PUBLIC AFFAIRS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY (PARL) MINISTRY

Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

The ministry of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) is more than responding when religious liberty is threatened. It is the ministry of building trust before a crisis, serving neighbors without strings attached, defending freedom of conscience for everyone, and helping the church become a constructive presence in the community.

What Is The Ministry of PARL?

The strongest PARL ministry is usually consistent rather than complicated: know your community, build genuine friendships, serve practical needs, understand religious-liberty concerns, and be ready to help when a question of conscience arises.

RELATIONSHIP	Build trust with civic leaders, community organizations, other faith communities, journalists, educators, and neighbors before you need to ask for anything.
SERVICE	Let public affairs grow out of Christlike service. Look for needs your church can meet without making assistance conditional on religious participation.
LIBERTY FOR ALL	Defend freedom of conscience consistently, including for people whose beliefs differ from our own.
MISSION	Keep Jesus at the center. PARL should help the church represent His character in the public square through truth, compassion, courage, fairness, and respect.

A Simple Annual Rhythm

A church could begin with four touchpoints each year: one relationship-building visit with a civic leader, one community service partnership, one religious-liberty education emphasis for members, and one public-facing activity that introduces the church as a thoughtful advocate for freedom of conscience.

Start Small

For a first year, select three to five ideas. Assign a PARL leader or small team, place the activities on the church calendar, and report back to the church about the relationships and needs you discover.

1. Build Relationships in the Community

Visit your mayor, township supervisor, or city manager. Request a short introductory visit. Thank them for public service, introduce your congregation, ask what challenges they see in the community, and offer to be a constructive partner and resource.

Meet local police and fire leadership. Express appreciation, learn about community-safety needs, and ask whether the church can support a practical initiative.

Connect with county and municipal officials. Introduce the church to county commissioners, clerks, emergency-management personnel, or other officials whose work intersects with community life.

Attend a city council, township board, or county commission meeting. Listen and learn. Regular attendance helps a church understand local issues and become known as a respectful community participant.

Meet a pastor or faith leader from another tradition. Build friendship without minimizing theological differences. Ask about community needs, religious-liberty concerns, and opportunities for appropriate cooperation.

Host a community leaders breakfast or luncheon. Invite a small group of civic, nonprofit, education, public-safety, and faith leaders. Keep the agenda relational: appreciation, introductions, community needs, and listening.

Invite a local journalist to learn about the church. Offer a brief tour, explain the congregation's community ministries, and provide a reliable contact for future questions involving Adventists or religious liberty.

Write thank-you notes to public servants. Recognize election workers, teachers, first responders, municipal staff, veterans-service personnel, or others whose often-unnoticed work benefits the community.

2. Serve the Community

Partner on a community service project. Work with a reputable local nonprofit, neighborhood association, food pantry, shelter, or civic group on a clearly defined need.

Prepare appreciation or care packages. Provide practical expressions of thanks for first responders, healthcare workers, teachers, election workers, or other community servants.

Support a local school in an appropriate way. Ask administrators what would be useful: school supplies, winter clothing, food assistance, tutoring support, campus cleanup, or another need the church can meet.

Participate in community cleanup or beautification. Adopt a road, park, block, or neighborhood project.

Build an emergency-response relationship. Connect with local emergency management and learn how the church facility, volunteers, Adventist Community Services, or other resources might assist during a disaster.

Serve alongside another faith community. Choose a project with a shared civic purpose such as hunger relief, refugee assistance, neighborhood cleanup, or disaster response.

3. Make Religious Liberty a Local Ministry

Appoint or strengthen a local PARL leader. Give one person or a small team responsibility for community relationships, religious-liberty education, and helping members identify appropriate resources.

Hold a Religious Liberty Sabbath. Use a sermon, interview, panel, or Sabbath School feature to explain biblical freedom of conscience, current challenges, and why Adventists defend liberty for all.

Create a religious-accommodation help pathway. Make sure members know whom to contact when Sabbath observance or another sincerely held religious practice conflicts with work or school requirements.

Offer a Sabbath accommodation workshop. Teach members how to make respectful, timely accommodation requests, document the process, communicate with employers or schools, and seek additional help when necessary.

Create a church religious-liberty resource page. Provide concise information about Sabbath accommodation, freedom of conscience, PARL contacts, and trustworthy religious-liberty resources.

Share religious-liberty resources in the church. Use bulletin inserts, short announcements, newsletters, social posts, or a resource table to keep members informed without turning every issue into a political controversy.

Subscribe community leaders to Liberty magazine. Consider appropriate subscriptions for attorneys, judges, civic leaders, educators, clergy, or others with an interest in constitutional and religious-liberty issues.

