



Think Tank
REPORT 2018



Introduction

We live in a fast-paced society where people expect visible results and significant financial returns. It can be thrilling when things are going really well. However, it can also be disheartening if the results of our ministry and evangelistic efforts seem to be dwindling. There are times when we need to stop and evaluate the direction that we are heading and the strategies we are using. God Himself invites us to do this. He said:

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

If we don't stop to reflect and listen to Him and to each other, we can find ourselves drifting off course or even stalling spiritually. If we do pause to discover the direction that God wants us to take, we can gain renewed energy, fulfilment and experience incredible results by working in alignment with Jesus' plan for our church.

To ensure that we are really focused on mission, the Greater Sydney Conference organised the Mission2Sydney Think Tank and invited every Adventist church and school in the Conference to send their most strategic leaders to the Think Tank. At least one delegate from each church needed to be under the age of 30 so that there was adequate representation from our younger generations.

Location

The Think Tank was held in The Millennium Room in the ANZ Stadium at Olympic Park over the weekend 23-24 February 2018. It was not only an impressive and central location to hold the event—it also represents one of the places in Sydney where you see thousands of people streaming in to watch sports, music concerts and attend other major events. The Mission2Sydney Think Tank was intentionally held in the very heart of our mission field.

Program

The Think Tank was launched with a devotional presentation by Pastor Terry Johnson, the President of the Greater Sydney Conference. He reminded us that quite a significant number of people have drifted away from the Seventh-day Adventist church in Greater Sydney over the years and highlighted that there is a great need to reach out to people and connect with them. His message refocused our hearts and minds on mission.


The Think Tank program consisted of:

1. Plenary sessions
2. Extended group prayer times with people at each table
3. Discussion around key questions provided by plenary speakers, with a scribe at each table taking notes on an iPad
4. Uploading responses to an online database

There were five plenary sessions and topics in the Think Tank program:

1. **History of Adventist Urban Mission:** Dr. John Skrzypaszek
2. **Church Revitalisation:** Dr. Tom Evans
3. **Understanding Australia:** Mark McCrindle
4. **Church Planting / Urban Mission Training Centre:** Dr. Kleber Goncalves
5. **Applying This to Mission:** Dr. Sven Östring





The discussions that followed each of these plenary sessions generated hundreds of lines of raw response material, representing thousands of words, from all of the delegates. This provided very valuable insights into the collective thought that occurred during the Think Tank.

Broader Dialogue

In order to enable the broadest dialogue to occur with all of the churches, the Conference followed up the Think Tank with two communication processes:

1. **Responses from Church Boards:** The discussion questions that were used in the Think Tank were distributed to all of the church boards. This allowed the discussions at Think Tank to occur in the local church context as well. Each church had the opportunity to send their own responses to the Conference.
2. **Facebook Forum:** Joyce Taylor, our Conference communication coordinator, launched and hosted an online Facebook Forum together. This forum was also co-hosted by Pastors Pablo Lillo, Raul Moran, Ben Turner and Abigail Figueroa to provide pastoral support and ensure that the forum was a safe place for people to share their perspectives and responses. The Forum was run from 7 May 2018 to 8 July 2018. It provided another communication channel and forum for people to discuss their perspectives on the issues regarding our mission here in Greater Sydney.

The Strategic Outcomes of the Mission2Sydney Think Tank

There were key themes that ran through the responses that were collected from the Think Tank delegates, the church boards and the Facebook Forum discussion. The Greater Sydney Conference identified the following five strategic focus areas that the Seventh-day Adventist church in Greater Sydney collectively believes that we need to focus on:

1. **Turning Up the Spiritual Temperature:** Our greatest need is to be connected with Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said,


“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He told His disciples,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

When Jesus began His public ministry, He was first baptised by water and the Holy Spirit and then He spent forty days praying and fasting in the wilderness. Deep down, we know that we need to become more on fire for Jesus. This needs to be our first priority. We need the Holy Spirit to transform us, from being spiritually luke-warm, complacent and discouraged about our mission, to being on fire for Jesus and the good news of His salvation and soon return. The practical solution is simple—**as many groups at the Think Tank acknowledged**, we need to “spend more time reading the Bible and praying.”

