

Irish Mission Session

31 October 2021

Strategic Plan 2021-2026

“And He called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them: Occupy till I come.”

Luke 19:13 (KJV)

The pastoral team met on 30 September this year and prayerfully considered five strategic objectives for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ireland and Northern Ireland, for the period 2021-2026. While certain strategic objectives may focus on a particular geographic area or location, engaging with these strategic objectives should be seen as an opportunity to strengthen the Irish Mission church family. As we grow and strengthen locally, we grow and strengthen as a united whole.

We present to you this proposal as a team and solicit your thoughts, ideas, concerns, and prayers as we seek to partner together to bring these strategic objectives to reality.

Introduction

The theme set at our last Session in 2019 was *Establish. Empower. Engage.*ⁱ This was to be our focus for the next few years. Unfortunately the pandemic, which struck at the commencement of 2020, and the nationwide lockdown imposed at various levels, greatly limited our ability to carry out all that we had planned.

Now, two years into this term, we are working to pick up the pieces. During this pandemic, many of our churches across our Mission have taken a hit emotionally, physically, spiritually, and financially. In view of the fact that this pandemic has exacerbated our plans to carry out our mission, we have decided to relaunch the theme *Establish. Empower. Engage.* We will also redouble our efforts to intentionally address some of the ongoing challenges in our Mission, namely:

- We face the need to experience greater interconnectedness across our Mission. Some of our church communities are experiencing isolation from the rest of the Mission family. This is a need we want to purposefully address.
- We also have a number of smaller churches/groups that are struggling to function from week to week due to a lack of available personnel. We want to look at how we can provide the needed support.

- Our membership is not divorced from internal tensions and, at times, unresolved issues. Such matters can serve to stifle the church in its function and mission. We want to implement a solution to mitigate conflict and foster resolution.
- With the growth of our Mission, for which we are deeply grateful to God, we still need to explore ways in which to reach out to the indigenous Irish in the North and South of our territory. These remain unreached.
- We cannot turn a blind eye to the huge challenges that our youth face in this generation – challenges to faith and a personal relationship with God. Many of our young people are grappling with the questions thrown at them as they are exposed to the postmodern, secularised way of thinking, reasoning and looking at life. We want to explore ways in which we can come alongside our young people to support, encourage, ground and strengthen them in their faith.
- In this ever-advancing age of technology, we realise that we need to be more on the cutting edge and engage in new ways to further our work here. We need to be using up-to-date means of communicating and spreading our message and harnessing the expertise of our members skilled in this area to assist us.

Thus, we propose to address the above challenges in the following strategic ways:

Strategic Objective No. 1 – Revitalising Congregations

We recognise that for many, many years the congregations in Northern Ireland were the backbone of our Irish Mission family. However, as part of the natural life-cycle of congregations, membership can be growing numerically, or it can be in decline. While over the last 20 years or more many of our congregations have grown in numbers and new churches have sprung up across the Mission, the reality is that some of our long-established congregations have had negative growth.

Our first strategic objective is to seek to revitalise the congregations on the north coast (i.e., Larne, Coleraine, and Derry/Londonderry).

The process of revitalising congregations can be broken down into four tasks:

1. Identify where in the natural life-cycle each congregation is currently.
2. Understand the nature of the congregation's growth/decline.
3. Assess the sustainability of the congregation's growth (or potential growth) and introduce measures to facilitate sustainable growth.
4. Assess the challenge (or potential challenge) of negative growth and introduce measures to address it.

Strategic steps for strategic objective Nr. 1:

- a. In the first semester of 2022 a deep analysis of each congregation would be undertaken.
- b. Each congregation would sit with a church growth consultant to discuss strategies applicable for growth and development of the particular congregation.
- c. Through dialogue, the Pastor, local church Board and IM leadership would develop a five-year strategic plan to revitalise the congregation.
- d. By December 2023 each congregation must have a revitalisation program in place.
- e. Monitoring and evaluation of each congregation would be set up by the IM Church Growth Department and the chair would report quarterly to the IM Officers' meeting.
- f. By October 2026 (next Session) each congregation would be plotted on the natural life-cycle chart and guided on how to remain on the trajectory of growth and health.

