



Adventist  
Mission

# Urban

# Centers of Influence

**Life Hope Urban Centers**

OPERATING GUIDELINES

2022 Edition

## **DEFINITION**

The name *Center of Influence* has been quickly adopted in Seventh-day Adventist circles and is used to describe projects or organizations from businesses, to hospitals, to churches, to individuals. And it is true that any and every Adventist organization or person ought to be a center of influence to those around them. However, a Global Mission Urban Center of Influence (UCI) is a specific type of project that should not be confused with the variety of entities calling themselves centers of influence.

A Global Mission Urban Center of Influence is a project that is usually built on a business model for the specific purpose of leading unreached urban people groups into Adventist fellowship. However, this is accomplished not through traditional evangelistic techniques, which are often ineffective in such urban settings, but through relationships that are established by meeting specific felt needs of the community in long-term, day-by-day interaction.

A Global Mission UCI does not meet the needs of the urban community simply for physical humanitarian reasons but specifically for the purpose of planting new groups of believers by establishing relationships and trust. And Global Mission UCIs are not placed in random urban communities but in locations chosen specifically where few or no Adventists live and where a specific unreached group<sup>1</sup> can be reached. In a word, Global Mission UCIs are strategically-placed church planting factories.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK OF UCIs**

Today, the huge and rapidly growing urban areas of the world loom as our greatest mission challenge. In most parts of the world, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a rural church—and most churches, institutions and services are located outside cities, where the majority of people now live.

City ministry was a top priority for Ellen White. In 1902, she told leaders that the church had neglected the cities. Although Ellen White promoted more focus and resources on cities, she was opposed to setting up huge urban institutions tying up the church's resources and personnel in just a few places.

Ellen White says that in large cities there are certain classes of people “who cannot be reached by public meetings.”<sup>2</sup> She championed wholistic urban ministry through Urban Centers of Influence (UCIs), which would connect the church to the community. She had a vision to “establish in all our cities small plants which shall be Urban Centers of Influence.”<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. White envisioned these UCIs spread out through urban areas and featuring a wide variety of activities such as lifestyle education, treatment rooms, bookstores/reading rooms, restaurants, literature ministry, lectures, instruction on preparing wholesome food, small groups, etc. Obviously, the particular activities of these UCIs will vary from place to place, according to community needs.

Urban Centers of Influence follow Jesus' wholistic method of ministry. Ellen White says: “It is through the social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world.”<sup>4</sup> These UCIs facilitate that vital contact.

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<sup>1</sup>See the definition of unreached people groups on page 6.

<sup>2</sup>*Gospel Workers*, page 64.

<sup>3</sup>*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, page 115

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, page 480.

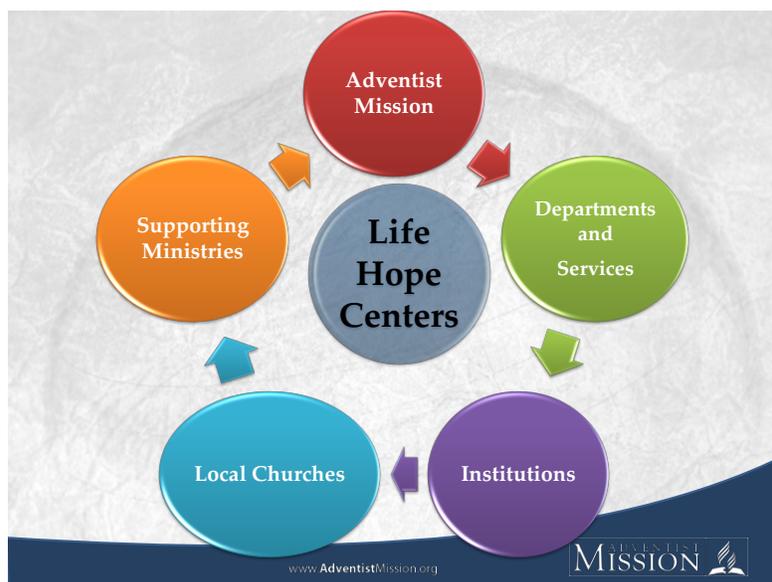


### LIFE HOPE URBAN CENTERS

The Office of Adventist Mission is working to revitalize Ellen White’s concept of Urban Centers of Influence and to establish a network of self-sustaining UCIs—called Life Hope Urban Centers—in key urban areas around the world.

