



Church Ambassador

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ALL WHO REPRESENT THE CHURCH AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

by John Graz



John Graz, Author
Penny Estes Wheeler, Editor
A Grace Brown, Graphic Designer

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy
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FOREWORD
TED N C WILSON

The need for special religious liberty advocates called “Church Ambassadors” at each level of our church organization has become a priority. As with all religious minorities, we are often victims of prejudice because the authorities and the public do not know who we are. We try to compensate from time to time by organizing public events; but these are not adequate if no regular contacts are made or relationships established. Unfortunately, the price we pay for this neglect is often very high.

The church should have those who represent her to the public at all levels of society: from the city council to the national assembly to congress; from the mayor of a small village or town to the president of a country. Are we equipped for such a task? The answer is “yes.” In every church, conference, union, and division someone has been assigned to be in charge of this mission: the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department (PARL) director. There is no need to create a new structure, but rather an urgency to reinforce what we have or should have in every church: a PARL director. He or she will be the “Church Ambassador” who works closely with the president of the church entity or with the church pastor, giving advice and information on relations with authorities. He or she will be part of the world network of PARL directors.

It is urgent that we equip our churches with talented and committed “Church Ambassadors.” They will become the face of the church in the public life of the city, the county, the state or province and of the country. There are many church members who have knowledge and experience of public life and who would be willing to serve in this position. We must find and equip them.

How do we equip them? Do we have resources to help those who agree to serve but need advice, direction, and information? This manual, entitled *Church Ambassador*, is in response to that very need. It is the result of more than 40 years of ministry at every level of the church organization. Easy to read, with many experiences and a few principles, it

FOREWORD
TED N C WILSON

will become the basic manual for the “Church Ambassador.” Readers will learn the principles of Seventh-day Adventist diplomacy; the way to organize an event, and the way to meet officials. I pray it will be read not only by PARL directors, but also by pastors and administrators and all those who are called to represent the church in the public square. They are all “Church Ambassadors!”

The Lord is calling each of us to this special work. The Apostle Paul indicates in II Corinthians 5:20 that “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” The Lord is calling us to this special work as “ambassadors for Christ” in reconciling people with the King of the Universe.

What an incredible task and responsibility entrusted to us through the grace of Jesus. It is my fervent wish that in the near future the church will be represented before authorities by dedicated members who have answered the call. We need “Church Ambassadors” who will honor the church they represent and make our members proud to be part of it. This army of “Church Ambassadors” will be ambassadors of the coming Kingdom of God for truly Jesus is coming soon!

Ted N C Wilson, PhD, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

WORDS FROM
DELBERT W BAKER

It is a delight for me to write a word of affirmation for this fine Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) manual. For some time there has been a felt need for a tool to demonstrate how the principles of PARL can be implemented on the local and other supportive levels of the Church. This manual will help fill that need.

This book is full of stories, examples and illustrations of the ways local PARL leaders can evaluate and challenge each believer to go to the next level of PARL awareness and excellence. It is my sincere desire that every church member and leader will carefully read this manual, mark it up, and then, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, put the principles into practice at every level of the church structure. In addition we challenge you to think of new and creative ways that you can bring the principles from this manual to life right where you are.

It is one of my proud responsibilities to be the Presidential Advisor to the PARL Department. Why? Because the entire PARL team, under the direction of Dr John Graz, is committed to supporting the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As you join in with the PARL team you will experience personal revival and reformation and you will do your part in helping to usher in the soon coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Delbert W Baker, PhD, General Vice President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

WORDS FROM
BERT B BEACH

For some time now, the various directors of PARL have been hoping to be provided with helpful and inspirational printed guidelines for their work. This book, written by John Graz, offers needed help. It presents the basic principles for successful leadership in public affairs and religious liberty in a Seventh-day Adventist setting. Having now served for nearly 20 years as the General Conference director of this department, he is eminently qualified to write and offer a viewpoint based on “experienced viewing” and not just theory.

The book is not like usual “manuals” full of sound, but technical, paragraphs and legalistic language. What you have here is a volume based on living experience and therefore it is lively and never boring. In fact, I would say this book is more a homiletic call to action and it explains in page after page, very lucidly, how to act and succeed when working for religious liberty. In essence, it is more than a departmental manual. It is truly a *vade mecum*, a splendid handbook or guide one carries about for frequent reference.

The many experiences by Dr Graz and his colleagues that the book draws upon will provide meaningful tutelage for those new in religious liberty leadership and offer uplifting and continuing wisdom for those who have long served at the religious liberty helm at the various Church organizational levels. Indeed, when read and applied, this book will reveal that experience and appropriateness are more valuable than knowledge as a base for Spirit-filled action in the religious liberty arena.

Bert B Beach, PhD, Director Emeritus
GC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty

JOHN GRAZ

You may be surprised by the way this manual is written. It is actually more like a book than a classic manual. My initial goal was to share my experience and to give the principles I learned during more than 40 years of working in Public Affairs. Finally I decided that it would be useful to share stories and the lessons I learned from them. I wanted a book that was easy to read, practical and full of examples. You will find all the stories are connected to the ministry of a Church Ambassador. For example, I learned from the divorce of my parents how to build bridges between the two families. It prepared me to build bridges between opposing people and organizations.

While I share with you my own experiences, I also report on the work of my colleagues and my team. All that has been accomplished could not have been possible without them. It has taken teamwork, and I want to thank:

- All the division PARL directors for their cooperation, their work and their support.
- The team who worked closely with me since 1995. I mention my associates in this manual, but I also want to thank our support staff: Lynn Friday, Marilyn Riley, Carol Rasmussen, Viola Hughes, Ellassie Hodges, Debbie Knott, and Gail Banner. Everyone played a very important role in our ministry.
- My two current associates: Dr Ganoune Diop and Attorney Dwayne Leslie. Ganoune is our Ambassador at the United Nations, as well as our representative in our relations with other churches and religious organizations. Dwayne is our Ambassador in Washington DC. Both of them are doing a great work for the Church and it has been a blessing for me to work with them.
- Dr Bert Beach did outstanding work year after year in the area of interchurch/interfaith relations.
- After Bert, we received great help from Dr William Johnsson who chaired a number of interchurch/interfaith dialogues. Bill also joined me for meetings of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions (CS/CWC).
- The Vice Presidents who were our Advisors: Pastor Leo Ranzolin, Dr Eugene Hsu and Dr Delbert Baker. They are friends and supporters as well as advisors.

WORDS FROM THE AUTHOR

JOHN GRAZ

- The three General Conference Presidents I worked with: Pastor Robert Folkenberg, Dr Jan Paulsen, and our current President, Dr Ted Wilson. All helped our department to be more relevant and better equipped. In recent years it has become evident that PARL is an indispensable tool in the hand of the world Church. Pastor Wilson has attended several Religious Freedom events, among them the 7th IRLA World Congress and the 2nd World Festival. He and Dr Baker encouraged me to write this manual.
- Blayre Brown who read the draft manual when she was working as volunteer in our department; Penney Wheeler who edited the manual; Grace Brown who designed and formatted the manual; and Carol Rasmussen who took the manuscript on its final steps to becoming a book.

What a privilege it is to be a Church Ambassador and to work for the glory of God! It is my prayer that you will find help and encouragement in the words written here.

John Graz, PhD, Director
GC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty



INTRODUCTION:

You Are an Ambassador for Your Church!



CHURCH AMBASSADOR

*“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us”
(2 Cor 5:20).*

If you have been called by the church to be its ambassador, this manual is for you. If you are a pastor or church elder and are considering serving your church as its Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) director, this manual is your basic tool. What you learn in these pages will help you be successful from the first.

It is a great honor and an extraordinary experience to represent the church in the public arena. You will become—or you already are—its visible sign, its ambassador.

Be Honest. Accept or Decline it!

Before you begin reading the first chapter I ask you to be honest about your calling. If you have no interest in this ministry, please do not accept it; and if you have already accepted it, resign. You have other talents. Do not do something for which you have no passion or interest. What is important is to serve our Lord Jesus and His Church in a position or ministry where you can and will make a difference. I have met too many “church ambassadors” who were not serious about their mission. Of course, everyone has their limits, but it is wrong for both you and this ministry if you feel halfhearted about it. Never accept the position with the intention of just being a figurehead. You are worth more, and you can do better than that.

It has happened that new PARL directors were told by their leaders not to spend too much time with this department. That was not good advice. Why? When you accept a ministry for the church, you have no choice but to do your best. You will either be a good ambassador or a poor one. If you don’t do your best, you will be frustrated. You don’t deserve that. You don’t want your colleagues and church members to say, “He (or she) is a good speaker but a very poor ambassador.”

One day a new ambassador will assume the position you held. How will he or she evaluate your work? What will his or her comments be? You may say, “My president said not to take this ministry seriously,” or, “I had so many other important things to do.” But in the end, what you have done, or not done, will be your legacy.

If you do not have the time to make this commitment, why did you accept the title and responsibility? Your church is counting on you. You don’t want to be an invisible, non-existent ambassador!

INTRODUCTION: **YOU ARE AN AMBASSADOR FOR YOUR CHURCH!**

What about your church leader? He or she may not care about your ministry. They may not give you any support. But despite that, it is your challenge and your privilege; and this book will teach you step by step how to be a success.

And so, to repeat: being an Ambassador of the Church is a great honor and a great responsibility. Accept it or decline it. But if you accept it, be consistent and do your utmost to be a good ambassador. Make people proud of you. Make the Master you represent pleased with your ministry. Work so that Christ can say, “Come good and faithful ambassador. You did well with what you had and now I am going to give you more.”

This manual will guide you in the basic principles of the PARL ministry. It will equip you to be a good ambassador of the church and suggest ways for you to have an active, successful ministry. You will learn about events you can plan for the annual Religious Liberty Sabbath and how you can make a difference in your community and your country. Of course, there is much more.

It will be helpful for you to read the *Religious Freedom World Report* published by PARL every two years under the direction of Dr Ganoune Diop. You will also want to read books and articles about religious liberty such as *Ambassador for Freedom* by Dr Bert B Beach and my book, *Issues of Faith and Freedom*. You also may enjoy the annual IRLA scholarly journal *Fides et Libertas*, *Liberty* magazine, and *Conscience and Liberty*. If English is not your first language, you’ll be interested to know that several of these books and journals have been translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German.

Do the Best You Can

You may think you’re too busy to spend time developing this ministry, but that doesn’t mean you can’t do anything. No matter who you are or what your profession, you have important skills. You have credibility in other areas and we don’t want to lose you. Just carefully organize your program. Do the best you can with the knowledge and resources you have. The important thing is to do *something!*

Remember, you are the Church’s ambassador. At the least, you can do the basic activities and promote Religious Freedom Sabbath, the fourth Sabbath in January. Make sure that religious liberty will be represented and active in every church in your area. If you do, every church will have an ambassador. Imagine the progress that would be made if these simple actions were taken at every level of the Church.

CHURCH AMBASSADOR

Your union office will send you the sermon and guidelines for the annual Religious Liberty Sabbath. We at the General Conference provide these basic resources. Use them. Of course, you may prepare your own sermon if you choose. If you do, and are a division or union PARL director, send a copy of your sermon to the General Conference PARL department as a complementary resource. We also ask that you send your material to the union PARL directors with a copy to the union president. If you work at the level of a conference or at a mission send your material to the local PARL director with a copy to the pastor. Do this by the second week of December and no later than the first week of January. It is important to remember that in some areas you must allow adequate time for the sermon to be translated. And there is one more task. Check to make certain the information has reached the local church.

If you are a local or a conference PARL director, send a report to your colleagues at the union and the division. This should be part of your routine. When you organize an event you will send a report of your *preparations* and a report of *the event* to your pastor, your conference president, and your union PARL director.

Remember, you are an ambassador.

Your job is much more than attending meetings and shaking hands with government officials. An important part of your job is to organize events so that your contacts will know more about you and who you represent. My colleagues and I in Washington DC are often invited to events such as concerts, commemorations, National Days, and lectures—each one organized by the ambassadors of different countries. Why do they do it? To make sure we are well informed about their country and to build a relationship with us and others.

To simplify, these events are important because they make friends!

Be More Visible

One time as I was talking with a government minister I said, “I know your ambassador in Washington. I have met him several times.”

For an instant a negative expression crossed her face and I wondered why.

“Yes, he is a kind man,” she replied, “but we would like for him to be more visible.”

INTRODUCTION: **YOU ARE AN AMBASSADOR FOR YOUR CHURCH!**

Her comment did not speak well of him. Yes, being kind is important, but it is not enough. This man's government wanted him to be more visible which, in turn, would provide more visibility to their country. I kept this thought to myself, but a few weeks later when I saw the ambassador I was tempted to ask, "What is your next event?" However, I kept quiet.

As an ambassador for your church you have the same responsibility and mission as do all other ambassadors. It is to make sure that your church is well known and well represented before the public and the authorities. What a privilege! The church has selected you as its ambassador. What a great responsibility! You are called to be a blessing for your church and your community.

Christ will help you to do your best. Do the best you can with what you have, and that begins by reading this manual. *You* can be a great ambassador.

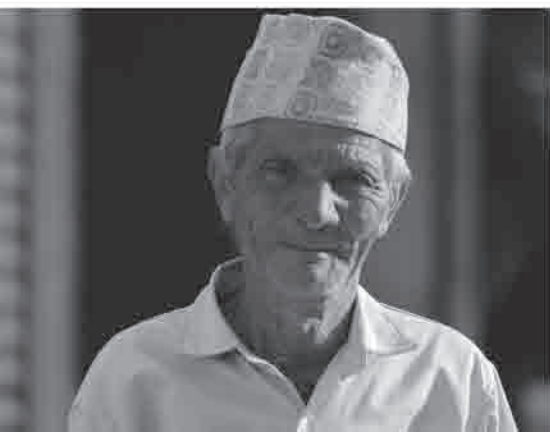
The following encouragement, given by God to Joshua, is for you too.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified—do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9).



SECTION ONE:

Twelve Keys to Being a Good Ambassador



TWELVE KEYS TO BEING A GOOD AMBASSADOR

It is possible that you were born to be an ambassador. You may not be aware of it, but after reading this manual I assure you that you will know if it is true. Quite simply, some men and women have been blessed with this gift. I can recognize them. You have the gift, even if you had not previously been asked to occupy this position. However, having the gift is not enough. It is important that you work to fully develop it.

I grew up in an endearing, but in many ways, divided family. My mother's family was Catholic. By tradition, my father's family was Protestant. So to keep peace and harmony we avoided talking about religion. When it came to politics the division was almost deeper, for our two families covered the whole spectrum of the political rainbow. However, they were united on one value. Both families valued freedom and risked their lives to defend it. Members of both families knew the price and the sacrifice that freedom costs. And so we were both united and divided, depending on the topic under discussion.

To make things even worse, my parents divorced and my world turned upside down. When I was 13 years old I had to leave my father's farm for a small, dark city apartment. I would have given everything I had just to see Mom and Dad talking together. Thanks to the Lord, a few years later they did.

Living in the middle of a divided family, I had to learn how to build bridges between them. I loved each and every one of my family members, no matter which "side" they were on, but only by building bridges could I stay in contact with both sides. I learned to be very careful about what information I shared with whom so I would not accidentally start a new cold war. I learned how frightfully easy it is to splash oil on a fire and that it benefits no one.

As an ambassador you have the possibility of building peace or war. A true ambassador — especially a church ambassador — will be dedicated to peace.

Even as a child I had my own ideas. The first 14 years of my life I followed my mother's religion. Then I followed the way of my father. His outlook was secular. He believed that God was good, but religion was synonymous with intolerance and fanaticism.

I was always very careful to keep the bridge in safe condition.

When I was 18 years old I shocked my family by becoming a passionate Seventh-day Adventist Christian. For the sake of my new faith, I was ready to break the bridge. My family

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accepted it, but they found it difficult. Becoming an Adventist was not a social promotion. “There are so many well-known and more respected religions,” they said in different ways. “Why did you choose this one?” But it was my new conviction and, as they had always respected the convictions of others, they respected mine.

A few months after this decision, I went back to school. I had decided to become a minister of the Gospel and I studied at a Seventh-day Adventist university. My faith in God and knowledge of the Bible and God’s love grew deeper. The nearby church appointed me deputy PARL director under the leadership of a young, bright professor, Dr Jacques Doukhan.

We met the mayor of the village of Collonges-sous-Saleve, where our seminary was located. During the years which followed I organized a group of students to help the old and poor people in the village. We organized a special Christmas festival for them. I also built relationships with some of the local religious leaders. It was my beginning as an official church ambassador. I learned that the best way to meet people is to take the first step with them. It is much easier to meet city officials when you have something to ask or to propose. Inviting the mayor for the closing ceremony of the school year was a tradition. You will find many other opportunities where an official would be happy to be invited and to be part of the program.



Twelve Keys to Being a Good Ambassador

If you follow these 12 keys you will become an excellent ambassador.

1. Understand Your Role and Mission

Who called you? For what are you an ambassador?

2. A Good Appearance Makes A Good Impression

Before you say a word people see you. Your appearance sends a message.

3. Introduce Yourself Correctly

The first words you say are important.

4. Increase Your Knowledge

Make yourself familiar with the church you represent and the world to which you are sent.

5. Build a Network of Friends

You cannot succeed alone. Friends open the doors of opportunity.

6. Set Goals

What do you want to achieve? How are you going to make a difference?

7. Believe Everything Is Possible

Have a positive vision and cultivate positive thoughts. With God everything is possible.

8. Follow the Path of Integrity

Do not lie! Be honest, even if it creates a problem for you. Integrity will be the best element of your character.

9. Be Humble

To God, and only to God, is the glory. You are His servant.

10. Be Persistent

Rome was not built in one day. Make sure that time is on your side.

11. Organize Public Events

Be active in your community. Plan events and invite local officials.

12. Be Loyal and Faithful to Your Church

Don't compromise your faith. Stay firm. You represent your church, not yourself. Be faithful. Pray and read your Bible. You are a faithful servant of God.

Expanding the Keys



1. Understand Your Role and Mission

We all have the same mission, but in different fields. Some of us work at the local level while others work at regional or international levels. The principles we follow and the mission we have to fulfill are the same. Meeting a head of state or a minister of government or an ambassador is not much different than meeting your city mayor. You have to understand your role. You are not representing yourself, but your church. The person you meet will see you not as Mr DuPont or Mrs Robinson, but as the one who represents the Seventh-day Adventist Church in his city or in her country.

What does the Seventh-day Adventist Church mean to them? It is important for you to know the history your local church has with the city. The first questions the official will have when he/she meets you will be related to the presence of your church in his/her district or city. How many members are there? How long have they been there? Are they on the right or on the left side of the political spectrum?

For most of them, you will be seen as a conservative, very conservative. A number of them will be positively surprised to learn that the Seventh-day Adventist Church not only has churches all around the world but a worldwide system of schools, universities, clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. They will be even more surprised with our humanitarian work through ADRA and our religious freedom activities everywhere.

As soon as you have been elected as a church ambassador, start to evaluate the relationship your church has with the community. Is it good, bad, or indifferent? What has your church done for the people of the community in the past? What is your church doing now? Is its image positive, negative, or nonexistent in local public opinion? At this point your church's communication director could help you. You may have to look in the archives of the local newspapers. How many times were Adventists mentioned? Was it positive or negative?

When I was a young pastor in charge of Adventist students at the University in Montpellier, France, the senior pastor, Adi Zurcher, became my great teacher. All the leaders of the city knew him. They respectfully called him, "Pastor Zurcher." In that area this was a very positive title. In this part of France where Protestants had made history, the title of Pastor was given only to the pastors of the Reformed Church. But they called him Pastor because they had a deeper relationship with him than with any other local religious leader. No doors were shut so strongly he could not get in. He met all the officials he wanted to meet.

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Walking was not easy for him as both his legs were paralyzed; but he overcame this handicap which could have ruined his ministry. His face was bright, as if every morning before beginning his work he had already won the battle. He had great visions and projects and his eyes glowed when he shared them with me. He smiled as if the results had already been achieved. Looking at me, he seemed to be surprised that I did not jump up full of joy. He saw the results and I saw the challenges. He wanted to do the best for his church and for his community and no one would stop him.

He was my first senior pastor, and I was full to the brim with intellectual knowledge. It took more than a week for me to appreciate his outstanding talents. Through his example, he taught me how to better serve. The Five Day Plan to Quit Smoking was one of the activities he ran and he did it several times a year. It was greatly appreciated by the community.

At this time I was also taking some courses at the university to complete an M.A. in history. One year one of my exams was scheduled on a Saturday and I needed to meet the dean of the school to explain the situation. She was the only who could make the decision to let me take the exam on another day. I was a little nervous for I thought it would be difficult or even impossible to move the exam to another day in a busy school calendar.

When I entered her office, she looked at me with a smile. She listened to me, then she said, "I will find a possibility and you will present your exam."

What a relief! I could hardly believe it was so easy, and I was impressed that a leader in a secular university so easily understood my situation. But as I was leaving her office she told me that she knew the Adventists. Yes! She had attended the "Five Day Plan" and had quit smoking.

I began my ministry in a church which had a great history in the community. When we met officials and religious leaders we always briefly mentioned what our small church was doing for the community. I knew that I was an ambassador of a small but well known church. This helped me grow a lot in my public relations. Pastor Zurcher's friends, and several years later Dr Bert Beach's friends, opened their doors to me and some of them became my friends.

Make sure you know the local or the regional history of the church you are representing.

You also need to know the history and the beliefs of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ambassadors know the history of their country and they identify themselves with it. As an ambassador of your church you will do the same.

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Be a Bridge Builder

As an ambassador you are a Minister of Peace — the one who builds bridges, the one who is able to understand others, including your opponents. A United States President once said: “To make peace we have to talk to our enemies.”

The church counts on you to be the peacemaker, the bridge builder. Of course, you will be seen as the black sheep by the radicals, the extremists, and the fanatics. Do not let yourself be affected by them. They are wrong. They confuse faith with provocation and conviction with aggression. Do not give them more importance or more influence than they should have. It would be a tragedy for your church to follow their ways. History is full of examples of this, and we know where it goes.

Bridge builders do not appear at random. They appear when there is a crisis which threatens the presence of the church. It takes years to build bridges in the community, and you will do it one contact at a time. It is your mission to build bridges and to make friends without compromising your faith. You have been called to become the face of your church to the public. Without hurting or insulting anyone, you should be able to explain in a few sentences what your church teaches. You should be able to speak with wisdom and to say appropriate words at the right time to the right person. Don't hurt the feelings of people by lacking sensitivity. Ask yourself, “How would I react if I were in their shoes?” And remember Jesus' principle: “Do to others what you want them to do to you.”

Be ready to explain the position of your church on radio and TV, as well as in front of reporters. This may not be an easy experience. If your church is well organized the communication director will do it, but when it comes to relationships with officials and members of the government you will be on the front line. I was communication director at the union and division levels for 15 years. It was excellent training for my current ministry. It is different from what I do now, but complementary.

Welcoming ambassadors and religious leaders in our world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland is one of my privileges. My assistant, Carol Rasmussen, has become an expert in organizing the program for these official visits. Everything has to be precise. Nothing can be improvised or left to chance.

During the dinner we include time for our General Conference President to say a few words of welcome and to give some information about the Adventist World Church. Then our guests have an opportunity to give their greetings. Most of them are eager to share about their country. If they believe prejudices are strong, they will present a positive side. As ambassadors,

they must promote and defend their country. Occasionally we have welcomed ambassadors from poor and chaotic countries. I have never heard them say, “I’m sorry because my country is not well managed. There is a lot of corruption there and we don’t have good leaders.” It has never happened — at least not in public.

Your mission is to make sure that the people you meet will be exposed to a positive view of your church.

I was in Europe during the tragedy of Waco, Texas in 1993. I can assure you that everywhere we had a good ambassador there were people to defend us. But in places where we had no ambassador, it was very difficult to promote a positive image of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We were unprepared to face such a crisis. In some places we lacked a network. We had no friends because no one had built bridges when it was possible to do so.



2. A Good Appearance Makes A Good Impression

You represent your local church, the world church and the kingdom of God. What a privilege! It means that you will be seen in many places in a special way. People who don’t have any idea about your church will try to guess what kind of organization you represent. The first sight of you will register an impression. That takes just a few seconds. Your image will inform them about your church. Then, of course, they will try to get an idea about you. They will probably categorize you as serious, responsible, intelligent, irresponsible, a fanatic, a lunatic, or more.

How do you want them to see you? You decide!

Now imagine that you represent a big business, or your country, and you have a meeting with leaders of other countries. How would you like to dress?

Imagine also that as a member of the Adventist Church you are invited to an important reception with high level officials.

You do not represent your church. You have been invited because you have done a great work for the community. Now the Master of Ceremonies presents the religious leaders invited.

On the list are the Cardinal, the Rabbi, the Imam, several Pastors, and your church Pastor. Then through the microphone you hear, “And now Pastor Jackson Green who represents the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

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Silence!

All the guests look at you. Of course, many of them know you are an Adventist and they look at you too. Are you happy, proud, embarrassed, or ashamed?

We may be proud of our leaders when they appear in public, or we may be embarrassed. It has nothing to do with their integrity, honesty, or spirituality. It has to do with the seriousness of our preparation.

When you understand this, you feel the responsibility on your shoulder. You are on the front line, in the spotlight.

In my ministry I have been invited many times and in many different countries to speak on radio and television. We have a weekly TV program produced by Hope Channel and the procedures they follow are the same as with other television stations. You will be on air at 6:00 pm, but you must be in the broadcast studio by 5:30 pm. Why?

You must be prepared to present the correct image when you are filmed under the lights and cameras of the studio. Cosmetic make-up will be applied. A professional will make sure that your tie is well adjusted, your hair is in good order, and your shirt and your jacket look well-presented.

You believe they take care of you because they love you? Probably not. Certainly, as professionals, they want you to have a good image on the screen — especially since you are one of the elements of it.

In most of the public meetings in which you are involved, someone is filming for a television broadcast or photographing the event. Photos will be placed in a newspaper or on the Internet. Often many photographers and reporters are present. Before they can see you, spend a few minutes with your friends or colleagues. Ask them if anything is out of place or needs straightening. Examine yourself in a good mirror so you can see yourself the way the public will. Again, if you don't like what you see, choose another ministry. There are plenty of other good and useful ministries in which it is not necessary that you wear the correct jacket with an appropriate tie or shirt.

Remember that your appearance is the first message people "hear." For some, it will be the first and last time they see you. They may not have another opportunity to see you. Your clothes are instruments. Do not be dressed like a king or a prince with \$1,000 shoes or a flashy coat. Dress as someone who reflects seriousness, kindness, and good taste.

The Way You Dress

When we have an important event such as a World Festival or Congress, I visit the place in advance several times. This has to do with both good promotion and the logistics of the event. It also provides opportunity to meet officials and to invite them to attend. In 2006, before the First Festival of Religious Freedom in Sao Paulo, Brazil, we met the governor of the state of Sao Paulo. We spent an hour with him and he gave us his full support. We did the same for the Second World Festival held in the same city seven years later. Our excellent team there prepared for my visit. Pastor Edson Rosa, attorneys Damaris Moura and Alcides Coimbra, and Prof Samuel Luz had done such good work there that many doors were open.

We had a meeting with the President of the City Council, a dynamic young man. As we waited for him in a reception room I saw a young man talking with a member of the council. He was wearing a T-shirt and sweat pants. No one introduced him to me and I did not know who he was. But I talked with him too. We covered the weather and the traffic downtown, a kind of insignificant discussion. After a few words he looked at me and said, "I am sorry but I used a bicycle to come to my office. I am dressed in a sporty way." He was the head of the council. He was the man I had been waiting for. I was confused. He was the only one not dressed for a formal meeting, and I was unable to identify him as the leader. No one introduced him to me and no one introduced me to him.

For a few minutes, all of us were confused. We apologized. He apologized.

It was embarrassing. This shows that how we are dressed makes the process of identification easy or difficult. The next day we had a meeting with the President of the Parliament of the state of Sao Paulo, then a meeting with the governor in his palace. With 14 million inhabitants, Sao Paulo is the largest city and richest city in the Southern Hemisphere. Being the governor of the state of Sao Paulo with its more than 40 million people is like being President of a middle-sized country.

We were very kindly welcomed. The governor invited us in to his office. He was well dressed, but was not wearing a tie. This was not a problem. He was the governor and a tie doesn't make a better man. After the introductions he talked about his father who was a good Christian and who knew the Adventists. Suddenly he stood up and apologized, saying that he had to do something important. He came back a few minutes later with a letter his father had written after he attended worship in an Adventist church. We also noticed that something about him had changed. He was now wearing a tie.

With a smile he said, "When I saw all of you with your ties I began to feel very uncomfortable." As the governor, he thought he had to be as well dressed as his guests. Interesting!

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Dr Jean Zurcher, President of the seminary where I studied theology, would say to us, “The way you are dressed honors or dishonors the one you meet, the church you represent, the mission you serve, and yourselves.”

Of course, it is not a question about the tie. I have met the President of French Polynesia, the President of French Guyana, and the President of East Timor. None of those men were wearing a tie. But they were well dressed according to the custom of their country and the climate.



3. Introduce Yourself Correctly

An introduction should be short and precise. A few words pronounced clearly and that is all. A few words, yes, but they must be the right words, the appropriate ones. You have to prepare in advance for your introduction. Do not improvise. Consider the people you will be speaking to, the venue of the meeting, and who you represent. The President of the City Council of Sao Paulo needed to be introduced when he joined us. Someone should have welcomed him by these words: “Mister President, thank you very much for your presence.” The delegation and its leaders would have been introduced.

Who should have done that?

Before you introduce yourself the first question you should ask is: Who am I representing? Am I representing my local church, the world church, the Life and Health Association, or perhaps the Religious Liberty Association, or ADRA?

The second question is to whom am I introducing myself — a politician, a father, a mother, a single parent, an atheist, a university professor, a minister?

Does he or she know my church?

a. Meeting President Clinton at the White House

How can you introduce yourself in a few words that will make sense to the one who hears them? Some are very gifted. They easily find the right words to say to the right person at the right time. The words you will use will contribute to the construction of your image. You may say just two words and the contact will be done because you smiled or because you made a mistake. There is always an element of mystery in the first contact.

In 1999 I received an invitation from the White House to attend the official introduction of the first US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Robert Seiple. I was

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in Los Angeles, California, on my return from Asia, when I read the e-mail messages from Marilyn Riley, my assistant. One said: “We have received a telephone call from the White House. They are inviting you for a meeting. You have to send your Social Security number and a copy of your passport.”

At first I thought it was a joke or, at the very least, a large meeting with maybe 3,000 people. Marilyn sent the requested information and received the confirmation. I was instructed to be at the White House at 3:00 pm. The meeting would be held in the Roosevelt Pavilion.

I did not want to be late. In fact, I was in the front of the White House at 12:30 pm. I stayed in Lafayette Square counting the benches, the pigeons, and the homeless. I am sure that the White House security cameras were focused on me. At 2:30 pm. I went to the visitor’s door. The guard said I had to come back 30 minutes later. Anyway, when I attended the meeting I was surprised to see that it was not a large crowd. There were around 100 guests — religious leaders and a few congressmen.

I chose a seat in the second row, behind the congressmen. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was there, and so was President Clinton. It was not an easy meeting for Clinton for he was in the midst of the Monica Lewinski scandal and all the media reports were focusing on that. President Clinton spoke after Secretary Albright and, as always, did very well.

When the meeting concluded the President stayed in the room a few more minutes talking with the congressmen. As I was standing nearby, I joined the group. He shook my hand and looked at me. He had the gift of giving people the impression that they were important. What a great gift that is!

But what could I say to him? I had no more than five seconds. I said 12 words: “Mr President, I am John Graz and I work with Wintley Phipps!”

He smiled. Because of my accent I was not sure he understood me. But as he was leaving he suddenly stopped, looked at me again, and said, “Wintley Phipps. He is a great guy!” Interestingly, Wintley was my associate in the department.

It would have been appropriate for me to say: “I am John Graz and I represent the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I want to congratulate you, Mr President, for defending religious freedom and for your new ambassador.”

But I knew that Wintley, my associate, had met President Clinton several times. And the President remembered him.

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b. How to Prepare to Introduce Yourself

Let's say you have 15 seconds: How do you introduce yourself? You have one minute? You are face to face with a President, or you have two minutes in an assembly? Two minutes is the maximum. Longer than two minutes and it is not an introduction but a promotion.

Let's say that you, along with a group of church representatives, have been invited by the city authorities to find the answer to violence in public schools. You have one minute to introduce yourself. People want to know why you have been invited. Are you qualified? They don't care about your knowledge of the history of Egypt or about your last trip to Norway. They want to know how you can help. Then you can say: "I represent the Emmanuel Adventist Church. We work with young people, teaching them to serve the community and to respond to violence with constructive activity."

You don't need to say more. You got your accreditation. You are accepted.

How do you introduce yourself in an interchurch meeting? "I represent the Adventist Church of Horeb. We are located in the west part of the city and have excellent relations with other churches. I myself have been involved in interchurch relations since I was 17 years old." It will make a strong impression — especially if you have just celebrated your 75th birthday.

c. Happy Bigot!

When we wear several hats, we can have some hesitation about which one we should use to introduce ourselves. When I was the communication director for the Franco Belgium Union, public relations and interchurch relations were my responsibility. One day I received an invitation from the mayor of the little town near Paris where we had our office.

All organizations working in the city were invited, and I thought we should be present. The local authorities needed to see that we, also, were interested in the life of our community.

Approximately 100 leaders attended the meeting. They introduced themselves one after the other: "My name is Pierre Bouchard and I am the coach of the Soccer Club." People applauded. "I am Arthur DeLong and I am in charge of the Judo Club." People cheered. And so on ... What about me? In such a context I thought it might be appropriate to represent our Life and Health Association instead the church. For sure they would applaud me. What about ADRA? Surely that will make a great impression. What about the Religious Liberty Association, the primary school. Would it make sense to say, "I represent the Franco Belgium Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church"? This is a very strange name. Would they think I was a bigot, or worse — a member of a dangerous sect?

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After a while the mayor asked, “Is there still another organization such as a cultural one or something else?” Just a few feet ahead of me I saw a man lift his hand, then put it down. He did that two or three times.

I was fascinated by this up and down. Finally the mayor said, “No one else?” I lifted my hand. He did not see me. Was it a sign from God? I said to the Lord, “Lord, as you can see it is not my fault, I wanted to introduce myself and my church but —”

I guess the Lord heard my prayer because someone saw me and said loudly, “There! There is someone.” All faces turned my direction and looked at me. I smiled. It is good to smile in such circumstances. I thought, Once I have introduced myself they may think I’m a bigot but at least they will see a happy bigot.

“Yes,” said the mayor. “Could you introduce your organization?”

I smiled and I breathed, maybe not in that order, and said, “I am John Graz.” Giving my name was the first part, but you have to continue. People looked at me. I could easily guess their thoughts: Who is he?

“I represent the Franco Belgium Union.” So far, so good, because that was also the name of a financial group. But to be consistent with my mission and myself, I added, “of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” And I felt inspired to continue, “We have been here in your community for a few years and we are very happy to be in such a friendly and beautiful city.”

Guess what? People applauded. It turned out to be a very friendly meeting. Afterwards the mayor invited everyone to have drinks and talk with each other. Then coming directly toward me was the man whose hand had gone up and down and who finally did not introduce himself. With a smile he said, “You are an Adventist? Are you a pastor?”

I replied “Yes!”

“I am the new Evangelical minister in this city.”

In some parts of the world this story will make no sense. Adventists are very well known in Jamaica, in Zambia, in Peru. In some countries Adventists have almost the status of a national church. But this is not the case everywhere. Poor public relations, poor interfaith relations, give the impression that our church is a cult.

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d. How to Introduce Your Church

As you understand, it is very important to introduce yourself well. Introducing the church you represent is even more important. After you introduce yourself the people you meet will naturally ask, “What church do you represent?” You may think they know our church; but the truth is that most of the people around the world do not have a precise idea about the Adventist Church. First, we are a small minority and outside of the United States our name sounds strange.

For many people religion means Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. After that some will add Pentecostal, Evangelical, Sunni, and Shiite. Then you have to be an expert to identify the thousand Protestant and Evangelical churches with their strange and long names.

Then some people believe they know our church because they have a friend who is Mormon or Baptist. What have they read about us? Even in the United States, where our church was born, most people don't know us. We were better known before World War II than we are now.

To introduce your church correctly you have to ask yourself the question: What do they know about my church?

If we have a college or a university nearby, will it be easier? It depends on the relationship the college or university has with the local population. When I am invited to speak in our institutions I ask, “What is your relationship with the city?”

I went to one institution that employs half of the people living in the village where it is located. They have a huge church and many other buildings. One of the employees said to me: “It is sad, but we are so busy that we have no time to build bridges with the people who live nearby. They don't know us.” Some of our institutions are known around the world but unknown where they live. The image they have in the nearby community is not very good.

In this case, how will you introduce your church when you meet the village authorities?

Here's how. Don't take too long, and emphasize what people can relate to.

Saying, “We are a Bible church!” may work in Atlanta or Houston, but in Paris or in Geneva this will mean, “We are a Protestant sect.” But if you say, “We are a Christian Church. We share the message of hope in Jesus and we serve the needs of people. We are present in 204 countries and have universities, colleges, and hospitals around the world ...” This makes sense for secularized people.

e. Does My Introduction Make Sense?

I have been invited to represent the Adventist Church at several world assemblies including those of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Baptist World Alliance. When speaking to the Lutherans I mentioned the place Martin Luther has in our tradition. For many Adventists, Luther was the most important person of the second millennium. I remember the Lutheran Assembly held in Winnipeg, Canada when, after my presentation the president of the Lutheran World Federation made some positive comments. He said, “It was what Luther wished, to overcome the ecclesiastical walls.” It was as if we had been introduced twice.

When I addressed the Baptist assembly in Honolulu in 2010, I emphasized our common heritage on adult baptism and religious freedom. I also mentioned that we owe our Sabbath belief to the Seventh Day Baptists. The delegates smiled as the Seventh Day Baptists are also members of the Baptist World Alliance.

At the World Assembly of the Reformed Churches I mentioned that I am a citizen of the Geneva of John Calvin, and I underlined our heritage from the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

My introduction at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010 was published in their magazine. My picture was just below the one of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Rowan Williams.

I was invited to represent my church at these world assemblies because their leaders were good friends and because I also invited them to our General Conference Sessions. The way you treat others is how they will treat you. Invite other religious leaders or officials and they will invite you too.

f. Make Your Introduction Relevant

When you are introducing someone the introduction should be relevant to the people who hear it. It should also value your guest and justify their participation in the meeting. A poor introduction insults your guest, the meeting, and, of course, yourself. At the other extreme, an inflated introduction makes people suspicious about the real person.

This is why you must write out your introduction. People are not interested in every aspect of your guest’s life and activity. The shortest is often the best, but stick to the essentials. It is not useful to mention the name of their cat or their dog unless you are invited by a club that cares about animals. A good exercise would be to write two basic introductions. One will be short

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and general. The second one will be a little longer and more personal. The academic titles are important as they give information about the intellectual background. But remember, an introduction has to make sense for those who are listening to you.

