

“If God gives me strength,
I shall be in the cities”

Ellen G. White, “outpost centers,”
and mission work in cities

David Trim

Country Living, published in 1946

“Out of the cities; out of the cities!”—this is the message the Lord has been giving me. The earthquakes will come; the floods will come; and we are not to establish ourselves in the wicked cities, where the enemy is served in every way, and where God is so often forgotten.”

Country Living, 31

(From an article that first appeared in the *Review & Herald* in July 1906.

Probably based on a sermon she had given at the dedication of Loma Linda Sanitarium three months before

““Out of the cities! Out of the cities!”—this has been my message for many years.”

Life Sketches of Ellen G. White (1915), 409

Two years after her 1882 testimony she posed a rhetorical question to church leaders:

“Shall the prince of darkness be left in undisputed possession of our great cities because it costs something to sustain missions?”

“Let those who would follow Christ fully come up to the work, even if it be over the heads of ministers and presidents.”

Testimonies for the Church, 5:369

Ellen White rebukes the GC officers, 1909

“There is no change in the messages that God has sent in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time.”

“As I look over the past testimonies, I see that **for years** the importance of working the cities has been urged. But . . . excuses have been made, and this great work has been sadly neglected.

1910: “A call to labor in the great cities”

“For years the work in the cities has been presented before me and has been urged upon our people. . . . Before this time, every large city should have heard the testing message, and thousands should have been brought to a knowledge of the truth. Wake up the churches, take the light from under the bushel.”

Diary fragment, 1911

“We must throw ourselves with more earnestness into the work of giving the truth to those in the cities. For years the Lord has been calling our attention to this work.”

Conflicting views?

- Mrs. White's "message for many years", from at least 1882 to around 1907, was to *get out of the cities*;
- For "years and years", from at least 1884 until at least 1911, she urged Adventists to go *into* cities to work for those who dwelt in them

Conflicting views?

No!

- **First**, *at times* in her writings, Ellen G. White is setting out *principles*, but at *other times* she was *addressing a particular set of circumstances*

Conflicting views?

No!

- **Second**, she was **very balanced** and centrist (by Adventist standards): spent much of her career arguing against extremists of either side. Result: half the time she can sound as though she holds the reverse of the extreme view she is arguing against

Letter to Haskell from Australia, April 9, 1900

“I have a few words to say in regard to what you say about building a home in Stanmore. This, my brother, will never be. The bubonic plague is in Sydney, and is steadily developing. There are fresh cases every day. From the experience I have recently had, nothing could induce me to locate in Sydney or any of the suburbs.”

Plague in Australia!

- 12 major plague outbreaks in Australia between 1900 and 1925
- Ships imported wave after wave of infection from Asia, where the plague was still common.
- 103 people died in the 1900 Sydney outbreak—hence Ellen White's concern!

Letter to Wellmans from Australia, Apr. 27, 1900,

Wahroonga was “the most desirable of all the suburbs of Sydney” and the Sanitarium was to be placed there—Mrs. White had no qualms about this

Meeting in California, 1904

“Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things”.

“...my mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, “Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense.”

Killer cities

“The physical surroundings in the cities are often a peril to health. The constant liability to contact with disease, the prevalence of foul air, impure water, impure food, the crowded, dark, unhealthful dwellings, are some of the many evils to be met.”

Ministry of Healing, 365

Killer cities

- 1830, life expectancy in cities in New England was 46.7 years, whereas in the rest of rural New England it was 52.5 years.
- 1900, in the United States as a whole, life expectancy for a white man was 44 years in urban areas but 54 years in rural places”
- 1900, child mortality in cities was 23% higher than the average in the countryside.
- Similar patterns obtained in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Scandinavia

Killer cities

Adna Weber, US economist and statistician, 1899:

- “It is almost everywhere true that people die more rapidly in cities than in rural districts. . . . There is no inherent or eternal reason why men should die faster in large communities than in small hamlets. . . . [I]t may be affirmed that the excessive urban mortality is due to lack of pure air, water and sunlight, together with uncleanly habits of life induced thereby. Part cause, part effect, poverty, overcrowding, high rates of mortality, are found together in city tenements.”

Killer cities

Ellen G. White, 1899 (revised 1900 and 1905):

- “It was not God’s purpose that people should be crowded into cities, huddled together in terraces and tenements. . . . The more nearly we come into harmony with God’s original plan, the more favorable will be our position to secure health of body, and mind, and soul.”

Ministry of Healing, 365.