These will be branded the same and will be undergirded by the same theological/spiritual principles, but they will vary in shape, size, and sophistication. Their look, style, and flavor will be shaped to local situations; however, the philosophy and principles of operation will be consistent.

They will utilize local Adventist workers, Global Mission pioneers, and volunteers. They will partner with church departments, institutions, and lay organizations.



Although primarily seed-sowing, they will connect to small groups and urban church planting initiatives. They must be long-term, “on the ground” projects.

*“There is means now tied up that should be in use for the unworked cities in Europe, Australia, and America, and in the regions beyond. These cities have been neglected for years.”—Ellen White, Manuscript 11, 1908.*

## GOALS

**Wholistic:** Christ’s method was to meet people’s physical needs first, but then He always bid them, “Follow me.” His method was wholistic. Urban Centers of Influence have the specific agenda of connecting with people where they are in order to share with them the good news of the gospel. *Every proposal for an Urban Center of Influence must make explicit plans for how the center will build bridges from meeting people’s physical needs to meeting their spiritual needs.* Ideally, every center should result in new Seventh-day Adventist groups being established in urban areas. They may not look like a standard church congregation, but one of the primary goals of these UCIs is to build new Adventist communities.

**Discipleship:** UCIs should not only serve people’s physical needs and should even do more than merely introduce people to Jesus. UCIs should conscientiously work toward building people’s relationship with Jesus as well. Proposals for UCIs should include plans for the discipleship of both those who work with and for the center as well as those being reached.

**Sustainability:** Adventist Mission funding for UCIs is limited to five years. Within five years or even earlier, a center should be established well enough to be self-sustaining. Often urban centers can be linked to some revenue-generating enterprise such as a medical or dental clinic. While it is recognized that not all UCIs will be able to become self-sustaining, a plan for sustainability should be considered in each center proposal.

## TEN PRINCIPLES FOR URBAN CENTER OF INFLUENCE MINISTRY

One of the items that the approval committee will look at in Urban Center of Influence proposals is the plan for not only meeting immediate needs of the surrounding community but for meeting spiritual needs as well. The ten principles that follow will help serve as a guide for making these plans.

### Don’t build prejudice

“Paul did not approach the Jews in such a way as to arouse their prejudices,” writes Ellen White.<sup>5</sup> She speaks of workers who have “closed doors through which they might, by a different method of labor, have found access to hearts, and through them to other hearts.”<sup>6</sup> She adds that ministers are “to win souls, not to repulse them.”<sup>7</sup>

*Urban Centers of Influence are in the business of breaking down walls and barriers—not raising them. They are about connection, not alienation.*

“The work which Christ came to do in our world was not to erect barriers, and constantly thrust upon the people the fact that they were wrong,” says Mrs. White. “He who expects to enlighten a deceived people must come near to them and labor for them in love.”<sup>8</sup>

### Meet people where they are

“Many do not realize the necessity of adapting themselves to circumstances, and meeting the people where they are,” says Mrs. White.<sup>9</sup> She urges patience and understanding for people from different backgrounds and whose lives are out of harmony with God’s will. “Ministers should be careful not to

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, page 118.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, pages 118, 119.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, page 119.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, page 373.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, page 381.

expect too much from those who are still groping in the darkness of error,” she says.<sup>10</sup> Jesus Himself modeled how we need to meet people where they are, before we can help lead them to where God wants them to be.

### **Move slowly and carefully**

At first, Paul didn’t tell the Jews that they must believe in Jesus of Nazareth, says Ellen White: “Step by step he led his hearers on.”<sup>11</sup> We shouldn’t be looking for quick methods and instant results, or placing high expectations and hurdles for those seeking spiritual truth. Mrs. White urges church planters, for example, not to “create difficulties by attempting to make prominent the question of diet.”<sup>12</sup>

*Urban Centers of Influence are, as the name says, places of influence. They provide a framework for the Holy Spirit to work, at His own pace, to touch and change the lives of people.*

### **Adapt the message to the audience**

Ellen White says that the apostle Paul “varied his manner of labor, shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed.”<sup>13</sup> She adds, “God’s workmen must be many-sided . . . They are not to be one-idea men, stereotyped in their manner of working, unable to see that their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people among whom they work and the circumstances they have to meet.”<sup>14</sup>

Urban Centers of Influence call for workers who aren’t afraid of doing things differently, being creative, and doing things “outside the box.” Truth does not change. But the way we shape it, dress it, and present it must change according to our audience. This calls for much prayer, and a lot of fresh thinking from all involved in UCIs.

