

**THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING LAY MEMBERS OF
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH PROGRAM
AMONG THE SIMALUNGUN TRIBES**

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Abstrak

Pelatihan bagi anggota Gereja adalah hal penting untuk menggenapi perintah Kristus seperti yang terdapat dalam Matius 28:19-20. Hal ini adalah sesuatu yang mutlak dan harus menjadi tugas yang utama bagi seorang Pendeta dalam melaksanakan tugas tugasnya. Secara khusus di wilayah Daerah Sumatera Kawasan Utara dimana kantor pusat berada di wilayah Batak Simalungun, namun pertumbuhan pekabaran 3 Malaikat belum terlihat hasilnya secara nyata dibandingkan dengan pekabaran yang sudah dilaksanakan kepada suku batak lainnya seperti Toba dan Karo. Adapun tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menguatkan Pimpinan Daerah Sumatera Utara dan Perguruan Tinggi Advent Surya Nusantara serta semua Pendeta yang melayani di tanah Simalungun dapat menyadari bahwa pelatihan kepada anggota Gereja menjadi salah satu jalan keluar untuk menjangkau suku batak Simalungun dan pada saat yang sama untuk menguatkan anggota Gereja agar terlibat sepenuhnya dalam pekerjaan pekabaran Injil kepada orang lain.

Kata Kunci: Pelatihan, Keterlibatan, Penginjilan, dan suku Simalungun.

INTRODUCTION

The challenging ministry in North Sumatra Mission (NSM) is how to convince the native *Batak Simalungun* tribes to the three angels' message. This challenge is based on many reasons, firstly, that the location of NSM office and the Surya Nusantara College is in the capital of Batak Simalungun tribes but there is no significant growth in

terms of SDA church membership of the *Batak Simalungun* tribe compared to another *Batak* tribe such as *Batak Toba* and *Batak Karo*.¹ Secondly, there are only a few pastors in NSM coming originally from this tribe. Therefore, the NSM has a big challenge in nurturing the members, in mobilizing them into ministry, and in reaching the people of the *Batak Simalungun* tribe.

The purpose of this paper is to find out that training church members is one of solutions to reach out to the *Batak Simalungun* tribe, and at the same time to encourage church members to be involved in an area of ministry they are fitted in, and to encourage them to participate in the work of proclaiming the gospel to other people. Kelly states that, “A major factor for a successful evangelistic program is proper training of the eager individuals who want to be involved.”²

The objective of this study is to encourage North Sumatra Mission, Surya Nusantara College and church pastors who serve in Simalungun territories to maximize all members in doing God’s work through proper training and actual involvement in the ministry.

Biblical-Theological Foundation of Training Lay Members

A. Biblical Concept of Training.

¹http://www.bonapasogit.eu/Pagina's/Engels/Batak_Nation.htm; accessed 31 may 2007; Internet.) There are actually six distinct Batak tribes in this area: Angkola/Sipirok, Karo, Mandailing, Pakpak/Dairi, Simalungun and Toba. Although these six groups have many things in common, there are differences in their languages, histories and traditions.

²Chuck Kelly, “Training for Evangelism (Formal and Informal),” chap. In *Evangelism Today and Tomorrow*, compilers Charles L. Chaney & Grandville Watson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 140.

Proclaiming the Gospel is the task and responsibility of all church members. In other words, the Savior's commission to the disciples included all believers.³ This commission is recorded in Matt 28:19-20:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every thing I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

This commission cannot be finished by the pastor alone unless all members involve themselves in the ministry. Ellen G. White says that "many would be willing to work if they were thought how to begin. They need to be instructed and encouraged."⁴

James L. Garlow also realizes it and says, "A properly balanced view of lay ministry stresses not only the call to ministry and the gifts for ministry, but also training for ministry."⁵ At this point, training is very important to enable church members to be more effective in the service of God.

The meaning of training is found in Eph 4:12, "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." The word "prepare" in Greek is "*Katartismos*" which is translated as "equip," or "train."⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln

³Ellen G, White, *The desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 822.

⁴White, *Ministry of Healing*, 149.

⁵James L. Garlow, *Partners in Ministry: Laity and Pastors working together* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1981),103

⁶Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edit (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2000), 526

comments, “It is the notion of making complete, which can include making complete by restoring or training.”⁷ Moreover, Klyne affirms that, “The church must train people for various levels of ministry. And training is not merely for future clergy, all members are to be trained and enabled to do the work to which God calls them.”⁸

In order to help every member become more effective in doing ministry, and also to help people maximize their potential for Jesus Christ, training is an important aspect in the church. Ellen White emphasizes that “every church should be a training school for Christian workers.”⁹

B. Lay Training in the Old Testament

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament where men were trained for the work of God by association with other men of God. The first example is the association of Moses and Joshua. Leroy Eims mentions that, “God has given Joshua to Moses in answer to Moses’ prayer and one of the first things Moses did was put some of his honor on Joshua.”¹⁰ As a spiritual leader, when Moses trained Joshua, he never

⁷Andrew T.Lincoln, *World Biblical Commentary*, Vol 42(Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 254

⁸Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1966), 224.

