DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry

Emphasis on Missions

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: BRIDGING THE GAP: UNDERSTANDING CHURCH-COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MEMBERS IN ABIDJAN THROUGH A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LENS

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Abstract

Despite being located in a rapidly growing, socially diverse urban context, Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Abidjan communes of Cocody and Yopougon appear largely disengaged from sustained, contextualized community ministry. Preliminary observations suggest a disparity between the Church's missional identity and its practical engagement in addressing the social, economic, and spiritual needs of the local population. Members demonstrate reluctance to participate in community ministry, resulting in isolation from the very communities the Church is called to serve.

Method

The study employed an existential-phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of church-community disengagement among Seventh-day Adventist members in Abidjan. Following Heidegger's existential-hermeneutic phenomenology and informed by van Manen's interpretive approach, the study used two primary data collection methods: (1) semi-structured interviews with church members, leaders, pastors, elders, and departmental directors; and (2) participant observation in natural settings. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify core meanings and patterns across participants' stories and observed practices.

The study focused on understanding how participants perceive, interpret, and respond to the apparent disconnect between church life and meaningful community involvement in the communes of Cocody and Yopougon.

Results

Findings revealed that church-community disengagement is experienced not merely as inactivity but as a profound loss of clear purpose, relational distance, and decreased sense of mission. Contributing factors included leadership practices that failed to mobilize members effectively, limited training and equipping for community ministry, organizational priorities that favored internal programs over external engagement, and socio-cultural pressures inherent in Abidjan's urban setting.

Conversely, moments of genuine engagement—characterized by inclusive leadership, discipleship through service, and visible acts of compassion—were described as spiritually revitalizing experiences that affirmed the Church's mission and strengthened members' sense of purpose.

Conclusion

Revitalizing church-community engagement requires intentional discipleship, participatory leadership, and strategies contextually tailored to the local Abidjan setting that integrate spiritual growth with practical service. The study concludes that when churches move beyond mere residency to active presence in the community, members experience transformation that enhances their witness and strengthens the Church's missional identity. By emphasizing lived experience through an existential-phenomenological lens, this research contributes to practical theology and missiology, providing actionable insights for strengthening the Adventist Church's witness through genuine presence and faithful involvement in community life. The findings demonstrate that mobilizing members for community ministry is essential not only for external impact but for internal spiritual vitality and mission fulfillment.

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I dedicate this Dissertation first to God, my wife, Roselyne, my sons Jallah and Dahn, and my daughter Elizalyne for their continued encouragement, understanding, and support. I also thank the pastors, elders, departmental directors, and members of the Churches that participated in Abidjan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	Adventist Community Services
APEST	Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher
GCSDA	General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMC	International Mission Council
MD	Missio Dei
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SDAC	Seventh-day Adventist Church
SG	Social Gospel
SWCC	The South East Côte d'Ivoire Conference
U.N.	United Nations
WAD	West-Central Africa Division

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My heartfelt appreciation goes to the current president of the South East Cote d'Ivoire Conference, WAD leaders past and current, and members of the Seventh-day Adventist churches in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, as well as community participants and conference administrators, whose openness and lived experiences made this study possible. Their voices gave this research meaning and depth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of Ministry Context

There are 13 communes in Abidjan, each with distinct characteristics in terms of population density, population structure, and needs. The Seventh-day Adventist church forms a minute fraction of these communities. The study concentrates on two of these communes: Cocody and Yopougon. Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, has a rich and dynamic history. A financial hub in West Africa and, arguably, all of Africa, it promises to provide more opportunities despite some vulnerabilities, like any thriving city in the world. Rapid urban population growth strains existing infrastructures, giving rise to informal settlements that lack adequate housing, sanitation, and utilities, and are prone to flooding due to heavy rains and rising sea levels. This results in pollution in the Ébrié Lagoon, affecting biodiversity and the livelihoods of the local people. While Abidjan boasts significant wealth, many residents live in poverty, lacking access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The Christian church has a significant presence in the city of Abidjan, and it is anticipated that the churches will contribute to alleviating the pressing socio-economic challenges, while also enhancing other aspects of life that can improve the community's welfare. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also adheres to the Great Commission, as outlined in the Bible, given by Christ to His church. Jesus' mobilization of mission workers for engagement and involvement "ensure that…. he

called unto himself disciples. Of them, he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles" (Luke 6:13 KJV). He ordained them and commanded them to "go…preach, heal the sick, and raise the dead" (Matt 10:1-20 KJV).

Within this context, the study acknowledges that mobilization of this kind may not be new, considering the testimony of some members indicating their reluctance to engage in community ministry. With this understanding, this study finds Cocody and Yopougon as the ministerial backgrounds. Within the 13 communes of Abidjan, Cocody is an upscale commune with a population of over 692,523, according to the 2021 census data, and a population density of 5,790 inhabitants per square kilometer. Economic affluence, educational prominence, and political activity make it a central and influential commune within Abidjan and Côte d'Ivoire.[1]

Of these two, Yopougon is the most densely populated among the 13 communes and the entire country. Even the population density is as high as 9,584 inhabitants per square kilometer. Nickname: Yap City Yopougon boasts the highest population of 1,571,065.[2] Data collected from these two communes is adequately helpful in understanding members' lived experience of disengagement. Within these boundaries are members, pastors, elders, department directors, and others from whom the sample size is lifted.

Background of the Study

The study highlights what appears to be a lack of structured community ministry within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Abidjan, based on personal and

[1] "Cocody," accessed 23 December 2024, https://www.cia.gov/.

[2] Rita Bossart, "In the City, Everybody Only Cares for Himself": Social Relations and Illness in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire," *Anthropology and Medicine* 10, no. 3 (2003): 343-359, accessed 12 December 2024, 10.1080/1364847032000133852.

ministerial experiences after living and working near this center of attraction for an extended period. Sensing this phenomenon, the researcher's observations suggest that this may be one of the reasons for members' reluctance to participate in Community ministry, with both internal and external implications. Internally, they are concerned with leadership vision and priorities, resource availability, congregational support, and strategic planning. However, externally, they are concerned with community needs, partnership opportunities, historical context, and encouraging member involvement as a form of social capital.

Statement of the Problem

Despite being located in a rapidly growing, socially diverse urban context, Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Abidjan communes of Cocody and Yopougon appear largely unengaged in sustained, contextualized community ministry. Preliminary observations suggest a disparity between the Church's missional identity and its practical engagement in addressing the social, economic, and spiritual needs of the local population. This apparent limited engagement raises concerns about the Church's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission within the city. The problem this study addresses is what appears to be a lack of intentional mobilization and structured involvement of local Seventh-day Adventist congregations in community ministry. Without a clear strategy and deeper member engagement, the Church risks remaining isolated from the very communities it is called to serve.

Research Questions

1. How do SDA members in Cocody and Yopougon describe their experience with the surrounding community?

2. What specific life experiences do church members in Cocody and Yopougon describe as shaping their personal feelings and perceptions about community involvement?
3. What are the obstacles that church members face while participating in community ministry in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire?
4. What strategy can be used to help church members be involved in community ministry in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire? (How do members envision their participation in community ministry?)

The researcher acknowledges that research question 3 in the study focuses on practical phenomenology for ministry intervention, which is usually permissible in DMin research. "Practical phenomenology is an approach that applies phenomenological thinking and methods to real-world practices and everyday actions, rather than remaining at a purely theoretical or philosophical level."[3] It focuses on how phenomenological insights can inform and shape our actual practices—how we act, relate to others, and engage with the world. Additionally, the researcher further acknowledges the use of a participatory/collaborative research methodology grounded in phenomenological insights. Participatory research is a collaborative approach where researchers work with people rather than just studying them.[4] It engages community stakeholders, individuals with lived experience, or those affected by an

[3] Max van Manen, "Phenomenology of Practice," *Phenomenology & Practice* 1, no. 1 (2007): 11-30, 10.29173/pandpr19803.

[4] S. R. Duea, E. Zimmerman, L. Vaughn, S. Dias, and J. Harris, "A Guide to Selecting Participatory Research Methods Based on Project and Partnership Goals," *Journal of Participatory Research Methods* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1-32, 10.35844/001c.32605.

issue throughout the entire research process—from identifying the problem and developing research questions to collecting data and sharing results.[5]

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of SDA members in the Abidjan communes of Cocody and Yopougon and to describe their disengagement from the community, in order to develop a contextualized approach to bridging this gap.

Justification for the Study

In contemporary sociological discourse, the nature and future of community remain the subject of intense debate. While some scholars argue that the concept of community is eroding in the face of globalization, urbanization, and individualism, others suggest that what is occurring is not the disappearance of community, but its transformation and revival. Delanty contends that community is not vanishing but being reshaped — reimagined through new forms of belonging in response to the very forces of globalization and individualism.[6]

This broader sociological shift has significant implications for the Church. As society becomes more fragmented and individualistic, these tendencies also infiltrate faith communities. The result is that many believers, including members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, increasingly struggle with communal engagement beyond the walls of the sanctuary. While church members may maintain participation

[5] Duea et al., "A Guide to Selecting Participatory Research Methods Based on Project and Partnership Goals," 1-32.

[6] Gerard Delanty, *Community* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 1.

in worship and fellowship, intentional and sustained involvement in community ministry is often limited or neglected.

Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was born as a dynamic, mission-driven movement with a strong commitment to holistic engagement — not only proclaiming the gospel but also living it out through acts of service, compassion, and community transformation.[7] This missional identity calls for active presence and relevance in the public square.

The justification for this dissertation, therefore, lies in the need to provide space within the church mission to the community for members to experience spiritual growth by participation in ministry to the community. Ultimately, members' participation as witnesses, utilizing their God-given talents, will enhance the spiritual transformation the church needs to bridge the gap. As a consequence, their transformation makes mobilizing church members more intentional and responsible, fostering a renewed understanding of their role in the community, and they are more likely to respond to the contemporary call for Christian presence and witness.

Specifically, this study seeks to empower local churches:

1. To go beyond mere residency in the community — not simply to occupy geographic or social space — but to be active agents of worship, fellowship, engagement, and transformation. The biblical mandate to "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13) implies stewardship, presence, and active participation in the flourishing of society.
2. To fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). This commission demands movement — not only inward,

[7] Russell C. Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 11.

toward deeper faith — but outward, toward others in relational, evangelistic, and compassionate ways.

3. To function as a living, interconnected body, in which every member is vital. According to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:12-23, the Church as the body of Christ thrives when each part actively fulfills its role. Community ministry offers a tangible context for this body-life to be expressed.
4. To recognize the significance of every member's contribution to the mission of the Church (1 Cor 12:27-31). Mobilization is not limited to leadership or a few committed individuals, but must become the shared calling of the entire congregation.

In essence, this study is not only a response to sociological and theological realities but a strategic call to recover the Church's mission in the community — restoring the Adventist witness to be both incarnational and impactful in the heart of the city.

Delimitations of the Study

This study examines the apparent observed gap between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its surrounding community. In seeking to explore ways of bridging this gap, the research is delimited to members, pastors, elders, departmental directors, and others in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from whom the sample size is drawn.

Limitations of the Study

One task of research is to understand phenomena through various lenses. Prominent among them are the subjective or objective lenses. Against this backdrop,

the study used a subjective lens, even though it is premised on the "assumption that the subjective experience of an individual is not as reliably informative as objective data collected from external reality."[8] Data will be collected exclusively through interviews and participants' observations.

Research Mitigation Strategies

This study used a qualitative, existential-phenomenological design to explore approaches for mobilizing Seventh-day Adventist churches in Abidjan for community ministry. As such, several limitations are acknowledged:

1. **Limited Generalizability:** Due to the small, purposive sample, findings are not statistically generalizable. However, detailed contextual descriptions were provided to enhance transferability, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to their settings.
2. **Researcher Bias:** Researcher subjectivity is an inherent risk in qualitative studies. Therefore, the first critical issue to address is a philosophical tension between subjectivity and traditional objectivity. To mitigate this, bracketing will be considered, as a hermeneutic phenomenologist argues, a way of disciplining presuppositions rather than eliminating them. However, using Van Manen's Interpretive phenomenology, as distinguished from descriptive phenomenology, explicitly acknowledges the researcher's role in co-constructing meaning through hermeneutic interpretation and reflexivity. Hence, a reflexive journal will be maintained throughout data collection and analysis to reflect on personal assumptions and maintain objectivity.

[8] Neubauer, Brian E., Catherine T. Witkop, and Lara Varpio. "How Phenomenology Can Help Us Learn from the Experiences Of Others," *Perspectives on Medical Education* 8, no. 2 (2019): 90-97.

3. **Phenomenological Rigor:** As phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, the researcher uses Van Manen's Six Research Activities (Existential-Phenomenological) as an added rigor to the study, where he describes phenomenological research not as a linear method but as six dynamic, interrelated research activities that guide the researcher in uncovering the meaning of lived experience.

Method and Procedures of the Study

This study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically an existential phenomenological design, to explore how Seventh-day Adventist churches in Abidjan interact with their surrounding communities. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people assign to them. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, values, and challenges within their natural settings. The existential phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate as it focuses on interpreting the meanings individuals attach to their experiences—in this case, relating to ministry, engagement, and mission in an urban context.[9]

The study aims to address the previously stated research questions by gathering rich, descriptive data from the lived experiences of church members and leaders through two primary research gathering methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These approaches offered insights into current practices, perceptions, limitations, and potential avenues for sustainable and contextually appropriate community engagement.

[9] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 72.

Research Design

Phenomenology as a research methodology originated with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who introduced the descriptive method. Husserl's approach sought to identify the universal "essence" of an experience by requiring the researcher to "bracket" (or set aside) all personal biases and preconceptions to achieve a state of pure consciousness.

However, this study follows the philosophical path developed by Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), which is the foundation of existential-hermeneutic phenomenology.[10] This approach was chosen for a critical reason: Heidegger argued that a researcher can never truly be separate from their world. Instead of "bracketing," which he saw as impossible, the researcher must be reflexive—openly acknowledging their own pre-understandings as part of the interpretive process.

An existential design is the most appropriate choice for this study for two reasons:

1. **It Fits the Phenomenon:** Community "disengagement" is not a simple object to be described. It is a complex, lived experience involving personal choices, feelings, and the *meaning* (or lack of meaning) that members find in their relationship with the community. This existential focus is ideal for exploring such a phenomenon.
2. **It Aligns with the Goal:** The goal is not simply to describe disengagement, but to *understand* the lived barriers to engagement. This

[10] C. B. Draucker, "The Critique of Heideggerian Hermeneutical Nursing Research," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 30, no. 2 (1999): 360-373.

requires an interpretive approach that seeks to understand the meanings participants attach to their experiences, limitations, and perceptions.

Therefore, this design allows for an accurate and rich exploration of the participants' lived experiences. Data collection will occur in the natural settings of Cocody, Yopougon, and their surrounding communities. Through primary methods of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this study will gather in-depth data. This data will then be interpreted to offer deep insights into current practices and limitations, forming the essential foundation for developing the contextual engagement approach proposed by this project.

Overview of the Study Structure

The study is expected to consist of six chapters, each structured to reflect the logical flow of the research:

- Chapter One introduces the study, outlining the background, ministry context, statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, justification, methodology, and definitions of key terms.
- Chapter Two explores the biblical and theological foundations, focusing on the Church's mission in both the Old and New Testaments and framing the theological rationale for community involvement.
- Chapter Three reviews relevant literature on ecclesiology, mission, urban ministry, and the role of the Church in community development, establishing the scholarly context for the study.
- Chapter Four presents the research design and methodology, detailing the approach, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, procedure, and analysis methods.

- Chapter Five presents a detailed analysis of the research findings, offering thematic insights derived from participants' experiences and observations.
- Chapter Six concludes the dissertation with a synthesis of findings, ministry implications, lessons learned, challenges encountered, and recommendations for further research and practical ministry applications.

Expectations

The study is expected to provide deeper insight into the current state of community engagement among Seventh-day Adventist churches in Cocody and Yopougon, including how church leaders and members perceive and approach community ministry. By exploring the barriers to active involvement, the research aims to identify practical, contextually appropriate approaches to enhance community outreach. It is hoped that these findings will encourage church leadership to initiate intentional training and mobilization efforts that align with both local realities and the church's broader mission. Additionally, the study seeks to foster stronger collaboration between congregations and leadership in utilizing available resources more effectively. Ultimately, it is expected that the outcomes will promote a more integrated and mission-driven presence of the Church within the communities it serves.

Definition of Terms

Church Disengagement: Church disengagement describes the gradual process of withdrawing from involvement in religious community activities, worship services, and spiritual life. It signifies a decrease in participation in church activities and religious practices, often shown by lower attendance, limited involvement, and a weakened bond with the faith community.

Community: A unified group of individuals with shared interests, typically residing in a specific geographic area and engaging in collective social, cultural, or economic life.

Disengagement: Disengagement is a concept that refers to the gradual process of distancing oneself physically, emotionally, and mentally from an activity, organization, or system. This withdrawal happens across three main areas: emotional (affect), motivational (cognition), and participatory (behavior). An important distinction to understand is that disengagement is not a single, uniform concept. Instead, it exists on a spectrum and can be interpreted in various contexts. In organizational settings, research shows that disengagement is different from "not engagement" and should be viewed as a separate functional state, sometimes serving as a coping mechanism. This means that disengagement is not merely the absence of engagement but an active process of disconnecting.

Economic Involvement: The act of contributing financially or materially to church-related initiatives, aimed at supporting both internal church needs and the broader community, particularly individuals in critical need.

Engagement: The state of being actively involved, committed, or occupied with a task, role, or relationship. In this context, it refers to intentional participation in church or community-related activities.

Impact: A significant or meaningful effect resulting from action or interaction. Here, it refers to the positive transformation resulting from collaborative ministry between the Church and the community.