### **Use a variety of methods**

“The laborer for God is to study carefully the best methods,” writes Ellen White.<sup>15</sup> She adds, “In connection with the proclamation of the message in large cities, there are many kinds of work to be done by laborers with varied gifts. Some are to labor in one way, some in another.”<sup>16</sup>

*Urban Centers of Influence provide the flexibility to provide services and ministries that connect with particular needs.*

In some areas the greatest need may be to provide child-care for the children of single mothers who need help and support. Or it may be to provide counseling on how to budget, and to make wise financial decisions. Or it may be to offer demonstrations on cooking healthful, inexpensive meals. Workers need to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs in their particular area.

This involves understanding their communities. Like Paul who walked through Athens studying what the people worshiped, we need to study our communities. We need to mingle and discover what is most important in people’s lives. What do they consider sacred? What do they consider important? In what areas are they feeling pain or hurt? What needs—physical, social, emotional, or spiritual do they have? How best can we connect to their interest and needs?

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, page 381.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, page 118.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, page 233.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, page 118.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, page 119.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, page 118.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, page 345.

Drive-by evangelism will not do. This is long-term, on-the-ground commitment to connect wholistically with people—following in the footsteps of Jesus.

### **Live the message**

UCIs provide an opportunity to demonstrate Christianity—not to just talk about it—showing what it looks like in practice. “A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of Christianity,” writes Ellen White.<sup>17</sup> She adds, “If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Treat people with respect and kindness**

Workers in UCIs will not see people in the surrounding community in terms of “targets” for baptism or mere statistics, but as brothers and sisters whom Jesus has called us to love and care for. When Jesus saw the crowds, He looked on them with compassion (Matthew 9:36). He calls us to do the same.

“The Lord Jesus demands our acknowledgment of the rights of every man,” says Ellen White. “All are to be treated with refinement and delicacy, as the sons and daughters of God.”<sup>19</sup> Ministers “need to cultivate that rare Christian courtesy which would render them kind and considerate toward the souls under their care.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Don’t criticize**

Workers in UCIs will concentrate on the positive—what builds up, not what knocks down. “If you seek to meet the opposition with argument, you will only multiply it, and this you cannot afford to do,” says Mrs. White. “Hold to the affirmative.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Work personally in small groups and with families**

Ellen White tells pastors that giving speeches and sermons and other discourses isn’t the only way to evangelize. “The best work you can do is to teach, to educate,” she says. “Whenever you can find an opportunity to do so, sit down with some family, and let them ask questions. Then answer them patiently, humbly.”

*Presenting Jesus to families, in homes, in small groups, is often more successful than sermons to crowds in halls or churches.*<sup>22</sup>

Mrs. White also points to the method Jesus taught His disciples—establishing small groups to study the Bible in a “free, conversational” atmosphere.<sup>23</sup> Groups that focus on spiritual themes will naturally spring up from UCIs.

### **Follow Christ’s method**

Ellen White says that Christ’s method alone will bring true success. She summarizes that method in five steps.

- *Mingle with people:* UCIs place us in the middle of where people live. Literature, public evangelism, radio, TV, and internet can play a vital role in the mission of the church. But they

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, page 123.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, page 363.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, page 123.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, page 382.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid*, page 358.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, page 193.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, page 408.

can only support, and never replace, personal, hands-on, mingling ministry. In Matthew 8 and 9 alone, Jesus touches five people, including a leper (who, under Jewish law, makes Jesus ritually unclean). Workers in UCIs must be prepared to move out of their comfort zones, and form relationships with people who are different from them, and to whom they may not be naturally attracted.

- *Show sympathy*: “You must come close to those for whom you labor,” says Ellen White, “that they may not only hear your voice, but shake your hand, learn your principles, feel your sympathy.”<sup>24</sup>
- *Minister to people’s needs*: These needs will vary from place to place. This can range from providing some people with something to eat, through to prayer and counseling for someone who is divorced or bereaved or just desperately lonely.
- Some sort of health ministry will almost always serve to connect to people. Ellen White called health ministry the “right arm” of the message, and she said that Jesus spent more time ministering to the sick than preaching. She says we need to help the poor, care for the sick, and comfort the sorrowing and the bereaved.<sup>25</sup>
- *Win people’s confidence*: Through mingling, showing sympathy, and ministering to needs, we show people that we care. As they learn that we care about them physically they will be more inclined to pay attention when we introduce them to spiritual healing as well.
- *Bid them to follow Jesus*: This is not some sort of artificial construct where we have been luring people with the first four steps, and now hook and reel them in. This arises naturally from the first four steps. In a “closed” country environment, this must be dealt with carefully, with discretion. But when people start questioning us about our motivation, and why we live our lives the way we do, it is the most natural thing in the world to start talking about the Source of our spiritual commitment.

