a query like “What happens after we die?” or “What does the Bible say about prophecy?” By learning to appear in those searches, we could invite people into a personal exploration of the Adventist message.

Over the years, as I have studied and practiced the basics of digital communication, I have seen the enormous potential of SEO (Search Engine Optimization). While it has evolved with time—often in complicated ways—its main purpose remains the same: help people find the right content when their hearts are open to new truths. There is nothing superficial about this. We are not talking about “gaming the system” or putting fancy keywords into thin, meaningless pages. We are talking about a genuine invitation: if someone hungers for biblical hope, they should encounter a path that leads them to us and eventually to Jesus.

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the history of SEO, why it matters, and how artificial intelligence has changed the way we approach it. I will also explore video optimization—especially on YouTube—as another avenue to touch the hearts of seekers. Finally, I want to reflect on our flagship site, adventist.org, and the dream we share for its future: a comprehensive, global, and mission-driven website for everyone who is searching for the Adventist message.

A Brief History

The growth of the internet has been a story of constant change. In the early days, much of what people called SEO was a set of crude tactics aimed at tricking search engines. Sites were stuffed with keywords and cloaked content so that the same words appeared repetitively in the background or in hidden text. Because search engine algorithms were basic, they could be easily manipulated, and low-quality pages often ranked well. As search engines progressed—especially with Google’s rise—they started considering user satisfaction more than anything else.

By the early 2010s, Google began releasing algorithm updates designed to fight spam and reward better content. Some of these updates, called Panda and Penguin, penalized sites that used manipulative link-building or carried large volumes of thin content. This forced most site owners to rethink their strategies: scattering keywords or buying links would no longer carry sites to the top. Instead, there was a new focus on serving people’s needs and producing genuinely engaging, helpful, and well-structured pages. The early 2010s are often seen as the turning point when “content is king” became a popular motto.

In the years that followed, many businesses tried to fill the web with dozens of blog posts every week, hoping that this avalanche of content would lead to high rankings. But the internet became so saturated that it was not enough to publish endless articles on popular religious or health topics. Only those who aimed for excellence, depth, and user-friendly experiences actually rose in the results. Search engines began interpreting long,

conversational queries and responding not just to exact keywords but also to user intent. The emphasis was on meaning and relevance, not mere repetition of a few terms.

Today, we have reached a point where artificial intelligence shapes search results in ways we never imagined just a decade ago. Google uses RankBrain—an AI component that helps interpret complex queries—and is testing even more advanced AI integrations. Microsoft's Bing is using AI-based chat. This approach tries to synthesize answers without requiring users to click anywhere. We now talk about “zero-click” results. It means content creators must be more aware than ever that competition for visibility is fierce and that search engines focus on perceived authority, clarity, and trustworthiness.

The question we must ask is whether the Adventist Church will keep pace with these changes. When someone looks for an answer about the Sabbath, prophecy, the Second Coming, or practical spiritual needs, we want them to find authoritative, balanced, pastoral content that leads them toward a deeper encounter with Christ. Remaining invisible online is no longer acceptable, and continuing outdated methods only makes us lag further behind.

The Foundational Principles of SEO

At its core, search engine optimization comes down to one principle: aligning content with the ways people search. After extensive reading, working alongside specialists, and running many tests, I have found that three questions summarize whether we succeed or fail. The first question is whether people click on our result when it appears on a search engine page. If our page has an unattractive title, or if the snippet under our title is poorly written, people will ignore us. The second question is whether they stay on the page and engage with it to the end. This depends on whether our content genuinely speaks to what they searched for. If the content is superficial or fails to address the question, they will leave. The third question is whether they explore more of our site afterward. If we structure our site well and reference related articles or call them to deeper engagement, they continue.

This signals to the search engine that the site offers valuable information for similar queries in the future.

I have realized that success in those three steps—attracting the click, sustaining interest, and inspiring deeper exploration—depends on several basic elements. Good content is always essential, whether it is text, audio, or video, and it must be relevant to people’s real questions or struggles. If we say we want to answer “What does the Bible say about the state of the dead?” then that page must answer it thoroughly, in straightforward language, and with a structure that’s easy to follow.

I have also learned how important it is to provide meaningful internal links. If someone is reading about the state of the dead and we have a page on biblical eschatology or a section about how Adventists interpret the resurrection, we should connect these pages seamlessly. That way, if they finish reading one article, they can continue to learn more. This pattern of moving from one page to another is beneficial to the user, and it leaves a strong positive impression on the search engines because they measure user engagement.

We cannot forget the technical side of things either. A site with broken links, pages that load slowly, or layouts that confuse visitors will always underperform. *Adventist.org*, for instance, has gone through multiple iterations to improve loading speed, navigation, and mobile readiness, especially as search engines like Google penalize sites that are not optimized for phones or tablets.

But the most important lesson for us, particularly in a church that has historically been fragmented in its digital approach, is that fragmentation hurts. If each of our church ministries, media centers, or conferences uses a separate website to address nearly identical topics, we dilute our authority. Unifying under a single domain—*adventist.org*—gives us a single, authoritative voice that represents us thoroughly. Rather than scattering content in dozens of corners, we can become a powerhouse of biblical resources, letting visitors find everything they need in one place.

Product SEO as the Next Frontier

Historically, we have tended to think of SEO as primarily “keyword research” and “content marketing,” where we generate articles around popular topics. Many companies and ministries followed that path. But a newer approach, known as Product SEO, expands the vision by suggesting we treat our website more like a product. Instead of asking “Which keywords are trending?” we ask “What do people genuinely need, and how do we solve those needs with pages, tools, and features that are easy to find?”

This thinking drives us to consider what service or “product” our site offers to real people. If someone types “I’m grieving after losing a loved one,” do we provide a resource that shows true empathy and then leads them toward a short pastoral chat? If someone wants a deep Bible study about prophecy, do we have an integrated pathway that not only delivers lessons but lets them connect with a mentor? Treating the site like a product means we develop it to solve concrete user needs, and then we apply SEO fundamentals to ensure it’s found.

What sets Product SEO apart is the constant iteration. We remain attuned to user feedback and data, adjusting content or introducing new features as we learn more. And we collaborate across teams. In our church context, that might involve bringing together pastors, graphic designers, IT engineers, and theological experts all at the planning table. We think through the entire user journey from the moment they search for a spiritual question, land on our page, read or watch what we offer, respond to an invitation to talk with someone, and ultimately become a disciple who connects with a local church. Our website becomes a living, evolving ministry space, not just a static “article repository.”

The AI-driven world of today demands that we do more than feed a search engine. People rely on quick solutions and are bombarded with shallow content. Unless we create something unique and deeply helpful, we will remain lost in the crowd. By adopting a Product SEO mindset, we focus less on juggling keywords and more on building meaningful, high-quality experiences that cannot be easily replicated. A generic piece of

text about faith is easy to duplicate. A well-designed system that leads a grieving person from confusion to comfort, with real human support, is not. That is what makes Product SEO so attractive for mission.

Video SEO

Many of us consider YouTube a platform for occasional sermons or youth group highlight reels, but it is also one of the largest search engines in the world. People type queries into YouTube, often relating to biblical or theological questions. I have personally watched entire discussions unfold in YouTube's comment sections, where the creator becomes a spiritual mentor simply by responding diligently to each user. If we properly use YouTube to share our message, it can become a major gateway for global Adventist evangelism.

A very useful framework for thinking about YouTube optimization involves three questions. The first is whether people will click on our video when they see the thumbnail and title. This is the same principle as standing out on a search results page, except we deal with visuals: does the thumbnail convey the core message of the video, and does the title stir curiosity or promise an answer? The second question is whether viewers will stay to watch for a significant amount of time, which is crucial because YouTube rewards "watch time" as a strong measure of relevance. If we create a long, unedited sermon without any variation in visuals, many will give up quickly, especially if the introduction does not grip them. Engaging presentation and good editing help. The third question is whether viewers continue to watch more content on our channel. If a user finishes a video and moves on to related content we produced, YouTube recognizes that we are offering real value and may promote our channel more widely.

I have learned that much like web SEO, video SEO also depends on coherence and clarity. A strong opening sets the tone. If you promise biblical explanations, deliver them. If you invite watchers to continue exploring, make it easy for them to do so, perhaps by embedding links to relevant series or playlists that delve deeper into the same subject. Over time, the accumulation of watch time and the growth of a consistent audience signal

to YouTube that you are a credible source. For the Adventist Church, this can turn YouTube from a random collection of scattered videos into a focused channel that truly engages spiritual seekers.

Adventist.org: Our Digital Home

In many ways, the story of adventist.org reflects the broader changes in how we approach the digital world. This site began as an institutional portal that mainly listed departmental structures, administrative statements, and some basic information about beliefs. It never quite aimed at capturing people's felt needs or spiritual questions. For a long time, when someone typed "Seventh-day Adventist" into Google, they might find information about us, but they would also see a host of antagonistic websites challenging our doctrines. We did not truly occupy the digital space in a purposeful way.

Starting in 2019, the General Conference Communication Department joined forces with the Center for Online Evangelism to give adventist.org a major overhaul. We decided to move the administrative content onto gc.adventist.org, freeing the main site to focus on presenting the Adventist faith, covering fundamental beliefs and the wide range of doctrines that define our movement. We also implemented a careful editorial workflow that combined theological expertise, SEO research, subject matter interviews, and repeated rounds of editing and reviewing. Everything was aimed at producing a library of trustworthy and visitor-friendly material. We wanted to protect the Adventist reputation and ensure that search engines would see us as the primary authority on who Adventists are.

The results were striking. Not too long ago, nearly half of the top page of Google results in English-speaking countries would lead to hostile or misleading sites that portrayed Adventists in a distorted light. After years of careful focus on content, that number plummeted to around one percent. Now anyone wanting to learn the facts can discover official resources quickly, which is an enormous victory for truth and transparency. However, in the midst of that success, we also recognized a gap. We had improved our

informational presence, but had not fully transformed visitors into active participants who study, pray, and eventually join local Adventist communities. That realization laid the groundwork for the next phase of development.

Where We Are Going: One Missional Website for the World

The plan to build “One Missional Website for the World” arises from a clear need for unity. If you look at organizations like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with churchofjesuschrist.org, Jehovah’s Witnesses with jw.org, or even the Vatican with vatican.va, it becomes clear that a single, consolidated domain yields massive advantages. Instead of scattering the church’s official voice across hundreds of fragmented pages, they pull everything into a unified site. This boosts search engine authority, makes the experience more consistent for users, and ensures that the official perspective becomes the first search result people see.

I want adventist.org to do the same. Rather than multiple, loosely connected sites that each try to rank for similar topics, imagine a global platform where local divisions simply localize or translate core materials and also add region-specific resources when needed. Instead of each union or conference feeling pressured to maintain a stand-alone site with minimal reach, everyone would feed into the same domain. Our presence in many languages would expand, and the cumulative authority of so many resources would position adventist.org as an unmissable reference for all spiritual searches related to our distinctive beliefs.

We talk about reaching every nation, tribe, and language, yet we often forget that the “nations” are now also online, searching on Google, asking YouTube questions, or exploring voice assistants on their phones. By consolidating, we can respond more effectively. We can guide people to resources about Sabbath, prophecy, or health, and then channel them to local communities for fellowship. This approach raises a big question about how to handle local data or personal information. Each region typically has its own privacy laws and systems for managing spiritual interests. The vision does not discard local Customer

Relationship Management Systems (CRMs). Instead, it merely uses adventist.org as the user-facing entry point, which then hands off data to whichever local entity is equipped to continue the relationship.

Beyond that technical detail, there is a pastoral motive. Adventist.org should not only feature articles about fundamental beliefs, but also help people find a church to attend, request prayer, or even talk to someone about the spiritual or emotional challenges they face. The site becomes a kind of digital front door, followed by a series of rooms. We can talk about prophecy in one room, host short devotionals in another, and offer a quiet prayer corner in yet another.

By making adventist.org that global home, we also create brand consistency. People encounter the same visual identity and user-friendly navigation. Their trust grows when they realize it is truly the church's official site and not just a small local project. In a sense, it mirrors the development of our corporate structure in the nineteenth century, when local mission outposts merged under broader conferences for efficiency and unity. This time, though, the platform is digital.

Building a Global Digital Care Ecosystem

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that merely publishing articles about the 28 fundamental beliefs or about biblical doctrine does not mean people will experience pastoral care. If we want to transform visitors into disciples, we need a system that addresses their personal struggles and questions and that ultimately guides them toward real connections with others. This is where a global digital care ecosystem enters the picture.

At the heart of this approach is a feature that I see as essential: pastoral or spiritual care available to anyone who arrives at adventist.org. Someone grieving the loss of a loved one might click on an article discussing hope beyond death, read some inspiring words, and then see a prompt asking if they would like to pray with someone. We could offer a simple

chat feature that connects them to a trained volunteer or pastor from their region. That volunteer would not only pray but also invite them to a structured spiritual care plan, where daily Scripture readings or short devotionals become part of the healing journey. In North America, Adventist Information Ministries (AIM) has already experimented with similar approaches and proven it can work. Other divisions could replicate the model by integrating their own CRMs to store user data locally.

In parallel, we can create a “Bible Mentor” system that connects those seeking biblical knowledge to existing Bible schools like It Is Written or Voice of Prophecy. Instead of duplicating courses, we embed or refer them seamlessly, yet within the common user experience of adventist.org. People might explore a short, three-part introduction to basic Adventist beliefs, and if they want more, they can sign up for a 20-lesson series from a recognized ministry. The important thing is that each user’s journey feels continuous and consistent, not a disjointed handoff from one site to another with different branding and complicated sign-ins.

This digital care ecosystem, powered by a unified domain, moves us well beyond static articles and sermons. It becomes a platform that users can visit regularly for a period of weeks or months as they grow in faith. They might track their progress, ask questions, and even schedule a time to meet local Adventist members in person. I am convinced that, especially in our AI-driven world, such an interactive and relational approach is the only way to stand out. Thousands of AI-generated articles will flood the web, but we can offer something more real. We can give people human contact, relevant spiritual insights, and the chance to share their journey with a loving community.

The Big Picture and the Next Steps

The dream of a consolidated, globally recognized platform can seem huge, but it can be achieved in manageable phases. In the short term, we can refine the existing content on adventist.org to ensure it is up-to-date, theologically accurate, and user friendly. We can

begin testing a few features like prayer chat or a “Talk to Someone” button on pages related to grief or personal crisis so we can measure the response.

From there, we can introduce more languages. We can partner with major divisions to translate core materials. We might do small pilots, see how local fields respond, and then expand the system. We can similarly integrate Bible study schools, working out issues of brand consistency and user handoff, ensuring that the transition from adventist.org to any study portal is not jarring. Meanwhile, we continue producing or refining videos for YouTube, applying the principles that help people find and engage with them.

Looking beyond one or two years, we can envision a fully developed pastoral care system in each territory. We can imagine a day when each local union or conference has a structured way of receiving digital interest information from adventist.org, enabling them to maintain the personal connections that digital seekers crave. At that point, the site becomes a fully realized spiritual ecosystem, hosting thousands of pages of content across multiple languages, each page guiding visitors toward further engagement, deeper study, and personal relationships.

Naturally, challenges will arise. Merging departmental websites and subdomains into a single site requires organizational humility and cooperation. Balancing budgets for content creation, translations, and platform development is a continuing struggle. There might also be concerns from those who feel they will lose autonomy in their local online presence. Yet I believe the cost of staying fragmented is far greater. With so many voices competing for attention, we can no longer afford to speak in scattered tones. A single, clear, global voice better represents who we are: a united movement with one mission and one message.

Serving the World Through Search

Whenever I contemplate the biblical mandate to preach the everlasting gospel “to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Revelation 14:6, NIV), I think of how that urgency applies equally to digital spaces. We used to imagine that going to every nation meant

sending people with Bibles and tracts, and we still believe in personal contact. But in our generation, nations and tribes also gather in digital environments. They communicate on social media, watch sermons on YouTube, and explore their curiosity on Google or Bing. We cannot remain absent from those places if we hope to honor our prophetic calling.

SEO is not a marketing trick, and neither is YouTube optimization. It is simply the process of removing unnecessary barriers so that people who long for truth will not miss the chance to discover it in their moment of searching. Our best chance is to harness these digital channels and offer content that addresses real human needs, invites deeper inquiry, and provides authentic human connection. That is not a small task, and it may require more investment, collaboration, and innovation than we expect. But it is work that deeply aligns with the essence of the Adventist movement.

I often picture someone alone at a kitchen table late at night, typing in a question about the meaning of suffering or the interpretation of a prophecy. That moment of curiosity can blossom into a life-changing journey if we have prepared our site, created empathetic content, and put in place a mechanism to follow up personally. Failing to prepare means we leave that person to wander the digital wilderness, encountering confusion, half-truths, or antagonistic narratives that distort God's character and our message.

For those of us in leadership—whether at local church, conference, union, or division level—I plead that we take these possibilities seriously. We have an opportunity to unify around adventist.org as our global “home base,” localize it for every language possible, and create the kind of spiritual experiences that draw seekers in. We have the technologies, the talented creative minds, and the pastors who understand how to nurture people's souls. Bringing them together in a single digital mission can become one of the most powerful evangelistic strategies of this century.

I pray that we embrace this call, recognizing that behind every search query there is a person with a story, a need, and a heart longing for hope. By taking SEO seriously, cultivating a presence on YouTube, and building a global pastoral care and Bible study

portal, we align ourselves with God's intention to reach humanity where they are. May we commit ourselves to this effort, believing that the Holy Spirit continues to guide those who act on faith, unity, and love. If we do our part, God will undoubtedly open doors that we never saw coming and lead countless souls into the light of His truth.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Digital Presence as Mission Field: The internet is the new “marketplace” where people seek answers to life’s biggest questions. A unified digital strategy helps us share Christ’s message where many first go looking—online.
2. Centralized Digital Strategy and “One Missional Website”: Adventist.org stands as our single, authoritative platform. By consolidating content, languages, and user engagement tools here, we concentrate our online influence. Though the General Conference (GC) and North American Division (NAD) partnership currently allows for spiritual care through Adventist Information Ministries (AIM) primarily in North America, the goal is to expand globally, ensuring consistent, high-quality evangelistic resources worldwide.
3. SEO as Evangelism Tool: Search Engine Optimization is not just a technical exercise but a ministry opportunity—every improved ranking can connect a truth seeker with the Adventist message, guiding them from interest to involvement.
4. Content Quality and Authority: Rigorous editorial processes and theological reviews on adventist.org ensure our content is both biblically sound and reader-friendly. This fosters trust and credibility, vital for meaningful spiritual engagement.
5. Reputation Management: Consolidating high-quality material on one domain has significantly reduced antagonistic websites from dominating search results for Adventist terms. A single, central platform bolsters our ability to present the church’s true beliefs and identity.