Influence: The capacity to affect the character, development, actions, or beliefs of individuals or groups through direct or indirect involvement.

Involvement: Active participation or inclusion in an event, activity, or initiative, particularly in the context of community or church-based work.

Religious Involvement: The expression of concern for others' physical and material well-being through religious or church-based service, without necessarily prioritizing evangelistic objectives.

Reluctance: A state of hesitation, disinterest, or unwillingness to participate, often due to personal, cultural, or institutional factors.

Social Involvement: Participation in activities that foster interpersonal interaction and contribute to the social fabric of a community or society.

Social Mobilization: The process of organizing and motivating a large number of people to take collective action—often at a personal cost—for the benefit of the wider community, typically requiring broad participation to be effective.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH, MISSION, AND THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

The historical account of the people of God in the OT and the Church today is no different, with wilderness wanderings (Exod 19-1-3; 35:1-3), a hostile environment, and believers whose faith in God was unstable (Exod 32:1-8). They were overwhelmed by what is today termed cross-cultural influences (Jews and Gentiles), which gives credence to Stephen's assertion of a Jewish bias that led to the rejection of Moses and Jesus (Acts 7:37-42). It included an unstable commitment to God in a multifaceted environment (Exod 32:1-8). It led to various modes of operation as a coping mechanism, such as summary execution (Acts 7:54-66), arranging false witnesses against believers, including Jesus, their Lord (Matt 26:59-62), and so on.

Nevertheless, these mechanisms did not yield the results they desperately sought. In this segment, the study expresses a strong desire for a needed understanding of the notion of the Church in the OT. It further raises the question of what role it played, and how it impacted the mission? Therefore, this chapter traversed the historical landscape of the people of God from the beginning and leading to their future, establishing Biblical footprints of the Church, the Mission of God, and the role and Impact of the Mission in the Community.

The Definition of the Church

Chaim and Laura conducted a word study of the term ἐκκλησία in an Aramaic context. Comparing the Greek legal term ἐκκλησία, meaning "call Out," with the Aramaic Lodoth from two Aramaic words' od and y'od, suggesting that it comes from a word used for Church, which is an old Semitic legal term from the root' od meaning to assemble or gather together to testify, and finally instructing in a matter of law or call a witness to testify.[1] Considering the word church, therefore, from the Aramaic, Greek, and Semitic background, is a group of believers in a master or deity who congregates for fellowship and study as preparation to serve as witnesses to their Lord as a call-out people.

The Notion of the Church in the Old Testament

The Oxford Languages online dictionary defines a notion as a conception of or belief about something.[2] Moreover, even though "in secular Greek, the term *ekklēsia* originally designated a gathering of people—for example, of citizens as a political entity"[3] and may not necessarily serve as the concept of the church, the NT points to corresponding evidence in the OT outlined in Stephen's sermon (Acts 7:38), positing the idea of *ekklēsia or church* in the OT as an assembly or congregation.

Stephen references, "This is he that was in the Church in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him in the mount, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:" (Acts 7:38). Here, the use of "this is he" by Stephen,

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[1] Chaim & Laura, "Word Study - What Is The Church? - לעדת," accessed 19 December 2023, https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2015/03/word-study-what-is-the-church-%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%93%D7%AA/.

[2] "Notion," accessed 27 March 2023, https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/.

[3] Ekkehardt Muller, "The Universality of the Church in the New Test," in *Message Mission and Unity of the Church,* ed. Angel M. Rodriguez (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 19.

the reference is still to Moses"[4] (Acts 7:38; Matt 18:17). Stephen's mention of the Church in the wilderness expressed the idea of an "assembly" or a "congregation"[5] that existed then. He pointed to that assembly historically as the "people of God,"[6] the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, to receive the Law (Exod 19), establishing a special relationship with God, the Lawgiver, the rescuer of Israel from captivity. Moses referred to God as the giver of the oracle (Gr. *Logia* Zonta) or the "living oracles," which is a diminutive of logos, meaning "words." Meanwhile, in the view of the LXX, it is used for the "word" of God (Num 24:4, 6).[7]

To support Stephen's idea above of *Ekklesia* as a gathering or assembly in the OT, the Eerdmans Dictionary introduces two Hebrew words to clarify the concept further: "'*ēḏâ* and *qāhāl*."[8] These words support the concept of the church in both testaments. While *ʿēḏâ* usage denotes the officials of Israel, *qāhāl* never appears in such contexts, meaning it implies no legislative or judicial function. It emphasizes, "The function of *ʿēḏâ* is to bring to trial and punish violators of the covenant (Num 35:12, 24-25; Lev 24:14, 16); to arbitrate intertribal disputes (Judg 21:10, 13, 16); to crown kings (1 Kgs 12:20); and to reprimand its leaders (Josh 9:18-19)."[9]

Furthermore, the use of ʿēḏâ above is associated with the critical role of Israel as an assembly of a nation or people for several reasons, including religious and, in

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[4] "This is he" [Acts 7:38], *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC),* rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976 - 80), 6:202.

[5] Ibid., 202.

[6] Gerhard Pfandl, "The People of God in the Old Testament," in *Message Mission and Unity of the Church,* ed. Angel Manuel Rodriguez (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1.

[7] "In the Wilderness" [Acts 7:38], *SDABC,* 6:202.

[8] Michael D. Hildenbrand, "Congregation," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 274.

[9] Ibid., 274.

particular, worship of a deity, which is similar to God's people in a covenant relationship with Him. In fact, "the announcement of the special covenant relationship between God and Israel (Exod 19:4-5), according to Gerhard Pfandl, opens with a conditional clause." The clause, "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, "indicates that God requires Israel's faithfulness to the covenant (Exod 19:5). Also, the Eerdmans dictionary stresses, "The usage of *qāhāl* is roughly equivalent to *ʿēḏâ*, though it is more general. Used for a multitude of nations (Gen 28:3), an army (Num 22:4; Ezek 17:17; 23:46), and other human gatherings of various kinds."[10] Elsewhere, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon renders it like this "in the Septuagint often equivalent to *qāhāl*, the assembly of the Israelites, (Judg. 21:8; 1 Chron 29:1), etc., mainly when gathered for sacred purposes pointing to the Church in context, (Deut 31:30; 32:1; Josh 8:35; 9:8), etc.; in the NT thus in Acts 7:38; Hebrews 2:12."[11] In Christendom today, there is a shift from the use of the OT, indeed a contradiction.

Consequently, the study argued that if, in the OT, "there is no indication of instruction from God to believers (Old Covenant) to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers to win others to faith in Yahweh,"[12] means nothing about mission in the OT according to some, then how is it possible that God permits mission in the NT? Are His people not found in the OT? Is He a different God in both Testaments? The above questions guide the search for a connecting point between the two. Arguably, the identification of God's people in both testaments is connected to

[10] Hildenbrand, "Congregation," 274.

[11] Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (D. D. Public Domain Formatted and Hypertexted by Oaktree Software, Inc Version 1.8), 3476.

[12] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 17.

mission, juxtaposing it with the sin problem that led to what is considered protoevangelium or protevangelium (Gen 3:15), an underlying theological discourse. On that basis, God's people are involved in evangelism and mission worldwide, and I will submit that it has been their matching order by being his people.

A lot is available in the OT supporting the concept of the church. In Gerhard Pfandl's words, the first issue to confront is the term "People of God." Beginning with the creation narrative, he says, "It starts where God's people consisted only of Adam and Eve."[13] The evidence of the people of God in the OT "exists for communion and service to him and the rest of creation."[14] At Sinai, they "entered a special covenant relationship with God, which allowed them to keep the covenant by obeying his voice."[15]

The Notion of the Church through the Promised Seed in the OT (Zera')

Considering the promised seed to better understand the church in the OT. "Seed in the Hebrew language is (זָרַע Zaraʿ), it means fruit, plant, sowing time, posterity: - carnally, child, fruitful, seed-time), sowing-time."[16] In Greek, it is "σπέρμα, meaning something sown, i.e., Seed (including the male "sperm"); by implication, offspring, especially, a remnant (as if kept over for planting): — issue, Seed."[17]

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[13] Pfandl, "The People of God in the Old Testament," 1.

[14] Ibid.. 1.

[15] Ibid., 8.

[16] Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary of the Old Testament (Hebrew Strong's) Public Domain Electronic text downloaded from the Bible Foundation E-Text Library: <http://www.bf.org/bfetexts.htm> Hypertexted and formatted by Oaktree Software, Inc. Hebrew text added by Oaktree Software, Inc. Version 3.3, paragraph 2245.

[17] Ibid., paragraph 4613. https://godrules.net/library/strongs2b/gre4690.htm

Ekklēsía refers to the people of God, even in the OT. Their gathering was for a special purpose, which included worship (Judg 20:2; 1 Chron 29:1; cf. Acts 7:38). The NT also considers the church as the people of God gathered in the name of Jesus (Eph 3:21; 5:23; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Cor 10:32).[18] Critical to the promised seed is the unfortunate disobedience of the first family (church) or people of God, which led to their fall (Gen 3:1-8). The study refers here to the first family (Adam & Eve), the nucleus of the Church in the OT.

The fall of the First Family was indeed a crisis. To address this crisis, God the Father and His only begotten Son initiated the plan of salvation. He issued this important mission statement: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15). As a dedicated student of the Bible, Brown synchronizes his understanding with that of other students, accepting that Israel had a special relationship with God. Nonetheless, that understanding of Israel is not without contestation in the NT. He links this understanding to the promised seed, his son, to Israel via the lineage of Abraham through Jacob, and by a covenant relationship with God.[19] Brown supports this assertion that "The Semitic background is plausibly the usage of *qahal* ("assembly," LXX: *Ekklesia)* in the phrase "the church of the Lord" in (Deut 23:1), to describe Israel in the desert."[20]

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[18] Allan J. McNicol, "Church," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 252.

[19] Robert L. Saucy, "A Rationale for the Future of Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 4 (1985): 433-42.

[20] Raymond Brown, "New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (1981), 3, accessed 19 December 2023, https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/3013/2632.

The Ultimate Aim of the Church in the OT

The ultimate question to ask here is what is God's intention for the *Ekklēsia*? How about his salvific plan for humanity? Readers can see evidence of his interest in correcting the sin problem and his covenant relationship with man (Gen 3:15). His intervention set the stage for His intention. In acknowledgment of God's intention for man, Kaiser Jr. observes three crises. "The curse of the ground, the created order, and all humanity,"[21]

> First, "he refers to the promised Seed (Zera') of the woman in (Gen 3:15), His promise to dwell in the tent of Shem (Gen 9:27), and the choosing of Abraham through whom the messianic promised Seed (Zera') mentioned in (Gen 3:15) would find fulfillment."[22]

The Andrews Bible commentary sees God's intention in this light: "The Lord did not leave them in total darkness to face death that would follow their rebellion and their claim of independence from Him."[23]

The Notion of the Church in the New Testament

Even though Scripture declares, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26), readers must observe what influenced the name. Townsend considers the term Christian from the point of view of separation between two religions - Judaism and Christianity. Arguing that "the term 'Christians,' puzzling and even inexplicable in a first-century document, is appropriate as it shows up in the second century."[24] Because the term Christian distinguishes this emerging new

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[21] Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations,* 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 2, 4, 7.

[22] Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament,* 2, 4, 7.

[23]Ángel Manuel Rodríguez et al., eds., *Andrews Bible Commentary*, 146.

[24] Joseph B. Tyson, "9 Acts, the "Parting of the Ways" and the Use of the Term 'Christians," in *Bridging between Sister Religions*, eds. Alan J. Avery-Peck and William Scott Green (Leiden, The

religious group from Judaism, Ellen White agrees that: “It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.”[25] But she adds that, “They became recipients of the name because Christ was the main theme of their preaching, teaching, and conversation.”[26] A similar case is the Pentecostal experience (Acts 2:47).

Luke’s notion of the Church in the NT is an assembly in the household (Acts 10:24-27, 30). “The disciples breaking bread from house to house is evidence of house churches” (Acts 3:46). Brown observed, “that the term (*ecclesia)* was used first for the Christian community of a given region or city before applying it more abstractly to the whole body of Christians.”[27] Adding more evidence, Brown says, “We find the church of the Thessalonian” (1 Thess 1:1), “the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:1), “the church of God which is in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1), “the churches of God which are in Judea” (1 Thess 2:14).”[28] And it appears they were probably house churches.

The Growth of the Church

The foundation is critical. Therefore, Stevens’s testimony, which points to the OT (Acts 7:38), helps to assess church growth in the NT. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). From twelve men with at times no exceptional vocations and backgrounds chosen to serve as disciples by Jesus, and His teaching to them was by example (John 1:36-42; Luke 5:1-11; Mark 2:13:14; Matt

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Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 128, accessed 19 December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324541_010.

[25] Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 156, 157.

[26] Ibid., 156-157.

[27] Brown, “New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church 1.

[28] Ibid., 1.

10:1-11). The number kept adding up; obeying Jesus' instructions to "wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), the record shows 3000 conversions in one day (Acts 2:41, 42). It kept increasing from 3,000 to 5,000 (Acts 4:4). Later it became a multitude of people affirming the exponential rate of growth (Acts 4:32; 5:14; 6:7). This trend of progression is with the people of God throughout Scripture from Seth (Gen 4:25, 26) to Noah (Gen 9:1), then Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 7; 17:5-7) and David (Mark 11:9, 10) until the Messiah (Gal 3:16, 17, 29).

Historical Evidence of the Church

Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-53 reveals the cultural heritage and history of the Church in the NT. Researchers are unsettled by the teleological, artistic, or polemical observable dimensions of his speech; in the case of Hogeterp, it is "Israel's History of Migration and Dislocation."[29] Earlier in Acts 6:8-15 Steven speaks of his fellow Jews who he identified as members of the synagogue of Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others from Cilicia and Asia (Acts 6:9). His defense confirms his Jewishness, saying, "The God of glory appeared unto our Father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran" (Acts 7:2). That seems to be a critical issue with the history of the Church in the NT.

The wilderness church (Acts 7:38) points to the people of God in the OT (Ex 16:1, 2, 10; 17:1; 19:3, 17; Num 27:14; 2 Chr 1:3). However, migration and dislocation, according to Hogeterp, are understudied and answer the quarrel between Stephen and his audience. Using Stephen's lenses reveals linkages to the promised Seed (Zera') (Gen 3:15) through Abraham. But only people of faith benefit (Acts 7:2).

[29] Albert L. A. Hogeterp, "Reading Stephen's Speech as a Counter-Cultural Discourse on Migration and Dislocation," *Open Theology 7*, no. 1 (2021): 289, accessed 19 December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0162.

The Andrews Bible Commentary argues that "He did not mention the name of Jesus but only alluded to him"[30] (Acts 7:37, 52, 56), albeit it was the fact and cannot make him less the promise Seed Zera' (Deut 18:15, 18; Acts 7:37; Acts 3:22; Matt 17:5; John 1:45; Luke 24:27), or the expected Messiah. Scholarship on Stephen's retelling of Moses's life has focused on the parallels between Moses and Jesus, rightly concluding that Luke has reshaped Moses in the image of Jesus.[31]

Glimpses of Mission in the Old Testament

Searching for glimpses of Mission in the OT can be challenging and sometimes problematic. One such challenge is the issue of presuppositions. For Kwabena Donkor, "Presuppositions affect hermeneutics."[32] He defines presuppositions as assumptions and hermeneutics as interpretations. In other words, he suggests that our assumptions may affect or inform our understanding of some of the challenges or problems in the OT's search for glimpses of the mission. For instance, some higher critics of the OT separate it from the NT. Gabler separates biblical from dogmatic theology, for example. His March 30, 1787, lecture assigns different tasks to each. In effect, "the OT occupies a lower rung than the NT and therefore argues that historically the OT and NT need to be considered for separate treatments."[33]

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[30] Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, gen. ed., *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light, Depth, Truth. New Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), 1813.

[31]Dulcinea Boesenberg, "Retelling Moses's Killing of the Egyptian: Acts 7 in Its Jewish Context," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 48, no. 3 (2018): 148-156, accessed 19 December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107918781281.

[32]Frank M. Hasel. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 7.

[33] Ben C. Ollenburger, "Old Testament Theology before 1933," in *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future, ed.* Ben C. Ollenburger (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 5.

Garrett rebukes Gabler's distinction between "dogmatics" and "biblical theology" as misleading.[34] Garrett sees such opinion as selective instead of objective and dangerous for a clearer understanding of the OT.[35] On the other hand, Dumitrescu quotes Hahn, saying, "For a long time, scholars agreed that there is a Christian mission in the true sense of the word only after the resurrection of Jesus… In the OT, there is no mission in the real sense"[36] a view that is not supported by Dumitrescu who believe mission commences in the OT. Christopher Wright also thinks differently from Hahn and concludes that "the OT contains the roots of Mission, while in the NT, one finds the development, fulfillment, or extension of Mission. He also believes there should be a messianic reading of Scripture up to Christ and a missional reading to Christ, applying two types of hermeneutics to the Scriptures."[37]

Indeed, the messianic reading of scripture to Christ affirms the restoration of man's broken relationship with God through the promised seed in the OT (Gen 3:15). The plan of salvation is prophetic, pointing to Christ (Gal 3:16, 29) through Abraham's lineage. Therefore, He points to the covenant (Gen 12:1-3) of the three blessings that all people of faith enjoy, having been blessed through Abraham's faith (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:29; 4:7; Eph 3:6).

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[34] Duane A. Garrett, *The Problem of the Old Testament: Hermeneutical, Schematic, and Theological Approache*s (Westmont, CA: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 7.

[35] Ibid., 8.

[36] Cristian Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology in the Old Testament: A New Paradigm," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 43-62, accessed 19 December 2023, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol4/iss1/5

[37] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 41.

