

A SPECTRUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

GROW *the Vision*

Adventist Forum Strategic Plan 2020

Process: The Strategic Planning Committee met via Zoom several times a month during May-September 2020. Others participated by conversation or by emailing suggestions. The committee listened to an array of wise voices on the topics of identity/mission, journalism, community, finances, and strategic partnerships

Thank you: Norman Yergen, Nick Zork, Michael Nixon, Juli Miller, Larry Geraty, Bonnie Dwyer, Steve Hergert, Kara Rachal, Michael Scofield

The Mission of Adventist Forum

Adventist Forum's purpose is conversation toward Seventh-day Adventist renewal. Adventist Forum affirms both our Movement's calling and its (imperfect) humanity. True renewal, we believe, involves both honest self-correction and fresh imagination. In this light, Adventist Forum, uses a variety of media---Spectrum journal, Spectrum website, podcasts, events--to highlight three kinds of content: reporting and analysis, opinion and research, artistic expression such as poetry, stories and visual art. The resulting conversation may be unsettling [challenging?] as well as inspiring; but it will, we believe, facilitate the renewal for which all church members hope and pray.

Adventist Forum is a fully independent advocate of Seventh-day Adventist renewal that is beholden to readers but not to any official administrative structure. The point is to challenge apathy and to advance Adventist faithfulness and mission. The work of Adventist Forum is fluid, reminding people to attend to that which is timely—rumbles, fractures,

trends, creations, powers, alliances, losses—as well as that which is transcendent and timeless.

History

Across five decades, Adventist Forum has provided a space for fellowship with others who appreciate beauty and who know there is always more to learn. (the next section comes from a current description on website) *During the uproar of the 1960s the younger generation questioned everything. It focused its attention on such major issues as the Vietnam War, civil rights, traditional morality, and ecology. Patriotism, rules, and values were no longer taken for granted. Seventh-day Adventist students were no exception. As more and more church members began to attend non-Adventist universities and colleges they applied critical thinking learned in their studies to other topics — including their church's beliefs and practices — that meant much to them. Many Adventist graduate students and other like-minded individuals began to meet in groups for discussion and fellowship. These groups were the forerunners of local Forum chapters that meet today throughout the world. In time, these diverse discussion groups came together under the umbrella of the Association of Adventist Forums (AAF). In 1968, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists officially endorsed the association in the Adventist Review. The organization is currently known as Adventist Forum (AF).*

Overarching Goals

1. Adventist Forum will create the premiere web presence in Adventism. The **Spectrum** website will host conversation on a variety of topics,

including those not addressed in traditional church spaces and will be a place where visionaries and opposition can respectfully speak. The historical contributions of Adventist Forum will be visible on the website.

2. Adventist Forum will continue to expand its independent reporting of news relevant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church via all of its media choices including **Spectrum** journal, **Adventist Voices** podcast, and the **Spectrum** website.
3. Adventist Forum will take steps to increase the number of members and broaden its reach through its website, journal, books, convocations and increasing the use of video and digital media.
4. Adventist Forum will seek to be a space where each person will be respected and empowered, and Adventist Forum will advocate the bedrock biblical principles found in Micah 6:8 and Galatians 3:28 in the context of the life and teachings of Jesus.
5. Adventist Forum will prioritize strategic partnerships with local Adventist Forum chapters.
6. Adventist Forum will seek strategic partnerships with groups which have common values and with those for whom there would be benefit to both groups in the form of shared content and broadened reach. Partnership will not mean the two groups are in total alignment.

Analysis

Adventist Forum has the opportunity to participate in adaptive change, rooted in the

values of the community. During Bonnie's tenure, Adventist Forum has strengthened a more holistic expression of faith that lives in heart and mind. As Bonnie has shepherded adaptive change during her tenure, Adventist Forum now must continue the momentum for continued adaptive change that, realistically, will require a capital fundraising campaign.

After more than two decades of editorship of **Spectrum** journal, Bonnie Dwyer will retire in December 2021. The board must evaluate future needs and priorities to make succession decisions. Adventist Forum has the opportunity to name a successor to Bonnie in a timeframe that allows the successor to collaborate with her on one or two journal issues. **Spectrum** journal subscribers have a deep appreciation for the print journal, and it would be prudent to mount a large effort to explore the scope of the audience for the print journal. Integration and authenticity are two core values for 21st century people concerned with spirituality. Currently, the Spectrum journal is one of the few spaces to integrate artwork and faith in the Adventist community. Bonnie has crafted this journalistic space during her tenure.

The board should explore the candidate's vision for contribution and interface with the Adventist Forum mission. As Bonnie has created the path that has become her impact on Adventist Forum, the board should allow space for her successor to use creativity in the role. To allow for the talents and interests of her successor, it will be prudent to wait to create a job description. For example, depending on the candidate, the board may segment the duties of journal editor from the role of being a liaison who will maintain donor relations, plan conferences, and focus on

fundraising. For optimal flourishing, the board must make clear the lines of authority and responsibility for website-editor and whomever assumes editorship of Spectrum journal.