6. User Experience Focus: Ensuring intuitive navigation, compelling design, and practical features (like finding a local church) helps visitors transition from casual browsing to genuine spiritual exploration. Centralizing on adventist.org strengthens these user pathways.
7. Continuous Adaptation: Regular performance checks and content updates keep adventist.org relevant, adaptable, and effective. In a fast-paced digital world, ongoing refinement is essential to sustain our evangelistic momentum.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we unite every administrative level globally behind adventist.org so we minimize fragmentation and maximize our online presence for mission?
2. What strategies can we implement to help online visitors progress from merely receiving information to forming deeper spiritual connections, including meaningful interaction with local or digital faith communities?
3. How do we replicate the current NAD-based AIM model and the success of adventist.org across diverse languages and regions to ensure a robust, unified global digital presence for the Adventist Church?

Chapter 14: Content Development

Alyssa Truman

Over the past two decades, content creation has undergone many cycles of transformation due to the rapid pace of technological innovation and the ever-changing shift in user behaviors. For Adventist content creators, understanding this journey is important. It helps us see where we have come from and how we got where we are today while also helping us recognize the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

I remember in the early 2000s when blogging emerged as a primary avenue for self-expression, giving anyone with internet access a chance to share their ideas with the world. Suddenly, everyday people—students, parents, professionals—could share their thoughts and feelings with the entire world. As they developed their online presence, opportunities came to earn income through advertising or sponsorships. This era celebrated personal storytelling, as bloggers took the time to reflect, research, and write about what mattered to them.

The late 2000s and early 2010s marked a major shift when social media platforms began to dominate. I was on MySpace early and remember telling my husband that Facebook would never be bigger than MySpace. I clearly was wrong in that regard. This shift to social media meant that, suddenly, we could connect with people in real time, share our thoughts and pictures, and get curated feeds of the people and brands that we wanted to follow without having to remember website addresses.

Instagram's launch in 2010 opened the door to a new kind of visual storytelling, challenging creators to adapt their strategies and be more spontaneous. The long-form blog posts still had their place, but many creators found themselves drawn to social media's instant feedback and the allure of broad audience reach. Captions became shorter, images became more polished, and the quest to stand out in a crowded digital space intensified.

This era also gave rise to a new role in the online ecosystem: the influencer. While blogging often felt like an intimate conversation, influencers embraced the art of “visibility labor,” carefully cultivating public personas to engage followers and work with brands.⁶¹ The personal brand became the focal point, blending authenticity with strategy. As platforms rolled out new features—like Instagram Stories—content creators were pushed to diversify their approach and stay active across multiple channels to maintain their visibility.

Alongside this expansion came the increased reliance on algorithms to shape what users see. For better or for worse, creators had to adapt not only their content but also the timing and frequency of their posts in hopes of staying in their audience’s feed. It became clear that a robust presence on social media was no longer a casual choice; it was an essential part of connecting with people meaningfully.

Looking ahead, there’s no doubt the landscape will continue to evolve. The rise of short-form video (like TikTok) and growing e-commerce integration into social platforms suggests that staying flexible and open-minded is necessary. For Adventist creators, this adaptability goes hand in hand with our unique calling to share messages of hope and faith in a constantly shifting digital arena. By understanding where we’ve been, we can be better prepared for where we’re going.

Adventist Content

So, how does this impact us as leaders and as a church? As a church, we have struggled with utilizing these digital platforms and have been slow to embrace them to communicate the truth we have to the world. We often viewed them as tools to communicate internally, neglecting to realize the incredible reach and evangelistic nature they have.

⁶¹ Crystal Abidin, “Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers’ fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram.” *Media International Australia* 161(1), 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X16665177>

As a church, we must stop preaching to the choir. We must recognize that while our weekly bulletin is important for internal communication, our online platforms act much more like a billboard on the (internet) highway. If we talk to only ourselves, we'll miss countless people searching for spiritual truth or community.

As one of the strategists for digital channels of the General Conference, I noticed we struggled with this as well. We tested many things and often wanted to come up with a broad approach we could use as we created content, but despite the best of intentions, we often ended up with narrow categories that didn't quite capture the breadth of what we needed to share. This was easier in many ways, as it gave our creatives very narrow lanes where they knew how to operate.

In the summer of 2023, I decided to spend time talking with young adults, pastors, and church members. I spent a lot of time in prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance on how we could make our digital presence more impactful. Through those conversations and prayer times, it became clear that every piece of content we produce should help people know one of three big-picture ideas: knowing God, knowing the Bible, and knowing the church.

Knowing God

"Knowing God" isn't just about head knowledge of who God is; it's about nurturing a real, daily relationship with Him. This is where we share content on prayer, Bible study, fasting, and even the importance of community with fellow believers. When we point people toward God's character—His love, grace, mercy, and justice—we're helping them see how He reveals Himself in everyday life. Many in our audience have never encountered God on a personal level, so our posts should be relatable and full of hope, encouraging that first step into faith.

We can encourage engagement by including calls to action that prompt prayer or personal reflection. Incorporating Bible verses that highlight aspects of God's nature to deepen understanding would also fall in this category.

Content might include:

YouTube Video or Website Page

- **Video Title:** “How to Hear God’s Voice: Three Practical Tips”
- **Content:** A short talk (5–7 minutes) or a page where you share how to discern God’s voice through Scripture, prayer, and community counsel. Include personal experiences.

TikTok or Instagram Reel

- **Concept:** A quick, 60-second video with you talking about one attribute of God (e.g., “God is merciful because . . .”) or sharing a short testimony of answered prayer.
- **Call to Action:** “Let us know in the comments how you’ve seen God’s mercy in your life.”

X (Twitter) or Threads

- **Post:** “A quick reminder: God’s grace isn’t earned—it’s freely given. Need to talk to someone? Send us a DM and let us pray for you.”
- **Visual:** Have Ephesians 2:8, 9 written out with a nice background.

Knowing the Bible

In many parts of the world, biblical literacy is at an all-time low. A 2021 study showed that in the United States, only 11 percent of people read the Bible daily.⁶² We often assume that those coming to our pages know their Bibles as well as the pastor in the pulpit, but this is simply not true. We must create content that introduces people to the Word of God and

⁶²Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299433/bible-readership-in-the-usa/#:~:text=A%20survey%20from%202021%20found,to%2029%20percent%20of%20respondents>

helps familiarize them with the stories and truth found in its pages. At the same time, we know the Bible has layers of depth; we can't only offer "milk" for those who are new to faith but must also offer "meat" for those ready to go deeper (see 1 Corinthians 3:2). Our content must meet people where they are—curious newcomers, returning believers, or seasoned students—and help them grow steadily in their understanding.

Content might include:

Facebook or Instagram Story

- **Caption:** "New to Scripture? Start here! We're launching a 7-day reading plan to help you explore the life of Jesus. Download the plan now. [Link]"
- **Visual:** A simple graphic with "7-Day Reading Plan" front and center.

YouTube

- **Video Series:**
 - Where to Start If You're Brand-New to the Bible
 - Understanding Parables in the New Testament
 - Old Testament Prophets 101
 - Deeper Doctrinal Studies (like the Sabbath, the Second Coming, etc.)
- **Call to Action:** Subscribe and share questions in the comments for future episodes.

TikTok or Instagram Reels

- **Concept:** Quick "Bible FAQ" clips, such as: "Ever wonder why there are four Gospels? Here's a 30-second explanation!"

- **Call to Action:** “Got more questions? Let us know, and we’ll feature them in our next video.”

Knowing the Church

“Knowing the church” is about more than just listing contact information or talking about upcoming potlucks, for instance, at a local level. It’s about introducing people to who we are as a local and global community, sharing our stories, and inviting them to be part of something bigger than themselves. Whether highlighting local outreach events or showcasing global ministries, this content should help people see that Adventists strive to reflect Christ’s love in practical ways.

Content might include:

Facebook

- **Caption:** “We love being a part of a global church family. We were inspired by this story of our brothers and sisters in Peru who found a way to connect meaningfully with the deaf community in their area. [Link to ANN article]”
- **Visual:** A group photo from a previous volunteer event.

TikTok or Instagram Reel

- **Concept:** A fun behind-the-scenes mini-tour of your church, youth group meeting, or Sabbath School.
- **Call to Action:** “Curious about what we do on Sabbath mornings? Come see for yourself or join us online at [Link].”

X (Twitter) or Threads

- **Tweet:** “Did you know there are more Adventist congregations worldwide than McDonald’s, Starbucks, and 7-Eleven stores combined? #AdventistChurch”

- **Link:** Direct to an adventist.org overview page on facts about the church.

These three pillars—knowing God, knowing the Bible, and knowing the church—have become the cornerstone of our Adventist digital strategy. They serve as a framework to ensure our content is meaningful, purposeful, and aligned with our broader mission. Whether we’re posting a simple devotional on Instagram or creating an in-depth Bible study series on YouTube, we’re reaching beyond our immediate church community, transforming what could have been a local bulletin into a global billboard.

Ultimately, the goal is to share messages of hope, faith, and belonging with a world often searching in all the wrong places. By recognizing where people are in their spiritual journey—and offering them a way to grow closer to God, understand His Word, and connect with a supportive community—we can fulfill our calling to be a light in the digital landscape.

Purpose-Driven Content

Now that we’ve established the broad themes of knowing God, knowing the Bible, and knowing the church, the next step is to consider the *type* of content we produce. We found there are three primary types of content we used and recommended to others—informational, inspirational, or community-building. Each type of content serves a distinct purpose and can even resonate with different audiences.

Informational posts might include something as straightforward as “5 Tips for Starting a Daily Prayer Routine” or a brief lesson on an often-overlooked Bible story. Inspirational content could feature a personal testimony about how someone overcame a struggle through faith or a spotlight on global mission projects that show the church in action. Finally, community-building content attempts to foster genuine connection—perhaps by asking readers to share their favorite verses to lean on in hard times or by inviting them to offer prayer requests in the comments.

Sometimes posts can overlap in purpose, but you need to understand how they interact with each other. For example, you might create a Facebook post that says: “Meet Sarah, who found hope in her darkest hour through our church’s prayer ministry. Has prayer made a difference in your life? Share your experience below—let’s encourage one another!” In this scenario:

- *It informs* people about a ministry that exists in your church.
- *It inspires* by showing the transformative power of prayer.
- *It builds community* by inviting others to share or reach out for support.

A pinned comment could also give them times for your weekly prayer meeting.

These kinds of posts open the door for deeper conversations, showing that the church isn’t just a building with events on a calendar, but a living, caring community ready to walk alongside people in their faith journeys.

A simple way to evaluate each post before sharing is to ask: “What do I want my audience to do, feel, or learn after seeing this?” If the answer is unclear, consider revising the post. For instance, if you want people to attend an event, provide them with all the essential details—but also include why it’s worth their time, how it benefits them, and a clear next step they can take.

Calls to Action That Connect

Ultimately, each post should guide your audience toward the next step in their spiritual journey. That next step could be sending a private message asking for prayer, downloading a Bible study guide, or showing up for an in-person event. Think of calls to action as more than mere links or sign-up buttons; they’re pathways to ongoing relationships. As we’ll explore further in Chapter 16, this relational approach can help people feel truly seen and supported, making them far more likely to stay connected in the long run.

Consistency

Consistency is one of the most powerful tools in your social media toolkit. A regular posting rhythm signals to both your audience and the platforms themselves that you're serious about what you share. Platforms tend to reward consistent activity by showing your posts to more people, and your followers learn they can rely on you for engaging, timely content. The key, however, isn't to flood your feed with daily posts—it's to find a sustainable rhythm that fits your team's capacity and serves your community.

Assess your resources: How many high-quality posts can you realistically produce each week? If you can manage only two solid posts that educate, inspire, or invite conversation, that's better than five rushed posts that struggle to connect. Quality almost always trumps quantity. Once you settle on a workable pace, create a content schedule—maybe it's Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, each with a distinct theme or focus. Over time, your audience will expect—and look forward to—those posts.

While being responsive to real-time events is important, having a broader plan ensures that your social media presence aligns with your church's mission and annual milestones. Start by mapping out key dates: major holidays, sermon series, or significant community events. Incorporating these into your calendar lets you build anticipation over several weeks or months. For example, if a new sermon series on prayer starts in two months, you could share short personal testimonies or invite prayer requests in the lead-up, priming your audience for what's to come.

Of course, flexibility is crucial too. Life has a way of throwing curveballs, so be prepared to pivot if circumstances shift. Maybe there's a natural disaster or a sudden local need; your planned content might need to pause so you can address more immediate issues. It's all about balancing foresight with responsiveness.

Above all, remember that your content plan isn't just about filling a calendar or checking boxes. Each post, whether scheduled months ahead or created in response to a timely

topic, is an opportunity to deepen relationships, foster meaningful dialogue, and extend the church's reach. By combining a steady posting rhythm with a thoughtful long-term strategy, you'll build trust, strengthen your online community, and keep your church's mission front and center—no matter how quickly the digital landscape evolves.

Key Considerations for Effective Content

Lastly, some foundational elements can make or break your church's digital ministry. Your content strategy isn't just about *what* you post or *how often* you post—it's also about *who* you're talking to, *how genuine* you sound, *whether* you're measuring impact effectively, and *if* everyone can access your message. In other words, we need to focus on four key considerations:

1. **Audience** – Knowing exactly who you're trying to reach.
2. **Authenticity** – Building trust by staying true to your identity.
3. **Analytics** – Understanding what works (and what doesn't) so you can adjust.
4. **Accessibility** – Making sure no one is left out, online or offline.

Audience

Your audience includes the people you are intending to reach through your content. Each platform often has a different audience, so depending on what age, gender, language, or even country you are trying to connect with, you may need to use a different social media platform. This also means that content you use on one platform might not resonate with users on another platform. The overall theme might resonate, but the way it is worded might not create a meaningful impact.

You must determine whom you want to talk to and then determine which platforms you should be on. Once those are determined, understand what is meaningful to each

platform's audience and create content that is meaningful to them. Often, this means meeting with and talking to them.

One summer I sat down with all the high school and college-aged summer workers at the General Conference. I asked them to give feedback on the Adventist Church's Instagram. After 30 minutes of them picking it to pieces, one of them said, "They should hire someone who knows what they are doing." I said, "That's me."

While my department had spent much time putting on the channel what we thought consumers wanted, we had neglected to sit and talk with the actual users. Much of the feedback from that meeting was implemented, and our Instagram became much stronger because we not only knew our audience but also took the time to hear from them.

It's also essential to remember that your audience isn't static. People's spiritual journeys evolve, and new faces will appear over time. Regularly assess who's engaging with your content and stay open to the possibility that you might discover new segments you didn't expect—like seekers who found your page through a friend's share. This ongoing analysis will help you refine your strategy so you're always meeting people where they are.

Authenticity

In an age flooded with highly polished, corporate-style messaging, authenticity is refreshing. If you have ever been on X and seen the Wendy's corporate account, you know that people aren't looking for perfectly polished statements anymore. Our digital presence should reflect the genuine heart of your community.

One of the best ways to maintain authenticity is through storytelling. Share testimonies from members about how they've grown in their faith, talk about the challenges and joys of church projects, and showcase community outreach in a way that highlights real people. Create content that addresses people's needs—for example, content on how to pray for your children, how to find purpose in life, or how to find peace in pain. When individuals

see their hopes, struggles, and experiences mirrored back to them, they feel more connected and valued.

Remember, authenticity doesn't cancel out excellence—well-produced visuals that still feel genuine can help your posts stand out without losing their personal touch. However, this doesn't mean that everything needs to be overly produced. A video shot on a phone interviewing members can sometimes be more effective than one with three cameras in a studio with perfect lighting. Know who your end user is and ensure that what you are saying resonates with who you are trying to reach, rather than just getting out content for content's sake.

Analytics

Creating impactful content is only half the battle; understanding its impact is the other half. Most social media platforms offer built-in analytics tools that give insights into likes, shares, comments, and overall reach. However, don't just look at the numbers—interpret them.

Your audience may respond more to short, heartfelt videos than long text posts, or perhaps testimonies get more engagement than downloadable content. Take a look at these patterns to refine your approach. If a particular video type sees a spike in shares, consider testing a few similar ones to see if it is the topic, delivery method, type of post, or call to action. The more you look at the data, the better feedback you can give those creating the content. This will create a cycle of learning and growth, allowing the creatives to master what they are doing and find greater purpose as their reach increases.

Remember, analytics are helpful only if you use them. When certain types of posts consistently perform well, replicate what works. If a particular style of content or topic falls flat, change it up or phase it out. Analytics should inform your decisions, helping you tailor content that meets people's needs and keeps them engaged.

Accessibility

For a content strategy to truly reach all members of your community, it has to be accessible to everyone—both in terms of technology and skill. That means ensuring your posts can be viewed on various devices, including mobile phones and tablets, and using captions for videos to support those who are hearing-impaired or scrolling without sound.

Optimize images and videos for mobile, and consider writing concise, clear captions or descriptions. If you're sharing audio content, add transcripts for those who may not be able to listen. These steps may seem minor, but they demonstrate respect for all users.

Not everyone on your leadership or volunteer team will be a social media whiz. Offering basic training—like how to create engaging posts or how to use a specific platform—empowers more people to contribute.

By focusing on these four areas—audience, authenticity, analytics, and accessibility—you'll not only craft content that resonates with our members but also make room for newcomers to feel welcomed, informed, and inspired. Ultimately, it's about creating an inviting digital space that mirrors warmth and authenticity while staying tuned to the evolving needs of everyone God brings across your path.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Digital Evolution: Content creation has evolved significantly, shifting from blogs to social media platforms, requiring adaptability in communication strategies.
2. Purpose-Driven Content: Effective church content should focus on three key areas: helping people know God, understand the Bible, and connect with the church.
3. Engagement Focus: Social media content should serve as an invitation to dialogue, not just information dissemination, fostering community and relationship-building.

4. Consistency and Planning: Regular, reliable content builds trust, requiring a balanced approach between long-term planning and flexibility for current events.
5. Audience Understanding: Tailoring content to different segments of the church community is crucial for effective engagement.
6. Authenticity: Genuine, real-life stories and experiences resonate more strongly with audiences than polished, corporate-style content.
7. Data-Driven Strategy: Utilizing analytics to understand content performance is essential for refining and improving social media strategies over time.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively balance the need for consistent, high-quality content with the realities of limited resources and volunteer-based content creation in many of our churches?
2. In what ways can we leverage social media to not only inform and engage our existing church members but also reach and appeal to nonmembers and seekers?
3. How can we ensure that our digital content strategy aligns with and enhances our overall mission and evangelistic efforts, rather than becoming a separate or disconnected aspect of our ministry?