Host a religious-liberty forum. Invite qualified speakers to address conscience, Sabbath accommodation, church-state relations, or the history of religious liberty.

Help students understand conscience rights. Equip parents and students to communicate respectfully with schools about Sabbath conflicts, religious assignments, scheduling, and other matters of conscience.

4. Engage Public Life Without Becoming Partisan

Pray for public officials by office, not party. Include local, state, and national leaders in congregational prayer while keeping the church's spiritual mission distinct from partisan endorsement.

Invite local officials to community events. A health expo, school program, service project, anniversary, or community meal can provide a natural setting for leaders to meet the congregation.

Recognize public service. When appropriate, publicly thank officials or community servants for specific work that benefits the community without implying political endorsement.

Write about religious liberty. Submit a letter to the editor or op-ed on a local issue involving conscience, pluralism, Sabbath accommodation, or the importance of protecting minority faiths.

Provide thoughtful public comment. When a local ordinance or policy directly affects religious exercise, church ministry, or equal treatment, prepare a concise, respectful statement focused on principle and practical impact.

Attend candidate forums as listeners. Encourage informed civic awareness while maintaining the church's nonpartisan posture. PARL ministry should build bridges across political differences.

5. Create Conversations About Faith, Conscience, and Community

Host an interfaith religious-liberty roundtable. Invite a small number of local faith leaders to discuss shared concerns such as conscience, workplace accommodation, religious literacy, or community peace.

Invite a neighbor of another faith to a meal. Personal hospitality can build trust quickly. Listen to their experience of faith and community life.

Facilitate a youth conversation on faith and civic responsibility. Discuss how Christians can be faithful to Christ, respect people who disagree, serve their communities, and protect freedom of conscience.

Host a 'Know Your Neighbor' evening. Invite representatives from several faith communities to explain basic beliefs and discuss how neighbors can live together with conviction and mutual respect.

Organize a prayer walk. Pray for schools, businesses, neighborhoods, civic institutions, first responders, and community leaders. Keep the focus on blessing the community rather than political messaging.

Interview a community leader at church. A short Sabbath interview with a nonprofit leader, educator, first responder, or civic official can help members understand local needs and identify ways to serve.

6. Communicate the Church's Public Witness

Tell stories of religious accommodation. With permission, share brief testimonies of members who navigated Sabbath or conscience conflicts with faith, respect, and good communication.

Create short videos. Produce 60- to 90-second reflections on conscience, service, dignity, peacemaking, justice, compassion, or another theme rooted in the life of Jesus.

Feature community partners. Use the church newsletter, website, or social media to thank organizations and leaders with whom the congregation has served.

Maintain a media contact list. Keep current contact information for local newspapers, radio, television, and community publications so the church can communicate clearly when a story is genuinely newsworthy.

Prepare a one-page church introduction. Include the church's mission, key ministries, community service, contact information, and a short explanation of the Adventist commitment to religious liberty.

Share a monthly PARL minute. Give the congregation a brief update on one relationship, one religious-liberty principle, one current need, or one practical action members can take.

A 12-Month Starter Plan

For churches that want a simple place to begin, this sample plan turns PARL into an ongoing ministry rather than a once-a-year emphasis.

JANUARY	Identify three community leaders or organizations the church should know.
FEBRUARY	Share a five-minute religious-liberty emphasis with the church; explain where members can seek help with Sabbath accommodation.
MARCH	Visit a mayor, township supervisor, city manager, or other local leader; ask about community needs.
APRIL	Choose and schedule one community service partnership.
MAY	Meet a pastor or faith leader from another tradition for relationship and dialogue.
JUNE	Share a 60 Second spiritual reflection on dignity, conscience, peace, or service.
JULY	Send appreciation notes or care packages to a group of local public servants.
AUGUST	Review the church website and add clear PARL or religious-accommodation contact information.
SEPTEMBER	Host a Sabbath accommodation or religious-liberty workshop for members, parents, and students.
OCTOBER	Attend a local government meeting and listen for issues affecting community well-being or religious liberty.
NOVEMBER	Invite a community leader or nonprofit partner to a church event; thank them for their service.
DECEMBER	Review the year: What relationships were built? What needs emerged? What should the church continue next year?

Before You Act: Five Questions

- Does this activity build a genuine relationship or meet a real community need?
- Can we participate without compromising our beliefs or implying partisan endorsement?
- Are we protecting freedom of conscience consistently, including for people unlike us?
- Have we identified the right person to represent the church and communicate clearly?
- Will our conduct help people see the character of Jesus more clearly?