

Contemporary  
**EVANGELISM**

FOR THE

**21<sup>ST</sup>** CENTURY

C A R L T O N   B Y R D



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## CHAPTER 1

# A Biblical and Theological Foundation of Evangelism

### **Biblical foundation of evangelism**

**S**eventh-day Adventists declare that the Bible is God's Holy, inspired Word, the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian. They regard the Bible as the authentic, authoritative, infallible Word of God.<sup>1</sup> The Bible teaches that prior to the creation of this earth there was war in heaven between Christ (Michael) and Satan (the dragon). Christ was victorious in this war, and Satan was cast out of heaven

(Revelation 12:7–9). Satan's chief activity on earth has been to deceive the world regarding the love of God.

Satan's deceptive activity began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and

Since that time, God has been "seeking" humanity in His efforts to reconcile fallen creation.

Eve. Despite implicit instructions from our Creator, humanity's first parents fell prey to Satan's cunning deceptions. Consequently, Adam and Eve's fall adversely affected God's entire creation. Since that time, God has been "seeking" humanity in His efforts to reconcile fallen

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creation. It was in the Garden of Eden after the Fall that God asked Adam, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:6, 9). This question rests on the premise that the Creator desires to be involved in a seeking mission for fallen creation. Just as God sought Adam in the Garden of Eden, God is seeking fallen humanity today.

The heart of evangelism is based in the heart of a seeking God. Throughout Old Testament Scripture, God’s desire to seek and save humanity is demonstrated—from God seeking Adam and Eve to the Israelite exodus from Egypt by way of the Red Sea and to the saving of the Jewish nation as realized through the courage and resilience of Esther (Genesis 3; Exodus 14; Esther 4–10). Because of the seeking and saving nature of God, the plan of redemption to restore humanity was fully effected in the New Testament as God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, so that through Jesus, humanity could have eternal life (John 3:16).

**The heart of evangelism is based in the heart of a seeking God.**

The Bible states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). Hence, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was active not only in creation but also in re-creation and redemption through fulfilling the mission of God by being born of woman in human flesh and then dying on Calvary’s cross for the

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remission of humanity's sins (John 1:29; 3:16, 17; Acts 4:12; Revelation 12:11). The Son, just prior to His crucifixion, informed His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit (Comforter) to lead them into all truth (John 14:16; 15:26). Furthermore, the Son left them with the gospel commission to tell a dying world that Jesus saves (Matthew 28:18–20).

The church, an institution established by Christ and for which Christ sacrificed His life (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25), is God's modern evangelistic agency by which God can reconcile and restore creation. The church, the body of Christ, is to join God in this seeking, missionary movement (Acts 2:41–47).

The church has been sent by God to teach that healing comes through humanity's acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The sending mission of Christ was to bring wholeness and healing to the world. The mission of the church is the same. The church has been sent by God to teach that healing

comes through humanity's acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The church in this "sending" is called out of the world, redeemed, and then sent back into the world to reach and transform the world.

Darrell Guder and Letty Russell share this sentiment and specifically refer to mission as "sending," expressing that this "sending" is the central biblical theme outlining the purpose of God's action in human history. The church is God's "sent people" to carry this gospel. Russell suggests that through this "sending," the church participates

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in God’s mission of the redemption of humanity and the restoration of all creation. When understanding the mission of God and grasping the meaning of this “sending,” she also proposes that one should envision God the Father sending the Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. Furthermore, it should be understood that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are now sending the church into the entire world.<sup>2</sup>

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church focuses on evangelism throughout the entire world.