Chapter 15: Marketing

Sam Neves

There is a phenomenon that has perplexed me for years: the Seventh-day Adventist Church spans more local communities than McDonald's, Subway, and 7-Eleven combined, yet most people on the street have little or no idea who we are or what we represent. Every Sabbath, we worship in more than 175,000 congregations around the globe. We operate more than 9,000 schools serving over 2 million students and run a vast network of hospitals, clinics, and food factories. We should be impossible to ignore—yet our global footprint remains oddly invisible. Why is that?

On reflection, I have come to believe that one major cause of this “invisibility” is our longstanding discomfort with marketing. In fact, for many Adventist leaders, the very word “marketing” evokes distaste, as if it were purely about gimmicks, hard-sell tactics, or shallow branding. That misunderstanding has stifled something essential: a capacity to communicate powerfully—across multiple contexts—what we actually stand for and why it matters in people’s lives. As a result, many Adventist institutions have improvised their own branding, forging separate identities that often appear disconnected from the church that birthed them. While such fragmentation might succeed on a local or institutional scale, it diminishes our collective impact.

Yet I believe marketing is far more than cheap commercialism. Marketing, at its core, is *the art of being heard*. It is clarity of message, precision in targeting, and wisdom in timing. Most importantly, it’s about intentional presence where people naturally gather. From an evangelistic standpoint, marketing is ensuring we are not whispering in a marketplace filled with loudspeakers. Rather than an afterthought, it should be viewed as a strategic way to share God’s end-time message—vividly, compellingly, and honestly.

Below, I’ll outline how the Bible itself provides us with powerful models for marketing. I’ll then re-examine the concept of marketing for a twenty-first-century Adventist context, with

special attention to digital marketing. We'll also address how to build cohesive marketing campaigns and measure success in ways consistent with our mission. Finally, we'll explore how to uphold ethical principles and maintain a spirit of cultural sensitivity, integrating our online efforts with the warmth of personal relationships that have always characterized genuine Adventist ministry.

Marketing as a Biblical Mandate

We sometimes imagine that marketing is a modern invention—something the early church never needed. However, effective communication in busy public spaces has been around since biblical times. Scripture is filled with examples of God's people employing strategies we might today label "marketing," though couched in spiritual language.

The apostle Paul didn't preach to empty streets; he positioned himself in the synagogue and the bustling agora of Corinth (Acts 18:4). He invested time in the heart of commerce and intellectual debate—precisely where people congregated. His daily presence, with reasoned conversations and personal testimonies, meant his message wasn't lost in a vacuum. Paul understood that if he wanted both Jews and Greeks to hear about Christ, he had to be visible in the cultural and economic hub of the city.

Jesus, too, demonstrated marketing principles—albeit in a divinely orchestrated manner. He deliberately traveled through Samaria (John 4) and conversed with a socially marginalized woman at the town well. She then became a living "advertisement" for His teaching. The outcome was two days of captivated Samaritans flocking to hear Jesus for themselves. This is a model of strategic presence: a single transformative encounter reverberated across an entire region.

Then there's Elijah, who choreographed a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). He didn't hold a private debate behind closed doors; he staged a public spectacle that forced the nation to choose between Baal and the true God. From a purely communicative

viewpoint, Elijah knew how to galvanize public interest. The result was a decisive demonstration of God's power that shaped the nation's spiritual direction.

Daniel, exiled to Babylon, leveraged a clear personal identity as a means to influence. In refusing the king's meat and wine (Daniel 1), Daniel and his companions weren't merely being obstinate. Their distinct choice resulted in better health, superior wisdom, and a place of respect in the king's court. Their countercultural behavior became "news" in a foreign land, ultimately exalting the true God in an idolatrous empire.

Nehemiah presents another template for project management and communication. He surveyed Jerusalem's ruined walls quietly, then enlisted diverse groups to work cooperatively (Nehemiah 2-4). His methodical approach—assessing challenges, clarifying vision, rallying support—reads like a modern strategic marketing campaign. Nehemiah's strong leadership and clear messaging overcame opposition and reinvigorated an entire community's morale.

Acts 2:42-47 describes a movement that spread like wildfire—thanks to strong communal living and daily interactions in homes and public spaces. Believers' unity, generosity, and authenticity "marketed" the gospel more powerfully than any advertisement. People were drawn in by the visible difference in the apostles' everyday lives.

Finally, Jonah's abrupt sermon—"Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4)—produced one of history's most rapid revivals. Though short on nuance, his unembellished message hit a nerve in Nineveh and triggered a citywide repentance. Sometimes, a blunt, urgent call resonates deeply, given the right divine timing.

From these biblical accounts, we see that marketing—in the sense of making God's message both visible and compelling—is integral to our spiritual heritage. Rather than diluting the gospel, these figures used thoughtful strategy to ensure maximum clarity for the largest possible audience.

Redefining Marketing

We live in an era of information overload, where thousands of voices compete for attention—often with sophisticated technology and big budgets. To remain a credible witness for Christ, we must master the ability to articulate our distinctive message clearly and confidently. For Adventists, that means spotlighting teachings such as the Sabbath, the sanctuary, holistic health, and the Second Coming, using our unique global identity without watering down the biblical essence.

But let's be honest: Negative perceptions of “marketing” continue to lurk. Some equate it with self-promotion, vanity, or profit-focused deception. To counter this, we must emphasize that *Adventist marketing is ministry-centered*. It is never about forcing decisions, but about offering opportunities. We aim to reduce confusion, highlight truth, and invite individuals to explore deeper spiritual commitments.

Digital Marketing

But how do we implement marketing principles in a world that is largely digital? Our congregations have limited budgets; our pastors are stretched thin with visitation, preaching, and administrative duties. This is why we must carefully use digital platforms and well-coordinated campaigns—tools that can magnify our reach while preserving precious human resources.

1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

In a time when even spiritual seekers turn first to search engines, SEO acts as our front door. By optimizing our websites for relevant terms—“Adventist health principles,” “Bible prophecy insights,” “Sabbath truth”—we position ourselves where seekers are already looking. This isn't a quick fix. It demands ongoing efforts to maintain technical quality (site speed, mobile responsiveness), produce authoritative content, and cultivate respected

backlinks. Yet the payoff is immense: sustained, cost-effective visibility among those longing for biblical answers.

Deeper Insight: If our content never appears on page one of a Google search, many will never know it exists. Regularly updating websites with new sermons, articles, or testimonies tells search engines that our digital presence is active and valuable. Over time, the synergy of SEO and content creation can funnel genuinely curious individuals to local church communities.

2. Content Marketing

People today are bombarded by trivia and clickbait; offering meaningful content stands out. Written articles, infographics, podcasts, and short videos can all answer life's pressing questions: "How does prophecy apply today?" "What's a balanced Christian approach to mental health?" By investing in quality storytelling—rooted in Scripture and Adventist heritage—we can demonstrate authenticity. Instead of chasing viral trends, we can craft resources that outlast fleeting social media cycles and provide ongoing spiritual nourishment.

Deeper Insight: The best content marketing aims to serve rather than sell. Educational pieces on Christian finance, biblical perspectives on climate issues, or Adventist approaches to healthy living can quietly witness to our faith. Coupled with a call to action—like "Want to know more? Visit an upcoming health seminar!"—content marketing naturally transitions from reading to real-life engagement.

3. Social Media Marketing

Social media fosters immediate, unfiltered interaction. However, it also thrives on brevity and sensationalism. An Adventist approach should leverage these platforms *without* succumbing to trivial or manipulative tactics. For example, a local church might hold weekly live Q&A sessions on Facebook or Instagram, addressing theology, prayer requests, or

community questions. When done consistently, social media can humanize our church identity, reminding users we're not an institution but a fellowship of real people following Christ.

Deeper Insight: While it's tempting to focus solely on numbers (likes, shares), the real metric is *relational depth*. Even a small church can cultivate a loyal digital audience if it consistently shows compassion, authenticity, and a willingness to engage meaningfully in comment threads or direct messages.

4. Email Marketing

Email might seem dated, but it remains one of the highest-converting communication channels. A well-managed email list keeps members and friends connected to the heart of our mission. Whether providing a weekly devotional, a monthly testimonial, or an invitation to local events, email allows for personal, direct outreach. Over time, these messages can grow from casual interest to ongoing spiritual mentorship.

Deeper Insight: Success lies in segmentation. Not every subscriber wants the same information. A new convert might need beginner-friendly Bible lessons, while a long-term member might relish advanced theological discussions. Aligning message content with subscriber needs can significantly enhance open rates and spiritual impact.

5. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising

For immediate visibility in crowded online niches—like “Bible prophecy seminars” or “Christian depression support groups”—PPC can drive traffic efficiently. It does require careful budgeting and a discerning approach to targeting. But the advantage is clear: we reach people who are actively searching for spiritual solutions or faith-based communities. If done properly, it can accelerate local church initiatives, fueling attendance at upcoming events or sign-ups for Bible study.

Deeper Insight: PPC's effectiveness hinges on a strong landing page. An ad might promise "Answers to End-Time Questions," but if the landing page is disorganized or unclear about next steps, potential guests may bounce away. Once they click, they must find a welcoming digital environment that resonates with their questions.

6. Video Marketing

Video is not just entertainment; it's a potent vessel for testimonies, doctrinal teaching, and storytelling. A short, heartfelt testimonial from a recent convert can often move hearts more powerfully than a 10-page article. Livestreams of Sabbath services or archive sermon series on YouTube can extend the local pulpit to a global audience. Producing high-quality but down-to-earth content engages a visually oriented generation, bridging the gap between the intangible realm of faith and everyday human experience.

Deeper Insight: Concise, well-structured videos that convey Adventist distinctives—like the Sabbath or the health message—can trigger curiosity. Consistency is crucial: uploading once and then going silent confuses viewers. Regularly planned segments, whether weekly or monthly, train audiences to anticipate fresh spiritual nourishment.

7. Influencer Marketing

Within Adventism, we might call this "collaborating with recognized voices." Think of a known Adventist speaker, an author, or a respected health expert. Partnering with them—say, hosting a joint webinar or featuring them in a podcast series—lends credibility to your outreach. People who trust these individuals will be more inclined to trust the local church or ministry that's hosting them. Of course, we must ensure that these voices align with core Adventist beliefs and maintain integrity.

Deeper Insight: Influencer marketing doesn't have to be about social media fame. Even a local pastor known for community service can be an "influencer" within a specific region.

Leveraging their local reputation in a digital campaign can amplify the church's profile across that territory.

8. Marketing Automation

Automation lets us keep in touch without overburdening staff. For instance, if someone downloads a free eBook on prophecy from our website, we can automatically send follow-up emails with additional resources or event invitations. This kind of nurturing flow, built into an automation tool, ensures no seeker is lost due to human forgetfulness or lack of time.

Deeper Insight: Set a loving, personal tone in automated emails rather than sounding robotic. Use first names, share brief testimonies, and always invite real conversation (e.g., "Feel free to reply to this email if you have questions!"). This keeps the technology from undermining genuine personal contact.

9. Mobile Marketing

So many around the globe rely solely on smartphones for internet access. Ensuring our websites are mobile-responsive is merely the first step. We might consider a dedicated church app offering daily devotionals, easy prayer request submissions, or an events calendar. Geotargeting can also be employed—sending a gentle invitation to someone who physically steps near an Adventist institution. However, we must always respect user privacy and avoid intrusive messaging.

Deeper Insight: Simplicity is key. Overly complex apps or endless push notifications can irritate or confuse. Keep mobile experiences streamlined and purposeful. If the user's phone pings with a new daily Bible verse or a short prayer prompt, it can become a cherished moment in their day.

10. Data Analytics and Insights

All these efforts benefit from consistent data tracking. By analyzing metrics—website visits, social media engagement, email open rates—we can refine our approaches. If certain spiritual themes consistently generate interest, we might develop deeper content around them. Conversely, if some strategies yield no fruit, we can pivot quickly and save resources.

Deeper Insight: Data is merely a tool. It should never overshadow prayerful discernment. Metrics can inform, but the Holy Spirit moves in ways that sometimes defy numerical logic. Balancing spiritual sensitivity with data-driven stewardship remains one of our greatest callings in digital evangelism.

11. User-Generated Content (UGC)

UGC invites members or seekers to share their own stories—testimonies, images of fellowship events, or short personal reflections. This kind of “peer-to-peer” witness often feels more genuine than polished institutional output. A shared hashtag, a community-driven blog, or weekly “Member Spotlight” videos can cultivate a sense of belonging across digital channels.

Deeper Insight: Encourage authenticity over perfection. A cell phone video of a heartfelt testimonial might garner more engagement than a slickly produced but impersonal segment. Let the Holy Spirit work through honest voices that reflect real human struggles and triumphs.

12. Personalization and Segmentation

People have varied spiritual journeys. One-size-fits-all newsletters can result in lackluster engagement. Segmenting your audience—by age, location, spiritual interest—allows for more relevant messaging. Tools that personalize recommended content based on user preferences can also guide visitors toward deeper truths at their own pace.

Deeper Insight: Even local churches can manage basic segmentation. Parents of small children might receive updates about parenting workshops, while new believers get resources on Adventist fundamentals. Personalization honors people's unique spiritual contexts and fosters stronger connections.

Campaigns With a Purpose

One of the most significant challenges facing Adventist communication leaders today is figuring out how to structure a digital marketing campaign that captivates people's attention in an increasingly noisy world. Many have heard the term "marketing campaign" in the context of political races or commercial product launches, and they worry that employing such tactics might seem too corporate or manipulative for a church whose highest goal is saving souls.

Yet when we consider what a campaign actually is—a focused, organized effort to communicate a crucial message to a specific group—we realize that it resonates perfectly with our mission to share hope and truth. This isn't a new concept, as evangelists have led promotional campaigns for public evangelism meetings for a while. This section is intended to help communication leaders who are traditionally focused on PR (public relations) campaigns to develop digital marketing campaigns for their church or ministry.

It all begins with clarity of purpose. People often jump straight into setting up a Facebook event, emailing a newsletter, or sharing a short video on YouTube, but these scattered efforts tend to fizzle out if they're not guided by a well-defined goal. Perhaps you want to invite the local neighborhood to an upcoming health expo, or maybe you'd like to reach 200 new online Bible study participants over the next six months. When your team understands precisely what you're aiming for, every piece of content you produce will serve that overarching intent. A clear goal also makes it easier to measure results and to inspire volunteers, because it grants them a concrete sense of direction. Rather than aimlessly posting or sending messages, everyone will be working in unison, confident about why they're expending energy and resources in the digital realm.

Once you know what you want to accomplish, the next step is determining whom you need to reach. It's tempting to say "everyone," but that simply isn't realistic, and it often leads to generic messaging that fails to connect with anyone in particular. Think deeply about your ideal audience. Are you trying to attract a demographic that's never set foot in a church, or are you trying to reconnect with former members who are drifting away? Does your campaign primarily serve families with young children, college students grappling with big questions, or older adults seeking closer community ties? By narrowing your scope in this way, you can tailor language, imagery, and even platform choice to the needs of the people you hope to serve. This targeted approach might feel limiting, but it actually frees you to craft messages that resonate—each social post or email is more likely to land in receptive hearts.

Having identified both the goal and the audience, it's time to settle on a central message. Think of this as the heart of your campaign: the essential call to action, the key theme, or the singular idea around which all your digital assets will revolve. Maybe your church wants to emphasize that this upcoming evangelistic series will "help you find peace in turbulent times," or maybe it aims to "discover a healthier, more balanced life through biblical principles." Choose a message that is simultaneously rooted in Adventist values and plainly relevant to everyday life. It should be consistent across your flyers, your social media announcements, your online registration forms, and any follow-up communication. The power of this consistency cannot be overstated. People are inundated with messages and images all day. If they see the same compelling words or visuals from your church multiple times, they're more likely to pay attention and develop recognition that says, "Oh, I've seen this. It must be something significant."

The next stage involves deciding which digital channels will best convey that message to your chosen audience. Some might default to a scattershot approach: post on every platform possible, from Facebook to TikTok, hoping to cover all bases. But each platform caters to different user behaviors and demographics. Facebook, for instance, can be useful for community-oriented groups, event pages, and slightly older audiences. Instagram might

be more impactful if you have a youth-focused campaign or visually appealing content that sparks immediate reactions. YouTube can be a powerful channel for longer-form messages, testimonies, or highlight reels, especially if you want to preserve sermon archives or share behind-the-scenes stories.

Email remains a strong contender for more in-depth or personal communication, such as inviting people to your virtual small groups, distributing devotionals, or sharing testimonies in a more reflective tone. Select the platforms that align naturally with your campaign goals, and make sure you have the capacity to keep them updated. It's better to do a stellar job on one or two channels than to underwhelm across five or six. Each platform you choose should support the overall goal, not distract from it.

When your message is ready and your platforms are identified, begin constructing a coherent path that leads people from first encounter to a deeper level of involvement. This journey is sometimes called a funnel, but I prefer to think of it as a discipleship pathway in digital form. You start with content that grabs attention—perhaps a captivating two-minute video on social media that poses a provocative question: “Are you searching for real peace?” Then those who respond to that invitation are guided to the next step, perhaps a dedicated web page or online event sign-up that explains the program more thoroughly.

From there, individuals who show greater interest can receive additional follow-up: an automated thank-you email, a personal message from a volunteer, or an invitation to join a private online group for further questions or prayer requests. This layered approach ensures that each interaction naturally flows into the next, so no one is left unsure of how to learn more or get involved. It also respects each individual's readiness; some will take quick steps forward, while others might linger on the edges until they feel more comfortable.

A major pitfall that church leaders must avoid is forgetting about the human element once the campaign is launched. Technology is wonderful, but if someone sends an email inquiry or posts a question on your church's Facebook page and is met with silence, your

campaign's momentum can collapse. Assign specific people the role of responding to messages, building online relationships, and ensuring that the digital environment feels just as nurturing and caring as your local fellowship hall might.

This can be done by a volunteer team or by a designated communication director. The key is consistency and timeliness. When people discover the sincerity of your church's outreach—when they realize it isn't just promotional fluff—they become far more open to the deeper truths you have to share. Building that trust through caring interactions is, in many respects, the heartbeat of the entire campaign.

Eventually, you'll want to take a step back and examine how well everything worked. Were there spikes in website traffic that didn't translate into in-person attendance at your event? Did certain social media posts spark lively discussions while others were completely ignored? How many people actually joined the online Bible study group, and what feedback did they share about their experience? These reflections guide your future campaigns, showing which aspects need refining.