Adventist Forum has strength as an early adopter of varied technology to report news and to create conversation spaces via local chapters, the **Spectrum** website, and conferences. Recently, several independent journalism endeavors have sprouted in Adventism, but Adventist Forum has the longest history, which defines its unique purpose in a burgeoning field. Longevity and historical impact are key to the Adventist Forum identity, and the fact that these values are not readily on view at the website weakens Adventist Forum. Adventist Forum would be wise to commit to making a visible web presence of its history as a faithful conversation partner. According to google analytics, the **Spectrum** website has high traffic, averaging 90,000 unique readers per month, which is on par with Adventist Review and significantly higher (more than double) that of Adventist Today.

In the next 5-10 years, changing journalistic platforms and financial constraints might influence Adventist Forum to decide to publish the journal online only. It would be astute to take this opportunity to create a website with flexibility to adapt if need be.

With the aging of the original founding cohort, Adventist Forum confronts an existential threat if it fails to listen to younger voices, to adapt journalistic practices, and to transfer power to younger people. Adventist Forum also faces an opportunity to converse with long time donors and to share a vision of relevancy for the future.

Adventist Forum has an identity problem

with younger people, and, currently, its history/ purpose is not quickly conveyed to viewers who come to the website. With rising societal interest in podcasts, Adventist Forum has supported a podcast, **Adventist Voices**, in which board member Alexander Carpenter interviews people on a range of topics. This is a strength, because it provides a new media platform that may attract a more diverse audience demographic for Adventist Forum.

Adventist Forum has been an advocate for equality on the topic of women's ordination, and, in recent years, has been a source to promote the concept that being an Adventist means to respect human equality, and being an Adventist is more than holding a set of beliefs. Advocacy in other areas, besides women's ordination, would be an opportunity to broaden the footprint of Forum with a younger generation.

Finding common ground with other entities could help raise awareness of the identity of Adventist Forum. Many Adventist groups have a natural alignment with **Spectrum** journalistic endeavors and would point to the work of Adventist Forum as having created a fertile ground that allowed development of thoughts on issues that had not been addressed by the institutional press. Some examples are Adventist Peace Fellowship, Society of Adventist Philosophers, Adventist Kinship, and Adventist Society of Religious Studies. Increasing contact points with sister entities provides an opportunity to forward the mission of Adventist Forum.

More recently, COVID-19 has changed how people do church, and this could be an opportunity for Adventist Forum to lead in a way to stimulate discussion and inspiration via Zoom.

Online expressions of community can be nurtured via Zoom break-out rooms with face to face conversation.

In the past three years, Adventist Forum has had a donor base of approximately 500 people. Adventist Forum uses eTapestry to record interaction with donors. It is not clear whether or not the data from eTapestry is being optimized. However, the aging Adventist Forum cohort provides an opportunity to assess interest for legacy gifts.

Goal Action Plans

Goal 1: Adventist Forum will create the premiere web presence in Adventism. The Spectrum website will host conversation on a variety of topics, including those not addressed in traditional church spaces and will be a place where visionaries and opposition can respectfully speak. The historical contributions of Adventist Forum will be visible on the website.

- A. *Board:* Authorize funding to hire a contract website designer or firm to work with Alisa and Steve to assess needs and prepare a proposal to present to the board.

Timeframe: DONE

- B. *Board:* Fundraise for Upgrade from Drupal 7 to Drupal 9 and to redesign the front- end, user-facing web page templates to streamline, modernize, and increase ease of use for readers. Drupal 7 will no longer be supported in November, 2021

1. Have a specific ask for this project, and keep donors informed. Pricing to be determined, likely six figure.

2. Consider asking for corporate grants.

Timeframe: IN PROCESS

- C. *Board:* Authorize funding for converting all Spectrum journal content from jpeg photo documents into word documents that can be accessed by internet search engines. Preliminary exploration suggests \$30,000-\$40,000

Timeframe: IN PROCESS

- D. *Staff:* Maintain active social media presence. Cultivate relationships with varied leaders and groups within Adventism.

- E *Staff:* Create topical collections of the work done by Adventist Forum and place this on a visible place on the website. For example, Ellen White, Creation, Racism.

Timeframe: 18 months

Goal 2: Adventist Forum will continue to expand its independent reporting of news relevant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church via all of its media choices including **Spectrum** journal, **Adventist Voices** podcast, and the **Spectrum** website.

- A. Create subcommittee to find a journal editor to start in **January 2022**. Settling this decision gives confidence to start a fundraising effort.
1. The committee will query candidates for interest in the position and present some candidates to the board along with possible ways to craft a job description that would meet the talents of these candidates and Forum needs.

2. The committee will give consider academic excellence and a candidate's relationship with Adventist Forum.

3. The committee will present a model for delineated lines of authority and responsibility for journal editor and website managing editor.