The Act of Sending: The Trust of Mission in the Old Testament

God's act of creation and sending is the commencement of Mission throughout Scripture, and it is not different in the OT. For the Andrews Bible Commentary,

> God's blessing involved filling the earth and representing the Creator as stewards. God gave Adam and Eve the privilege of participating in God's loving and caring dominion over Creation. They became stewards of the Lord."[38]

Adam and Eve's role as stewards in the Garden of Eden is an assignment for humanity. God serves in the position of ownership, and humankind serves in the managerial position. To complete the term of reference stated in Genesis 2:15 is "to dress and to keep." The Key Word Study Bible adds that, "Man was always to accomplish work, but God intended man to enjoy it. Work only became drudgery after the fall (Gen 3:17-19).[39] In conclusion, the list of God's acts of sending is inexhaustible. From Adam (Gen 1:26-27; 2:15-17) to Seth (Gen 4:25-26), to Noah (Gen 6:8, 9), to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 7) to Moses (Exod 3:1-14) and the patriarchs of all ages up to the congregation of his people (Exod 19:3, 17) and finally his Son (Gal 4:4, John 1:14; Phil 2:7).

The Promised Seed in the Old Testament

Christianity, without the promised Seed (Zera'), is meaningless. It holds the key to all the discussions on Mission, the Gospel, the Church, and salvation. In both Testaments, the promised seed is central to the plan of salvation. It begins with the calling and sending of Abraham (Gen 3:1-3). In Abraham's commission to go on

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[38] Rodríguez et al., eds., *Andrews Bible Commentary*, 143.

[39] Spiros Zodhiates, ed, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991), 5.

God's Mission, like the great commission, God said, "I am with you always…." (Matt 28:20). Similarly, He said to Abraham, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Gen 15:1 NKJV). The keyword study Bible introduces the Greek word "Πατριά from πατήρ, father. Or what refers to after the father belongs to or springs from him, including his family descendants. Luke 2:4 refers to David's lineage (i.e., the descendants). It goes on to say that usage, in a wider sense, refers to people, nationality, or race (Acts 3:25)."[40]

Readers of the Biblical text supporting the Promised Seed would notice that Stark rightly observed, "A recurrent theme in this analysis is the intertwining of the seed promise(s) with the various respective promises to Abraham about inheritance."[41] The significance of the Promised Seed is in both the meaning and the fulfillment. Cheek's Revelation is typical of this line of thought:

> Throughout the History of the Church, Genesis 3:15 has generally been under fire as a Protoevangelium to some extent, and many Christian interpreters have understood the verse as the first messianic prophecy. Others, not identifying the Seed of the woman as an individual, still understand Gen 3:15 as a Protoevangelium declaring the serpent's defeat and its Seed through the collective Seed of the woman—the Church.[42]

Furthermore, Cheek suggests that the influence of Historical-Critical methodology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, combined with the so-called era of Enlightenment, rationalism, and other factors, led interpreters to abandon the idea of the Protoevangelium in favor of a naturalistic interpretation. However, what complicated matters was the total scholarly opposition in the later part of the

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[40] Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible,* 1747.

[41] J. David Stark, "To Your Seed, I Will Give: The Land(s) Promised to Abraham in Genesis and Second Temple Judaism," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 30, no. 1 (2020): 1-21, accessed 19 June 2024, 10.5325/bullbiblrese.30.1.0001.3.

[42] Jonathan Cheek, "Recent Developments in the Interpretation of the Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64, no. 2 (2021): 214.

twentieth century towards the concept of the messianic Seed in Gen 3:15 as the first Gospel. One such contention of the woman's Seed is whether the Seed spoken of is singular or plural. But Hamilton would insist, "The verse is good news whether we understand Zera singularly or collectively."[43]

Glimpses of Mission in the New Testament

Finding glimpses of the mission in the NT is more automatic than in the OT. Peters succinctly indicates, "The NT is all about Mission."[44] Fagbemi adds that, "Mission is at the heart of Christian theology."[45] With this backdrop, let us find glimpses of the Mission recorded in the NT. From the gospels to Revelation, mission is found everywhere. Matthew presents the central figure of the mission upon whom the gospel finds relevance, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1 KJV).

Although Matthew recorded the baptism of Jesus in chapter 3, he only began his ministry in chapter 4, preaching repentance and introducing the kingdom of God (Matt 4:17 KJV), as well as calling disciples to follow him. Mark's account starts with the baptism of Jesus, where all three persons of the Godhead were present, and he immediately began His ministry (Mark 1:9-11 KJV).

Luke summarizes the salvation trust of God with John the Baptist as the channel: "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to

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[43] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 199-200.

[44] George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), 131.

[45] Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, "Transformation, Proclamation and Mission in the New Testament: Examining the Case of 1 Peter," *Transformation* 27, no. 3 (2010): 210, accessed 19 June 2024, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052804.

make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17 KJV). John placed the seal on it, pointing to the promised seed and the logos that read, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. All things were made by him, and without him, nothing was made. In him was life; and the life was the light" (John 1:1-4 KJV). Mission, therefore, is about being, and his being brings light, and we are sent to share his being with others so that they, too, may live via the light given from the source of life.

Proclamation of the Everlasting Gospel

Because God is everlasting and his plan of salvation is eternal, the Gospel cannot be less. The good news is that it began in the OT (Gen 3:15) and concluded in the NT (Matt 24:14). From the beginning of the NT, gospel ideas are readily accessible, starting with the miraculous conception and Birth of Jesus Christ. What else could occupy the headlines but the εὐαγγέλιον (the good news)? The appearance of an Angel to Joseph, saying, "…. Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which she has conceived is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt 1:20, 21). The mission is the fulfillment of the gospel, for every sinner has a chance through the Savior to come to save us from our sins.

The Bible Study Journal acknowledges this when commenting on Revelation 14:6, noting that the fulfillment of the first angel's announcement of spreading the Gospel message to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people is first evident in Matthew 24:14.[46] It further emphasizes that, in the context of Revelation, the Gospel includes the good news of Christ's second coming, in which He rescues His people, and

[46] Andrews University Press, *The Great Prophetic Books of Daniel and Revelation: A Bible Study Journal* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), 135.

suggests that it consists of the good news about the character of God in contrast to the nature of Satan (Rev 12:7-11).[47]

A Witness before the Second Coming

On the one hand, Satan would seem to have done his worst and gotten the ascendancy through his diabolical, deceptive scheme that led to Sin (Gen 3:1-7). On the other hand, he exposes himself to a transparent and loving God. Willing to redeem man from a fallen state through Jesus Christ (John 3:16) and prove the devil's lie to the entire universe (Gen 3:4). In this context, the Gospel serves as a witness before the coming of Jesus Christ.

> The Gospel witnesses the Power of Jesus to transform human lives and give them a new meaning. Gospel means literally "good news."(from Old English god, good, and spel, message or story—like Spiel in German, also used in English: "a long spiel"). Indeed, it is good news serving as an agent to change people's lives: it proclaims a message of salvation rather than simply telling a story or a history for its own sake.[48]

A witness is pivotal to judgment. In a court of law, evidence from witnesses is the only thing that indicts or acquits according to Scripture, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Sin is a sentence needing payment. The only way for a not-guilty plea is to stand trial in a court of law. The critical and compulsory reason for Mission brings the case of a man accused by Satan to court (Gen 3:1-7), causing God to employ the services of an advocate (1 John 2:1, 2; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24). As a result, Mission is not an incidental occurrence but an intentional, plan of God for humanity (Gen 2:9).

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[47] Andrews University Press, *The Great Prophetic Books of Daniel and Revelation*, 135.

[48] William Franke, "Gospel as Personal Knowing: Theological Reflections on Not Just a Literary Genre," *Theology Today* 68, no. 4 (2012): 413, accessed 19 June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573611424472,

Mission Implemented by Jesus

A careful study of Scripture points the reader to the Mission. Dean Flemming "identifies a tension within the Church today and tries to address it."[49] The postmodern generation of the 21st century must be impacted by mission. However, the tension lies in how Jesus's mission is implemented to serve this purpose. Implementing the Mission means monitoring Jesus' ministry. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases among the people" (Matt 4:23). Flemming argues that the tension "concerns the purpose of the church in the world—mission."[50] He further enumerates that the missional impact from the traditional evangelical Christian point of view should tilt toward a verbal witness.

In contrast, the 19th-century generation would instead view the success of the missional impact via the social Gospel by leading lives of sharing love, justice, and mercy in society rather than just words.[51] On the one hand, the tension is thinking that without verbally (preaching the Gospel), it is impossible to lead people to make a decision. On the other, too many words without tangible, practical manifestation (love, sympathy, relief from suffering, etc.) repel from acceptance of Christ. That is how you understand Jesus' means of implementation. It's more about not telling.

Summary

Pursuing the Biblical and Theological foundation of the Church, partaking in the Mission of God, and joining Jesus to Impact the Community is a befitting road

[49] Dean Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing, and Telling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 11.

[50] Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, 11.

[51] Ibid., 11-14.

map in the fulfillment of God's Mission. First, defining the Church from the Greek word *Ekklesia* and comparing the concept in both Testaments (Old & New) will help the reader understand the basis of the Gospel and its propagation. In Acts 6 & 7, Stephen's speech connects the OT with the NT as complementary. The term "called-out" or "assembly" in the OT suggests "the people of God" and points to God's people in the NT, regardless of the culture from which the called-out or Community comes.

Evidently, a community or group of people has a source; consequently, the study notes that it began with the creation of a family in Genesis 1:26-28. From this backdrop, a relationship started with a promise to save humanity (Gen 3:15) through the Seed (Zera) of the woman. Biblical evidence shows that this promise was not restricted to the OT, as some may argue, but universal (Gal 3:7, 16).

Otherwise, what would be the justification for God calling a person from a background not in conformity with his chosen people (Josh 24:2, 3) or an uncircumcised none Jew (Gal 3:6-14) as an individual (Abram) to herald his cause of salvation? This unique history shows God's dealing with humanity through a covenant with Abraham and extending it to his Seed (Gen 15:18; 12:7). Paul alludes to it and says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, and to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to your seed, who is Christ" (Gal 3:16).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examines relevant literature on the history of the SDA mission, the Church, the concept of the Mission, and the impact of missionary work worldwide. In 2024, the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) celebrated 150 years of mission. Has the mission been successful? What has been its impact? Is the mission still necessary? How is the church involved?

History of Mission in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

"Modern SDAs' roots are in the second advent movement in the early nineteenth century."[1] Knight points to three cycles; the first is agitation for change in the 1850s and the church organization between 1863 and 1900. The second cycle began with calls for change in the late 1880s, reorganization between 1901 and 1903, and refinements between 1903 and the beginning of the 21st century. And what appeared to be the third cycle began in the 1980s."[2]

The Second Great Awakening (Protestant Religious Revival in the United States, 1795-1835) influenced the SDA church's mission focus, moving leading proponents of the Second Advent of Jesus. Front-line heralds like William Miller

[1] George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 13.

[2] George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 8.

(1782-1849) and Joshua V. Himes (1839) elevated the Advent message through publications such as The Signs of the Times and the Midnight Cry, including those of James and Ellen White, to name a few. Despite recent calls for church structure and organization, "In short, too much organization could frustrate the church's mission than facilitate it."[3] The rich heritage of the mission focus of the SDA Church compels all SDA churches to be mission-focused.

The Concept of the Church

The historical backdrop of such a mission compels readers to understand the concept of the Church. To begin with,

> "The Church' is not definable by observation, nor empirically describable. What you understand by it will depend wholly on your theological premises or prejudices, on your ecclesiology, and there is no agreed ecclesiology among Christians of different confessional traditions or the same tradition."[4] Beale exclaims, "The following discussion revisits this debate and attempts to establish further evidence that the LXX background in Paul's letters is clear."[5] Chia, extensively quoting from the Hatch & Redpath concordance,[6] speaks in favor of the term ekklēsia having an Old Testament substitute in "Qahal," a Hebrew term[7] meaning congregation.

The consistent review of the literature points the reader to the ἐκκλησία background in the Old Testament and projects its use in the New Testament as consistent with that background. In concurrence, Smith sees "the ripping of the earthly temple veil at Christ's Sacrifice as intentional and the founding of his Church

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[3] Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 169.

[4] Edmund Hill, "What Is a Church?" *New Blackfriars 51*, no. 600 (1970): 223-228, Accessed September 30, 2024. https://doi.org/43245618.,

[5] G. K. Beale, "The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 2 (2015): 152.

[6] Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1897-1906), 433.

[7] P. S. Chia, "The Word Ekklēsia in Matthew and Its Implication for Social Justice," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (2021): 25, accessed 13 December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107920980932.

in the NT. But God established his people as the primary vehicle through which heaven and Earth intersect."[8]

Church as the People of God

A glance through both Testaments indicates how the Church identifies itself. They both refer to the people of God as the church, congregation, or an assembly (Exod 19:3, 17; Deut 33:4; Neh 5:7; Acts 2:47; 5:11; 7:38; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:22; 11:26; Rom 16:1, 4, 5, 16, 23). However, the Church is not a building but people or Humanity (Gen 1:26, 27), rendering Humanity as Adam in a collective sense. However, as a proper noun, Adam refers to the first man God created (Gen 2:20). Meanwhile, another translation of Adam is a person. It could refer to any given person (Num 31:28, 30, 35, 40). Therefore, readers are privileged to survey scriptural evidence that permeates the OT (see Isa 2:3, 4; 11:11) and the NT (see Phil 1:11; Acts 24:47) regarding the church as the people of God.[9]

Church as a People in Relationship

Understanding from scripture that the church is identified as the people of God sets the stage for a people who should relate with God and each other. God, as the originator of the relationship dynamic, gave life in the act of creation and established relationships between Himself and humanity, as well as between humans. Hence, Ellen G. White alludes to this relationship dynamic,

> The Sabbath is a sign of creative and redeeming power; it points to God as the source of life and knowledge; it recalls man's primeval glory and thus witnesses that God's purpose is to re-create us in His image. The Sabbath and

[8] Anthony WagenerSmith, "Urban Church Planting: Three Functional Shifts from the New Testament," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 15, no. no. 1 (2019): 119, accessed 13 December 2023, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol15/iss1/10/ Retrieved 03/31/2023.

[9] Bertil Wilander, "The Mission of God and the Faithfulness of His People: An Exegetical Reading of Revelation 14: 6-13," *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith* (2009): 277.

> the family are instituted alike in Eden, and God's Purpose is indissolubly linked. On this day, more than on any other, we can live the life of Eden.[10]

Another is the tripartite relationship from creation, a record of active involvement and action of God and the Holy Spirit, revealing an act of the Godhead linked to the NT (John 1:1-4) with Jesus as an active participant. Such truth compels the people of God to maintain their relationships with God, one another, and the community. Family lineage further explains the dynamics of the relationship. Everyone comes from a family, and churches comprise families. So, how will the family stay healthy together, introduce God, or invite others to have a relationship with God? One can't be part of it without relating to others or being isolated.

Church as a Community

Myra L. Watkins "considers the church a disciple community in her argument for the church's public witness as a community."[11] She further emphasized,

> Framing the church as a disciple community with a reimagined Memory and hope to safeguard the church from Christian nationalism and transform Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral. In the disciple community, biblicism draws from the gospel as public truth towards transformation and flourishing in society, and crucicentrism leads to a kenotic presence with an embodied commitment to the well-being of others (Phil 2:5-11), conversionism is connected to discipleship, and activism involves the entire community of disciples on a mission where they live.[12]

Another trademark of the church as a community is reconciliation. After Adam and Eve's broken relationship with God was restored through God's reconciliation plan, the church had no choice but to adopt reconciliation as a

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[10] Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 2017), 250.

[11] Myra Watkins, "Public Witness Through the Church as the Disciple Community in the Context of Christian Nationalism," *Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2024): 51, accessed 13 December 2023, https://doi.org/10.29357/2789-1577.2024.22.1.3, 57.

[12] Ibid., 57.

community. Reconciliation was a prominent part of Jesus' Mission on Earth, and he left the stage, passing it on to his disciples. Hunter adds that: "As missiologists consider the meaning of a theology of reconciliation, we must be oriented to this vocation, to the Christian life as participation in the ministry of reconciliation."[13]

The Concept of Mission

In Botha's 2019 World Ecumenical Council (WEC) report, subgroups deliberated on several issues relating to the Church and its Mission or theology.[14] Among the hotly contested issues is the age-old debate of which comes first: the Church or the Mission. Botha asks, "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" The study shares this sentiment because the direction the pendulum swings determines how the Mission will be implemented and affected. Notable among Biblical scholars, there remains a rift between Mission being the Church's Mission and, on the other hand, God's Mission. Hence, there is a need for some working directives to pursue this line of thought. Alawode and Ngomo suggest the following: 1. To examine the conceptual understanding of Christian Missions; 2. The Biblical basis for Christian missions; 3. The nature of Christian missions, and 4. Misconceptions about Christian missions.[15]

Under the first directive, the researcher stands with Alawode and Ngomo, noting that a proper understanding of the Christian Mission is essential. They quote

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[13] Danny Hunter, "Radical Ecclesiology: The Church as an Arena for Reconciliation through Cultivating Alternative Community," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 75-82, accessed 13 December 2023, 10.1177/0091829619887391.

[14] Nico A. Botha, "Church and Mission: Unavoidable Issues in Defining the Relationship," in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, eds. Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron (Johannesburg, South Africa: UJ Press, 2022), 17-32.

[15] Alawode Akinyemi Oluwafemi and Ernest Ngomo Nsong-Nkwele, "The Sense and the Nonsense of Christian Missions," *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 19, no. 20 (2018): 1-15, accessed 21 July 2023, https://biblicaltheology.com/Research/AlawodeAO02.pdf.