What if you said, “I am happy to introduce Dr [or Elder] Robert Price. He is not the one we wanted to invite. The one we had chosen is not able to join us. Elder Price did not get a Nobel Prize, but he will do his best to make the meeting interesting for those who came. But next year we will have a great speaker.”

We should create a Nobel Prize for the worst introduction. How will Elder Price react? He may say, “I am sorry to be here. I have just learned that the one you wanted was not able to come. If you have something important to do, go! Don’t waste your time here with me.” But Price may be a giant and he may laugh and overcome this poor introduction and do the best he can. Make people you introduce happy. They will pay you back in giving the best speech they can.

You may think, but what about humility? At this level it is a question of *savoir vivre*, not a question of humility. Let your guests deal with humility. It is not your job to become humble for them.

Don’t improvise!

I went to Jordan for the first time in 2010 with Dr William Johnsson. Bill was the contact person for our meetings with those of other religions and he had good contacts with some Muslims. We were welcomed and met officials, religious leaders, and a member of the royal family. Bill had prepared a very good introduction of the Adventist church. In one of our meetings a young Muslim woman was taking notes. At the end of the discussion she asked to give a few comments. She said, “If I understand well what you said, you are like the people of the book our religion describes.” That meant that Bill’s introduction made a lot of sense for her.

In 1997 I was invited to the last meeting of the conversation between Adventists and Lutherans held in Geneva. Bert Beach, the leader of our delegation and the co-organizer of the meeting, made a key remark at a very delicate moment. One of our theologians gave an excellent lecture on our prophetic beliefs of the last days. The Lutheran theologians, who were very friendly with us, listened to him with interest. But suddenly one of them said with emotion in his voice, “If you believe that those who don’t observe the Saturday Sabbath will be destroyed forever — which means that my grandchildren will be lost — then you are a sect.”

A deep, embarrassing silence followed. I feared that this would be the end of the friendly, brotherly conversation. We were speechless. But Bert had the appropriate reaction. Our church was being described as a sect because of its end time prophetic interpretation. Today, such a scenario makes little sense for our Lutheran friends, even if it was our heritage from Martin Luther.

Bert said, “Those who will be condemned are not condemned because of the Sabbath observance, but because they persecute those who keep it!” At that, light suddenly broke through the darkness. The conversation was saved. All agreed with the validity of the remark. Why? Because it made sense that those who persecute innocent people will be rejected from heaven if they don’t repent.

On Saturday both delegations went to the church of our Seminary of Collonges and took communion together. Lutherans and Catholics recognize infant baptism, and we don’t. However, Adventists welcome people of other faiths to take communion with us. On this point we are more open than they are.

g. How to Introduce an Official Guest in Two Minutes

The principle is the same. It has to make sense.

I like to introduce guests, and it is one of the functions of my job. I have made numerous introductions at our world headquarters but also when we have congresses and during the world General Conference Sessions. I did it before 80,000 people in Toronto, 40,000 in St Louis, and 75,000 in Atlanta. My introductions lasted no more than one minute. Our guests had three minutes to share their greetings. Three minutes is very short, too short for some.

A government official invited by one of our divisions was scheduled to greet the assembly. I knew he had a tendency to speak too long. His English was still hesitant. I explained to him that he would have three minutes to speak and asked if I could read his introduction. He agreed. His text was three pages long. It could have easily taken 15 minutes to read. He needed to reduce it from three pages to 15 lines. I said to him, “You represent a government and many people will see you and listen to you. What you will say must be simple and short and make them happy.”

The question was what did he want to say to this crowd of Adventists who had come from all around the world? We wrote a few lines and together we tried to imagine how our people would react. They would probably applaud if he said something positive about our hospitals and universities. If he said, with conviction, “The government of my country is grateful for the good work of your church,” and gave people time to applaud, they would. He probably

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realized that it would be better to read a short piece than to read a long text that most of the people would not understand and not listen to. He spoke for three minutes and was applauded twice. People enjoyed what he said. It was short, correctly pronounced, and it made sense. Of course, offering to help prepare the speech may not be well accepted. When you invite VIPs to give a greeting, you have to be very clear about the time they have. If they have three minutes, it means about 200 words. You have to speak with them ahead of time — not just a few minutes before they stand up to speak.

Some are very gifted and know how to touch people in a few minutes. In 2010 in Atlanta I introduced the Secretary General of the Baptist World Alliance on Saturday evening. It was the closing program. About 70,000 people were in the stadium. He said, “I have been with you for several days and I did not sit in the VIP corner but I was with my delegation, the Inter-American Division.” At that there was a storm of laughter and applause. His few words made a big difference and everyone knew who he was and which church he represented.

In your ministry you will have many opportunities to make a difference as you introduce yourself and give greetings on behalf of your church, but you also have the important opportunity of introducing officials and guests. A good introduction will be a great gift for your guests.



4. Increase Your Knowledge

To be a good ambassador you must learn and know. Learning is a process, and there is always more to learn. It is not a good sign when someone says, “I know, I know! I don’t need help. I am smart enough to know what is good and right!” In our work we have to learn, to correct, and to improve ourselves. You will not lose your credibility if you read your introduction or your speech to your colleagues, your assistant, or your spouse. You need to test a product before you launch it. But choose someone you trust. Avoid the person who will say to all around that he made your speech or he improved it considerably. It should be an exchange. You help me and I help you. Your colleague, assistant, or spouse represents those who may listen to you. You can learn from their feedback.

Knowledge does not come only from books but also from your experience. You will learn a lot if you are humble enough to correct and improve your work. Experience is important but it will not give you the Church Statements on various topics, or the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, or the First Amendment, or The UN Declaration of 1981, or the various conventions about religious freedom. You need to read and, if possible, learn these documents. A general knowledge about the laws, about history, about politics, about world affairs will help you a lot.

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a. Local Church History

You represent the church as you meet educated people and leaders. In a few seconds they will evaluate you. They will make sure they know where you studied, what you studied, your public experience. The profile of the Church Ambassador is very specific. Everyone has received gifts, but the gifts are not all the same.

I am surprised when I see the kind of ambassadors that some local churches elect. It seems that leadership often goes to those who have nothing else to do or who already wear too many hats. The result is that an inadequate or absent ambassador represents your church before the authorities. A poor choice in other functions may be corrected and won't create too much damage. But how long will it take for the church to be aware of the mistakes made by its own ambassador? How could you repair the damage?

Church ambassadors should know the church doctrines well enough to explain them in a few appropriate words. This does not mean they need to give a traditional Bible study every time they meet an official. They must be persons of conviction and, at the same time, open and able to listen to others who don't have their conviction. They have to speak with intelligence and wisdom.

As ambassador, you should also be aware of the life of your local church, its challenges, and its successes. You are not open to the world but isolated in your own church. And yet, inside and outside of your church you should feel like a fish in water.

Your colleagues and your pastor need to be informed about what you are doing and how the church can be a center of influence in its own town. Give them a report every time you can. If your report is short and precise, they will be open for another one the next time you have something to report. But if you are verbose and not very precise, it will be difficult to get other opportunities.

You have to be known outside of your church as someone who knows about it, and in your church as someone who knows about the external world.

Of course you have to read. Read the Bible and you will be encouraged and will find many illustrations for your ministry. Jesus was the best Ambassador God could have sent. What about Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah ... what about the apostles? They were exposed to the world but they were first ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Their stories will be a great source of inspiration for you. Develop your knowledge of the Bible, of Ellen White's writings, of your church, of religious freedom, your city, and the community you are called to serve. Be enriched by reading the experiences of those who worked before you in this department.

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b. Global Church History

Before I came to the General Conference I did not have a deep knowledge about the history of our department. I knew more about the Church history as it was the subject of my Master's Degree at Montpellier University, France. So I started reading about the church and religious liberty. I discovered that this ministry was very strong in the 1880s. In 1889 our leaders chartered the National Religious Liberty Association which became, in 1893, the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA). In 1901 the Department of Religious Liberty was organized at the General Conference. In the 1880s the religious liberty team collected about 250,000 signatures to petition against Sunday laws. Years later, in 1927, they collected, along with other organizations, nine million signatures on the same issue, then in 1936, 500,000 signatures were collected against calendar reform. At this time the world church membership was about 300,000.

Every five years we have the General Conference PARL Advisory in Silver Spring with our colleagues from the 13 world divisions. During this time we visit some senators or congresspersons. After World War I, the United States President received the PARL directors at the White House. It makes us humble today.

In the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* you will find interesting articles about our department and the IRLA. We easily forget the work of those who occupied this position in the past. A reading of Dr Beach's book, *Ambassador for Freedom*, is a must as is also the book on Dr Jean Nussbaum. Dr Nussbaum was very active at the League of Nations before World War II. He spoke to the League on the subject of calendar reform. He also knew Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt very well and several heads of state.

Bert Beach told me that when he was the director of our school in Italy, Villa Aurora, one time he heard the announcer say on the national radio evening news, "Today the president of the Italian Republic met Dr Jean Nussbaum, secretary general of AIDLR. They talked about the state of religious freedom in the world." I don't know if anyone had more visibility outside of the Adventist Church than Dr Nussbaum.

Dr Gianfranco Rossi also did a remarkable work. Italy is one of the rare countries in Western Europe where we can have a meeting with the President and the Prime Minister, but it did not happen in a day. It is a long story of continual and consistent relations between the church and the state. Dr Rossi published a 600-page book, including a lot of documents.¹ I hope one day someone will translate it into English.

¹ Gianfranco Rossi, *Lotte e vittorie degli avventisti italiani per la liberta religiosa*, Edizioni ADV, 2007.

I had the great privilege of traveling with Dr Bert Beach for several years. He was a living history book about our department and about the church. There are those who write about history, collecting documents and articles, and those who are part of history. Both are great resources. I encourage you to learn about our department and our church history, and one day you will be part of the history too.

To make history, learn history.



5. Build a Network of Friends

You cannot succeed alone. Our department exists to build bridges and to open doors. Isolation has always been a temptation for churches, for some have a concern that we will lose our identity and beliefs if we are exposed to others. I became an Adventist when I was 18 years old. The first year after my conversion I wanted to convert all the people I knew, plus others. However, my way was not to build bridges but to catch people. During that time I classified people into two categories: those who could be caught, and the others. All my interest went to the first category, a category which continued to shrink. But this was not Jesus' way. Our Lord healed and helped many people and He directly called a few. Having good relationships was part of His ministry.

After a year of trying to be out of the world, I followed this statement Jesus made: *"You are in the world but not from the world."* Prejudices against our church were so strong that more than anything I wanted people to understand what kind of Christians we were. So instead of fleeing their company, I met them. First I met those with whom we had common faith — Christians and the religious believers — then with those who believed in human dignity.

In my current ministry I have met top Christian leaders and attended inter-religious meetings, conversations, and dialogues. In spite of that, I am still an Adventist and happy to be one. I have never been tempted to change. There are great Christians and people of faith in other "houses." Sometime their kindness challenges me. Most of the time they enrich me and I am blessed by their friendship. But, I am still here in the Adventist Church!

Always seek to make friends and to build bridges. There are so many people of goodwill in this world. Talk with them, share with them, become friends with them.

Making friends does not mean you will adopt their lifestyle or eat or drink like them. You are who you are. You have nothing to hide about your religion or your lifestyle.

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It requires time to build a real friendship. Take the time it needs. Cultivate your friendships year after year without calculating the outcome. Don't think, "If I become friends with this one, he will help me to get this position or this advantage." Nobody wants to have friends like that. If your purpose is just to use people for your own advantage, they will probably do the same with you. People aren't stupid. They know when friendship is faked.

I don't remember ever asking help for myself from the friends I have in Public Affairs. But I have asked help for someone else who needed it. Having friends will help our Church, especially when we have problems. It may help our members get freedom to worship on Sabbath. It also helps reduce misunderstandings and prejudices.

On March 15, 2012, Antonio Monteiro, an Adventist pastor and missionary in Togo, was falsely accused of being one of the leaders of human blood trafficking and the murder of eight young women. The police gave no proof. No one had found any bodies. Yet he and a church member were arrested and tortured because an ex-convict had been forced to give the police some names.

We wanted to help them, as we did for other innocent members in prison. But what could we do from our office? My first question was, Who can help us? You always ask this question when you face a serious problem. First you think about your friends and other individuals you know. We cannot be successful alone. I invited a friend for a luncheon. We talked about Pastor Monteiro's case and I shared our strategy with him. We were going to collect 100,000 signatures for a petition. "If you are the only one to defend them," he said, "your signatures won't be enough. But if you have several non-Adventist names and organizations involved, you will have a greater chance to succeed." That was good advice from someone who used to receive this kind of petition. But the best approach would have been to have friends there in Togo.

The first question we should ask when a problem happens is, "Do we have friends in the government? Do we have contacts in the media? Do we have friends in other churches or religions?"

If the answer is, "No, we do not," we are in a very difficult situation.

It may happen that some leaders think that the Church does not need strong PARL departments. "If we have problems," they say, "we hire a lawyer or a public relations agent." They will change their mind when they get the bill. It is like those who say, "We don't need fire fighters because there is no fire." Guess what happens when there is a fire? The question people will ask is, "Who is responsible?"

Relationships are essential in our society, and it has always been the case. Make friends and be a friend to others.



6. Set Goals

What do you want to achieve? How are you going to make a difference? All those who made something great of their life had a goal.

Alexander the Great had a goal, and so did Caesar, Napoleon, Dr Albert Schweitzer, and Mother Theresa. When you set a goal for your ministry, you are going the right direction. It will help you to prioritize your activities, to make choices. The goal is like the finish line in a race. Life is a race and there are no spectators. All of us are in it. The departure takes place at our birth. The arrival is when we die. The time between is our time, the time to accomplish something, to make a difference. Between our birth and our last breath we can make history. But if we have no goal and if we don't know where we are going, we are sure to arrive nowhere and accomplish nothing.

The first goal we set should be our ultimate goal. Christians call it eternal life, the kingdom of God.

When we accept it as our ultimate goal, we have to arrange our priorities according to it. This is why Jesus said, "*Seek first the kingdom of God ...*" The rest will be given to you but don't be distracted by it. Keep going in the right direction, the direction of your goal. The apostle Paul lived with his goal in mind. He evaluated his work according to his goal. He understood that God had given him a period of time to accomplish his mission. He was in the race. He was an actor, not a spectator. He writes, "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14).

Jesus' ultimate goal was to save people, gaining eternal life for them. Dying on the cross He said, "All things are accomplished!" Beginning His public ministry, Jesus knew where He was going and what He had to do. More than every one of us, He could have been distracted from His goal. In the desert, the devil's temptations were powerful distractions. In Galilee, people wanted to keep Him with them just as we want to keep a great doctor or lawyer or a rich benefactor with us. But Jesus answered, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). He didn't say, "I think ... I should ... My feeling is, I should go to the other towns." No, He said, "*I must ...*" Jesus had no time to waste. He was not turning around, looking around. He knew He had an important mission to fulfill and no time to lose.

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Paul, too, was totally driven by his mission. He wrote, “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I don’t preach the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).

The church’s ambassadors know the ultimate goal of their life. They always select their priorities according to it. They have been called for a specific mission and their mission has to be part of their life. It is not an option.

a. Analyze the Situation Clearly

When you become PARL director, make a clear analysis of the situation of your department. What has been accomplished? How can you bring in new impulses and ideas without destroying the good things done by your predecessors?

The two churches where I was pastor had good relationships with the authorities. Those who were before me did well. I had to make certain I did not lose the benefit of their work. In both churches we had a group of committed young people which made our program possible.

Within my first church, I developed the youth ministry and its evangelistic dimension. We had a great musical group. We preached the Gospel in the secular universities of the city and in several little towns in the region. We were invited by the regional TV and by interchurch groups.

My goal there was to keep our group of students in the church and to attract others, and we could only do this by organizing activities that appealed to them. We did that, and we increased the visibility and the witness of our church in the city. We had unforgettable experiences.

My second church had also a good relationship with the city council and the mayor, but almost no relationship with other religious leaders. I tried to enlarge our network and became good friends with the Protestant pastor. He was in charge of a well-known cultural center and he offered to let us use its auditorium every time we organized a public program. He also invited me to preach in the Protestant temple.

His cultural center became the best place to hold our public events. Having our meetings in such a place gave us more visibility, more credibility, for at this time a strong anti-sect and cult campaign began in the media. It frightened people. Tragedies such as the mass suicide led by Jim Jones in Guyana and the activities of Reverend Moon had a devastating effect on public evangelism. Without our good relationship with the city council, most of our outreach activities would have been neutralized. But on the contrary, the regional and local newspapers published several positive articles on the ministry of our church in that town.

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When you set your goal don't ignore the good work done before you. Respect those who did it and build on their successes. Don't be the, "I am here now and things are going to change" type of leader. You don't have to change everything done before you to show that you are going to do something. A good strategy is to build on what has already been done.

I often compare our ministry to building a cathedral. We are involved in the same beautiful construction to the glory of God. The first generation has to find the place then build the foundation. The second one builds the walls, another one the roof and the towers. The result will be fabulous if the architect's drawing is followed and the work is carefully done. It will be a great building for the glory of God. It will attract the attention of generation after generation.

All those who were involved will be able to say, "I was there, I brought the stones... I painted the stained glass... I built the stairs." Imagine what would happen if each generation had decided to move to another site or to change the master plan!

Your mission is defined by the purpose of the department: ***To promote and defend religious freedom for all and to make the church well known as a Christian church based on the Bible.***

b. Keep Your Vision

To make your vision successful you must first determine your goal. Then plan a strategy to accomplish the goal. It will include developing a good relationship with officials and religious leaders of your city or country. Ask yourself: How many officials should I meet this year?

You know that public events can help you meet them so your next question is, How many public events should I organize during the next three years? Then you outline a simple plan for each year. You will fill in the details later.

"Is there anything worse than losing one's sight?" someone asked.

"Yes!" came the answer. "It is even worse to lose one's vision!"

You need to have a good mixture of vision, dreams, and realism. Start where you are with what you have and make progress.

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c. Annual Religious Liberty Sabbath

Begin with the annual Religious Liberty Sabbath. This is a world event voted by the General Conference and occurs on the fourth Saturday of January every year. Has your church organized a special program for this Sabbath? Some churches have a good educational and spiritual program while others may give a whole five minutes to the PARL director to introduce the offering. That's all! Some, including large churches, ignore totally this Sabbath and the offering is like an underground activity. Those who have not been informed will never know about it.

One of your goals should be to make sure that is not the case in your local church or in any of the churches in your conference and union.

That is your first step. The second is to make certain that the sermon will be on religious freedom. The third step is to organize a special program on religious freedom such as a concert or a panel with guest speakers and experts.

This is your basic work. If you do this, it will be a good beginning.

But you say that it's already done. Very good! Later on in this manual I will give you some examples of events which can make history. But now I have a question for you about the Religious Liberty Sabbath. How many people attended the afternoon meeting? How much was last year's offering? The year before that? This year's offering?

In February 2013 I was invited to preach at one of our universities. They had two services, totaling probably more than 1,200 students, professors, and friends. We were very pleased. In the afternoon on our way back to the hotel, we were invited to speak by a local church. We accepted. Only ten people came to that meeting. They were very motivated, but unfortunately the church scheduled our meeting at the same time as a funeral.

Imagine it is your church. What would be your reaction? You did very well inviting the world leader, the union leader and his deputy, and you feel miserable because only 10 people came. It could be very embarrassing.

Discouraged? Probably!

Are you ready to give up? What happened? You did not get any support!

Why should you continue? Next week someone will come and speak about the *Conspiracy of the Ten* and the church will be full. The posters are already on the church information board.

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You may ask why people who talk about religious freedom don't try to be more interesting. People like plots and secret revelations. Promise them those, and they will come.

By the way, with only ten people attending it was almost a secret meeting. You could suggest that the next meeting be called "Secret Meeting on Religious Freedom: Incredible Revelations." You may add, "Only the ten first registered will be accepted." However, this is not our way to work.

d. How Would You Go from 10 to 10,000?

OK, you are serious but only ten people have come. What would you do?

I suggest you breathe deeply and go outside for a few minutes. Look at the sky, hoping it will be a blue sky, and remember Paul preaching in Athens and Elijah under the tree (1 Kings 19:4). Before the meeting's end take a picture of the ten people. The next day draw a chart for the next five years. You start with ten people in 2014. Now set up a goal for 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Let say, to be very conservative, 50 people for 2015. That would five times as many people. Strive to have 100 people in 2016 and 150 in 2017.

Do it! It is possible. Set your goals and be ambitious for the Lord. You can be sure that in 2015 the number of people, including officials, will increase dramatically.

Life is a race. You have a clear mission. Now work on your goals.

Do it! You are ready to make history.

You have just set up a goal for the coming year and for three, five, or seven years to come. You had a consultation with the local pastor, the elders, or your president. You select the dates. As long you don't have a date your goal is just a good intention, a beautiful vision, a *possible* success. Nothing may ever happen.

Many times people say to me, "A festival is a great idea. We will do it." Or, "We plan to have a congress in our territory. It will be a great one."

My answer is, "Very good. Congratulations. You are close to making history" But I must add, "When will it be?" As long as there is no date, we are in confusion. Selecting a date is the first concrete step to reaching the goal. When that is done, you are on the right track. Don't expect that you will have no questions, no doubts, and no opposition. All that is part of the

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deal. If everyone could do what you plan to do, you would not make history. But you have a vision. You will organize an important event, and you will make a difference.

Talking about religious freedom once a year for five or ten minutes is useful, but you have been called to do more and you will do more. You have to believe it is possible. You are right. It is possible. With God everything is possible. You will bring your project and your goals to God. It will be a great adventure of faith.



7. Believe Everything Is Possible

In 2005, for the third time, I was elected Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department Director during the General Conference Session in St Louis, Missouri. During the previous 10 years, with our team, we had developed the IRLA's activities and also relationships with different governments.

In December 2004, I received the Medal of National Merit from the president of Romania, with the rank of Commander. As Bert Beach, who a few years before had received a Medal from the President of the Republic of Poland, said: "When people want to gratify you, don't discourage them." I owed this honor to my excellent colleague Pastor Viorel Dima. For years he was an outstanding champion of PARL in Romania and one of our best union directors.

We organized a good IRLA World Congress in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1997, then in Manila, Philippines in 2002. We spent more than an hour with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo at the Presidential Palace.

We had launched the journal *Fides et Libertas*. My associate Richard Fenn chose the name for the journal and he did a great work in publishing the first two issues. He was followed by Dr Jonathan Gallagher and Viola Hughes. The IRLA has now been recognized by the United Nations. In 1999 we started a new adventure with the *IRLA Meeting of Experts*. It has become one of the top annual think tanks on religious freedom. A book was published by the Ministry of Justice in Spain on our work on *Religious Freedom in the Public Education*.

In 2003 we established the annual Religious Liberty Dinner in Washington DC. Thanks to James Standish, who organized and initiated it with the support of Lincoln Steed and *Liberty* magazine. Over the years we got Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and John Kerry as keynote speakers. We also initiated and sponsored a number of symposiums and regional congresses around the world. For a few years we invited the representatives of NGOs and government experts to our world headquarters for a group we called the Washington Coalition

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for Religious Freedom. In 2002 the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions elected me as Secretary. Bert Beach had been my great predecessor for 32 years. He did very well to favor my election.

I enjoyed ten blessed, full, and very exciting years. In 2005 at the General Conference Session in St Louis I thought my time was over. I did not see what could be my new contributions for another term of five years. I had a good team and over the years I had three good executive assistants, Lynn Friday, Marilyn Riley, and Carol Rasmussen.

Remember building the cathedral. Continuity is an important factor of success. Too many times we are tempted to focus too much on our own success. Our personal achievement may become more important than our mission. Imagine what would happen if the architects of the cathedrals had been more interested by their own glory than in the achievement of these beautiful monuments. What would have happened? Every new architect would have modified the plans to make sure their own work would be the one remembered and praised. The harmony and the beauty of the building would have been in danger.

When we decide to work for the church, we decide to work for a cause and an organization that is far beyond us. We work for the glory of God. We are in communion with the past, with the present, and with the future. We will die but the Church will be there and our department too. Our glory will be to have been part of this monument dedicated to the glory of God. We are called to bring our stone to the cathedral, not to destroy or to disfigure it.

a. The Lord Will Make You the Head

At this time I did not want to invent something new for the love of novelty, but I needed to find some new motivations.

One day while reading my Bible, I was attracted by a promise of God in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse 13. This was not the first time I'd read this text but this time it captivated my attention. It was like an answer to my prayers. It opened a new vision. This text was going to mobilize my energy for at least the next 10 years: "The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be only at the top, and not at the bottom" (NRSV).

The promise of God was for me and for everyone who believed in it. I remembered also the text, "Everything is possible for the one who believes."

My question to God was, "Could I apply Your promise to my ministry, and how?" What does the "head," the "top" mean?

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It means that when God has called us for a mission, He does not expect us to be satisfied with small visions which produce small results. He promises to move us to the top. He will do it, not us. There are so many examples in the Bible. *Why, I thought, wouldn't the same thing work for PARL?* I looked at every activity we had been doing for several years and asked, "Is this activity at the top? Are we the head in the following fields?"

- The IRLA Meeting of Experts?
- The IRLA World Congress?
- The journal *Fides et Libertas*?
- The TV Show *Global Faith and Freedom*?
- The *Religious Freedom World Report*?
- The Festivals of Religious Freedom?

When God asks us to do something it has to be great. Not necessarily spectacular or big, but great.

It may have just a small beginning, but later on it makes a difference. The Bible gives so many examples. Abraham had a son, Isaac. God said his descendants would be as numerous as the stars filling the heavens. Millions of people have a son, but believing you are the son of the promise makes a difference. Having a meeting with 20 experts is not a great thing. But if 10 years later this meeting becomes the top think tank in its field, it is a great thing. Don't evaluate the greatness by the appearance. What will make your event great is the vision you have about it and the promise of God.

The Religious Liberty conference or panel you organize will be great if, a few years later, it develops into the number one "event of religious freedom" in your city. It is possible, I assure you. You will not find a lot of competition and you can make a great difference. You can fill an auditorium with a good speaker talking about persecution or about the new bills voted by the government and their effects on the freedom of everyone.

b. A New Vision to Be Built on God's Promise

I prayed for the IRLA World Congress of 2007. It was my third one as General Coordinator and for the first time we decided to hold it in Africa. Our manager, Donald Robinson, who had been the manager of the three previous congresses, proposed Cape Town as the location. The two congresses I had coordinated were in Rio de Janeiro and Manila and we had around 350 to 360 attendees.

Having God's promise in mind, my goal for Cape Town was 600. We reached this number, but don't believe it was easy. Cape Town is very far from Washington and we did not have any

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main administrative offices there. Plus one of our best partners in the city was not reelected to his position, and we lost him a few months before the congress. But, thanks to the support of the union and the division there and the work of our PARL directors Hensley Mooroven and Busi Khumalo, it worked. It was a great experience and our GC team did very well. God had blessed us.

What about the next world congress? What would be our goal? I thought we should be even more ambitious and set a goal of 800 to 1,000 participants. If we could reach this number our congress would become one of the largest congresses on religious freedom ever organized.

The Inter-America Division was interested in such an event. Roberto Herrera had been working hard to multiply training seminars, symposiums, and festivals. He made history in 2008 by organizing the first Inter-American Congress on Religious Freedom. The Dominican Union President, Pastor Cesario Acevedo, and his team made history too with their second festival. It was a success with 13,000 people attending. It became the second largest festival in the world and the largest in the Americas. This was 2009. Several times Roberto Herrera and I travelled to Central America and Mexico to promote the Seventh World Congress. We got strong support from the Division President, Pastor Israel Leito, and all the leaders. We received excellent backing from our General Conference President, Pastor Ted Wilson. He came and spoke during the congress and during the third festival. Eight division presidents attended and 50 experts, officials, and religious leaders were part of the program. How many participants did we have? Nine hundred!

Our team was new but everyone did their best. Our new Congress Manager, Daisy Orion, found a great location and negotiated good prices. We did not reach the 1,000 participants we'd hoped for, but we had more than 800. The work Roberto Herrera did with the support of his division made a great difference.

God blessed us, but at the same time He helped us realize that with such numbers we needed to be more professional. It is important to set a precise goal if we want to see progress. But goals have to be sustained by faith in God's promise.

The **Religious Liberty Dinner** is another example. James Standish was the visionary who led the organization of the first five dinners. I think his goal had to do with the number of participants and the quality of the speakers. He got both — more than 300 participants and fabulous speakers such as Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and John Kerry. The first dinner was held in the Caucus Room in the Russell Senate Building. The room is famous because several historical hearings were held there including the one on the sinking of the Titanic, the one on the Watergate scandal, and the hearing on the Contras. The goal was reached. It was time

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to go forward. What would be the next goal? More participants? A great speaker such as the First Lady or the President of the United States?

When, in 2008, James Standish was selected to be the Executive Director of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Attorney Barry Bussey, who had just joined us, faced an enormous challenge: How to keep this event at an acceptable level? With the help of his Assistant, Debbie Knott, and Melissa Reid, Associate Editor of *Liberty*, Barry did it. The year after, they did even better. Then Attorney Dwayne Leslie and Melissa Reid took the lead.

Their goal for 2012 was not the number of participants, but the number of ambassadors and embassies represented, and government officials and NGO leaders present. It was one of the best Religious Liberty Dinners. The majority of those who attended were not Adventists. We were hosted by the Canadian Embassy and our keynote speaker was the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Tenth Religious Liberty Dinner was mentioned by the media as the “Annual Religious Liberty Event” in Washington. The goal was reached. The faith and vision that Barry and Dwayne inherited from James had become their own.

For 2013, the team again had a great idea. The Prime Minister of Canada had just chosen the first Ambassador for International Religious Freedom. The dinner gave him an excellent opportunity to come to Washington and he was able to share his vision before members of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the State Department, NGO leaders, and ambassadors. And for the second time the Canadian Embassy agreed to host our dinner. It was a new success. The US ambassador, who was our guest speaker in 2011, came to meet her new Canadian colleague. The Chair of the US Commission came too, for the same reason. It was a great event.

In 2014 our guest speaker was Melissa Rogers, Advisor to President Obama.

What will be the goal for 2015?

We all believe that one day a head of state will be the speaker. Remember the promise and believe in it: “God will make you the head and not the tail.”

c. I Needed More Faith

The **Festival of Religious Freedom** is another good illustration of fixing goals and believing in God’s promises. In January 2006 the thought came to me that we could have a great gathering for religious freedom. Not just a few hundred in attendance, but perhaps 10,000. But when and where? I thought we should reach this number by 2009.

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It was my dream based on God's promise. But how could we do it? Where would we find the money, the stadium, or the place to gather such a number? It was evident that the General Conference would never totally finance or organize a second world event run by our department.

During February 2006, while on my way to Cape Town to prepare for the Sixth IRLA World Congress, I attended the assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil as an observer. Afterward I stayed a few days in Sao Paulo to meet Williams Costa, the new PARL director for the South America Division. His background was in communication and music so he had several questions about his work for religious freedom. He had also organized large evangelistic meetings for Pastor Alejandro Bullón. As we were visiting local conference headquarters in the state of Sao Paulo, I shared with him my dream, my goal, and the challenges I had to face to reach it.

"I don't have a lot of knowledge about religious freedom," he said, "but I know how to organize big meetings." He also knew how to lead an orchestra and work with the media. Above all, he had a lot of energy and determination. As I listened to him I had the impression that an angel was suddenly making my dream possible. Here was the person we needed to set up a mass gathering in 2009.

Then he asked, "Why should we wait until 2009?"

My answer was obvious. "We have never done any big meetings for religious freedom. People don't come out for religious freedom."

I had the idea to build a very attractive program, such as a concert including short testimonies. But it was still an idea. Costa, however, knew how to do it and he had the energy and the talent to mobilize people.

We visited an indoor stadium of more 10,000 seats in the center of Sao Paulo. When I saw all the seats I thought it would be a miracle to fill half of them. I took a picture in the empty stadium with Williams Costa, Samuel Luz, and Attorney Alcides Coimbra. What a great team it was. Edson Rosa was not in the photo, but he was working behind the scenes. He was Secretary of the Brazil Central Union which was very involved in the meeting.

On June 10, 2006, the stadium was more than full with about 12,000 people and according the police 20,000 stood outside. I could not believe it. The program was fabulous and the focus was religious freedom. It was a miracle for me. We were three years ahead of my goal. This first mega festival was followed by a number of others around the world. More than

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40,000 gathered in the stadium of Luanda, Angola in 2008. The main organizer was a member of parliament and former Vice President, the Honorable Benjamin Fausto Paiva. He received the full support of his union president Pastor Teodora Elias. This great event was planned in the same division where the Sixth IRLA World Congress was held. Many division leaders would have objected by saying that one big event is enough; we don't need two. This was not the case for Pastor Paul Ratsara and his team. They all came to Luanda and brought their support to the largest gathering of religious freedom to date. Then the General Conference Executive Committee, with the support of Dr Jan Paulsen, voted to hold the First World Festival in Lima, Peru, in 2009.

In Lima, the gathering in the stadium became the climax of a series of events, including three symposiums in Trujillo, Cuzco, and Lima, a march in the city with 10,000 people, and the meeting in the National stadium with about 45,000 people. The same year we had 13,000 in Santo Domingo and 15,000 in Bogota followed by a congress attended by the President of the country. God's promise became reality. Never in the past were such large meetings held to celebrate religious freedom. We, as a Church and as PARL, made history.

In Lima, the two union presidents, Pastors Orlando Ramos and Samuel Sandoval, were very much involved and they received strong support from the young president of the South America Division, Pastor Erton Kohler. Pastor Edson Rosa who succeeded Williams Costa did a fantastic work.

I conceived and promoted the concept of the festival. But the unions, with the support of the division, did most of the work. Division presidents Paul Ratsara and Erton Kohler were part of the program. From the General Conference, Dr Eugene Hsu and Dr Ella Simmons were involved in the symposiums and in the large meeting in the stadium.

Of course everywhere we had these events our PARL directors played an important role: Hensley Mooroven in South Africa and Angola, Edson Rosa in South America, and Roberto Herrera in Inter-America, Gilbert Wari in West Central Africa, for the third All-Africa Congress and the second Festival. All played a key role in making it possible.

The great adventure is not over. It is just the beginning. We have to believe in God's promise and do great things for His glory. Believe, and you will make history!

In such meetings the number of participants is an important factor but not the only one. If you cannot have 50,000 but only 3,000 or just 600, do the best you can. But above all, do something. Believe, and you will see God's promise become a reality.



8. Follow the Path of Integrity

“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt” (Josh 24:14, NKJV).

Don’t lie! Be honest even if it creates problems for you. Integrity is your best bet.

I have in my memory a beautiful quotation of Ellen White. It has helped me so many times. In the class of Dr Jean Zurcher we had learned by heart a few of her quotations and among them this one: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men — men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”²

At that time, I thought it was rather strange to ask university students to memorize such quotations. I remember the course because Dr Zurcher was an outstanding educator and, of course, I remember several quotations. They are a treasure to me now.

As I write these lines Lance Armstrong, who won the *Tour de France* for seven consecutive years *and* a personal battle against cancer, was on the national news. During a TV interview he confessed that he had cheated. He used prohibited drugs to help him win the races. During all the years that he was a model, a hero, for millions, his life was a lie. Of course, many before him lived the same story. Politicians lied, bankers lied, CEO’s lied, and scientists lied. It happens that some religious leaders lied too.

Of course not everyone lies. There are still people who can look at themselves in the mirror without apprehension. They may not be as successful and as rich as the others, but they have interior peace. Integrity is part of their personality. Sad to say, some ambassadors also lie. Sometimes their government orders them to lie. Not everyone obeys, of course. Some would rather resign than lie, and so they do. What about the ambassadors for the church?

During the Fifth IRLA Congress in Manila, I spent time with Professor Abdelfatha Amor, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief. I asked him what qualities were essential qualities for a UN Ambassador. He mentioned four and among them, integrity.

“Integrity,” he said, “will give you respect and credibility. Both are essential in our work.”

² Ellen G White, *Education*, 57.

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Integrity begins with the way you introduce yourself. The title you have should, of course, be correct. Sometimes people are introduced with titles they don't have. We have to make sure the right titles have been provided. Once I was introduced as Secretary General of the Christian World Communion. In fact it is Secretary, not Secretary General. When this happens I always find a way to correct it — Doctor, Professor, Pastor, and Reverend. Some people are very generous, but you must be careful. The wrong title will come back against you. I knew a religious leader who had to resign because the title he used was not correct. The truth came like a bomb and discredited him.

Integrity is also about the way you introduce your church or your association. If you are from a small city church, don't say it has several hundred members. Be precise when it comes to statistics and information. If you're not sure just say, "I will check on this and will give you the correct figure."

Integrity is about the stories you tell people. Is it a true story? Did it actually happen, and happen the way you are telling it? Is it a legend or a fable?

Of course, integrity comes with a price. One of the most beautiful stories in the Bible tells of Joseph, a young Hebrew slave in Egypt. His integrity cost him years in prison. But in the end his integrity made him blessed by God and he became Prime Minister of Egypt, just below Pharaoh in power and responsibility.

Don't promise anything you're not sure you can do. You will make an impression for a while, but then you will lose your credibility. It will ruin your ambassadorship.

The Bible is full of promises for those who practice integrity:

"He who walks with integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will become known" (Prov 10:9, NKJV).

"Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich" (Prov 28:6, NKJV).

"He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly fall" (Prov 28:18).



9. Be Humble

“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:4, NKJV).

“A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor” (Prov 29:23). To God, and only to God, is the glory. We are His servants.

A big ego is not the exclusive right of movie stars or celebrities. We can commit our lives to a great cause and even to Jesus and still maintain a big ego. The church organization offers many possibilities to satisfy our ego. There are positions in leadership, elections, magazines, TV shows, large meetings, and books. Churches have produced their stars too. Of course, in church society we will find less excess than in the “world.” But outside the church humility is one of the most difficult virtues to develop and to keep alive. The temptation is real. We initiate and organize public events. The secular media interviews us and we meet heads of state, ministers of government, ambassadors, and religious leaders. The opportunities to be in the picture are many. But we are a General Conference department just as all the others.

It is true that we have special connections with the GC president when it comes to dealing with governments and relations with other churches and religions. We are also involved in the preparation of public statements. But each of the General Conference departments has their territory which completes ours. This is why we work very closely with them. Rajmund Dabrowski and Williams Costa were PARL directors in their divisions, and I was communication director in my union and division. I had been communication director for 16 years. Our cooperation goes first and naturally to communication and to the Office of General Council. But we need the cooperation of all. The youth department and the department of women’s ministries are very supportive of our festivals.

It can be a real temptation to forget that we are the humble servants of the Lord and our church. When we are successful, others may see us as arrogant. When we are not successful they will see us as incompetent. If we are very active we may attract too much attention. In our ministry there are many possibilities to open the door to misinterpretation. Being humble will protect us and it will keep us in the hand of God.