Timeframe: DONE

- B. *Staff/Board:* Authorize the production of story/video to show the way independent journalism has impacted the Adventist community at key points in recent history. An emotionally compelling story can serve to draw potential donors into the meaning and value of Adventist Forum and will convey Adventist Forum's identity.

Timeframe: DONE

- C. *Board:* Appoint a chair to the fundraising committee or consider contracting for this position.

Timeframe: DONE

- D. *Board:* Task the fundraising committee to create an itemized list of large financial needs of Adventist Forum. This includes but is not limited to:

1. Website upgrade: **Fundraise for this immediately**

2. Making all journal articles accessible to internet searches by putting them in word documents with corrective line editing (possibly \$30,000) within **18 months**

3. Having funds on hand to assist with logistical changes that, likely, will come with the transfer of editorship.

4. Consider the feasibility of the creation of a

Dwyer Independent Journalism endowment that can be used in the future for robust reporting on key events. What amount would be needed to supply this need?

5. Staff/Board: Identify donors by region and have a board member visit regionally, hosting a meal for gratitude/listening.

Timeframe: Spring of 2022.

D. *Board:* Seek a three-year commitment from the advisory council. Seek 15 donors who will make a \$15,000 commitment over three years.

E. *Board:* As part of a large-scale capital campaign to secure resources to support independent journalism during this time of adaptive change, long time board members will do in-person or zoom appeals to donors. Secure the bulk of the targeted goal before announcing this campaign.

Goal 3: Adventist Forum will take steps to increase the number of members and broaden its reach through its website, journal, books, convocations and increasing the use of video and digital media.

A. *Staff/Board:* Market the journal as a way to increase membership with targeted complimentary subscriptions and email invitations.

Timeframe/Metric: Increase membership by 15% by the end of 2021, One subscription push done in August 2020, resulting in 100 new subscribers.

B. *Staff/Board:* Host Zoom Conferences/

Conversations with emphasis on international collaboration.

Timeframe/Metric: Host one international Zoom event in 2021.

C. *Staff/Board:* Launch a **Patreon** subscription service for podcasts.

D. *Board:* Host experiences where people can gather and learn by discussion or common experiences.

E. See goal #5. Strategic partnerships will help accomplish this goal.

F. See goal #2 and the power of crafting a story via an authentic video describing Adventist Forum.

G. See goal #4 as a way to engage people with issues on which they are passionate

Goal 4: Adventist Forum will seek to be a space where each person will be respected and empowered, and Adventist Forum will advocate the bedrock biblical principles found in Micah 6:8 and Galatians 3:28 in the context of the life and teachings of Jesus.

A. *Staff/Board:* Consider the role of website comments in the effort to promote respect. Would a different strategy achieve the value of respect? For example, curated letters posted weekly would not give the space to toxic diatribes.

Goal 5: Adventist Forum will prioritize

strategic partnerships with local Adventist Forum chapters.

- A. *Board:* Confirm current status and expected future status of each of the 10 chapters and continue engagement with them as appropriate.
 1. For those chapters which are in start-up or maintenance mode, engage with them as requested to support programming, communications, networking, logistics, special events or projects, etc.
 2. For those chapters which expect to cease activity, assist them with an orderly and dignified closing of operations as requested and provide appropriate acknowledgment of their history with Adventist Forum.
 3. For those chapters which do not know what they want to do, provide guidance for coming to a decision and then an implementation plan for that decision.
- B. *Board:* Facilitate discussions on potential timely and beneficial revisions to mission of chapters and the corresponding changes to their organization and activities.
- C. *Board/Staff:* If in the area of any chapter, board or staff will seek to out lunch or dinner with member/members.
- D. *Board/Staff:* If substantial donations are received from a specific chapter, make a dedicated vision to thank them.
- E. *Board/Staff:* Incorporate special shout out/ recognition of chapters at annual conference

or regional events.

- F. *Board/Staff:* Connect with chapters in some form at least 6 times per year.
- G. *Board/Staff:* Explore with chapters the expanded use of video and audio conferencing to enlarge audiences for programs, to share programming responsibilities with other chapters, to connect more frequently with their members, and to access a wider bench of speakers who can present to them remotely.

Goal 6: Adventist Forum will seek strategic partnerships with groups with common values and with those for whom there would be benefit to both partners in the form of shared content and broadened reach. Partnership will not mean the two groups are in total alignment.

- A. *Staff:* Give partnering entities the opportunities to post on rotating sections on the website to allow sharing content and widening reach.
- B. *Staff: Twitter Takeover:* strategic partners can have designated times to take over the Spectrum **Twitter** feed and vice versa.
- C. *Board Chair:* Create an advisory board from this group and circulate a collaborative online agenda with semi-annual zoom meetings to share insights and create synergy. Invite each person on this board to contribute a column to the website annually.

Timeframe: Ongoing