## PROJECT TEAM

Pastors, Global Mission pioneers, and other church members who help run Urban Centers of Influence are called to a special and specialized ministry. They themselves are to be “a center of holy influence.”<sup>26</sup> They need different spiritual gifts from those of the public evangelist, or of those accustomed to working only in traditional methods. They should be people immersed in God’s Word, but not necessarily great preachers. Workers in UCIs should be gifted in one-on-one, small-group personal ministry, and bridge-building across cultures, languages, and religions.

## UNREACHED GROUPS

Global Mission UCIs are specifically geared toward reaching unreached people groups. A great deal of confusion surrounds who should be considered reached and who remains unreached. When Global Mission speaks of reached and unreached, it is not individuals that are in question but groups of people. Following is the definition of reached and unreached for Global Mission purposes.

- **People Group**: A significantly large sociological grouping of people who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of shared language, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, occupation, education, and/or patterns of social interaction.
- **Reached People Group**: In order for a people group to be considered “reached” by the three angels’ messages, the following criteria must be considered:

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, page 192.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, page 163.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*, page 373.

- a. There are adequate numbers and resources to effectively witness to the group without outside assistance.
  - b. They have the option to worship in their first language or “heart language,” not only in a trade language or in translated worship services.
  - c. They have access to the Bible and other key materials in their first language.
  - d. They have indigenous church leaders who can witness to the rest of the people group without working through a translator.
- **Unreached People Group:** A group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to effectively witness to that group without assistance from “outside” (e.g., foreign cultures or other people groups).<sup>27</sup>

All Global Mission projects are to be specifically built around reaching unreached groups. If a group has been reached (even if not every individual in that group has been reached), then funds other than Global Mission funds should be used to continue working to reach the individuals of that group, while Global Mission funds should be used to begin new work among an unreached group.

## FUNDING

Some Global Mission funds from the Office of Adventist Mission will be available to help start Urban Centers of Influence in strategic urban areas. Funding must be a partnership among various organizations and institutions of the church. It is important that these be seen as locally owned and supported projects—not something just financed by the General Conference.

1. For 2020, Global Mission has allocated \$1 million to start new UCI projects. It is not possible to know the exact number of projects that can be funded with that amount because that will depend on the amount of money requested in each application.
2. The budget will be split between different sized projects based on a tier system.
  - a. Tier 1 will be allocated \$250,000. Projects requesting up to \$25,000 will be funded from this tier. At least 10 projects per year can be funded at this level.
  - b. Tier 2 will be allocated \$300,000. Projects requesting up to \$75,000 will be funded from the second tier. At least four projects per year can be funded at this level.
  - c. Tier 3 will be allocated \$450,000. Projects requesting up to \$150,000 will be funded from the third tier. At least three projects per year can be funded at this level.
3. Applications will be processed twice per year. Each April, approximately \$500,000 will be awarded to the best project applications received, and in September another \$500,000 will be awarded.
4. While Global Mission staff are able to advise whether or not a project qualifies as a Global Mission UCI, they are not able to give detailed guidance for improving individual UCI applications. Instead, comprehensive instructions and samples of what the committee is looking for is provided at [UrbanCenters.org/application](http://UrbanCenters.org/application). It will be up to you to study the instructions and create your project proposal.
5. Global Mission at the General Conference will provide up to 50 percent of the total cost of a UCI project, and the division, union, and conference/mission will be required to contribute at least 30 percent between them.
6. For the remaining 20 percent of the project, the sources of the funding must be clearly identified.

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<sup>27</sup>Global Mission Issues Committee recommendations document voted by the General Conference Mission Board, Oct. 2, 2016.

Financial assistance from the General Conference will mostly be to help with personnel and resources, not for buildings. In some parts of the world, a UCI may be established in a simple rented room in a downtown area. In other parts of the world, it may be more sophisticated. In still other places, it might be a church hall. The shape or size of the center is not so important as long as it provides a platform for reaching out and meeting the needs of the surrounding community.