We may know one aspect of something, but surely not everything. One of life’s great lessons is that there is always something to learn. No one is perfect and everything we do may be improved.

When we fail — and it can happen — how do we react? We can say, “It is not my fault!” or, “I am not the one for this kind of program.” But making excuses will not make you happy. Just be humble and recognize that you are not perfect and you may have missed something. Humility will help you evaluate and correct. I am not perfect, but thankfully there is time to progress and improve.

Being humble also means that you don’t run after popularity or celebrity or rewards. You do your best and let God decide the consequences and the reward. You are not in the same league as those who need public recognition and honor to have the impression they are someone. Jesus again said, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt 23:12).



10. Be Persistent

Rome was not build in one day.

You’ve got the vision. You set your goals. You work with integrity. You are humble enough to survive many disappointments and sometime jealousy ... you are very close to succeeding. Still one essential quality must be added: persistence. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial,” writes James. Why is he blessed? What will happen to him? “. . . when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

Perseverance is a synonym of the word *endurance*. Often we could use the word *patience* instead. If you want to reach your goal, perseverance will make the difference. If you have to face opposition and obstacles, endurance will make a difference. If you are disappointed because things are not going as fast as you expected, patience will make a difference.

You want to organize a symposium for Religious Liberty Sabbath. Your church is not a large one, but you know that you could have an audience of 150 people. The pastor supports you but he will have no time to help you and, by the way, the budget for religious liberty is around zero.

This does not mean you are helpless. You can invite the conference or the union PARL director. They will be happy to know you are doing something and, if they can come, they will cover their own expenses. You might even invite someone from the division or the General Conference. From time to time I receive phone calls from local religious liberty leaders inviting me to come for a special Sabbath. I look on my calendar and sometimes I am able to attend. I want to encourage them. If I go, the conference, the union and the division leaders

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will be informed and one or more may come with me. There will be no cost to you, but you will already have great publicity. One of your leaders will preach on Sabbath morning and in the afternoon you can invite some local experts. You have your symposium. You have your date, the fourth Sabbath of January, and you have your goal — 150 people attending.

But then you discover that another program has been planned this very Sabbath in a nearby Adventist church. Then some people come to you with their doubts. “We have never done that in the afternoon. It will not work! Nobody is interested by religious liberty!”

They may propose that you invite some “experts” in conspiracy theories. They have nothing to do with religious liberty, but they know how to attract people. You feel the support of some declining and become very close to giving up. “No interest, no meeting!”

But remember what Jesus told His disciples about the end of time. “Those who endure until the end will be saved!” Be patient, persevere, endure, and you will succeed.

a. Persevere in Doing Your Best

If I come with the union director and only 25 people show up for the afternoon meeting, what will be the message to us and to your small audience? Unfortunately, it won't be a good message.

You have been courageous, but you missed something.

You may not be a good organizer or marketing is your weak side. Something is wrong. Instead of hosting a successful meeting it has become an embarrassment. You have done well in some points but you lacked perseverance in others.

My Second IRLA World Congress in Manila was not an easy one. We planned to go to Asia, and we chose Manila. We have a strong church there and we expected to have the support of the Southern-Asia Pacific Division. My colleague, Hiskia Missah, helped us a lot. Don Robinson, our Congress Manager, signed the contract with the hotel. The deal was that if we booked 200 rooms, we got the meeting rooms for free and, as we expected to have more than 350 participants, we did not foresee a problem. Then September 11, 2001, happened and suddenly many people were afraid to fly. Then attacks by some extremists in the Philippines made newspaper headlines. A number of participants cancelled their reservations. What could we do? We feared that we would never be able to book the required 200 hotel rooms.

We had invited speakers from the United States, Europe, and Africa. Among them was the former US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the United Nations

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Special Rapporteur, and the Philippines Senate President. Would they be speaking to a half empty auditorium? Along with Don Robinson we decided to keep on, to persevere.

The last three days before the opening we got a lot of support. Ambassador Tejano, who had been the PARL director of the union in the Philippines, and Congressman Abajon, joined us and they invited all the top officials. The President of the country promised to receive a delegation in her palace. On Friday I had a meeting at the union headquarters with all the pastors of Manila. They promised to come — at least to the opening meeting. The division leaders and staff booked a certain number of rooms. And so at the opening meeting the auditorium was full, including the Senate President, the President of the Congress, the leader of the opposition, and the Minister of Education. On Friday morning news of the congress was on the front page of one of the largest newspapers in the Philippines.

Persevere because you don't know what God has in store for you. You may be surprised.

b. Dealing with the Moment of Doubt

In every event we organize there is a moment of doubt. Do we have to give up? No we don't.

For the Fifth Religious Liberty Dinner in Washington DC, James Standish had invited Senator John Kerry, the Democratic Presidential candidate running against George W Bush. We had a long, suspenseful wait before we were certain that he would come. When Barry Bussey took the lead he had to face the same incertitude. When Dwayne Leslie and Melissa Reid, organized the Ninth Liberty Dinner in 2011, none of the potential guest speakers could come. I even thought that we should just take a break that one year. After all, we were the only association that had had an annual dinner since 2003.

As we met to consider our options we looked at each other and suddenly Dwayne had a bright idea. He suggested that we invite the newly nominated US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom who had been nominated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Obama, but had not yet been confirmed by the Senate. Her name was not known in the religious freedom field. A certain number started to criticize such a choice and others were skeptical.

But Dwayne said, "We should invite her. In doing so we will give her a great opportunity to show that she is very motivated for this position. We will also attract all those who would like to hear her speak about religious freedom."

She knew us as James Standish had contacted her directly after her nomination. And so Dwayne invited her, and she accepted. It was a great dinner. Our General Conference

President, Elder Ted Wilson, gave a short speech about Adventists and religious freedom. Our former General Conference President, Dr Jan Paulsen, and his wife came too. As we had invited the former Bishop of Oslo, the Rev Dr Gunnar Stålsett, to receive the International Award, the Ambassador of Norway and his wife came to meet him and Dr Paulsen. It was a successful event.

When you plan a program, don't expect that everything will go smoothly and without any surprise. Be ready to face a last minute choice. Who knows! But persevere, endure, and be patient.

11. Organize Public Events

Be active in your community and invite officials to your meetings.

Looking back in my ministry I consider the many events that I organized. Is it a predisposition or a talent? After I became an Adventist it came naturally. When I discovered the Gospel and accepted God's call in my life I immediately wanted to go to the mission field without losing any time studying. But Dr Jean Zurcher, the President of the French Seminary, advised me to finish my secondary school. "If you are well trained," he said, "you will serve better." So I studied very hard. The second year I organized a welfare group. Every Friday afternoon we helped the poor people of the village. At Christmas we organized a special program for the elderly people, including food and gifts. It was the best way to show the community that we were part of it, taking care of the poorest and the old.

A few years later, as youth pastor and chaplain for students, we organized a musical group and gave evangelistic concerts on the University of Montpellier campus and in the surrounding cities. Then with the youth leaders we organized what we called "Special Jeunes" events in France. It was a program of two or three days that included several concerts and street evangelism. We began in the city of Avignon, the city of the pope's palace. In the summer I was also in charge of Youth Evangelism Camps.

When I moved to the city of Pau to become senior pastor of another church we opened a "Friendship Bar." On Saturday night we invited young people to spend the evening with us drinking hot chocolate, eating cake, playing the guitar, and reading the Bible. It was an evangelistic program. We worked with drug addicts and former prisoners. The secular media was interested and published articles on our work. It was a very positive way to promote our church and our beliefs. Thus the church began a "center of influence."

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I was convinced that if we wanted to share a message we must create an event. It is one of the best ways. Do we have a message to share? Yes of course! Create an event!

a. An Event Is a Message by Itself

My second church had fewer than 100 members and I was more involved in youth evangelism and health promotion than in religious liberty. Then one day the division PARL director, Dr Lanares, contacted me. He was doing an excellent work through the *Association internationale de defense de la liberte religieuse (AIDLR)* and published the journal *Conscience and Liberty* in French, German, and several other languages. He had authored several books and he gave public lectures. Dr Lanares was a great ambassador for the church in Europe.

When he came back from a study tour in Russia I suggested that he give lectures on the theme “Religious Freedom in Russia.” The idea interested him and I organized his meetings in Pau, the city where I was a pastor. My good relationship with the director of the Protestant Cultural Center was helpful, and an interchurch choir accepted our invitation to be on the program. It was a success. More than 300 people from various churches attended. A year later I was working for the Franco Belgium Union and I organized the same meeting in Paris. The auditorium was full there, too. We had the participation of professors from the Sorbonne University and a reporter from the famous newspaper *Le Monde*.

An event provides the opportunity to meet important people such as government officials, religious leaders, and opinion leaders. When I came to the General Conference in 1995 I thought that our department should organize more public events. We continued to hold the IRLA World Congress, making it a five-year event. Also in 2003 we launched, with Ambassador Robert Seiple, the *Washington Coalition*. Twice a year for several years, we invited NGOs, officials, and experts from Washington. It became a well-known event. It still exists in another form in Washington DC.

I have mentioned other events we organized such as the Religious Liberty Dinner, the World Festival of Religious Freedom, and the annual IRLA Meeting of Experts. Our team became experts on how to organize such events, and we can help you to do the same at your level. We also initiated the Religious Liberty Concert, which is an excellent way to include musicians and artists.

You may say, “In my country, or in my city, it is impossible!” But there is an event you have the mission and responsibility not to miss — the Religious Freedom Sabbath. It is already accepted by the world church and its divisions. It is on the GC Annual Calendar. You don’t have to create it, but just make sure it is done.

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But, you ask, what kinds of things could we do?

You might have a symposium, a lecture, a liberty concert, a festival, a religious liberty dinner, or an awards ceremony. Just take a few minutes to think about all the possibilities you have.

This is a great opportunity to give an award to someone who has made a difference for your community. It is a way to thank your city or your country for defending religious freedom. You just need to be creative, and you have a full Sabbath for that.

b. Don't Miss Your Event!

Even if you don't have a choir in your church, you can invite some artists who will attract people. Perhaps you can have a special program like the one I attended in 2012 in Zagreb, Croatia. The Adventist Church there is small, but they have always cultivated good relations with authorities and religious leaders. On Sabbath we had the religious liberty program during the morning church service and then in the late afternoon the Croatian Association of Religious Liberty organized an award ceremony.

One award went to the President of the Republic. He was represented by his advisor. The other one went to Professor Hans Kung. He accepted it and sent a nice letter. The third went to a man from Bosnia who found \$10,000 lost by a Serb family fleeing the war. They had saved this amount for one of their children who needed surgery. What did he do? He found them and gave the money back. Both Hans Kung and the President wrote letters underlining their faith in religious freedom. The budget was very small but the event was covered by the media.

Such dinners have been organized in Sao Paulo, Brazil; Moscow, Russia; Bucharest, Romania; and in some other places. It could be done in the capital cities where it is possible to invite ambassadors, government officials, and religious leaders. The main focus will be on the awards. It could be done in any city following the same principles with the number of guests corresponding to your budget.

The largest award dinner on religious freedom that I have attended had about 500 participants. It is organized every year in Richmond, Virginia by the First Freedom Center. It is still the most prestigious. I was honored to receive the 2011 National Award. The governor, a senator, a member of Congress and the mayor attend the event. People paid to be there. The dinner is a source of income for the Center.

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Choose an event you can organize. Plan to do it on a regular basis, and you will make a difference. You will attract the attention of your community, make friends with some officials, and promote religious freedom.

You may not be able to organize a festival with 45,000 people or a congress with 900 participants or a symposium with 200, or a meeting of experts. But you can do something with what you have. Do it now and I can assure you, you will do it again. You will establish a tradition and you will make a difference.

I am writing these lines in a plane flying back home from Seoul, South Korea. I went there for the Division PARL Advisory, but I was also invited to the Annual Council and to a religious freedom event. It was not a festival, not a concert, not a symposium, but still the church was full. Why?

Instead of holding a religious freedom meeting they focused on the situation in North Korea. It became a celebration of the freedom they have in South Korea and testimonies and a prayer session for Christians in North Korea. People who came were grateful for such a program. Focusing on a specific country or case will get support from a large public.



12. Be Loyal and Faithful to Your Church

Loyalty is an important factor in the choice of an ambassador. I remember inviting a European ambassador to the General Conference headquarters. He kindly came even though his government had just been changed and he had to prepare for the visit of new the Minister of Foreign Affairs. That was not an easy task as the Minister had planned to come to Washington to announce that his government would pull back their troops from Iraq. The ambassador was also the leader of a political party which had lost the election. He had to be loyal to the new government and do his best to facilitate the meetings with the US State Department. He did it, but as you can imagine a few weeks later the new government replaced him. Every government wants to be sure its ambassador will understand, be able to explain, and support its politics. Loyalty is not an option for an ambassador. If you are not loyal to the government of your country, you resign. If you don't want to resign you will be fired.

An Adventist ambassador, Ambassador Bienvenido Tejano, was not involved in politics and his loyalty was well known and appreciated. He was the friend of a President who had to resign. But the next two Presidents kept him in his position. His loyalty was not in question.

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The church ambassador is loyal to God first and to the church he or she serves. We all hope that the church will always be loyal to God. Adventists who are faithful regularly face this challenge. Ambassador Tejano was criticized because he did not celebrate the National Day on Saturday. But his President supported him.

One of the greatest examples of being faithful to one's religious beliefs was the Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, Sir James Carlisle. He had not been involved in politics but his name was proposed by the previous Governor General. Queen Elisabeth who was cruising in the Caribbean invited him to come on her ship to be knighted. It is a prestigious ceremony and you receive the title of Sir. The only problem for him was the day. It was on Saturday, the Sabbath.

His Excellency James Carlisle did something that Daniel and the three young Hebrews did in Babylon. He politely declined. You can imagine how many people criticized him. But Queen Elizabeth answered that she understood very well, and she invited him to Buckingham Palace on another date. It was not on Saturday.

Both officials gave priority to God. We cannot expect less from church ambassadors. Be loyal! If for one reason or another you have questions or problems inform your pastor or president. Loyalty also means integrity. You have the right to disagree and in some cases you have the right to resign because you disagree. I worked directly under six presidents, among them three General Conference Presidents. They were each different but I knew what I could do on my own and what I could not do without their OK.

As an ambassador you will have to deal with many sensitive issues. You always need to get the OK of your leader and to explain what you are doing. Your pastor or your president may not ask you to get their permission or explain certain things, but believe me, do it anyway. Ambassador Tejano used to say, "As ambassador, I have to be sure that what I say is in harmony with what my President or government says. It is an ethical and professional obligation."

In the same way, loyalty to your church is also loyalty to the structure of the leadership. If you are ambassador in a local church, *your* leader is your pastor or the chair of the church board. Don't feel obliged to send a copy of your report to the conference president or the union president unless your pastor suggests doing so. You may embarrass him. Your conference president may ask what kind of game you are playing. And if you are the conference PARL director you deal with your conference president first.

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The same principle applies if you work in a department under a director. Don't send your report to the president with a copy to your director and 10 or 15 other people. Your director is your leader. He or she deserves the priority. They may choose to send a copy to the president, but it is not your place to do so. This kind of detail reveals more about someone than a thousand words.

In most countries the ambassadors are under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the United States they serve under the Secretary of State. Imagine the reaction of the Minister, if he or she received, with 15 other members of the government, a copy of a report from one of his ambassadors directly addressed to the President.

The questions everyone will ask will be about his loyalty! You may be right. You may be more efficient than your leader, but the question will be about your loyalty. When I was young I certainly made this kind of mistake, jumping over one level to get directly to the lower one or to the upper one. Not good! We used to say, "It's better to contact God directly than His saints!"

It works with God, but not very well with men. When you agree to serve an organization, even if it is a local church, you have to follow the rules and respect the structure. If you don't agree, you are free to organize your own ministry and dictate your own rules to those who follow you.

Does this seem too rigid?

Don't forget that you are entitled to send your report of activities to your PARL leaders at the upper levels. Keep in constant communication with your president and with your conference, union, division, and General Conference PARL directors.

But what if you want to have a private communication with another leader? What can you do? If it is private business, you are free to do so. Do it without sending a copy to 15 other people, but keep it private.

In our ministry, loyalty is a factor of success. The church ambassador does not represent himself or serve himself, but serves the church and God.

Be Spiritual

By spiritual I mean that you must remember you are an Ambassador of the Kingdom of God first and you need to have regular communication with the King. As a country asks its

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ambassador to keep an ongoing relationship with its government, you have to keep a constant and personal relationship with God.

If you don't, you will rapidly lose the essence of your mission. You can become a great diplomat, a great technician about public affairs, but that is not enough. You have to be a man or woman of God. It will keep you humble and open to God's influence. You have been called by God and He has a lot of promises for your ministry. You are called to live fabulous experiences with God but also to face temptations and challenges.

Sometimes we are treated like Presidents or members of a government. It happened that once, in a beautiful hotel, I was given the Presidential Suite for a night. It has only happened once in all my life. As I picked up the key at the reception desk my associate, Attorney Dwayne Leslie, smiled and said, "You got the Presidential Suite!"

I thought it would simply be a larger room, but when I reached the door, I hesitated. It was a French door. I opened it and entered a large beautiful salon. I saw a shiny black piano, a kitchen, another salon, and on my right a large bathroom and a bedroom. On my left I saw another bathroom and a master bedroom. *Someone is going to come out of one of these rooms*, I thought.

I quickly left the suite, shut the door, and walked away for a few minutes. I expected someone to open the door I'd just closed and ask, "Why did you come to my suite? You're not the President, are you?" But no one came. I looked carefully at the key and again checked the room number.

After three minutes, I reopened the door with more assurance. "Hello!" I called. "Is someone here?" I waited, then said, "I am a visitor."

There was no answer. It was my room for the night. I had a great view of the beach. I felt like a little king, but I knew this would not last long.

God helped me not to become addicted to this luxury. I could describe for you some of the hotel rooms I have stayed in — poor lighting, cold water, showers which didn't work, mosquitoes that did, and loud noises outside. I could tell you about the long hours spent in these kinds of rooms waiting for the evening meeting to begin. Sometimes I was unable to read or write, as I was just in survival mode. Fortunately it was the exception, not the rule.

You are an ambassador, but don't expect to receive all the advantages that ambassadors usually get. Don't play the role of the ambassadors of this world. The most important thing is to feel

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God's presence and to walk on Jesus' paths. Jesus had no hotel to stay in when He came to our world. I don't think He ever slept in a palace. But He was constantly in communion with His Father. He did not receive His power from the world, but from God.

As a church ambassador you may, at times, receive flamboyant introductions and at other times have no introduction at all. Before my first IRLA World Congress I went to Rio de Janeiro to meet reporters and to visit the hotel we had chosen. My colleague, Siloe de Almeida, did a great job. He knew many people there and we met with many officials. The last night there I was invited to a large evangelistic campaign held by Pastor Alejandro Bullón. It was located at the very point where the Carnival of Rio reaches its climax. About 30,000 people were in the building and I was in the VIP corner. Suddenly I saw myself on giant screens, and my name was given, and people applauded. Am I so important?

A few weeks later, while on vacation in my home country, I went to a church where I had preached several times before leaving Europe. The church had about 60 members. They were all nice people, and I knew most of them. Then the elder, whom I also knew, welcomed the visitors. He welcomed someone who came from the nearest city, another who had been in the hospital, another who missed the service last week. But nothing — not a word, not a sign — was given for my wife and me. We came from the Adventist Church headquarters, the General Conference in Washington DC and we chose this church so we could be with our brothers and sisters. But we received not one word of welcome. It helps to remember our priorities. Every time you are honored, remember there will be other times when you are not even noticed.

There are many great people, giants of faith, who have given their entire lives to working for God, yet they never received public recognition. But I can say to you that in heaven, near the Throne of Grace, they will be ahead of me. Don't let yourself become addicted to honor and flattery. You are in the hands of God. Remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem, how He was welcomed like a King — more than that, like the Messiah. What happened a few days later? He was impaled on a cross!

The key of our success as ambassadors of God and disciples of Jesus is to give God the first place in our lives.

Stay in communion with Him in prayer, in reading His Word, and in meditating on His life. It will give you courage and faith. It will give you perseverance and wisdom.



Test What You Have Learned

Select one correct answer to each question.

1. You are called to be the new church ambassador.

- a. You accept, but you know you do not have the time to do a good job with this ministry.
- b. You decline as you have no time for this ministry.
- c. You accept, and will do the best you can.

2. What is the main purpose of a good introduction?

- a. To make people laugh.
- b. To give the audience information so they will better understand your work.
- c. To impress the audience with your successes and talents.

3. From the list below, circle seven words that describe a good church ambassador:

mission, water, car, movie, appearance, sport, friends, integrity, pollution, silver, gold, persistence, celebrity, selfishness, humility, spirituality, superficiality

4. Why does a good ambassador need a strong network of friends outside of the Church?

- a. To have a good social life.
- b. To get personal advantages.
- c. To facilitate his/her mission.

5. Why is a good appearance important?

- a. It makes me attractive and successful.
- b. It honors the church I represent.
- c. It will help me to get higher position.

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6. Select the three main reasons to organize events.

- a. To make people busy.
- b. To send a message.
- c. To be in the news.
- d. To increase your network of friends.
- e. To make the Church well known.
- f. To make money.

The correct answers are: Question 1. **c**; Question 2. **b**; Question 3. **Mission, appearance, friends, integrity, persistent, humility, spirituality**; Question 4. **c**; Question 5. **b**; Question 6. **b,d,e**.

If you got: six questions right: Very good. You are on the way to being a great ambassador. You got 10 points.

Five questions right: Good! You got 8 points.

Three questions right: Read two principles again, or change your glasses. You got 3 points.

If you got fewer than three points, don't be depressed but ask for a translation of this manual into your mother tongue. You will have another chance in the following chapters.



SECTION TWO:

Being Practical: How to Do It



SECTION TWO

BEING PRACTICAL: HOW TO DO IT



1. The International Religious Liberty Association

a. History

In 1889, during an assembly in the Tabernacle in Battle Creek, Michigan, 110 Adventist leaders decided to charter a new association to promote and defend religious freedom. The church had been very active in this field. It had already published a magazine on the subject, *The Sentinel*. But it needed an association which could respond more specifically to the challenges against religious liberty.

They named it the National Religious Liberty Association. The idea was well received outside of North America and in 1893 the association became the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA). Later on, as books and brochures were published, church leaders organized the Library of Religious Liberty. Then the church set up the Bureau of Religious Liberty. In 1901 the General Conference established the Department of Religious Liberty. In 1909 *Liberty*, the name given in 1906 to the magazine, had a full page for the Religious Liberty Association. It listed 11 regional associations which included foreign countries such as Australia and Great Britain.

In 1946 the IRLA, newly reorganized and officially registered in Washington DC, opened its membership to non-Adventists. This was done under the influence of Dr Jean Nussbaum, a Swiss citizen living in Paris. He was the Religious Liberty Department Director in Europe.

Including non-Adventists was a revolution, even if in the past cooperation with those of other beliefs was not excluded. Today the IRLA has members from many different religions and beliefs including non-believers.

The purpose of the association is “To defend, promote and protect religious freedom for all people everywhere.” The definition of religious freedom we adopted is given in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

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Those who agree with Article 18, have no problem working with the IRLA.

The IRLA Panel of Experts is made up of a majority of non-Adventists. But the IRLA Board of Directors has a majority of Adventists. In spite of that, the current president and several vice presidents are not members of the Adventist Church. No one gets a salary from the IRLA. We work on a voluntary basis.

Our Association in Russia has been one of the most successful in including people from different beliefs. All religions in Russia are represented by one of their leaders, while eminent university professors represent the scholars and the board includes former government officials. At the start the Russian Orthodox Church was represented as a member, then they asked to be an observer. In 2013, the association started the process to get official recognition under the name of the Russian Religious Liberty Association (RRLA). At this time the head of the Office of Relations with the Society joined the board. In Russia it is important to have the Russian Orthodox Church on the side of freedom.

Pastor Oleg Goncharov, the division PARL director, is the current Secretary General. Of the 17 members on the board, only three are Adventists but every board member recognizes the role of our church in religious liberty and they have always elected the division PARL director their Secretary General. Victor Kruchenitsky was the first, then Victor Vitko.

People know we don't have a hidden agenda. Our church is committed to defending religious freedom. The IRLA is probably the best example of cooperation of a large number of people of goodwill working under the banner of religious liberty.

The IRLA works in partnership with regional and national associations in about 80 countries. Some are active, such as those in Colombia, Brazil, Russia, Romania, Italy, Croatia, and Poland. Some are moderately active, and some are in a state of hibernation but still alive. We also try to develop Religious Liberty clubs in local churches and institutions. We should have a Religious Liberty club in every one of our Adventist universities. However, while some Adventist universities have Amnesty International and other clubs, most have nothing about religious freedom. Only Pacific Union College and Oakwood University have Religious Liberty Clubs.

In 2003 we decided to encourage every country to organize its own national association rather than being a national chapter of the IRLA. In Brazil the name of the association is the Brazilian Association for Religious Liberty and Citizenship (ABLRIC). In Romania it is Conscience and Liberty Association. Both are quite active and both are well recognized by the government of their country. Some of the European countries are under the umbrella of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (AIDLR).

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In your city, you could organize your association as a chapter or a branch of the national association. In California it is the West Californian branch of the North American Religious Liberty Association. We call it NARLA WEST. But in Sacramento, to deal with the Congress and all legal issues, the organization is called the Church State Council. It is also a partner with NARLA.

NARLA is a partner with the IRLA. Instead of having a central world association we have a world *network* under the umbrella of the IRLA. We don't interfere in the decisions of the national associations, but we share information and projects, and we can be their advisors. It does not take a lot of time for everyone to recognize that it is in our interest to work closely together.

The Adventist Church supports the IRLA and national associations. It has been understood and accepted that the PARL director of the church will be the Secretary General or the Executive Director of the association.

This means that you, as PARL director, should be the administrative leader of the association. In most cases, the PARL director will agree to serve the association as long as religious freedom is the main focus. It is not necessary for the president to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

b. Leaders Must Follow the Bylaws

In some countries the Adventist Church fully supports the association but keeps it exclusively Adventist. In that case, the union or conference president is the president of the association. It may be not ideal but if it works, why not? We need the active support of church leaders. It is better to have them in than out.

But the following principles should be respected. When we represent the association, the title we use is that of the association. In our world congresses, the division presidents are the IRLA regional presidents. The union or conference presidents become the national presidents. All the division PARL directors become IRLA regional Secretary Generals.

I would give the same advice for events organized by the association. These are public events and not church events. It is very embarrassing to invite non-Adventists on behalf of the association to a meeting that turns out to be a church meeting. When that occurs, people have the impression they were trapped. If you want to have a church meeting on religious freedom, do it. You can have it on behalf of the PARL department. But please, be honest and consistent. I know that with most of the large congresses we organized the majority of the participants are Adventists. But a religious liberty congress is not a church event. Before people choose to attend the event we must inform them about its purpose and its program.

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“Is this an Adventist meeting?” asked the prime minister.

A good example occurred during our Third All-Africa Religious Liberty Congress held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, August 7–10, 2013. The Prime Minister accepted an invitation to attend the opening session and before it began we spent a few minutes talking with him in the VIP lounge. His first question was, “Is this an Adventist meeting?” We explained that the IRLA has members from various religions and beliefs, and he was pleased when he saw leaders of the Muslim community and those of other religious groups and scholars. He had no intention of attending a church meeting. But he did come to give his and the President’s support to religious freedom for all.

c. How to Organize Your Association

To organize your association you can follow the steps.

- 1) Be sure the church supports the organization by a vote of its Executive Committee.
- 2) Organize a working group, then a funding board with a president, a secretary, and a few members.
- 3) Write the bylaws in conformity with your purpose, in agreement with church values, and according to legal regulations.
- 4) Follow the rules of your country and make the legal request.
- 5) Elect your board and your officers.
- 6) Congratulations! You have your association. Welcome to the family.

It may take a while before you are legally recognized but you can use this time to plan your activities.

You will have an association that is independent from the church, but which has the strong support of the PARL team. If you are more comfortable, your association may be part of the activity of the PARL department of the church. If it is legal, you don’t need to fill out any forms.

As we welcome people from other faiths, we usually prefer to have an independent association which has strong links with the church. It will help the ministry of religious freedom in its relations with the authorities and give it credibility.

d. Who Is Behind the IRLA?

Reporters sometimes ask, “Who is behind the IRLA?” The answer is, “The IRLA is an independent association and its members have their own beliefs. They may be members of different churches or religions.” Then we must underline the fact that they are all committed to defend and promote religious freedom for everyone. If reporters want more information we can give them a brochure that gives the history of the IRLA. It makes clear that our association was chartered by Adventist leaders in 1893 and it became open to all in 1946. We have never hidden our links with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We must be honest. It would be very naïve to hide the relationship between the church and the association. Every reporter can look at the names of board members and ask who employs them.

If the union president is president of the association and four board members, out of six, are church employees, what will your answer be then? “We are proud that our church has been so involved in the battle for religious freedom for everyone.” We should not be ashamed of our history.

**2. Religious Liberty Sabbath**

A Religious Liberty Sabbath should be the basic event for every PARL director. Consider it as a gift and use it the best you can. If you are in a local church, you will make sure the pastor and the church board place this special Sabbath on their calendar. When you are asked to take charge of this department your first question should be about the Religious Liberty Sabbath. It is your responsibility to plan its activities in cooperation with the pastor. It will be your program.

What you should normally present:

a. Report

A report about religious freedom should be given at the beginning or at the end of Sabbath school. You can use a video, a PowerPoint presentation, or you may interview an expert or someone who had been persecuted for their religious beliefs. You, yourself, may also give a report about the state of religious freedom in your country and in the world.

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b. Sermon

Your conference and union should have received a sermon from your division or from the General Conference. This can be a good source of documentation for the one who will preach this Sabbath. No one is obliged to use or to read this specific sermon, but it is important that the one who preaches on this day will preach about religious freedom.

c. Introduction of Guests and Officials

The religious freedom Sabbath should be open to friends and officials. It could be wise to invite the mayor or someone from the City Council to represent the town. You can, of course, invite someone from the government and some religious leaders if your members accept that. You can give your guest five minutes to introduce himself and share some encouragement.

If you have invited city officials, make sure someone is waiting at the door to welcome them when they are still outside and to lead them inside. Make sure that their reserved seats are free. If the seats are not clearly designated with a “Reserved” sign you will have someone sitting in their seat. And when your visitors leave, walk with them to the door where their car will pick them up. Stay with them until they get into the car and drive away.

Remember that you have many things to organize such as the reserved seat and a reserved space in the parking lot. You should also explain to your guest when he or she will speak and who will be in their audience. Their staff will appreciate your sharing some information about the audience before the official comes. If there is a former missionary or a well-known doctor or surgeon in the church, the officials should know that too.

You will give them a printed program which includes their name at the appropriate point. They should know when to speak and how long. They should also know that for technical reasons you are strict on the timing. Most officials and leaders enjoy speaking. It is a privilege for them and they will be very pleased to do it in your church. The guest will speak between the Sabbath School and the worship hour, or in the afternoon. They should not speak during the worship hour which is God’s time.

If appropriate, offer an award during this special Sabbath. It could be done in the morning between the Sabbath School and the worship or at any other time during the day’s program. The best time, of course, is when the room is full.

Who should receive the award? Someone who has done something special for religious liberty. But as you are also the Public Affairs director it could be a member of the City Council who did a positive action for religious minorities, who has written a book or article to defend the

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persecuted, or someone who passed good legislation. Offering an award will open the church to others and will express our interest in the community.

The afternoon meeting is important but it is more challenging to get a good attendance. It depends on the program and the way it is publicized. In some parts of the world the church will be packed, but in other places it will be almost empty. Why is that? Religious freedom is not always presented in an interesting way. But if you invite people who will give a report on the persecuted church in Iran, you may have more success. If you invite a speaker who travels around the world and comes with a lot of stories, it may help draw people back for the afternoon service.

Your preplanning and promotion can include posters placed around town, church bulletin announcements, and perhaps even a news note in the religion section of your town's newspaper. Most of the afternoon meetings on religious freedom are very interesting.

In 2012, for the first time in recent history, a panel was organized on the campus of Loma Linda University. Norman Farley, our liberty leader in Southern California who organized the Freedom Classroom, had great courage. We thought that only 50 to 60 people would come in the afternoon though we knew that many in the area are involved in one way or another to promote, protect, and defend human dignity. One of the challenges was how to reach them.

Norman did it by organizing a panel with three speakers. I was one of them. The second one was Professor Roy Branson, and the third was a general in the Marines who defended conscientious objectors. Also the general had been asked by President Obama to work on the case of Guantanamo. We had a great time. The interest generated by Norman's team filled 300 seats.

A good afternoon program can work reasonably well, but it must be well prepared and promoted. Most of the time the only publicity we get is an announcement during the morning church service. There is no poster and no information has been given about the speakers. Those who come to the meeting are heroes.

Prepare the event ahead of time. Invite members from the other churches in your area. Make it attractive, but don't be discouraged if the attendance is below your hope. See the positive side. There is always a positive side and be sure to note the lessons which will help you with your next year's program.

There are many things which can be done to make Religious Liberty Sabbath a great success. You can present a video documentary on persecution, followed by questions. A pastor from Iraq was invited by NARLA for its Summit in 2013. Just do something!

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Don't forget that millions of people around the world are persecuted for their religious beliefs. Don't forget the privilege you have to live in a free country. Doing nothing—not even saying thank-you for the freedom we have—is not an alternative. You have been called to be the light on the hill. Be the light! We can live an exciting experience with God as we defend His value of freedom.

Make sure the Religious Liberty Sabbath will honor those who gave their lives for God and for our freedom.



3. Liberty Concert

The Spencerville Church is one of the most beautiful Adventist churches in Maryland. It is a church committed to classical sacred music. I have preached there a few times for the Religious Liberty Sabbath, and in the afternoon we would have a panel discussion. Both Bert Beach and I attend that church, and every panel he organized was very good. He had good support, too, with 50 to 100 people coming to hear the panel discussion. Not bad at all.

Then one year Bert and I suggested that instead of our usual Religious Liberty meeting the church choir could give a Religious Liberty concert. James Bingham, the conductor, agreed and the New England Youth Ensemble led by Dr Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse also performed. It was the First Festival of Religious Freedom held in this church and county officials were invited.

Melissa Reid presented the program, which included a few short interviews during the concert. It was a great program and the church pews were full. About 700 attended. I am sure a Liberty Concert with Wintley Phipps or the Heritage Singers would fill any church, and there are many other excellent artists who would be pleased to be part of a program on religious freedom. Great values were promoted by great people, but also by great artists. I encourage every large church that has a good choir and/or music program to organize a Liberty Concert.



4. Religious Liberty Dinner

As I wrote earlier, the idea came to James Standish. It began with a vision and by faith, and then hard work followed. You will find your own way. The principle is to have a dinner where you can invite a number of people and give awards. You can do it in your capital city and invite ambassadors and government officials or in any city with local leaders.

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How many guests will you invite? I would say a minimum of 50 to 60. The dinner may come before or after other meetings such as a symposium or a festival. We have tried to have it during Spring Council at the General Conference. It gave an opportunity for division leaders to meet ambassadors from their countries. It worked very well. Do the same with your local pastors. It is important that they meet the mayor and members of the City Council.

How do you proceed?

- a. Decide on the purpose of the dinner.
- b. Build a budget.
- c. Select a team and set up a planning committee.
- d. Choose a location.
- e. Set the date.
- f. List the people you want to invite.
- g. Choose a keynote speaker.
- h. Select awardees.
- i. Prepare awards.
- j. Work on the menu and the design of the room.
- k. Make a seating chart.
- l. Prepare the welcome speech.

Let me explain these points.

a. Decide on the Purpose of the Dinner

The **purpose** of the dinner should be well established before you do anything else. Write it down and follow it.

The purpose could be: To provide an opportunity for people of different beliefs to meet each other on the theme of religious freedom.

It could be: To increase awareness about the rising rate of persecution in the world.

It could be: To offer people a positive image of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a human rights defender for all.

One of the goals will be: To make friends who share the same values, and to improve visibility of the Adventist Church.

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b. Build a Budget

You will be limited by your **budget**. Make a realistic estimate of the cost. Sign a contract for the venue and the food provider. Do your best not to have a last minute unexpected expense. If you invite musicians, ask them how much it will cost and get it in writing.

The basic considerations are: Who will do what? How much will it cost? Who will pay?

An unrealistic budget can ruin your event forever.

c. Select a Team and Set Up a Planning Committee

You need a **good team**—not a large team—of people who will help. While you need people with good ideas, you also need people who will be responsible for an aspect of the dinner. Choose people you can depend on to give the welcome, to find sponsors, etc. The planning committee should always include the pastor or the secretary or president or treasurer of the local conference or union. That person should chair the committee. The working group will follow step-by-step the organization of the dinner.

d. Choose a Location

The **location** for the dinner is very important. It could be in a hotel or a restaurant, if possible in a place where similar events are held. A neutral place would be my preference—not a church or a place specifically tied to one religion. But it is up to you to decide. Ask people to advise you. Remember, you want to honor a few people. You want them and those who are invited to be pleased to come and to bring their spouse. There should be space for a platform, a good sound system, and maybe a video system. Don't forget that the choice of venue for the dinner will send a message about your meeting and your organization.

e. Set the Date

The **date** of the dinner should be carefully chosen. It should not be on a holiday, on the evening of a great sport event such as the Super Bowl, during the Olympic Games, or when some other major event is taking place.

f. List the People You Want to Invite

The **invitees** will represent: NGOs, universities, government, countries, and religions. You also will decide what the ratio should be between Adventists and non-Adventists. Should it be 50/50 or 30/70? What is your goal?

g. Choose a Keynote Speaker

Choosing the **keynote speaker** is not easy, especially if you have an annual event. Give your preference to someone who can talk about religious freedom, someone who has been active in this area. Most of our speakers had this profile. Hillary Clinton is a good example. She had no history of promoting religious freedom. But as a former First Lady, a senator, and possible future Democratic candidate for the presidential race, it was important for her to have a public statement on religious freedom. Her speech was well done. It became her religious freedom speech. It was on the Internet for several years.

You could also invite someone who has been persecuted and/or who has written a book on persecution. Some years ago we invited Dr Mikhail P Kulakov. (He is now deceased.) He told the story of his life in Russia during Communism. A pastor, he was eventually sent to a labor camp. His story was very appropriate and moving.

You could invite someone who has promoted legislation in favor of religious freedom. This was the case of Senator John Kerry. He was, with Senator Rick Santorum, the lead sponsor of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act bill (WRFA) in the Senate.