This evaluation is not merely a numbers game; while quantitative data—like conversion rates or attendance figures—is useful, anecdotal evidence and personal testimonies can be just as revealing. If only five people joined your digital health seminar but three of them ended up joining a local Adventist church, that's a success story worth celebrating. Conversely, if you reached 5,000 social media impressions but had no meaningful connections, it might be time to reassess your approach. Always keep in mind that every single contact represents a person beloved by God. If your campaign fosters tangible transformation in even a handful of lives, that is a remarkable achievement.

Strategies for Limited Resources

One misconception that often prevents churches from attempting digital marketing campaigns is the assumption that a large budget is necessary for any meaningful impact. While having funds certainly helps, abundant resources do not guarantee success. Clever

insights, volunteer dedication, and small psychological shifts in how you present your message can be enough to spark considerable growth. The behavioral economist Rory Sutherland once observed how modest tweaks in context or framing can sometimes accomplish more than expensive overhauls.⁶³ Applying this principle can energize your campaigns, especially when money is tight.

For instance, a church in a financially struggling area might look at major infrastructural changes, such as upgrading to professional video equipment or hiring a marketing consultant, and feel discouraged because they simply cannot afford it. Yet consider how a slight change of angle can yield remarkable results.

Let's imagine a small rural congregation that once wanted to promote a new community service day—an initiative that involved collecting donations, preparing meals for the unhoused, and offering free health screenings. Lacking funds for flashy advertising, they leaned on the talents of their youth, enlisting them to produce a short, heartfelt clip on a borrowed smartphone. They shared this video on local Facebook groups and WhatsApp circles, focusing on the genuine impact the event would have for neighbors in need. People responded, not because the video was polished, but because the sense of passion and sincerity came through. A simple, cost-free measure—ensuring the video told personal stories and ended with a direct invitation—accomplished something that a bigger production might have failed to do if it lacked that emotional warmth.

Let's illustrate this concept through an imaginary camporee. The organizers had only a modest budget to publicize the event, but they concentrated on building online excitement through storytelling. Attendees from previous years were invited to submit short anecdotes of what the camporee meant to them—whether it was forging lifelong friendships or experiencing a spiritual breakthrough.

⁶³ Rory Sutherland, *Alchemy: The Magic of Original Thinking in a World of Mind-Numbing Conformity* (London: W.H. Allen, 2021).

These stories were then woven into a narrative posted on the event's Facebook page and shared in local church newsletters. Participants also decorated their own social media profiles with a custom camporee frame, creating a viral effect that spread far beyond official channels. Rather than focusing on glossy materials or paid ads, the organizers poured their energy into harnessing user-generated content and heartfelt endorsements. The results were astounding: registration hit record levels, mostly driven by personal endorsements, which cost almost nothing financially. This underscores how authenticity and creativity can outperform large marketing spends in capturing hearts.

Measuring Success by Focusing on Engagement

One of the most common mistakes churches make is to gauge digital campaigns by superficial metrics such as social media “likes” or raw visitor counts. I have done that many times in the past. While these numbers might stroke the ego, they don't necessarily reflect actual spiritual impact or sustained interest. More meaningful are indicators of real engagement. Consider how many people comment on or share your posts, how long viewers watch your videos, or how frequently visitors return to your website. If your goal is to deepen faith or nudge individuals toward attending a local event, then you must track how many actually sign up or show up in person, and whether they stay connected afterward.

A local church might, for instance, discover that although one of its Facebook videos went viral and garnered thousands of views, very few watchers took further action—like messaging the page, visiting the website, or attending a subsequent online meetup. On the flip side, a more modest post that attracted fifty direct messages might be far more significant because it spurred tangible interaction. This principle also applies to your website. Counting visitors isn't as illuminating as tracking whether they read an entire devotional post or sign up for an email list. By focusing on these more relational signals, you gain a better grasp of the spiritual journey your audience is on.

Some churches have found that simply surveying new attendees about how they first learned of the church or event is particularly revealing. If 10 newcomers mention that they discovered the church through a specific online campaign, you know that effort truly bore fruit. This kind of direct feedback can guide future decisions about which platforms to invest in and what style of content resonates best. In many ways, measuring engagement is part of ongoing discipleship, helping you see how effectively your digital presence translates into real-world fellowship, conversation, and spiritual growth.

Ethical Considerations

As digital tools evolve, leaders must grapple with ethical dilemmas that were unimaginable a decade ago. AI-generated text, for instance, is rapidly becoming commonplace. Soon disclaimers such as “this content was partially generated by an AI” may feel as antiquated as disclaimers about using computers to type documents. That does not, however, remove the leader’s moral responsibility to stand behind what is published in their name. If AI suggests a theological interpretation that skews away from Adventist doctrine, it is the leader’s duty to correct it before hitting “publish.”

Similar caution is warranted around plagiarism. AI tools can inadvertently recycle existing phrases from the vast datasets they rely on. Thoroughly reviewing your content before publishing is critical to confirm its originality. This is essential not only for preserving the integrity of your church’s message but also for avoiding legal or reputational complications.

Other ethical issues revolve around privacy and data protection. Churches often gather emails, phone numbers, and personal prayer requests, which must be handled with confidentiality. A data breach can harm your community’s trust and carry serious consequences. Implementing robust security measures and clarifying privacy policies can go a long way in protecting both your participants and your church’s witness.

Transparency and authenticity remain paramount. Effective digital marketing can pique curiosity, but that interest must be met by genuine spiritual care. If an event is described as

“free,” don’t hide small fees or push for donations in ways that feel duplicitous. If a campaign claims to focus on mental health from a Christian perspective, ensure you actually have resources or qualified individuals available to address questions beyond the surface level.

The minute marketing slips into manipulation or hyperbole, we compromise the gospel we are called to share. By emphasizing honesty in every campaign detail—whether about finances, theological content, or event logistics—leaders underscore that the Adventist Church isn’t just selling a product but extending a heartfelt invitation to experience Christ-centered transformation.

Bringing Online and Offline Experiences Together

It might be tempting to imagine a future where in-person gatherings become optional. While digital platforms have indeed proven helpful—particularly for reaching those unable to travel or who live in remote regions—most Adventist leaders recognize that a purely virtual church experience can never fully replace the warmth and depth of physical fellowship. The challenge lies in blending both spheres so that the digital enhances and expands what happens face-to-face, rather than overshadowing it.

At a practical level, this integration requires intentional planning. Let’s imagine a live streamed camporee for members who couldn’t attend in person. Even as hundreds of young people pitched tents and participated on-site, a parallel virtual community watched the main events online, posted photos of themselves wearing their club uniforms at home, and engaged in real-time Q&A with the camporee speakers. The organizers had prepared a system to handle these live interactions, ensuring that online participants were acknowledged and could share prayer requests or testimonies along with those physically present.

At the same time, campers on the ground were occasionally encouraged to log onto the platform to greet their virtual counterparts, showing that the event was truly a united

experience rather than two separate tracks. Although not everyone can replicate such a large-scale setup, the principle holds true: being deliberate about bridging the digital and physical realms creates an environment where technology amplifies community rather than replacing it.

In smaller church settings, this might look like using a QR code in your printed bulletin that points to a short video testimony recorded by a local member or inviting those who watched the sermon livestream to an on-site potluck where they can meet the pastor face-to-face. The possibilities are endless, but success depends on removing silos between your “online team” and your “in-person team.” They must plan together, share updates, and stay flexible. The extra thought put into aligning schedules and announcements ensures that no one—whether they’re sitting in a pew or on their living room couch—feels like an afterthought.

Leaders should also continually assess how digital efforts feed into meaningful, ongoing discipleship. A well-executed digital campaign might draw someone into a Zoom Bible study, which then transitions to small in-person get-togethers for those who live nearby. Alternatively, a thriving physical church community might foster a digital reading group for busy parents who can’t attend weeknight gatherings in person. In each instance, the emphasis is on building relationships that transcend one channel or format. The aim is not to have a “digital side” and a “real side,” but rather a single ministry expressed through multiple avenues.

Ultimately, weaving together the online and offline worlds requires creative thinking and a willingness to adapt. It means acknowledging that there are valid reasons for online-only experiences—ill health, geographic distance, or personal comfort zones—while also affirming the irreplaceable value of face-to-face worship and fellowship. When done thoughtfully, the digital sphere becomes a place where people initially connect, learn, and grow, setting the stage for deeper involvement in a physically gathered community. In that

sense, the internet may serve as the “front porch” to your church, inviting people to step inside and experience a handshake, a conversation, or a shared meal.

With all these insights in mind, Adventist leaders can approach digital marketing campaigns not as a daunting leap into secular territory, but as an extension of their gospel calling—using innovative channels to meet people in a busy, digital age and inviting them into God’s abiding truth. By balancing clarity of goal, careful targeting, consistent messaging, authentic interactions, ethical diligence, and a bridge between online and offline fellowship, the Adventist Church can harness technology’s potential while remaining faithful to its mission of proclaiming Christ to all the world.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. **Marketing as Mission:** Marketing should be viewed as an essential tool for effectively communicating the Adventist message in a crowded digital landscape, following biblical examples of strategic communication.
2. **Integrated Digital Strategy:** A comprehensive digital marketing approach, including SEO, content marketing, social media, and email campaigns, is crucial for reaching and engaging diverse audiences.
3. **Resource Optimization:** Adventist organizations can maximize limited resources by repurposing content, leveraging volunteer skills, and utilizing free or low-cost marketing tools.
4. **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Utilizing analytics and insights is essential for measuring campaign effectiveness, refining strategies, and demonstrating the impact of digital mission work.
5. **Long-Term Engagement:** The ultimate goal of digital marketing should be building ongoing relationships that support spiritual growth and active church participation.

6. Ethical Considerations: Maintaining high ethical standards in all digital marketing activities is crucial for building trust and aligning with Adventist values.
7. Cultural Sensitivity: Adapting marketing strategies to diverse cultural contexts is essential for effective global outreach while maintaining the core Adventist message.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively balance the use of modern digital marketing techniques with our traditional Adventist values and approaches to evangelism?
2. What strategies can we implement to better integrate our online and offline outreach efforts, creating a seamless experience for individuals throughout their spiritual journey?
3. How can we ensure that our digital marketing efforts are not only reaching new audiences but also effectively nurturing long-term engagement and spiritual growth within our church community?

Chapter 16: Engagement

Alyssa Truman

I recently preached a sermon at a communication event in France. I had spent much time praying and preparing, asking God to give me the words and message He had prepared for the listeners. After I finished, a young woman approached me to share how impactful the message was to her at this time. This led us to a 15-minute conversation about how you can hear the Holy Spirit talking to you. We ended in prayer, both encouraged and inspired by each other.

Now imagine, instead, after delivering the sermon passionately, I simply walked back to my room and did not speak to those who had listened to my sermon. That would sound unthinkable in a face-to-face setting, yet it happens all the time when we post digital content and neglect to interact with those who comment or send direct messages.

People today crave real connection, not just information. But here's the good news: It's easier than you might think to turn a one-sided online presence into a vibrant, two-way conversation. Over the next few pages, we'll explore practical ways to nurture meaningful relationships through digital engagement—from responding to comments and messages to creating spaces where followers feel seen and heard. We'll discuss shifting from simply broadcasting content to building genuine community, ensuring that every post is an invitation to deeper connection and faith. Lastly, we will discuss how to build a team of people who can interact with those coming to our digital properties.

Nurturing Relationships Through Digital Engagement

When we create digital content for our church—an inspirational devotional video, a Facebook post sharing the power of prayer, or an Instagram Reel highlighting a youth service project—our goal isn't merely to inform. It's to *relate*. Every comment or message we receive represents someone taking the time to engage with something that moved

them, challenged them, or stirred their curiosity. A true digital strategy must be built on the understanding of engagement. This is built on personal interaction with those who connect with us in an authentic and often empathetic way. By doing so, we show a real, caring community behind our posts—one ready to walk alongside people in their spiritual journey.

Responding to Comments and Messages

The simplest way to nurture these online relationships is to respond consistently and thoughtfully to every comment and message. Sometimes, that might look like a single “love” reaction for someone who just posts “Amen” or drops a praying-hands emoji. Even these small acknowledgments matter. This simple act tells the commenter, “We see you. We appreciate you.” It demonstrates that our digital presence isn’t a set-it-and-forget-it bulletin board, but a living, breathing extension of our ministry.

When someone leaves a more meaningful comment—perhaps sharing a personal struggle or asking a question—we like to respond with personalized answers. Providing your response team with quick reference materials, such as relevant Bible verses or sample replies, can help them feel prepared for various common topics (faith, doubt, hardship, salvation, etc.). Having these resources on hand not only saves time but also ensures that every interaction is biblically grounded and lovingly presented.

Other times, a comment may call for a more in-depth reply. I remember one young man wrote us a direct message on Facebook. He lived on another continent and simply commented, “Where can I get a Bible?” After chatting for a few minutes with me, he asked where to start to understand God better, and I suggested the Gospel of John. As we continued to talk, I was able to look up a church near his location with the help of Adventistlocator.org and let him know where he could find a local church family to help him on his spiritual journey. He later messaged back, saying he was grateful that a *real person* had taken the time to help him, rather than some automated bot.

Creating Spaces Where Followers Feel Seen and Heard

While replying to comments and messages is essential, our desire is for deeper engagement, which allows us to have more meaningful conversations. Ask open-ended questions like “How can we pray for you this week?” or “What is a Bible verse bringing you hope today?” These prompts let followers know that their thoughts and feelings aren’t just welcome—they’re valued. It’s in these community spaces that connections truly flourish, allowing people to share their stories and find solidarity in faith.

The place where people look to be the most seen is not in the public comments, but often in the direct messages. They will often come with their deepest burdens, such as questioning if God can still love them if they had premarital sex, or experiencing pain from broken relationships, or struggling to get through school and looking for purpose and meaning in life.

One mother reached out to us, sharing through a private message that her child had expressed suicidal thoughts. She never expected anyone to respond, but felt the need to just share her pain somewhere. We answered almost immediately, allowing the woman to share her struggles and creating a digital pastoral visit experience. After offering a heartfelt prayer, we asked if she would like a local pastor to connect with her family in person. With her consent, we located a nearby church, found its pastor, and shared that information with the mother so she could seek additional support. She expressed profound relief and gratitude, amazed that a real, caring human was on the other end of the screen.

However, not every encounter is positive. You may sometimes run into comments that use profanity or hateful language. In those cases, it’s best to hide or remove them to maintain a respectful space. However, if someone simply disagrees with a message or raises questions in a non-hateful way, let that conversation stand. Healthy dialogue—grounded in kindness, respect, and a willingness to listen—can be a beautiful way to model Christ’s love, even

with those who see things differently. We rarely run into overtly toxic posts, but when we do, we view them as opportunities to respond calmly and graciously.

Measuring Engagement Beyond Likes

As these relationships are built, remember that depth often matters more than breadth. It is easy for us to report “data” without considering the real purpose we are posting. A post might get only 20 likes but spark five genuinely heartfelt conversations in the comments—and that’s a huge win for ministry impact. Don’t just track how many comments, likes, and shares your posts received. We must also record and track those deeper interactions, personal stories, prayer requests, and ongoing dialogues.

When asking your media team to share their analytics, ensure that they aren’t just giving numbers but also sharing the impact posts are making. Shifting this mindset as leaders helps keep first things first—missional impact on people. This will also boost your creatives to make more meaningful posts because they understand that people matter more than the data alone.

Practical Strategies for Digital Engagement

For a long time, many churches have treated social media and other online platforms like a digital bulletin board—great for announcements and event flyers, but not much else. While basic information-sharing has its place, it won’t cultivate true discipleship or a sense of belonging. If our goal is to move beyond simply informing people and start *connecting* with them, we need to embrace interactive, community-building practices online.

Leaders often worry about not being “tech experts,” but you don’t have to be. Your role is to support and guide your team, helping them see that genuine conversation and care can happen just as easily behind a keyboard as it can face-to-face. What really matters is presence, authenticity, and a willingness to invest in relationships—even digital ones.

Platform-by-Platform Approach

Facebook

Think of Facebook as a bustling town square where all ages gather. Your team might already post sermon videos or event updates here, but encourage them to go a step further. Rather than simply sharing a link with a caption, have them jump into the comments and ask thought-provoking questions: “Thanks for watching our latest message, John! How did this topic speak to you this week?” A personal follow-up like that can spark meaningful conversations.

Facebook also offers tools like Groups, which can serve as virtual small group spaces for Bible study, prayer, or specific ministries (such as youth or community outreach). In these groups, you can host live sessions, post polls, and facilitate real-time discussions. The result is a more intimate environment where people feel comfortable opening up and engaging consistently.

Instagram

Instagram thrives on visual storytelling. Rather than letting your media team feel intimidated by this, view it as an opportunity to show the *heart* of your church. Posting beautiful photos of baptisms, mission projects, or youth events can draw people in, but Stories are where the magic of quick, authentic interaction really shines. Imagine your youth pastor hosting a weekly “Ask Me Anything” session in Instagram Stories—teens can submit anonymous questions about faith, and he can respond in real time with warmth and relatability. This approach meets young people right where they are, and it fosters an environment of openness and transparency.

YouTube

Many churches treat YouTube as a “video dump”—a place to archive sermons or promos. But it has the potential to be a vibrant digital fellowship hall if you treat the comments

section like an after-service gathering. Encourage a team member or volunteer to moderate and engage with viewers. If someone thanks you for a sermon on hope, reply by asking how they plan to apply that message daily. You can also use YouTube's "heart" feature to acknowledge thoughtful comments, letting people know you see and appreciate them. Consider creating playlists for themed series (e.g., "Understanding Daniel and Revelation," "Practical Christian Living," etc.) to make content more navigable and inviting.

Church Website

Your website isn't just a static brochure—it can become a hub for meaningful interaction. Adding a live chat feature during certain hours can be a game changer, especially when staffed by trained volunteers who can answer questions, offer prayer, or guide visitors to the right resources. Think of the late-night seeker wrestling with doubts who discovers a friendly person ready to listen, which might be the spiritual lifeline they need. Additionally, keep an updated list of online and in-person events so people can easily find ways to get involved.

The Power of Strong Calls to Action (CTAs)

No matter which platform your team uses, a strong call to action is crucial for moving beyond the passive consumption of content. Instead of always asking for "likes" and "subscribes," consider CTAs that foster deeper engagement:

- "Share a verse that's encouraged you this week."
- "How can we pray for you? Leave a request in the comments, and our team will lift you up in prayer."
- "In today's devotional, we talked about finding peace in chaos. We'd love to hear from you. What's one practical way you seek peace in your daily life?"

A well-placed CTA turns a passive viewer into an active participant, creating opportunities for real conversation and community-building.

