

Yes....but why?

People often ask me, “Why does AFM exist?” In response, I often share our mission statement, “AFM establishes indigenous Seventh-day Adventist church-planting movements among unreached people groups.” This however explains what we do, rather than why exist.

It is important to understand the Why of our ministry. There is a hierarchy:

Why	Articulated below – the why behind the what we do.
What	Our Mixxion statement – what we do.
How	Our Core values – how we do what we do.

Ministries often begin with a visionary leader / founder, and a clear Why. The Why defines the What and is expressed in the How. Senior leaders embody the Why, departmental leaders are competent in the How, i.e. how we organize to accomplish the Why, and front-line personnel put the How into practice. Sometimes, there is a disconnect between the How at the front-lines and the underlying Why. When an organization or ministry is fuzzy about its core Why, it tends to focus on the What and the How. However, when the Why is fuzzy or forgotten, the essential spark that keeps the ministry focused, on-target in difficult times, and which generates a visceral level of support and buy-in from supporters, is gone, and the ministry drifts until it is overtaken by other organizations.

So, here is an articulation of the Why of our ministry, which drives the What and is expressed in the How.

Historically speaking there have been common yet profoundly inadequate motives for mission. There was the imperialist motive, turning converts into docile subjects of colonial authorities. Then the cultural motive, i.e. mission as the transfer of the missionaries’ allegedly “superior” culture. Some had a romantic motive, where mission was the fulfillment of the desire for exotic locations and adventure. Finally, we have seen the ecclesiastical motive, i.e. the urge to export one’s own confession and denominational authority to new territories.

Throughout mission history, there have been better motives. There is the conversion motive, emphasizing personal decisions for Christ, but which narrows the Kingdom of God to the number of “saved” souls. The eschatological motive points believers to the 2nd Coming, but often ignores present needs or injustices. The church planting motive builds congregations, but tends to exclusively identify today’s visible church with God’s kingdom. Finally, there is the philanthropic motive, working for justice in this world, but limiting God’s Kingdom to social improvements in this world alone.

Some serve because God has so commanded (Isa. 60.1). Matt. 28.18-20 is perhaps the most famous version of the Great Commission. In Luke 24.44-47, Jesus also taught that repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name is to be proclaimed to all nations. In John 20.21-23, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins wherever He is preached, and in Acts 1.8, Jesus commanded us to be witnesses to the Risen Lord to the ends of the earth. In proclaiming the Gospel, we are aligning our lives with God’s perfect will. “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” thus finds fulfillment in our lives. Yet, a motivation of obedience alone can sometimes lead to the “gritted-teeth” experience of the older brother (Lk. 15.29).

So, what is AFM’s motivation? Why are so many willing to carry such scars and sacrifice so much?

First, we are compelled by the love of Christ for the lost (2 Cor. 5.14, John 3.16-17). God’s love has entered us and now flows through us to those who have yet to enter His kingdom. Our sharing is the natural overflow of a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father, and is but the organic expression of our own joyful experience of salvation.

Second, in proclaiming the Gospel throughout all nations, we are hastening the End (Matt. 24.14). We thus hasten the end of all the suffering and sorrow, disease and death our sinful age entails. We serve today so no tears need be shed tomorrow, anywhere.....or for eternity!

Third, we serve because the cosmos reverberates with joy over every sinner who is welcomed into God's kingdom. In leading the lost to Calvary, we bring joy to our Heavenly Father (Lk. 15.7, 10). Our ministry is thus played out on a cosmic canvas, with an angelic audience eagerly cheering every move we make to lift Jesus high as the sin-bearing Savior. By implication, every saved soul leads to anguish and gnashing of teeth among defeated demons and for Satan himself. Amen!

On a personal level, I can do no other, for in Acts 13:47-48, God has captured my heart. "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord." I never forget answering the preacher's altar call at age thirteen and experiencing the joy and assurance of salvation, and the AFM worldwide family exists that others may hear, believe, and experience that same joy today. And that, dear friend, is the "Why" behind the "What!"