Tennet as saying, “The word mission needs cautious definition if it is to continue as a valuable word for the Church.”[16] They contend that the historical potency of the Church resonates around the Concept of Mission or Missions. Consequently, the mission takes precedence over the church.

Therefore, Willis, Jr. insists on a nuance between “mission” and “missions,” intimating that the two words do not mean the same thing. He argues that mission is God’s redemptive purpose in establishing His Kingdom.”[17] Creation and redemption testify to God’s power to establish his reign and rule. Ultimately, his kingdom serves humanity. Therefore, John Stott and Ajith Fernando insist that readers consider “God’s Mission as God’s redeeming action in the world which is different from God’s providential action.”[18]

Review of the Concept of Mission

Surprisingly, the Mission enterprise has experienced multiple transformations. On this note, analyzing the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium, 29-30 April 2022, is helpful. The point of departure is the context of the Byzantine Missions and their current relevance in scholarship, acknowledging the historical impact of Mission[19], which includes the conversion and Christianization of the premodern era. The neglect of such a transformation in postmodern or post-Christendom for Christian mission, as

[16] Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 53.

[17] T. Avery Willis Jr., *Biblical Basis for Missions* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1979), 11.

[18] John Stott and Ajith Fernando, *Christian Missions in the Modern World* (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 33.

[19]Sergey Ivanov and Andrea Sterk, “Byzantine Missions: Meaning, Nature, and Extent,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 76 (2022): 399-400, accessed 03 August 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27172445.

the central thesis of that symposium, is noteworthy. Despite some negative images outlined in the missional endeavor, it is ultimately positive and transformational, aligning with the biblical text.

Definition of Mission

The definition of Mission has changed over time. Bosch says, "Since the 1950s, there has been a remarkable escalation in the use of the word mission among Christians."[20] He insists that the "term 'Mission' presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those for whom we do Mission or go on such an assignment."[21] Wright refers to all cross-cultural missionary work, including missionary societies' work, evangelism endeavors, Church-planting missions, whether long-term or short-term missionary career work, and a global network of such agencies and individuals, such as the Lausanne Movement, as missions.[22]

For others, Mission refers to Christ's Great Commission, recorded in Matt 28:18-20.[23] McGill highlights that "Christ's holistic Mission of salvation is to teach and tend. At the same time, Walls and Ross indicate that "The Christian Mission involves doctrine and practice, orthodoxy and Praxis, care of the human spirit and body, and spiritual and physical cultivation of God's creation."[24] Meanwhile, Robert

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[20] Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*, 1.

[21] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Biblical Theology for Life: The Mission of God's People*, *A Biblical Theology of the Churches Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 1.

[22] Wright, *Biblical Theology for Life: The Mission of God's People,* 23.

[23] Jenny McGill, "Furthering Christ's Mission: International Theological Education," *Transformation* 32, no. 4 (2015): 225-39, accessed 07 August 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/90008841.

[24] A. F. Walls and C. Ross, "*Mission in the 21st Century": Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), xiv.

opines, "The word 'mission' comes from the Biblical Greek word for sending[25]. Therefore, he intimates that Christianity, like Islam, is a sending religion."[26]

The First and Second Commission

According to Konz, those sent on a mission have two commissions: one for mission advancement and another for mission fulfillment. "The Even Greater Commission: Relating the Great Commission proposes a means to reconcile and properly order two of the dominant missiological concepts of the past century: the so-called "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:18-20 and the concept of missio Dei."[27] The depth of Konz's contention is,

> As noted, missio Dei better recognizes that it is not the Christian, the missionary, the missionary organization, or the Christian church that is fundamentally the active Subject and Agent of the mission. Instead, God is the precedent Subject, Agent, and Lord of God's mission, specifically, in the Son and Spirit by the will of the Father; human agency and the sending of the church, therefore, remain secondary and after the divine mission."[28]

And it is this word of sending that lexically links the Old Testament with the New Testament.[29]

Paradigm Shift in Mission

Readers interested in undertaking a mission will need to understand the paradigm shift as a critical transition. As intimated by Prince and Kikon, "Within

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[25] Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion,* vol. 25. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 1.

[26] Ibid., 1.

[27] D. J. Konz, "The even Greater Commission: Relating the Great Commission to the Missio Dei, and Human Agency to Divine Activity, in Mission," *Missiology* 46, no. 4 (2018): 333-349, accessed 07 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829618794507.

[28] Ibid., 337-338.

[29] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2012), xix.

mission studies, the idea of mission has come to be understood through the models of 'inculturation' and 'contextualization' as a response to the enlightenment or colonial mission model.[30] The point of departure is that the results of the former model cause agitation for change. "Critics point to its lack of focus and insensitivity on the mission field and its culture, causing two other models that came as a response - inculturation and contextualization,"[31] reechoing the missional voice of Emil Brunner in summary that, "Mission is the reason for the existence of the church"[32]

Additionally, Adeyemo points to the epic classic of imperialism or colonialism in Africa, which is the extreme account of mission activities on the continent. Adeyemo adds, "It will be recalled that in the struggle against colonial imperialism of the 20th century, a class of leaders emerged in Africa, seen as freedom fighters. Most of these leaders and their fighters were products of Christian mission schools."[33] It was Bosch also who signaled that "Since the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment paradigm has reigned supreme in all disciplines, including theology."[34] In the same breath, he says, "Today there is a growing sense of disaffection with the Enlightenment and a quest for a new approach to and understanding of reality."[35] While this shift promises to solve the problem, it seems to fall short without addressing the pragmatic presentation of the gospel, meeting and addressing the

[30] Brainerd Prince and Benrilo Kikon, "Mission as Translation: A Fusion of Three Horizons," *Transformation* 35, no. 4 (2018): 251-63, accessed 4 August 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26554623.

[31] Prince and Kikon, "Mission as Translation: A Fusion of Three Horizons," 254.

[32] Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), 108.

[33] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa's Enigma and Leadership Solutions* (Nairobi, Kenya: WorldAlive Publishers, 2012), 2.

[34] Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*, 189.

[35] Ibid., 189.

cultural needs of the recipients, and giving a better translation of the text. To address this concern, Tienou rightly describes, "Christian Mission is rooted in the nature of the gospel and the nature of the church."[36]

The Content of Missio Dei

The progression of a paradigm shift is partly due to Missio Dei's discussion. Engelsviken, in a 50th-anniversary lecture on IMC (International Mission Council) of Willingen, invokes, "The development that found its most extreme form in the 1960s and 70s involved a change from a more anthropocentric understanding of mission to a more theocentric, and from a more ecclesiocentric to a more cosmocentric."[37] Breed underscores that Missio Dei, in the light of Ephesians, is an essential technical term in the discussion of the missional task of the church. He indicates semantically contrary content is involved in the talks, which could lead to misunderstandings due to some participants' unclear understanding of the term Missio Dei. Determine to grasp the immediate content of Missio Dei Breed thoroughly investigates this mission discussion from two angles: Mission (Missions) is inherent to the nature of God, which means He is a missional God, and the viewpoint that Mission (Missions) flows from the mutual relationship in the Trinity.[38] The transition corrects the anthropocentricity and leads to a clear understanding of the mission. Scherer suggests that, "For Martin Luther, the mission is always preeminently the work of the triune

[36] Tite Tienou, "The Challenges of Mission in Africa," in *Adventist Mission in Africa: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Gorden R. Ross (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission Andrews University, 2020), 3.

[37] Tormod Engelsviken, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003): 481-97, accessed 4 August 2023, 10.1111/j.1758-6631.2003.tb00424.x.

[38] Gert Breed, "'n Kritiese blik op missio Dei in die lig van Efesiërs," *In die Skriflig* 48, no. 2 (2014): 1-10.

God - missio Dei - and its goal and outcome is the coming of the kingdom of God."[39] It starts and finishes with him.

Preparation for Involvement in Mission Work

The paradigm shift was a step in the right direction. White suggests a road map for preparation and involvement in the Mission of all believers. She outlines it under "all Members Needing Spiritual Revival."[40] In three distinct advices, including the following;

1. Genuine conversion and burden for souls.
2. Putting away every sin that prevents cooperation with God.
3. A need for reconversion before sharing Bible truths with others.
    a. Under the first counsel, she identifies, "Inactivity and indolence in the cause of God lead to backsliding of members and their example, hindering others from going forward."[41]
    b. Second, she intimates that "When laborers of experience in a community where our people live put forth a special effort to win souls, a most solemn obligation rests upon every believer in that field, to do all in their power to clear the king's highway by putting every hindrance sin away, cooperating with God and their brethren."[42]

[39] James Scherer, "Church, Kingdom, and Missio Dei: Lutheran and Orthodox Correctives to Recent Ecumenical Mission Theology," in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium,* eds. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland and Paul Pierson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 82-88.

[40] Ellen G. White, *Ministry to the Cities* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 186.

[41] Ibid., 186.

[42] White, *Ministry to the Cities,* 187.

c. Encouraging missionologists involved in mission implementation, she shares her experience in nightly prayer for those who do not realize their spiritual condition, pleading and saying, "O Lord, set thy people in order before it shall be everlastingly too late."[43] By this Revelation, she opines, "We ought to long with all the heart for a thorough reconversion, that may enthrone the truth in our heart and mind, and that, the Holy Spirit, aiding us, may be prepared to present the third angel's message before others who need it so much."[44]

Mission Theology and Transformation

The study has already established that the Mission comes from God to the world. It is the nature of God and flows from the mutual relationship in the Trinity. Van Engen "describes mission theology as an activity all believers should be engaged in, not a static set of prepositions with which folks may or may not agree, not a bunch of verbal affirmations that one may quickly forget, but an activity of reflection and action-of Praxis."[45] Muller and others infer that Mission theology engages the world and reflects the environment in which it resides.[46] On that note, Dybdahl "suggests that theology is the prayerful, reflective application of Biblical content to a specific situation."[47] For him, "True theology is done in the context of a heart of devotion and

[43] White, *Ministry to the Cities*, 187-188.

[44] Ibid., 188.

[45] Charles Van Engen, *Transforming Mission Theology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), 3.

[46] Karl Muller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen B. Bevans, and Richard H. Bliese, eds. *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, vol. 24. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), xiii.

[47] Jon Dybdahl, "Adventist Response to Mission Challenges through Theology and Contextualization," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 26-33.

relies on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and lead. The same Spirit that inspired the Bible leads the mind in theology."[48]

A Recognition of Missionary Impact Wherever

In some missiological literature, mission societies, "lack of focus and insensitivity on the mission field and its culture,"[49] is problematic. Despite leading to agitation in the past and a shift in mission theology, the impact of mission is visible and undeniable. In other words, the hard-earned positive gains from mission activities outweigh the negative. However, ignoring the justifiable critique of "the inextricable link of colonialism and mission in the late 1960s and early 1970s is worth acknowledging."[50]

For some, the impact of missionary work was Western education; for others, it was a change of lifestyle, dress code, culture, learning new skills, governing differently, and exposure to architectural designs. Despite its ancient objective of domination, the civilization of the subject, an extension of the colony, compulsory trade through military conquest, and might. It has Biblical and providential motifs. Harris succinctly illustrates it in these words, "Rooted historically in the biblical command to go to all nations with the gospel (as found in Matt 28:19, Acts 1:8, and elsewhere), the latter can be said to be founded on a providential basis."[51]

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[48] Dybdahl, "The Challenges of Mission in Africa," 37.

[49] Prince and Kikon, "Mission as Translation: A Fusion of Three Horizons," 254.

[50] Muller et al., *Dictionary of Mission,* xiii.

[51] Jim Harries, "Providence and Power Structures in Mission and Development Initiatives from the West to the Rest: A Critique of Current Practice," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 2 (2008): 156-165, accessed 4 August 2023, https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=51e48194-9c8e-3b42-9d64-33051e7d14e4.

The statement above gives evidence of two motifs serving as a pathway for impacting through missional engagement wherever. The providential basis alluded to by Harris is rather obnoxious and worrisome. He exclaims, "that power relations that include effective mechanisms for feedback from recipients to donors are vital to achieving successful aid/development programs."[52] Harris contends that, because this was not the case, recipients had no means of counterbalancing or critiquing the adjudication of the missional motifs stated above, thereby limiting their potential to impact positively. Wildwood analyzes the term 'white missionary with black evangelists. "The racial differentiation has been used for several important reasons that emerged from a consciousness by scholars of the racist colonial context in which missionary work operated, and by which it was influenced."[53]

The Church's Role in the Community

From an NT perspective, ἐκκλησία refers to "Followers of Christ who derived their identity and mission from Jesus and understood themselves to be the true eschatological community of God."[54] The church, therefore, as a community, will have to minister to the larger community that embodies its physical, social, political, and spiritual boundaries. It cannot isolate itself. It's a good influence that profoundly impacts the community and is also noticeable. Readers must know the church's role and that the community gains inspiration from what the church is and does. It becomes problematic, therefore, if the church exhibits a wrong posture in the

[52] Harries, "Providence and Power Structures in Mission and Development Initiatives from the West to the Rest," 156.

[53] Emma Wild-Wood, "Modern African Missionaries: A Reassessment of Their Impact in Uganda 1890s-1920s," *Exchange* 50 (2021): 274, 270-288.

[54]Joshua M. Greever, "Church," *Lexam Bible Dictionary*, accessed 16 December 2024 https://app.logos.com/books/LLS%3ALBD/headwords/Church?headwordLanguage=en&registration_source_host=biblia.com&tile=right&zzls=2eMKcwoXCjz1vw4IwEMKGw7%2FD.

community. Ellen White indicates, “The world will be convinced, not by what the pulpit teaches, but by what the church lives. She goes further to say, the minister at the desk announces the theory of the gospel; the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power.”[55]

What Should the Church be Doing?

If the church assumes a practical mode of operation rather than a theoretical one, it is time to embrace Newbiggin’s challenge, like North America “Publishing the outcome of its first years of meeting and consultations in 1996 of ‘The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America.’”[56] Ellen G. White shares, “There is [a] need to come closer to the people through personal efforts. Engaging more in personal ministry and less time sermonizing will see greater results.”[57]

From experience, Dr. Maria Black et al., practicing internalist and psychiatrists and an ordained minister in the African Methodist Church (AMC), adds that at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, “We have been struck by the breadth of the racial disparities that African Americans, especially older African Americans, face during this COVID-19 pandemic in the USA. Indicating further that COVID-19 does not discriminate by race or ethnicity...”[58] Attention was focused on “Black

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[55] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:16.

[56]George Hansberger, “The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America,” *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America,* eds. George Hansberger and Criage Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 3-32.

[57] Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1942), 143.

[58] F. Desouza, C. B. Parker, E.V. Spearman-McCarthy, G.N. Duncan, and R.M.M. Black, “Coping with Racism: A Perspective of COVID-19 Church Closures on the Mental Health of African Americans,” *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 8 (2021): 7-11, Accessed 12 June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-020-00887-4.

churchgoers who have always had physical access to the Church (black churches) and have used this deep-rooted cultural and religious establishment to cope with the psychological and social effects of racism."[59]

In the Philippines, "Amidst the crisis, at the time, concerned citizens engaging the government underscored at that time recent call that was made for (public physical health) for a need to cater not only to the public's physical health but also to their mental health."[60] Upon this premise, they interjected the religious or spiritual component as urgently needed. "A similar call should be made for people's spiritual well-being as well."[61] Their advocacy rests on "Studies showing the importance of spirituality in health care as it gives people stability and meaning."[62]

Social Responsibility and Advocacy is a Biblical Legacy

As a Biblical legacy, social responsibility and advocacy are the Biblical road maps designed for the church to impact communities wherever they are. Therefore, William indicates that the (SDA) church, "has received criticism for keeping silent in the face of social injustices in many contexts in the past, especially under totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, Communist Russia,[63] the apartheid regime in South

[59] Desouza, et al., "Coping with Racism," 7.

[60] Fides A. del Castillo, Hazel T. Biana, and Jeremiah Joven B. Joaquina, "Church In Action: The Role of Religious Interventions in Times of COVID-19," *Journal of Public Health* 42, no. 3 (2020): 633-634, accessed 15 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa086.

[61] Ibid., 633.

[62] Martin Rovers and Lucie Kocum, "Development of A Holistic Model of Spirituality," *Journal of Spirituality and Mental Health* 12, no. 1 (2010): 2-24, accessed 15 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/19349630903495475.

[63] Zdravko Plantak, "Adventist Attitudes to Human Rights: An Historical Perspective," In *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 11-37.

Africa, and the genocide in Rwanda.[64] He probes the Biblical legacy of the Church's responsibility and advocacies when quoting Rae. He reveals that "Rae notes that the social ethics in the OT were upheld by the law, which mandated individual behavior, and in doing so, structured the society."[65]

Conversely, Rae pointed out that the New Testament does not emphasize "institutional morality and social ethics" as much as the Old Testament. It focuses more on "a morality for the church" rather than on society at large.[66] This remains constant despite the emphasis on social ethics in the New Testament shifting from society to the church's morality. If the mission is all the church does, then part of its agenda is social responsibility and advocacy wherever it is.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter's review of relevant literature examined the concept and definition of the Church, the Church's relationship to the Mission, missionary impact wherever, and the church's community role. From this backdrop, there is enough evidence of strategies that would be helpful in the next chapter to mobilize churches to impact and influence their communities. It is worth noting that churches are involved in Mission and should see it as the Mission of the Church; the study will consider it God's Mission, influencing the Church as participants.

Pursuing such a route provides a fresh perspective and enhancement to the idea of the Mission, as well as the role, impact, and influence of the Church in the

[64] Michelet William, "The Concept of Social Justice in the Social Sciences, Bible, and Adventism," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 13, no. 2 (2017): 132-152, accessed 16 August 2023, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol13/iss2/12.