Remember, the goal isn't just to boost metrics; it's to foster genuine connections. Encourage your team to use emojis, show genuine excitement, and admit if they don't have all the answers. People resonate more with authenticity than polished perfection. When your church's digital presence feels human, inviting, and real, it signals to the online world that there's a true community waiting on the other side of the screen—ready to welcome, listen, and grow together in faith.

Building the Right Team for Engagement Success

By now, we've understood that digital engagement is far more than posting content. It's about walking alongside people in their faith journeys. That's a big task, and no single person can do it all. Ideally, you must build a dedicated team to respond to each comment and message. As a leader, your role is to shape that team and give them the resources they need to thrive.

Determining Team Capacity

One of the most common questions leaders ask is "How many interactions can one person handle?" The truth is, it depends on the person. A staff member dedicated full-time to digital engagement might manage 150 to 200 meaningful weekly interactions—including 20 to 30 in-depth comments or private messages daily. But not every interaction requires the same effort: a short "Thanks for sharing!" might take 30 seconds, while a thoughtful response to a deeply personal or theological query could take 15 minutes or more.

Let's look at a practical scenario. Suppose your online presence reaches about 5,000 followers across multiple platforms. In a typical week, you might see:

- **500** likes or short "Amen!" comments
- **100** substantial comments or questions
- **20** direct messages needing pastoral care or detailed answers
- **5–10** leads for online Bible studies or local church involvement

To handle this effectively, you could structure your team like this:

1. A full-time digital engagement coordinator (often a pastor)

- Oversees the overall strategy, handles complex or sensitive interactions, and ensures the team's efforts align with your broader ministry goals.

2. A part-time community manager

- Responds to moderate-level comments and messages, moderates live sessions, and flags high-priority issues for the coordinator.

3. 5 to 7 trained volunteers

- Offer a friendly presence for simpler interactions, greet newcomers in comments, and assist with triaging questions that need deeper pastoral care. These are often members you trust to be the voice of your church.

Volunteers vs. Paid Staff

Volunteers bring passion, empathy, and diverse perspectives. They're often excellent at greeting newcomers, moderating comments, and sharing personal testimonies. However, it's risky to rely solely on volunteers for the more demanding or sensitive aspects of digital engagement. Complex theological questions, crisis situations, and strategic planning often benefit from the dedication and instruction that come from training and leadership.

Example of a Team in Action

Picture this: André, a volunteer, notices a comment from someone expressing deep doubts about God. He responds with a few words of encouragement and tags Jessica, one of your part-time community managers. Jessica sees the situation and reaches out privately to learn more and offer prayer. If the person's needs are more pastoral, she loops in Pastor Mark, your full-time digital engagement coordinator, who can schedule a call or connect the individual with local church resources. Each team member plays a role, and no single person feels overwhelmed by complex situations.

Engaging in digital ministry can be emotionally taxing. Team members might read heartbreaking stories, encounter heated theological debates, or carry the weight of others' burdens. To sustain them, schedule regular check-ins—both one-on-one and as a team. Encourage healthy boundaries, such as designated offline hours, and create a supportive culture where it's OK to say, "I need a break." Your digital team needs spiritual nourishment and encouragement just as much as those they serve.

Building a Sustainable Future

As we look to build a consistent presence, we are often asked about using automation instead of humans. Chatbots and auto-responders can handle routine questions like "What time is your service?" or "Where can I sign up for a small group?" But it's important to be transparent about automation and make it easy for someone to reach a real human. A good rule of thumb is to use technology to enhance human interaction, not replace it. Once a chatbot gathers preliminary information—like name and general concern—someone on your team should follow up personally to ensure that people feel genuinely cared for.

A thriving digital engagement team not only meets people where they are today but also positions your ministry for growth tomorrow. As your online community expands, you may need to add more volunteers, another part-time position, or new technology tools. Periodically review your team structure, the workload, and the spiritual health of your members, adjusting as needed to ensure that everyone involved feels supported and empowered to share Christ's love online.

What to Do Now

Effective digital engagement isn't just about having the flashiest content or the largest online following—it's about real people building real relationships. When we take time to respond with genuine care, invite dialogue, and organize teams committed to personalized follow-up, we transform our digital spaces into extensions of Christ's ministry. Every

comment, direct message, or live chat becomes a sacred opportunity to share hope and healing, reminding us that behind every username lies a person in need of God's love.

In many ways, this work can be more intricate and time-consuming than traditional ministry methods. It requires strategic planning, thoughtful delegation, and a willingness to adapt when platforms or community needs change. But the potential impact is immense. Online seekers can quickly become church family if they sense that compassionate individuals are ready to listen, pray, and offer tangible resources. Equipping a dedicated engagement team and ensuring their well-being allows for sustained, life-changing interactions across your church's digital channels.

In a world where so many voices compete for attention, it's time for the church to stand out by being authentically present. Through consistent engagement, relevant storytelling, and a heart of service, we have the privilege of pointing people toward a God who sees them, knows them, and cares deeply for them. By embracing digital engagement as a genuine ministry, you're not just meeting a modern need—you're following Jesus' example of meeting people where they are and sharing His love in every space He calls us to occupy.

Church, it's time to engage.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Engagement Is Essential: Creating content without engaging with the audience is like preaching without interacting with the congregation; it misses crucial opportunities for connection and spiritual growth.
2. Quality Over Quantity: It's better to produce less content and dedicate more resources to engaging with those who interact with it, fostering deeper connections.

3. Platform-Specific Strategies: Each social media platform requires a tailored approach to engagement, from responding to comments on Facebook to hosting Q&A sessions on Instagram Stories.
4. Clear Calls to Action: Every piece of content should have a specific, engagement-focused call to action that invites real interaction and values audience input.
5. Team Structure: An effective digital engagement team includes both paid staff for strategic and complex interactions and trained volunteers for lighter engagement tasks.
6. Automation Balance: While automation tools can handle basic queries, they should enhance, not replace, human interaction in digital ministry.
7. Team Well-being: Supporting the emotional and spiritual health of the digital ministry team is crucial for sustainable and effective online engagement.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we restructure our current digital ministry resources to prioritize engagement and relationship-building over simply producing and distributing content?
2. What steps can we take to train and support both staff and volunteers in effectively engaging with our online community while maintaining appropriate boundaries and pastoral care standards?
3. How can we measure the success of our digital engagement efforts beyond typical metrics like views or likes, focusing instead on the quality and impact of the connections we're making?

Chapter 17: Data as a Strategic Asset

Richard Stephenson

Data stands as one of the most valuable assets in the modern church's arsenal, offering unprecedented opportunities to enhance our mission of sharing God's love and preparing people for Christ's return. In an era in which information flows abundantly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church must harness the power of data to serve its members more effectively and reach out to those seeking spiritual guidance. By intelligently leveraging our data resources, we can transform how we operate internally and how we engage with the world around us in fulfilling our mission.

At its core, data utilization in the church context should always aim to bring people closer to God's love and the promise of salvation. Every data point we collect and analyze represents an opportunity to better understand and serve an individual in their spiritual journey. For instance, by carefully examining patterns in member engagement with various church programs, we can tailor our ministries to meet people where they are spiritually. This personalized approach reflects Christ's own method of reaching out to individuals, addressing their unique needs and circumstances.

In the realm of church administration, intelligent data use can significantly streamline our backend operations, freeing up resources for our primary mission. Consider our treasury systems: by implementing advanced data analytics, we can optimize financial processes, identify financial trends, and allocate resources more efficiently. This might mean developing predictive models that anticipate fluctuations in offerings, allowing for more strategic budgeting and ensuring that funds are available when and where they're needed most. Such efficiency isn't merely about balancing books. It's more so about stewardship that honors God and maximizes our capacity to share the eternal gospel.

Similarly, our secretariat infrastructure can benefit immensely from data-driven approaches. By analyzing membership data, we can gain insights into church growth patterns, identify areas needing pastoral support, and track the effectiveness of various

programs. This information enables church leaders to make informed decisions about resource allocation, potentially leading to the establishment of new congregations in underserved areas or the development of targeted outreach programs. Every data-informed decision translates to more souls reached with the message of God's love and the imminent return of Christ.

The true power of data as an asset shines brightest when applied to our missional efforts. In an age in which attention is fragmented across countless digital platforms, leveraging data can help us cut through the noise and deliver our message more effectively. For example, by analyzing online engagement metrics, we can refine our digital evangelism strategies, ensuring that our content reaches those most receptive to it. This might involve using machine learning algorithms to identify the most effective times and platforms for sharing specific types of spiritual content, or personalizing outreach messages based on an individual's previous interactions with our digital resources.

Data can help us identify and respond to emerging spiritual needs in real time. By monitoring global trends and local community data, we can proactively develop resources and programs that address current challenges. For instance, if data indicates a rising interest in mental health within a particular demographic, we can swiftly create and distribute content that addresses these concerns from a biblical perspective, showcasing God's healing power and the hope found in Christ.

This intelligent use of data also allows us to measure and improve the impact of our missional initiatives continually. By establishing clear metrics and consistently analyzing outcomes, we can identify which approaches are most effective in leading people to Christ and preparing them for His return. This progressive evaluation and refinement ensures that our efforts remain relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world.

Finally, data plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of global community within our church. By sharing anonymized insights and success stories across regions, we can inspire and inform local congregations worldwide. This data-driven collaboration can lead to the rapid

dissemination of effective evangelism strategies, allowing the global church to move in unison toward our shared goal of preparing the world for Christ's return.

It's important to note that as we leverage data as an asset, we must always do so with a spirit of humility and dependence on divine guidance. *Data should inform our decisions, but never dictate them.* We must balance our use of data with prayer, spiritual discernment, and a steadfast commitment to biblical principles. We must continually seek God first! Our goal is not to replace the Holy Spirit's leading with algorithms, but to use the tools God has provided us to amplify His message and reach more hearts.

Data as a Liability

Data stands as a powerful asset for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but it simultaneously represents a significant liability that demands careful consideration and management. As we navigate the digital age, we must recognize that the very information that helps extend and support our mission also exposes us to risks that could potentially undermine our efforts to share God's love and prepare people for Christ's return. Understanding and addressing these liabilities is crucial for maintaining the integrity of our ministry and the trust of those we serve.

One of the most pressing concerns regarding data as a liability is the issue of security and privacy. In an era of increasing cyber threats, the sensitive information we hold about our members, our seekers, and those we reach through our ministries becomes a potential target for malicious attacks. A data breach could expose personal details, financial information, or even confidential pastoral records, leading to a profound breach of trust. Not only would such an incident damage our reputation but it could also deter individuals from engaging with our church, effectively creating barriers to sharing the gospel message. We must view our role as stewards of this data with the same seriousness as we view our stewardship of financial resources, recognizing that protecting this information is an extension of our care for God's children.

The complexity of data protection regulations across different jurisdictions also poses a significant liability. As a global church, we operate in numerous countries, each with its own set of data protection laws. Navigating this regulatory landscape requires substantial resources and expertise. Noncompliance, even if unintentional, can result in severe penalties, potentially diverting funds from our core mission work. The effort required to ensure compliance across all our operations can be a drain on human resources, potentially taking focus away from direct ministry and evangelism efforts. This challenge underscores the need for a robust, global *data governance and data protection framework* that aligns with our mission while respecting legal requirements.

Another liability of data lies in the potential for misinterpretation or overreliance on analytics. While data can provide valuable insights, an excessive focus on metrics can lead to a mechanistic approach to ministry that loses sight of the human element and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. For instance, if we rely too heavily on engagement statistics to shape our message, we might inadvertently water down crucial biblical truths in favor of more "popular" content. This approach risks compromising our fundamental mission of preparing people for Christ's return by prioritizing short-term engagement over spiritual depth and truth.

The vast amount of data we collect also raises ethical concerns about consent and the appropriate use of information. As we gather data to personalize outreach and improve our ministries, we walk a fine line between being relevant and being intrusive. There's a risk of alienating individuals if they feel their personal information is being used in ways they didn't anticipate or approve. This is particularly sensitive in the context of spiritual journeys and personal beliefs. We must constantly evaluate whether our data practices align with our ethical standards and the trust placed in us as a church.

Data dependency is another liability that warrants attention. As we integrate data-driven decision-making into our operations, we risk becoming overly reliant on these systems. This dependency could leave us vulnerable to disruptions in our digital infrastructure. For example, if our data systems were to fail during a critical evangelistic campaign, our ability

to coordinate efforts and respond to interested individuals could be severely hampered. Balancing the benefits of data-driven approaches with the need for robust, nondigital contingencies is essential to ensure the continuity of our mission in all circumstances.

The cost of maintaining and securing our data infrastructure is a significant financial liability. Investing in state-of-the-art data management systems, employing skilled data protection personnel, and continuously updating our security measures require substantial resources. While these investments are necessary, they can strain our budgets, potentially limiting funds available for direct ministry and outreach programs. We must carefully weigh the benefits of advanced data capabilities against the core financial needs of our mission work.

Lastly, the rapid pace of technological change presents an ongoing liability. The systems and practices we implement today may become obsolete or vulnerable tomorrow. This necessitates constant vigilance and adaptation, which can be exhausting for our organization and potentially distracting from our primary spiritual focus. Staying current with data technologies and threats requires continuous learning and investment, which can be challenging for a global church with diverse resources and capabilities across different regions.

While data remains a crucial asset for our church, its liabilities cannot be overlooked. The risks associated with data security, regulatory compliance, ethical use, and resource allocation pose significant challenges to our mission. However, by acknowledging these liabilities and addressing them proactively, we can mitigate risks and ensure that our use of data aligns with our values and supports rather than hinders our ultimate goal. As we navigate these challenges, we must remain grounded in our faith, seeking divine wisdom to balance the benefits and risks of data in our quest to share God's love and prepare the world for Christ's return. Our approach to data must reflect the same care, integrity, and spiritual discernment that characterizes all aspects of our ministry, ensuring that even in the digital realm, we remain faithful stewards of the resources and responsibilities entrusted to us.

Data as a Mission Multiplier

Data stands as a powerful multiplier of mission for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, amplifying our efforts to share God's love and prepare people for Christ's return. In an age in which information drives decision-making and shapes strategies, harnessing data effectively can exponentially increase the impact and reach of our ministry. By viewing data not merely as a byproduct of our activities but as a catalyst for mission, we unlock new possibilities for spreading the gospel and nurturing faith in ways that were previously unimaginable.

At its core, data as a mission multiplier is about leveraging information to make our efforts more targeted, efficient, and impactful. Every interaction, program, and outreach initiative generates valuable data that, when properly analyzed and applied, can inform and enhance our future endeavors. This approach transforms our ministry from a series of isolated actions into a dynamic, interconnected system that continuously learns and improves, always with the goal of bringing more people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

One of the most powerful ways data multiplies our mission is through personalized ministry. By carefully analyzing patterns in member engagement, spiritual growth, and individual needs, we can tailor our approach to each person's unique spiritual journey. For instance, a data-driven system could track an individual's interaction with various church resources—such as attendance at Bible studies, engagement with online content, or participation in community service—and use this information to suggest personalized spiritual growth paths. This might involve recommending specific devotional materials, connecting them with mentors who have overcome similar spiritual challenges, or inviting them to events that align with their interests and stage in their faith journey. Such personalization reflects Christ's own method of ministry, in which He met each individual at their point of need, speaking to their unique circumstances and heart conditions.

In the realm of evangelism, data serves as a powerful multiplier by enabling us to identify and reach receptive audiences more effectively. By analyzing demographic information, online behavior, and community trends, we can develop highly targeted outreach strategies. For example, if data indicates a growing interest in health and wellness in a particular region, we could launch a campaign that introduces our health message as a gateway to broader spiritual truths. This data-informed approach allows us to allocate our resources more efficiently, focusing our efforts where they are most likely to bear fruit. Moreover, by continuously tracking the effectiveness of different outreach methods across various demographics, we can refine our approaches in real time, ensuring that our evangelistic efforts remain relevant and impactful in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Data also multiplies our mission by enhancing our ability to collaborate and share knowledge across the global church. By aggregating and analyzing information from diverse regions and cultural contexts, we can identify successful strategies and adapt them to new environments. For instance, if a particular approach to youth ministry shows exceptional results in one part of the world, data analysis can help us understand the key factors contributing to its success. This insight can then be shared with other regions, allowing them to adapt and implement similar strategies tailored to their local contexts. This data-driven collaboration creates a powerful multiplier effect, in which successful practices are rapidly disseminated and adapted across the global church, accelerating our collective mission impact.

In the area of resource management, data serves as a crucial multiplier by optimizing how we allocate our time, funds, and human resources. Advanced analytics can help us predict trends in giving, anticipate needs in different regions, and identify the most effective use of our limited resources. For example, by analyzing patterns in church planting efforts alongside demographic and economic data, we can develop models that predict the most promising locations and approaches for establishing new congregations. This data-driven approach to resource allocation ensures that every dollar spent and every hour invested is

maximized for mission impact, allowing us to be faithful stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us.

The multiplying power of data is particularly evident in our efforts to prepare people for Christ's return. By monitoring global events, social trends, and spiritual indicators, we can align our messaging and programs with the signs of the times, making our end-time message more relevant and compelling. For instance, data analysis of current events in light of biblical prophecy could inform the development of targeted resources that address people's concerns about the future, offering hope and guidance through the lens of Adventist eschatology. This data-informed approach allows us to be more effective in fulfilling our unique prophetic role, helping people understand the times we live in and the urgency of preparing for Christ's return.

In the realm of discipleship and spiritual growth, data serves as a multiplier by enabling us to create more effective pathways for nurturing faith. By tracking individual and collective spiritual journeys, we can identify common obstacles, milestones, and catalysts for growth. This information can then be used to develop more targeted discipleship programs, create supportive communities, and provide timely interventions when individuals may be struggling in their faith. For example, a data-driven system could identify patterns that indicate when members are at risk of disengagement, prompting pastoral care or peer support before the individual drifts away from the church. This proactive, data-informed approach to discipleship multiplies our ability to nurture and retain members, ensuring that more individuals continue to grow in their faith and contribute to the mission of the church.

The multiplying effect of data extends to our educational institutions as well. By analyzing student performance, learning styles, and postgraduation outcomes, we can continuously refine our educational approaches to better prepare students for service and witness in the world. This might involve adapting curricula to address emerging challenges to faith, developing new programs that meet the evolving needs of the church and society, or creating personalized learning experiences that maximize each student's potential. By

leveraging data in this way, our educational institutions become more effective incubators of faith and mission, multiplying their impact on each student and, by extension, on the world they will serve.