⁹White, *Ministry of Healing*, 149

feared loosing some of the loyalty or respect of the people. Otherwise, Moses shared his authority with Joshua. Again Eims mentions that, “Moses rejoiced to see Joshua begin to carry some of the load.”¹¹ In this association, Joshua helped Moses in his ministry and it helped him to carry on after Moses was gone. Joshua succeeded, while in leadership, to bring God’s people to the Promised Land some years later (Josh 1:1-2).

C. Lay Training in the New Testament

Jesus ordained twelve men that they should be associated with Him and that He might send them forth to preach. According to Eims, He had two things in mind in the training of the twelve. First, that they would be of help to Him then and there in carrying out His mission. Second, that they would carry on after He was gone.¹² The apostle Paul is one of the examples in making disciples, actually discipleship takes time and effort. He was accompanied by Sopater son of Phyrrius from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and from the province of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4). After Paul and his co-workers evangelized and many of the people were baptized, Paul always helped them to experience spiritual growth. He trained them and equipped them directly or indirectly. He did this so that the converted people could become committed disciples or reproducers. Paul became burdened for these people and said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in

¹⁰Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 32.

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid, 34

all the towns where we preached the Word of Lord, and see how they are doing” (Acts 15:41). The book of Acts records the result of their training, edifying and equipping works. Because of the faithfulness of the lay members and the apostles in Jerusalem, and because of their ministry both inside and outside the church “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

The *Batak Simalungun*: General View And Brief History

General Information

The island of Sumatra is one of 13, 000 islands that make up the country of Indonesia. In the Northern Central part of Sumatra live the Batak people, who collectively comprise around four million people, making them one of the largest ethnic groups in that country which hosts over three hundred distinct ethno- linguistic minorities. The term *Batak* was first used by Malay settlers to describe any non-Muslim in this part of Sumatra. (In fact a Batak, upon conversion to Islam, was no longer considered a Batak by the Malay, but ethnically Malay).¹³ There are actually six distinct Batak tribes in this area: Angkola/Sipirok, Karo, Mandailing, Pakpak/Dairi, Simalungun and Toba.¹⁴ Although these six groups have many things in common, there are differences in their languages, histories and traditions.

¹³http://www.bonapasogit.eu/Pagina's/Engels/Batak_Nation.htm; accessed 31 may 2007; Internet

¹⁴<http://www.indonesianmusic.com/batak.htm>; accessed July 25; Internet

Batak Simalungun people (1.2 million strong) inhabit the northeastern shore of Lake Toba in North Sumatra province. MD Purba (1997) hypothesised that the name "Simalungun" came from the term "Sima-sima ni Lungun" which means quiet place, a reflection of the sparsely-populated nature of the Simalungun homeland when they first arrived. The Simalungun language can be written in the Simalungun variation of the Batak alphabet. Despite the close cultural and linguistic relationship between the Simalungun and other Batak tribes, the Simalungun people consider themselves a distinct ethnicity, and they believe that their ancestors moved from Nagaland and Assam in India to North Sumatra in the 5th century AD.

The *Batak Simalungun* people are divided into four major clans (*marga*): **Sinaga**, **Saragih**, **Damanik**, and **Purba**, each of which is divided into dozens of smaller sub-clans. A salient distinction of the *Batak Simalungun* culture is that clan affiliation is not considered as important to a person's social standing, instead a person's place of origin (*hasusuran*) and role in traditional ceremonies (*tibalni parhundul*) are the most important methods of identification of a *Batak Simalungun* person. The lack of clan importance is because the kings of the different Batak Simalungun clans have engaged in a political alliance (*harrunguan bolon*) that has lasted for centuries.

The *Batak Simalungun* people are roughly divided equally in terms of religion. The Western Simalungun people mostly embrace Christianity due to the efforts of German Lutheran missionary Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen in the mid-1800s. Meanwhile, the Eastern Simalungun people are mostly Muslims due to their close proximity to the Muslim Malay polities located on the eastern seaboard of North Sumatra. However, the

Batak Simalungun people are united in their common indigenous culture despite their different religious affiliation.