You could invite a scholar or religious leader, but it must be someone who attracts the attention of the media and of the authorities. It could be a mayor, a member of the City Council who is in charge of relations with religions or a scholar who wrote an article on religious freedom. Invite someone who will speak in favor of religious freedom. Don't invite someone who will give a generic speech without any specific focus on the subject. Your guests will be frustrated.

h. Select Awardees

Selecting the **awardees** is another challenge. First, choose only a few. The more awardees you have, the less important both they and the award will appear. At our first dinners we made the mistake of giving too many awards. Recipients for the National and International Awards were chosen carefully, but having numerous awards diluted their importance. We later agreed to give only four awards, then three. Now we give two awards, plus one to the keynote speaker. This means that the keynote speaker must have something to do with religious freedom. We give the National Award and the International Award. Some received their award a few years before they got an award from the famous First Freedom Center in Richmond, Virginia. In their introduction there, the IRLA and Liberty Awards were mentioned in their biographical information.

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As previously mentioned, I have been honored by two important awards. In 2011 I received the National Award of the First Freedom Center. Then in October, 2013, I received the International Religious Liberty Award from the J Reuben Clark Law Society and the International Center for Law and Religion Studies.

In the first awards ceremony they gave four awards: the local, the regional, the national, and the international. This yearly event takes place in a beautiful hotel in Richmond, Virginia, and people pay to come. It is very professional.

The second one is also an annual event held in a beautiful hotel in Washington DC. At this one only the International Award is given. Around 130 people attend and most of them pay to be there. As the organizers are linked with Brigham Young University, a good number of attendees are Mormons. Usually the awardee is introduced by three people, though in my case it was four. My good friend Professor Cole Durham opened the dinner. Professor David Little, another good friend, gave the tribute. The words they said will stay in my mind until my last breath. In fact, as I listened I almost thought I was attending my own funeral. David Little is one of the most respected experts in the commission which prepared the project of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Then, he became a professor at Harvard Theological Seminary. He, along with Professor Cole Durham and Professor Jeremy Gunn are probably among the best scholars in this field.

i. Prepare Awards

How should we proceed in choosing the persons to receive the awards? I am a member of the First Freedom Center's International Award Committee. They have different committees and they meet several times before taking a vote. First they ask us to propose a candidate. Second, they prepare a list. Every member receives the list and rates each person on it. Then we have a telephone conference to decide who will get the award. I have been pleased to have had three names I proposed accepted.

j. Work on the Menu and the Design of the Room

When you organize a dinner, you will have to spend time with things which may become important. I think about the **menu** and seating. Make sure invitees will appreciate what they are invited to eat. A poor menu makes a poor event. A good menu is already a good opportunity to make your event great. Do not neglect the decoration of the room. It is what your guests will see first.

k. Make a Seating Chart

For the **seating**, do not underestimate the problems and frustrations it can produce. It indicates the importance you give to people and how you recognize them. Some tables should be reserved for “important” guests. It may take time to do it, but you have no choice. Do it well, and your guests will be pleased.

l. Prepare the Welcome Speech

The **welcome speech** should not be long. It is a welcome to all and not a sermon. If you have to write it, don't write more than five or six lines. But you can decide to add to the welcome a special welcome to some officials, like ministers, ambassadors, members of Parliament, and so on. Make sure you respect the protocol rules. If you miss someone or someone is late, take another opportunity during the dinner to welcome him or her.

For the selection of names you could work within your Religious Liberty Dinner Steering Committee. Set up a list of possibilities. Consider the work accomplished by each person on the list, the positions they have occupied or occupy, and the number of years they have been active in the field of religious freedom.

Each **award** should have criteria established for its recipients. You build its credibility if your selection is well done and serious. After all, it is like a Nobel Prize. When the Nobel Peace Prize is given to Mother Teresa, or to Dr Schweitzer, it truly means something. But, unfortunately, that has not always been the case.

**5. Religious Liberty Congress**

There are different types of IRLA congresses: the World Congress, the International or Regional Congress, and the National Congress.

The IRLA World Congress is held every five years. The IRLA regional chapter, which corresponds to the division PARL department, organizes the International or Regional Congresses. An International Congress may also be organized by a national association if experts are invited from other countries. We have had international congresses in many countries.

A congress is a meeting which lasts at least two or three days and includes experts from different countries and religious leaders. There should be at least 200 participants. This kind of event attracts the attention of the media and authorities. The congress in Lima, Peru was the

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first South American Religious Liberty Congress. The second one was held in Chile. Both were organized by the national association with the support of IRLA South America. Until now, we have had two congresses in India, one in Asia, one in Inter-America, and three in Africa. All were organized by the regional association with the support of the national and world associations.

A congress increases the credibility of the association when it becomes a regular event. When you plan a regional or a division congress, also set the date for next one. I was very fortunate to attend the first division congresses in South America, with Siloe Almeida; in Inter-America, with Roberto Herrera; and in Asia with Tad Shinmyo. Each of these made history. The tradition continued in Africa as the Second All-Africa Congress was held in Accra, Ghana, in 2006 and the third in Yaoundé, Cameroon in 2013. In Accra we visited the country's President. In Yaoundé, the Prime Minister attended the opening meeting and 750 people were present.

Pastor Gilbert Wari, the Division and IRLA President for the West-Central Africa Region, and his team did a great work. The date of the next All-Africa Congress will be in 2017.

When you plan a congress it is very important to think long term. You are going to build a tradition. If you have the privilege of laying the cornerstone, don't forget the next stone. A cornerstone alone is not useful. To have a congress one year and nothing for the next ten years will not promote the cause of religious freedom.

With three All-Africa Congresses, one World Congress, and four Religious Freedom Festivals, the IRLA in Africa has built its credibility. The First IRLA Asian Congress was held in Taipei, Taiwan. It was excellent. The keynote speaker, the mayor, became the country's President just a few years later. Several congresses were held in Russia, but now they need to establish a tradition for the division congress, as do Europe, Australia, and Southern Asia. There are still some places around the world where someone courageous will be able to lead a team and convince union and divisions leaders that they can make history and open a new way, a new tradition.

Think about the modern Olympic Games. The first one was held in Athens. It was a relatively modest meeting. Imagine that no other Olympic Games had followed! The world would have totally ignored the name of Pierre de Coubertin. The number one event of the world would not have existed. Make history in your country, in your region, by starting the tradition of a Religious Freedom Congress.

Questions to Answer before Planning a Congress Include:

a. What Is the Purpose of This Event?

Why do you want to organize a congress and not a symposium, a forum, a panel, a festival, or a concert? Of course, a congress is more appealing than a symposium. It is a public event and a great opportunity to make friends and develop contacts with the authorities.

b. Where Will You Hold the Congress?

The capital city is the number one choice for an international or national congress. It is useful to have the proximity of the government as well as national and international institutions, embassies, universities, *and* the media. But there are some exceptions to the rule. Some cities may be more appropriate than the capital city.

The Fourth IRLA World Congress was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1997. It is not the capital city of Brazil, but from an international point of view Rio de Janeiro is far more attractive than Brasilia. The IRLA South America leader, Pastor Siloe Alamedia, had worked several years in public relations for the Adventist hospital and he had a great network of friends in the media. The President of Brazil did not come, but the Minister of Justice did. Government officials from several other countries came, too.

The next world congress was held in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, in 2002. Many government and political leaders came to the congress. We were received by the President of the country, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in her palace. The 2007 World Congress was held in Cape Town, Republic of South Africa. We chose an attractive place instead the capital city. We doubled the number of attendees and the president of the West Cape Town State, the Honorable Ibrahim Rasool; the mayor of Cape Town, Mrs Helen Zille; and a number of religious leaders were among the speakers.

For the 2012 congress, we decided to go to Inter-America where the work of religious freedom was booming. Mexico City was our first choice. But a few years before we had gone to the Dominican Republic, to its capital city, Santo Domingo. Roberto Herrera organized the First Inter-American Congress there in 2009. It was followed by the second festival which attracted 13,000 people. Pastor Cesario Acevedo, the SDA Church president in the Dominican Republic, and his team, were strong supporters of religious freedom. I knew they would do their best to help us. I knew also that the Inter-American Division, with its president Israel Leito, would make sure we had a successful event.

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I went to Santo Domingo with Roberto Herrera several times. We also visited it with our Congress Manager and Treasurer, Daisy Orion, and Attorney Dwayne Leslie. But finally we chose the large resort of Barceló in Bavaro near Punta Cana, instead of the capital city. It was a fabulous place with an international airport nearby. The choice was excellent and we had 900 participants. Government officials from several countries attended. The Dominican Republic Secretary of State was the guest of honor at the closing ceremony. He did not hesitate to drive four hours to be with us to deliver a speech on behalf of the country's President.

Now we are working on our Eighth IRLA World Congress. My associate, Attorney Dwayne Leslie, visited and considered several venues, along with their cost, amenities, and capacity to handle the program we are planning. Finally we decided to hold the Eighth IRLA World Congress in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at the Westin Hotel. It will be held August 22 to 24, 2017.

Why didn't we choose Washington DC? Sometimes the capital city has more inconveniences than advantages for such an event.

In the end you have to deal with very practical, concrete questions relative to the hotel, the transportation, what support you can get from your regional or national association, the tourist environment, the auditorium, and the global cost. Only then do you make your choice. We also got the support of the IRLA partner association NARLA, of the North American Division and strong support from the Religious Liberty leader of the southern states, Ms Amireh Al-Haddad. They have already set their goals. The dream of 1,000 participants is no longer impossible.

It is important for a World Congress to have members of governments and heads of state. But it is also important to have enough participants to justify the name World Congress and to have a good place to stay. If both can be done within the budget, as it has been done until now, the future is bright.

c. What Is Your Budget?

Now we become more practical. One of the great principles of success is to do great things with what you have. Many dreams have been destroyed forever by a lack of seriousness about a realistic, healthy budget. A healthy budget should also include a certain amount for something which has not been planned but can happen. You have your vision. Your event is on its way. But before going too far you must ask two essential questions: How much will it cost *and* who will pay the bill? As long you don't have an answer to these two questions, dream your dream, get some sponsors, and pray.

You are going to live a great adventure. You are going to make history. But don't expect it will be an easy ride. If it was, everyone would have already done it. God wants to test you. Are you convinced this should happen? Are you energized and eager to get started? Do you deserve the high privilege of making great things for Him and for a beautiful cause? If you don't cover your budget, don't be discouraged. You still have work to do. Is your project well prepared? Have you been ambitious enough?

Remember that people who give money are making an investment. They don't want to invest in some little thing which is not well thought out or planned, or has no future.

I was asked once to prepare a request to get financial help from an organization. I was not sure about the result and did not want to spend hours writing something that had no chance of getting any support. I asked for only a few thousand dollars, thinking that the amount was so small they would easily accept it. The man I met to look at my project said, "For a few thousand dollars, I will not find anyone to support you. If you multiply that by ten, I have more chances for success." I did, and I got it.

The budget for our Second World Festival in Sao Paulo, Brazil was estimated correctly at the time, but as the date for the festival approached the expenses went up. We dreamed of having 40,000 people in the Vale do Anhangabaú in Sao Paulo. But that meant more security, more giant screens, more sound equipment, and a huge platform. All that would cost a lot.

d. What Is Plan B?

My first reaction was, "Go to plan B!"

The organizer, Pastor Edson Rosa, replied, "There is no plan B!" To me that sounded like the voice of William the Conqueror when he burned his boats after debarking on the English shore. "It is life or death!" No way back!

A few months before the event we met the governor, the president of the State Assembly, and the president of the City Council. I announced everywhere, and around the world, that it was going to be a huge meeting. I talked with my Treasurer, Daisy Orion, and my Vice President, Dr Delbert Baker. Fortunately our department had some savings for special projects and we were able to increase our contribution. But I did not know if it would be enough, and we prayed to get more sponsors.

Even if you work well to get a realistic budget, many things can happen that make it obsolete. It is the time of testing, the time of God. Maybe He has another plan. When it comes to the

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church's money we have to be conservative and wise. Make sure you get the support of your treasurer. Don't risk destroying the credibility of your church by incurring a heavy debt.

But having said that, don't underestimate the great power of God. There are many events where the initial budget has been pulverized. Sometimes expenses can be avoided or reduced. And then there are events which will make history! For these, we should find the resources.

March 30, 2013, two months before the Second World Festival, the Day of Religious Freedom and Friendship was held in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico. Our world church president, Pastor Ted Wilson, the Inter-American Division president, all the division officers, and several union presidents attended. For hours, 27,000 people sat both inside and outside the stadium. It was the Plan B of the traditional Festival we had planned for Chiapas in 2011. The new union decided to have a day of Friendship and Religious Liberty. They celebrated their freedom with a program that ran from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. During it, 4,500 people were baptized. It was the largest event in this new union and the first visit of the General Conference President. It was also the largest Festival of Religious Freedom in Inter-America. They made history. They kept the theme of religious freedom and added public baptisms. It was a great illustration of what religious freedom is.

What was the true benefit of such an event? It was the first time our church in Chiapas had held a mass meeting to publicly say, "Thank you, God, and thank you, Chiapas, the governor, and the authorities for religious freedom." It happened in a country where during 30 years Seventh-day Adventists and evangelicals were severely persecuted.

May 25, 2013 in Sao Paulo, was the second time Adventists in Brazil publicly thanked God, their country, and their authorities for the religious freedom they enjoy. Edson Rosa and the organizers got the needed additional money. Could the church cancel such a meeting because the estimated budget was too low? The answer was no! And the festival was a great success.

Make a realistic budget ahead of time and make sure you stay within it. If you are not certain, prepare a Plan B and even a Plan C. Don't be discouraged if it turns out that you must go with Plan C. Don't give up. Make sure that you plan another similar event a few years later. Plan C will not make history but it may open the way to larger events.

The budget and the weather led us to choosing a large university auditorium for the third festival held in the Dominican Republic. Two thousand people filled the auditorium, and the result was excellent. Ministers of the government, members of parliament, and religious leaders were there. The young people put on a beautiful musical program on the theme of religious freedom in the Bible.



6. Festival of Religious Freedom

Congresses are organized by the IRLA, as are symposiums, forums, and the Meeting of Experts. But the Liberty Dinner and the Festival are joint productions, organized by the church and supported by the IRLA. Most of the Festivals are done in consultation with other churches and religious organizations. Before the First World Festival in Lima, Peru in 2009 I went there several times with Pastors Siloe Alameida and Edson Rosa. The two union presidents invited all religious leaders to meet with us and I explained the concept to them. They were very supportive, but unfortunately were not able to become partners in the organization.

When I was invited to give a lecture at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, I challenged the members of the Latter-Day Saints International Society. I said to them, “I saw the beautiful stadium on your campus. You have everything you need to hold a major Festival of Religious Freedom.” They smiled. I said the same to the Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Baptists. I proposed having a festival at the National Cathedral in Washington DC, and people there were interested. Until now we have not been able to put together a large coalition for such a big event. My dream is that such a great event will be held with all organizations and people who believe in religious freedom. For the moment Adventists have been the only church able to organize such big meetings. In Los Angeles an Interfaith Council invited me to tell them about the festival. All were very interested and said they could fill a huge stadium. They could invite celebrities and musicians and singers. But for the moment it has not happened. We have still some work to do.

If you decide to have a festival with the support of your church, conference, and union, be sure to contact the other believers in your area. Religious freedom is a principle. We defend and promote it for all. They may not be able to give you financial support but they may have a great musical group or a choir. Welcome them. They may be willing to help. You can include them in your steering committee. You also can include them in your program. Be wise and diplomatic as you must be certain that in getting support from one group you will not lose the support of another one.

In most of the countries where we have had a festival it has been very well organized. Adventists around the world know how to organize events. Don’t trim their wings and don’t complicate their task by adding people to the organization team who are lukewarm in their support of the project. When I think of the largest festivals—in Luanda, Angola; Lima, Peru; Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico; Sao Paulo, Brazil—I am still impressed by the organization. Five hundred buses brought people to the festival in Lima. Every church had its block of seats in the stadium, and the program was fabulous. They asked the director of the Adventist Media Center, Jony Pastor, to organize the event. He did very well with his team.

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In Santo Domingo and Bogota, the organization was impressive too. When we arrived at the indoor stadium we were proud to see an army of Pathfinders in charge of the welcome, parking, first aid, and security. In Santo Domingo 13,000 people filled the stadium and 15,000 in Bogota. They began at 10:00 a.m. and finished at 1:00 p.m. Both cities gave an excellent program. The Pathfinders made a great performance and the young people played a musical on the history of religious freedom.

The first festival in Africa was held in Accra, in 2006, the Sabbath following the Second All-Africa Congress. The second festival was held in Cape Town in 2007. It was on the Sabbath following the Sixth IRLA World Congress. Both were very well done. In Cape Town the auditorium of 4,000 was full. Sibusiso B Khumalo was in charge and despite the fact that his office was some distance away, he did a remarkable job. The first congress organized in Luanda had 600 participants. Later, meeting in the main stadium, more than 40,000 people attended! Many immigrants come from China, Europe, South America, and of course African countries to work in Luanda. Hotels are packed, and very expensive. The traffic in Luanda is impossible and the cost of living very high. In spite of all this, at 9:00 a.m. a huge crowd gathered inside the stadium. Ten thousand Pathfinders and women in uniform walked for religious freedom. It was very hot but they were there with dignity and discipline. They overcame all the obstacles and made history. It was the largest mass gathering for religious freedom ever held in the entire world, up to 2008.

a. The Festival I Missed

There are so many Festivals of Religious Freedom in the world that it difficult for me to attend them all. But there is one I would not have missed for anything—the Second World Festival in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It and the IRLA World Congress were my top projects. In December 2012, I went to Brasilia and Sao Paulo to work with Edson Rosa and his great team. We met the governor, the state assembly, and the city council presidents. Even so, I missed this great event. A few days before it began my wife, Medina, had brain surgery. Suddenly my priorities changed. My associate, Dr Ganoune Diop, attended and was very much appreciated. I also missed the special Religious Liberty Week in Bucharest three weeks later. Was this a sign that I should turn over my responsibilities to someone else?

A few weeks later I was able to go to Yaoundé, Cameroon to attend the Third All-Africa Congress on Religious Freedom which was a great success. It was followed by a festival attended by 5,000 people, among them Muslim leaders and Christians from different churches. We were pleased to have a Women's Muslim Choir perform. The festival began with a parade of 2,000 Pathfinders and other participants wearing their congress T-shirts and caps. It was impressive to see so many people in the streets to celebrate religious freedom.

All these events went very well and the organizers did an outstanding work. The promotion of religious freedom requires a large team working together. It should continue even if one of the team members is not there.

b. The Location

Before you decide the location ask if similar events have been held at the site and who did them. You need to involve people who know how to organize large events and build a good program and who can skillfully relate to the media and authorities. You should also involve all departments of the church: Women, Youth, Health, Education, Children and, of course, Communication. Once I know that we have the support of the division, or the union, the conference, or the church pastor I know that it will work. Be sure you have the support of your leader.

There are several varieties of festivals. We had beautiful festivals with 4,500 in Bucharest, 4,000 in Cape Town, and 3,000 in Port of Spain. We also had two festivals in Santo Domingo with about 2,000 people each, and one in Honolulu with 1,000. The programs were excellent and local officials and religious leaders came. It is not a problem that you will not have an audience of 15,000 or 45,000 people. There are many other possibilities. It's up to you to decide the size of the event and the way it will make a difference in your church and your community. A great program in an auditorium of 1,000 or 2,000 seats, such as the first and the third festival in Santo Domingo, can be filmed and shown on TV. Then it becomes a very successful event.

You must find your own way. You can also have a festival in your local church. We did it in my church at Spencerville, Maryland. The church was full, full for religious freedom. This had never happened before at our church. Two county officials came and Melissa Reid and I shared information about religious liberty. Most of the people came for the concert, but they learned also about religious freedom.

c. Planning Your Program

The program of the festival's main meeting should be attractive to everyone. That means no long speeches. Instead, ask your young people to plan music, songs, personal testimonies, and dramas. In Santo Domingo the young people preformed a musical on the theme Religious Freedom in the Bible. The first festival in Seoul was held in the church of the Adventist hospital. Young people acted out the stories of Korean pastors tortured, then executed by Japanese soldiers. The soldiers asked, "Are you willing to worship the emperor of Japan and no longer Jesus Christ?" Saying "no" meant death for some.

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The second festival was held in the large auditorium of the Adventist university. The program was very professional. They selected some of the most beautiful pieces of Italian music. The students performed a musical on the story of Esther. Around 1,000 people attended and an evangelical leader and one of the city executives were introduced.

In 2006 in Sao Paulo the program consisted of short speeches and songs by the best group in South America. It was a very well organized program.

d. A New Dimension to the Festival of Religious Freedom

What we call the Festival of Religious Freedom now lasts several days. It includes such activities as a symposium, public lectures, a dinner, and a concert. In Sao Paulo in 2013 a Friday night concert was given by Richard Octaviano Kogima, a young, talented musician. He performed pieces he had composed just for this event. Visits to city officials and religious leaders, a forum, radio programs, and sermons in churches were also under the umbrella of the festival.

A few days after the Seventh IRLA World Congress in 2012, I flew to Asia and met Pastor Jonathan Catolico in Singapore. We flew together to Manado in Indonesia where the first public Festival of Religious Freedom had been organized. Christians are the majority in Manado. They have a good relationship with leaders of other religions, and religious freedom is protected. We arrived at noon on Friday and had a luncheon with several religious leaders. This enabled the organizers to introduce us and to promote the event. Saturday morning I preached to the students at the Adventist university, then in the afternoon we attended the festival. The province government had offered us the use of a nice, large auditorium. How did that happen? Our East Indonesia Union Conference President, Pastor Noldy Sakul, had a good relationship with the authorities.

The auditorium was filled. Musicians and singers had a good part in the program. But eight religious leaders and officials had been asked to speak. Each one was allotted ten minutes. *An hour of this*, I thought, *and people will start leaving*. But not at all! People were very interested in hearing the guests and they listened, laughed, and applauded. This taught me that the program has to be well received by the people who attend it. In some regions the fewer speeches given, the better. But that is not a universal rule. At some huge gatherings for a good cause the speakers are the largest portion of the program.

e. Promotion

In Seoul and Honolulu in 2008 attendance was far less than we expected. Why was that? In both cases those in charge of the promotion underestimated the difficulty of drawing people to the program. People came on Saturday in Honolulu, and the program was very good. On Sunday the mayor of Honolulu, religious leaders, and experts came to speak but the general public did not come. This showed that the event planners did well with public relations but not with promotion.

This experience taught us some good lessons. First, when you choose the day for your event, make sure it is the good one. Second, don't believe that people will come just because you have their pastor tell them about it in church or you pay for a few newspaper advertisements. It takes more than that. Much more.

You have to make sure that your target audience receives the information. You have to motivate them about religious freedom. Explain to them why the presence of every single one of them is important. They will be there to say: "We love religious liberty and we want to keep it."

Of course they should know the kind of program they can expect. Don't underestimate the work of promotion. Promote, promote, and promote again!



7. Checklist for Organizing an Event

Here are 14 steps that will help you to promote your event. They are general principles that can be applied everywhere. To begin, you must have a vision. Here's how to make it happen.

- a. Map the project like architects map a future building.
- b. Establish a budget and find sponsors for it.
- c. Get support of the church administrators and leaders.
- d. Set a date and a venue.
- e. Set up a working group and start the countdown.
- f. Set up a program committee and distribute the responsibilities. Determine who is doing what and when.
- g. Contact pastors, artists, choirs—any and all who may contribute to the event.
- h. Promote the event in the media and in the churches.
- i. Visit and invite local officials and others.
- j. Make sure you have all the authorizations and insurance needed.
- k. Keep to the deadline.

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- l. As part of the planning process write and submit reports for the media. Take pictures and write articles. Distribute these to the appropriate places, including churches, schools, newspapers, and newsletters. Contact key people at these different places to make certain your advertising will reach its audience.
- m. Thank those who helped.
- n. Set up a date and a venue for the next event.



8. Religious Liberty Awards

a. Why We Give Them

An award is both a gift and a recognition. Most people appreciate being the recipient of an award. Of course, all awards should have true meaning, and not all awards are on the same level.

On the top is the Nobel Peace Prize. Then there are a multitude of others. In every field of activity, in every profession, there is a way to recognize people's work. One of the best is the award. If you have never given any awards you will have to start. During our annual Religious Liberty Dinner, we give three awards—the National and the International awards, and an award for our guest speaker.

Well known leaders such as Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and John Kerry received our awards. Ambassadors Robert Seiple, John Hanford, Suzan Johnson Cook, Andrew Bennett, and US Commission Chair Dr Katrina Lantos Swett, Professor Cole Durham, Professor Jean Bauberot, and others have received our awards. Several of them were also recipients of the National or International Award of the First Freedom Center in Richmond. When their bios were read, I was very pleased to see that our IRLA/Liberty/NARLA Award was included.

This shows us that year after year our Religious Liberty Award has gained more value. Would it have been the case if we had held an event one year and then done nothing for six years? An award is like a good antique. Its value increases with the years.

In the dinner we organize during the General Conference Session, we also give awards. There are the IRLA awards and the PARL awards. But the most prestigious IRLA awards are given during the World Congress, every five years. They are presented during a special meeting or during the supper. We also give certificates and a plaque to those who host the congress. During our last World Congress in Punta Cana, for the first time, we gave the Lifetime Dedication Award. I had proposed Dr Denton Lotz as the recipient. Lotz had been

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a champion of religious freedom all his life as well as the IRLA President for about 10 years. Totally unexpected, I received the Lifetime Dedication Award too.

The good thing with the award is that it can be done at local, national, regional, and international levels. It won't cost a lot. You can begin in your church on Religious Liberty Sabbath, perhaps between Sabbath school and the worship service. Or you can present it during an afternoon meeting for religious liberty, or during a dinner.

Most people will appreciate receiving their award before a large gathering. If you are a church of 100 members and you decide to present the award during a dinner with 20 people, it won't be very attractive for the one who receives it. You should do the best you can to honor the one you have chosen to honor.

Don't forget that part of the award is the event that surrounds it. If it is a dinner, choose a nice restaurant where similar events have already been held. Those you honor with the award will respect you by accepting your recognition. You have to respect them too. Or you can present it at church on Sabbath morning or during a special program such as a liberty concert. Either venue will be very much appreciated.

In your local church, you can give the Community Award, the Regional Award, and the Interfaith Award. Three or four is enough. The more you give, the less is the perceived importance unless the category has a special distinction. Be sure to invite people for the next year's event, and the one the year after.

b. Procedure for Giving Awards

Every year that you have a Religious Liberty Sabbath in your church is a great opportunity to give awards. This is how you can do it.

- 1) Give the awards at church, between Sabbath school and the worship hour.
- 2) Give the award during a special meeting such as the Liberty Concert in the afternoon or evening.
- 3) Give the award during a special dinner in a restaurant.
- 4) Make sure you contact the media before the event.
- 5) Invite your Religious Liberty leaders at the conference, union, and/or division levels and, of course, the local religious leaders.
- 6) Plan ahead. At this meeting announce the date of the next award ceremony.

By following these guidelines you will create tradition. You will be surprised by the positive influence it will have on the relationship of your church with the community.

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c. Choosing the Kind of Awards to Give

As Public Affairs and Religious Liberty leader, you have several choices. You can give an award to a member of the local government who facilitates inter-religious relations. You can call it the Bridge Builder Award. Then you, of course, have the Religious Liberty Awards. You can also give a top award covering several aspects of human rights and religious freedom. You will have to choose the name of the award. You might use the name of an important activist for Religious Freedom. If he or she is an Adventist it will be a good opportunity to underline the role of the SDA Church in promoting this important value. If the person is not an Adventist, make sure you have the legal authorization to bestow the award. Our church has given the world some great leaders of religious freedom. I think of leaders we had in Russia, Italy, France, Poland, Croatia, Romania, Brazil, and the USA. We should not be ashamed to remember and honor their ministry.

d. Salamat Mayor Awards

In January 2014, I went to the Philippines for a congress followed by a festival in Manila and another festival in Davao on the island of Mindanao. I stayed a week there with Jonathan Catolico and our union PARL leader. They included me in a program called “Salamat Mayors.” Every year they organize a dinner in several cities to honor the mayor for his/her integrity, good work, and defense of religious freedom. I attended the dinners and was impressed by the reaction of the mayors. They were very moved by the fact that a church recognized their work for the community. They came with their families and their team.

This is something every church and conference can do. Why not you? City mayors are important in the community. To thank them for their good work is a very positive way to show we care about others and about the community where we live.



9. How to Meet a VIP (Very Important Person)

For a successful meeting with a VIP you *must* be well prepared. Nothing should be improvised. The way you and your team proceed is part of the message you give to the VIPs you meet, and that message begins with the first contact whether it's a telephone call to their office, a letter, or a visit. Each step of the process exhibits who you are and how you handle yourself. These contacts also reflect on the church you represent.

Even if you never meet an ambassador, a government minister, or a mayor, follow the right principles. By taking every meeting seriously you honor the one you meet. Your town mayor should be treated with the same respect that you would give a member of the state or federal government or an ambassador.

Not everyone is familiar with the proper protocol for meeting government officials; but the mistakes you make at the local level will be easily and naturally detected and you may correct them without too many consequences. The earlier you begin the better it is. In every meeting, try to do your best. Be as personable and professional when you meet the third secretary of the mayor as when you meet a head of state. Step by step you will understand the principles of protocol and you will learn the exact titles of the officials you meet. Do you address them as Mr, Mrs, the Honorable, Your Excellency, Your Imminence, Your Grace, or what?

a. Before the Meeting:

Define the purpose of the meeting. A successful meeting begins when you decide to have it and concludes with the evaluation you make immediately following it. This is what you should do.

The first question the official will ask is, “What can I do for you?” But the first question he will ask himself is, “Who is this person, and why do they want to meet me?”

Then comes the final question, “What can I do for them?” Politicians will, of course, think about the number of potential votes you represent and the support you could bring to them. Are you ready to give an answer in a few seconds?

The question could be, “What can I do for you?” or “According to the report I received from my assistant you are planning to organize a congress on religious freedom in my city.”

If you have a reply ready, you are on the right track. You will show you are articulate. You will be precise and short. You will not waste their precious time. In the western world you will go directly to the point. You will answer the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. But be careful. Brevity is not a universal rule. You have to be sensitive to the various cultures of the world. Make sure you know how it works where you are. In some countries going directly to the point is seen as a sign of arrogance.

As I met authorities on six continents, I learned to follow my local colleagues. The meeting may begin with general talk and thanks for the visit. Then when the official asks, “What can I do for you?” you go to the purpose of your visit. It could be a body language message. You have to follow the discussion carefully.

Here are some suggestions on how you may reply to the question, “What can I do for you?” or “Why did you ask to meet me?”

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- We have a project for the community and we need your support.
- We have a problem. Could you help us?
- We would like to invite you to a ceremony.
- We want to thank you for your help.
- We want to help our community to oppose violence, to promote health, etc.
- We would like to interview you for our international (or national) magazine.
- We have an important visitor from our world headquarters or we have the visit of the IRLA Secretary General from Washington DC.

It may not impress officials in some parts of the world but at least it will show them that you have international connections.

You will mention the purpose of your visit in your first contact with the office of the official. It could be a courtesy visit to simply say thank you, and to make sure the official you are speaking to will know the face of the church. It could be to bring an invitation to an event you will organize. Please do not wait until you have a problem before you meet authorities.

My first official visit to the mayor of Collonges was to explain our project to help the poor people in the community and to invite him for a special service in our church. My first official visit when I was senior pastor in the city of Pau, France, was to the mayor. I went with my PARL director. We wanted to thank him for he had helped us get our church property, and we wanted to invite him to one of our services.

When he welcomed us in his office he was still reading his assistant's note regarding our visit. He smiled. He knew our local church. My predecessors had a good relationship with his office. He said, "What can I do for you?"

I answered, "Nothing special, Mister Mayor, but we wanted to thank you on behalf of our church. We wanted also to say that we are praying for you." He was very surprised and said, "You know, most of the people who come to this office have something to ask. Not a lot come to thank me and to pray for me." Then he asked questions about our church and we gave him some literature. It was a "courtesy visit." A few years later the mayor became Minister of the Government of France.

One of the first high level visits I made was with two colleagues. It was planned for 20 minutes. We had to deal with the advisor of the President of a European country. He was the kind of person who had no time to listen. My colleague introduced us and spoke in a general way. The man sat behind his desk and after two minutes he looked at us, not very friendly. "Get to the point," he said. "What is the problem?"

SECTION TWO: BEING PRACTICAL: HOW TO DO IT

Define the purpose of your visit and be able to say it in less than three minutes. Then the discussion will be opened and you will share more details if necessary.

I had a similar experience in Washington DC. I was with Professor Anatoly Krasikov from Moscow and a friend. We met the head of the Library of Congress who had been one of the US presidential advisors for Russia. This man had met Professor Krasikov there and invited him to visit him in Washington. Now Krasikov was accepting the invitation.

Entering his beautiful office, my friend looked down at the great view of Washington and said with admiration, “What a beautiful view you have.” It was a good way to warm up the meeting, but the man looked at us and said, “I guess you did not come to my office just to admire the view!”

We felt as if we’d received a bucket of cold water in our faces.

1) Get information about the official you want to meet. To avoid mistakes or inappropriate statements you need to have information about the person you will meet. I recall a time I met some high level people and did not know much about them. The meeting went well and I reported it to our committee. Then some members told me what they knew about the official’s private life.

It is good to be prudent when you talk with an official. It helps avoid problems, and I was pleased that I had been prudent in my talk. You don’t need to pay a detective, but you do need to know what others know about the VIP you will meet. Be cautious when the atmosphere has become familiar and everyone is invited to speak openly about general issues. In a moment’s time you can destroy years of good relations. Let the VIPs give their opinion and points of view, and don’t argue with them. Your visit has a purpose. Stay focused on it.

2) Don’t neglect the staff. Don’t neglect or underestimate the staff members. They will play a key role in facilitating your meeting. Dr Nussbaum, the “Prince of the Church Diplomats,” always brought Swiss chocolates for the secretaries and asked about their families. And when you need it, the person managing the official calendar may do their best to find a place for you on it.

3) Work with an intermediary. In many cases a simple letter, a visit to the VIP’s office, or a telephone call will not be enough to get the appointment you need. It is good to know someone who can recommend you and speak for you. This is why it is so important to build a network of “friends.” If in your letter you can say, “I met your assistant (or your advisor) and he encouraged me to write to your office,” you are more likely to get the meeting you seek. Being able to reference someone official will make a strong difference.

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How will you meet their staff? Attending some official meetings will open many doors. You may also know someone who has a good relationship with them. Some members of your local church may know more officials than you do. They can also help.

When I was in Paris we wanted to meet the Minister of Education about the problem Adventist students had on Saturdays in public schools. A friend of mine, a church member, knew the spokesperson for the President of the French Republic, so he asked him to meet with us. He did, and after the visit we received a letter from the Minister of Education that significantly helped our students.

You have to build your network of friends outside and inside the church.

4) In writing, request a meeting within a specific time period. People who are in charge of planning meetings need to have some information before saying yes or no. It will help. Of course you will form it as a suggestion, “Your Honor, would it be possible to meet you during the month of February?” You must also justify your suggestion and let them suggest another date.

But when you deal with the Prime Minister or the President, you let their office propose the dates. You may receive a telephone call saying, “The President will be pleased to meet you on Monday at 4:15 pm for 15 minutes.” You don’t argue. You thank them, and make certain you arrive on time. Then you say, “Thank you very much, Mr President.”

Of course, if you are traveling and the suggested date will not work for you, you will have to use your diplomatic talent to negotiate another date.

Before suggesting a specific time, try to learn when the official is in the office. There are periods when they travel and other periods when they stay in their city. You could get this information from your network of friends.

5) Write down a few questions. When you have defined the purpose of your visit, write down a few questions. You are not planning an interview. Two or three essential questions will do. The rest will, or will not, come into the discussion. We met the president of the City Council of Sao Paulo a few months before the Second World Festival of Religious Freedom. Our purpose was to inform him about the event but also to get his agreement, and to invite him to attend. Then he gave us the names of the people we had to meet for security and for needed authorizations. The organizers had done their work and already met with the technicians. Having the president’s agreement made the event official. Even so, it does not mean

that everything is OK and your work is done. It means you can begin to work on all the practical issues with the people in charge.

6) Define the role of every member of your delegation. You don't meet an official alone. It could happen, but most of the time—at least for the first visit—you should come with a team. You come with your own officials such as your president, some church officers, and the PARL director.

Before you go to the meeting you should decide who will speak first and who will speak last. Know who will introduce the team and who will explain the project or say a few words of encouragement. Decide which of you will give information about the world church, the national, and the local church? Who will pray at the meeting's end? At the same time you must be flexible enough to let the official lead the meeting if he or she wants to. In general, the local or national church authority will make the introduction. In Sao Paulo and in Lima the union president introduced the team.

Before the First World Festival in Lima we met the Vice President of the National Assembly. A young man was there before we arrived and he led us to the Vice President's office and introduced us all. I was surprised that our union president did not do that. I thought that this young man must work for the government, that likely he was in charge of the protocol. Everything went very well. In introducing us, he facilitated the meeting.

I was surprised to learn that he was the director of our Media Center, Jony Pastor, and the organizer of the very large meeting in the stadium during the First World Festival of Religious Freedom. The union president had asked him to lead us. He was well prepared and did very well.

7) You must follow protocol. You must also decide who will be the first to enter the official's office, who will sit by him or her, and who will take the other seats.

Unfortunately, some people have no sense of protocol. The first one to arrive sits down in the first seat! What a poor message it gives about our organization. We have to make sure that before the meeting everyone knows and understands their role. You cannot play around with protocol. You must know who comes first and second and third, and respect their position. You may think your president or your pastor is not well equipped for such meetings. You can even think that once the picture is taken there no need for him to do any more. You are wrong. He is the president and you must do your best to help him. You are not the president, are you? A respect or a non-respect of protocol will give important information about your organization and about you, too. If you do not respect protocol the impression will not be good.

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8) Pray that you have a good meeting. Pray before, during, and after the meeting. Pray all the time.

Pray with your team before leaving your office. You will be the Ambassador of the Kingdom of God, the Ambassador of your Church. You are God's humble servant and you ask Him to lead the meeting, to inspire your words. Pray for the officials you meet and for their family.

9) Check your appearance. Your appearance is part of the message you will give. My plane arrived late on my first trip to Santiago, Chile. My colleagues were waiting at the airport for me and we had to hurry to the palace of La Modena to meet the secretary of the government. I was not at all ready for such a visit and not dressed as I should be. I had just a few minutes to improve my appearance and probably it was not enough. I learned that we should never organize an official meeting with people who have just arrived after an overnight flight in an economy seat. It is a rule we try to follow. Upon arrival we go first to the hotel, take a shower, rest a short while, and change our clothes. Only then are we ready to go to an appointment.

Don't hesitate to look at yourself in the mirror and also ask your team if you need to correct your appearance. They may see something about you that you haven't noticed. You must be as perfect as you can. It shows respect for the people you will meet.

b. During the Meeting:

Keep the meeting short and interesting. If you asked for 15 minutes, be ready to leave after 15 minutes. Once the time is up, do not ask any other questions or give further explanations. Sometimes the officials want to talk longer. Let them decide, but be ready to leave when you were scheduled to leave. Be sure to thank them for their time.