[65] William, "The Concept of Social Justice in the Social Sciences, Bible, and Adventism," 136.

[66] Ibid.

community. The progression shown above involves focusing on the centripetal and centrifugal components of God's missional agenda, attracting adherents to the center and redirecting attention away from the Church or individuals to Yahweh (God).

Thus, allowing the working of the Holy Ghost to permit all to revolve around God as the center and be influenced and led by the Holy Spirit becomes a centrifugal force spreading and attracting new believers to Yahweh (God). As a result of this understanding, the concept of a mission unique to the NT is put to rest. In other words, God's salvific and redemptive initiative for all nations, people, tribes, and tongues is not limited to the NT. Therefore, the mission's scope extends from creation to eternity. Consequently, the researcher is hopeful that churches will be mobilized during this study and will have a greater impact and influence in their immediate area of operation or residence, thereby increasing God's missional reach and adding more disciples to the church.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter reviewed literature on the challenges the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces in bridging the gap with the community in Abidjan. This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the ministry context, historical background of the Church, research design, sampling procedures, instrumentation, and methods of data analysis.

Brief Description of Ministry Context

Demography

Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, is the country's primary urban, commercial, and industrial hub. It is home to the Port Autonome d'Abidjan—one of West Africa's busiest ports—and ongoing infrastructure projects, such as the 37.5 km Abidjan Metro, which aim to improve urban mobility. The city's population has grown significantly, from 3.1 million in 1998 to over 6.3 million in 2021, creating challenges in housing, infrastructure, and public services.[1]

Yopougon. Yopougon is the most populous district of Abidjan, with a population exceeding 1.5 million. It hosts two major industrial zones and is home to the Azito thermal power plant. Yopougon is also known for its dynamic cultural and social life. However, it faces challenges, including the expansion of informal

[1] City Population, "Cocody," accessed 16 May 2025 https://www.citypopulation.de/en/ivorycoast/abidjancity/011104__cocody/.

settlements and underdeveloped infrastructure.[2] This presents an opportunity for the SDA Church to engage a promising young population through community ministry and moral education.

Cocody. Cocody is an upscale district in Abidjan, with a population of approximately 447,000 (as of 2021). It is notable for its diversity, with significant populations of Akan (especially Ebrié), Kru, Mandé, and Gur. French is the official language, but local languages such as Ebrié, Dioula, Baoulé, and Bété are also widely spoken. Historically, Cocody evolved from a fishing community into a high-status residential area favored by elites and foreign diplomats.

Cultural Context

As Côte d'Ivoire's most cosmopolitan city, Abidjan embodies the country's religious and cultural diversity. Districts such as Treichville and Adjamé have significant Muslim populations, while Cocody and Plateau are predominantly Christian. Despite religious affiliations, many individuals practice dual religious identities, often integrating African traditional beliefs into Christian or Islamic faiths. Cultural festivals typically attract widespread participation, regardless of one's religious background, and foster interfaith collaboration.

The ethnic makeup of Côte d'Ivoire includes:

- Akan (e.g., Baoulé, Agni): ~29%
- Mandé (e.g., Malinké, Dan): ~28%
- Gur/Voltaic (e.g., Senufo, Lobi): ~16%
- Kru (e.g., Bété, Dida): ~9%
- Others/Non-Ivorian: ~24%

[2] Le Monde, "Yopougon," accessed 17 May 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/

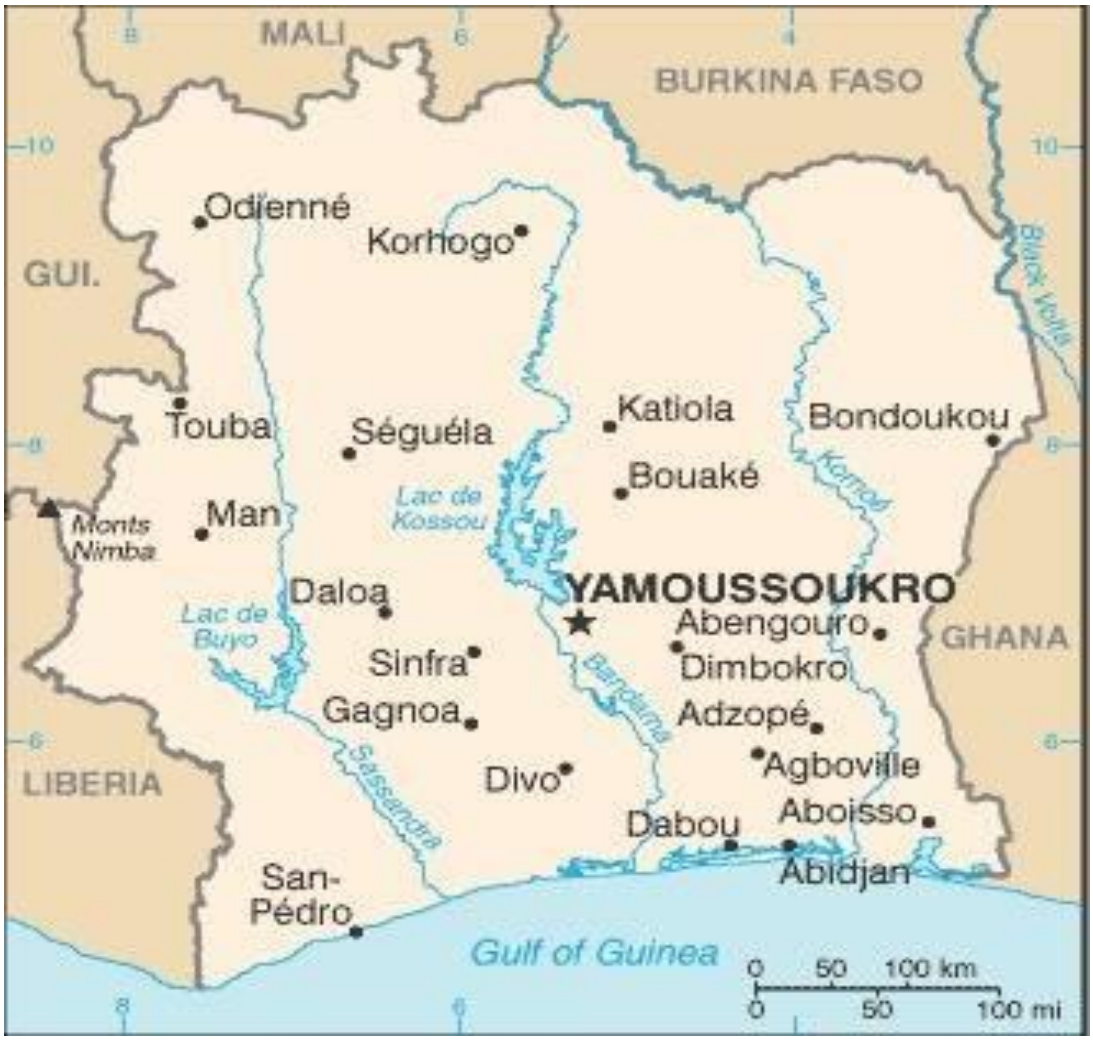

Figure 1. Map of Côte d'Ivoire

Religious Background

According to the 2021 census, Côte d'Ivoire has a population of 29.4 million, of which 42.5% are Muslim, 39.8% Christian, and 12.6% non-religious. [3] Other groups—each representing less than 5% of the population—include Animists, Buddhists, Baha'is, Rastafarians, Jews, and others. Christianity includes Catholics,

[3] United States Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2023," accessed 19 May 2025, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/547499-COTE-DIVOIRE-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf.

Evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists, and various Protestant denominations, while the Muslim population is primarily Sunni, with smaller Shia and Ahmadiyya groups.

History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in Africa

The Seventh-day Adventist message arrived in South Africa in 1871 when William Hunt, a mineral prospector, reached Kimberley. Previously, Hunt had attended evangelistic meetings in California and was dedicated to sharing the gospel wherever he traveled. In East Africa, the Church was introduced to Tanzania around 1903, near the Pare Mountains (Mamba Miamba), by German missionaries Johnn Ehlers and A. C. Enns. In West Africa, a unique phenomenon marked the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Hannah More, an American missionary from Connecticut who was stationed in Sierra Leone and visiting America on furlough, met S. N. Haskell, who gifted her a copy, among other books, of John N. Andrews' new work, *History of the Sabbath*. She returned to Africa as a teacher in a Protestant Episcopal orphanage in Liberia and studied the books carefully. Haskell ensured that she received more books by mail, and she studied them all. [4]

After being discharged from her missionary duties due to her newfound faith in Adventism—which led her to change from Sunday to Sabbath worship—she traveled from her last station in Liberia to her previous missionary stations in the region, depositing Adventist literature at each location on her way back to the United States. As a follow-up to the seeds Hannah More had planted, the Third Angel's Message first arrived in Ghana through the printed word. In 1888, a ship dropped off literature sent by the International Tract Society at Apam, a coastal city in the Gold

[4] Onaolapo Ajibade, "West-Central Africa Division," Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists, first published December 25, 2020, accessed 20 May 2025, https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=8CAV&highlight=west|Africa.

Coast (now Ghana). Mr. Frances I. U. Dolphijn read the literature and became convinced of the Sabbath doctrine. [5]

In 1892, the General Conference requested that Elder Lawrence Chadwick survey the missionary potential of the West African coast. When his vessel reached Apam, he was welcomed enthusiastically by three or four dozen Seventh-day Adventists led by Francis I. U. Dolphijn. Chadwick also found another group of converts waiting for him in Sierra Leone, led by Pastor Coker. Yet another group in Liberia, led by Mr. Gaston—who had heard the Advent message on a trip to South Africa and returned to share it with his people—also awaited him. [6]

History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Côte d'Ivoire

The Adventist message was introduced to Côte d'Ivoire around 1920, primarily through local Ivorians who had encountered the faith in neighboring Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast). These early believers began sharing their newfound faith in rural areas such as Tiemelekro, Agbahou, Iroporia, and Beugretto. This grassroots movement laid the foundation for the Church's establishment in the country. [7]

In the mid-20th century, missionaries Gordon Ellstrom and Jesperson arrived from Dakar, Senegal, bringing with them a prefabricated house. They settled in Cocody, a district in Abidjan, where the chief of Adjamé village granted them land to build a chapel, a Christian bookstore, and housing. This site became the headquarters

[5] David T. Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa (1888-1988): A Mustard Seed* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Lasob Productions, 2001), 10.

[6] C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to The World—The Story of Seventh-day Adventists* (Boise, ID: Pacific, 1977), 179-180.

[7] Assienin Grah Salomon, "Cote d'Ivoire Conference," Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists, first published December 1, 2020, accessed 20 May 2025, https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=1B7K&utm_source=chatgpt.com#fn4,.

of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Côte d'Ivoire and remains significant to this day. [8]

The Church was formally organized in 1946 with a modest membership of 17 individuals. Over the decades, membership grew steadily: by 1985, there were 2,057 members, and by 2000, the number had reached 7,215. Despite this growth, the Adventist Church's expansion in Côte d'Ivoire has been slower than that of other denominations, such as the Methodist Church, which had 1.35 million members by 2000. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Côte d'Ivoire is organized into several administrative units, including the Southeast Côte d'Ivoire Conference. As of June 30, 2024, this conference comprises 50 churches with a membership of 6,199, serving a population of over 13 million. [9]

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Côte d'Ivoire has experienced slow but steady growth since its establishment in the early 20th century. Below is an overview of its membership history:

- 1920s: As stated earlier, the Adventist message was introduced to Côte d'Ivoire by Ivorian traders returning from Ghana. Early evangelism took place in rural areas such as Tiemelekro, Agbahou, Iroporia, and Beugretto. [10]
- 1946: The Church was formally organized with 17 members. [11]

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[8] Salomon, "Cote d'Ivoire Conference."

[9] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Southeast Cote D'Ivoire Conference," accessed 20 May 2025, https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13554&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[10] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Côte d'Ivoire," *2018 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 390.

[11] Elie Weick-Dido, "A Comparative Study of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the United Methodist Church with a Strategy for Enhanced Adventist Membership Growth in Cote D'Ivoire" (DMin diss., Andrews University, 2007), 120.

- 1985: Membership increased to 2,057. [12]
- 2000: The number of members reached 7,215. [13]
- 2004: Membership was reported at 9,490. [14]
- 2019: The Côte d'Ivoire Conference reported 10,224 members, with 96 churches and 120 companies. [15]
- 2024: The Southeast Côte d'Ivoire Conference recorded 6,199 members across 50 churches, serving a population of over 13 million. [16]

Another key factor supporting membership growth in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Côte d'Ivoire is its educational institutions, which have played a significant role in the Church's expansion. Notably, the secondary school established in Bouaké in 1958 has nurtured many educated church members. The success of Adventist education has led to the construction of numerous classrooms across the country, based on the belief that "when you have a school with six classrooms, you have six churches." [17]

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[12] Weick-Dido, "A Comparative Study of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the United Methodist Church with a Strategy for Enhanced Adventist Membership Growth in Cote D'Ivoire" 120.

[13] Ibid., 120.

[14] Nation Master, "Seventh-day Adventist Membership: Countries Compared," accessed 21 May 2025, https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Religion/Seventh--day-Adventist-Membership?utm_source=chatgpt.com#google_vignette.

[15] West-Central Africa Division, *4th Quarter Statistical Report of 2019* (Abidjan, Ivory Coast: West-Central Africa Division archives, 21/05/2025), 4.

[16] [16] Nation Master, "Seventh-day Adventist Membership."

[17] Julie Z. Lee, "New Church and School Buildings Boost Membership Growth in Côte d'Ivoire," *Adventist Review*, published January 16, 2020, accessed 21 May 2025, https://adventistreview.org/commentary/new-church-and-school-buildings-boost-membership-growth-in-cote-divoire/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Research Approach

Woods is right when pointing out that "effective research allows the research topic to drive the research design." [18] Hence, this statement supports the researchers' choice of a qualitative research approach. Additionally, information, as is known, can be acquired via many obvious routes. This study reviewed several of these research approaches to ensure fair representation and determine the best fit for the topic.

Beginning with this review, "qualitative research systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings." [19] As a human-subjects-based inquiry, this research is situated within the social context of individuals and their environments. Therefore, "qualitative research is also grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of the lived experience," suggesting that it "…study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them." [20] Creswell's contribution signals a contrast in qualitative methods, demonstrating a different approach to scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, in the humanities and social sciences, the qualitative approach is often preferred for its ability to capture depth and complexity.

In conclusion, a careful examination of a qualitative research approach—focusing on interviews and participant observations—is most suitable for this study. One immediate reason is that "qualitative interviews involve direct interaction with

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[18] C. Jeff Woods. *Designing Religious Research Studies: From Passion to Procedures,* (Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, 2016), 2.

[19] Tim Sensing. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, 2011), 57.

[20] Norman Denzin K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd eds.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005). Quoted by Sensing, in his qualitative research book on page 57, indicating that there are 3 editions of Handbook of Qualitative Research by Denzin and Lincoln in circulation different from each other with different authors and chapters as well.

respondents."[21] Therefore, qualitative research emerges as the most appropriate approach. At the core of the issue of church members' reluctance to engage in community ministry, the choice of a qualitative research approach—specifically, an existential-phenomenological design—was made after careful evaluation of the three primary research methods.

Research Design

When Creswell cites Bogdan and Taylor for the understanding of research design, he suggests that, "It refers to the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem, research questions, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing." [22] At the same time, Steven J. Taylor et al. signal that "research design in qualitative research remains flexible both before and throughout the actual research." [23] For Yin, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions." [24]

Although qualitative research aims to comprehensively understand social phenomena in their natural environments, it relies on people's direct experiences as meaning-making agents in their daily lives. It focuses on the *why* rather than the *what* of social phenomena. [25] As this study employs an existential-phenomenological design

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[21] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 246.

[22] Ibid., 5.

[23] Steven J. Taylor, Robert Bogdan, and Marjorie L. DeVault. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 29.

[24] R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 29.

[25] E. Fossey, C. Harvey, F. McDermott, and L. Davidson, "Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 36 (2002): 717-732.

as its specific qualitative approach, it collected data to answer research questions that aim to assist the SDA Church in Abidjan in bridging the gap between the church and the community. However, as this qualitative approach progresses, it continues to evolve.

Tracing the roots of phenomenology, history points to Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle as philosophers who struggled to understand phenomena. During the first decade of the twentieth century, an influential German philosopher named Edmund Husserl, according to Fochtman, Lopez & Willis, and Wojnar & Swanson, helped phenomenology flourish, intimating that he intended to establish an unbiased and rigorous understanding of human consciousness and experience.

As a chosen approach, additional alignment to the thrust of phenomenology is as follows: (1) directing people's conscious experiences of understanding phenomena by themselves, [26] and (2) gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of people's everyday experiences. [27] Others, like Giorgi and Moustakas, suggest that phenomenological research is a design of inquiry originating from philosophy and psychology, in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon as described by the participants. [28] Creswell opines that phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas called an essence description.

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[26] C. Polifroni and M. Welch, *Perspectives on Philosophy of Science in Nursing: An Historical and Contemporary Anthology* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 1999).

[27] M. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press, 1990).

[28] A. Giorgi, *The Descriptive phenomenological Method in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach* (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009).

Therefore, a qualitative methodology rooted in an existential-phenomenological approach was selected, which aims to describe the essence of lived experiences,[29] perceptions, and internal realities of individuals within a specific religious and cultural context. Existential phenomenology, as the appropriate approach in research, is part of a complex philosophical tradition and a method of inquiry. It is uniquely justifiable by its tenet of exploring phenomenology through direct interaction between the researcher and the objects of study.[30] Furthermore, it attempted to employ bracketing as a barrier for investigators, based on a Husserlian descriptive-phenomenological approach, helping to set aside preconceptions. But later used Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutical approach for reasons that would be expounded later.