### **Jesus’ approach to evangelism**

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is rooted in the Holy Scriptures as articulated by Jesus Christ in the great gospel commission: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even until the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

The gospel commission of Jesus Christ makes evangelism the primary function and duty of the church. The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church focuses on evangelism throughout the entire world.<sup>3</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* accentuates this point as follows:

The church is organized for mission service to

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fulfill the work Israel failed to do. As seen in the life of the Master, the greatest service the church provides the world is in being fully committed to completing the gospel “‘witness to all nations’” (Matt. 24:14), empowered by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This mission includes proclaiming a message of preparation for Christ’s return that is directed both to the church itself . . . and to the rest of humanity.<sup>4</sup>

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* further adds that the church board, composed of the principal officers of the church, has a number of important responsibilities, but “its chief concern is the spiritual nurture of the church and the work of planning and fostering evangelism in all its phases.”<sup>5</sup>

One dictionary provides a theoretical definition of *theology* by stating it is “the study of God and his relation to man and the world.”<sup>6</sup> Douglas Hall states that “to confess something is to own, avow, declare, reveal, or disclose what in the depths of the soul one considers truly to be the case.”<sup>7</sup> Seventh-day Adventists believe that the theological confession of the faith is the gospel commission of Jesus Christ. This commission rests in reaching the world through evangelism—the proclamation of the gospel.

Hall’s interpretation of Christian confession implies worldly witness and public testimony. He emphasizes that the good news (gospel) that Jesus Christ redeemed

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the world through His precious blood shed on Calvary must not be hoarded or confined, but rather it must be spread to all the earth.<sup>8</sup> The admonition to evangelize the entire world is inclusive of all believers in Christ, dating from the time of Christ's earthly life during His itinerant ministry until His second coming.

The apostle Paul verbalized the primacy of this witness and testimony when he expressed, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1:16). Furthermore, the urgency in proclaiming the gospel is imperative, for Jesus Himself said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

Christ's commission transcends national, cultural, racial, and economic lines. Disciples are to be made of all people with no respect to background (Acts 1:8; Galatians 3:26–29). The call to evangelism is universal and ubiquitous. The church is to be a missionary church in the cultures where its residence is held. The church is not the mission or goal of the gospel but its instrument and witness. Church growth expert C. Peter Wagner concurs, stating that

Christian mission is what God sends us to do. He sends us out as ambassadors of His Kingdom into a world yet dominated by the evil one. . . .

. . . The heart of the Gospel Commission is to make disciples of all nations. In light of the

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Kingdom of God, each person who becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ is another person lost to the dominion of Satan.<sup>9</sup>

Christians, which by their very name are implicated as disciples, or followers, of Christ, have been called by God to carry this gospel to humanity—to exercise the “confession” of the faith.<sup>10</sup> The church is to be a community that is being brought to live the representative life of Christ in this world. To represent the life of Christ is to portray and stand for what He espoused when on earth. Although the work of the incarnate Christ on earth is finished, the church’s participation in this work as Christ’s representative is not. The entire church is to commit itself to the gospel commission. As Jesus made disciples of individuals, the church must also seek to proclaim the gospel message to others and make disciples to proclaim the gospel message of Christ.

**The church is to be a community that is being brought to live the representative life of Christ in this world.**

Throughout the New Testament, the followers of Christ are challenged to be a “sending” people and to evangelize. Christ exhorts His people to let their lights shine (Matthew 5:16). He also challenges them to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). He then expresses that His disciples are His witnesses (Luke 24:48). In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus teaches the importance of every shepherd seeking that one lost sheep, even if he has to leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness.

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“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” (Luke 15:4).

God’s urgent, eschatological message calls for the people of God to take the everlasting gospel to all the inhabitants of the earth, calling for them to fear and worship God who made

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heaven, earth, the sea, and the fountains of water (Revelation 14:6, 7). The fact that the message of the first angel of Revelation 14 indicates an “everlasting gospel” should not be read casually. Rather, the insertion of the word *everlasting* emphasizes the distinction that this gospel is the only gospel that can save humanity. The acceptance of this gospel will lead to loyalty and allegiance to God.

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), this task seemed like an impossible assignment to His small group of followers until they understood His plan for its fulfillment. Christ’s plan is so outlined: “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12). Put simply, the church is comprised of followers who

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have been equipped with diverse gifts to share the mission of Jesus Christ, which is the evangelization of the world.