In 2006 Pastor Clive Dottin organized the First Caribbean Congress on Religious Freedom in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. It was followed by a festival. The day before the congress Clive took us to the Prime Minister's office. Clive knew everyone there and the Prime Minister received him as a friend. Represented in our delegation were the union, the division and the General Conference.

The recent tsunami in Asia was still on the minds of people. We met the Prime Minister to invite him to speak to our congress. He accepted. I gave him some information about the IRLA, but he was also interested in our understanding of the tsunami. Many religious people wondered if it was punishment from God. He opened a discussion which lasted at least 15 minutes, maybe more. The meeting lasted longer than we expected because the Prime Minister wanted it to. That can happen, but it is not a rule.

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You have to be flexible but always be sensitive to the time you have been given. If not, when the visit is over the officials will look at their watches and may not be pleased. Time is very important to them. A short visit may be more useful and open doors more readily than a lengthy visit. Keep in mind what their reaction will be when you ask for a second visit.

Remember that if you came to explain a problem, you will not work directly with the official. You will be given the name of one of their experts and this is what you will need.

1) Make your request specific. “The purpose of our visit is ...” “We wanted to meet Your Excellency to get your help on this issue ...”

As I have already mentioned, sometime you have to be flexible. In September 2012, I went to Lome, Togo with our legal advisor, Attorney Todd McFarland. We went to the prison to meet Pastor Antonio Monteiro and Brother Bruno Amah who had been accused of being part of human blood trafficking. Of course, no evidence had been brought to the case. We made a very sensitive visit to the Minister of Justice and he agreed to receive us. The union president, Pastor Guy Roger, introduced us and informed the Minister that the president of our world church would be coming in a few weeks. Then he made the link with the arrest of our two church members.

He knew it would not be appropriate to begin with this very sensitive issue. When you have to deal with a sensitive case you must try to put your feet in the shoes of those who agreed to receive you. Don't embarrass them. Let them have the last word and read between the lines. You will not solve the problem in just 15 minutes in their office. However, it is true that your brief visit may open—or shut—a helpful door.

As this book was being written we learned that a court in Lomé, Togo acquitted Pastor Antonio Monteiro but sentenced Bruno Amah to life in prison.

2) Do not ask too many questions. Let's say you come with a maximum of three questions. You list them according to your priority as the person you are seeing may not give you enough time to ask the last one. That is not the end of the world. The visit in itself is important, and after a while you can work with their assistant. It has happened that a high official did not let us to talk very much. When that happens, you listen and appreciate. When the time is up he or she will say, “If I can do something for you, speak with my assistant.” The assistant is playing a key role. But the impression you leave on the official will determine if the assistant can help you or not.

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3) Do not overdo the praise. This is not a universal rule, but most of the time it works well. You have to show respect, to recognize the position of the official you meet. But it is also important that you keep your dignity. You represent the church, the people of God, and in some ways you are one of the ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. You are not a courtesan but another official. Don't praise a tyrant for his good work or a dictator for the great freedom he gives his people. If you do, you lose your credential as God's ambassador. But you can thank them for their time and the warm welcome you received.

If the President who agreed to receive you or your church president explains that he is doing his best for more justice, for peace and for religious freedom, your prayers and encouragement will be appropriate.

4) Give a gift. What kind of gift should you give? Books or pens with the Church or the IRLA logo are appropriate.

Most of the gifts will go to the storehouse or to "the museum," but not all. It depends on the way you introduce it. Once we had some beautiful pens that we gave to top officials. I remember giving one to a Prime Minister who had already received several gifts. When he saw the pen he told his assistant, "Keep this one for me."

The gift should not be too expensive. It is not a bribe. You don't want to try to buy the favors of the official. The gift is a token of your thanks for their time so give something which may make a difference. If you come on behalf of the church a good religious book will be appropriate. A Bible would be my first choice but an attractive edition of a book such as *Steps to Christ* is also appropriate. If you are thinking of a magazine, consider *Adventist World*, *Liberty*, or *Vibrant Life*.

Avoid giving books that can create conflicts. If you do you will burn your chance to have another meeting. Do not take advantage of the kindness of an official and hurt him with an inappropriate book. Think of your appointment as a visit to his home. It is a matter of courtesy and education. You do not criticize your host's religion or the color of his jacket. If you disrespect this rule you will be evaluated as a poor ambassador.

Every evangelist knows that you do not begin a series of meetings with a topic that causes conflict. I remember going to an important meeting with the head of state and representatives of other religions. Each religious organization was invited to bring some documentation to introduce itself. Most brought brochures about their work for the community.

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Then I saw a beautiful magazine. I opened it and to my surprise its contents railed against the doctrines of all the others present. I was shocked to see that the magazine came from us. The only message we had to contribute to this official meeting was, “We are right. All of you are wrong!” There was nothing about the humanitarian work we do around in the world; nothing about our schools and our hospitals; and nothing about our commitment to making the world a better place.

I showed it to our church leaders and they were embarrassed. Our people had worked for years to set up this meeting. It took time to get the head of state and the many religious leaders together at the same time in the same place. But the meeting was hijacked by Adventist church members who brought inappropriate literature. They saw this meeting as a great opportunity to convert people but they ignored the basic rules of respect. Imagine that a friend invites you to an important event and you are happy to go. When you arrive you are given several brochures. You’re glad to get them because you expect they will provide some information on the topic being discussed. You open the first brochure and read, “Saturday is *not* the Bible day of rest!”

You believe that message was not intentional and you open the second brochure. Its title is “Why Adventist teachings are wrong!” What is your reaction? You call the friend who invited you and ask, “Are you sure I am welcome here? Why did you invite me?”

Don’t give too many books either. In Jakarta, Indonesia, we met with two leaders of the largest Muslim organizations in the world. The meeting was excellent. Jonathan Catolico was with me and the union president led our team and introduced us. At the end of the meeting our union secretary offered the two leaders three beautiful books on health. The gift was very much appreciated. Our secretary did not give them a book titled “Why the Muslims are Wrong.” It would have been a lack of *savoir vivre* and a dangerous provocation. If you have a problem understanding this, just put your feet in their shoes.

Remember what Jesus said to His disciples, “Therefore, whatever you want men do to you, do also to them.”

If you visit officials on behalf of the IRLA you may give them a copy of *Fides et Libertas*, *Liberty* magazine or *Issues of Faith and Freedom*. You can also give a pen with the IRLA logo.

If the visit is made on behalf of the church and the IRLA, don’t mix the gifts. Let the person who represents the church give the religious books and the one who represents the IRLA give the other gifts.

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5) To pray or not to pray. In most of the visits made on behalf of the church, we pray for the official after asking their permission. In European countries where church and state are separated, praying for an official is not usually done.

Some may be offended if you even ask. You must do your homework before the visit and learn if prayer will be accepted or not. As to a prayer at the end of the meeting, if you ask and you receive a cold *No*, it is not a good way to end your time together. But when you say thank you for the visit you can say, "Mister Mayor, my community will pray for you!" Most often the answer will be, "Thank you very much!"

If your visit is done on behalf of the IRLA, you will be wise and make sure you make the right decision.

When your delegation includes both Adventist pastors and IRLA officers the situation is different. You have the pastor with you representing a church and to propose to pray is almost normal.

In most of the countries around the world when we have a mixed delegation, the meeting ends by a well-accepted and well-received prayer by the pastor. Again be sensitive to the culture and to the tradition.

6) Take photos. Pictures are important for you and for your ministry. Pictures are part of the proof that you are doing your job. If you can show a photo of you and a large group with the President of your country it means something. If the picture shows you with a group of four it means something else. If you are alone with the President, it means you have connected at the highest level. Now, if the photo is of you in the President's home and his wife is preparing a luncheon in their kitchen, it means you are friends with them.

I assure you that such pictures will open many doors. Pictures will be a good instrument for an evaluation about your network of friends. It will prove that you are doing something. I agree that photos may not prove you are a good ambassador, but at least they will show that you had a meeting with the top leader in the country.

Often union or conference presidents and sometime pastors show me photos of them with different officials. It attracts my interest and curiosity. It shows that a work is done. You will need pictures to illustrate the article or report you write about your meeting. Pictures, pictures, pictures! They are important.

c. After the Meeting:

1) Be ready to give an interview to the media. If you have a meeting with a top official you can be sure that when it is finished, reporters will ask you questions. You will probably have official reporters who represent the newspaper, the radio, and television. They may interview the local pastor and not you directly. Before the meeting you have to decide who will be the spokesperson. You have also to decide if the other members of the team will answer too. If it is the case you will have to prepare some possible questions. It is a very delicate exercise. There are some traditional answers such as, “The meeting with the president was cordial and we shared with him some of our concerns about religious freedom in the world today.” Or, “The president listened to us with interest and explained the position of his government.” If you had a great meeting and you received official support from the president or the mayor you can say: “The president said he supports all actions which can improve the lives of his citizens.”

When Billy Graham was a young and already popular preacher, he and his close team were received by President Harry Truman who, by the way, was also Baptist. When they left the White House reporters bombarded Graham and his team with questions. “What did you say to the President? What did you do?”

Candidly they told the reporters everything. “Did you pray with the president?” one reporter asked.

“Yes, of course!”

“Did you kneel down with the president? Could you show us?”

So Billy Graham and his friends knelt down and showed how they prayed with President Truman. The next day the picture was in all the newspapers and Billy Graham was never again invited to visit President Truman.

Prepare what you will have to say, advise the visitor about what he or she should say, and do not stay too long. The more you speak the greater the chance you have of being trapped. Afterwards a reporter may ask you for an interview. Accept it, if you are ready. If not, move it to the evening or the next day. You need time to carefully prepare for it.

If you are interviewed, ask to read the article before it is printed. Some reporters will let you do so and some will be offended. It depends on the newspaper. It will be a good exercise to make the right decision.

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In a local church you will follow the same principles.

If you have a meeting with a mayor who has problem with justice, the reporters will be very interested in your opinion. Imagine the local newspaper headline, “Adventist ambassador says the corrupt mayor is ‘a good man.’ ”

That is not what you need to improve the church image.

2) Debrief your team. Even if it is a short meeting, as PARL director you need to take note of the impressions on your team, the remarks, and the suggestions. Then, alone or with your team, you will analyze the meeting and note what was good and what you have to change or improve. If you can print your report and start a booklet you will be better prepared for the next visit. You will share substantial information with your pastor or team members.

3) Pray together. Do not forget to thank God for the meeting you had, and pray for those you met and their families. Pray at every step. Pray for the purpose of the meeting, for the connection you can build with the VIPs, for the wisdom you need. Pray, pray, pray! Prayers will open the doors of heaven and the blessings of God on your ministry.

Conclusion

You have met the officials! Congratulations, you have done a great job. You have received information and enlarged your network of friends. You have made the church visible. You may have clarified misunderstandings. But more than that, you have expressed the church’s interest in the community and its leaders. You have demonstrated that even if you are different, if you are not *from the world*, you are not rejecting the community or their people. God sent His only Son to save the world and you are in the world. You have been a good ambassador.



SECTION THREE:

Adventist Diplomacy



SECTION THREE

ADVENTIST DIPLOMACY

This section is taken from a PowerPoint Presentation called Adventist Diplomacy. It will help you understand the purpose of our ministry and the methods we use to accomplish it.

A Quiet Diplomacy

“So should the followers of Christ, as they approach the time of trouble, make every exertion to place themselves in a proper light before people, to disarm prejudice, and to avert the danger which threatens liberty of conscience.”¹

Definition

Diplomacy is a method of dealing with others to maintain peace and protect its interests. This is a common definition. It applies to any kind of diplomatic work.

But what is Adventist diplomacy?

Adventist diplomacy is dealing with others in such a way as to accomplish the mission of the church given by Christ in protecting its interests, in keeping peace, and building good relationships with all.

Peace is an important aspect of our diplomacy. Jesus’ message is a message of hope and peace. There is a blessing for the peacemakers as the Lord said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt 5:9).

The apostle Paul confirmed this when he recommended that the Christian members not provoke others but, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18).

¹ Ellen G White, *The Great Controversy*, (Hagerstown MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008), 335.



1. Why Adventists Need Diplomacy

We need diplomacy to accomplish our mission. Maintaining peace and building good relationships are more effective and cheaper than fighting a useless war.

An official of the US Foreign Affairs Commission began his report with a similar remark. He was not wrong and it would have been beneficial for the leaders to listen to him, for a few years later the United States was involved in very expensive war which almost ruined the country. In a state of peace people can work and focus on their priorities. In a state of war all their energies are directed on their survival.

Of course peace does not mean compromising our beliefs and our values. Peace is one of our values. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God. Every time we work for peace we announce the Eternal Peace which will be established when Jesus returns.



2. Principles and Goals of Adventist Diplomacy

One day I asked a Vatican diplomat what was the goal of their diplomacy. Rome has probably the best diplomatic service in the world. What is their goal? He did not hesitate one second. “To accomplish the mission of the Church!” he replied.

All Christian churches and organizations share the same priority. It is the mission given by Jesus—to preach the good news to every nation, tongue, and people, and to baptize those who believe.

I made a list of seven goals of Adventist diplomacy. It is not an exclusive list and you can add a few if you want. But don’t forget these seven.

- To fulfill our global mission
- To promote our values
- To defend religious freedom
- To protect our members
- To cultivate good relationships with authorities
- To preserve our interests
- To increase our presence

You may have questions about “To preserve our interests.” Does it sound too self-centered? Think about it. We have specific interests too. Think about our institutions. In many places

they are great tools in accomplishing our mission. We have an interest to develop them and to protect them. Interest here does not mean money or benefit, but useful tools.

a. What Are the Best Methods for Achieving Our Goals?

Having set up our goals, we must consider the best methods to achieve them. Possibilities include the three following ways:

- Isolation
- Dilution
- Cooperation

Isolation may work for a while, when a movement has just begun. The first Eremites isolated themselves. But then others joined them and, as the movement grew, they built monasteries which attracted crowds. Isolation is not possible if you live in society with other people. Here is one example: You need a permit or authorization to build a church or a school. Sometimes you even need a permit to hold public meetings.

Imagine that you want to be totally isolated and to do so you decide to go live on the moon. But to get there you will need a lot of authorizations. To survive there you will need to stay in permanent contact with people on earth. Isolation is not a guarantee of faith and faithfulness. Sincere Christians have tried to keep themselves isolated and very often it led to destructive results. History is full of such examples. Something else to consider is, if you are isolated how will you share the good news with others?

Jesus did not isolate Himself except for times of personal prayer. He met people where they were. He became part of social meetings such as a wedding, dinners, and a funeral. The New Testament church was not isolated. It was a persecuted church but it stayed in the society or in contact with it. It wanted to be the light of the world. God does not order us to flee people but to meet them and share the good news of salvation with them.

Dilution is the other extreme. You want so much to be with others that you lose your identity and rapidly lose your mission. You want to please the majority and be accepted by it at any price. Of course, you may get some privileges and recognition for that. But at the very end the specific mission of the church will be diluted in a larger group. This is probably one of the reasons we are not a member of the World Council of Churches. We don't want to be absorbed, then marginalized by the majority. Of course there are also theological and eschatological reasons.

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Cooperation is our way. We are free to decide with whom, on which actions, and for how long we are ready to cooperate. Remember that our pioneers did not isolate themselves. In fact, they cooperated with other organizations to promote and defend healthful living and religious liberty.

When the values we believe in are threatened, cooperation is a way to defend them. Cooperation is not an alliance for the unity of the churches. It is a way to answer a specific need or concern. Cooperation should be well defined about its tenure and limit. For example, in Washington we cooperated with other churches or religious organizations on the issue of Religious Freedom in the Workplace. There are many areas where we can cooperate with others, but it must be done following certain rules and principles. It also has to be approved by the Church Board. It would be counterproductive if our cooperation with others led to division of the church.

It is not enough to have the majority on your side. You need to have a large majority. In others words, you don't want to give to a small but active minority, opposed to any kind of relationship with others, the right to impose their opinion. In some cases you may need to use all your diplomatic talents to keep peace in your own church. As a church, we are rarely members of interchurch or interfaith organizations, preferring the status of observer. Why is that? We don't want to be isolated, but we are prudent too.

I have been personally invited to attend many publicized religious events. It is not easy to say "no" to someone who invites you and who believes that it would be a great privilege for you to be there. Millions of people would be proud to attend, and you do not want to insult your friend who was happy to invite you. At the same time, you do not want to create a schism in your own church by accepting the invitation. After consultation with your leaders, who will favor internal peace, you will find a way to write a nice letter in which you will thank your friend for the invitation but state that, unfortunately, you are not able to come. You are not obliged to give details such as, "My president is totally opposed," or, "There is a group of crazy people who will create a schism in our church if I come." Don't make things worse. Your friend will understand as he or she may have this kind of problem too.

There is another side to this issue that we must consider. Sometimes we are not aware that the person who invites us to certain events may be exposing themselves to a lot of critics who are saying: Why did you invite him?"

When I was a young pastor, a friend who was a priest invited me to introduce my denomination before a group of regional ecumenical leaders. I explained what Adventists believe and

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why we are not part of the ecumenical movement. They listened to me with kindness and respect. But after the meeting, I heard one participant say, “It is already difficult to understand ourselves. Now if we add the Adventists, where are we going to?”

It made me realize that every time I was invited to speak in such a setting, the one who invited me also took some risks. That person may be hearing, “Why did we invite them, they are not even involved in ecumenism.”

The story of Abraham and Lot is a good lesson about isolation and dilution. Abraham kept his independence and God accomplished His mission through him. But Abraham was not isolated. He had relationships with his neighbors and sometimes made agreements. He shared common interests too, but he was never under the authority of another group. Abraham’s nephew Lot followed another way which led to his family being swallowed up by another people. It was a sad story.

b. Basic Principles

There are some basic principles we should follow in our diplomacy.

1) Be a Realist. We have to see things as they truly are, with a rational mind. We can’t afford to reason with our hearts and our emotions. $1 + 1 = 2$. Period! Anything else will get you into trouble.

If you are a frog, don’t believe you are a lion.

If you are a mouse, don’t believe you are an elephant.

There are 19 million Seventh-day Adventists in the world, not including young children. It is a good number. I remember that in 1964, when I became an Adventist, we numbered close to 1.5 million.

The world population is more than seven billion. Now it’s a blessing that there are 19 million Adventists in the world. But we must compare that with the approximately 600 million Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals. On the other hand, Catholics number 1.2 billion and Muslims number 1.3 billion.

If we spend most of our time with Adventists our vision of the world may be distorted, for in terms of numbers we are a relatively small group. But what about the future? Look at the projected numbers for the year 2050. Catholics would be two billion, Pentecostals one billion,

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Baptists, 500 million, and Adventists, 100 million including children. One hundred million would be a large number but still a minority. Looking at it a different way, there would be one Adventist for every ten Pentecostals or every 20 Catholics.

Let us take another approach. There are more Adventists in Brazil than in any other country in the world. If we compare ourselves with others it will give a more realistic picture. The population of Brazil is 200 million. Catholics are 65 percent of the population while Protestants are 25 percent.

There are 1.3 million Adventist church members in Brazil. But if we include children Adventists number close to three million. That represents about 1.5 percent to 2 percent of the population.

If the statistics we get are reliable we can be realistic when checking our facts. In 2005, in Brazil, more Adventist church members were listed on the books than there were four years later in 2009. What happened? Between the two dates our church in Brazil had the courage to ask for an audit.

As an ambassador your information must be as correct and precise as possible. This is essential if you want develop an appropriate strategy for reaching the people.

There is no true diplomacy without researching the truth.

2) Reality and Perception. Even when you have the correct figures you must remember that in diplomacy, perception of reality may be different from one person to another.

“In politics,” wrote W Freeman Jr in *Arts of Power*, “... perceptions are reality. In diplomacy, perceived power is real power.”

3) Seize Opportunities. Opportunities can make a difference in your ministry. Consider some of the biblical greats. Joseph, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the apostle Paul were able to seize opportunities. They were prepared to make their point when the opportunity arrived. God, of course, sent it to them. To seize opportunities you have to be well informed and ready to act or speak. For example, new legislation is the result of debates in meetings and in commissions. Carefully do your homework and get as much information as you can. One of the meetings may be more important than the others. Don't miss that one. And when you have an opportunity to speak, be ready and make sure that what you say is appropriate. King Solomon wrote, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Eccl 3:1).

Imagine that you are a gardener and your mission is to keep a beautiful garden. On this day your goal is to water the plants, but there is a big problem. An adult lion is sleeping in a corner of the garden. What strategy will you set up to accomplish your mission?

a) Ignore the lion

You pretend it does not exist. You don't even want to look in that corner of the garden. There is no lion except in the fertile imagination of some people. The consequence: you water the plants without any concern about your safety.

b) Keep an eye on the lion

You are realistic enough to see that there is a lion. This is not good news. You have researched lion habits and know that it is not a vegetarian. If the lion is hungry, he can eat you. You will do your work, but you will keep an eye on him. You know what to do, and are ready to act if he gets up and starts after you.

c) Try to cut off the lion's tail

You are realistic enough to see the lion, but you don't understand why he is sleeping. It bothers you and you want to make sure it is still alive. You neglect your mission and instead of watering the flowers you try to cut off the lion's tail. Life without persecution seems boring and you need action. You can guess what will happen. Once the lion wakes up he will be unhappy and hungry. You will need all your energy to save your life. You will not accomplish your mission.

The right strategy is "b." You do your work. You are happy to have temporary freedom to act. Thankful to God, you keep an eye on the lion and are prepared to move if he acts. But unfortunately, in history and even today, some have preferred strategy "a" or "c."

c. How Successful People Set Up Their Strategy

It is interesting to see how politicians and religious organizations establish their strategy. Facing a certain problem President Richard Nixon said, "Only two questions were relevant: Who had the most power, and who shared most of our values?"

"Ultimately, we have to deal with the one who had more power, not the one we liked the best or with whom we were more comfortable."

Frederick the Great also had his point of view. "He, who tries to defend everything, defends nothing," he said. "Making strategy means making choices and making choices means enforcing a set of clear priorities."

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And Henry Kissinger, one of the best diplomats America has had, said, “As a country we have to learn that when you conduct foreign policy, you have to deal with interests as well as values, and you have to reconcile the concerns of other countries with your own concerns.”²

Nick Cafardi, co-chair of Catholics for Obama, wrote about the strategy of diplomacy of the Vatican. “The Holy See typically does not base its diplomatic relations on theology.” The Vatican, he continues, “at one point sent an Ambassador to Genghis Khan, for heaven’s sake.”³



3. The Church’s Place in the Community Network

In some countries, such as France, to lead youth camps and youth activities we must get a State Diploma. The work we did for this diploma gave us a series of good training sessions and developed good youth leaders. We learned how the community’s network operates. I have never forgotten one exercise we had to do, making a sociogram. Three times during the six days of training the teachers asked us to write on a sheet of paper an answer to the questions, Who of our group would you like to have as leader and who of our group would you *not* want as leader? We could list two names each time we answered.

On the third, fifth and sixth days of our training the teachers brought in a big map. Several circles had been drawn on it, from the smallest in the center to the largest. Small crosses had been drawn on the circles. Each cross represented one of us. Tension in the classroom was very high. The teacher said, “Every cross you see, the one that is almost in the middle and the one that is outside the last circle, has a name connected to it. Where are you on this map?” The crosses were connected by lines.

One cross had a lot of lines reaching it. It was almost in the middle of the map. It meant that many among us wanted to work under his or her leadership. Sadly, there was one cross outside the last circle and no line went to it. That showed that one of us had been rejected by the group. No one had chosen that person as a possible leader.

The worst thing happened on our last day when the teacher asked, “Now, do you want to know the name on each cross?” Silence. Finally someone said yes, and the others agreed.

2 Henry Kissinger, *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2012, A17.

3 Nick Cafardi, *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2013, A17

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It was probably the most difficult test we did, but one of the most useful. As we were trained to be in charge of a team of youth leaders and a number of teenagers for three weeks at a time, it was important to know how a group of leaders perceived us.

At the city level it works more or less the same. You have people or institutions in the center. They are supported and well accepted. You also have others which are rejected. It is important as an ambassador to know where the church we represent would be situated in a graph. Are we far away from the center or near it?

My church may be incognito, but if one of our members or a good personal friend is the assistant or the advisor to the city mayor, we are not isolated. To simplify, it is important to know who you are related to or who you know. The reality is more complex than that, but when it comes to communication this illustration is helpful.

In truth, we are not interested in getting privileges or power. We simply want people to have a positive impression of our church and church members, and we want to protect religious freedom. Authorities should identify us as people who represent values and honesty. We want to serve and to help. Our church wants to be a benefit to the global community, not to take advantage of it. That means we will not be associated with the race for political power. We should not be seen as dangerous. Nor should we appear to be members of a secret society.

Are we able to find a place in the community network? If we can, we can set a strategy to make more friends and improve the community. And a strong position in the global network will be good for religious freedom.

a. Keep in Mind the Prophetic Viewpoint

Our vision and understanding of history are inspired from the book *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*. It provides insight about the future and an understanding of the past. We know that religious freedom will be the last battle in a context of persecution. In this battle we are not called to be spectators but actors.

We know also that religious freedom will be a clear demonstration of the character of God and a sign of His kingdom. The battle has already been won and we are on the winning side, on God's side.

b. Refuse Unacceptable Methods

The end does not justify the means. For many people involved in the battle for power, any kind of power, the end, their goal, justifies the means. According to Mao Tze Dong, the great leader of China, “It does not matter what color the cat is as long as it catches mice.”

This philosophy has had disastrous consequences on our societies. People lie openly while looking directly in your eyes. We could compile a long list of famous, very popular leaders who publicly lied. Some went to prison and some were forgiven. How many were never caught?

Adventist diplomats refuse to compromise their values to get the result they want. In God’s sight, a lie is a lie, killing someone is a crime, and stealing is a crime too. If you accept the devil’s methods he will lead you to destruction. I know this will seem to be naïve to some. But I ask, “What is the purpose of my work? Is it for the glory of God or my personal glory?”

If you are working for the glory of God you will use only the methods of God!

A church diplomat will never use methods which are contrary to Christian values. That is unacceptable.



4. Qualities of an Adventist Diplomat

In a meeting in Washington DC, a former U.S. diplomat was asked about the qualities needed to be a good diplomat. He replied, “Initiative, integrity, innovation.”

As we were visiting some historical sites in Manila, during the fifth IRLA World Congress I asked the same question to the UN Special Rapporteur. He underlined the fact that in his mission he did not have military forces to help him. To succeed, he was very much dependent on the goodwill of the officials he met. He gave me four main qualities a diplomat defending religious freedom should have:

- a. Integrity
- b. Respect
- c. Humility
- d. Perseverance

Integrity, respect, and humility are the best methods to remain reliable and to exert real influence. The bottom line is that the foundation of all mission is trust. You must build a climate of trust before you can hope to solve a problem. Adventist ambassadors have neither

an army nor a billion dollars to make a difference. But they have integrity, respect for others, and humility. Always respect people, and make a distinction between “sin” and “sinners,” between a “system” and the “believers” in the system. Humility is the sign of greatness. Do not give the impression that you know everything and are better than everyone else. Show the same interest in everyone.

You must have these three basic qualities, but they are not enough. Perseverance will make the difference. Sometimes I hear of problems solved after a telephone call to the President of a country. Of course, it usually requires more than a telephone call to solve a serious issue, but an appropriate call to a powerful leader can contribute to a solution. The call could be one of the factors that made a difference. Be ready to persevere.

Many people want to get immediate results for it makes their position stronger. If nothing happens they give up and focus their energy on something else. But Jesus said, “Persevere until the end.” Persevere until you get the result you’re working for: Until the prisoner is free; until justice is done; until a bad law is changed. It takes time to build good relationships and to be known and trusted as a good Christian. It takes time to achieve our goals.



5. The Field of Action

Our diplomatic actions must reach authorities at all levels, including religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, media, and professional organizations. These are where decisions are made that affect the ministry of our church and religious freedom for all.

For example, at the General Conference, we try to reach:

- a. Governments and Embassies
- b. State Commissions
- c. Religious Leaders
- d. US Congress and Senate
- e. The United Nations
- f. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Follow the same principles at the national, regional, and local levels. You want to reach those who have direct or indirect influence on the community—people, institutions, and commissions. Your job is to get information and build your own network of friends without compromising your faith or your values.



6. A Good Christian Foundation

Good diplomacy is very often a tension between realism and idealism. We have given examples of realism but it alone may lead to wrong choices and a wrong strategy. For an Adventist diplomat, idealism is the positive and optimistic side of our faith. We think *God will change their hearts. They are good people. We share a lot of common ground and God will bring about a miracle ...* But people looking on can view us as naïve and easy to deceive. That is better than viewing us as hypocrites and liars, but it may not be very helpful. Idealism helps us to be caring people of integrity while realism enables us see where we are, who we must deal with, and where we are going.

Another approach has been continually present in Christian history and in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles—the apocalyptic one. Combined with idealism and realism, it keeps our work on a good Christian foundation. But alone, it will paralyze all initiative and lead to disaster.

History is full of examples of apocalyptic tragedies from Munster, Germany in the sixteenth century to Waco, Texas just a few years ago. For Adventists, the apocalyptic approach is a grand source of hope in a chaotic world. It tells us that there will be an end to wars and calamities because Jesus is coming and will take His people home. God will have the last word.



7. Biblical and Adventist Diplomats

Adventist diplomats will find their model in Jesus the great Ambassador of the Kingdom of God. He was King and Ambassador. The Bible will provide a source of inspiration for them. I will mention just a few of other biblical models:

a. Biblical Diplomats

1) Abraham knew how to avoid wars and conflicts. He was wise enough to make the right choice and protect his people. He refused to fight with his nephew Lot but accepted the second choice to keep peace. He recognized Melchizedek and gave him “the tithe of all.” He refused any deal with the corrupt king of Sodom. He did not want him to say, “I have made Abraham rich.” He wanted to be dependent upon God only.

2) Jacob learned how to avoid conflicts. When he came back to the land of his father, he carefully organized his arrival to disarm the potential anger and hostility of his brother Esau. He wanted to avoid war, and he won peace by showing humility and bringing gifts to his brother.

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3) God taught **Joseph** how to become one of the greatest diplomats of the Bible. He learned how to survive in slavery and in prison. He knew how to speak to the king without betraying his God. He led his adoptive country to prosperity.

4) David's dream was to build the temple in Jerusalem. But God gave this privilege to his son **Solomon**. According to God, David had too much blood on his hands—he had to fight too many wars. Solomon was a diplomat and he saved a lot of money by avoiding wars. His policy resulted in a time of prosperity and power. Much of the money which came to the state was used to build the temple (1 Kings 3–12). It was a time of peace, good relations, and prosperity.

Unfortunately Solomon became corrupted and wasted the great gift of God. The problem is not that he made alliances with heathen nations, but that he compromised his faith. Success often opens the door to temptations. Solomon should have remembered his father's sins. But he did not.

Success for God's diplomats is to make friends without compromising their faith. Failure is compromising one's faith to make friends, and making unwise alliances.

5) **Nehemiah** knew how to defend the cause of his people to the king and to get his full support. He also knew how to deal with the enemy of Israel without having a war.

6) **Queen Esther** found the opportunity and the words to protect her people from extermination and to lead the king to reverse his decision. She understood why God had made her queen of the great empire of Persia.

7) **Paul** introduced himself as an ambassador several times. "I am an ambassador in chains" (Eph 6:20). He saw himself as the ambassador of reconciliation, the ambassador of the Gospel; but he shared this title with all of Jesus' disciples. "Now we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20, KJV).

As we look back at our church's history we see a quite a number of ambassadors and diplomats.

b. Adventist Church Diplomats

1) Following chronological order, I should list **John Nevins Andrews** first. During the Civil War, church leaders chose him to meet government officials in Washington DC to obtain the status of non-combatant for our young people. It was not easy as the church was not yet organized, but he succeeded. How many lives did he save by obtaining such recognition?

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2) **Dr Jean Nussbaum** was a great pioneer for religious freedom in Europe. A Swiss citizen living in Paris, he played a role in the debate on the reform of the calendar at the Society of Nations in Geneva before the Second World War. He knew Pius XII before he was Pope, and met him in Rome after the war. Dr Nussbaum launched the *Association internationale pour la défense de la liberté religieuse* (AIDLR) and published the journal *Conscience et Liberté*, which was translated into several languages. He knew Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt who accepted the presidency of the *Conscience et Liberté* board. Dr Nussbaum inspired countless leaders for the ministry of religious freedom. He was the “Prince” of Adventist diplomats.

3) **Elder Neal C Wilson** was also a PARL director. In his various administrative positions he always added the PARL dimension, meeting officials and following State issues. When he was General Conference President, he met a number of heads of state. He was a pioneer in building relations with Secretary General Gorbachev’s administration. He also had friends at the United Nations and strongly supported the decision to have a full-time representative there.

4) **Dr Bert B Beach** had a great presence both inside and outside the church. His fluency in five languages and his great knowledge made his participation in international meetings very significant. Eloquent, rational, precise, and faithful, Bert Beach made a difference in our church’s history when it came to building relationships with other Christians. His voice was listened to with respect, and Christian leaders knew he represented the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was not impressed by anyone but respected everyone. His outstanding relationship with religious leaders caused him to be elected and reelected every two years for 32 years as Secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions. When he left the position the Christian leaders followed his suggestion and elected me as his successor.

5) **Dr Gianfranco Rossi**, a friend of Bert Beach, did a great work in Italy for years. It paid off when the government officially recognized the Seventh-day Adventist Church and granted it the benefit of the 8/1000 on income taxes. Every year a number of Italian taxpayers chose to give 8/1000 to our church for its social and humanitarian activities. Dr Rossi will be remembered as the strongest voice we had for years at the United Nations and especially at the Human Rights Commission. He played a role in the redaction of Article 6, paragraph “h” of the *United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*. The paragraph reads: “To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one’s religion or belief.” Including “days of rest” in this official document was a result of Rossi’s ministry at the UN.

6) **Dr Pierre Lanares** made a difference in the organization of AIDLR in Europe. He worked mainly through *Conscience et Liberté* which became a biannual journal. Translated into several languages, the journal became the reference regarding religious freedom. The best experts of the time—philosophers, theologians, jurists, historians—published their articles in it. Dr Lanares' thesis on the *Religious Freedom International Documents* gave him authority in this field. Lanares was also an international speaker. I had the privilege of knowing him very well and of working with him.

7) **Ambassador Bienvenido Tejano** was PARL director for the church in the Philippines when I first met him. At that time he was asked by President Ramos to be part of his team when he travelled to the United States. Then the new President of the country asked him to be ambassador, which he accepted. The two Presidents who followed kept him at his position for 15 years. He served his country with excellence and his God with talents, integrity, and faithfulness. His experience is such an encouragement that I hope he will write a book soon.

8) **Dr Zachariasz Lyko** was the remarkable church ambassador in Poland during the difficult years of Communist rule. During that time he made certain that the church was known and after Communism he made sure that the new government knew us too.

9) **Pastor Nelu Dumitrescu and Pastor Viorel Dima.** I must also mention our ambassadors who served in Romania during difficult times. These two men represented the church, and when the Communist regime collapsed they had the respect of all. I travelled with them during one of the darkest periods of Romania's history, and after the fall of Communism I regularly went to Romania to support their work. Pastor Dima knew the President and all the leaders. He organized symposiums, congresses, meetings of experts, and the First European Festival of Religious Freedom. Romania became the number one country in Europe in terms of religious freedom promotion. They established a great history.

Today the division PARL director, **Attorney Liviu Olteanu**, is from Romania and the current union PARL director, **Dr Nelu Burcea**, is the heir of a great tradition. Their work helps maintain a leadership position in the world in terms of religious freedom activities. We have found the same strong tradition in the United States, Croatia, Italy, Spain, and France, where the ministry of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty has been taken seriously for decades.

I must mention other names such as **Pastor Mikhail P Kulakov** and **Pastor Victor Krushenitsky** who followed him. The work they did in Russia and in Euro-Asia was remarkable. In 2009 Pastor Kulakov was honored with the IRLA/Liberty International Award given during the Religious Liberty Dinner.

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And there are more. Attorney **Jose Hayasaka** in Mexico, Pastor **Clive Dottin** from the Caribbean, and so many others who worked in countries where PARL was very active such as Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Chile, Trinidad, Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and more. They established a tradition and some of them made history with their congresses, festivals, and symposiums such as those held in Lima, Peru; Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico; Luanda, Angola; Sao Paulo, Brazil and even more.

The history book of religious freedom is still open, and there is a page for you too.

The list is not complete. I wish I had space to add more names. There are so many good and faithful members who served, or still serve, God and the church as excellent ambassadors. Don't hesitate to recognize them when you have a religious freedom event.



8. Results of Good Diplomacy

What are the results of a good diplomacy? Here are four that you can expect.

- a. Increased visibility of our church
- b. Protection of our members
- c. Recognition as a Christian Church
- d. Freedom to preach our message

Good diplomacy will reinforce our identity, bring respect for our values, and make our message known in a positive context, giving an opportunity for everyone to accept or reject it.



SECTION FOUR:

Workshops and Documents



SECTION FOUR
WORKSHOPS AND DOCUMENTS



1. Questions and Answers

a. Should I sign a petition written by other churches or secular associations?

It often happens that we are contacted as a church or IRLA to sign a letter addressed to a head of state or a high official. Most often the intention is good. It could be to release an innocent person from prison, to oppose persecution or discrimination, or to campaign against repressive legislation. The case is worthy, and the letter is legitimate. May I sign? Do I have to participate? Let us think about it.

Do I know the case well? Do I know the organizations which led the campaign and what kind of relationship do we have with them? On whose behalf should I sign? How will my signature be perceived inside and outside of my own church?

Imagine that an atheist association asks you to sign a petition against the presence of the 10 Commandments in a public building or public square. The reason given is to protect the great principle of separation of church and state. Will you sign it? You favor the same principle. Will you add your church's name to such a list? Is there another way to publicly express the church's position other than a signature?

Think about the issue and the motivation of the campaign organizers. Why did they target the 10 Commandments only, and not the statues of Jupiter and Venus which are also in the public squares? Would the church approve of your signing on its behalf? How will the name of my church be perceived on such a list by its members, and by the authorities?

My position has always been conservative in using the name of the church. In many cases we sign on behalf of the IRLA, but only after getting the approval of its officers.

This does not mean that the church should never be associated with others to defend or promote values we believe in. But it should be done with the support of its administration. PARL can propose, but the conference or the union committee will decide if it wants to agree.

When we speak on behalf of the church at the UN Human Rights Council, we voluntary have our text approved by the General Conference PARL director who has direct contact with the GC president and vice president. It may not appear to be the quickest way to work

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but with e-mails it goes fast. The worst that could happen to you is that after you sign a campaign letter the higher level of the church publicly corrects you by this written statement:

“Mr Artur Kidley, our PARL director, did not express the official position of the church, but his own personal opinion.”