Embree refers to the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology, citing seven unique perspectives, employing existential phenomenology, encompassing "descriptive (transcendental constitutive) phenomenology that is concerned with how objects are constituted in pure (transcendental) consciousness, setting aside questions of any relationship of the phenomenon to the world in which one lives,"[31] and the hermeneutical (interpretive) mode of being, where it is believe is to find appropriate answers to the question of being.

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[29] Md Asadul Islam and Faraj Mazyed Faraj Aldaihani, "Justification for Adopting Qualitative Research Method, Research Approaches, Sampling Strategy, Sample Size, Interview Method, Saturation, and Data Analysis," *Journal of International Business and Management* 5, no. 1 (2022): 01-11.

[30] Danuta M. Wojnar, and Kristen M. Swanson. "Phenomenology: An Exploration." *Journal of holistic nursing* 25, no. 3 (2007): 172-180.

[31] L Embree, "What is Phenomenology," in *The encyclopedia of phenomenology*, Vol. 18. eds. L. Embree, E. A. Behnke, D. Carr, J. C. Evans, & J. Huertas-Jourda, (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic, 1997), 1-10.

Additionally, understanding phenomenological research and its intended purpose requires a qualitative research design that attends to participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the research directly interacted with pastors, elders, departmental leaders, and members to gather sufficient evidence of a noticeable gap between the church and the community. It explored the deeper meanings of reluctance and mitigated it by working with individuals and communities affected by it.

The Contrast between Heidegger's Hermeneutical Approach and Husserl's Bracketing

The choice between Heidegger's hermeneutical interpretive approach and Husserl's bracketing represents a fundamental philosophical divide in phenomenological research. Husserl's descriptive approach seeks to objectively capture the essence of experiences through bracketing—setting aside researcher perceptions to enter the lifeworld of participants without presuppositions.[32] In contrast, Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology emphasizes co-constructed meaning, shaped by both researcher and participant.[33] This distinction essentially separates epistemological (descriptive) from ontological (interpretive) lines of questioning.[34]

The researchers' analytical insights and their probe of the two views led them to choose one for the following reasons: first, Heidegger fundamentally rejected bracketing because he adopted ontology—the science of being—over Husserl's

[32] Alison Rodriguez and Joanna Smith, "Phenomenology as a Healthcare Research Method," *Evidence Based Nursing* 21, no. 4 (2018): 96-98, https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2018-102990.

[33] Adrianna Watson, "A Postmodernist Qualitative Research Approach: Choosing between Descriptive and Interpretive Phenomenology," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 81, no. 10 (2024): 6968-6973, https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16730.

[34] Ibid.

theory of knowledge.[35] He developed interpretive phenomenology using hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation, focusing on "being in the world" rather than attempting to achieve pure objectivity. The interpretive approach explicitly acknowledges that pre-understanding cannot be "bracketed" and allows researchers to use their contextual knowledge and prior understanding, which are viewed as inseparable from authentic interpretation.[36]

Second, Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology values authenticity through the co-creation of meaning, employing the hermeneutic circle for deeper contextual understanding.[37] While descriptive phenomenology pursues authenticity through objectivity using methods like Giorgi's analysis, interpretive phenomenology achieves authenticity by acknowledging the researcher's role in meaning-making rather than denying it.

Justification for the Methodological Approach

This research aims to understand the essence of the lived experiences of SDA members that may contribute to their reluctance or lack of preparedness to engage with their surrounding community. As a result, the most suitable research approach is a qualitative one, specifically an existential phenomenological design.

This approach is appropriate because it values the in-depth, subjective realities of the participants, which is crucial for this study. It allows the researcher to engage in direct interaction with church members through in-depth interviews and participant

[35] Watson, "A Postmodernist Qualitative Research Approach," 6968-6973.

[36] S. P. S. Senanayake and N. N. J. Nawaratne, "Factors Influencing Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of research and Scientific Innovation* 12, no. 12 (2025): 297-319, https://doi.org/10.51244/ijrsi.2025.12120028.

[37] K. Dahlberg, E. Gjengedal, and M. Rheim, "Editorial," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health & Well-Being* 5 (2010): 1-2, 10.3402/qhw.v5i4.5800.

observation. These methods facilitate the researcher's ability to gather rich, descriptive data not only from the members' words but also from their behaviors and expressions.

Furthermore, the interpersonal dialogue central to the phenomenological interview allows the researcher to build rapport, fostering a comfortable, safe environment in which participants feel free to provide the information needed to understand the phenomenon of disengagement.

Population and Sample

Nestor Nsiamah et al. suggest that the population in research "…is the group of individuals having one or more characteristics of interest."[38] While the identified population encompasses all SDA members and leaders in Cocody and Yopougon, the accessible population comprises those who are available and willing to participate in the research during the study period. This includes pastors, elders, departmental leaders, and lay members from Seventh-day Adventist congregations in the two communities of Cocody and Yopougon who agree to participate and meet the criterion of having direct experience or meaningful awareness of community ministry initiatives or an interest in involvement in church ministry.

Scholars like Creswell & Poth, Guest, Bunce, & Johnson opine that phenomenological research emphasizes depth over breadth. They insist that the goal is to reach data saturation—the point at which no new significant themes emerge from additional participants.[39] In existential-phenomenological research, Moustakas and

[38] Nestor Asiamah, Henry K. Mensah, & Eric Oteng-Abayie, "General, Target, and Accessible Population: Demystifying the Concepts for Effective Sampling," *The Qualitative Report* 22, no. 6 (2017): 1607-1621, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2674

[39] J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018); Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce, Laura

Dukes typically recommend a sample size of 8 to 15 participants. Therefore, this study recruited about 8 to 19 participants, ensuring representation from various church roles (pastors, elders, youth leaders, and lay members). This sample size is considered sufficient for a phenomenological study, as it captures the shared essence of the phenomenon, providing rich, detailed narratives while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis. This can be expanded by including various groups within the church. Due to the maximum sampling technique, which is a purposive sampling approach was employed to facilitate reaching saturation early. For a fair representation of members of the SDA church who will form the sample size of this study, the researcher carefully included the vulnerable (e. g., children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and the economically/educationally disadvantaged) in consonance with the great commission "to go and make disciples of all nations" (Mark 16:15).

Sampling and Sampling Technique

Sampling refers to the process of selecting participants from a defined population to obtain information relevant to the research objectives. In qualitative inquiry, a sample represents a purposively chosen subset of a population that can illuminate the phenomenon under investigation.[40] The research population for this study consists of members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

To capture the diversity of lived experiences within this population, the study employed maximum variation sampling, a purposive sampling strategy widely used in

Johnson, "How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," *Field Methods* 18, no. 1 (2006): 59-82.

[40] Islam and Aldaihani, "Justification for Adopting Qualitative Research Method, Research Approaches, Sampling Strategy, Sample Size, Interview Method, Saturation, and Data Analysis," 1-11.

qualitative research. As Patton observes, this approach seeks to identify participants who represent a broad spectrum of perspectives rather than statistical representativeness.[41] By intentionally including individuals who vary in characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic background, and level of church involvement, the researcher can uncover both shared patterns and unique insights.[42] This diversity strengthens the credibility and transferability of the findings, ensuring that the results reflect the range of experiences within the church community.

In practical terms, the researcher first identifies key criteria that capture meaningful differences among participants—such as congregational role (pastor, elder, lay member), type of community engagement, and demographic diversity.

Although maximum variation sampling provides rich and nuanced data, it demands careful management of time and resources, as the diversity of perspectives increases the complexity of analysis. To maintain methodological rigor while ensuring depth of interpretation, this study will follow established phenomenological guidance on sample size. Scholars such as Moustakas (1994), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Dukes (1984) recommend between 5 to 15 participants for phenomenological research, emphasizing depth over breadth.[43] Smaller, purposively selected samples allow for intensive engagement with each participant's lived experience, enabling detailed analysis through horizontalization, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesis.

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[41] M.Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 234-235.

[42] U. Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 6th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2018), 175.

[43] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 107; John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 78.

Finally, by integrating data triangulation through interviews and participant observation, the study aligns with the existential-phenomenological tradition, which seeks to describe the essence of lived experience as faithfully as possible. Purposeful inclusion of diverse voices ensures that the findings authentically reflect the multifaceted relationship between the church and its surrounding community.

Instrumentation

Research instruments are vital tools for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data in qualitative studies. They ensure the systematic gathering of accurate and reliable information from participants. In this study, two primary instruments will be employed: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These instruments are chosen for their ability to elicit rich, descriptive data that reflect participants' lived experiences in their natural settings. As Creswell and Poth note, qualitative researchers often collect data themselves—through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants—allowing for deep engagement with the phenomenon under investigation.[44]

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview method will serve as the principal instrument for data collection. This approach combines predetermined, open-ended questions with the flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth. Islam and Aldaihani emphasize that semi-structured interviews balance structure and freedom, enabling the

[44] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014), 185.

researcher to maintain focus on key topics while encouraging participants to elaborate on personal experiences and perspectives.[45]

Compared with structured interviews, which allow limited exploration, and unstructured interviews, which may lack direction, the semi-structured format provides both consistency and adaptability. Through this method, the researcher can probe beyond initial responses, clarify meanings, and pursue follow-up questions that reveal deeper layers of understanding.

The interview questions were developed in English and subsequently translated into French to accommodate participants who are more comfortable in that language. This bilingual approach ensures accessibility and inclusivity within the cultural context of Abidjan. Some interviews were conducted in person and audio-recorded (with consent), then transcribed for analysis, while others were conducted by correspondence. But all participants were personally contacted by the researcher and received their consent. The aim was to gather narratives that reveal how members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church perceive and experience community engagement within their congregational settings.

Participant Observation Protocol

In addition to interviews, participant observation was adopted to complement and triangulate the data. Observation provides direct insight into behavior, interactions, and contextual dynamics that might not surface during interviews. As Sensing observes, the value of observation lies in perceiving a phenomenon from

[45] Islam and Aldaihani, "Justification for Adopting Qualitative Research Method, Research Approaches, Sampling Strategy, Sample Size, Interview Method, Saturation, and Data Analysis," 01-11.

multiple "angles of vision"—that of the participant, the outsider, and the researcher.[46] This multi-perspectival approach enhances the depth and reliability of findings.

Participant observation allows the researcher to immerse themselves in the setting and note both verbal and non-verbal expressions that reveal communal attitudes, participation levels, and interpersonal relationships within the church and its neighborhood. Field notes documented observable patterns, reflective impressions, and contextual details relevant to understanding the phenomenon.

Following Woods's evocative metaphor, "Each question posed is like planting a seed in the soil with the intent of seeing how it responds to its new environment."[47] Similarly, each observation is expected to yield insight into the realities of the field. The researcher approaches this process with openness and reflexivity, recognizing that meaning often emerges gradually through sustained engagement with participants and their lived experiences.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Although qualitative research does not employ statistical techniques in the traditional sense, it relies on systematic and interpretive procedures to analyze textual data. The present study will utilize thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meanings within the interview transcripts and observation notes. This analytical process will involve coding, categorizing, and synthesizing information in light of the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

The ultimate goal is not to predict or quantify but to interpret and make sense of participants' experiences. As Islam and Aldaihani suggest, qualitative analysis

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[46] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 90.

[47] C. Jeff Woods, *Designing Religious Research Studies: From Passion to Procedures,* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 85.

emphasizes understanding a phenomenon rather than explaining or forecasting it.[48] Through triangulation—comparing findings from both interviews and observations—the study seeks to enhance credibility, validity, and trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations and Protection of Vulnerable Participants

Ethical integrity is central to this study. All participants will be informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of their involvement through a written consent process. Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning codes to participants and securely storing data. Participation will be entirely voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The research also pays special attention to vulnerable groups, including children, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, and individuals facing economic or educational disadvantages. The study affirms inclusivity, guided by both ethical research principles and a biblical framework that emphasizes justice and compassion (Exod. 23:6-9; Lev. 25:25; Deut. 24:14; Luke 14:13-14). In practical terms, this means providing accessible venues, ensuring safe environments, and offering necessary assistance during data collection.

To minimize potential discomfort or risk, interviews were held in safe, neutral locations, such as offices and church premises. No unforeseen challenges arose during the interviews, so no support from relevant authorities, including church leaders and local emergency services, was needed.

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[48] Islam and Aldaihani, "Justification for Adopting Qualitative Research Method, Research Approaches, Sampling Strategy, Sample Size, Interview Method, Saturation, and Data Analysis," 1-11.

Data Collection and Procedures

The process of data collection in qualitative research involves systematically gathering information that illuminates a specific phenomenon. In phenomenological inquiry, data collection enriches understanding by capturing participants' lived experiences in their natural context. As Woods notes, the *context of the study* refers to "the group of people or set of organizations that you identify with as a researcher." In this study, that context comprises members of Seventh-day Adventist churches in Cocody and Yopougon, both located in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Before data collection, the researcher obtained official approval from the Southeast Côte d'Ivoire Conference and consent from the respective pastors and first elders of the selected churches. This process ensures institutional cooperation and ethical compliance. The participants included church leaders, departmental directors, and regular members, chosen through maximum variation purposive sampling to represent diverse perspectives within the congregations.

Data collection relied on two complementary qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews and participant observation—which together provide triangulated insight into the phenomenon of church-community disengagement. These methods allow the researcher to explore both individual and communal dimensions of lived experience.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews served as the principal method for eliciting participants' personal narratives. This approach facilitates open dialogue, enabling participants to articulate how they perceive their relationship with the surrounding community, the experiences that shape these perceptions, and the challenges they

encounter in engaging in community ministry. The interviews also explore participants' reflections on potential ways to strengthen church-community relations.

Each participant received an invitation letter explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of responses. Consent forms—including permissions for recording, photography, and data storage—were expected to be signed prior to each interview. Interviews were conducted in person, by correspondence, and, where necessary, via online platforms such as Zoom or WhatsApp to accommodate participants' availability. Interviews were conducted in English and, where needed, translated into French to ensure comprehension and comfort.

All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed manually. Participants can review and verify their transcripts to enhance accuracy and credibility—a process often called *member checking*. This ensures that the recorded data authentically reflects participants' intended meanings.

Participant Observation

Participant observation complemented the interview data by providing direct insights into behaviors, interactions, and communal practices within the church and its immediate context. This method enables the researcher to experience the phenomenon from multiple "angles of vision": the participant's perspective, the outsider's perspective, and the researcher's interpretive stance.

Observations were conducted for four weeks during regular church activities, outreach events, and informal community interactions. Notes recorded captured verbal and nonverbal behaviors, social dynamics, and environmental factors that shape disengagement or engagement. The researcher maintains an *overt role*—openly identifying as a researcher—to foster transparency and trust within the study setting.

Reflective journaling accompanies the observation process, documenting the researcher's evolving insights and emotional responses.[49]

Out of 26 individuals interviewed, this study documented 15 participants in line with the sampling size permitted for this study, whose lived experiences are grounded in the existential dimensions of their being-in-the-world within the religious communities of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. However, all recorded lived experiences from the 26 individuals interviewed were used, provided they were not already included in the 15 recorded participants' experiences.

Existential-Phenomenological Representation of Participants Demographics

Participants Situatedness in Their Lifeworld

Table 1. Participants' Existential Positionality and Lifeworld Context

Existential Dimension	Participants Characteristics
Lived relations (Relationality)	Leadership Positioning: 8 Pastors, 7 department leaders, 5 lay leaders Ecclesial Membership: 6 members Gender Distribution: 7 women, 8 men
Lived Space (Spatiality)	Geographic Situatedness: Two Urban communes in Abidjan -Cocody (urban/middle-upper income area) -Yopougon (diverse socioeconomic area) Community Diversity: Multiple distinct communities within each commune.
Lived Body/ Materiality (Socioeconomic being)	Economic Diversity: Varied household income levels Educational Diversity: Varied Educational attainment Note: Socioeconomic diversity encompasses both material conditions and access to resources
Lived Time (Temporality)	Current Positioning in leadership and community roles reflects accumulated life experiences and ongoing engagement with religious practice

[49] Anne Mulhall, "In the Field: Notes on Observation in Qualitative research," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 41, no. 3 (2003): 306-313.

Participants and Their Lifeworld Context

This phenomenological study involved 15 participants from two communes in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire—Cocody and Yopougon—each representing distinct communities within their respective areas. Their lived relationships were characterized by various roles within their churches: 8 were pastors, 7 were department leaders, 5 were lay leaders, and 6 were general members. This diversity in roles highlights different levels of spiritual authority, community responsibility, and collective involvement within their faith groups.

The participants' existence was reflected through gender representation (7 women and 8 men), and their material-economic status included socioeconomic diversity based on household income and educational level. Their location in Cocody and Yopougon placed them within different urban settings - each neighborhood characterized by unique socioeconomic conditions and community dynamics.

This demographic setup aligns with the existential-phenomenological perspective that participants are not just data points but individuals whose experiences originate from their unique positions within intersecting aspects of space, relationships, materiality, and time.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic, thematic approach consistent with phenomenological methodology. Its appropriateness as a qualitative research method that explores how people experience and make meaning of their lives, particularly during significant life events or challenges, makes the analysis authentic. It combines

two philosophical traditions under Van Manen's hermeneutic approach, arguably considered as the most interpretive and flexible method[50]:

1. Phenomenology - focuses on understanding experiences as they are lived, from a first-person perspective.
2. Existentialism - examines fundamental aspects of human existence, such as meaning, freedom, choice, death, and our relationship with the world.