Sociocultural Dynamics of the *Batak Simalungun*

From the ancient times, the Simalungun community has tied itself to *adat istiadat*¹⁵ (customs). Adat for Simalungun people is a way of life. Through it they can live in peace with each other. Every problem in their lives is solved through adat. Adat is an unwritten law, but most of the Simalungun people know and practice it in their lives. Generally speaking, *Batak Simalungun* people submit themselves to their adat. The adat is inherited from the ancestors and is not acquired through education. Adat law is dominant in the daily life of the Simalungun people. It influences and rules their behavior. The family tie, the clan is very strong among them. Adat also provides unity and identity among Batak Simalungun.

Historical Background of the North Sumatra

Mission of SDA

The history of the SDA church in north Sumatra Mission or even in Indonesia started when Ralph Waldo Munson, his wife, and their five children arrived in Emma

¹⁵Adat means custom, usage ethics with legal sanction, which have been customarily followed or carried out since early times. Adat is considered to be a kind of religious law. Adat are generally contaminated by pagan or heathen religious elements. Frank L. Cooley, *the Growing Seed: The Christian Church in Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Kwitang, 1982), 176.

Haven (now Teluk Bayur), Padang, west Sumatra, in January 1900.¹⁶ His first native convert was Immanuel Siregar; he came to Padang to establish a newspaper and there studied the Bible from Munson.¹⁷ Because of the strong influence of Muslims, the SDA work in Padang did not progress. After spending four years in Padang, Muson moved to Medan, North Sumatra. Together with G.F.Jones, an Australian Missionary, Munson opened the work in Medan in 1904; here they experienced a little progress.

The real initiation of SDA work in North Sumatra started when Immanuel Siregar, the first native convert to SDA Church came to North Sumatra after his conversion in Padang. He came to Tarutung, and from Tarutung, he went to Bungabondar, Sipirok to share the good news and the SDA message with his own family. The majority of SDA work in North Sumatra during this period was done through education, particularly through the English Language Schools. Some English schools were opened such as Sipogu English School, and Batakland English School. From these schools the SDA work went to every place in Tapanuli and North Sumatra.

Besides the schools, the colporteurs supported the SDA work in the NSM during this period. Many colporteurs worked in NSM selling books, while they witnessed and evangelized people.

¹⁶Ralph Waldo Muson was an SDA pioneer Missionary to Indonesia. *SDA*, s.v. "Munson, Ralph Waldo (1859-1934) See also Rajaoman Nainggolan, 165.

¹⁷Clyde C. Cleveland, *Indonesian Adventure for Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965), 28

The SDA work in Simalungun was started in 1935 by two literature evangelists, when they opened an English school and conducted an evangelistic effort for three months. Because of the political situation, the mission office was moved from Tapanuli to Pematangsiantar. Actually the spreading of the good news and the SDA work for native Simalungun was started in 1963 by Herman Purba and S.Saragih.¹⁸ In general, lay members actively involved themselves in spreading the Gospel. Besides their daily work, they realized that spreading the gospel was their responsibility as Disciples of Christ. In every new place they entered, they always introduced the SDA work to the people around them. Many churches and schools were built during that time because of the rapid growth of church membership.

SDA Work in Simalungun: North Sumatra Mission from 1963 to 2005.

In an annual report of NSM in 2005, it shows that there were 23,764 church members, 165 churches and 30 ordained ministers.¹⁹ These memberships come from six Batak tribes (Toba 60%, Karo 30%, Simalungun 5%, others 5%), Javanese, and North Sulawesi. Since the SDA work in Simalungun started in 1963 until 2005, the native simalungun membership is 1,430, 20 churches and 2 ordained ministers.²⁰ In other words,

¹⁸Emil H.Tambunan, *Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ke Tujuh di Indonesia: Perintisan dan Pengembangannya* [Seventh day Adventist in Indonesia: Pioneering and Her Developing] (Bandung: Indonesia Publishing House, 1999), 256-257

¹⁹http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=634860; Accessed 26 July 2007

²⁰Pastor B.Sagala, Secretary of NSM, 2007

compared to two Batak tribes (Toba and Karo), the Simalungun is the lowest in terms of growth in number of membership, church building and mission workers. Many reasons why the SDA work in Simalungun was very slow compared to Toba and Karo tribes. First of all, despite the close cultural and linguistic relationship between the Simalungun and other Batak tribes, the Simalungun people consider themselves as distinct in ethnicity.²¹ Second, lack of professional members or the paucity of mission-operated institutions like schools, clinics in Simalungun villages. Third, the most important factor is the lack of lay members who are actively involved in spreading the Gospel.

The Importance of Training Lay Members Program Among the Simalungun Tribes.

The end product of the Great Commission of Christ is disciples, not merely baptized people. True Disciples of Christ should produce other disciples. It simply means that one should minister to other people and pray for them.²² This idea is well grounded in the Bible as demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus and Paul.