Every ambassador wants to avoid that.

b. What does the church expect from a PARL leader?

The best way to be a good PARL director is to help the church improve its communication with leaders and authorities and to promote and protect religious freedom for all.

We may have some members who are uncomfortable with any kind of openness to the community. They are in favor of a quasi-isolation of our church. But most of our members do not like to be victims of prejudice. It is not good for their social or professional life, nor for their families. Like every human being, we are pleased when our image is positive. And this will be one of the positive outcomes of our ministry.

The church has certain expectations when it elects you as PARL leader. It is to have a good ambassador, one who will represent the church well in public. The church expects you will be:

- 1) A good ambassador
- 2) An expert when you speak of PARL
- 3) Correctly informed
- 4) Reliable when you give a report or share news
- 5) Loyal to the church
- 6) Faithful to the message of the church
- 7) A person of hope.

These are their expectations. It is your job to make sure you fulfill them.



2. Test Yourself

Are you a good ambassador? You have been in charge of PARL for at least three years and you want to know if you are a good ambassador. Read and answer the following questions.

During the last three years, how many times:

1. Have you met official leaders?

If you've met official leaders twice, write down 2. If your answer is 5, write down 5.
Ex. 5 = 5 points. If your answer is more than 10, write 10. Ex. 18 times = 10 points

2. Have you met with religious leaders?

3. Has the mayor of your town invited you to town functions?

4. Have religious leaders invited you to meetings?

5. Have you been invited for radio or TV interviews?

6. Has the press interviewed you on one or more occasion?

7. Have you attended community meetings?

8. Have you been asked for professional advice?

9. In your sermons, have you mentioned religious freedom and the importance of cultivating good relationships with others?

10. Are you a member of a community association of general interest?

For this question, a "yes" receives 10 points, a "no" receives 0 points.

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Now add up your total. If your total is:

70–100:	You are outstanding.	Factor A
40–70:	You are doing very well and you can be outstanding.	Factor B
20–40:	You have no choice: You must improve!	Factor C
00–20:	What is your title anyway? Are you sure you are working with PARL?	Factor D

Now you know if you are a good ambassador. Congratulations. I am sure that this knowledge will help you make good decisions. Think of five things you want to do in the near future, and write the answers below.

My resolutions are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

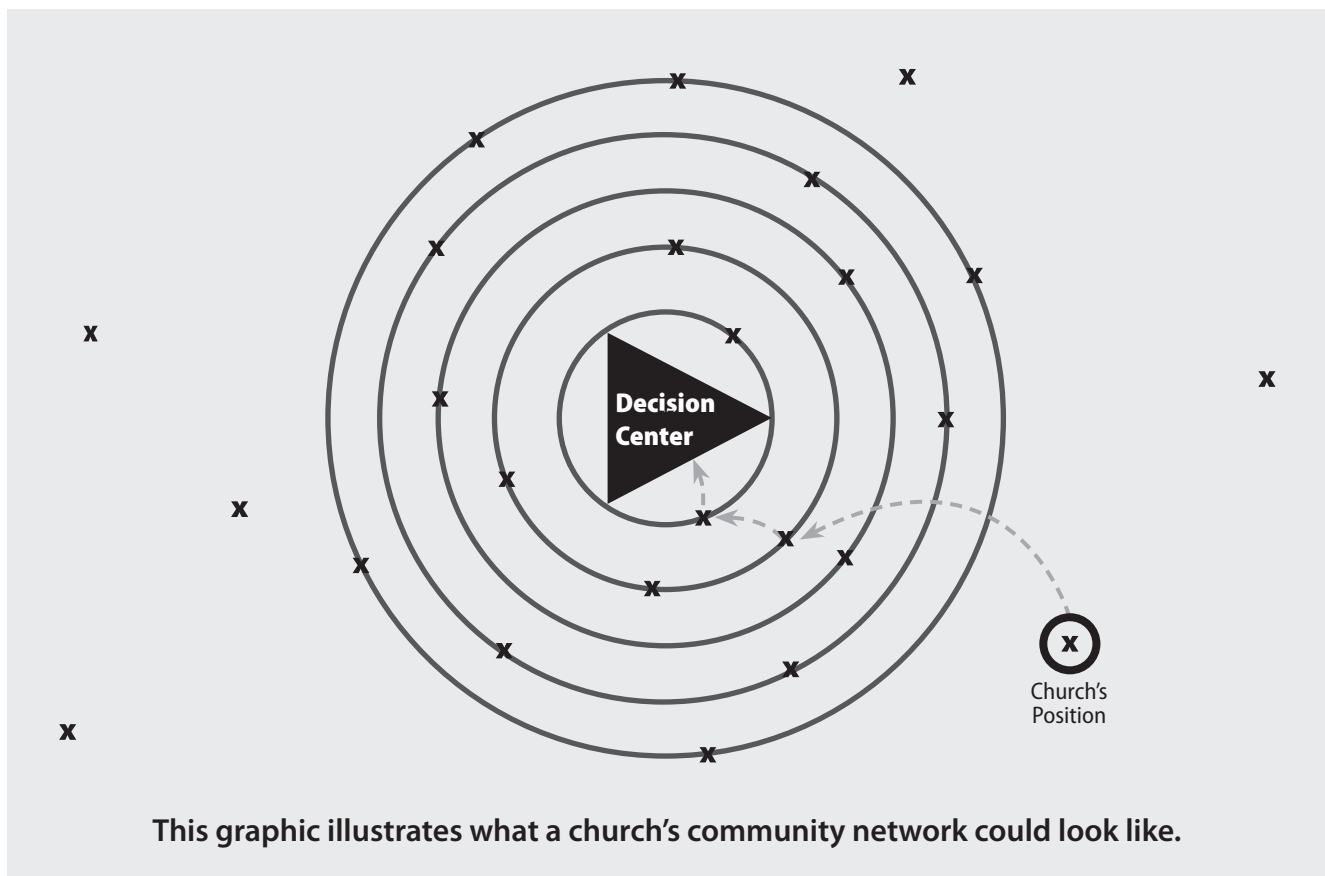
3. Your Position in the Community

a. What is your position in your community network?

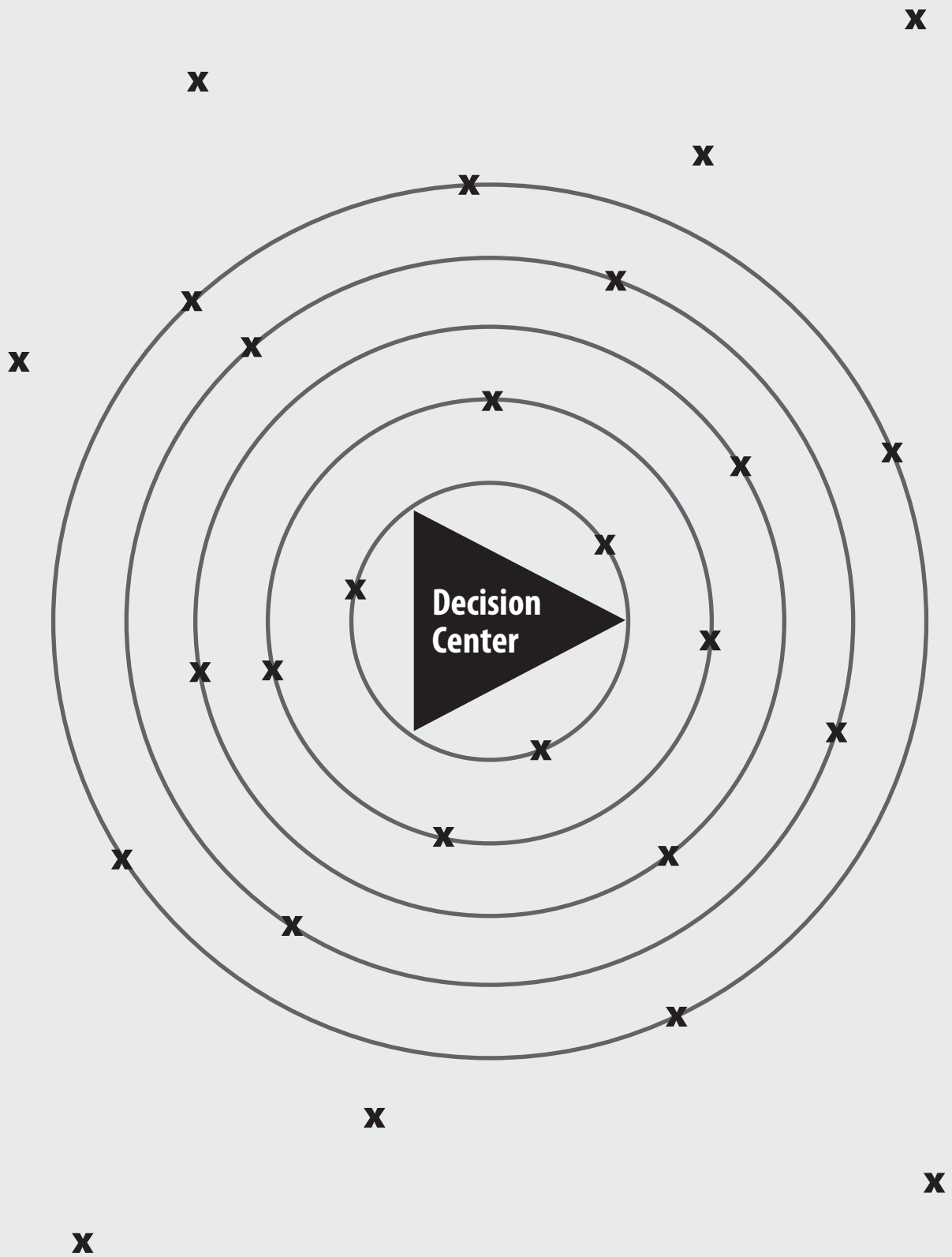
This exercise will evaluate your position in the community network. Draw a large square. This represents the community. In the center of the square, draw a triangle. It represents the center of decision, the authority. It could be the mayor or a regional president, the prime minister or the president of the country.

Then, from the center to the edge of the square draw a succession of circles. Let's say that the nearest circle to the center is No. 1, the next is 2 ... the last one is 7. On the circles draw small crosses to represent people who play an important role in the community. Some are connected to the center of decision, directly or indirectly. They represent people of influence.

For example, suppose the mayor or the president is in the triangle. Who is closest to him or her? It may be his deputy or her husband? Who are close to the one who is close to him? Draw a cross for each person. Of course, you will include the head official for the institutions and associations. Then evaluate your church's position. Try to guess where your church is and where you and your pastor are.



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Circle the church's position in your community and draw lines to show your own network.

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It is possible that your cross will be out of the circle. Why? We are a small organization and are not involved in politics. In terms of power we are far away from the center. But when it comes to relationships we may have some good bridges to the center. Let's say the church is outside of the circle but you or some church members have a good network of friends. Imagine you are a good friend of the mayor. You were in school together. It will not put your church close to the center but in terms of relationships it will make a link from outside to the center. You can draw a line from the church position to the triangle. It means that the church has access to the center, access through you. Are you close to one of the mayor's deputies, or associate, or close relative? If yes, then draw a line from the church's position to line No. 2. The fact that your church has none of the power of a political party or a bank or a big business does not mean it cannot have access to the center of decision.

Now you have to think about the links between people. The links are like roads or circuits. For example, if you know someone located in circle 3 and that person knows someone else located in circle 1, your network is good. You have a road or a circuit which leads to the center. You are connected.

On the contrary, if you are located on circle 2, but don't know anyone closer to the center, you are not connected. You may become connected if the No. 2 moves to the center. It can happen with elections.

In the community the position of the church you represent is important but the network is sometimes more important. This is why people of influence are very often members of clubs or associations. They build their network. I don't know the mayor, but I am member of the Religious Freedom Club. In this club are two advisors of the mayor and I have become friends of theirs. It improved my proximity to the center.

b. Are you well connected?

Try to see where you are and how you are connected. What is your network?

As church ambassadors, we don't play the usual politic game. We don't build a network to manipulate leaders or to take over their power. We just want our church to be better known and to witness about the values we believe in. There is no search for power. We see ourselves as servants of the community, not rulers.

A good PARL director will help the church improve its communication with leaders to promote and protect religious freedom for all.

CHURCH AMBASSADOR

This test will stimulate you to think about the community network and its main actors. You may set up a strategy to be in the circles or to build a road to the center. The religious freedom events will help you. In fact, every event will help you enlarge your network. But above all, pray to God who is the One who will open the doors the same as He did for Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Paul.



4. Your Priorities

a. You have just been elected Religious Liberty director in your local church.

Choosing from this list, order your priorities from 1 to 10.

- 1) To learn my job description.
- 2) To learn the history and philosophy of PARL as stated in the manual.
- 3) To plan my activities for the next five years.
- 4) To spend one year at the university.
- 5) To visit historical places for religious freedom around the world.
- 6) To buy a new suit.
- 7) To make a list of government and religious leaders I have to meet and visit.
- 8) To organize a Liberty Concert.
- 9) To send *Liberty* magazine or *Fides et Libertas* to officials.
- 10) To organize a full program for Religious Liberty Sabbath with the support of the pastor and the church board.

Suggested Answer:

If your first three priorities include 1, 2, 3, 7, or 10, you get 10 points.

If your first three priorities include 2, 6, 7, 9, or 10, you get 5 points.

SECTION FOUR: WORKSHOPS AND DOCUMENTS

b. An organization contacts your church and asks you to sign a petition against religious symbols, such as a cross, on public buildings. How do you react?

- 1) You sign because you are in favor of the separation of church and state.
- 2) You contact your colleagues at the conference, union, and divisions levels.
- 3) You don't sign because you respect the history and tradition of your country and because no one is forced to worship these symbols.

Suggested Answer:

If you answered 2, you get 10 points. If you answered 3, you get 5 points.

If you live in a country that is predominately Catholic or Orthodox, and if no one is forced to worship or to bow down to religious symbols, you will be wise not to sign the letter.

But if you involve the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, your priority is to get advice from your conference or union PARL director. You are representing the Adventist Church, not yourself, so you should follow the position of the Church or get the advice of its administration.

The Church's position is for the separation between church and state, but without denying this we must also be wise and not expose our church to attacks. Without signing the petition you should explain the Church's position. (Read chronicle and debate.)

c. When an Official Speaks at Your Church

You have invited a government official to give a message to your church during the Sabbath service. Where do you put him/her in the program?

- 1) As part of the Sabbath School session
- 2) Between Sabbath School and the worship service
- 3) In the worship service, after the Bible reading

Suggested Answer:

If you answered 2, you get 10 points. If you answered 1, you get 5 points.

Worship is dedicated to God, and God is the center. Open a neutral, but honorable space for official guests.

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d. What is the correct title to use to introduce an ambassador?

- 1) His Excellency, the Ambassador of Trinidad, Mr John Paxton
- 2) His Excellency John Paxton, Ambassador of Trinidad
- 3) The Ambassador of Trinidad, Mr John Paxton

Suggested Answer:

If you answered 2, you get 10 points. If you answered 1 or 3 you get 0 points.

e. A Bill on Defamation of Religions

You have heard that a bill to protect religions from verbal and written attacks is being studied by a commission of the Parliament. According to the bill's authors the purpose is to protect religions and religious peace in the country.

1) What is your position?

- a) Are you in favor of this or opposed to it?
- b) Give three reasons to explain your choice:
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)

2) What do you plan to do?

- a) Describe your strategy.
- b) Give the first three steps you plan to take.
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)

SECTION FOUR: WORKSHOPS AND DOCUMENTS

Time: 30 minutes followed by a report.

You can form groups of three to five people to discuss this and make a decision. Have each group select a chair and secretary.

f. How to Reverse a Negative Perception

After an evangelistic campaign which was seen as offensive by other religions, your church has been listed as a cult or cult-like. Local authorities have received many complaints and public opinion is in favor of a sanction against your church.

Unfortunately, this reaction makes some members happy, almost excited, as they see persecution coming. The potential consequences for our institutions and for our mission in the community will distress others. You have six months to reverse the trend and the negative perception of the authorities.

- 1) What is your reaction?
- 2) What is your plan to reverse the perception?
- 3) Set up a strategy employing a five-point approach.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)

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g. A Crisis in Your Church Regarding Ecumenism

Rumors have been spread in your local church that the General Conference has secretly been a member of the World Council of Churches. Pictures “proving it” are on the Internet. The GC PARL director is shown shaking the hand of the leader of the WCC.

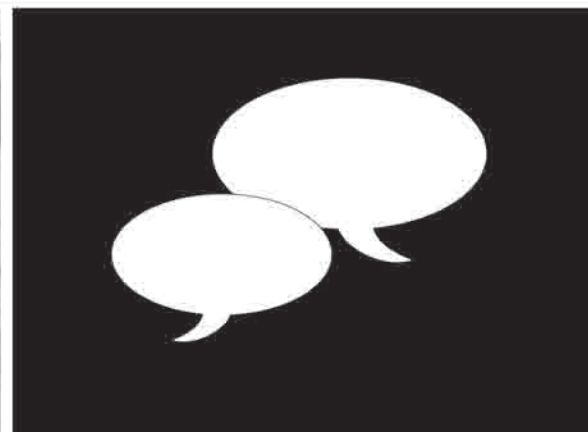
Members are confused. You have only a few weeks to reverse the situation.

- 1) What is your immediate reaction?
- 2) Set up a five-point strategy to clarify the situation and explain the reality.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)



SECTION FIVE:

Speeches and Religious Liberty Sermons



1. Introductions, Greetings, and Speeches

a. Introductions



(1)

**Mayor Kasim Reed, Atlanta, Georgia
2010 General Conference Session
Friday, June 25, 7:00 pm**

Brothers and Sisters,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends,

It is an honor for all of us participating in the 59th General Conference Session, to welcome the mayor of Atlanta: The Honorable Kasim Reed.

Mayor Reed was inaugurated as Atlanta's 59th mayor on January 4, 2010.

He was first elected to the Georgia General Assembly in 1998 as State Representative. From 2002 to 2007, he served as State Senator.

Mayor Reed's civic leadership and service has been nationally recognized. In 2001, he was selected by the Georgia press as one of the "40 under 40 Rising Stars" and "Lawyers on the Rise" and as one of the "10 Outstanding Atlantans."

Now for the 59th Session of the General Conference, the 59th Mayor of Atlanta: The Honorable Kasim Reed.



(2)

Rev Dr Larry Miller

General Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference

July 2, 2010, 7:00 pm

Atlanta, Georgia

Brothers and Sisters,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends,

In the 16th century, those who baptized adults, believed in religious freedom, in the separation between church and state, in non-violence, and in Jesus' return, were not called Adventists, they were called Anabaptists.

Among them, was a group who immigrated to America, the Mennonites. In spite of facing terrible persecution in Europe, they remained faithful and today you can find Mennonites around the world. They are a great source of inspiration for us.

We admire their commitment to peace and non-violence.

We have always had good relations with our Mennonite brothers and sisters.

Tonight I am very pleased to welcome the Secretary General of the Mennonite World Conference, a very good friend, Dr Larry Miller.



(3)

Rev Dr Neville Callam
General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance
July 3, 2010, 7:00 pm
Atlanta, Georgia

Brothers and Sisters,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends,

Adventists and Baptists have many things in common. William Miller was a Baptist pastor. We share the same love for the Bible as God's Word, the same faith about religious liberty. We practice the same baptism by immersion. From the Seventh-day Baptists we received the Saturday Sabbath.

The Baptist family is gathered in the Baptist World Alliance which represents 100 million Baptists around the world. Tonight we are very pleased to welcome their General Secretary: the Reverend Doctor Neville Callam.

Reverend Callam comes from Jamaica. He is known as a man of communication and an international speaker. He is here with his wife, Dulcie. Mrs Callam, could you please stand up? Reverend and Mrs Callam, it is a pleasure to welcome both of you.

CHURCH AMBASSADOR



(4)

Rev Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe
CEO and General Secretary of the
World Evangelical Alliance
July 2, 2010, 7:00 pm
Atlanta, Georgia

Brothers and Sisters,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends,

The World Evangelical Alliance is a network of churches in 128 nations and composed of 100 international organizations. The World Evangelical Alliance gives a voice and a platform to more than 420 million Evangelical Christians.

Adventists and Evangelicals shared many common beliefs and year after year, we have developed good relations between us.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome the CEO and General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance. The Reverend Doctor Geoff Tunnicliffe is a man who is known around the world as a strong voice for the marginalized, the poor, and the persecuted: Reverend Doctor Geoff Tunnicliffe.



(5)

**Ambassador Palan Mulonda
Republic of Zambia
Protocol Lunch, General Conference Headquarters
April 1, 2013**

President Ted Wilson,
Dear Guests,

I would like to welcome you to our special luncheon in honor of His Excellency Palan Mulonda, Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia to the United States of America.

Mister Ambassador is accompanied by First Secretaries Chembo Mbula and Patricia Littiya.

We are also very pleased to have with us our World Church President, Elder Ted Wilson. Now Mrs Sharon Mabena will offer grace before we begin to eat.



(6)

**Dr Katrina Lantos Swett
Chair of US Commission on
International Religious Freedom
2013 Religious Liberty Dinner
Canadian Embassy
Washington DC**

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the International Religious Liberty Association, the North America Religious Liberty Association and *Liberty* magazine, it is a great honor and a pleasure for me to introduce the recipient of the Religious Liberty Award 2013.

Dr Katrina Lantos Swett is the Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious freedom. She graduated from Yale University in 1974 at the age of 18 and earned her Juris Doctor at the University of California, Hastings College of Law in 1976. In 2002, she was the Democratic nominee for Congress in New Hampshire's 2nd District, and she was chosen as a Presidential elector in 1992.

Dr Lantos Swett has experience in education and in broadcasting. She co-hosted the highly regarded political talk show "Beyond Politics" for many years. She interviewed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Vice-President Al Gore, First Lady Hillary Clinton, and many others.

She also worked on Capitol Hill as Deputy Counsel to the Criminal Justice Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee for then Senator Joe Biden.

In 2008 Dr Katrina Lantos Swett established the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, and she serves as its President and Chief Executive Officer. She also teaches Human Rights and American Foreign Policy at Tufts University.

SECTION FIVE: **SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS**

And on a more personal note: Dr Lantos Swett has been married for 31 years to former Congressman and Ambassador Richard Swett. They are parents of seven children and they have two grandchildren.

I would like also to add that Dr Katrina Lantos Swett's father was the late Congressman Tom Lantos. He was a Holocaust survivor. He came with his wife, Annette, from Hungary after World War II.

Dr Katrina Lantos Swett!



(7)

Rev Dr Gunnar Stålsett
Bishop of Oslo
2011 Religious Liberty Dinner
Washington DC

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce the recipient of the International Award, the Rev Dr, and I should add, Bishop, Gunnar Stålsett.

The first time I met you, dear Gunnar, it was 15 years ago in Oslo, Norway. Dr Bert Beach introduced me to you. At that time you were Vice-President of the Nobel Prize Committee and many celebrities wanted to meet you.

You were also the former General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, the former Secretary of the Norwegian Bible Society, and the former General Secretary of Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical Affairs.

But you were not yet the Bishop of Oslo, and you were also not yet the co-founder and first International President of the Oslo Coalition of Freedom of Religion.

You had organized the first International Congress on Religious Liberty held in Oslo, but you were not yet the Moderator of the European Council of Religious Leaders. That came later.

At that time 15 years ago, you were already very well known for your commitment to human rights, peace, and religious freedom. We were honored to welcome you to our IRLA Panel of Experts as a champion of religious freedom.

You have played an important role for peace in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, and Kyrgyzstan. When Lincoln Steed and I visited Timor Leste and had a meeting with the country

SECTION FIVE: **SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS**

President, saying we knew you had a very positive effect. Having you as a main advisor for the new Timor Leste Constitution was the guarantee that religious freedom will be included.

Dear Dr Rev Gunnar Stålsett, for your outstanding commitment to religious freedom, I have the great honor of giving you the IRLA and *Liberty* magazine International Award.

b. Official Greetings



(1)

**The Lutheran World Federation Assembly
Stuttgart, Germany
July 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

On behalf of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists and its nearly 30 million worldwide Adventist family, living in 205 countries around the world, I am very pleased and honored to bring you their brotherhood greetings in Jesus.

Adventists have always seen themselves as part of the movement of the reformation of the 16th century, and Martin Luther has a very special place in their vision of history and in their theology.

The few past years we have had an important dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation. It has encouraged us to have dialogues with other churches and it became a model for all other dialogues.

This is the third assembly I have attended and I would like to congratulate you for your courage in revisiting your history about your relations with the Mennonites. As Adventists we also have our roots in the Anabaptist movement. We appreciate very much your honesty and your sincerity.

On behalf of my Church I want to thank you very much for the Rev Dr Ishmael Noko. He has been a great Ambassador of the Lutheran family around the world and before governments and international institutions. He was the friend of all, the mediator, a voice of wisdom, faith and peace. May God bless him and his successor the Rev Dr Martin Junge.

Thank you very much and may God bless your assembly.



(2)

**The 20th Congress of the Baptist World Alliance
Honolulu, Hawaii
July 29, 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

On behalf of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists—a family of nearly 30 million people living in 205 countries around the world—I am very pleased and honored to bring you their brotherhood greetings in Jesus. We believe Adventists and Baptists have many things in common. William Miller, one of our Founding Fathers, was a Baptist pastor.

From the Seventh-Day Baptists we received the Saturday Sabbath. We share with you the same love for the Bible as God's Word, the same faith about Jesus' mission to preach the Gospel to every nation and people, and we share a common hope in His soon return. We practice the same baptism by immersion.

We received from you our love for religious liberty and in many parts of the world we are united with you to defend and to promote it. Where you are persecuted, we are persecuted too. We are both concerned about human rights where freedoms have been denied.

On behalf of my Church I want to thank your General Secretary, the Rev Dr Neville Callam who is a great Ambassador for the Baptist family around the world and who has become a friend. I would also like to thank your former General Secretary, Dr Denton Lotz, for his friendship and his outstanding Christian testimony and his commitment to religious freedom.

Thank you very much for inviting me and may God bless the 20th congress of the Baptist World Alliance.

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(3)

**World Communion
of Reformed Churches Assembly
Grand Rapids, Michigan
June 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

On behalf of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists and its nearly 30 million worldwide Adventist family, living in 205 countries around the world, I am very pleased and honored to bring you their brotherhood greetings in Jesus.

Adventists have always seen themselves as part of the historical movement of the reformation of the 16th century. They have a great admiration for Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In recent years we have had dialogues with the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches and the Presbyterian Church USA. Our pastors around the world have cultivated good relations with your pastors and many of our scholars have studied in your seminaries.

I want to congratulate you for the successful merging of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. As a member of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions, I had the privilege of seeing the beginning of the discussions between the Rev Dr Setri Nyomi and Rev Richard van Hutten. The world needs a strong and united Protestant family.

Thank you very much and may God bless your assembly.

c. Official Speeches



(1)

**Festival of Religious Freedom in Seoul, Korea
November 1, 2013**

People sometimes ask me why we, as a church, defend and promote religious freedom for all people everywhere. A question like this is generally asked by people who live in a free country and enjoy religious freedom. These people represent about 25 percent of the world population. They tend to forget that the other 75 percent live in countries where they do not have religious freedom. They tend to forget about the 200 million Christians who are discriminated against or persecuted.

Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today. But people with other religious beliefs are also persecuted.

What happens when we do not have religious freedom? Maybe I should ask the question differently. What is the difference between living in South Korea and North Korea? In which of those countries would you live if you had the choice? Why? Imagine what your life would be like without religious freedom.

Without religious freedom there would be:

- No schools, no universities, no hospitals, no nursing homes where your faith is shared.
- No church, no Bible, no Sabbath School, no freedom to criticize the religion of the state.
- No right to preach, to give Bible studies, to change your religion.

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I can tell you that in this context our lives would be miserable. When we woke up each morning we would be afraid to speak about our faith, to answer questions, or to teach our faith to our children.

Would you want to live in such a country? No! We have the privilege of living in a country where religious freedom is a reality, where we can build churches, preach the gospel, and talk about Jesus without being arrested.

A few weeks ago we received news about one of our brothers in Pakistan, a young man named Sijjad Masih. He was arrested in 2011 and accused of blasphemy. When we heard about him we worked closely with our church in Pakistan to help him. Why was he arrested? In his country Christians are a very small minority and they are often discriminated against and often attacked by religious extremists.

There are two laws which create real problems for Christians: the law against Apostasy and the law on Blasphemy. The first law sentences to death those who change their religion and become Christians. The second law carries the sentence of life in prison, or death—for those who say something against the traditional religion and its prophet.

You may have read the story of Asia Bibi. She was accused by women working with her on a farm of having said something they interpreted as blasphemy. The crowd wanted to kill her. The police arrested her and she was sentenced to death.

What happened to Asia Bibi? Two men defended her: the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, a Muslim; and former Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in the Pakistani government. What happened to these two men? Both of these men were assassinated. Asia Bibi is still in prison.

What about our brother Sajjad Masih? He was sentenced to life in prison and his sentence is being appealed. We shared news of his situation with the world church and we worked with other Christians, but it is likely he will stay in prison for several years.

In some countries if you say to your neighbor, "Jesus is the only Savior and the Bible is the only Word of God," you could be accused of blasphemy and arrested, or you could be killed by fanatics.

SECTION FIVE: **SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS**

Would you want to live in such a country? No, we love religious freedom and we don't want to live in such country. We want to keep our freedom. Why?

Because religious freedom is part of human dignity. It is a gift from God. God gave us the freedom to choose when He created us. Religious freedom is also a basic human right.

Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: "Everyone has the right of freedom of conscience, beliefs and religion ..." Religious freedom is also a gift from Jesus. Jesus lived it during His ministry. He never forced anyone to follow Him. He never forced anyone to stay with Him against their own will. He gave His life for our salvation. He loves us so much that He respects our freedom to love Him or to turn away from Him. Jesus is my model.

Religious freedom is a great and very precious gift. What do we do when we receive a gift? We say: Thank you! Thank you to God.

In 2006 we developed a simple concept. In every country where we have the freedom to worship, to preach, to evangelize, we should show to all the country and its government that we are grateful. We want to gather as many people we can to say Thank You to God and to that country for religious freedom. We want to send a strong message to the world. This message is: We love religious freedom and we want to keep it.

This was the beginning of a great adventure called the Festival of Religious Freedom. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2006, 12,000 people filled an indoor stadium. An additional 20,000 people were outside the stadium, wanting to get it. Since then we have had meetings on five continents with attendance from 4,000 to 40,000.

The First World Festival of Religious Freedom was held in Lima, Peru, and our church filled a stadium of 45,000 seats. Two government ministers were with us as well as religious leaders and ambassadors. They made history as it was the largest event for religious freedom ever held in the world.

A few months ago we held the Second World Festival of Religious Freedom in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It was preceded by a series of events including forums, a Liberty

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Concert, and meetings with the governor, the mayor, and the president of the State Assembly. Twenty religious leaders and around 30,000 people attended the gathering in the largest square in Sao Paulo. They made history as the largest event for religious freedom ever held in Brazil.

They also made history when the City Council of Sao Paulo voted that May 25 would be the annual Day of Religious Freedom. Sao Paulo is the first large city in the world to have an annual Day of Religious Freedom.

A total of more than 200,000 people have attended the Festival of Religious Freedom. It is a world record. It has never before been done in history.

Next year more than 15 festivals are already planned for large cities such as London, Manila, Lusaka, Kigali, Madrid, Port Moresby, and others.

I am sure that one day you will be able to say, "Thank You to God and Thank You to [the name of your country] for religious freedom. It is good for people. It is good for the country. We love religious freedom, we want to keep it."



(2)

**Seventh IRLA World Congress
Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
May 23, 2012
IRLA Secretary General Opening Speech**

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

History

It is a great privilege for me to give the Secretary General report for the fourth time at an IRLA World Congress. The first time was in Rio de Janeiro in 1997. Several of you were in Rio. Then we met in Manila in 2002, and in Cape Town in 2007. Let me ask you a question: How many of you attended:

- The Sixth IRLA World Congress in Cape Town in 2007?
- The fifth one in Manila in 2002?
- The fourth one in Rio de Janeiro in 1997?
- The third one in London in 1989?
- The second one in Rome in 1984?
- The first one in Amsterdam in 1977?

I think Dr Bert Beach attended all of them.

Welcome!

Rio de Janeiro was my first IRLA World Congress as Secretary General. I had the great pleasure to have among the guest speakers Prof Alberto de la Hera, Prof Rosa Maria Martinez de Codes, Ambassador Robert Seiple and Prof Cole Durham. All were with us in Manila and in Cape Town.

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I am very proud to welcome to this Seventh IRLA World Congress about 50 experts, speakers and government officials. We also welcome representatives from several NGOs and all those who have come because of your personal interest and involvement in religious freedom. All together you represent almost 80 different nationalities.

Of course, I am very pleased to be in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, in such a beautiful environment. When you will get up in the morning and look at the beach and at the swimming pools, when you will finish your lunch and look at the beach and at the swimming pools, a question will strike you: "What am I doing here, in this great resort?"

We are here to affirm and to further the cause of religious freedom. This Seventh IRLA World Congress will make history. With more than 800 participants, it is the largest such world congress ever organized.

Thanks

I would like to thank all those who have worked on this event: Our Congress Manager, Daisy Orion; the team I work closely with: Dr Ganoune Diop, Attorney Dwayne Leslie, Bettina Krause, Carol Rasmussen, Gail Banner; the IRLA Inter-America team led by Pastor Roberto Herrera and President Israel Leito, and the Dominican Republic Team led by Attorney Miguel Nunes and Pastor Cesario Acevedo. I want also to mention our Vice President Dr Delbert Baker who has supported us from the beginning and Dr William Johnsson, who has agreed to join us here. I thank all those who have helped us in many ways and will be with us during this few days.

Remembrance

As we begin this great event, I want us to remember two good friends. Both attended our previous congresses and they would have wanted to be with us today: Pastor Karel Nowak, Secretary General of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty, and Professor Abdelfatha Amor, former United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Karel Nowak died August 19, 2011, as he was going to Sydney to attend our Meeting of Experts. Professor Amor passed away January 2, 2012.

Victims of Violation of Religious Freedom

We cannot open this Seventh World Congress on Religious Freedom, without remembering those who are victims of the violation of religious freedom. Millions of believers and non-believers are discriminated against, deprived of their rights, insulted, arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death, simply because of their religion or belief.

I would like to mention some names:

- Asia Bibi, arrested in 2009 and sentenced to death for Blasphemy
- Governor Salman Taseer and Minister Salman Batthi, assassinated in January 2011 and in May 2011 because they opposed the Blasphemy Law.
- Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, arrested in 2009, for apostasy and sentenced to death.
- The victims of religious fanaticism in the state of Orissa, in India, during the riots in 2008.
- In northern Nigeria, in Northern Ethiopia; in Egypt; in Somalia ... The list is long and would not be complete without mentioning North Korea.

Religious Freedom and Human Rights

Religious freedom is a core and basic human right. It is inseparable from other freedoms.

Religious freedom is not a subcategory of human rights, a kind a luxury given by obligation to a few strange people. If human rights are not respected, religious freedom is not safe, not secure. Human rights and religious freedom go together.

The IRLA Contribution

What has the IRLA been doing to promote and defend religious freedom? I will give you a few examples which illustrate our activities:

- The IRLA Meeting of Experts. Every year since 1999, we have invited some of the best experts on religious freedom to this meeting. The purpose is to study and share on some important issues. The theme of the first meeting was *Religious*

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Freedom and Proselytism. It became, year after year, one of the best think tanks about religious freedom. The three first meetings were hosted in Spain by Professor Alberto de la Hera and Professor Rosa Maria Martinez de Codes. The 13th Meeting of Experts was hosted by the University of Sydney and the School of Law. This year this prestigious group will have their meeting at the University of Toronto. Several important statements have been produced. They include: *Religious Symbols in Public Square, Religious Freedom and Proselytism, Religious Freedom and Security.*

- Religious Liberty Award Dinner. Every year the IRLA works with the North American Religious Liberty Association and *Liberty* magazine, to hold the Religious Liberty Award Dinner. Among the speakers have been Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator John Kerry, and Senator John McCain. This year, the 10th dinner will be held at the Canadian Embassy and our guest speaker will be the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- Congresses and Symposiums. The IRLA has been involved in a number of international training seminars, congresses, forums, and symposiums on the six continents. Sites for these meetings include: Angola, Russia, South Korea, Mongolia, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, Colombia (with the President of the Republic of Colombia, Dr Uribe, present), Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, Jordan, Romania, Brazil and others. We had some historical events: the first Caribbean Congress held in Trinidad; the first Inter-American Congress in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; the first symposium in the Middle East, hosted by the University of Amman, Jordan and organized by the Arab Bridge Center for Development and Human Rights. Its President, Professor Amjad Shammout, will be one of our speakers this week.
- Festivals of Religious Freedom. The IRLA and the Adventist Church work together to organize Festivals of Religious Freedom. The Festival is a mass meeting whose purpose is to publicly support religious freedom. Festivals were organized in many countries. In 2008 the largest gathering for religious freedom was held in Luanda, Angola with 45,000 people. Then in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 2008, 13,000 people filled the stadium. In 2009 the First World Festival of Religious Freedom was held in Lima, Peru in the National Stadium. About 45,000 people attended. The program was fabulous. Only a few months later, 15,000 people

filled the indoor stadium in Bogota, Colombia. It was the largest festival ever held in Inter-America. Never before were stadiums filled with so many people who celebrated religious freedom and said: "We love religious freedom, we want to keep it!" In 2013 several mass festivals are planned. One will be in Chiapas, Mexico. The Second World Festival will be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Some Remarks about Our Congress

An IRLA Congress is about religious freedom, but it is not a religious event. We come together to defend a principle: Religious Freedom for all people everywhere. We are together to promote and defend Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other major international documents and treaties. We represent different faiths, different religions, and different churches. We have among us believers and non-believers. But all together we share the same attachment for religious freedom for all. We are different, but respectful of each other.

The theme "Secularism and Religious Freedom—Conflict or Partnership," is very stimulating. I am sure that our experts will explain the difference between secularism and secular. Some may make the distinction between post-modernism and secularism, between ideological and pragmatic secularism.

We decided also to have a daily theme. Today it is "The Secular State and Religious Freedom." Tomorrow it will be "Promoting Religious Freedom in Secularity—Means and Methods." And on Thursday, the last day, "Secularism and Religious Freedom: How to Live Together."

The Program

The program is composed of 10 plenary sessions, two breakout sessions, and four meetings in the evening on special topics. During the plenary session you will listen to the best experts on religious freedom; religious leaders from different faiths; officials and member of governments.

You will have to learn how to use your radio to get the translations. For the Breakout Sessions most of you won't need a translation. We will have six groups, two in Spanish, two in English, one in French and one in Portuguese. There will be a panel with four panelists, followed by a general discussion. The Breakout Sessions will give you more opportunity to dialogue with our experts. Don't miss these sessions.