Christ's method was  
neither contentious  
nor argumentative  
nor irrelevant.

Jesus Christ advocated and practiced relevant evangelism when on this earth while modeling a people-oriented, relational focus. He never devalued the importance of people and their needs. "Christ's method alone will give true success

in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow me.'"<sup>11</sup> Christ's method was neither contentious nor argumentative nor irrelevant. Christ approached individuals in loving service and met their human needs in an appropriate, humane fashion.

Through His relational approach to ministry, Jesus contextualized His evangelistic methods to the cultures and age to which He found Himself. He reached people at their diverse levels of need, and then He shared the good news with them. As a result, they were receptive to His teachings and message. If the church is to effectively evangelize the world, it must be able to identify with the current and future social, as well as spiritual, needs of society.

Jesus' method of evangelism is illustrated in John 4:1–42. Jesus met the woman at the well and asked her for a drink. He began socially conversing with her and remained positive with her without condemning her. After winning her

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confidence, He then confronted her with the gospel with the statement, “I that speak unto thee am he [the Christ]” (John 4:26).

Like Christ, the church must contact others through relevant, friendly relationships. We cannot win individuals to Jesus Christ if we are isolated, insulated, and not a “seeking” people. The church has been sent by God to seek. Church members need to establish common interests with unchurched individuals, arouse that interest, gain the respective individual’s confidence, and avoid judgment or condemnation. Ultimately, the unchurched should be confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Guder teaches that the church needs to set as its foundation “the reign of God.” This reign of God is rooted in God’s mission to reconcile His creation through the accomplished death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> The gospel, in essence, is Jesus Christ Himself. He became the incarnate Son of God to save us all from sin and death. Therefore, if the church is to receive and enter this reign of God, it will turn from other hopes and loyalties while seeking to accumulate a singular hope in one true God.

**The gospel, in essence, is Jesus Christ Himself. He became the incarnate Son of God to save us all from sin and death.**

Guder suggests that if the entire church would receive and enter the reign of God, three things would happen: First, evangelism would move from an act of recruiting with those outside the church to an invitation of companionship. Second, the community of the church would

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testify that it has the announcement that such a reign is coming and, indeed, is already loose in the world. Finally, to those invited, the church would offer itself to assist their entrance into the reign of God and travel with them as co-pilgrims.<sup>13</sup>

### **The writings of Ellen G. White**

Ellen G. White, the inspired prophet of the Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>14</sup> and cofounder of the same, had much to say about the evangelization of the world. Her writings on evangelism are so extensive that more than five hundred references to evangelism are listed in the Ellen G. White Writings website. In fact, many of these selected writings were published in the book titled *Evangelism*.

Throughout the book *Evangelism* and in numerous other works, Mrs. White promotes and fosters the need for evangelism in our world. Although she addresses diverse evangelistic issues in varying cultural and societal contexts, ranging from appropriate versus inappropriate evangelistic styles to the funding for evangelistic campaigns, she consistently stresses in her writings that evangelism is the primary work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She asserts that “the evangelization of the world is the work that God has given to those who go forth in His name.”<sup>15</sup> In *Christian Service*, she adds, “The church must realize its obligation to carry the gospel of present truth to every creature.”<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. White clearly advocates the biblical mandate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to engage in the work

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of evangelism. She states, “We are not, as Christians, doing one-twentieth part that we might do in winning souls to Christ. There is a world to be warned, and every sincere Christian will be a guide and an example to others in faithfulness, in cross-bearing, in prompt and vigorous action, in unswerving fidelity to the cause of truth, and sacrifices and labors to promote the cause of God.”<sup>17</sup>

Her support of this biblical mandate for evangelism is exemplified in her full adherence of the gospel commission that Christ gave His disciples in Matthew 28:19, 20, just prior to His heavenly ascension. She, however, makes the commission specifically applicable to Christ’s disciples today. She says, “To us also the commission is given. We are bidden to go forth as Christ’s messengers, to teach, instruct, and persuade men and women, to urge upon their attention the word of life. And to us also the assurance of Christ’s abiding presence is given. Whatever the difficulties with which we may have to contend, whatever the trials we may have to endure, the gracious promise is always ours, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’”<sup>18</sup>