The involvement of lay members is very important in reaching the world with the gospel because the laity can work in places where the pastor can not work effectively because of prejudice and language barriers. In many cases, lay persons can work more effectively and more acceptably than the pastor.

²¹See p.9

²²Rex Edward, *A New Frontier—Every Believer a Minister*(Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press,1979),94

Therefore, according to Ellen White, “It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellowmen.”²³ Meanwhile, Weber affirms that, “to equip the laity is the primary duty of every pastor.”²⁴ Also John W.Fowler believes that “to train the laymen is one of the pastor’s most important responsibilities.”²⁵ Through the training of members, they will know how to transmit the principles of the Bible to others.

How to motivate the Simalungun church members to actively involved in evangelism effort or in spreading the Gospel? Especially in North Sumatra mission, wherein one pastor serving 7-10 churches and the branch?

1. To activate the Simalungun SDA members, pastors must devote more time in training the laymen.

Eims confirms that,

“Jesus Christ began His mission with a personal Ministry of a little more than three years. . . . That training was the foundation of His whole Ministry. Much of His time during those three-Plus years was concentrated on these men.”²⁶

²³White, *Desire of Ages*, 822

²⁴Hans Ruedi Weber, *The Ministry of the Laity in The World* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1956), 24.

²⁵John W.Fowler, *Adventist Pastoral Ministry* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1990), 143

In contrast, the pastors have not had time to help and train the church members. They have been too busy with administrative work and preaching to attend to the more important task of training laymen to do God's work. This lack of training naturally has made the laymen feel inferior, and has rendered them passive and unprepared to do church ministry, even though they have talents.

2. Pastors should delegate some responsibilities to the church members and lead them until they can stand on their own to do God's work.

Ministers should not do alone the work which belongs to the church, thus wearying themselves, and preventing others from performing their duty. They should teach the members how to labor in the church and in the community.²⁷ Many would be willing to work if they were taught how to begin. The members need to be instructed and encouraged.²⁸ Especially in training the Simalungun people, we should follow what Coleman points out when he says that Jesus "spent more time with His disciples than with everybody else in the world put together."²⁹ According to the New Testament record, Jesus ate with them, slept with them, talked with them, traveled with them, and ministered to the crowds with them. Jesus used His time

²⁶Eims, 37-38

²⁷Edwards, *Every Believer a Minister*, 58-73

²⁸Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, DC: Home Missionary Dept. of General Conference of SDA, 1947), 59

²⁹Robert E. Coleman, "Association with Jesus," chap. In *Discipleship*, eds. Billie Hanks, Jr., and William A. Shell (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 57.

together with His disciples in most of the three and a half years of His ministry in this world.

3. Pastor should mobilize or involve lay members for soul winning, assign special tasks to them, and keep them busy in the ministry.

A person who is already baptized must be involved in church ministry; because to be a Christian means telling people that the Savior has come.³⁰ While the new convert is preaching the Gospel or witnessing, he will be impressed to be a good disciple, because the more he tells about Jesus, the more he will be like Him.

4. North Sumatra Mission should take action to conduct a regular training course in evangelism for both laymen and the pastor. This program is extremely important to Simalungun people because on one hand,

Church members have misunderstanding about the role of the laity and the pastor in church activity. Thus, the church member's expectations of their pastor have been very high, because in their thinking the pastor is the only one who has the full responsibility in the church ministry. On the other hand, the church pastor in the field thinks that the main role of the pastor is to do visitation. Equipping and training members is placed as the duty of the pastor after visitation and doing evangelism.

CONCLUSION

³⁰Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1982), 21

Lay training is essential to fulfill the great commission of Christ as stated in Matt 28:19-20. There can be no question that training of the laity is absolutely necessary, and it must be assigned high priority. However, pastors in Simalungun context did not make it as a priority in their minister, and this concept has caused the evangelism process to be stunted because most church members never think that the new members should produce other converted people.

Several other reasons why lay members of Simalungun are not actively involved in evangelism surfaced. These include the following: (1) members are not trained to do it, (2) members do not know how to do it, (3) members are not motivated to do it, and (4) members feel that evangelism is not their responsibility.

Failure of the pastors to trust the church members has taken place because the members have insufficient training. The pastors have not had time to help and train the church members. This lack of training naturally has made the laymen feel inferior, and has rendered them passive and unprepared to do church ministry.

Therefore, North Sumatra mission should encourage pastors and members in Simalungun church to involve the members in the ministry of the church. Pastor should devote more time in training the laymen and lead them until they can stand on their own and delegate to them some responsibilities in the church.

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