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As you are serious about the subject and so anxious to learn, we know you will not miss a single session. Some of you will even want more. For you, we have added Special Topic meetings held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. This will give you a great opportunity to know what is going on around the world and the current challenges to religious freedom. These meetings will be a panel discussion followed opportunity for questions. Don't miss them.

Remarks on the Theme

When we talk about secularism, memories from my childhood come to mind. I am sure many of you have shared a similar experience. When I was a child the church was the center of our life, followed by the public school. In the community, the priest and the teacher were two opposite poles of attraction. It was the beginning of what we call *secularization* today.

In fewer than 10 years, I saw a great change occur. Today only a minority of people regularly go to church and only a small number attend vespers. The village has become secularized. Does this mean religion has disappeared?

No. But the influence of the religious institution is not as dominant as it was years ago. People feel free to go to church, or not. They know they will not face public disapprobation if they don't. In terms of power, secularism challenges religion but on the individual level, it gives people more freedom to decide about their religion and belief.

Is Secularism Still on the Rise?

As I travel around the world I am sometimes asked if secularism is still on the rise or if it has begun to decline. When I see a thousand Muslims praying in some streets in Paris, blocking all the traffic because the Mosque has become too small, I have questions. It was not this way when I lived in Paris. When I see, thousands of Evangelicals in France asking for the authorization to build a church, I have questions. When I see, in Russia and in several former Communist countries, (with the exception of the Eastern part of Germany and the Czech Republic) the building of new churches, the arrival of new convents, and the new power of the national church, I have questions.

Apparently the extreme ideological secularism during decades has not convinced the new authorities. What about the Middle East, Indonesia, Malaysia—countries which previously had many signs of secularization during the past 30 years?

Religion is coming back to the public square. The last time I went to Djakarta, Indonesia, I saw many more young girls wearing headscarves in the capital city than I saw 10 years before. Signs of religious intolerance and violence towards the minorities show that society is changing.

Governments and politicians try to build new bridges with religious organizations. The alliance between Church and State is seen as a positive and pragmatic approach to build a strong and united society. Even in very secularized parts of the world such as Europe, governments seem to open doors to a positive cooperation between religious organizations and the State.

Is this just an impression? Is secularism on the decline?

This is not the main question we will ask, but we should not ignore it.

The Main Questions

Of course, the main questions are:

- What is secularism?
- Is secularism good for religious freedom?
- Is there, in the world today, an acceptable alternative to secularism?

I see this congress as a great opportunity to learn more about religious freedom; to meet experts, officials, religious leaders, and people from more than 70 countries; and, above all, by your very presence showing that you stand for religious freedom for everyone everywhere. We all are here to show that we are not resigned to the idea of people being discriminated against, tortured, or executed just because of their religion or belief. We are here because we believe in human dignity, and religious freedom is part of our human dignity. I am here also because I believe that religious freedom is God's gift of love for all people, everywhere.

2. Opinions and Recognitions

a. The Swiss said “No” to the Minarets: Is It a Religious Freedom Issue?

(November 29, 2009)

Like many Swiss living outside of Switzerland, I was surprised by the result of the recent referendum. Fifty-seven percent of the voters supported the proposal of banning minarets. There are four minarets in Switzerland and the people decided that four is enough. Is this a religious freedom issue?

My first reaction in reading the results was to see how my Canton of origin, Geneva, voted. The Muslim population in Geneva is significant and they have a mosque and a minaret. They voted in favor of the right to build minarets. Three other French-speaking Cantons did the same and so did the city of Basel. If the Muslims had been seen as dangerous, the population of Geneva would have, with a large majority, voted like the rest of the country.

Did the Swiss vote against Islam as a religion and against the Muslims? The majority of those who have been interviewed, including those who supported the initiative, would say No! They may be offended by such an accusation. Why is that? They will reply that they have nothing against building houses of prayers and mosques. That means they are in favor of religious freedom. Some may add that in the last 10 years more mosques were built in Switzerland than churches were built in most of the Muslim and Islamic countries around the world. They will also explain that the minaret is a cultural symbol of another culture, and also represents the most repressive aspect of the Islamic world. Some may ask for reciprocity: “You will have your minarets in Switzerland when you authorize Christians and other faith believers to build their churches and temples in your countries.”

I am not sure that the 400,000 Muslims living in Switzerland have such an influence.

I don't think the Swiss people voted against Islam as a religion, but the supporters of the ban did their best to frighten people. The poster showing minarets appearing like missiles covering a Swiss flag is a good example. The debate became very

emotional. It was no longer about authorizing a religion to build a house of worship with its symbol, the minaret. Instead it became about opening the door to a wave of 1.3 billion Muslims which, in a few years, will change the country for the worst, Switzerland becoming another Iran. The vote became a way to show to the world—its international organizations and its politicians—that in Switzerland the people don't want to change their tradition and their culture.

In Switzerland there is a political system called Direct Democracy. It means that the people are the sovereign, not the politicians. There is no king but the people. Imagine such a vote in other European countries. Imagine such a referendum about other religious symbols and buildings in other parts of the world. How would people react? I travel around the world and I see religious minorities often presented as if they were a foreign religion. They are accused of threatening national and traditional culture. People tend to be conservative and react against something which is not familiar and which could change their landscape, their values and habits.

Those who defend religious freedom must face such a reaction. The "other's" religion is associated with foreign powers. It is presented by nationalists as a means of destabilization and annihilation of the national culture. One of the big debates in Europe, before Islam took the front pages of the newspapers, was about cults and sects. Europe is still not familiar with religious pluralism. Our history is full of religious persecution and intolerance. In Switzerland, when I was a kid, we used to divide the country between Protestants, Cantons, and Catholic Cantons. After it became apparent we could not eliminate the other side, the motto could have been: "We can live together but don't try to change my canton." Here we are Catholic or here we are Protestant. But today it is no longer Protestants against Catholics. Rather, Islam is seen by some as a new religion, able to change the traditional landscape.

But there is an aspect the media did not notice: secularization. I live in the United States where I see more and more mosques and minarets. Nobody, except a few extremists, seems to be frightened by them. Why? Because in the US there are many other religious buildings too. Religious diversity and pluralism are a fact. In Europe the society is very secularized. That means that religion is no longer the center of our lives. You can believe what you want, but don't try to convert me. For some a good religion is a dying religion. When Evangelicals or Pentecostals became too active they also faced hostility from the public. Don't bother me with your religion!

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A minaret is visible and expresses a living religion. For some, it is far too visible with the potential to become even more visible. A majority of Swiss showed that they are not ready for this move.

May it change one day? May the Muslims in Switzerland be accepted as full citizens? My answer is Yes. In Europe, Islam will become like it is in Switzerland, a religion like others, but a work has to be done. The Muslims should keep on working with other religions and their leaders for the well-being of all citizens. They should work for religious freedom around the world, for more justice and less poverty.

It takes time to change centuries of tradition, but Switzerland has a robust democracy and freedom of expression. Banning the minarets as is done in some other parts of the world, banning or persecuting those who have another faith, is certainly not a good example of religious freedom. I am sure that most of those who supported the ban are not against religious freedom. But their vote was certainly not in favor of it either.

I hope this result shows that a work needs to be done, not only in Switzerland but in many places around the world. Believers should meet each other. They should build bridges and work together for their common interests. Religious violence should be strongly disapproved and religious dialogue and religious freedom encouraged and defended. We all live on the same planet and we must live together and help each other. This will be done if we accept the right and the freedom of every individual to be different than others. It will be a good policy for the coming years in Switzerland and in the world.

b. Recognition of Denton Lotz, a Great Voice for Religious Freedom

It is with certain nostalgia that I write these few words of thanks for Dr Denton Lotz. Since 2002 Denton has been the IRLA President. It has been a great honor and pleasure to work with him for the past ten years. Denton is a vibrant defender and promoter of religious freedom. As Secretary General of the Baptist World Alliance for many years, he met religious leaders, heads of state, government officials, monarchs and princes. In all his interventions he had strong words of support for religious freedom.

Denton and the IRLA share the same heritage of religious freedom: The Anabaptist/ Baptist heritage. It includes separation of church and state in a context which makes cooperation possible—not in a context of hostility. This is why most of the IRLA members see Denton as one of them.

Denton was also a great Christian leader. As Secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions (CS/CWC), I can give testimony. Denton represented very well the Baptist World Alliance family in that group. He was also the voice of religious freedom.

I will never forget the large and historical convocation when the President of Romania hosted many of the religious leaders of the world. I was invited to attend. Denton was among the top ten who were invited to speak to the crowd and to all the officials: Presidents, Patriarchs, Cardinals, Ministers of governments, and Ambassadors. No one else said a word in favor of religious freedom, but Denton did. In this great meeting, religious freedom was not ignored because Denton was there.

Every time Denton was invited to speak we knew that he would have a word for religious freedom, a word for those who are persecuted for their faith.

Dear Denton, it was an honor to have you as IRLA President. It was a pleasure to work with you. Thank you for being, year after year, a great Ambassador for religious freedom for all people everywhere.

3. Religious Liberty Sermons



Sermon 1: Let My People Go!

Exodus: 3:7-11; 5:1, 2

Let My people go!

It is not a wish. It is not a request. It is an order.

“Let My people go!”

Through the ages these four words have become a powerful motto used by all messengers of freedom. Through human history it became the message of the multitudes of victims of discrimination, oppression, and slavery. Every time a people or a group of believers, or a gender, or a race was persecuted, humiliated, someone stood up and lifted the banner of freedom with these words:

“Let My people go!”

It is the powerful warning from God to all oppressors, and a beautiful message of hope for all who are persecuted. It is also a strong signal for all men and women of courage to stand up for the freedom to believe. In fact, the order of God should be read in its entirety.

“Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert’” (Ex 5:1).

Or as it is written in Exodus 4:23, ***“Let my son go, so he may worship me.”***

It is a religious freedom issue and of course it is a human rights issue. Both have always been closely related. Religious freedom is a basic, fundamental human right. Every time the freedom to practice a religion is not respected, human rights are attacked.

It was a few minutes after midnight.

A new year has just begun. The Coptic Christians of Alexandria are leaving the Cathedral after attending the mass as they have done generation after generation since the first years of Christianity. They are not foreigners in Egypt. It is their country and the country of their ancestors. Because they have remained Christians they have become second-class citizens in their own country. But for centuries they lived in peace and were protected by the authorities. Today they are still the largest Christian community in the Middle East.

As they leave the church joyful, wishing each other a Happy New Year, a bomb goes off killing 21 and injuring a hundred. This comes after the Christmas day massacre in a Catholic church in Iraq. Why? *Why?*

Because of their religion.

For a minority of religious fanatics in some parts of the world, only one religion should be accepted.

Why do we defend religious freedom?

- Religious freedom is a fundamental freedom, a basic human right.
- Religious freedom is a gift of God who gave to all human beings the freedom to choose.
- Religious freedom is a sign of the Kingdom of God.
- As Seventh-day Adventists, religious freedom is our prophetic mission.

What is the alternative to religious freedom?

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Imagine your life without religious freedom. *Imagine you live in a country where there is no religious freedom. None at all. There are about 10 countries like that.*

Would it make a difference for you today? Yes, it would. *Most of you would be in prison or in camps.*

As we came to church this morning some questions may have gone through our minds. Questions such as, who is preaching today? Will we be able to understand his English? Will he speak too long?

Is my tie crooked?

What was that noise I heard under the hood of the car as I drove to church? But for hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters the questions are:

Will the police raid the church this morning?

Will the fanatics kill me?

Will I find a new job?

Will my children be expelled from their school?

Will the police take them away from us?

Will I survive?

When people ask me, "Why are you defending religious freedom," I answer with another question: "How—as a disciple of Christ, as a human being who believes in human dignity—how can you live while paying no attention to those who are persecuted?"

According to some experts, more than 200 million Christians are being discriminated against and persecuted in the world today. In 11 countries, according to the law, conversion away from the country's religion is a crime punishable by death. In more than 30 other countries such a conversion very often means death too. Religious

fanatics can kill you. So can the members of your family to save their honor. There are countries where saying that Jesus is the only Savior is considered blasphemy and you can be *sentenced to death* for that.

Of course, not only Christians are persecuted. Members of religious minorities, dissidents, and non-believers are also persecuted. We also defend them every time it is possible. We defend the right of every human being to choose his or her religion and to share and teach it. We also defend the right to have no religion at all. Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have the right to build their mosques and temples in every country around the world, and Christians should have the same right.

The message is still the same: **Let My people go!**

The author is the same: **GOD!**

The messenger, too, is still the same: **The people of God.**

I. God heard and was concerned

Exodus 3:7 – ***“The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard the crying out of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”***

The descendants of Israel who settled in Egypt to escape the great famine during the time Joseph was prime minister there, had multiplied. They had become so numerous that the Egyptians felt their security threatened. We can easily understand them.

Pharaoh could have encouraged a policy of integration: “In spite of your religion, you are all citizens of Egypt and servants of Pharaoh.”

He could have been more persuasive, saying to the Hebrews, “You must become Egyptian or go back home. Make your choice!”

Instead he chose to make the successful people of God slaves. It was a great way to keep good workers without paying them. A good way to make sure they would have no future in Egypt or anywhere else. There are words for that: genocide; final

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solution. But the powerful Pharaoh did not know that the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe has always been on the side of His persecuted people. He is never on the side of the persecutors.

“The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed”

(Ps 103:6, NKJV).

“He delivers the poor in their affliction, and opens their ears in oppression”

(Job 36:15, NKJV).

“The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed” (Ps 9:9, NKJV).

Has God forgotten those who are persecuted?

“The Lord said: I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying ...” (Ex 3:7).

God is love, justice, and compassion. He hears the cries of the victims of intolerance. It is important to remember that because when we are persecuted we may be tempted to think that God has forgotten us or to feel alone, abandoned.

In August 2008, 11 Adventists were killed by religious fanatics in the State of Orissa in India. Their church and their houses were burned.

Last year my colleague visited their village in India. He saw the remains of the church and the destroyed homes. Our members there had no money to rebuild them. The widows had no money with which to send their children to school.

They have been forgotten!

People who are persecuted feel alone.

In 2008 in the southern part of Mexico we organized five festivals of religious freedom in five cities. In the town of Oaxaca I met the representatives of 24 Native Indian families. In 2004, they had to flee their village to save their lives. They lost

everything they had. They could not go back unless they agreed to give up their Adventist faith. They did not!

But they have no jobs and you can imagine how their lives are now. Have we prayed for them? Have they been forgotten?

How many times in one year have we prayed for those who are persecuted?

They have been forgotten.

Churches were destroyed in the Northern part of Nigeria and believers were killed. Have we prayed for them?

Have they been forgotten?

I don't want to blame anyone, but we can understand why most of the time those who are persecuted feel alone. If one of them is reading these words I want to say, **No, you are not alone.** God is with you. God is on your side. Trust Him and in the middle of the darkness you will see His glory.

I want also to say, **You are not abandoned** by your brothers and sisters. They just don't know what happened to you. But you have more than 18 million brothers and sisters around the world and when they know what happened, things will change.

God Hears, God Sees, God Acts

God hears the cry of Asia Bibi a Christian mother, sentenced to death because of the Blasphemy law in Pakistan.

God hears the cries of a woman who was arrested, tortured, and condemned to death under the Apostasy law because she met Jesus and publicly confessed her new faith.

God hears the pain of the family of the Muslim governor who was opposed to the Blasphemy law in Pakistan. He was assassinated.

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All of them may have felt they were forgotten and that no one cares about them and no one helps, but God cares. God hears, God sees, God acts.

All these heroes and martyrs will have a special place in heaven.

The enemy suggests to us that God does not see, does not hear, and does not do anything! Why did God not deliver them? Why? Why? Why?

God heard the Hebrews crying. God saw their suffering. God had a plan to deliver them.

What did He do?

He called Moses!

Today God is hearing the cries of those who are persecuted. What does He do? He calls us!

II. God Calls Moses: Moses, Moses!

"When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am'" (Ex 3:4).

God said: "I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex 3:7, 8).

At this point Moses was probably very impressed. "At last God is planning to do something. It is great news. Thank you, O Lord, for sharing it with me."

But God works through His creatures. He needed a man to deliver His people from slavery and God found him. Moses!

"I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex 3:10).

But when Moses heard God's call, he said: "Who am I?" This could be translated as: "O Lord this is a very good idea, but there is an error on the person. I am not the man!"

SECTION FIVE: **SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS**

Forty years ago I was the man. I killed an Egyptian and I was ready to lead my people, but nobody was interested and I had to run away to save my life. Just to let you know, Lord, I am 80 years old. I should have been retired for 14 years. During the past 40 years I've led flocks of sheep. I am very good at doing that, but nothing else."

And God could have replied, "OK Moses! I understand. I'm sorry. I thought you were younger.

But do you have some names you could suggest?"

But instead God said, "I will be with you... I AM WHO I AM ... I am the Lord, the God of your fathers... I am the one who can put fire to an old, dry bush like you, and make it burn forever. I have a plan. You will be my Ambassador!"

But Moses answered, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (Ex 4:13).

Millions of people are persecuted and discriminated against for their faith. God hears their cries. Who will help them?

Ellen G White saw it as a prophetic mission of the church. She wrote:

"The banner of the truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God's witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has in this last conflict been committed to our hands."¹

The banner has been given to us. Where did we put it? Where is the banner? Is it in the basement? Is it in the attic? Under the carpet? Who should lift up the banner? The answer is, You and me!

You and me!

Some of you may say, "Not me!" And you have good excuses.

I am too old.

1 Ellen G White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 68–69.

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But that may not be a good reason. As we know, Adventists are still young at 80 years of age.

I have no time.

Really?

I am not qualified enough.

Don't you know that God qualifies those He calls?

Looking at himself, Moses saw all his weaknesses. He thought God had made the wrong choice.

But God said to Moses: "I will be with you. . . I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. . . I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed . . . I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 3).

Moses saw himself as an old, dry bush which could burn up in a few seconds. But in the hand of God he could burn 40 years more, and forever.

God calls us. We are powerless, but He is powerful and with Him we can change the world. We can do it! We can help those who are persecuted. We can promote religious freedom as it has never been done in the past. We can pass new laws.

Yes! We can, because God calls us to do it.

I know that some of our members believe we should not waste our time in opposing persecution. Why do they think that?

According to them, we must be persecuted so Jesus will come. No persecution, no Jesus' return. It may seem a strange way of thinking but I can assure you it is well established in our culture.

Some of our members believe that as a Church we should not do anything to prevent persecution. Instead we should do our best to activate it. We should be

SECTION FIVE: **SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS**

more provocative, make more attacks against other religions. We should make sure that the public looks at us as an isolated, irresponsible, and dangerous cult.

It is true that there is a tension between the end of time and the defense of religious freedom. In fact, both religious persecution and religious liberty are signs of the end time. Persecution is the sign of the devil and religious freedom is the sign of the Kingdom of God.

We need religious freedom to be able to practice the values of the Kingdom of God. We need religious freedom so we can build hospitals and schools, churches and youth centers. We need religious freedom so we can help the poor. We need religious freedom to enable us to preach the good news of salvation in Christ.

In which countries is the Adventist church growing the most?

Where we have religious freedom! Central and Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Philippines.

Where do we have the largest number of institutions? Is it in North Korea? No! Why? We don't have religious freedom there.

So many signs warn us that the storm is coming. Laws are passed which will create problems for our institutions. In today's world the trends are no longer in favor of the separation of church and state. We see more and more alliances and the control of the state is growing. Yes, be ready. The storm is coming.

But for now enjoy your freedom and help those who are persecuted. Be a sign of the Kingdom of God right here.

Yes, God calls us and we can do something. We must do something. We can make history.

Finally, Moses accepted God's call. He was 80 years old and his great adventure with God had just begun.

Imagine him declining God's call!

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Moses would have remained a “has been.” He would have been “the prince who became a shepherd.” He would have been unknown to us. But because he accepted God’s call to bring freedom to His persecuted people, Moses became one of the greatest leaders in history. The greatest after Jesus.

Let My people go!

The Mission

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and brought God’s order to him: “Let My people go!” It is not a wish. It is not a request. It is an order from God!

Imagine that we take the call of God seriously. We represent a population of 30 million in 200 countries around the world. We are already seen as a Church more involved in religious freedom than most of the others. But we could do more. We must do more.

In a few years, through the IRLA, we have organized one of the top annual think tanks about religious freedom in the world: the IRLA Meeting of Experts. In 2010 our twelfth meeting was held in Amman, Jordan. It was our first meeting in the Middle East in partnership with a Jordanian Association. Then, in 2011, the meeting was held at the University of Toronto. This group published some excellent statements which were very much appreciated at the United Nations.

Every year we sponsor international symposiums, forums, and congresses where heads of state, government officials, and religious leaders participate.

Every five years we organize the IRLA World Congress. It has become one of the major world events for religious freedom. In 2012 it was held in the Dominican Republic and we had 900 participants. It became the largest IRLA congress ever organized.

But we can do more. We must create a grass roots movement wherever possible.

The Festivals of Religious Freedom are a great gathering and a place to thank God and the country for religious freedom. The largest were held in stadiums around the world. In Santo Domingo 13,000 people attended, 15,000 in Bogota, and 40,000 in Luanda, Angola.

In 2009 we had the First World Festival of Religious Freedom in Lima, Peru. Forty-five thousand people attended, including ministers of government, ambassadors, religious leaders, and the president of the Supreme Court. A few days before the festival, three successful symposiums were held, and a march with 10,000 people.

On December 2, 2010, the first law for religious freedom was voted in Peru. Now the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other churches are recognized by law as churches and not as associations. It opens a new era for religious minorities in Peru. The chains of discrimination began to be broken.

Let My people go!

Our church there made history by having the largest gathering for religious freedom ever held, and in being actors in the passing of an historical law.

Let My people go!

If we take God's promise seriously we will make history, not just in Peru, or in Angola or in Brazil, but around the world. God wants us to be participants in the history of the world, not just experts or commentators.

This strong message of freedom sent from countries where freedom is a fact will be heard in countries where millions of believers are persecuted. The message will say: Let My people go!

Will God find a Moses here?

Eighty years old is not compulsory. You can be younger or older. God will put some fire on dry bushes.

What could you do?

- Pray for those who are persecuted.
- Once a year, organize a Religious Freedom Sabbath.
- Join your Association for Religious Freedom.

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- Support the IRLA, *Liberty* magazine, and in one way or another support those who are directly involved in defending and promoting religious freedom for all people everywhere.
- Organize a local and regional association to promote and defend religious freedom.
- Thank God publicly and thank your country which protects religious freedom.

Why do we defend religious freedom?

- It is basic human right.
- It is a prophetic mission.
- It is a sign of the Kingdom of God.
- It is the last battle which is coming.
- Religious freedom comes from God.
- Religious persecution comes from the devil.

God loves us and He gave us the freedom to follow Him or not. He gave us the freedom to have a religion, to change a religion, or to have no religion.

God hears the persecuted, He sees their sufferings, and He calls us to help them. In this time of history, He calls us to send to the world this powerful message of hope and judgment: Let My people go!



Sermon 2: We Could Hear the Whistle

“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve: ‘Do you also want to go away?’” (John 6:66, 67, NKJV).

Introduction

A million people would give everything they have to have what you have. Why? Not because of who you are and not because by the world’s standard you are well off. They would give all they have to have the freedom we enjoy in this country. We freely pray together. We sing hymns any time we choose. We openly worship our God.

Just for that, a million people would give everything they have to be here:

- Without trembling about a possible raid of the police, like those in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan
- Without asking themselves if a bomb is going to blow up and kill them or their friends, like in Iraq or Egypt
- Without the risk of being attacked and butchered by a group of religious fanatics, like in Orissa, India or Northern Nigeria

What a privilege you and I have to live:

- In a country where religious freedom is a founding value
- In a country where the law protects us even if we are a minority
- In a country where we are free, according to our conscience, to have a religion, to change a religion, or to have no religion.

“The greatest good of the people is liberty. It is to the state what health is to the individual,” wrote the French philosopher Diderot.

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Why? Why? Why?

I travel around the world to promote and defend religious freedom. I meet government officials, ambassadors, and religious leaders. With our team we organize congresses, symposiums, festival of religious freedom, religious liberty dinners, meetings of experts.

We train our leaders. We explain to our members why we are defending religious freedom for all people everywhere.

It happens that some members express their misunderstanding about our ministry. They believe we should not oppose persecution.

Those who are persecuted don't think like that. They dream to be free to worship God and to share the good news.

Others think that evangelism is enough and we should not do anything else. Their definition of evangelism is very narrow. I agree that evangelism is the priority. But they don't see that evangelism is very dependent on the liberty to worship as you please.

Why do we have so many evangelists and so many ministries dedicated to evangelism in America? That is not the case in North Korea or Iran. What makes the difference? Two words: *religious freedom!*

If you believe evangelism is the mission of the church, you must defend the freedom to evangelize.

Some church members are more practical. They say that according to prophecy we will be persecuted anyway. Why are we fighting against it? We should welcome persecution.

You may believe you need to be persecuted to become a better Christian. That's OK. But don't create problems for your brothers and sisters where they have freedom. Contact me and I will give you a few good addresses of places where you will have a 100 percent chance of being persecuted. Go! You don't need to buy a return ticket. You will stay there longer than you expect.

If you believe it is not appropriate to defend religious freedom: I ask you, What about **health, justice and poverty...** Why do we try to help people have a better and longer life?

It is just a question of months or years. At the end, all will die! Let them die, then. Heaven awaits them, eventually.

What about **poverty**? Jesus said, "You will always have the poor with you!" Welcome to the poor. Please don't change anything in the society. Don't try to have more justice, more generosity! Jesus said, "You will have always the poor with you." So make sure they are here.

Of course, everyone can understand that it makes no sense to say such a thing.

God's value and a gift

- We are promoting and defending religious freedom because it is one of God's values,
- Religious freedom is a sign of the Kingdom of God and we are first citizens of His kingdom.
- It is also a gift from God. He created us with the freedom to choose. And it is a gift for all human beings, not just for Americans or Europeans or Brazilians.

Of course, religious freedom is an essential **human right**. You could read that in Article 18 of the universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many other documents and constitutions. *"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion ..."*

It is the foundation of the system of values of the American Republic. Thomas Jefferson wrote: *"The God, who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time."*

But I think we shall miss the most important point, if we don't go to Jesus. Did Jesus practice religious freedom? Yes, of course. But why?

Jesus is our model

"From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?'" (John 6:67, NKJV).

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Jesus is our model. He has never forced anyone to follow Him, even when He needed the support of all His disciples.

In John 6, Jesus speaks clearly about His mission. Many of His disciples are disappointed. They don't understand His message: *"I am the bread of life ... I have come down from heaven.... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."*

What is He talking about?

People who were following Jesus were interested in *actual bread* but not in the *bread of life*. They wanted to have a better life. They want to get rid of the Romans who oppressed them. They wanted to be free, free to eat every time they were hungry, and free to save some money for their children.

"Jesus, Could you do that? Yes you can, we know you can."

"About the eternal life. It's not an emergency. We'll see you later on and anyway, we have the Temple and the priests. Jesus, we ask you to seize power in Jerusalem and everything will be perfect."

But that was not what Jesus said.

And a large number of His disciples left

Those who left are the ones who believed that they could not change the world without imposing their will, without oppressing or killing those who disagree with them. They were no longer interested in what Jesus said.

In His speech on the *bread of life*, Jesus gave the **purpose** of His mission and He showed the methods He will use to accomplish it.

He will not be a new Alexander the Great, nor a new Caesar. He will not follow their way. He is different. He comes from heaven. He is the son of God and He gives His life for our salvation.

He is the King, but His kingdom is not from the world. It is from heaven.

At this very moment, for many observers, Jesus has just spoiled all His chances of becoming the King of Israel. They think He is a dreamer for sure. Maybe a prophet, but nothing else. They feel He is leading them in the wrong direction and they decided to leave Him.

They left!

How would Alexander the Great or Caesar have reacted? We know what they did in such circumstances. They killed those who wanted to leave them.

Can you imagine, just before the battle of Gettysburg, General Robert Edward Lee or General George Gordon Meade, asking their troops, *“Now I would like to know how many of you want to stay and fight? How many of you want to leave? Those who want to leave, you are free!”*

No way!

If you leave, we will shoot you for desertion.

How did Jesus react?

He looked at the twelve and said: *“Do you also want to go away?”*

Jesus took the risk of losing His small troop.

Why?

Because He believed that every human being has the right to choose. He respected their choice. He knew that, if He forced them to follow Him, He would have betrayed His mission. Of course Jesus could have impressed them with wonders. He could have performed great miracles. He could have called down the celestial army. He could have opened a window into heaven to convince them.

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But He did not. Why? He did not want to impose His will on their free will. *That* is religious freedom. Jesus practiced religious freedom in every step of His ministry. It was part of His living message: Don't impose what you believe on others even if what you believe is the truth.

Religious freedom is the core of God's character of love. It is the core of the Gospel. You may ask: Is it really? If that is the case, why has the Christian message, which is a message of love, peace, and justice, been for centuries corrupted by the use of violence and persecution? Why have God and religion been so often been hijacked by religious fanatics?

What happened?

The New Testament records no order to kill or persecute anyone. Yet Christians were persecuted until AD 313. They suffered so much for centuries. What happened?

Christian leaders ceased to take Jesus as their exclusive model. They forgot the question He asked His disciples: "Do you also want to go away?" They forgot the Kingdom of Christ. They chose to build the Christian Kingdom. They followed Caesar's way: "You have no choice! Follow me or die!"

Remember 313

In 312, the day before the battle of the Melvin Bridge, the young Constantine, proclaimed Emperor by his army, marched to Rome. He was already known, as was his father, as a protector of Christians. The story tells that he saw the sign of the cross in the sun and he decided to paint it on the shield of his soldiers.

He won the battle and, of course, for the Christians, it was a great miracle. After three centuries of persecution the new Emperor of Rome was on their side. And in 313 Constantine and the other Emperor, Licinius, issued the *Edict of Milan*. It was the first official document on religious freedom. They agreed to "... grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; ... who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly without molestation."

Imagine the Roman Empire being faithful to this edict. It would have changed the history of the world. But a few decades later, in 380, by the Edict of Thessalonica, The Emperor Theodosius the Great made Christianity the religion of the Empire. Caesar became the king of Christians. Heretics and pagans were persecuted. The Christian kingdom took the place of the kingdom of God.

In this alliance between the Church and the Empire, the religion of Christ lost its soul. Religious freedom was no longer appropriated by the new power. When a religion is associated with the power of the state, the temptation to persecute those who disagree is very strong. Every time we lose the vision of the Kingdom of God, Caesar becomes our king and Caesar doesn't care about religious freedom. Caesar uses the power to get more power and to keep it.

My kingdom is not of this world

When Jesus had to stand before Pilate, He had no power, no army to defend Him. In a very short confrontation between the symbol of the powerful Roman Empire, and the powerless King of the kingdom of God, Jesus makes no compromise. He is faithful to His speech on the Bread of Life. He is not a defeated King. He is the King of a new world. His kingdom will have the last word. "If My kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight ... but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

No one is forced to believe in Him, to follow Him. In the tragedy of the cross every actor made their choice and took their responsibility. Jesus respected their freedom.

We are disciples of Jesus

We believe in religious freedom because we are disciples of Jesus. We are citizens of His glorious kingdom. It is a free citizenship. Everyone is invited but no one is forced to come and to worship God. God loves us and He wants to build a relationship of love with us. There is no love without the freedom to love.

Persecution bears the signature of the evil one

In Revelation 13, we see the enemies of God in action. Religious freedom is not in their program. Persecution, discrimination, and humiliation are their favorite methods.

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They persecute God's people. They put a mark on them and kill them.

Revelation 13:15: "...all who refused to worship the image [to the beast] is to be killed." We are on the other side. We are on the side of hope, on the side of the truth and religious liberty.

What might we do?

On the map of the world we can see the increasing number of countries where there is no religious freedom. The increase of violent intolerance shocks us. According to Pew Forum, 75 percent of the world population lives in such countries. What are we doing? Not enough!

We are doing many things and in some ways Adventists are recognized as the champions of religious freedom. We have organized the largest congresses, one with 900 participants and another with more than 40,000 attendees, the largest world gathering ever for religious freedom. But 200 million Christians live in countries where they are discriminated against or persecuted. Some of them are sentenced to death for the crime of apostasy because they became Christians or for the crime of blasphemy because they testified about their Savior.

Asia Bibi a Christian mother was accused of blasphemy in 2009. She was sentenced to death. She is still in prison. The governor of her province, who took a position in her favor, was assassinated by his bodyguard in January 2011. A few months later a minister of the government of Pakistan defended her and challenged the blasphemy law. He, too, was assassinated.

I have contacts with a mother who became Adventist by watching our TV programs. She lost her job and her husband divorced her. She had to leave her house and her children and pay a fine. She tried to get a lawyer, but no one would agree to defend her. They are afraid they would be assassinated for defending a woman who became a Christian. In spite of that, she shares her new faith and gives Bible studies. In her country the government is planning to pass a law on apostasy. If that happens she will become a criminal and may be sentenced to death.

The Middle East was the cradle of Christianity for two thousand years. In the Middle Ages Christians were still the majority there. Their contribution to the Arab civilization is extremely important. After World War II, their number decreased and now they are disappearing. There were 1.4 million Christians in Iraq in 2003. Today they number between 500,000 and 700,000. It is a sign.

What can we do?

- We have to preach the truth!
- We have to vigorously defend and promote religious freedom for all people everywhere. It will be far more efficient to fight against religious fanaticism than any other method.
- We have to follow Jesus' method of love and non-violence, but with conviction.

If we don't do it, we don't deserve the freedom we have in this country. Edmund Burke wrote, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

You remember what Martin Luther King Jr said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Could we hear the whistle?

In a letter to our church President Ted Wilson, Congressman Frank Wolf quoted the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was executed by the Nazis. Bonhoeffer wrote:

"A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

"Week after week the whistle would blow. We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more."

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And Bonhoeffer concludes with these words: “Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me and all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”

Ellen White wrote that we are not doing the will of God if we sit and do nothing to defend freedom of conscience.

We have organized the largest events on religious freedom in history and many other things, but all we do is just a drop of water in the Ocean of Intolerance.

We used to say that religious freedom is in the DNA of Adventists, but the truth is that if we did not have the General Conference, the divisions, and the unions—that is, the church administration—supporting us, religious freedom would have disappeared from our activities and from our values.

The former moderator of the European Conferences of Churches said in a book published in France: “I admire the Adventists for their work in favor of religious freedom.” The “world” recognizes our work. We are invited by secular universities. We have the best think tank of experts formed largely of non-Adventist professors. But we could do far better.

The defense and promotion of religious freedom offers us great opportunities

We can play a major role in building bridges between people of goodwill from different beliefs. There are people of goodwill everywhere. We just have to find them and work with them.

Lincoln Steed and I went to Ambon in Eastern Indonesia just after the religious war between Christians and Muslims. Eight thousand people were killed there and numerous churches, houses, and schools were burned. We met Christian leaders and Muslim leaders. They all welcomed us. We heard stories about Christians helping Muslims to rebuild their mosque and Adventists hiding Muslim families, but also Muslims protecting churches during Christmas.

SECTION FIVE: SPEECHES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMONS

One of the best defenders of religious freedom was the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Professor Abdelfatha Amor. He became a good friend of mine. He was a Muslim.

In all the events we organize we make certain that people from different religions are invited. Why? We defend religious freedom for everyone, not just for us. It is a gift from God for all human beings.

I am sure that in all our universities we have students who care about those who are persecuted. We should have vibrant clubs of religious freedom in every Adventist university and college. Every year we should have a beautiful freedom concert. It won't be a revolution in the traditional way, but it would show the world the kind of values we cherish and Who is our Master.

If you should organize a Religious Freedom club in your church, your school, or your community, you will make history there. I assure you that rightly organized, the members of your club will make a difference in their community and in their country. There are full pages to write in the book of religious freedom and you can write your pages. God does not want you to be observers. He wants you to be actors, to make history, not sit by and watch it happen.

Some of the most moving moments in my ministry have been to see stadiums filled by people who said: "We love religious freedom and we want to keep it. Thank you, God, and our country for religious freedom!" When I began to work for religious freedom the first meeting I attended had 25 people representing several churches. My colleagues seemed to be satisfied with the good discussion we had. But I was not satisfied with the small attendance. Religious freedom is for *all people* and we need as many people as possible to say they love it. Everywhere people have gotten a vision for religious liberty, they made history!

"Do you want to go away?" Jesus asked His disciples.

And Peter replied: **"Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"**



SECTION SIX:
Appendices





Appendix I

BYLAWS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

[AS REVISED APRIL 2007]

A District of Columbia

Nonprofit Corporation

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS AND MEMBERS MEETINGS

Section 1. Membership

There is one class of members of the Corporation. The members are responsible for certain governance matters as described in the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws and under the laws of the District of Columbia.

Section 2. Members

Members who fail to take active part and support of the Corporation during the period between biennial meetings may, at the discretion of the Board of Directors, be deemed to no longer be acting as a member and that member's position may be deemed vacant for purposes of filling all vacancies at the next regular members meeting. The Board of Directors shall serve as the nominating committee for purposes of nominating individuals or organizations to serve as members of the Corporation.

Section 3. Members Meetings

Regular and specially called meetings of the members shall be held at the call of the chairperson of the Board of Directors or by the Board of Directors. The Biennial Meeting of the members shall be considered the Regular meeting of the members and shall be held at the time and place as voted by the Board of Directors. In any year that a special meeting of the entire membership takes place, then that meeting shall suffice as the Biennial Meeting for that time period.

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Section 4. Special Meetings

Specially called meetings of the membership may be called by the Board of Directors by giving notice of the time and place of said meeting.

Section 5. Notice

Notice of both regular and specially called meetings shall be provided to the members not less than ten (10) days and not more than fifty (50) days preceding the time of meeting. Written notices shall include the date and place of the meeting and may be delivered in person, by mail, by facsimile or by email.

Section 6. Parliamentary Procedure

The parliamentary procedures for meetings of the membership of this Corporation shall be governed by the Roberts Rules of Order.

Section 7. Quorum

Twenty percent (20%) of those eligible to serve as members, including the President (or his designee) and at least two other officers of the Corporation, shall constitute a quorum for a membership meeting.

Section 8. Voting

Each member shall have only one vote on any one question. A majority vote of a quorum of members present at any meeting, either in person or by telephone or video conference, shall be the official act of the members, unless otherwise required by the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws or by law. No member shall be entitled to a vote by proxy. The votes of the members of the Corporation shall be taken by voice, unless otherwise determined by the members or by the chair.

ARTICLE II – LIMITATIONS ON ACTIVITIES

In general, the Corporation has authority to do and perform such acts and transact such business in connection its purposes that are not inconsistent with the law; provided, however, that the Corporation shall not perform any act or transact any business that will jeopardize the tax exempt status of the Corporation under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and its regulations as such Section and regulations now exist or may hereafter be amended, or under corresponding laws and regulations hereafter adopted.