Ellen White gives us this very encouraging prediction and spiritual challenge: “There is no change in the messages that God has sent in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we



have not yet witnessed.... As a people we are not half awake to a sense of our necessities and to the times in which we live. Wake up the watchmen. Our first work should be to search our hearts and to become reconverted. We have no time to lose upon unimportant issues." *Ministry to the Cities*, 28.

Practical strategies that we can do this include:

- Making a commitment to regular family worship in our homes and with our children
- Developing a system of prayer partners within our churches
- Engaging in our annual 40-days of prayer and Conference prayer summit

2. **Member Empowerment:** It was very evident from the Think Tank responses that we strongly believe that the way to achieve the mission that Jesus has given us is for all of our members to be empowered to share their faith and lead people to become disciples of Jesus. It is certainly recognised that pastors need to model evangelism and disciple-making in their own lives. However, the 5 million people who live in Greater Sydney will never be reached through the approximately 60 Seventh-day Adventist paid pastors in our Conference alone. Sharing the good news about Jesus and making disciples is the privilege and responsibility of every Seventh-day Adventist who has been saved by faith in what Jesus has done for us at the Cross. Jesus Himself made this astonishing statement,

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12

It is mind-boggling to think that the Son of God and the Creator of the Universe would say that people who believe in Him would do greater things than Him, but this is because Jesus is an empowering and equipping Leader. Paul had the same vision for the church, which he shared with the churches in Ephesus:

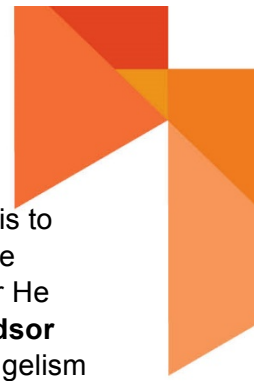
“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11,12

We need to move beyond being consumers and critics of church ministry and return to the Biblical model of empowering members to do ministry in our churches, serve people in our community, share the good news about Jesus and make disciples in Greater Sydney. As **Fountain in the City** observed, “The ‘culture hurdle’ that needs to be addressed in our churches in Sydney is the tendency for members to come to church as consumers rather than contributors and participants. The way to address this is to promote and encourage members to find a role in the church that taps in to their passions and talents and gets them excited about contributing and participating.” Our mission depends on empowering our members.

Practical strategies for empowering our members include:

- Enabling our members to identify and utilise their spiritual gifts within their local congregation
- Develop our members as leaders and disciple-makers
- Modelling personal evangelism
- Providing simple tools and resources for people to use to fulfil their ministry in the church and share their faith in the community






3. **Community Engagement:** One of the primary reasons that the church exists is to fulfil Jesus' mission to seek and save people who are spiritually lost. One of the characteristics of God's end-time people is that they follow the Lamb wherever He goes, and Jesus is always at work on His mission to save people. As the **Windsor Church Board** put it, "The local church must have a passion for the lost. Evangelism should be the first item on the church board agenda and the church board should spend most of its time developing plans and strategies on how to win souls for the kingdom." There are so many benefits of engaging with community. Firstly, it is very fulfilling to be able to serve people and meet their needs, like Jesus did. Also, the people will really see what Jesus is like when we step out of our comfortable homes, churches and offices and spend time with them. Finally, our own faith will grow as we share the story of what Jesus has done with the people around us.

Ellen White identifies the importance of empowering our members for service and outreach. She writes, "Nothing will so arouse a self-sacrificing zeal and broaden and strengthen the character as to engage in work for others.... Many would be greatly benefited by sacrificing their pleasant, ease-conducting associations. They need to go where their energies will be called out in Christian work and they can learn to bear responsibilities.... They need to be placed where their energies will be called forth in active Christian effort. They are losing their spiritual life, becoming dwarfed and inefficient, for want of self-sacrificing labor for others.... Doors of service are open everywhere. All around us are those who need our help. The widow, the orphan, the sick and the dying, the heartsick, the discouraged, the ignorant, and the outcast are on every hand." *The Ministry of Healing*, 151,152.

