



## ORGANIZING AN OFFICIAL MISSION GROUP

The Working Policies of the Southern New England Conference (SNEC) (pp. 104-105) and the Church Manual (pp. 37-43) serve as localized applications of the principles outlined in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, as well as the Working Policies of both the Southern New England Conference and the North American Division. These documents are designed to provide guidance for the practices of church employees and volunteers, thereby supporting the ministry of the local Seventh-day Adventist congregations within the territory of the SNEC.

The Southern New England Conference is focused on evangelizing individuals within its territory, with a critical strategy of planting new churches. The Savior's commission to spread the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15) requires encouraging new decisions for Christ and fostering discipleship among all members. The following policies have been established to support the growth and accountability of emerging mission groups and churches.

The objective of the mission group is to expand the ministry of the local church in a specific geographic area or, to a limited degree, to a particular people group (differentiated by geographic location, ethnic, cultural, or social identity) who are without the ministry and access to an existing Seventh-day Adventist Church. The organizational goal of a mission group is to, within a designated amount of time, become a company by meeting the expanded objectives of a company as listed within the Guidelines for the Organizing of Companies (pp. 104-105; pp. 37-43).

- 1. Consultation with Southern New England Conference.** Before the submission of an application, appropriate consultation with the Ministerial Director, Vice-President of Mission Development and the Secretariat Department is required:
  - To determine the geographic location of other churches, including sister Conferences.
  - To assist in coordinating new church initiatives with the conference strategic plan for church and school growth.
  - To provide potential resources and give helpful assistance to the group leadership in the establishment of a healthy and supportive environment.
  - To allow the Regional Ministerial Director to consult with local pastors to solicit input and support.

**2. Authorization.** A mission group shall only be authorized by the Conference if the board of a sponsoring church recommends it. A mission group should work closely with the involvement and agreed support of a locally established conference church and its leaders. This will likely be the church where most of the Group's attending members hold their church membership. Due to an isolated geographical location or other circumstances where a relationship with an established church is impossible, the Southern New England Conference Administrative Committee may consider approval after carefully reviewing the specific application and circumstances.

**3. Conflict.** A mission group should not be organized as the result of any internal church disputes. Members must also adhere to the teachings, written standards, and policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Southern New England Conference.

**4. Application.** An application form, available through the office of the Vice President for Administration or the Conference website, must be completed and submitted for approval to the Vice Presidents for Administration and the Department of Pastoral Ministries and Discipleship. Following these approvals, the Administrative Committee will review and recommend the recognition of the new group.

- Leadership. The officers and leaders of a mission group must be recognized and appointed by the sponsoring church (see Leadership Oversight section below).
- Membership. This core group will consist of at least fifteen (15) experienced baptized members in the Seventh-day Adventist Church committed to providing adequate ministry and leadership. Membership of those attending the mission group is held in the sponsoring church.
- Tithes and Offerings. The mission group's treasurer will receive all tithes and conference offerings and send them to the sponsoring church monthly.
- Financial and Board Responsibilities. The mission group is charged with all financial and administrative responsibilities and represents a recognized church.
- Register the mission group or church plant with the secretary of the state.
- Register the mission group or church plant for the EIN number of the Internal Revenue Service in collaboration with the treasury department of the Conference.
- The Conference can expect to audit Mission Groups, Companies, and Churches biannually. In matters of church discipline and major financial decisions, the board of the sponsoring Church will process those decisions with appropriate input from the mission group leadership.
- Mission groups are not authorized to enter into long-term rental agreements of any kind except with the approval of the sponsoring church. They are also not permitted to purchase real estate or hold a non-profit status with a state or federal agency.

4. **Accountability.** A representative of the mission group should present a quarterly progress report to the church board of the sponsoring church. This report should include a quarterly financial report, a summary of outreach results and future outreach plans, any challenges and resourcing needs, etc.

5. **Pastoral Coverage.** A mission group is, by nature, a lay-led initiative, and with the involvement of the laity in leadership and ministry, it is likely to be successful. The district pastor of the sponsoring church is viewed as a resource to the local mission group and not as the primary pastoral leader. The district pastor, therefore, should be involved most significantly in planning and resourcing for the group but not in its continuous operational ministry.

- Time Frame. Once a mission group is organized, it has one year to move from mission status to company status or dissolve (see requirements for applying for company status).
- To Establish a comprehensive program aimed at enhancing new member retention and facilitating their seamless integration, all within the motivating framework of the Total Member Involvement program (NAD).
- Pastors must prioritize ongoing real-time training to effectively develop and empower their mission group or church plant, ensuring that they meet the needs of their community and fulfill their mission.

6. **Church Leadership and Organization Structure.** When seeking approval for a church plant or mission organization, it is essential for the group to demonstrate their ability, under the leadership of the lead director, lay pastor, and church elder, to effectively identify and cultivate potential lay leaders. These leaders will be crucial in taking on significant roles focused on fulfilling the mission, ensuring lasting impact and growth.

Church plants and mission groups are expected to follow the structure and principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each church plant or small group should create a church board with different leadership roles to ensure good governance and ministry (CM pp 25-30; 39-40;44-47).

The board should include an associate treasurer to manage finances with the sponsoring church treasurer, a church clerk to keep church records and membership lists, and a Personal Ministries director to oversee outreach and evangelism in the community. Additionally, a Sabbath School director should support members' education and spiritual growth through Sabbath School programs, a Youth director to engage younger members, and a Children's Ministries director to plan activities for children.

The board should also have deacons and deaconesses who serve the congregation and community by helping with hospitality and worship preparation. Together, these roles will help the church plant or mission group operate effectively and grow spiritually, creating a collaborative ministry environment (CM pp. 74-115).

## 7. Organizing an Official Mission Group

Related NAD Policy Number: SNEC EXCOM

Date Adopted: 01/01/09

Criteria for a group or branch Sabbath School to begin meeting with recognition of the Conference Administration:

1. Be approved by a “Mother” church as a group sponsor.
2. Begin with a core group of at least fifteen (15) members. Develop a systematic pattern of giving tithes and offerings. The Mother church should handle the finances of the group.
3. The leader should request in writing to be recognized as a group with a proposal stating the name, mission statement, community to be reached, beginning membership and attendance, activities and events planned, proposed budget and plans for growth and evangelism.
4. Rent Subsidy. When an unorganized group is approved by the Conference Administrative Committee and the parent church in a business meeting, and there are at least ten members in this new group, the following rent for a public hall subsidy will be given upon request.
  - 100% of rent for the first 3 months
  - 75% of rent for the next 3 months
  - 50% of rent for the following 3 months
  - 25% of rent for the final 3 months