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No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Articles, this Corporation shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170 (c) (2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and its regulations as such Section and regulations now exist, or may hereafter be amended or under corresponding laws and regulations hereafter adopted.

ARTICLE III – BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Section 1. Powers

The business activities and management of property of the Corporation shall be conducted and administered by its Board of Directors, which may exercise all of the general powers granted to non-profit corporations enumerated in Section 29-301.05 of the District of Columbia Nonprofit Corporation Act (the “Act”) including subsequent amendments thereto.

Section 2. Number of Directors

The number of Directors shall be at least five (5). In addition to the regular Directors, the Members may name Advisory Directors who shall provide expertise and assistance to the Board when available. Such Advisory Members shall be entitled to voice and vote when in attendance at any Directors meeting.

Section 3. Term for Directors

All Directors shall be elected by the members of the Corporation at the regular meeting of the membership and shall serve for a two (2) year term until the next regular meeting of the membership which is held at the time of expiration of the director’s term.

Section 4. Vacancies

Directors shall have the power to fill vacancies occurring in the Board of Directors between regular meetings of the membership. Persons thus appointed shall serve until the next regular meeting of the membership, unless a director is filling a vacancy created by the resignation or termination of another director and the new director is replacing that person because of the person’s position qualifying that person to serve on the Board in which case the new director

SECTION SIX: APPENDICES

shall serve the remainder of the term of the director being replaced. Any director who serves on the Board because of that person's position shall automatically be terminated as a director if that person resigns or is terminated from the position that qualifies the director to serve on the Board.

Section 5. Quorum

One-half of the total number of regular directors of the Board of Directors, under the chairmanship of an officer of the Board of Directors, shall constitute a quorum.

Section 6. Voting

Each Director shall have only one vote on any one question. A majority vote of a quorum of Directors present at any meeting shall be the official act of the Board of Directors.

Section 7. Notice

The Board of Directors shall meet on a regular schedule as communicated to the Directors or at the call of the Chair. Such meetings shall be held at the principal office of the Corporation or at such other place as the Chair, or the President if requested by the Chair, may determine either within the District of Columbia or elsewhere. The Corporation shall provide reasonable notice to the Directors in advance of any meeting based on the circumstances requiring such meeting but in no case shall notice be less than three (3) days in advance of any meeting unless such meeting is a regular meeting of the Board of Directors according to a schedule regularly provided to the Directors in which case notice shall be deemed to have been given.

Section 8. Waiver of Notice

Whenever any notice is required to be given to any Director of the Corporation under the provisions of these Bylaws or under the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation or under the provisions of the Act, a waiver thereof in writing, signed by the person or persons entitled to such notice, whether before or after the time stated therein, shall be deemed equivalent to the giving of such notice.

Section 9. Assent to Action

A Director of the Corporation who is present at a meeting of the Board of Directors at which action on any corporate matter is taken shall be presumed to have assented to the action taken unless the Director's dissent shall be entered in the minutes of the meeting or unless the Director shall file a written dissent to such action with the person acting as the secretary of the meeting before the adjournment thereof, or shall forward such dissent by registered mail

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or in person to the Secretary of the Board of Directors within three (3) days after the adjournment of the meeting. Such right to dissent shall not apply to a Director who voted in favor of such action.

Section 10. Meeting by Telephone Conference

Board members may participate in meetings of the Board of Directors by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment by which all persons participating can hear each other at the same time, and participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at such a meeting.

Section 11. Action by Directors without a Meeting

Any action required or permitted to be taken at a meeting of the directors of the Corporation may be taken without a meeting if a consent in writing, setting forth the action so taken, shall be signed by all of the directors. Such consent shall have the same effect as a unanimous vote of the directors and may be stated as such in any articles or documents filed with appropriate office required under the Act.

Section 12. Director Conflicts of Interest

Any Director who has an interest in a contract or other transaction presented to the Board or a committee thereof for authorization, approval, or ratification shall make a prompt and full disclosure of their interest to the Board or committee prior to its acting on such contract or transaction. Such disclosure shall include any relevant and material facts known to such a person about the contract or transaction that might reasonably be construed to be adverse to the Corporation's interest.

No Director shall cast a vote on any matter which has a direct bearing on services to be provided by that Director, or any organization which such Director represents or in which such Director has an ownership interest or is otherwise interested or affiliated, which would directly or indirectly financially benefit such Director. All such services will be fully disclosed or known to the Board members present at the meeting at which such contract shall be authorized. Corporation salaried individuals cannot vote on their own compensation, and compensation decisions will be made by the Board of Directors or as otherwise provided for in these Bylaws.

Section 13. Loans to Directors and Officers

No loans shall be made by the Corporation to any Director or Officer of the Corporation.

SECTION SIX: APPENDICES

Section 14. Removal of Directors

At a meeting of the Board of Directors called expressly for that purpose, any director may be removed by a vote of a majority of the Directors then in office.

Section 15. Committees of the Board

The Board of Directors shall have the right, but not the obligation, to appoint committees of the Board. Any committee formed by the Board of Directors shall not have the authority of the Board of Directors but shall at all times report to the Board of Directors for implementation of recommended actions. The designation or appointment of any committee shall not operate to relieve the Board of Directors or any individual Director of any responsibility imposed upon it or the Director by law.

ARTICLE IV – OFFICERS

Section 1. Officers

The officers of this Corporation shall consist of a President, at least one (1) Vice President, a Secretary General/Secretary and a Treasurer. These and any additional officers of the Corporation shall be elected by the Board of Directors. Any officer may concurrently hold more than one office providing that the President or Vice President may not concurrently serve as Secretary or Associate Secretary.

Section 2. Election of Officers

Officers of the Corporation shall be elected at the first meeting of the Board of Directors following the regular Meeting of the Members. The Officers terms shall be for one (1) year or until their successors are elected, whichever is later, unless for a longer period provided for herein. At the Board's discretion, Officers may be elected for term not to exceed three (3) years.

Section 3. President

The President shall preside at all meetings of the members. The President shall be an ex officio member of the Board of Directors and shall serve as the Chair of the Board of Directors. To the extent needed, the Chairperson shall be available to the Secretary General for consultation on matters related to the Board of Directors and its activities.

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Section 4. Vice President

The principal duties of the Vice President(s) shall be to assist the President in the execution of the President's duties and to discharge the duties of the President in the event of absence or disability, for any cause, of the President. The Vice President shall do and perform such other duties as may, from time to time, be assigned by the Board of Directors or the President. In the absence of the President, the Secretary General shall preside at all meetings of the members and the Board of Directors.

Section 5. Secretary General/Secretary

The Secretary General, who shall also be referred to as Corporation's Secretary, shall be the chief executive officer of the Corporation and shall have general charge and control of all its business affairs and properties. The Secretary General may sign and execute on behalf of the Corporation all bonds, contracts, or other obligations that have been authorized by the Board of Directors. The Secretary General shall be ex-officio a member of the Board of Directors and all standing committees. The Secretary General shall do and perform such other duties as may, from time to time, be assigned to him by the Board of Directors.

In his duties as the Secretary, the person in this position shall be: to give notice of meetings as set by the President or as otherwise regularly scheduled, to countersign all deeds, leases, and conveyances executed by the Corporation unless otherwise called for herein, to affix the seal of the Corporation to all papers required or directed to be sealed, to keep a record of the proceedings of the Board of Directors, and to safely and systematically keep all books, papers, records, and documents belonging to the Corporation, or in any way pertaining to the business of the Corporation, except the books and records incidental to the duties of the Treasurer.

Section 6. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall have custody of all the funds and securities of the Corporation, and shall keep full and accurate account of receipts and disbursements in books belonging to the Corporation. The Treasurer shall deposit all monies and other valuables to be held in the name and to the credit of the Corporation in such depository or depositories as may be designated by the Board of Directors. The Treasurer shall disburse the funds of the Corporation as may be ordered by the Board of Directors, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements. The Treasurer shall render to the President and the Board of Directors, whenever either requests, an account of all transactions implemented or completed as Treasurer and of the financial condition of the Corporation. The Treasurer shall do and perform such other duties as may, from time to time, be assigned by the Board of Directors or the President.

SECTION SIX: APPENDICES

Section 7. Other Officers

Deputy Secretaries General, Associate Secretaries and Associate Treasurers of this Corporation are hereby established and may be appointed as deemed appropriate by the Board of Directors. All deputy and associate officers shall do and perform such other duties as may, from time to time, be assigned to them by the Board of Directors.

Section 8. Removal of an Officer

Any officer may be removed from office at any time, with or without cause, upon the vote of a majority of the Board of Directors whenever, in its judgment, the best interests of the Corporation will be served thereby. Removal shall be without prejudice to any contract rights of the person so removed, but election of an officer shall not of itself create contract rights.

ARTICLE V – FINANCES, CONTRACTS, GIFTS, BANK ACCOUNTS AND LOANS

Section 1. Handling of Financial Matters

In addition to the Treasurer, such officers or agents of the Corporation, as from time to time shall be designated by the Board of Directors, shall have the authority to deposit any funds of the Corporation in such banks or trust companies as shall from time to time be designated by the Board of Directors and such officers or agents, as from time to time shall be authorized by the Board of Directors, may withdraw any or all funds of the Corporation so deposited in any such bank or trust company, upon checks, drafts, or other instruments or orders for the payment of money, drawn against the account or in the name or behalf of this Corporation, and made or signed by such officers or agents; and each bank or trust company with which funds of the Corporation are so deposited is authorized to accept, honor, cash and pay, without limit as to amount, all checks, drafts or other instruments or orders for the payment of money, when drawn, made, or signed by officers or agents so designated by the Board of Directors until written notice of the revocation of the authority of such officers or agents by the Board of Directors shall have been received by the bank or trust company.

Section 2. Deeds and Instruments

All deeds and other instruments of this Corporation shall be executed by at least two officers. Legal instruments to be recorded shall be properly notarized and, where necessary, shall carry the corporate seal with attestation by the Secretary or an Associate Secretary. No officer shall have any power or authority to bind the Corporation by legal instrument, or otherwise, unless

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approved by the Board of Directors. Any officer may be authorized by the Board of Directors to sign any legal document.

Section 3. Contracts

The Board of Directors may authorize any officer or officers, agent or agents, to enter into any contract or execute and deliver any instrument in the name of and on behalf of the Corporation, and such authority may be general or confined to specific instances.

Section 4. Gifts

The Board of Directors, or as otherwise delegated to the Officers of the Corporation, on behalf of the Corporation may accept any contribution, gift, bequest or devise for the general purposes or for any special purpose of the Corporation.

ARTICLE VI – AFFILIATED ASSOCIATIONS

Section 1. Affiliation

Associations and organizations in any country with similar objectives may affiliate, as local, national, or regional associations, with this corporation upon a majority vote of the board of directors and subsequent majority vote of members at a biennial or special meeting. The board of directors shall establish requirements for affiliated status.

Section 2. Disaffiliation

Affiliated associations may be disaffiliated upon majority vote of the board of directors of this corporation and subsequent majority vote of members at a biennial or special meeting.

ARTICLE VII – PUBLICATIONS

Section 1. Official Publications

After a resolution by a majority of the board of directors, a majority of members voting at a biennial or special meeting may approve an official magazine, journal, or publication for the corporation.

SECTION SIX: APPENDICES

Section 2. Affiliated Publications

Official magazines, journals, or publications of affiliated associations may be known as affiliated publications of the corporation if approved by majority votes of both the board of directors and a subsequent meeting of members.

ARTICLE VIII – AMENDMENTS

The Articles of Incorporation and these Bylaws may be altered, amended, or repealed by a majority of the members of the corporation voting at a biennial or special meeting.

ARTICLE IX – CORPORATE SEAL AND RECORDS; FISCAL YEAR

Section 1. Corporate Seal

The seal of this Corporation shall consist of an ordinary sized circular impression with the words “INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION” in an outer circle enclosing the word “Incorporated.”

Section 2. Inspection of Records by Members

Upon written request to the Secretary General, a member may inspect, copy, and make extracts of the accounting books and records as well as the minutes of the proceedings of the Board and its committees. Such inspection, copying and, extracting shall take place during normal business hours. Any such request must be for a purpose reasonably related to the interests of the person as a member. Any inspection, copying or, extracting must be made in person. This privilege shall not apply or appertain to any item designated by the Board as confidential or otherwise deemed injurious to the operation of the Corporation.

Section 3. Inspection Rights of Directors

Every Director shall have the absolute right at any reasonable time to inspect: the Corporation’s books, records, and documents of every kind; physical properties; and the records of each of its subsidiaries. The inspection may be made in person or by the director’s agent so designated in writing. The right of inspection includes the right to copy and make extracts of documents.

Section 4. Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of this Corporation shall correspond with the calendar year.

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ARTICLE X – DISSOLUTION

Upon the dissolution of the corporation, the Board of Directors shall, after paying or making provision for the payment of all of the liabilities of the corporation, transfer all assets of the corporation to a nonprofit organization tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue law), as determined by the Members to be used exclusively for the purpose of religious liberty in harmony with its status as an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue law). None of the same shall inure to the benefit of any private individual member or director or any corporation which is not in harmony with this Article.



Appendix II

O 110 Relationships with Other Christian Churches and Religious Organizations

To avoid creating misunderstanding or friction in our relationships with other Christian churches and religious organizations, the following guidelines have been set forth.

1. We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men and women as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.
2. When interdivision work brings us in contact with other Christian societies and religious bodies, the spirit of Christian courtesy, frankness, and fairness shall prevail at all times.
3. We recognize that true religion is based on conscience and conviction. Therefore it is to be our constant purpose that no selfish interest or temporal advantage shall draw any person to our communion and that no tie shall hold any member save the belief and conviction that in this way the true connection with Christ is found. If a change of conviction leads a member of our church to feel no longer in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice, we recognize not only the right but also the responsibility of that member to change, without opprobrium, religious affiliation in accord with their belief. We expect other religious bodies to respond in the same spirit of religious liberty.
4. Before admitting to church membership members of other religious organizations, care shall be exercised to ascertain that the candidates are moved to change their religious affiliation by religious conviction and out of regard to their personal relationship with God.
5. A person under censure of another religious organization for clearly established fault in Christian morals or character shall not be considered eligible for membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church until there is evidence of repentance and reformation.
6. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is unable to confine its mission to restricted geographical areas because of its understanding of the gospel commission's mandate. In

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the providence of God and the historical development of His work for individuals, from time to time denominational bodies and religious movements have arisen to give special emphasis to different phases of gospel truth. In the origin and rise of the Seventh-day Adventist people, the burden was laid upon us to emphasize the gospel of Christ's second coming as an imminent event, calling for the proclamation of biblical truths in the setting of the special message of preparation as described in Bible prophecy, particularly in Revelation 14:6-14. This message commissions the preaching of the "everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" bringing it to the attention of all peoples everywhere. Any restriction which limits witness to specified geographical areas therefore becomes an abridgment of the gospel commission. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also acknowledges the rights of other religious persuasions to operate without geographical restrictions.

NOTE

This statement is policy O 110 in the *General Conference Working Policy*. It was written in 1926.



Appendix III

*Seventh-day Adventists and the Ecumenical Movement*¹

The General Conference Executive Committee has never voted an official statement regarding the Seventh-day Adventist relationship to the ecumenical movement as such. A book has been written dealing at length with the subject² and a number of articles have appeared over the years in Adventist publications, including the *Adventist Review*. Thus, while there is not exactly an official position, there are plenty of clear indications regarding the Seventh-day Adventist viewpoint.

Generally, it can be said that while the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not completely condemn the ecumenical movement and its main organizational manifestation, the World Council of Churches, she has been critical of various aspects and activities. Few would wish to deny that ecumenism has had laudable aims and some positive influences. Its great goal is visible Christian unity. No Adventist can be opposed to the unity Christ Himself prayed for. The ecumenical movement has promoted kinder interchurch relations with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices.

Through its various organizations and activities, the ecumenical movement has provided more accurate and updated information on churches, spoken for religious liberty and human rights, combated against the evils of racism, and drawn attention to socioeconomic implications of the gospel. In all this the intentions have been good and some of the fruit palatable. However, in the total picture, the banes tend to outweigh the boons. We shall examine some of these.

Adventism a Prophetic Movement

The Seventh-day Adventist Church stepped upon the stage of history—so Adventists firmly believe—in response to God’s call. Adventists believe, it is hoped without pride or arrogance, that the Advent Movement represents the divinely appointed instrument for the organized proclamation of the “eternal gospel,” God’s last message, discerned from the prophetic vantage point of Revelation 14 and 18. In the focalized light of its prophetic understanding,

1 This document was written by Bert B Beach and originally published as a pamphlet by the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1985.

2 Bert B Beach, *Ecumenism—Boon or Bane?* Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974.

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the Seventh-day Adventist Church sees herself as an eschatologically oriented “ecumenical” movement of the Apocalypse. She begins by “calling out” God’s children from “fallen” ecclesial bodies that will increasingly form organized religious opposition to the purposes of God. Together with the “calling out” there is a positive “calling in” to a united, worldwide—that is, ecumenical—movement characterized by “faith of Jesus” and keeping “the commandments of God” (Rev 14:12).

In the World Council of Churches the emphasis appears to be first of all on “coming in” to a fellowship of churches and then hopefully and gradually “coming out” of corporate disunity. In the Advent Movement the accent is first on “coming out” of Babylonian disunity and confusion and then immediately “coming in” to a fellowship of unity, truth, and love within the globe-encircling Advent family.

In understanding the Adventist attitude toward ecumenism and other mainline churches, it is helpful to remember that the early Advent Movement (characterized by the Millerites) had ecumenical aspects: it arose in many churches. Thus, Adventists came from many denominations. However, the churches generally rejected the Advent message. Adventists were not infrequently disfellowshipped. Sometimes Adventists took with them portions of congregations. Relations became embittered. False stories were circulated, some of which unfortunately still persist today, the pioneers had strong views, and their opponents were no less dogmatic. They tended to look more for what separates than what unites. That was an understandable development. Today, of course, the interchurch climate tends to be more irenic and benign.

What are some of the problems Adventists have with ecumenism? Before we endeavor to give a summary answer to this question, it needs to be pointed out that the ecumenical movement is not monolithic in its thinking, and one can find all kinds of views represented in its ranks (that in itself, of course, is a problem!). We will try to make reference to what can be considered mainstream thinking within the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization now representing about three hundred thirty different churches and denominations.

Ecumenical Understanding of Unity

The New Testament presents a qualified church unity in truth, characterized by holiness, joy, faithfulness, obedience, and evangelism.³ “Ecumenthusiasts” (to coin a word) seem to take for granted the eventual organic unity and communion of the great majority of the churches. They emphasize the “scandal of division,” as if this were really the unpardonable sin. Heresy and apostasy are largely ignored. However, the New Testament shows the threat of

3 See John 17:6, 13, 17, 19, 23, 26.

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anti-Christian penetration within “the temple of God” (2 Thess 2:3, 4). The eschatological picture of God’s church prior to the Second Coming is not one of a mega church gathering all humankind together, but of a “remnant” of Christendom, those keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus (see Rev 12:17).

There is clearly a point at which unorthodoxy and un-Christian lifestyle justify separation. The WCC seems to miss this point. Separation and division in order to protect and uphold the purity and integrity of the church and her message are more desirable than unity in worldliness and error.

Furthermore, Adventists are uncomfortable with the fact that the WCC leaders seem to give little emphasis to personal sanctification and revival. There are indications that some may view such emphasis as a quaint pietistic hangover, not a vital ingredient of a dynamic Christian life. They prefer to soft-pedal personal piety in favor of social morality. However, in Adventist understanding, personal holiness of life is such stuff as the morality of society is made (with apologies to Shakespeare). Without genuinely converted Christians, any formal organizational unity is really of a plastic nature and of little relevance.

Ecumenical Understanding of Belief

In many church circles broad-mindedness is seen as an ecumenical virtue. The ideal ecumenist, it is suggested, is not dogmatic in belief and is somewhat fluid in doctrinal views. He greatly respects the beliefs of others, but is less than rigid about his own belief. He appears humble and not assertive about doctrinal beliefs—except those regarding ecumenical unity and racism. He has a sense of partial knowing. To show religious doctrinal arrogance is, ecumenically, especially sinful.

All this has a laudable side. Humility and meekness are Christian virtues. Indeed, Peter tells us to always be ready to answer and give a reason for our faith, but this must be done with humility, respect, and a good conscience (1 Peter 3:15, 16). However, there is in ecumenical ranks an almost inbuilt danger of softness and relativization of belief. The whole concept of heresy is questioned. Lately, questions are even raised regarding the idea of “paganism.” Typical of some ecumenical presuppositions is the idea that all denominational formulations of truth are time-conditioned and relative, and therefore partial and inadequate. Some ecumenists would even go so far as to advocate the need of doctrinal synthesis, bringing together various Christian beliefs in what has been called a kind of cocktail approach. We are told that each church is imbalanced and it is the task of ecumenism to restore balance and harmony. Within the reconciled diversity of the ecumenical movement, presumably everyone, in the words of Frederick the Great, “will be saved in his own way.”

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Adventists believe that without strong convictions, a church has little spiritual power. There is the danger that the ecumenical quicksand of doctrinal softness will suck churches into denominational death. Of course, this is precisely what ecumenical enthusiasts hope for. However, Adventists feel that such doctrinal irresolutions must be vigorously resisted; otherwise spiritual self-disarmament will be the result and a truly post-Christian age would be upon us.

Ecumenical Understanding of Scripture

Adventists see the Bible as the infallible revelation of God's will, the authoritative revealer of doctrinal truth, and the trustworthy record of the mighty acts of God in salvation history.⁴ Adventists see the Bible as a unity. For many WCC leaders the Bible is not normative and authoritative in itself. The emphasis is on biblical diversity, including at times demythologization of the Gospels. For a large number of ecumenists, as is the case for liberal Christianity in general, inspiration lies not in the biblical text but in the experience of the reader. Propositional revelation is out; experience is in.

Apocalyptic prophecy is given practically no time-of-the-end role. *Pro forma* references to the Parousia are made, but have no implications for urgency and make little measurable impact on the ecumenical concept of evangelistic mission. There is here the danger of eschatological blindness.

Seventh-day Adventists see the biblical picture of sin and redemption within the framework of the "great controversy" between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, between God's Word and the lies of the impostor, between the faithful remnant and Babylon, between the "seal of God" and the "mark of the beast."

Adventists are, first and foremost, people of the Word. While believing in the unconditional authority of the Scriptures, Adventists recognize that the Bible was "written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. . . . The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen."⁵ Many ecumenists would say that the Biblical text is not the Word of God but contains this word as men respond and accept it. In contrast, Adventists would say that the utterances of the Bible writers "are the word of God."⁶ God is not on trial; neither is His Word, form criticism notwithstanding. It is man *vis-à-vis* the Bible who is on trial.

4 See *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, chapter 1, "The Holy Scriptures."

5 Ellen G White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 21.

6 Ibid

Ecumenical Understanding of Mission and Evangelism

The traditional understanding of mission highlights evangelism, that is, the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. The ecumenical approach sees mission as involving the establishment of shalom, a kind of social peace and harmony. Adventists have problems with any tendency to downplay the primary importance of announcing the good news of redemption from the stranglehold of sin. In fact, the traditional, including Adventist, view of salvation has always been the saving of individuals from sin and for eternity. Ecumenical evangelism sees salvation as primarily saving society from oppressive regimes, from the ravages of hunger, from the curse of racism, and from the exploitation of injustice.

The Adventist understanding of conversion means for a person to experience radical changes through spiritual rebirth. The majority emphasis in WCC circles appears to be on changing—converting—the unjust structures of society.

As we see it, in the area of evangelism and foreign missionary work the fruits (or maybe we should say lack of fruits) of ecumenism have often been less evangelism (as we understand it—from Paul to Billy Graham), less growth and more membership decline, fewer missionaries sent out, and proportionally less financial support coming in. In fact, the missionary outreach has shifted away from mainline “ecumenical” churches to conservative evangelicals. It is sad to see such a large evangelistic potential lost to the missionary movement, especially at a time of increasingly active and militant Islamic outreach and the awakening of Eastern and indigenous religions.

Some successful Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic outreach efforts appear to run counter to the ecumenical low-key “joint mission” approach. The latter may sound good in an ecumenical study paper, but soul-winning results are lacking. The paraphrase of an old saying has some relevance here: “The proof of the ecumenical pudding lies in the evangelistic eating.” While Adventists oppose the use of corrupt methods in evangelism (such as making false statements or using forms of bribery or cajolery), they cannot blindly condemn proselytism without a clear definition.

Ecumenical Understanding of Sociopolitical Responsibility

Admittedly, the whole question of Christian social and political responsibility is a complicated one. The WCC and other councils, of churches (such as the National Council of Churches in the United States) are heavily involved in what are usually seen largely as political questions. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is very much more circumspect in this area (in comparison to evangelism, where the tables are turned!).

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Much ecumenical thinking in the area of political responsibility includes or involves: 1) a secularization of salvation; 2) a postmillennial view advocating the gradual political improvement and social betterment of humankind and the establishment through human effort, as divine agents, of God's kingdom on earth; 3) adaptation of Christianity to the modern world; 4) evolutionary Utopian faith in progress; and 5) socialistic collectivism, favoring some form of egalitarianism and the welfare state, but not Communist materialism.

Presumably, ecumenical social activists consider Adventism as a Utopian vision of pie in the apocalyptic sky by and by; this is wrong. Faced with the many problems of society, Adventists cannot be, and generally are not, apathetic or indifferent. Witness this: more than 800 hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare institutions serving more than 14 million outpatients in a recent year; a large educational system circling the globe with more than seven thousand schools; Adventist Development and Relief Agency—a rapidly expanding worldwide service of the church in areas of acute and chronic need. Several other service activities could be referred to.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it is necessary to distinguish between sociopolitical activity of individual Christians as citizens and involvement on the corporate church level. It is the church's task to deal with moral principles and to point in a Biblical direction, not to advocate political directives. The WCC has at times been involved in political power plays. While Adventism will sow seeds that will inevitably influence society and politics, it does not wish to be entangled in political controversies. The church's Lord did state: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and like her Lord the church wishes to go "about doing good" (Acts 10:38). She does not wish to run the government, either directly or indirectly.

Ecumenical Understanding of Religious Liberty

In the early years of the WCC, beginning with its first assembly at Amsterdam in 1948, religious liberty was placed on the ecumenical agenda. Religious liberty was seen as a vital prerequisite for ecumenical unity. In 1968 a religious liberty secretariat was set up at WCC headquarters. However, in more recent years the WCC religious liberty stance has been somewhat ambiguous. In 1978 the secretariat was closed down, mainly for what was seen as a lack of funds. This, of course, in itself speaks regarding the priority given to religious liberty in the organized ecumenical movement.

Today the ecumenical tendency is to view religious liberty as simply one of the human rights instead of the fundamental right that under girds all other human rights. This is, of course, the approach used by the secular mind. Secularists or humanists refuse to recognize religious belief as something apart or above other human activities. There is here the danger that religious liberty will lose its unique character that makes it the guardian of all true freedoms.

It must not be forgotten that historically it has been the balance of power and denominationalism that have neutralized religious intolerance and worked for religious liberty. Formal religious unity has existed only with force. There is thus in society an inbuilt tension between unity and religious liberty. In fact, the eschatological picture of the final events is a dramatic tableau of religious persecution, as the massive forces of apocalyptic Babylon try to squeeze the church of the remnant into the mold of united apostasy.

Finally, the religious liberty outlook becomes increasingly clouded when it is realized that certain ecumenical activists accept fairly easily religious liberty restrictions affecting believers of a different religio-political stamp, who are exerting what is perceived to be a negative social stance. Furthermore, some ecumenical leaders are quite willing, in revolutionary situations, to see religious liberty interfered with and “temporarily shut down,” in order to promote unity, nation building, and the “good” of society as a whole.

The Influence of Prophetic Understanding

What we have written so far highlights some of the reservations Adventists have regarding involvement in the organized ecumenical movement. The general attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward other churches and the ecumenical movement is decisively influenced by the above considerations and determined by prophetic understanding. Looking back, Adventists see centuries of persecution and anti-Christian manifestations of the papal power. They see discrimination and much intolerance by state or established churches. Looking forward, they see the danger of Catholicism and Protestantism linking hands and exerting religio-political power in a domineering and potentially persecuting way. They see the faithful church of God not as a jumbo church, but as a remnant. They see themselves as the nucleus of that remnant and as not willing to be linked with the expanding Christian apostasy of the last days.

Looking at the present, Adventists see their task as preaching the everlasting gospel to all men, calling for worship of the Creator, obedient adherence to the faith of Jesus, and proclaiming that the hour of God’s judgment has come. Some aspects of this message are not popular. How can Adventists best succeed in fulfilling the prophetic mandate? It is our view that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can best accomplish her divine mandate by keeping her own identity, her own motivation, her own feeling of urgency, and her own working methods.

Ecumenical Cooperation?

Should Adventists cooperate ecumenically? Adventists should cooperate insofar as the authentic Gospel is proclaimed and crying human needs are being met. The Seventh-day

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Adventist Church wants no entangling memberships and refuses any compromising relationships that might tend to water down her distinct witness. However, Adventists wish to be “conscientious cooperators.” The ecumenical movement as an agency of cooperation has acceptable aspects; as an agency for organic unity of churches, it is much more suspect.

Relationships with Other Religious Bodies

Back in 1926, long before ecumenism was in vogue, the General Conference Executive Committee adopted an important statement that is now a part of the *General Conference Working Policy* (O 110). This declaration has significant ecumenical implications. The original concern of the statement was for the mission field and relationships with other “missionary societies.” However, the statement has now been broadened to deal with other “religious organizations” in general. It affirms that Seventh-day Adventists “recognize every agency that lifts up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world, and... hold in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.” In the church’s dealings with other churches, “Christian courtesy, friendliness, and fairness” are to prevail. Some practical suggestions are made in order to avoid misunderstandings and occasion for friction. The statement makes it very clear, however, that the “Seventh-day Adventist people” have received the special “burden” to emphasize the Second Coming as an event “even at the door,” preparing “the way of the Lord as revealed in Holy Scripture.” This divine “commission” makes it, therefore, impossible for Adventists to restrict their witness “to any limited area” and impels them to call the gospel “to the attention of all peoples everywhere.”

In 1980 the General Conference set up a Council on Interchurch/Interfaith Relations in order to give overall guidance and supervision to the church’s relations with other religious bodies. This council has from time to time authorized conversations with other religious organizations where it was felt this could prove helpful.

Adventist leaders should be known as bridge builders. This is not an easy task. It is much simpler to blow up ecclesiastical bridges and serve as irresponsible “Christian commandos” Ellen White has said: “It requires much wisdom to reach ministers and men of influence.”⁷ Adventists have not been called to live in a walled-in ghetto, talking only to themselves, publishing mainly for themselves, and showing a sectarian spirit of isolationism. It is, of course, more comfortable and secure to live in a Seventh-day Adventist fortress, with the communication drawbridges all drawn up. In this setting one ventures from time to time into the neighborhood for a quick evangelistic campaign, capturing as many “prisoners” as

7 Ellen G White, *Evangelism*, 562.

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possible, and then disappearing with them back into the fortress. Ellen White did not believe in the isolationist mentality: “Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ’s messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.”

Usefulness of Observer Relationships

Experience has taught that the best relationship to the various councils of churches (national, regional, world) is that of observer-consultant status. This helps the church to keep informed and to understand trends and developments. It helps to know Christian thinkers and leaders. Adventists are provided the opportunity to exert a presence and make the church’s viewpoint known. Membership is not advisable. Those ecumenical organizations are usually not “neutral.” They often have quite specific goals and policies and play sociopolitical advocacy roles. There would be little point in being halfhearted members (at best) or *pro forma* members (as many member churches are) or often in opposition (as inevitably would be the case).

On local levels, dealing with more practical and less theological issues, one could envision some forms of Seventh-day Adventist membership, with caution, however. We are thinking of such organized relationships as ministerial associations/fraternals, local church organizations, Bible study groups, and specific groups or networks to study community needs and help solve local problems. Adventists must not be perceived as simply opting out of any Christian responsibility for the local community.

In recent years, Adventist leaders and theologians have had opportunities for dialogue with other church representatives. These experiences have been beneficial. Mutual respect has been engendered. Worn-out stereotypes and inaccurate and untrue doctrinal perceptions have been removed. Prejudices have been unceremoniously laid to rest. Theological tools and understandings have been sharpened. New dimensions have been recognized and new vistas of outreach opened up. First of all, however, their faith in the Advent message has been enhanced. There is no reason for Adventists to have an inferiority complex. It is a wonderful privilege to be a Seventh-day Adventist and to know that the theological and organizational foundations of the church are sure and secure.

Heralds of the True Oikoumene

Adventists seek to be heralds of the only true and lasting *oikoumene*. In Hebrews reference is made to “the world [Greek: *oikoumene*] to come” (Heb 2:5, NEB), the coming universal kingdom of God. In the final analysis, it is this “ecumenism” Adventists are working for. Every other ecumenical movement is ephemeral. In the meantime, it is a Christian duty to

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“concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ” in one’s heart. “Be ready at any time to give a quiet and reverent answer to any man who wants a reason for the hope that you have within you. Make sure that your conscience is perfectly clear” (1 Peter 3:15, 16, Phillips).



Appendix IV

How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism

Seventh-day Adventists regard all men and women as equal in the sight of God. We reject bigotry against any person, regardless of race, nationality, or religious creed. Further, we gladly acknowledge that sincere Christians may be found in other denominations, including Roman Catholicism, and we work in concert with all agencies and bodies that seek to relieve human suffering and to uplift Christ before the world.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to take a positive approach to other faiths. Our primary task is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of Christ's soon return, not to point out flaws in other denominations.

The beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are rooted in the biblical apostolic teachings and thus share many essential tenets of Christianity in common with the followers of other Christian churches. However, we have a specific identity as a movement. Our compelling message for Christians and non-Christians alike is to communicate hope by focusing on the quality of life that is complete in Christ.

As Adventists relate to Roman Catholicism in particular, both the past and the future enter into our thinking. We cannot erase or ignore the historical record of serious intolerance and even persecution on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic system of church governance, based on extra-biblical teachings such as papal primacy, resulted in severe abuses of religious freedom as the church was allied with the state.

Seventh-day Adventists are convinced of the validity of our prophetic views, according to which humanity now lives close to the end of time. Adventists believe, on the basis of biblical predictions, that just prior to the second coming of Christ this earth will experience a period of unprecedented turmoil, with the seventh-day Sabbath as a focal point. In that context, we expect that world religions—including the major Christian bodies as key players—will align themselves with the forces in opposition to God and to the Sabbath. Once again the union of church and state will result in widespread religious oppression.

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To blame past violations of Christian principles on one specific denomination is not an accurate representation of either history or the concerns of Bible prophecy. We recognize that at times Protestants, including Seventh-day Adventists, have manifested prejudice and even bigotry. If, in expounding on what the Bible teaches, Seventh-day Adventists fail to express love to those addressed, we do not exhibit authentic Christianity.

Adventists seek to be fair in dealing with others. Thus, while we remain aware of the historical record and continue to hold our views regarding end-time events, we recognize some positive changes in recent Catholicism, and stress the conviction that many Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.

NOTE

This statement was recorded on April 15, 1997, by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and released by the Office of the President, Robert S Folkenberg.



Appendix V

Additional Publications by the Author

Books:

Une histoire d'amour, Editions Vie et Santé, Dammarie les Lys, France, 1989. *L'avenir est à moi*, Editions Vie et Santé, 1997.

Sur le chemin de l'éternité, Editions Vie et Santé, 1996.

Le Mouvement adventiste du septième jour, origine et développement, Master in History thesis of the University Montpellier, France, published by the author, December 1974.

Réussir sa vie, Editions Vie et Santé, 1992.

101 Questions Adventist Ask, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho, 2000.

Issues of Faith and Freedom, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2008.

Published as General Editor:

Building Bridges of Faith and Freedom, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005.

Contributed Chapters to Books:

“Education and Religious Freedom,” “Questionnaire on Education and Religious Freedom,” in *Religious Freedom, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination in Education*, edited by Rosa M Martinez de Codes and Jaime Rossell, published by University of Extremadura School of Law, Ministry of Justice General Direction of Religious Affairs, 99-106, 115-128, Caceres, 2001.

“To Be a Christian after Auschwitz,” “Setting a Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell, the Impact of the Holocaust on Theology and Jewish-Christian Relations*, Edited by Jacques B Doukhan, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2002, 113-126, 137-142.

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“La Libertad Religiosa en La Educación escolar,” Ministerio de Justicia, Dirección General de Asuntos Religiosos, Madrid, 2002, 365-366.

“Christian after Auschwitz,” in *Creation Life and Hope, Essays in Honor of Jacques B Doukhan*, edited by Jiri Moskala, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2000, 223-232.

“Prosélytisme et liberté religieuse,” Malheur à moi si je n’annonce pas l’évangile” in *Actes du colloque de la Faculté adventiste de théologie*, Collonges sous Saleve, France, 2003, 99-104.

“Liberté religieuse et dialogue interreligieux” in *Encuentro de las Tres Confesiones religiosas cristianismo, judaísmo, Islam*, Ministerio de Justicia, Secretaria General Técnica, Madrid, 1999, 81-88.

“Religious Freedom and Inter-Religious Dialogue: Need for More Inter-Religious Dialogue?” in *Mélanges offerts au Doyen Abdelfattah Amor*, Centre de Publications Universitaires, Tunis, Tunisie, 2005, 502-518.

“Obstacles to Inter-religious dialogues,” *The Three sons of Abraham, Interfaith Encounters Between Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Edited by Jacques B Doukhan, I B Tauris & Co Ltd, London – New York, 2014, 73-80.

“From Symposiums to Stadiums: Promoting Religious Freedom,” *Living the Christian Life in Today’s World: A Conversation between Mennonite World Conference and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2011-2012*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Mennonite World Conference, 2014, 138-151.

“Religious Liberty and Global Security,” *Worldwide Human Rights and Religious Liberty: A New Equilibrium or New Challenges, Conscience and Liberty*, Volume 1, 2014, 112-121.

Articles in Journals and Magazines:

John Graz wrote numerous articles in the following journals: *Revue Adventiste, Signes des temps, Adventist Review, Fides et Libertas, Ministry, Dialogue, Liberty*. Several of Graz’s books and articles have been translated into other languages—Russian, Spanish, Romanian, German, Portuguese, Italian, Croatian, Japanese, English.

“Liberté religieuse et sécurité dans le monde,” Les Droits de L’homme et la Liberte Religieuse Dans le Monde – Un Nouvel Equilibre Ou De Nouveaux Defis, *Conscience et Liberté*, Edition spéciale, Tome I, Berne, Suisse, 2014, 117-126.

This easy-to-read manual is packed with practical advice and illustrated by the actual experiences of the author during 45 years of ministry to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Written for pastors, elders, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) directors, and all those who represent the church or its institutions, this manual will help you become a great ambassador for your church wherever you live.