The process of congregation revitalisation will require considerable research and strategic work which may also develop into an in-depth study. Even though it would be conducted in Northern Ireland, it would become a model to use in our other congregations. Possibly even a model to be followed in other territories within our Division. We thus make a call to all local elders, church Boards, congregations, departments, and ministries to consider how each may contribute so that, as we work together, this may become a reality.

Strategic Objective No. 2 – Grow New and Develop Current Ministries

We recognise that across the Irish Mission there are a number of growing and developing ministries, such as, but not limited to:

- Discover Truth
- Adventist Community Services
- Centre for Conflict Resolution Europe
- Local Centres of Influence

Our second strategic objective is to empower our current ministries to grow and develop while also providing support and guidance in launching new ones.

We would seek to do this by encouraging the vast pool of talent and resources within the Irish Mission churches to partner with these ministries. Also, our desire is that each local congregation would see itself as a *community centre* where lives are empowered and changed to the glory of God. The various ministries would minister together with and complement the work of the Mission Departments and, together,

would serve to provide tools for ministry and confer cohesion of strategy, vision, and approach. Moreover, we believe that witness and evangelism are best practiced when we *bridge* services so that our programs complement one another. This would ensure that churches do not work in isolation but rather network and minister in a united way across the Mission.

Strategic Objective No. 3 – Establish a Media & Youth Centre

We live in a world where media plays a large part in a constantly changing society. Our desire is to minister to the world through cutting-edge, relevant, and innovative media which touches lives and local needs.

Our third strategic objective is to establish a media and youth centre whereby we can empower and train young, media-savvy members to develop innovative, creative, and relevant local material through which we can share the Gospel within our immediate context.

While this media and youth centre may be geographically located in one area, our desire is that it be utilised by local congregations, ministries, pastors, innovators, and young people across the Irish Mission. The goal is for its programs and initiatives to have a region-wide impact and to address the needs of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and diverse evangelistic methods.

Strategic Objective No. 4 – Establish an Innovation and Marketing Ministry

We believe that while our message of God's character and mission to save the world will never change, the methods by which we share this message must grow, develop, and adapt so that the church, both locally and Mission-wide, remains relevant to peoples' lives. The call to ministry is given to the church membership as a whole — "every member a minister" and "total membership involvement" ought to be more than just slogans. Therefore, it is our desire for church members to partner with the pastoral team in designing and implementing innovative ways for reaching our communities. Thus making God *and* our Church known in tangible and credible ways. In some places our message and Church are met with prejudice while in others with ignorance; consequently, the way we market our Church *and* our theology needs to be tailored differently to make sense to differing communities.

To this end, **our fourth strategic objective is to establish an innovation and marketing ministry comprising of a think-tank of creative people across the Mission** and thus create an environment where new ministries can be dreamed, conceptualised, and established.

Strategic Objective No. 5 – Change of Status to an Irish Conference

God has blessed our Mission with membership and financial growth. We believe that by His grace our Irish Mission family will continue to grow over the coming years, and we celebrate this! As we experience growth, we naturally become more financially independent from the British Union Conference; we also witness and work towards the establishment of strong congregations, active community centres, departments and ministries' growth, and Church headquarters/offices and institutions (such as the proposed Media Centre).

We therefore believe that we have reached the tipping point for change of organisational status and thus **our fifth strategic objective is to change our status to an Irish Conference.**

The process will not be completed overnight; it will take a number of years as ministries and departments become more independently sustainable from our Union colleagues. Also, this would mean that it would be in the remit of the Irish Mission membership to elect its own leaders. We believe that this is the right time to build on the steps that have already been taken and work, together with the Division and the Union, on completing the process by the next Session.

As pastoral team, we wish to thank you all for your continued and faithful support in ensuring that this our Irish Mission continues to fulfil its calling and thus contribute to the hastening of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12).

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

Irish Mission Pastoral Team

October 2021

ⁱ A brief summary of the *Establish. Empower. Engage.* theme is found in the President's report on page 13.