This approach investigates the "lifeworld" - how we experience ourselves in relation to:[51]

- Lived body (corporality) - our physical, embodied experience
- Lived space (spatiality) - how we experience our environment
- Lived time (temporality) - our sense of past, present, and future
- Lived relationships (relationality) - connections with others[52]

It carefully followed Van Manen's Six Research Activities to analyze interview and participant observations:

- Turn to the phenomenon of interest - What truly interests you?
- Investigate experience as lived - Gather stories, descriptions, observations.
- Reflect on essential themes - What makes this experience what it is?
- Describe through writing and rewriting - Write phenomenologically rich descriptions.

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[50] Carina Nygård, Anne Clancy and Gabriele Kitzmüller, "I Am Forever Changed: A Phenomenological Study of the Existential Experiences of Parents of Children and Young People with Complex Care Needs," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 81, no. 5 (2024): 2631-2643, https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16509.

[51] Tetiana Yevtushok and Dominic Petronzi, "Like Something Supernatural in Your House: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to Explore the Experiences and Psychological Challenges of Parents Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder," *BMC Psychology* 13 (2025): 642, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03057-5.

[52] Nygård, Clancy and Kitzmüller, "I Am Forever Changed," 2631-2643.

- Maintain strong orientation - Stay Focused on the Phenomenon.
- Balance parts and whole - Move between specific details and overall meaning.

Ethical Safeguards

The study adheres to the highest ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participants' confidentiality was strictly maintained, with identifying information coded and securely stored. Participated voluntarily, with the option to withdraw at any point without penalty.

Particular attention was given to vulnerable groups—including children, persons with disabilities, and those facing social or economic disadvantages. Data collection venues were accessible, safe, and respectful of participants' dignity. In the event of unforeseen discomfort or harm, the researcher was prepared to collaborate with church leadership and relevant authorities to provide appropriate support.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework guiding the study, which examines the reluctance of Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, to engage in community-based ministry. A qualitative approach, using an existential phenomenological design, was adopted to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of pastors, elders, departmental directors, and lay members within their religious and social contexts. This design enables a deeper understanding of the values and motivations shaping members' engagement with their communities.

Maximum variation purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were employed as the primary data collection methods. These

instruments facilitated open dialogue and allowed for a triangulated understanding of the phenomenon. Data were analyzed manually through thematic analysis, following Van Manen's Six Research Activities, to identify key themes and patterns. Ethical standards—including informed consent, confidentiality, and institutional approval—were rigorously maintained in line with Adventist University of Africa guidelines.

In conclusion, the chapter established a coherent and ethical methodological foundation for exploring the study's research questions. The approach is expected to yield insights that can guide church leaders in fostering stronger community engagement. The next chapter presents and interprets the findings derived from this methodological process.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

After collecting data through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants and participant observation across four congregations in Cocody and Yopougon, the researcher conducted a systematic analysis using Van Manen's Six Research Activities as a framework. This process involved:

- Turn to the phenomenon of interest - What truly interests you?
- Investigate experience as lived - Gather stories, descriptions, observations.
- Reflect on essential themes - What makes this experience what it is?
- Describe through writing and rewriting - Write phenomenologically rich descriptions.
- Maintain strong orientation - Stay Focused on the Phenomenon.
- Balance parts and whole - Move between specific details and overall meaning.

All 15 interviews were transcribed verbatim, with French-language interviews translated into English while preserving semantic equivalence. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the analysis to record emerging insights, personal reactions, and methodological decisions. Member checking was performed with 8 participants (53.333%) to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and the researcher's interpretations.

The analysis aimed to uncover the essence of the lived experience of church-community disengagement among SDA members in Abidjan. Following existential

phenomenology, the focus was on understanding how participants experience, interpret, and assign meaning to their relationship with the surrounding community, as well as the barriers and opportunities they perceive regarding community ministry engagement.

In research, a researcher's perspective or worldview is called positionality. While that thought lingers in the reader's mind, it's important to recognize that presuppositions are unavoidable in qualitative research. It also "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" and describes the researcher's relationship to their research subjects. What the researcher chooses to study, how it is conducted, and the results are all influenced by their position. In this study, the researcher's primary presupposition is an apparent lack of structured community ministry.

However, there were other presuppositions that needed equal attention in the ultimate analysis of the study, including: 1. Human experience is meaningful and interpretable, 2. Church engagement is a lived experience, not merely a behavior, 3. Meaning emerges through embodied, relational life, and 4. The church is inherently missional (theological presupposition). These observations prompted the researcher's drive to seek understanding via the members' lifeworld, as already indicated in the study. In this context, the study acknowledges adopting Heidegger's interpretive approach of data analysis rather than Husserl's bracketing methodology.

As a matter of fact, Husserlian descriptive phenomenology employs bracketing, which means the researcher sets aside all preconceptions as biases that may hinder the attainment of pure consciousness. On the contrary, existential-hermeneutic phenomenology (following Heidegger) rejects the idea of bracketing as impossible. He argues that a researcher can never truly be separated from their world.

So instead of bracketing, the approach uses reflexivity - openly acknowledging the researcher's own pre-understandings as part of the interpretive process.

Furthermore, this chapter intentionally integrates data analysis and the presentation of findings rather than treating them as sequential, separable stages. This structural choice is not incidental but methodologically necessary. As the study employs existential-hermeneutic phenomenology in the tradition of Heidegger, this approach embraces reflexivity, recognizing that meaning does not reside in the raw data awaiting extraction but emerges in the interpretive encounter between the researcher and the participants' lived experiences. Hence, the findings were organized according to the four research questions, with major themes and sub-themes presented for each. Within each theme, the chapter carefully distinguishes descriptive evidence — drawn from verbatim interview excerpts and field observation notes — from phenomenological interpretation, ensuring that the reader can trace and evaluate every analytical move. This integrated format is itself a marker of methodological transparency and qualitative trustworthiness. Thus, data triangulation between interviews and observations strengthened the credibility of findings, revealing both convergence and divergence across data sources.

Research Question 1

How do SDA Members in Cocody and Yopougon Describe Their Experience with the Surrounding Community?

Overview

This research question explored the phenomenological essence of how SDA members perceive and experience their relationship with the communities surrounding their churches. Through analysis of interview data and observation of

church-community interactions, three major themes emerged: Discipleship as a Driver of Community Engagement, Community Needs Awareness**,** and Identifying and linking with The Church's Social Capital.

Theme 1: Discipleship as a Driver of Community Engagement

Description of the theme. The lived experiences articulated by participants under this theme present community engagement as fundamentally relational, spiritual, and moral. The participant describes a context in which strong church-community rapport functions as a protective and enabling force, allowing the church to fulfill its mission with minimal conflict. Where such rapport exists, the church is perceived not as a threat but as a partner in communal life. Weak discipleship, individualism, and lack of internal relationships undermine members' capacity and willingness to engage in community ministry. Therefore, central to the participant's worldview is the conviction that discipleship and service are inseparable. Service is not an optional activity but the defining expression of discipleship.

Supporting evidence of participants' visions for engagement from interviews. Participant #1, an elder from Cocody, articulated this tension clearly:

"A disciple serves; that is what makes him a disciple."

A young professional member from Yopougon (Participant #4) expressed similar awareness:

"Discipleship and service should be like a skill and a balance."

A department director (Participant #6) acknowledged that:

"Discipleship includes service to the community."

A church leader added (Participant # 15):

"Emphasizing that discipleship naturally includes serving others."

Supporting evidence from observations. Observational data corroborated this theme. During four weeks of observation across congregations, the researcher noted:

- **At Congregation #1 (Cocody)**, service began at 9:45 AM on 12/06/2025, week 3, but, as usual, members trickled in slowly. It was a day of prayer, and the prayer warriors had an early morning prayer session. The street opposite the church is a busy diplomatic route in a diplomatic environment. Quite a few people pass by, some startle at people disembarking from vehicles and walking into the church premises. Cars are packed on both sides of the street. Members embracing each other; some simply having a conversation, not ready yet to enter the church. A Sabbath sermon on prayers directed to God for families and children was expected to lead the entire congregation into direct connection with heaven as mothers and fathers prayed for their children's well-being. Some lament the challenge in bringing up children in the 21st century, and others praise God for the blessings of having children, while others weep for their children's waywardness. But the message did not refer to community engagement or social responsibility. Post-service announcements focused exclusively on internal church activities—prayer meeting schedule, church picnic, youth program, building fund. No mention of community engagement initiatives, which will need members trained as disciples.
- **Driving from home to Congregation #2 (Yopougon)** is often an exciting adventure, as you are swamped by vehicles on a major highway heading to the country's political capital, Yamoussoukro. You anticipate an entry point that will lead you to exit the highway into the Yopougon suburb,

heading toward the church. It was another Sabbath held on 11/29/2025, week 2. Service started at 9:45 AM in a very populated environment. The church is situated in a convenient location, adjacent to four intersections, with people moving back and forth as they pass by. We arrived and disembarked from our vehicle, and noticed a loud sound coming from just opposite the church. Actually, a group of members from another church (not Adventist) were intentionally preaching to passersby to sabotage our worship. The sound from their PA system was so loud that you could hear it while in service, and they stayed for a very long time before leaving, almost at the end of our service. But members are neither distracted nor confrontational. The researcher observed that the majority of members do not really live in the church's immediate environment. Members arriving for Sabbath service pass by community members (some visibly in need) without interaction beyond brief greetings. Some seem interested in what is happening in the church and may stop momentarily, observe for a while, and continue; others just keep going past the church. The same pattern occurred after service members congregated in fellowship within the church compound but did not engage with the surrounding community. The church was aware that an afternoon workshop would take place, and members were expected to attend. During this time, the researchers exposed the members to a call from church heritage to community ministry and mission. This experience, as observed by the researchers, points to the adjacency as being physically near but experientially distant, aware but inactive, a phenomenon in action.

- **Congregation #4 (Cocody)**: After weeks of announcements during mid-week service, Sabbath service and church bulletined announcement including social media and other platform announcement, an elders' meeting or a church business meeting commenced on 12/13/2025 week 4, and the researcher was sited in the pews along with other meeting participants observing extensive discussion about upcoming marriages, the women's convention, and the men's annual retreat. However, when one elder suggested establishing a community center or soup kitchen to build relationships with neighbors, the suggestion was acknowledged but not pursued. One nursing sister indicated it would be a worthy endeavor that would help many needy individuals. As a matter of fact, as the researchers intervened in the discussion, asking leading questions and encouraging the church to commit to such a mission initiative, a member of the choir, a professional working nurse, informed the audience of her initiative for such a vulnerable group of people, some on drugs, prostituting, and living on the street. She shared that she had worked with women's ministries to provide food packages at times and even invited them to attend church services, but did not have what it takes to continue. She pleaded for help from the church and from any well-meaning individual or organization to continue this ministry. The meeting returned to discussing the women's convention and the Men's (AMO) retreat, neither of which committed to community engagement in the meeting.

Interpretation. Community engagement is driven by discipleship. A church that aims to connect with and integrate into a community must have a purposeful structure that fosters bonding. The church exists to embody itself in every society and

influence it with its theological and relational drive for societal transformation. Their relevance is not in an inward focus, where members and leaders become spiritual lecturers and cognitively intelligent, but in being incarnational and relational, thereby fulfilling the gospel commission. From an existential perspective, this suggests that members have not yet integrated community involvement into their identity as Christians or as the Church.

Mission remains conceptual rather than incarnational. However, evidence from members' lived experiences, as articulated through interviews and observation, suggests that successive community engagement is fundamentally relational, spiritual, and moral. Unfortunately, some members' weak understanding of Theme 1: Discipleship as a Driver of Community Engagement may pose a challenge to implementation, confirming the description of SDA members living in adjacency as being physically near but experientially distant, aware but inactive, called to engage but unsure how.

Theme 2: Community Needs Awareness

Description of the theme. A second main theme explores participants' lived experience, depicting a church that struggles with its identity and mission within the local community. The metaphor of the church as an "island" powerfully conveys the feelings of isolation, irrelevance, and emotional strain that pastoral leaders experience. Despite genuine efforts, community outreach remains disjointed, poorly attended, and increasingly ineffective, fostering a view that the church's mission is unfinished. Moments of success—such as the Food Fair—demonstrate that when the church meets tangible, contextually relevant needs, relational bridges are formed. However, these moments are temporary, underscoring the absence of a sustained,

intentional strategy. The participant interprets this gap as a methodological failure rather than a lack of goodwill or resources.

Supporting evidence from interviews. The church pastor of a prominent SDA church in Abidjan, within the higher upper class of Cocody (Participant # 13), reflected on how community involvement is the raison d'être of the church with this testimony:

The first time I spoke about outreach and evangelism in my church, a member said to me, "Pastor, let's solve the problem in the church before going to evangelize others." My response was that I was sent here to take the church to the community and not to sit here and solve problems, and that is what I will do, period. Renewing this spirit of community involvement depends on the leader's vision and members' collaboration.

A female member from Yopougon (Participant # 12) described her personal experience:

From what I have experienced, many admire our discipline, order, and worship style. But some feel the church is distant and interacts with itself, especially outside of crisis. Some even say, 'Your church is serious, but we hardly see you in the community unless there is a campaign or crisis.'

As an elder, I have been troubled by all that confronts us as a church situated in an upscale commune like Cocody (Participant #14), hence my observation:

"From the elder's testimony, you can't help but recognize excitement and joy of fulfillment, stating, I remember when our church organized an outreach to those living around our church in Cocody, Abidjan. We asked all the church members to make the festive season very special for those less fortunate in the area. Used clothing, shoes, and other items were collected. Each member was equally encouraged to bring

some packaged food items. On Christmas Eve, we loaded these items into our cars and went from house to house, bringing joy to the hearts of those nearby. One elderly woman remarked, 'I didn't know the Adventist church cared about people so much.' That moment made me realize how visible acts of service can bridge the gap between the church and the community."

Supporting evidence from observations

Congregation #1 (Cocody): Fellowship acts as an essential pathway for increased involvement, support, and presence among members during church services, formal and informal meetings, and community outreach. It serves as an icebreaker, helping everyone understand and want to participate, simply because of a clear, inclusive roadmap that points toward the ultimate goal of their collective effort for God's mission. However, the date was 11/22/2025, week 1, the first week of observation. As on most occasions, it was business as usual: the meeting hall bustling with small groups everywhere, some standing, some seated, and others still outside; there was great expectation and different personal and communal agendas. In fact, as in the past, the researcher observed that no community members were present at the meeting, since they are not usually invited; however, ironically speaking, our existence is because of them. When asked why, a member said, "We do not know them, and they do not know us because we live far from the church."

Congregation #4 (Yopougon): As the researcher extended his observations within an enclave of Yopougon known for its high Muslim population in the first week of the observations, the sporadic nature of community engagement emerged through interactions with community members during home visits and discussions led by the first elder. It allows for acknowledging a visible disconnect between the church and the community. This led the researcher to recognize the need to observe and

collaborate with agencies, NGOs, supermarkets, community leaders, women and youth groups, and government entities, thereby creating a network that brings the church and the people together. The church feels this is difficult and has not given it a thought. But the researcher believes this is the right path to take to bridge the gap between the church and the community.

Field note (Week 2, Cocody): On a weekend during the first week, while visiting one of the local congregations in Yopougon, the researcher observed the church building locked and secured, with no visible signs indicating community programs, contact information, or a welcome to the neighborhood. The physical structure itself communicated inaccessibility. However, the researcher argues that the church should function as a community center, offering daily activities such as entrepreneurship training, dressmaking, auto mechanics, a nursery for child care for working mothers, literacy classes and computer science. A place where members are discipled and equipped for community engagement and better prepared for their daily social life.

Interpretation. This theme reveals an existential experience of a people's hidden identity that remains unintegrated. Even though members experience themselves as both residents of the community and members of the church, these two aspects of identity do not inform each other. The church has developed as an enclave—a protected, distinct society—rather than as salt and light within the community. Meanwhile, the community needs awareness that we can provide.

Phenomenologically, this indicates a failure of incarnational presence. The Church's mission is seen as extractive—drawing people out of the community into the church—rather than transformative, which involves bringing the presence of Christ

into the community. This mirrors the theological idea of being "in the world but not of the world," but it corrupts it into "in the world but not with the world."

Theme 3: Identifying and linking with the Church's Social Capital

Description of the Theme. The third theme reveals participants' dilemma of their identity as members of the church and the community. Still, they have yet to recognize that their social capital is tied to them, which sometimes leads to contradictory feelings about their place in the community. Many expressed a simultaneous desire for connection and fear of contamination, a tension between mission and separation, between identification with and differentiation from their neighbors. What is intriguing is that the social capital of a church refers to the networks, relationships, norms, trust, and shared values within and around a church that enable people to work together effectively for mutual benefit and the common good—both within the congregation and in the wider community. We need each other so desperately that it is incumbent upon us to make every avenue available to connect with one another in our own good.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Several young people in the church community are encouraged by their pastor's ministry, which sometimes engages them in discussions on topics such as life, theology, and much more. This is what happened in Yopougon between a pastor and one of his young parishioners (**Participant #1**), articulating this tension:

The church service was impressive, the message captivating, but it left a lingering question for the young man and his colleagues to respond to when his pastor said, "If we close our church and leave this community today, will they miss us? No was the answer from the young man and the other members who were present; they

won't miss us, they said, because we've added no value to their lives or community, nor have we connected with them. Well, on that note, the pastor said, it is a wake-up call for all of us, because we realized at that moment that we were not doing what we were supposed to do. And it was at that point that we set up the committee and said, "Okay, go look at how we can connect." This is the resolve for community connectedness, a crucial form of social capital that both the pastor and members recognize.

An actively engaged elder's wife in church activities from Cocody (Participant #2) expressed similar concern during the interview:

Church activities continued after divine service and she is busy interacting with the researcher through an interpreter, from French to English, she is clear when she stated that the only approach needed to grow and access our social capital is to "Regularly and actively listen to the surrounding community (e.g., surveys, and conversations with local leaders) to identify specific, and tangible needs that are currently unmet, rather than relying on past evangelism strategies that failed to open doors. This provides practical programs and precise planning." Presence with the people she claims is our greatest access point.