Practical strategies for engaging with our community include:

- Developing community service projects that meet the needs of our community
 - Building friendships with people in the community through shared interests
 - Confirming people's interests and decisions through culturally relevant evangelistic series like the Last Empire, the Live More project and the I Am series
 - Reaching new communities and people groups through dedicated Seventh-day Adventist mission teams who will launch new Adventist congregations
4. **Growing Together:** The sobering reality is that in many places around the world, the Seventh-day Adventist age profile is much older than the rest of society. However, this has not always been the case for the Seventh-day Adventist church, and Christianity in general. Jesus specifically choose young people to be part of His discipleship team. Also, most of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church were in their early twenties and they carried forward the mission of the church with passion and commitment.

In Australian society, there is a growing number (39%) of young people who say that they are not affiliated with any organised religion. However, research shows that young people are also more open to changing their worldview, if given the right circumstances and evidence. When we intentionally seek to reach young people, we will experience more energy and vitality in our churches. To do this, we need to be willing to trust the young people in our churches and give them the leadership "keys" of our churches. **As numerous groups at the Think Tank observed**, we need to "focus on young people and their needs."



With prophetic passion and longing, Ellen White wrote “With such an army of workers as our youth rightly trained might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come,—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin! How soon, in place of a possession here, with its blight of sin and pain, our children might receive their inheritance where ‘the righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever’; where ‘the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick,’ and ‘the voice of weeping shall be no more heard.’” *Review & Herald*, May 16, 1912. Let’s fulfil this prophetic vision, and enable our churches to grow young.

Particular strategies that we can use to grow younger include:

- Share the leadership in our church with young people at the right time
- Empathise with our young people, both within our church and in the community
- Take the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission seriously
- Develop a warm and encouraging culture in our churches
- Make young people and families our highest priority
- Be good neighbours in our society, including mentoring the young people in our community

5. **Media Engagement:** In Australia, 79% of people use social media. This jumps to 99% for young people between 18-29! The most common social media platforms are Facebook (94%), Instagram (46%) and Snapchat (40%). More than a third of Australians access social media more than 5 times per day, and for 18-29 years it is usually the first thing that they check in the morning when they wake up and the last thing they do before they go to bed.

While many people will dump all of their advertising mail in the bin and quickly close their door if you knock on it, they are open to viewing our media posts. Many people are actually searching for answers to spiritual questions on Google. It is one of the greatest evangelistic opportunities of our time, and we need to utilise this avenue to share the good news about Jesus. The Seventh-day Adventist church has always been willing to be innovative and use new technologies to spread the gospel, like the printing press, radio, television and satellite communications. We need to strategically use low-cost social media to reach people in Greater Sydney, particularly young people. **Woollahra Church** reported that it plans to “start a video ministry at our church that would encourage our young people to be involved.” We can also consider using conventional media strategies, like Faith FM, which have been proven to still be evangelistically effective.

Particular strategies that we can use to engage with people with media include:

- Develop effective social media strategies in our churches
- Produce high quality content that can be easily shared by our members and churches





Alignment with Greater Sydney Conference Vision

These 5 strategic focus areas are aligned with the vision of the Greater Sydney Conference which is:

Growing Disciples: Reach Up, Reach Out and Reach Across

These strategic focus areas are also aligned with the Great Commission that Jesus has given us in Matthew 28:18-20 and the three angels' messages in Revelation 14:6-12, which encapsulates our Seventh-day Adventist mission. These 5 strategic focus areas have been presented and accepted by the Greater Sydney Conference Board of Directors.

Motion

To adopt the five key focus areas arising from the Mission to the Cities Think Tank as follows:

1. Turning Up the Spiritual Temperature,
2. Member Empowerment,
3. Community Engagement,
4. Growing Together,
5. Media Engagement, and

FURTHER To prioritise resources and personnel targeting these focus areas.