In our health ministry, data serves as a powerful multiplier by enabling us to more effectively demonstrate the connection between physical health and spiritual well-being. By collecting and analyzing health outcome data from our lifestyle centers, hospitals, and community health programs, we can refine our approaches and provide compelling evidence of the benefits of the Adventist health message. This data-driven approach not only improves the effectiveness of our health outreach but also creates more opportunities to introduce people to the broader spiritual principles underlying our health teachings. For instance, data showing the positive impact of Sabbath rest on mental health could be used to develop targeted outreach programs that introduce the Sabbath truth through the lens of holistic well-being.

As we harness data as a mission multiplier, it's crucial to remember that *this approach must always be guided by the Holy Spirit and grounded in prayer*. Data provides valuable insights, but divine wisdom, claiming James 1:5, is essential in interpreting and applying this information in ways that truly advance God's kingdom. We must strike a balance between leveraging the power of data and maintaining the personal, Spirit-led nature of our ministry. The goal is not to replace human judgment and spiritual discernment with algorithms, but to enhance our decision-making and strategies with data-driven insights.

Moreover, as we embrace data as a mission multiplier, we must be mindful of the digital divide that exists within our global church. Not all regions have equal access to advanced data technologies or the expertise to implement data-driven strategies. Part of our responsibility in leveraging data for mission is to ensure that these capabilities are shared equitably across our world church, empowering all parts of the church to benefit from these advanced approaches to ministry.

Data Sovereignty

Building upon our understanding of data as an asset, a liability, and a mission multiplier, we must now address the critical concept of digital sovereignty. This principle is not merely about technological independence, but about ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of our mission in an increasingly complex and sometimes hostile digital landscape. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, digital sovereignty represents our ability to maintain control over our data, our key platforms, and our digital infrastructure, aligning them with our prophetic mission and values.

Our prophetic understanding informs us that as we approach the end times, our message may face intensified opposition, potentially leading to restrictions on our digital presence or deplatforming. While we continue to advocate for and pray for religious freedom, wisdom dictates that we prepare for scenarios in which our ability to communicate freely through mainstream digital channels might be compromised. This foresight underscores the importance of developing robust, independent digital systems that can withstand external pressures and continue to function even in adverse circumstances.

The recent loss of our data center in Ukraine serves as a stark reminder of how geopolitical events can impact our digital infrastructure. This incident highlights the urgent need for redundant systems and geographically diverse data storage solutions. As we move forward, we must develop strategies that ensure the resilience of our digital assets, not only implementing robust backup systems but also considering the geopolitical implications of where we store our data and host our platforms.

To achieve digital sovereignty while maximizing data as an asset and minimizing liabilities, we must focus on several key areas:

1. Decentralized Data Storage and Management

Implementing a decentralized data storage strategy with redundancies across multiple secure locations is crucial. This approach balances the need for data accessibility with the imperative of data protection. For instance, we could establish a network of secure denominationally owned data centers across different continents, each capable of operating independently if needed. This would not only protect against physical threats but also allow us to navigate varying data protection laws more effectively.

2. Platform Independence

While we continue to leverage certain commercial platforms, we must simultaneously continue to develop our own strategic platforms, such as ACMS and Adventist Web Engine. This dual approach allows us to take advantage of commercial offerings while still developing specific internal applications that meet our unique needs.

3. Embracing Open-Source Technologies

Adopting open-source solutions where appropriate can reduce dependence on proprietary systems and foster innovation within our global church community. For example, we have developed an open-source CMS that can be customized and improved by our global network of church entities. This approach not only reduces costs but also allows for rapid adaptation to local needs and challenges.

4. Advanced Security Measures

Implementing robust security measures is not just advisable—it's necessary for maintaining digital sovereignty. This includes advanced firewall systems, end-to-end encryption, sophisticated access control systems, regular security audits, and comprehensive training programs. For instance, we could implement a churchwide multifactor authentication system that protects access to sensitive data while still allowing for easy collaboration among authorized users.

5. Compliance and Ethical Data Management

Navigating the complex landscape of global data protection laws requires a proactive approach. We must develop comprehensive compliance management systems that not only meet legal requirements but also align with our ethical standards. For example, we could create a global data ethics committee that oversees our data practices, ensuring they respect individual privacy while facilitating our mission.

6. Continuous Education and Skill Development

To maintain digital sovereignty, we must invest in ongoing education for our members, leaders, and IT professionals. This could involve creating a digital literacy curriculum for church members, advanced cybersecurity training for our denominational IT staff, and regular briefings for church leaders on emerging digital trends and threats.

7. Collaborative Innovation

Leveraging the diverse talents within our global church community can accelerate our progress toward digital sovereignty. We could establish an Adventist tech innovation hub, bringing together skilled professionals from around the world to collaborate on developing solutions tailored to our unique needs and mission.

8. Balancing Openness and Security

As we pursue digital sovereignty, we must strike a careful balance between openness and security. Our mission calls us to be as accessible and transparent as possible, yet we must also protect sensitive information and the privacy of our members.

By implementing these eight strategies, we position ourselves to leverage data as a powerful asset for our mission while mitigating the associated risks and liabilities. This approach to digital sovereignty ensures that our voice remains heard, our message is accessible, and our mission is unimpeded in the digital age. As we face an uncertain future,

we work together to build digital systems that are resilient, ethical, and effective in spreading the everlasting gospel.

Moreover, by taking these proactive steps toward digital sovereignty, we demonstrate our trust in God's leading while exercising the wisdom and foresight He has granted us. We show that it's possible to be open and accessible while also being responsible and secure, potentially opening doors for partnership and collaboration with other organizations that share these values.

As we move forward in faith, let us leverage every tool at our disposal to ensure that the three angels' messages continue to reach every nation, kindred, tongue, and people—in the physical world and the digital realm alike. Our commitment to digital sovereignty is not just about technological independence; it's about faithfully fulfilling our prophetic mission. By God's grace, we will continue to harness the power of data and technology to prepare a people for the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. **Data as a Mission Asset:** Properly leveraged data can enhance mission effectiveness, personalize ministry, and optimize resource allocation.
2. **Balancing Benefits and Risks:** While data offers significant advantages, it also presents liabilities in terms of security, privacy, and potential overreliance on analytics.
3. **Mission Multiplication:** Data can exponentially increase the impact of ministry efforts through targeted outreach, personalized discipleship, and improved collaboration.
4. **Digital Sovereignty:** Developing independent digital infrastructure is crucial for ensuring the continuity of the church's mission in potentially adverse future scenarios.

5. Decentralized Approach: Implementing decentralized data storage and management strategies can enhance resilience and adaptability to varying global contexts.
6. Ethical Data Management: Maintaining high ethical standards in data use is essential for preserving trust and aligning with the church's values.
7. Continuous Adaptation: The rapidly changing digital landscape requires ongoing education, skill development, and flexible technology strategies.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively balance the use of data-driven insights with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our decision-making processes and ministry strategies?
2. What steps should we prioritize in developing digital sovereignty for our church, and how can we ensure these efforts are implemented equitably across our global community?
3. How can we foster a culture of innovation and collaboration within our church that leverages our members' diverse tech skills while maintaining our core mission and values?

Chapter 18: Hybrid Evangelism

Karen Glassford

Connecting digital seekers with in-person church experiences has long been our most significant challenge in evangelistic ministry. For over 20 years, countless efforts have tried to bridge that gap. While the church's online presence has expanded and improved, transitioning someone from a virtual interest to a physical community has remained difficult. In response to this dilemma, the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed the Digital Strategy for Mission (DSM), a world church initiative to integrate technology with our prophetic calling and connect seekers with caring friendships and spiritual mentorship through a local Adventist congregation.

Over time, a specific model emerged as the most efficient for combining the strength of digital outreach and the warmth of local church fellowship. This methodology, which we call hybrid evangelism, draws on Design Thinking and Agile principles to guide people from an online encounter to a nurturing community, and ultimately into meaningful discipleship.

One of the core questions drove us forward: How do we begin and maintain spiritual conversations with people who search online for answers to life's biggest questions, yet often fail to find God's transformative truth? A related question swiftly followed: Once we have engaged them in digital dialogue, how do we provide them with effective pastoral care, help them experience face-to-face fellowship, and, eventually, enjoy the fullness of faith in a congregation near their home?

These issues sparked numerous prototypes worldwide. Some projects thrived, offering new insights into bridging digital and personal ministry; others faltered, revealing shortcomings in our approach. Collectively they showed that biblical questions and answers to real-life issues are best resolved through pastoral care and compassionate relationships—far beyond Q&A platforms or ad funnels. By forging genuine connections—praying together, tackling real-life burdens, and journeying through the Bible—spiritual growth occurred without contentious debates.

The model is built on three key components, all steeped in prayer:

1. **Prayer Ads:** Targeted social media ads offer prayer and pastoral care within a local geographic area (geofencing). These ads reach people at their point of need or crisis.
2. **Immediate Response:** A dedicated team engages quickly with anyone who responds to these ads, offering spiritual support and initiating deeper conversations (though localized campaigns sometimes reduce the urgency).
3. **Local Church Involvement:** Trained members provide ongoing online and in-person pastoral care, ultimately welcoming seekers into the congregation.

Early pilot campaigns varied widely in scope and results, but side-by-side analysis helped refine our methods. Below is a table showing ad expenditures in initial prototypes, plus related outcomes:

Location	Initial Ad Cost (USD)	Resulting Contacts or Visitors (Early Stage)	Final Ad Cost Efficiency (USD Per Relationship)	Later Engagement or Baptisms
Auckland (NZ)	\$250	54 local visitors in a secular environment	Improved to under \$5/click	Sustained attendance, deeper growth
Fortaleza (Brazil)	\$60	1,500 clicks	Eventually stabilized below \$0.04/click	Engagement declined after 2 weeks

London: Initial Test in London (England)	\$2,000	About 22 meaningful relationships	Initial cost was \$90/click	Technical, legal, and follow-up challenges
Central California (USA)	Varied (avg \$100/click, initially)	Over 1,250 clicks across 6 churches	Reduced to under \$10/click	Over 40 baptisms
São Paulo (Brazil)	Varied (\$ cost not explicit early)	Over 4,000 clicks for Moema	Achieved below \$2/click	200+ visitors, 60 baptisms in 9 months

Let's understand these numbers. We saw how cultural context, local engagement, and pastoral care shaped sustainability. In Auckland, a modest \$250 produced 54 in-person visitors—despite a secular setting—showing that digital outreach can convert online interest into physical attendance. Fortaleza's \$60 campaign led to 1,500 new leads, but collapsed after two weeks when member engagement stopped.

London's initial campaign (over \$2,000 for 22 clicks) proved how big cities can require more contextual content and bigger budgets to see long-term cost reductions. Later, a new strategy dropped costs to \$8 per click. Central California and São Paulo demonstrated how coordinated efforts with the creative talents among members, pastors, and conference teams could reduce ad costs below \$2 per relationship, boosting results.

From Prototypes to a Unified Method

These early tests convinced us that digital advertising could quickly draw interest, but only genuine, ongoing pastoral care and friendship from local believers would lead seekers into the heart of the church. The most effective efforts fused broad digital outreach and on-the-ground interaction—blending technology's wide reach with personal visitation, potlucks,

and small group gatherings. Over time, we expanded this approach globally, adjusting to each culture but retaining core principles.

From the start, we knew that technology alone does not transform hearts. Every campaign and volunteer leans heavily on prayer, trusting the Holy Spirit to do the real work. Ads may spark curiosity, but only God's grace brings genuine conviction.

Often, people who find us online are at a moment of emotional need—searching for answers, wrestling with struggles, or simply longing for community. This is when local church members—who understand and love the Adventist message and the needs of their own community and whose lives are committed to intercessory prayer—make the greatest impact. Their ministry is vital as they respond quickly and empathetically, building personal bonds that guide seekers toward deeper fellowship in the local congregation and a transformational relationship with Jesus. At the same time, these volunteers often experience their own faith deepened as they minister to these new contacts. Time and again, they testify that seeing the Holy Spirit soften hearts—even across digital platforms—strengthens their spirituality and reaffirms God's active leading. In the end, we're reminded that while technology opens doors, it is God's grace that truly changes lives.

In broad terms, the hybrid evangelism model rests on three essential foundations: prayer ads, quick digital response, and local church involvement.

1. **Prayer Ads:** Targeted social media ads offer prayer and spiritual guidance to meet someone in their moment of urgency.
2. **Quick Digital Response:** Once that user clicks or responds, a dedicated digital team steps in—trained volunteers who quickly show empathy, speak of hope, and gently invite the seeker to explore more.
3. **Local Church Involvement:** As trust grows, online conversations transition from virtual to face-to-face fellowship, whether at a potluck, a Sabbath service, a seminar, or a small group meeting.

We continually refined ad creation, pastoral care training, and the process of integrating digital leads into local church life. In some areas, ads featuring a local pastor's personal invitation or a member's testimony proved most effective, while in others, a more formal style resonated better. While church-created personable ads generally yielded the best results, some regions saw success with static image ads that used carefully crafted wording

or stock video ads employed in creative ways. Flexible budgeting remained crucial, allowing ad expenditure to be adjusted based on performance, ensuring the most effective use of resources.

Measured in raw data, hybrid evangelism can look like an attractive marketing funnel: a certain cost per click, a cost per relationship, and a final tally of baptisms. But behind those metrics are real people encountering Adventism—people like the man in New Zealand who had never set foot in a church, the family in Brazil who found comfort and friendship in a local congregation, or the young London professional who discovered real hope amid the city's hectic pace. Pastors mention how prayer meetings have felt reborn, fueled by members interceding for digital contacts they have never yet met in person. Volunteers, too, testify that helping someone in their own city has encouraged their heart and strengthened their prayer life.

A Holistic Approach to a “Successful” Hybrid Campaign

Imagining the user journey is often the easiest way to see how the model unfolds. Picture someone named Ava. Late one night, burdened by stress and searching social media, she encounters an ad that simply says, “We’d love to pray for you today.” She clicks and types out her worries about unemployment and her uncertain future. A volunteer from the church replies with a warm message, acknowledging her pain, offering a short prayer, and inviting her to share more if she feels comfortable. Over the following week, Ava receives heartfelt daily messages from the volunteer referencing Bible promises, each one short, encouraging, and relevant to her current situation.

Over time, she feels less alone. After some days, the volunteer gently suggests she might benefit from a small online group that meets for Bible discussions. Intrigued, Ava joins one session, meets a few members, senses a genuine, caring atmosphere, and decides she’d like to attend a small gathering in person. A few visits later, she’s welcomed so kindly that it starts feeling like home. Eventually, she studies deeper truths of Scripture, culminating in her baptism and a new life of service. She shares her own gift for technology, jumping into the digital team that helped her find hope in the first place.

Though each story differs, many revolve around the same pivot: from a purely online moment of trust to a personal, relational connection. The emphasis is never on funneling

people into a building; it's about building them up in Christ, and the local Adventist church becomes the best place for sustained discipleship.

When local leaders decide to launch a hybrid evangelism campaign, they usually begin by crafting or commissioning ads that speak from the heart. These ads aren't long, but they must feel authentic—often featuring a local pastor standing near a recognizable landmark, compassionately communicating that the church is praying for the needs of the community and inviting those who need prayer.

Throughout the process, prayer remains central. Pastors typically pray before recording any video ads, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide their words. As soon as someone responds to an ad, a trained church member quickly reaches out with a friendly, personalized greeting—ideally within a few minutes—so that new contacts feel welcomed and cared for right from the start. During this initial contact, a prayer is offered, and many seekers express their heartfelt gratitude. This prompt, prayerful approach sets the tone for genuine connection, opening doors to deeper conversations and spiritual support. It's in this spirit of total reliance on God that we read: "The greatest victories gained for the cause of God are not the result of labored argument, ample facilities, wide influence, or abundance of means; they are gained in the audience chamber with God, when with earnest, agonizing faith men lay hold upon the mighty arm of power."⁶⁴

Rather than engaging in long theological debates, these church volunteers focus on pastoral listening and open-ended conversation starters such as:

- "Tell me more about your prayer request so I can pray for you even more intentionally."
- "What has been your experience with church, prayer, or faith?"
- "If you could ask God about something, what would that be?"
- "What is a religious or Bible question you've wondered about? I may not know the answer either, but we can chat about it."

Over time, they share short devotionals, called "daily messages," about finding peace or hope no matter the circumstances. These messages include a Bible verse that speaks to the seeker's felt needs. If the newcomer is receptive, the volunteer invites them to a deeper

⁶⁴ E. G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 259.

conversation—either a phone call, a Zoom meeting, or an in-person connection at the church.

The congregation must be ready for these visits. Greeters, prayer teams, and small group leaders should be prepared to welcome these guests warmly, bridging the digital-to-physical gap. Pastors and members keep local resource lists on hand, so if someone shares a specific crisis—like needing immigration advice or coping with depression—they can direct them to specific local assistance, while the church continues to provide them with ongoing pastoral care.

Since digital advertising reaches worldwide, every administrative level of the Adventist Church should align in this digital approach. The General Conference offers pastoral care training and resources highlighting best practices from prototypes. They provide insights and training on how to answer potentially difficult questions, effectively minister to people, and lead them into spiritual conversations and journeys. These trainings also cover the cycle of evangelism, helping churches plan strategic touchpoints (seminars, community service events, programs, small group Bible studies) throughout the year that culminate in reaping events.

Resources are recommended and would include John Peckham's book *Why We Pray*, which explores how petitionary prayer fits into God's loving plan when He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. This book offers fresh perspectives on why prayers matter and why some seem unanswered. Two additional example resources could be from the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department: *Discipleship Handbook*, which is a six-month Bible-saturated discipleship plan for churches covering topics from how to develop a meaningful personal devotional life to effective witnessing, and its follow-up guide to personal witnessing, *Spread the Word*, which connects various seed-sowing activities to heart transformation. These and other excellent resources support the church's success and spiritual growth.

Divisions and unions adapt strategies to their territories, factoring in language and cultural norms. Meanwhile, the local conference often manages campaign budgets and technical details, such as video ad editing, geofencing the ads, and data analysis. Pastors and church members do the frontline interactions—the prayer chats, the daily messages, the face-to-face welcomes, and the follow-up discipleship. Each layer of the church does what it does best, ensuring synergy.

Challenges, Adjustments, and a Future Vision

Not every region will see the same cost efficiency or number of baptisms. Socioeconomics, ad rates, and local church readiness all impact results. Where pastors are overstretched or churches are unprepared for new visitors, interest can fade. Another crucial aspect is cultural sensitivity. In certain regions, more formal ads might be appropriate; in others, casual social media posts featuring local families may do better. That said, the overarching principle remains: Combine broad digital engagement with personal relationships on the ground, and do it all under the guidance of prayer.

