

GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING OFFSHOOTS AND DOCTRINAL DISSENTERS

General Principle: No response is not an option. We should always respond in a redemptive way.

Step 1 – INQUIRY AND WHOLISTIC ASSESSMENT.

This is to know and understand from the source itself. Documentation is highly recommended from the beginning. The process should include wholistic assessment at multiple levels: personal, pastoral, elders, and church board. Ministerial Secretary be informed at the onset.

Step 2 – EXPRESSION OF CONCERN AND OFFER OF HELP.

As a result of the initial inquiry and assessment, an expression of care and offer of any possible help be extended to the person/group involved. "I'm here to help as a Pastor and Resource."

Step 3 – INSTRUCTION IN THE TRUTH.

Steps 1 and 2 might result into a need for instruction of the person/group involved based on the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. The Pastor ought to be ready and willing to undertake this step.

Step 4 – CONSULTATION WITH THE CONFERENCE.

Additional resources, information, and guidance can be sought from the conference (Ministerial, Church Growth, and President) as the need arise.

Step 5 – ADMONITION AND WARNING.

Proceed with admonition and warning depending on the result of thorough inquiry and diligent assessment. Explain and show the clear church protocols in the church manual from the beginning. A copy/photocopy of the related Church Manual section can even be handed out.

Step 6 – INSTRUCTIONS HANDED OUT re. INTERACTION WITH CHURCH MEMBERS.

Expected changes in behaviour and interaction with church members must be properly communicated to the person/group involved and who is deemed in need of admonition and warning.

Step 7 – REPORT TO THE MINISTERIUM.

As a preventive measuring step and for reference, a report must be shared with the local/district and ministerium at large.

Step 8 – STUDY SERIES ON PERTINENT ADVENTIST DOCTRINES.

A sermon/study series on church doctrines or studies on Church Unity and other related topics will help educate and protect the church from offshoots and doctrinal dissenters.

Step 9 – APPLICATION OF MATTHEW 18 PROTOCOL AND CHURCH MANUAL POLICIES.

If the person/group subjected to admonition and warning will not adhere, proceed with this step accordingly from Pastoral level, with Elders, Church Board, and Church Business Meeting level.

Step 10 – INSTRUCTIONS re. INTERACTION WITH THE CHURCH.

Expected changes in behavior, and interaction with church members, and relationship with the church must be properly communicated again whatever be the outcome of Step 9.

Step 11 – REQUEST OF ASSISTANCE BY THE AUTHORITIES.

At all given Steps, it does not move to the next if nothing happens with the taken Step. And if necessary and only if necessary, take Step 11.

Step 12 – REPORT TO THE CONFERENCE AND THE MINISTERIUM.

For reference and preventive measure again.

Points based on the book “*Understanding The Mind Of Offshoots*” (UTMOO) by Dr. Lazarus Castang and the Ontario Conference Church Growth Committee discussion.

1st Point. Reference Questions: “Where are we now (*as a worldwide church and conference*) in relation to offshoot movements?”
“Should we be alarmed?” “What should we do?” and “How to go about it?”

Some Key Punch Lines used by offshoots against the Seventh-day Adventist Church (p. 12 UTMOO)

- *The SDA Church is Babylon.*
- *The Adventist Church has become lax in its standards, practices and devotion to God and we are the emergent reformatory movement spoken of by the Spirit of Prophecy.*
- *The SDA Church is Laodicea and in its spiritual lukewarmness, God has spewed it out of His mouth.*
- *The Church does not teach the truth of righteousness by faith.*
- *God does not destroy is the character-of-God message.*
- *The personal attainment of sinless perfection is a precondition for heaven.*
- *This is the truth. Christ was only human or had a sinful nature just like us.*

Some Identified Groups and Individuals negatively affecting our churches today and in the past on a variety of ways:

- *Davidian Seventh-day Adventists or Shepherd's Rods, Desmond Ford and Good News Unlimited, Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement (SDARM), Hope International – Our Firm Foundation, Pastor Jack Sequeira, Dr. Walter Veith, Pastor Andrew Henriques, Pastor David Gates, Graham Maxwell, Emerging Church Movement, Adventist Peace Fellowship (APF), Truth for the Final Generation, Forerunner Ministries, Jeremiah Davis – Messengers of Light Ministry, and others.*

Observation Point: *Today, we are dealing with those leaning either towards extreme Right or extreme Left that who utilizes printed and social media and do not necessarily influence our church members to join a specific group/movement but to embrace dissident teachings.*

2nd Point. Due to the continuing rise of offshoot related activities, the Sub-Committee agreed that the task at hand is to recommend “Guidelines on Dealing with Offshoots and Dissenters” that would reflect key considerations below:

- *All offshoots are dissenters, but not all dissenters are offshoots. A distinction must be made.*
- *Offshoot is a movement different from dissenters. It's an organized and structured entity. One individual voice is not an offshoot.*
- *There is a need to warn and protect the church from insidious offshoot groups and dissident individuals alike.*
- *Both offshoots and dissident individuals are subject to church discipline on “Reasons for Discipline” in Church Manual p. 62.*
- *Both the offshoot's Psychology of their Theology and Theology of their Psychology ought to be considered.*
 - ✓ *Separation into offshoots is often based on grandiose thoughts or religious delusions of grandeur—a false sense of superiority, false sense of exceptionalism, false sense of mission mostly to Adventism not to the world, false sense of greater security of salvation based on new light, false sense of better personal righteousness, false sense of higher understanding of God's character, nature of Christ and human nature, false sense of better understanding nature of obedience and righteousness by faith, and false sense of being closer to God than those in the Adventist Church.*
- *Unity of the church is more important than individual stand and claim of a New Light or Truth. Progressive revelation is a must.*

3rd Point. Many offshoots tend to be un-teachable because (p. 48 UTMOO):

- *They lack humility to admit when they are proved wrong*
- *They lack humility to own up to their limited knowledge*
- *They lack the willingness to accept alternative viewpoint.*
- *They lack ability to integrate the data because of preconceived notions.*
- *So they discard all contrary evidence.*

4th Point. Discussion on Four Postures toward the challenge of Offshoots (p. 69 UTMOO)

- *The (4) Postures presented were No Response, Neutrality (on gray areas), Delayed Response, and Immediate Response.*
- *Sub-Committee agreed that “No Response Is Not An Option” but a Redemptive Approach be taken at all times.*
- *Immediate response should be taken if a landmark truth or major belief is at stake.*
- *Balance between Theology and Authority be taken in responding to Offshoots, Dissidents, and Dissenters. Question to be consider: “Does it call for a theological response or a response of church authority?”*