In many places, an existing church building located in an urban area can be a springboard for community-based ministry. Of course, for many people in urban communities today, the four walls of a church building are a difficult barrier to get past. But churches can provide a base from which to reach out into the community and meet people where they are.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

The amount of funding available is substantial but acquiring it requires work, research, and time. First, a business plan should be created. There are no specific format requirements for the business plan, but a checklist is available to provide a list of the types of information Global Mission will be looking for in the business plan.

Once the business plan is ready, it is time to complete the application form. Applications may be submitted to Global Mission for initial review without voted funding from other sources. This review will not involve detailed coaching for individual applications. Rather, the initial review will simply alert you whether or not your project will be eligible for Global Mission UCI funding. After the initial review from Global Mission, applicants must gain the approval of church administration. The application form requires the date of the vote, the amount of money being voted, the reference number of the vote, and the exact wording of the vote.

A separate map will also be required, which marks the location of the UCI, the location of Adventist churches, schools, and other institutions in the vicinity, and the proposed location of the first three church plants. The purpose of the map is to ensure that the UCI is not being placed in a location where Adventist presence is already strong, and to ensure applicants understand that the primary goal of the UCI is to plant multiple new worshipping groups around the city. Church buildings are not required. House churches or other types of worship groups are acceptable.

Once the division is in possession of the business plan, map, and the fully completed application, the division Adventist Mission director should send those documents to the Adventist Mission planning director at [scogginsj@gc.adventist.org](mailto:scogginsj@gc.adventist.org)

After Global Mission reviews the project application, it will be taken to the General Conference Mission Board Strategic Funding and Planning Committee for consideration.

The application form and business plan checklist are available at <http://www.UrbanCenters.org/application>. **Please be sure to download the latest application form before starting.** Using an application form that is outdated disqualifies the application.

## **REPORTING**

At the end of each year, a report of the previous year's activities must be sent to Adventist Mission. This report will trigger the release of any additional funds that have been approved for the project. If no report is received, then additional funds will not be sent. If after two years Adventist Mission receives no progress report on a project, any remaining funding will require reapplication and committee approval.

Reports should include overall progress, approximate numbers of people impacted during the year, a funding report, photos, and publishable human interest stories.

## **RECALLING FUNDS**

There are three circumstances where funds may be recalled.

- If the project was misrepresented in the application.
- If the funds were misappropriated and used other than the way stated in the application.
- If the project has not started within six months of receiving funding.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Can funds be used to build or remodel buildings to be used for Urban Center of Influence services?**

No. Global Mission uses funding to support people in mission not capital projects like buildings. If a small percentage of an overall budget is allocated toward some minor renovations, that may be considered so long as the majority of the funding goes toward funding salaries and operations.

### **How far away does an Urban Center of Influence need to be from an established church?**

There is no particular distance requirement. It may be that a local church will be able to help operate a new center. However, the idea behind creating a center of influence is to plant new churches in different parts of the city so the center will need to be placed far enough away to make establishing new churches viable. The exception to this might be where the church is dying or very few members compared to population live (less than 1:500).

### **Does a brand-new congregation have to be planted by an Urban Center of Influence?**

Not only one new congregation should be started, but several. The reason that Global Mission funds UCIs is because it is a means of starting new Adventist groups. In order to be approved for UCI funds, proposals must include a plan for establishing new Adventist groups in some shape or form, even if it is a long-term goal.

### **Can Urban Centers of Influence ever be funded in rural areas?**

Currently, UCIs are an initiative to reach the large urban areas with populations of more than 100,000 people with a ratio of 1 Adventist to every 500 people.

### **How creative can an Urban Center of Influence proposal be?**

Creativity is encouraged for UCIs. New angles and ideas may be just what a particular area needs.

### **How much money is available for an Urban Center of Influence?**

UCI proposals require that each church level contribute financially to the project. When this is done, Adventist Mission will contribute up to a maximum \$150,000 for a limited number of projects over the first three years for a new UCI. Also, Adventist Mission funding cannot exceed 50 percent of the total cost of the project. The funding committee will consider each application and may choose to accept the funding proposal or change the amount proposed.

### **What if a city where we want to place an Urban Center of Influence has no unreached people groups but has many individuals who have not been reached?**

Cities where it is difficult to find unreached groups rank low on Global Mission's priority list. However, it is rare that a large city has no unreached people groups. If these groups are not differentiated by language, culture, or religion, they may be differentiated by worldview, age, socio-economic status, or something else. By studying established Adventist churches and noticing the groups that are not represented, we can discover unreached groups. That said, for Global Mission purposes, a city of over a million is considered a people group in and of itself.

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