Our next experiment aims to accelerate church planting by merging digital outreach with purposeful on-site efforts. Traditionally, establishing a new congregation has required slow, incremental relationship-building. Now the plan is to nurture a digital audience first, then send volunteer missionaries or pastors to an area where local contacts have already been cultivated. By converting a rented home into a “house of prayer,” holding daily prayer sessions, and consistently offering practical small group Bible studies—reinforced by ongoing digital connection—we can more effectively form a thriving faith community. If attendance grows beyond the home’s capacity, leaders would decide whether to rent or build a new venue. Cultural or legal issues might arise, and the steady schedule of gatherings could prove intense for some planters, but the possibility of fifty-plus committed attendees in under a year is an exciting leap forward for Adventist mission.

We would also like to explore this same hybrid approach in Adventist hospitals, introducing simple cards to patients and their families that read, “Our sponsoring institution, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has a team ready to pray for you right now. You can contact them by scanning this QR code.” This straightforward invitation could connect patients and loved ones with the Adventist Church through online pastoral care, daily devotionals, and even follow-up visits after their discharge. This will be possible only with engaged church members in the area. Such an outreach strategy could further expand our evangelistic efforts, using digital channels to create personal connections in an environment where people often seek spiritual comfort and guidance.

Educational institutions play a vital role in this digital outreach strategy. As part of their practical training, theology students can gain hands-on experience by running complete hybrid evangelism campaigns in local churches. These capstone projects take students

through every phase—from crafting effective social media ads to coordinating prayer teams and providing online pastoral care. The experience culminates in organizing and conducting a reaping event months later, giving students practical skills in both digital and traditional evangelism before graduation.

The link with educational institutions is also needed. Imagine theology students, as part of their practical training, running complete hybrid evangelism campaigns in local churches. These capstone projects take students through every phase—from crafting effective social media ads to coordinating prayer teams and providing online pastoral care. The experience culminates in organizing and conducting a reaping event several months later. This hands-on training equips future pastors with both digital and traditional evangelism skills, preparing them to be effective instruments of God's grace as they connect with people and work with God in giving His truth and seeing Him transform lives.

Though it is tempting to focus on success stories in purely quantitative terms—like cost per relationship or raw visitor counts—such metrics tell only part of the story. The intangible effects, such as renewed prayer life, revived worship services, or a communal sense of mission, can be equally profound. Members who have participated often describe the joy of praying with someone in their community, marveling at how God transcends screens to touch hearts.

Pastors note that dealing with a flood of new digital contacts has ironically reconnected pastors to the evangelistic core of their calling, removing any sense of dryness that can come from just focusing on routine church work. In many cases, newly baptized members bring fresh energy and skill sets to the local church—some volunteer in digital marketing or creative content, bridging generational and technological gaps.

What Comes Next

As we keep refining hybrid evangelism, it's vital to remain open to emergent digital platforms, shifting user behaviors, and local feedback. We intend to continue measuring ad performance, retention rates, and spiritual growth across different fields around the world. A robust feedback loop includes monthly or quarterly check-ins with pastoral care response teams, local pastors, and newly baptized members. We also incorporate visual documentation—like short video testimonies from seekers or volunteers—to remind us that behind every “digital contact” stands an individual searching for hope.

We envision a future in which every local Adventist church is digitally enabled and providing attentive pastoral care, each championing a holistic mission that meets felt needs and points to Christ's soon return. Partnering with other Adventist ministries—health, education, community services—can magnify the effect, as these realms all have digital potential: from mental health Q&A sessions to short cooking demos that open spiritual dialogue. Our broader dream is that Adventist universities, youth organizations, and media centers will unify in pushing hybrid evangelism further, ensuring that no matter where you live, there's an online invitation leading to a local Adventist family near you.

Ultimately, each phase of hybrid evangelism remains grounded in prayer. No method, no matter how innovative, can replace the power of God. Ellen White put it this way: "The Lord can do more in one hour than we can do in a whole lifetime, and when He sees that His people are fully consecrated, let me tell you, a great work will be done in a short time, and the message of truth is to be carried into the dark places of the earth, where it has never been proclaimed."⁶⁵

When intercessory prayer meets well-managed digital campaigns, extraordinary transformations happen. The path from an online click to a heartfelt baptism becomes remarkably real. We do not claim that hybrid evangelism is the only way forward, but for our times, it seems to be a potent channel of grace. By placing technology in God's hands, guided by mission, we bridge the digital and physical worlds so more people can experience the joy of Christ's transforming truth and love—and eagerly prepare for His return.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Bridging Digital and In-Person Gaps: Hybrid evangelism emerged as the most effective model to connect online seekers with local Adventist churches, blending digital ads and nurturing face-to-face fellowship.
2. Prayer-Centered Ads: Short, compassionate social media ads offering prayer are a powerful entry point. These ads work best when genuine testimonies and personal invitations from local pastors or members are featured.

⁶⁵ E. G. White manuscript 93a, 1899.

3. Immediate Response and Pastoral Care: A dedicated response team is crucial. Volunteers provide spiritual support and prayer, share short “daily messages,” and continually guide seekers into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Hybrid evangelism is effective when saturated in prayer.
4. Local Church Readiness: Success hinges on active involvement from the local congregation. Members must be trained and willing to sustain relationships, integrating visitors into the church family quickly.
5. Global Adaptation and Cost Efficiency: Ad performance and costs vary widely by culture and urban context. While Auckland, São Paulo, and Central California saw concrete and continually growing results, more expensive cities like London require higher budgets and creative targeting.
6. Spiritual Emphasis and Training: The Holy Spirit remains central. Digital teams are encouraged to spend time in daily devotions and prayer, viewing each online conversation as a sacred opportunity for ministry.
7. Potential for Church Planting: Beyond revitalizing established congregations, hybrid evangelism shows promise for planting new churches by building virtual communities before missionaries arrive in a new area.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. What strategies can churches implement to ensure active, ongoing prayerful participation from members in hybrid evangelism, especially after the initial excitement of a digital campaign fades?
2. How can we tailor ad budgets and content in areas with high advertising costs or limited local capacities, ensuring we still experience meaningful, long-term conversions?
3. In what ways can we expand hybrid evangelism to plant new congregations globally while maintaining a strong spiritual foundation and providing consistent training for pastors and volunteers?

Chapter 19: Adventist Cloud

Richard Stephenson

The General Conference, on behalf of the world church, has introduced Adventist.Cloud, a suite of enterprise-class tools, built by the church, for the church. This is actually part of the GC's Digital Strategy for Mission (strategy numbers 4 and 5). Strategy 4 states: "Adopt a Strategy for Enterprise Services, including the adoption of World Church Platforms." Strategy 5 states: "Integration and Centralization of Resources." Here are three key reasons it's important for the church to create its own software solutions from a sustainability perspective, along with discussions of their importance.

Data Sovereignty

Creating its own software solutions allows the church to maintain complete control over its data, which we believe is crucial for long-term sustainability. When relying on third-party vendors, there's always a risk of data being inaccessible, misused, or lost if the vendor goes out of business or changes their policies, or if the vendor becomes antagonistic toward the church or its biblical beliefs. By developing and owning its software, the church ensures that sensitive information about members, finances, and operations remains within its control.

This level of data sovereignty is particularly important for a global religious organization like the Adventist Church. It allows the church to comply with various international data protection regulations, safeguard against potential misuse of information, and maintain the trust of its members. Furthermore, it provides the flexibility to adapt data management practices to the church's specific needs and values, ensuring that technology aligns with the church's mission and principles.

Cost-Effectiveness and Resource Stewardship

Developing custom software solutions can be more cost-effective for the church over time, promoting better stewardship of resources. While there may be higher initial costs, owning the software eliminates ongoing licensing fees and reduces dependence on external vendors. This approach allows the church to allocate more resources directly to its mission rather than to software expenses.

Moreover, as a global organization with numerous entities, the church can benefit from economies of scale. By creating solutions that can be used across different levels of the organization—from local churches to divisions—the church maximizes the return on its technology investment. This shared approach embodies good stewardship, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively to support the church's work worldwide.

Alignment With Unique Ecclesiastical Needs

Custom software solutions allow the church to address its unique ecclesiastical needs more effectively than off-the-shelf products. The Adventist Church has specific organizational structures, policies, processes, and requirements that may not be fully met by commercial software. By strategically creating its own solutions, the church ensures that its technology more perfectly aligns with its operational needs and theological principles.

This alignment is crucial for sustainability because it enables more efficient and effective operations. Software that is tailored to the church's specific needs can streamline processes, improve decision-making, and enhance mission effectiveness. It also allows for easier integration between different systems and departments, creating a cohesive technological ecosystem that supports the church's work. In the long term, this alignment between technology and mission contributes to the church's ability to adapt, grow, and fulfill its purpose in a changing world.

At the time of this writing, here are the inaugural World Church Platforms:

Adventist.Cloud Portal

The future of Adventist digital collaboration is the Adventist.Cloud portal (www.adventist.cloud). This centralized hub serves as your gateway to the entire suite of World Church Platforms, providing a unified, user-friendly interface for accessing all the digital tools your ministry needs.

The Adventist.Cloud portal offers more than just access—it's a comprehensive resource center for the digital strategy of the Adventist Church. Here, you'll find valuable information, tutorials, and best practices for implementing and maximizing the benefits of each platform. The portal also serves as a dashboard, allowing administrators to manage users, monitor usage, and access support resources all in one place.

By using the Adventist.Cloud portal, you're not just adopting a set of tools, but joining a global community of Adventist organizations *working together* to advance our digital mission. Experience the synergy of a fully integrated digital ecosystem, designed by Adventists, for Adventists. We invite you to step into the Adventist.Cloud portal and unlock the full potential of your ministry in the digital age.

ACMS, ACMS Treasury, and 7Me

Discover the power of seamless church management with ACMS and 7Me, the cornerstone of Adventist.Cloud. ACMS offers comprehensive membership and treasury management, ensuring that your local church's administrative needs are met with efficiency and precision. With its user-friendly interface, it helps you streamline operations and save valuable time for what matters most—your ministry.

Complement your church management with 7Me, the cutting-edge mobile-first application for online giving and church member engagement. This innovative platform allows your congregation to stay connected, contribute easily, and participate actively in church life, all from the palm of their hand. Experience the future of church community building with 7Me's intuitive design and powerful features.

By adopting ACMS and 7Me, you're not just implementing software, but embracing a solution built by the church, for the church. Benefit from continuous improvements, dedicated support, and the assurance that your data remains secure within the Adventist.Cloud ecosystem, operated from Adventist-owned data centers. Join the growing number of church entities worldwide that are transforming their operations with these world-class tools.

7Vote

Revolutionize your church's decision-making process with 7Vote, the state-of-the-art online voting and ecclesiastical election software. Designed specifically for Adventist organizations, 7Vote brings democracy into the digital age, enabling secure, efficient, and transparent voting for everything from church board meetings to large-scale ecclesiastical elections.

With 7Vote, say goodbye to the hassles of paper ballots and manual counting. This user-friendly platform ensures that every voice is heard, whether you're conducting a small committee vote or organizing a complex multitier election. Its scalable architecture means it's equally at home in a local church setting or a division-wide conference.

By choosing 7Vote, you're investing in a solution that's both cost-effective and tailored to Adventist needs. Unlike generic voting platforms, 7Vote understands the unique requirements of our church structure and working policy. Experience the peace of mind that comes from using a tool developed by Adventists, for Adventists, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of your important decisions.

ASAS (Adventist Secretariat Administrative System)

Elevate your church administration to new heights with ASAS, the Adventist Secretariat Administrative System. This powerful platform is designed to streamline and modernize the critical work of church secretaries at all levels of the Adventist organization. From managing official service records to tracking important church processes, ASAS is your all-in-one solution for efficient church governance.

ASAS brings clarity and order to complex administrative tasks. Its intuitive interface allows for easy data entry, retrieval, and reporting, ensuring that vital information is always at your fingertips. Whether you're preparing for a board meeting, generating statistical reports, or maintaining historical records, ASAS empowers you to work smarter, not harder.

As part of the Adventist.Cloud suite, ASAS integrates seamlessly with other church platforms, creating a cohesive ecosystem for church administration. By adopting ASAS, you're not just implementing software, but joining a global community of Adventist administrators who are leveraging technology to enhance their service to the church. Experience the transformative power of ASAS and take your secretariat to the next level.

Adventist Web Engine

Elevate your online presence with the Adventist Web Engine, a powerful website hosting and content management system tailored for Adventist organizations. This innovative platform empowers you to create stunning, functional, engaging websites that effectively communicate your message and connect with your audience.

The Adventist Web Engine offers a suite of modules to enhance your site's capabilities. From managing articles and sermons to handling donations and events, this versatile system provides all the tools you need to build a comprehensive online hub for your ministry. Its user-friendly interface makes content creation and management a breeze, even for those without technical expertise.

By adopting the Adventist Web Engine, you're joining a collaborative network of Adventist websites worldwide. Share resources, amplify your reach, and benefit from ongoing developments driven by the needs of our global church community. Experience the difference of a web solution built by Adventists, for Adventists, and take your digital ministry to new heights.

Jetstream

Unleash the full potential of your media ministry with Jetstream, a comprehensive suite of tools designed to streamline content creation, distribution, and engagement. Developed by Hope Channel International and now part of the Adventist.Cloud family, Jetstream empowers you to share the gospel message more effectively in the digital age.

By embracing Jetstream, you're not just adopting software, but joining a global network of Adventist media professionals. Share resources, collaborate on projects, and amplify your reach like never before. Experience the synergy of a platform built by Adventists, for Adventists, and watch your media ministry flourish in ways you never thought possible.

APS.net (Adventist Personnel System)

Revolutionize your human resources management with APS.net, the comprehensive Adventist Personnel System. As a vital component of the Adventist.Cloud suite, APS.net offers a robust set of tools designed to streamline payroll processing and expand HR services across the Adventist organization.

APS.net brings efficiency and accuracy to your personnel management tasks. From managing employee data and processing payrolls to handling benefits administration and generating reports, APS.net simplifies complex HR processes. Its user-friendly interface ensures that HR professionals can focus on supporting employees rather than wrestling with cumbersome software.

By adopting APS.net, you're joining hundreds of Adventist entities that have already experienced the benefits of this mature, field-tested solution. As part of the Adventist.Cloud family, APS.net integrates seamlessly with other church management tools, creating a unified ecosystem for your administrative needs. Embrace the power of APS.net and transform your HR department into a strategic asset for your organization.

Summary

Top six insights for Adventist leaders:

1. Data Sovereignty: Creating custom software solutions allows the church to maintain complete control over its data, ensuring security, compliance, and alignment with church values.
2. Cost-Effectiveness: Developing custom solutions can be more cost-effective in the long term, eliminating ongoing licensing fees and promoting better stewardship of resources.
3. Tailored Solutions: Custom software addresses the unique ecclesiastical needs of the Adventist Church more effectively than off-the-shelf products.
4. Integrated Ecosystem: The Adventist.Cloud portal serves as a centralized hub for accessing all World Church Platforms, creating a cohesive technological ecosystem.
5. Global Collaboration: These platforms foster a global community of Adventist organizations working together to advance the church's digital mission.
6. Scalability: Solutions like 7Vote and ACMS are designed to serve various levels of the church organization, from local churches to divisions.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively train and support church leaders and members at all levels to fully utilize these World Church Platforms, ensuring widespread adoption and maximizing their potential for ministry?
2. What strategies can we implement to ensure that these platforms continue to evolve and meet the changing needs of the church while maintaining data sovereignty and security?
3. How can we leverage these integrated platforms to enhance collaboration and resource-sharing across different regions and entities of the church while respecting local contexts and needs?

Chapter 20: Future Technologies

In every era of church history, God has used new media to advance His message of hope and salvation. Whether it was the Roman roads that facilitated the rapid spread of Christianity in the first century or the printing press that ignited the Protestant Reformation, technology has often served as a providential bridge between the gospel and a searching world. Today, we live in a time of unparalleled technological flux—an era when innovations seem to appear overnight, capture our imagination, and reshape global culture before we have even begun to understand them.

For Seventh-day Adventist leaders, these seismic shifts are both an opportunity and a challenge. On one hand, we have powerful tools at our disposal to reach every corner of the planet with the good news of Jesus Christ; on the other, we must navigate complex ethical dilemmas, resource constraints, and ever-increasing compliance obligations, ensuring that our focus remains on the mission rather than getting lost in the mesmerizing glow of novelty.

In this chapter, we will examine the horizon of *future technologies* in a unified, in-depth way, spotlighting the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI), immersive media (including virtual and augmented reality), and decentralized systems such as blockchain and peer-to-peer networks. We will also explore the changing face of social media, the heightened need for ethical digital pastoral care, and what it means to embrace these tools as faithful stewards of God’s message in the twenty-first century.

To those new to many of these concepts, the vocabulary may initially seem intimidating—terms such as AI, blockchain, or mixed reality might sound like they belong in a tech start-up rather than a church board meeting. But we must remember that the Lord has often guided His people to adapt and adopt new frameworks so they can more effectively share the truth of the gospel. Just as the apostle Paul became “all things to all people” so he might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9), we also are called to keep our eyes open

for any legitimate method to convey the timeless truths of God's Word to a generation that increasingly lives online. Our aim, therefore, is not to chase every new trend. Rather, it is to plant a firm spiritual anchor in today's digital reality, ensuring that we continually recenter on Christ's mandate to preach the everlasting gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people (Revelation 14:6).

One reason we need to look to the future is that the landscape of digital communication is inherently fragile. Within the past decade alone, we have witnessed entire social media platforms rise and fall, some overshadowed by more advanced competitors, others limited by shifting user preferences and aging demographics. We have also seen controversies around data privacy, sudden algorithmic changes that censor biblical teachings as "hate speech," and even government restrictions that can shut down or censor specific websites within hours. This reality should not necessarily cause alarm, but rather sober-minded reflection. If the Adventist Church invests heavily in a narrow range of platforms without considering future developments, we could quickly find ourselves sidelined, deplatformed, and struggling to regain footing in new or evolving media. By contrast, if we cultivate a forward-looking posture, we can adapt swiftly when conditions change, ensuring that the essence of our mission endures even as digital environments evolve.

Artificial Intelligence

A natural place to begin our exploration is artificial intelligence. For those who have never interacted with generative AI, it might evoke images of science fiction—thinking robots or malevolent supercomputers. The reality is much more practical and, for ministry purposes, far more hopeful. AI commonly refers to a category of computer algorithms designed to perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence, such as understanding language, recognizing images, solving complex problems, or making data-driven predictions. Even if someone has never consciously noticed AI at work, they have likely encountered it in everyday life. Voice assistants like Siri or Alexa use AI to interpret voice commands, while social media platforms employ AI to recommend content based on user

behavior. Even your email program's spam filter is a rudimentary form of AI, sorting out unwanted messages by pattern recognition.