Immoral cities

- She warns that “cities are . . . hotbeds of vice”, with “the sights and sounds of evil” evident at “every hand.”

Ministry of Healing, 363

- She writes of “the contaminating influences of modern city life” and of “cities that are fast becoming as Sodom and Gomorrah . . . God desires us to leave the sin-polluted atmosphere of the cities.”

MS 107, 1906 and
MS 67, 1901

Summarizing Ellen White's thought on cities as a whole

- When she urges Adventists to depart the cities, she typically is discouraging the creation, *in cities*, of colleges, schools, sanitariums, and hospitals
- As she points out, the young and sick are the most susceptible to the negative influences typical of big cities.
- Alternatively, she writes to encourage ordinary church members to live where they will be free of air and water pollution, where they can have contact with the soil, and grow their own fruit and vegetables.

No inconsistency

- Ellen White always wanted some Seventh-day Adventists to stay in cities.
- She did not believe all Adventists needed to serve as foreign missionaries, but actively encouraged as many as possible to go overseas
- She wanted an active body of enthusiastic workers to go as missionaries into cities, while encouraging many urban church members to move to the country

Outpost Centers

“We are to remember the cities that have been neglected and that must now be worked. . . . We are to be wise in securing advantages already provided that the Lord desires us to have. We are to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves in our efforts to secure country properties at a low figure, and from these outpost centers we are to work the cities.”

MS 119, 1902 and Lt. 157, 1902

Outpost Centers: Boston

Letter to Dr. C. C. Nicola, superintendent of the New England Sanitarium, located in Melrose, 8 miles north of Boston and today part of its metropolitan area.

“It was a wonderful providence that brought us into possession of the Melrose Sanitarium It is to be an important outpost center from which to work the city of Boston.”

Lt. 150, 1906

Outpost Centers: Location...

“We thank God that so many of our sanitariums are established in pleasing country locations, and yet within easy reach of important centers of population”.

Lt. 12a, 1910

Outpost Centers: Boston

“Boston has been pointed out to me as a place that must be faithfully worked The sanitarium is one of the greatest facilities that can be employed to reach Boston with the truth The light must shine in the outskirts and in the inmost parts. . . . This city and its suburbs must hear the last message of mercy to be given to our world.”

MS 27, 1907

Outpost Centers: General

“More and more, as wickedness increases in the great cities, we shall have to work these places from outpost centers.”

“For years we have been instructed that our people, and especially families with children, should plan to leave the cities as soon as the way opens before them to do so. But until it is possible for them to leave, they should be most

Outpost Centers: General

active in doing missionary work, however limited their sphere of influence may be. As they yield their talents and their all to God to be used as He may direct; as they live out their consecration by engaging in practical missionary work wherever opportunity affords, God will bless them”

MS 107, 1906

Outpost Centers: Living in the Cities

“Wherever the people of God are placed, in the crowded cities . . . or among the country byways, there is a home mission field.”

MS 87, 1907

Outpost Centers: Living in the Cities

At the 1910 Annual Council, Allen Moon, “spoke of an interview in which Sister White said that it was not so much by public evangelists that the work there was to be done as by seeking out the people one by one through Bible work and canvassing effort, and medical missionary work.”

Outpost Centers: Ministry in the Cities

- Ellen White urged repeatedly that vegetarian restaurants be maintained in inner city areas **and** that treatment rooms be opened alongside them
- Where possible, “a Bible school” be held also, as part of a “well-balanced work”, in which those attending the school would receive “daily instruction”, while lectures would also be offered to patrons of the vegetarian restaurants “on the science of health and Christian temperance”.

Outpost Centers: Ministry in the Cities

- The buildings in which restaurants and treatment rooms were combined should include lecture rooms
- Daily meetings should be held in which there should be “prayer and singing and talks, not only on health and temperance topics, but also on other appropriate Bible subjects.”

Outpost Centers: Retreat Centers

- Purpose of the outpost center: partly to provide periodic respites for weary city workers, worn down by the morally and physically polluted environment
- Outpost centers that were sanitariums would literally provide a rest cure for those who had spent long spells in the dusty, dirty, depraved cities

Outpost Centers: Retreat Centers

- “Our workers are not to think that they must remain in the cities to attend to various business matters connected with various lines of city work nor are they to hurry [back] in order to do this kind of work.”

Testimonies, 7:252

“I shall be in the cities”

“If God gives me strength now, at nearly eighty-two years old, I shall be in the cities.”

Now where are the people that will be ready to go out into the city?”

MS 127, July 27, 1909

Ellen White at Elmshaven