Mrs. White promoted evangelism, and her life was spent formulating methods of reaching the unreached. Her history shows that she traveled extensively sharing the gospel, published comprehensive evangelistic material, and taught workers within the Seventh-day Adventist Church about effective modes of evangelism while stressing the importance of intentional, continual engagement in evangelism. “Evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming

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upon the world is to occupy more and still more of the time of God's servants. . . . If every Seventh-day Adventist

She asserts that "the evangelization of the world is the work that God has given to those who go forth in His name."

had done the work laid upon him, the number of believers would now be much larger than it is."<sup>19</sup>

### Significance of evangelism to church vitality

While the word *evangelism* has been given many different definitions and descriptions, some of which were shared previously in this book, *evangelism* has often been coined metaphorically as the lifeblood of the church. All affirmative church activities, movement, and operations exist and stem from evangelistic endeavors. The consistent influx of new members, coupled with the energy and enthusiasm that church growth brings, contributes to the life, vivacity, and positive spirit of the church.

When new members are added to the membership of the church, there is a sense of joy and excitement. Positive, supportive attitudes are apparent within evangelism-driven churches. Members have a high level of enthusiasm for participation within the church, and lethargic, slothful attitudes are not as widespread. When evangelism is absent within a church, the church spirit is often dead, with the church headed for disintegration. Russell Burrill describes *disintegration* as the stage within the life cycle of a church where morale among the members is very low and the primary goal of the church becomes preservation and survival.<sup>20</sup>

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Evangelism also keeps the members of the church active in church affairs. Most important, members are more cognizant of the church's mission when evangelism is continually practiced by the membership. Ellen White says that "it is the idle mind that is Satan's workshop."<sup>21</sup> She adds, "Vigilance and fidelity have been required of Christ's followers in every age; but now that we are standing upon the very verge of the eternal world, holding the truths we do, having so great light, so important a work, we must double our diligence. Every one is to do the very utmost of his ability. My brother, you endanger your own salvation if you hold back now. God will call you to account if you fail in the work He has assigned you."<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, members actively working in the cause of God increase the likelihood of their being fortified with personal spiritual growth. George Knowles, in his book *How to Help Your Church Grow*, says, "When we who claim to be God's people move out in obedient service for Him, we become more aware of our spiritual needs. At the same time, we qualify for a greater infilling of the Holy Spirit, which is given for service."<sup>23</sup>

The consistent influx of new members, coupled with the energy and enthusiasm that church growth brings, contributes to the life, vivacity, and positive spirit of the church.

Christians become like Christ as they share in His work. This is the basic reason God has shared with us the

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privilege of service. Mrs. White expresses, “God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work.”<sup>24</sup> Although God does not need the church and can communicate His message and do His work without human vessels, the church needs involvement with God in service.

When the church lessens its outward missionary focus, members begin to center their attentions on internal matters. They lose sight of the gospel commission, and evangelistic opportunities and endeavors become foreign. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* clearly states, “When the [church] board devotes its first interests and highest energies to every-member evangelism, most [church] problems are alleviated or prevented, and a strong, positive influence is felt in the spiritual life and growth of members.”<sup>25</sup>

But when church members begin focusing on their personal needs as opposed to concentrating on the needs of the church and community, *koinonitis* develops. *Koinonitis*, by definition, is “when interpersonal relationships within the church become so central, that they become the focal point for almost all church activity and involvement.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, the overall spiritual growth of the church is lessened and evangelistic activity is minimal.

When the church fails to engage in evangelism, its purpose is often lost and mission misunderstood. Evangelism keeps the church rooted in its mission, and people working for the salvation of souls are not plagued with unnecessary strife. The spirituality of the church collectively, as well as

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personally, is strengthened through the constructive work of evangelism.

