We chuckle at such irony yet in some churches haven’t you sensed that there is an invisible pre-assigned seating chart? Maybe it is just a church you have visited and certainly would not happen in your congregation.

This week in our Bible Study we are challenged to determine whether our church focuses on all humanity located in our community or if we just belong to a church located in the community. Are people regularly coming to our churches who have never entered one before? Or are Adventist church buildings only open on Saturday and seen by others passing by as a museum among other dying churches waiting for a good offer from a real estate company?

If you are a member of a congregation which is constantly planning ways to move out from the pews into the community to share the good news with others in practical ways, you belong to a mission-driven church. Mission involves sending people out from a church building and into the community to speak for God. Mission-driven churches are all about building relationships with and reaching out to unbelievers. It is by establishing relationships with unbelievers that unbelievers become followers of Christ as well as Christian friends and church members.

Mission-driven churches don’t hold the expectation that strangers will walk in off the street into the church structure. Rather the expectation is that every member of the congregation is a missionary once they leave the building. If, however,
a visitor does come to worship, members are trained to welcome not shun them by only speaking to fellow church members.

By contrast member-driven churches focus on trying to keep the members in the congregation content by avoiding anything and anyone that is controversial. The smallest issue can cause a large rift among members. On Sabbath members are focused on the friends they get to see once a week at church. The pastor is the paid missionary.

It is important to keep a sense of balance between nurture and evangelism. As our Scriptures this week tell us, the main reason for a church to exist is to advance the gospel.

How long has it been since your congregation has evaluated the unique strengths your church has to offer your community? What is your congregation doing to spread the gospel? What ministries are already in place in which your congregation excels and can partner with other churches or associations and private agencies when community needs arise? If you cannot answer these questions perhaps now is a good time to take a serious inventory.

Hurricane Sandy gave many churches a chance to serve humanity in struggling communities. Should it take a disaster for our communities to know that we are Seventh-day Adventists? What would it mean to your church if it were known in your community as a seven-days-a-week Adventist church?

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