In the sphere of content creation and evangelism, *AI can dramatically extend our reach*. Imagine a scenario in which a pastor writes a sermon outline in English, and within minutes, an AI-driven translation tool provides drafts in Spanish, French, and Korean—complete with idiomatic phrases that resonate with those cultures. That content can then be polished by a human editor for theological accuracy and style, ensuring that it remains faithful to Adventist beliefs while also becoming more accessible to a wider audience. AI might also help in initially collating relevant Bible verses or historical quotes for a topic, freeing up more pastoral time for prayer, study, and direct community engagement. This is not about letting machines write sermons or preach the gospel, but about harnessing machine efficiency to lighten administrative burdens, ultimately *amplifying* the effectiveness of our human teams.

Beyond mere efficiency, AI has the capacity for *personalization*—a key concept in the age of digital outreach. At present, many church communications follow a one-size-fits-all model. We release articles, videos, or social media posts that are the same for everyone, regardless of their particular spiritual questions. AI can analyze user interactions to detect patterns—someone repeatedly clicking on content about prophecy might be offered additional resources on Daniel and Revelation, while another person frequently seeking mental health support could be directed to devotions or testimonies that speak to emotional well-being. This tailored approach can reduce the noise of irrelevant content and gently guide seekers along a spiritual pathway that resonates with their immediate life situation. Of course, these methods raise *ethical considerations* around privacy and data usage. As Adventist leaders, we have a scriptural obligation to protect each person's dignity, and this includes safeguarding their personal information. The moment technology violates trust or manipulates user data for ulterior motives, we have strayed from our mandate to reflect Christ's transparent love.

Immersive Technologies

A second domain of future technologies involves *immersive media*, primarily understood through virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). While many church members may have only a passing familiarity with these media—perhaps from seeing children play VR games or from short test demos at a tech store—their potential for spiritual transformation should not be underestimated. VR headsets immerse users in a simulated 3D environment, whereas AR overlays digital elements onto the real-world view through a smartphone or specialized glasses. Both forms of immersion can revolutionize how we experience biblical stories, worship, and even theological education.

Consider the story of the Exodus. In a traditional sermon, we might describe the parting of the Red Sea or the construction of the tabernacle, relying on oral explanations and perhaps a few PowerPoint slides. If we incorporate VR, however, an entire congregation could virtually *walk through* a model of the ancient sanctuary, visually explore each section, and understand more deeply the symbolism pointing to Christ. Or imagine an AR app that allows families to project the layout of Jerusalem's Temple courts right onto their living room tables, with each section accompanied by interactive pop-ups describing how worship took place. It's not that these experiences replace the Word of God or the moving of the Holy Spirit, but they can *supplement* traditional methods, igniting curiosity and making Scripture come alive in ways that resonate with visual and experiential learners. This approach aligns with the Adventist heritage of using visual aids—from the large prophecy charts of the Millerite era to contemporary media ministries that illustrate biblical themes for new generations.

Nevertheless, the church must address practical hurdles. High-end VR systems are cost-prohibitive for many institutions, and the technical know-how to produce truly meaningful experiences can be equally daunting. The onus is on us to find ways to introduce simpler, more cost-effective AR or basic VR elements that can reach a broad audience without sidelining those with fewer resources. This will require us to work more closely together as

a church! Moreover, we must emphasize that VR or AR cannot, and should not, replace genuine fellowship and corporate worship. These immersive tools are *enhancements*, not the essence. Human relationships, Spirit-filled preaching, and the warmth of a real handshake or hug in Sabbath fellowship remain irreplaceable cornerstones of Adventist community life.

Decentralized Technologies

While AI and immersive media often grab headlines, we should not overlook the quiet but significant rise of *decentralized technologies*. Terms like blockchain and peer-to-peer file sharing might initially appear far removed from spiritual matters, but their potential to strengthen the church's digital infrastructure is noteworthy. A blockchain is essentially a distributed digital ledger—transactions or data entries are recorded across many computers in a secure, tamper-resistant manner. The technology gained fame through cryptocurrencies, but it can be applied more broadly. Some experts envision that in contexts where the church needs *absolute transparency and security*—for instance, in validating ministerial credentials or enabling secure online voting at a General Conference Session—blockchain could be an invaluable tool. If a local church member in Kenya and a delegate in Canada are both voting on a crucial issue, blockchain-based voting could ensure that every vote is independently verifiable and that no single authority can meddle with the result. This level of integrity and transparency could bolster confidence in church governance across cultures and international boundaries.

In addition, we face a future in which online censorship and data control might become more frequent challenges, especially in areas of the world where freedom of religion or freedom of speech is curtailed. Peer-to-peer file sharing protocols—most famously, BitTorrent—distribute data across multiple nodes so that no single central server can be easily blocked. While these technologies are often associated with illicit file sharing, they can also be harnessed for legitimate ministry purposes: distributing large evangelistic series videos, theological archives, or training materials in regions with erratic internet

connectivity or government-imposed restrictions. The advantage here is *resilience*—the content does not reside in one vulnerable location, but is spread across numerous users, making it extremely difficult for authorities or other entities to fully remove the content. Of course, adopting such a model requires careful explanation and training, ensuring that members understand the ethical and legal guidelines for sharing church-related resources.

Future of Social Media

Parallel to these evolving digital infrastructures is the changing face of social media. A decade ago, leaders might have asked, “Should our church have a Facebook page?” Today, that question seems almost quaint. Social media is ubiquitous, yet it too is experiencing major shifts. Large platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X) still exist, but there is a growing migration toward niche and private online communities, often housed on messaging apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, or Discord servers. This transition responds to user fatigue with massive, impersonal feeds. People want smaller, more meaningful circles where they can be heard and engage in genuine conversation. For Adventist leaders, this presents an excellent parallel to how the early church relied on house-to-house fellowship—microcommunities now thriving in digital form. Instead of trying to capture everyone’s attention on a single monolithic page, we can foster numerous smaller groups for specific interests: health ministry, end-time prophecy, family life, or youth evangelism. Here, conversation can be more authentic, administrators can moderate in a more personal way, and members can grow deeper relationships that could translate into in-person fellowship.

Yet with this rise in microcommunities, the demands for thoughtful online engagement increase. If each of these groups is to remain vibrant and helpful, they need facilitators who understand how to guide discussions and handle conflicts or misinformation. Often, conflicts can intensify online, fueled by misunderstandings or the perceived distance that comes with virtual communication. In these spaces, our leaders and members need to model Christlike interaction, ensuring that we speak truth in love rather than letting trivial

disputes overshadow the unity of our faith. We also need to remain mindful of where data is stored. Many popular messaging apps are commercial products subject to corporate or governmental policies.

Ethical Pastoral Care

Nowhere is *data privacy* more crucial than in the realm of digital pastoral care. Pastors, chaplains, and lay leaders often find themselves answering spiritual questions in WhatsApp groups, praying with individuals through Zoom, or counseling families over email. The convenience of these tools has undoubtedly expanded the reach of pastoral ministry, enabling leaders to connect with people who might otherwise go untouched. However, we must remember that these interactions frequently involve sensitive personal information—family challenges, spiritual struggles, regrets, or fears. If we are using third-party platforms with intrusive terms of service, the confidentiality of these conversations might be compromised. That is especially troubling when we consider the expectation of trust that church members place in their leaders. They assume that vulnerable details of their lives—shared for the purpose of encouragement, counseling, and prayer—will not end up feeding an algorithm or leaking through a data breach. This is a sacred responsibility!

This ethical tension highlights the need for a church-owned or church-approved digital infrastructure for pastoral care and member engagement. While building custom platforms requires a significant investment in time, finances, and expertise, it aligns with the principle of digital sovereignty—the idea that the Adventist Church, as much as possible, should control the core technologies that carry its mission-critical communication. We must weigh whether the convenience of public platforms, with all their commercial-made features, is worth the inherent risks to confidentiality and mission continuity. Of course, such a discussion must be tempered with practicality. Smaller regions or local churches may not have the resources to create such infrastructure. Yet the overall direction should be clear: As technology evolves, so should our commitment to protect the spiritual and personal

well-being of every member, ensuring that no conversation about God's grace inadvertently becomes a commodity on the digital marketplace.

Conclusion

We might ask: Where does this all leave us? From AI to VR, blockchain to BitTorrent, microcommunities to secure pastoral platforms, the potential for using technology in God's service is vast. And now is the time to do it! The Adventist Church has a distinctive message—rooted in Scripture and the urgency of the three angels' messages—and we risk blurring that distinction if we become so enthralled with the *tools* that we forget the *task*. Our real objective is not to be cutting-edge for its own sake; it is to deepen our relationship with Jesus and point others to HIM! That is the *spiritual guardrail* we must keep in place at every stage. If a technology fosters more fruitful engagement with the gospel, let us use it wholeheartedly. If it distracts us from our core calling or places undue burdens on unity and ethics, we must exercise caution and even step away.

At the same time, we cannot let fear dictate our posture. The parable of the talents reminds us that it is better to invest bravely—even in uncertain conditions—than to bury our resources in the sand. Our resources, in this context, include not just money or materials but also the energy, creativity, and adaptability of God's people. We should not approach AI or immersive media as though they are inherently evil. Rather, we can approach them with a posture of *prayerful discernment*, guided by the Holy Spirit and the counsel of Scripture, testing each approach to see whether it serves the cause of Christ. We cannot forget that technology is an extension of human intention. When wielded by those committed to love, truth, and righteousness, it can become a powerful instrument of blessing.

To anchor these ideas more concretely, let us envision a near-future scenario. A small Adventist church in a remote area has begun using an AI-driven content system that translates their weekly sermons into several local dialects. Using modest VR headsets (some donated, some purchased through a mission offering), the youth group has created

a short but compelling VR experience that guides new believers through the fundamentals of Adventist beliefs, letting them “visit” representations of biblical sites and scenes as an introduction to the world of Scripture. Meanwhile, the church’s administrative team, guided by local leadership, conducts a secure online election via a blockchain-based voting platform—making sure that despite geographical distance, every member has a voice. The same members use a decentralized file-sharing approach to circulate newly produced health ministry videos, circumventing the intermittent internet blackouts in their region. In parallel, the church’s pastoral staff relies on a privacy-conscious messaging service (perhaps developed within the Adventist.Cloud ecosystem) to counsel believers who are grappling with everything from personal moral dilemmas to the hardships of a local economic downturn. Through all these tools, the local congregation builds a web of digital touchpoints that magnify their witness, bridging distance and cultural barriers so that the gospel remains front and center. This scenario is not a far-fetched sci-fi fantasy world—it is an illustration of how real churches, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can harness tomorrow’s technologies for the sake of Christ’s kingdom.

Granted, implementing such a vision will require *training* at all levels. Pastors must learn enough about AI to edit sermon translations effectively or about AR to coach a small group that wants to overlay digital Scripture prompts on their next prayer walk. Church technology specialists must understand how to maintain secure communication channels and run pilot projects on VR evangelism. Conference and union leaders will need to weigh the cost and benefits of adopting or scaling these innovations. Younger members, who may be more fluent in these technologies, can step up as “digital missionaries,” assisting the rest of the church family. Far from being a threat, these challenges represent *a unifying call*—an opportunity for intergenerational collaboration that breaks down the silos between pastors, educators, IT professionals, and church members.

We should also remember the most basic principle when it comes to technology in ministry: No matter how advanced the systems, the call to discipleship remains personal and relational. Someone might first encounter an Adventist evangelistic series via a VR

experience, but that seed of interest still blossoms best when nurtured by genuine, Spirit-filled connections—perhaps a caring phone call, a prayerful Bible study, or a warm invitation to fellowship in a local congregation. Every digital innovation ultimately points back to *living relationships*, because God’s method has always hinged on the sincerity of human hearts touched by His grace. In that sense, technology, for all its promise, remains a tool. It may enlarge our platform, but it cannot supplant the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit. The moment we forget that, we risk exchanging a living faith for mere technical savvy.

There is also a *prophetic dimension* to these discussions. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the final conflict will involve not just theological debates but also the capacity to continue preaching present truth despite social or governmental obstacles.

Decentralized systems might make it more difficult for oppressive forces to silence the gospel message, just as printed literature ensured that, even when open-air preaching was prohibited, new believers could read God’s Word. Meanwhile, immersive media can keep the biblical story fresh and compelling in a highly visual age—an age when many people would rather watch a three-minute video than read a 300-page book. AI can help us answer the countless spiritual searches typed into Google or whispered to a voice assistant, ensuring that biblical truth is not overshadowed by an avalanche of contradictory perspectives. So, while we never place our faith in technology itself, we do recognize God’s sovereignty in using these tools to ensure that His Word “shall not return to [Him] void” (Isaiah 55:11).

Still, we must walk a tightrope of caution with a holy boldness. We do not blindly adopt every flashy new platform; we also do not cower in fear when confronted by advanced systems that the world embraces. Instead, we scrutinize each development through the lens of Scripture and the unchanging truths of our Adventist calling. Does this new method help us “lift up Jesus” more effectively? Does it protect human freedom and dignity? Does it enhance theological engagement without distorting or trivializing the message of the cross? These are some of the core questions that every generation of believers has asked in its own way, whether regarding the printing press, radio broadcasts, television, or social

media. Our era simply has a new set of technologies and ethical puzzles that require the same Holy Spirit-led discernment as before.

We must also be mindful of *digital divides*—inequalities in access to hardware, bandwidth, or digital literacy. It can be tempting for well-funded church entities to charge ahead with sophisticated VR experiences while isolated or impoverished congregations lack even basic internet connectivity. This gap can foster resentment or leave entire communities behind. Adventist leadership must prioritize solutions that are scalable and shareable, encouraging a “tech solidarity” in which divisions, unions, and conferences share resources in the spirit of Christian love. This is the vision of the Adventist.Cloud. Perhaps that means creating offline modes for VR or AR content so pastors can store experiences on a device and demonstrate them in a remote location without constant Wi-Fi. Or it might involve setting up community labs where younger members train older ones on how to use new tools. If we truly believe the gospel is for all people—rich or poor, technologically advanced or not—then we must structure our digital strategies accordingly, making sure they serve as a blessing rather than a barrier.

Moreover, as we incorporate advanced systems, we must continue to trust God’s providence above all else. Technology will fail, and the more complex it is, the more potential points of failure. Servers can crash, cables can break, AI can malfunction. And yet the Lord remains faithful, and His purpose will be accomplished regardless of technical hiccups. Our confidence, then, is never in the tool itself but in the God who can speak through donkeys, in burning bushes, and via Roman roads. When we commit our technology initiatives to prayer, seeking divine guidance for each new project or platform, we keep ourselves from idolizing the modern or condemning the unknown. Instead, we position ourselves humbly and expectantly, ready to be instruments in the Redeemer’s hands.

In sum, these future technologies—AI, immersive media, decentralized systems, and new social media ecosystems—form a tapestry of opportunity. Each thread, if woven

thoughtfully, can create compelling new ways to fulfill the Adventist mission. Yet each also carries risks that demand prayerful vigilance. As we step into this new frontier, we will likely make mistakes. We might launch AI initiatives that do not yield the intended results, or produce AR apps that some find too simplistic, or experiment with blockchain-based voting that proves more complicated than expected. But mistakes, when approached with humility, can become stepping stones to deeper innovation and greater testimony of God's grace. Indeed, learning to "fail forward" is part of the reason God often chooses imperfect people to carry out His perfect will.

Let us, therefore, come together as a global family—administrators, pastors, teachers, IT experts, communicators, and lay members—collaborating to identify where these technologies can most effectively serve God's kingdom. In so doing, we honor the legacy of our pioneers, who used every tool at their disposal, from printing presses to camp meetings, to share the message of Christ's soon return. They saw these innovations not as ends in themselves but as channels for the Holy Spirit's work. We are called to adopt the same mindset for the age of digital connectivity and rapid technological change, remembering always that the true power of transformation resides in God's Word and His Holy Spirit, not in human inventions.

Every method we adopt, every system we build, and every forum we create must ultimately lead people to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let AI help us interpret data, but let Scripture remain the lens through which we read reality. Let VR take us inside the walls of ancient Jericho, but let the Holy Spirit touch our hearts in ways no simulation can replicate. Let blockchain secure our church's governance, but let the love of Christ be the bond that truly unites us. Let microcommunities thrive on messaging platforms, but let the fellowship of believers stand firm in living rooms, Sabbath School classes, and potluck lines around the world. Let every dimension of the digital realm become a reflection of the living gospel, so that when the next wave of technology arrives, we will already be prepared—anchored in our mission, ready to shine even more brightly for His glory.

At the final crossroads of history, our mission will not be remembered for how trendy we were, but for how faithfully we showed others the path to the Savior. This is why we invest in tomorrow's technologies: not to make a name for ourselves, but to ensure that every name is written in the Lamb's book of life. If we keep that perspective burning in our hearts, then all the data analytics, algorithms, immersive programs, and decentralized infrastructures in the world can become instruments of grace—never overshadowing but always magnifying the eternal truth that *Jesus is coming soon*. May we each, in our roles as Adventist leaders, do our part to harness these innovations with clarity, compassion, and unwavering focus on the gospel of Christ.

Summary

Top seven insights for Adventist leaders:

1. AI Integration: Artificial intelligence offers significant potential for content development, personalization, and enhancing search capabilities in digital ministry.
2. Immersive Technologies: Virtual and augmented reality present opportunities for creating engaging biblical experiences and enhancing education and training.
3. Decentralized Technologies: Blockchain and BitTorrent offer possibilities for maintaining digital presence and enhancing church governance in challenging times.
4. Social Media Evolution: The trend toward microcommunities on social media platforms aligns with the church's mission of discipleship and personal ministry.
5. Digital Pastoral Care Ethics: There's a need for a church-owned, secure platform for digital pastoral care to protect privacy and confidentiality.
6. Balancing Technology and Spirituality: While embracing new technologies, it's crucial to maintain our focus on core spiritual disciplines and human connections.
7. Ethical Considerations: The use of AI and immersive technologies in ministry requires careful consideration of ethical issues, including privacy, data security, and content integrity.

Top three discussion questions for Adventist leaders:

1. How can we effectively integrate AI and immersive technologies into our digital ministry while ensuring they enhance rather than replace personal spiritual experiences and human connections?
2. What steps should we prioritize in developing a secure, church-owned platform for digital pastoral care, and how can we ensure its widespread adoption across our global church community?
3. How can we balance the potential benefits of decentralized technologies like blockchain with the technical challenges and resource requirements they present, particularly in the context of our global church structure?