To further comprehend the impact evangelism imparts to the vitality of a church, a greater explanation should be given to the denotation of a disciple in relationship to evangelism. While evangelism rests in proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and should be the focus of the entire church membership, convincing individuals to also become His disciples should accompany the former. This promotes the concept that each one can reach one.

As individuals become disciples of Christ, they are very apt to see others become disciples of Christ too. A simplistic definition of a *disciple* is a “follower.”<sup>27</sup> First and foremost, to become a disciple, or follower, of Christ, one must be willing to repudiate self. Individuals have to be at God’s bidding in their respective lives. Jesus Christ expressed that those who are desirous of following Him must be willing to deny themselves and take up their cross in order to follow Him (Mark 8:34). True evangelism is a process that incorporates this self-renouncement and pursues the path of God’s will.

Yet to become a disciple of Christ, one must also understand that there should be a yearning to make others disciples as well. This is what Christ meant when He said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Although *evangelism* is defined as “the proclamation

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of the gospel,”<sup>28</sup> it is not restricted to one’s conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord or to be just simply a “follower” of Christ. It continues with instruction and teaching on the part of the current and prospective disciple. Donald McGavran’s twofold understanding of church growth is “discipling,” which is the initial coming to Christ, and “perfecting,” which is the full instruction into the Christian faith.<sup>29</sup> “Without the exercise of the mental faculties to understand the revealed will of God, there can be no real Christianity, no real growth. Instruction is thus of vital importance before and after baptism.”<sup>30</sup>

Finally, a disciple of Christ is one who has fellowship with other disciples. Acts 2:41, 42 teaches that after individuals were persuaded and convinced that Jesus Christ was indeed the Savior, they aspired to fellowship with other disciples of Christ. Evangelism is accepting Christ, becoming a disciple of Christ, following Christ, sharing Christ, and then fellowshiping with others in Christ.

True Christians will engage in evangelism each and every

True evangelism is a process that incorporates this self-renouncement and pursues the path of God’s will.

day. They will not confine evangelism to a limited day or season. Effective discipling means everyday evangelism. Emphasizing not only the denial of self but also daily

evangelism, Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” When one really studies the Bible, the

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student of the Word is convinced that evangelism was the main function of the early church and not a matter of secondary importance. The New Testament church followed the command of Jesus so completely that “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). They were so anxious to do God’s will that they went “praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The New Testament church followed the command of Jesus so completely that “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Because they had undertaken this great burden for lost souls, the Lord added three thousand new converts to the church (verse 41).

As the apostles were Christ’s witnesses then, we are His witnesses now. The work that God began through them, God will finish through the church as it demonstrates by total dedication that the church is God’s modern-day witness. Paul magnifies this concept by saying, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1, 2).

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Gottfried Oosterwal, in his book *Mission Possible*, reminds us that “though the Lord has never told us that the whole world will accept Him, He did definitely commission us to proclaim the gospel to every person on earth. Since Christ died for all of them, they all have a right to know it. Therein lies the challenge of our generation.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, while we cannot save anybody (that is the Holy Spirit’s role), we can tell everybody.

“The church’s main emphasis must be winning lost souls for Jesus Christ. We must do everything in our churches for the glory of God. We must realize that heaven does not shout over financial rallies or singing programs, but over the church’s burden to win lost souls.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus said, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

Churches actively involved in evangelism experience spiritual revival. The New Testament church of Acts 2 grew because it had an internal spiritual revival. There was a sense of centrality within the mission. Everyone knew their reason for existence: the proclamation of the gospel. When evangelism is paramount within a church, churches are strengthened spiritually due to the increased Bible study among members in preparation for this gospel proclamation. Evangelism keeps individuals rooted in the Word of God. Both the disciple of Christ and the prospective disciple benefit from the effects of evangelism. Both read the Word, study the Word, and experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word. When this is accomplished, the power of

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God will be seen, felt, and heard throughout the church, individually and collectively.

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