It is not all bad news. As a church, we've at times been connecting with the community, but not in a sustained, methodical way. Hence, as a department director (**Participant #5**), I acknowledge perceptions against our linkage with the community:

"It is true that some see us or perceive us as a closed church not willing to associate with others. Let me give you an example: I was a close friend of a religious head. And once he invited us to eat at a restaurant. They say you can come with your wife. So I went with my wife, and when we finished eating, he said, 'Let me tell you

something. I was surprised when you agreed to eat with me at the restaurant, because I know Adventists don't eat in restaurants."

Supporting evidence from observations

- **Congregation #3 (Yopougon)**: The third 3rd week of observation began with a sermon delivered by the pastor. It was observed that the central message, pointing to God's command to go and possess our possessions, elicited deep reflection among the congregation. The central theme focused on hearing God's command, keeping it, and taking action on it, which generated high enthusiasm, with more than half of the congregation signing up for community engagement based on the understanding of hearing, keeping, and doing. Since that day, the church has yet to take action, but is frantically planning through various ministries to implement it in 2026.
- **Congregation #2 (Cocody)**: In a post-service conversation, the researcher overheard members discussing a community health fair organized by a local Muslim association. While some members expressed interest in participating, others cautioned against attending "non-Christian" events. This revealed an internal debate about the appropriate boundaries of engagement. But with a clear understanding of community engagement from the fundamentally relational, spiritual, and moral aspect, this bridge would be easily navigated.
- **Participant Observation Note**: People are typically drawn to a group for their interests and acceptance. In meetings where all are invited, and their voice and ideas are valued, they will be encouraged to participate. It is

here that the church tangibly identifies with its social capital and makes an effort to link up with it.

Interpretation. This theme reveals the existential tension between two core aspects of Adventist identity: prophetic distinctiveness and missional engagement. Members experience themselves as called out (ekklesia) and simultaneously sent back (apostello). However, the emphasis on separation has, for many participants, overshadowed the mandate for engagement.

Phenomenologically, this inconsistency creates existential anxiety—a state of uncertainty about one's proper place and role. Members lack clarity about how to simultaneously be distinctive and accessible, holy and hospitable, separate and serving. This oddness often resolves into withdrawal, as separation is more precise and safer than engagement, questioning our identity and place in the community, and making it difficult to identify with and leverage our social capital.

Cross-Cutting Observations for RQ1

Several observations cut across all three themes:

1 **Geographic Variations**: Participants from the more affluent commune of Cocody reported slightly different experiences than those from Yopougon. Cocody members described greater social distance from their neighbors (often due to class differences). In contrast, Yopougon members felt more embedded in community struggles but were equally uncertain about the church's role.

2 **Generational Differences**: Younger participants (under 35) expressed a greater desire for community engagement but felt constrained by church culture and a lack of mentorship. Older participants often referenced "the way we've always done things" as an explanation for current patterns.

3 **Leadership Influence**: Multiple participants across all themes referenced members' hesitation about community engagement, reflecting on the existential lived experience of watching church leadership shape (or fail to shape) community engagement. They crave leadership modeling and advocacy for community involvement, with clarity and motivation. In conclusion, they insist that leaders channel their focus into evangelistic campaigns and doctrinal teaching, reflected in members' areas of focus as well, since they had no choice of their own.

Phenomenological essence: living in adjacency. The essence of SDA members' experience with the surrounding community in Cocody and Yopougon can be described as **"living in adjacency"**—a state of being physically near but experientially distant, aware but inactive, called to engage but uncertain how. Members exist at the border between church and community, never fully crossing into a deep relationship with either the sacred mission of service or the secular space of neighborhood life. This adjacency is not experienced as comfortable coexistence but as an existential tension—a persistent sense that the current situation does not reflect biblical ideals or personal values, yet the path to change remains uncertain. The church is present in the community, but not truly present for the community. Overcoming this challenge is following discipleship as a driver of community engagement, fostered by fundamentally relational, spiritual, and moral aspects.

Research Question 2

What Specific Life Experiences Do Church Members Describe as Shaping Their Personal Feelings and Perceptions About Community Involvement?

Overview

This research question aimed to understand the formative experiences—both positive and negative—that have shaped members' views of community ministry. Analysis identified four main themes: Childhood and Family Modeling, Transformative Encounters, Disillusionment and Disappointment, and Theological Socialization.

Theme 1: Childhood and Family Modeling

Definition: Community engagement may be the ideal missional objective of any church, but could be hindered by members' childhood and family modeling.

Description of the theme. Participants often linked their current attitudes toward community involvement to childhood experiences and family traditions. Those whose parents or extended family demonstrated service, hospitality, or community engagement were more open to such ministry. In contrast, those raised in families emphasizing doctrinal purity over practical service tended to be more hesitant.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #13, a senior pastor from Yopougon, shared a formative memory:

I was impressed by the evangelistic and social activities of the small church where I attended worship. Every Sabbath afternoon, a special meal is served to everyone, including passersby. Afterwards, there was an evangelistic outing in the community. Through these efforts, we regularly had visitors, as those we shared meals with often attended church. In a few years, the small group grew so much that three more churches were established. Its impact on the Community was positive. At its peak, these experiential templates directly influenced my feelings and perceptions, leading me to enroll in a seminary to become a pastor, while others became lay preachers and evangelists, leading the charge for Community engagement.

A female member from Cocody (Participant #9) had been involved in connecting with the community as a way of populating the church, but finding the community in a way unreceptive and compelling to contrast the Ivorian mentality, indicating that:

"Working with members of churches in Yopougon as a foreigner, I noticed a pattern and wanted to understand the Ivorian mentality. My understanding is that the church in Côte d'Ivoire was started by missionaries, as in most places. The missionary will give and give again, and church members will receive. Hence, community service and community networking require us to share with the community, which is not the tradition in Côte d'Ivoire. The tradition is that people come to church and they stretch their hands to receive. They come to God with a receiving mentality. This mentality is passed down from family to children."

Supporting evidence from observations. The church used a youth day program to penetrate the community, creating a lasting bond with community dwellers and leaders. However, observations of their responses showed noticeable family needs; therefore, a family enrichment program at **Congregation #3** (Cocody) was initiated in the 3rd week of observation. At the same time, a workshop on singles and their challenges with broken marriages drew immediate attention to an immediate solution to avoid misunderstanding and discouragement among young people for future marriages. This discussion was prompted by young members expressing fear about getting married in the future. For this reaction, they pointed to older members' examples of multiple divorces in the church as solely responsible for their fear, and these older members showed no remorse, instead justifying the divorces.

Interpretation. This theme demonstrates the decisive role of early socialization in shaping adult practice. Family modeling creates experiential templates

that profoundly influence how individuals understand Christian identity and mission. Where service was integrated into family life, members possess lived knowledge of how to embody compassion; where separation was emphasized, members lack practical models for engagement.

From a phenomenological perspective, childhood experiences create a pre-understanding, or horizon, through which members interpret present possibilities. These early imprints are not easily overcome by later teaching; they require intentional deconstruction and reconstruction of one's faith narrative.

Theme 2: Transformative Encounters

Description of the theme. Several participants described specific encounters or experiences that fundamentally shifted their understanding of community involvement—moments of revelation that challenged previous assumptions and opened new possibilities.

Supporting evidence from interviews

Participant #7, a female and middle-aged professional from Cocody, described a turning point:

"As a church leader and a preacher, it has always been a joy for me to be in contact with people in my community. Since the Lord called me up, I have experienced both success and failure in my personal ministry. But the one that has really strengthened me the most has been my ministry in prison for 8 years. Listening, praying, counselling, and even supporting and bailing inmates." I aided many in securing their freedom from prison and helped some to resettle and begin life anew. It has been a time of joy and sadness. Some will live up to the confidence reposed in them, while others will do the unthinkable that may shock you.

Another participant (**Participant #10**), a committed member, shared a convicting experience:

> "I have felt the connection between the church and the surrounding community when we, as a church, decided to visit the people living nearby. The purpose was to make these people our friends. Some houses were targeted, and we went out distributing food (rice, oil, plantain, sugar) and other items. We could see how happy and grateful they were! This had a positive impact on them, and these kinds of activities must be repeated frequently. Unfortunately, the church's connection with the community has been lost. From my point of view, it is because the church does not persist in doing what is vital and essential."

Supporting evidence from observations. At **Congregation #3** (Cocody), during a worship service, I delivered a sermon grounded in the biblical mandate from God to "go and make disciples," "go possess your possessions," which was a transformative moment. At this point, Scripture is experienced not cognitively but existentially, compelling bodily response— members standing, moving forward, and making a commitment. It is a confirmation that Engagement emerges when faith is framed as an obedient action, not an optional service.

Interpretation. Transformative encounters are phenomenological moments of disclosure—instances where the familiar becomes unfamiliar, and what is taken for granted is questioned. These experiences create what phenomenologists call "ruptures" in one's lifeworld, openings through which new understanding can emerge. Notably, these transformative encounters often took place outside formal church structures and programs, implying that genuine engagement with community needs can inspire deeper spiritual growth than religious activities alone. For these participants, experience came before and influenced theology rather than theology dictating practice.

Theme 3: Disillusionment and Disappointment

Description of the theme. Conversely, many participants shared negative experiences that led to cynicism, withdrawal, or resignation about community involvement. These included failed church initiatives, lack of leadership support, criticism from other members, or burnout from unsustainable efforts.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #11, a Youth from Yopougon, expressed deep frustration:

"During evangelistic campaigns, we invite community members. They agree to come, but often don't show up due to time constraints. When they attend once or twice, they don't return. It's also regrettable when the church baptizes community members but provides no personalized follow-up, causing them to leave. Community engagement is not practiced enough because church members prioritize self-interest and hesitate to invest in others. It is not regular but inconsistent, which undermines its credibility. I see our missionary efforts as unplanned and sporadic, not genuine, because we use them only to add up our numbers, not to disciple them, and once we accomplish our aim, it ceases."

A department director (Participant #3) shared a painful memory:

"My first encounter with the church left me with mixed feelings, depending on how members attended and were involved in church activities. I quickly realized that the church is so cold toward the community, or has nothing to do with the community.

I tried encouraging them to understand that we need to befriend the community.

To complicate matters, only a few members of the church were active because it was never full, but half empty. It dawned on me the reason why they would not even engage the community. In fact, let me tell you upfront that I have been really

frustrated. I'm not happy. It looks as if I'm always embarrassed when we don't want to engage with the community and bring in people."

Participant #8, a young adult, described burnout:

"Only a few members are involved, and some are not quite familiar with church activities. Despite all the encouragement, the teachings, and efforts to empower them for service, only a few are involved. The few that are really engaged with the community are showing signs of burnout, while others who may want to help do not have the time. Some wish they had the opportunity to reach out at their workplaces, but are skeptical because of the country's religious tapestry, climate, and philosophy. Work schedule and commitment are other challenges for many."

Supporting evidence from observations. During observation at **Congregation #2** (Yopougon), the researcher noted visible tension when community ministry was mentioned. Some elders shifted uncomfortably, tried to rush past the agenda, or changed the subject. When the researcher inquired, he learned of a previous failed attempt to establish a community relationship through the community's youth weekend sports meeting, playing soccer in the park with young men in the community. This plan did not receive backing from some prominent church leaders, which created a conflict between them and the church's pastor, who supported the initiative. Since then, there has still been emotional tension that has retarded the church's effort for community engagement.

Interpretation. Disillusionment experiences create phenomenological scarring—emotional and psychological wounds that shape future perception and behavior. These adverse experiences are compelling because they are felt as betrayals of trust, failures of community, or rejections of one's offering. The pain of these experiences often outweighs positive memories, leading to defensive withdrawal.

From an organizational perspective, these accounts reveal systemic issues: a lack of sustained support for community initiatives, competition between programs for resources and volunteers, an absence of a theological framework that integrates evangelism and service, and insufficient conflict-resolution mechanisms. Individual disillusionment often stems from institutional dysfunction. Hence, participants' constant exposure to disillusionment and disappointment, without any intentional or structural solutions, may affect their feelings and perceptions of community involvement, not just their memories.

Theme 4: Theological Socialization

Description of the theme. Participants indicated that, theologically, the church has been led to focus on evangelism rather than community engagement, a focus the researcher advocates as the raison d'être of existence, since, existentially, we are social beings living in a social environment that needs theological direction for a better, more prosperous life. The commission from Christ to "go and make disciples" is often cited by participants as our marching orders as a church, with a focus on people rather than numbers. Still, it seems overrun by messages from the pulpit emphasizing evangelism through the preaching of the gospel and pointing to cardinal doctrines that do not address social services.

Supporting evidence from interviews

Participant #5, a pastor, reflected candidly:

"Sermons from the pulpit today, in part, suggest staying together as brethren, enjoying strong denominational bonding, solidifying our doctrinal knowledge, and preventing us from engaging with the community or connecting with those around us. For better conceptualization, he refers to the incident at the Tower of Babel, noting God's intention for men to go out and impact the community. In contrast, men prefer

to stay together and selfishly enjoy each other's company, thereby blatantly disobeying God. I realize I am the chief culprit, given the seminary education that did not require me to engage in community ministry as part of my obligation."

A lay member (**Participant #14**) described the impact of sermons:

"When our pastor preaches about service and shares stories of members making a difference, it inspires me. But when sermons focus only on prophecy or internal church matters, service feels like we're majoring in minors."

Participant #9 contrasted Adventist culture with personal reading:

"The debate over what practices is Biblical, such as the celebration of Christmas, Easter, and other sensitive religious issues, as well as what are theologically sound for denomination distinction among others, has occupied our attention for years. However, revelations from Ellen White's writings, such as *Ministry of Healing and Welfare Ministry, are* convicting and provide the church with a contrasting direction. Her emphasis on practical service, health ministry, education, and helping the poor is not mistaken."

Supporting evidence from observations. Among the three Seventh-day Adventist divisions on the African continent, WAD is the smallest in terms of membership. For decades, its leadership has focused on changing that storyline with an aggressive evangelistic drive. In all four congregations, there are doctrinal seminars, discussions of improving attendance at prayer meetings as a revival, and opportunities for personal petitions, with minimal or no preparation for community outreach activities, and members are prepared for the imminent end-time events. Church announcements and bulletins are filled with nothing but evangelism and the goal of increasing membership. The church's documented priorities reflected theological emphases that privileged proclamation over demonstration.

Interpretation. Theological socialization functions as a powerful shaping force, often operating at an unconscious level. Members internalize not only explicit teachings but also implicit values communicated through what is emphasized and omitted, what is celebrated and ignored, and what receives resources and what is under-resourced.

The traditional Adventist theological framework, with its strong eschatological focus and emphasis on remnant identity, can be interpreted in ways that either motivate engagement (preparing a people through holistic ministry) or justify withdrawal (focusing on the "spiritual" while the world passes away). Participants' experiences suggest the latter interpretation has predominated in Abidjan contexts, creating theological barriers to community involvement.

Cross-Cutting Observations for RQ2

1 **Power of Story**: The narrative across all themes suggests that participants' current reactions are linked to their inherited stories, which they've lived and are telling as they go. It has affected their participation and distorted their understanding of what community ministry is and how they could be involved.

2 **Critical Consciousness**: As the social turf shifts, participants flow with it. Some are challenged to be open to change by engaging in critical reflection of their socialization (reading broadly, encountering other Christian traditions, experiencing cognitive dissonance). On the contrary, those accepting inherited patterns will question nothing, showing greater resistance to any change.

3 **Role of Pain**: Both positive (transformative encounters) and negative (disillusionment) emotional experiences were more formative than

cognitive teaching alone. Feeling precedes and outlasts thinking in shaping behavior.

Phenomenological Essence: Inherited Horizons, Emerging Questions

The core of formative experiences shaping members' perceptions can be described as **"inherited horizons, emerging questions"**—a state of living within received frameworks while beginning to question their adequacy. Members carry forward family patterns, childhood lessons, theological socialization, and past disappointments as lenses through which they view current possibilities. Yet many feel discomfort with these inherited lenses, sensing gaps between what they've been taught and what they encounter in lived experience. This creates a transitional phase—not fully committed to old patterns but not yet clear about new paths. It is a liminal space of questioning, vulnerability, and potential. Little by little, disillusionment and disappointment, along with family patterns, childhood lessons, and theological socialization that are not checked and corrected over time becomes a part of a pattern of formative experiences that may, lead a participant into culturally anti-community involvement.

Research Question 3

What Are the Obstacles That Church Members Face While Participating in Community Ministry?

Overview

This research question examined the specific barriers—both internal and external—that prevent SDA members from participating in community ministry. The analysis identified five key themes: Theological Ambiguity and Tension, Structural

and Resource Constraints, Fear and Self-Perception, Cultural Dissonance, and Leadership Gaps.

Theme 1: Theological Ambiguity and Tension

Description of the theme. The most common obstacle cited was the lack of clarity regarding the theological legitimacy and importance of community outreach. Participants showed confusion about how to combine social ministry with evangelism, whether community involvement is part of the mission or a distraction, and whether such work genuinely falls within the church's mandate.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #5, a department director, articulated the theological tension:

"When I was young and full of energy, the church was preaching the everlasting gospel while also engaging every phase of the church, addressing the social life of the people (health ministry, Youth ministry, Sabbath school, and personal ministry, etc.). Today, it is about proclaiming the three angels' messages and populating the kingdom of God, without concern about their social life. This theological ambiguity causes uneasiness in the church circles and outside."

A member from Cocody (Participant #10) expressed personal confusion:

"I don't know if helping with community problems is really a mission or if it's just being a good citizen. In fact, there are church members who need help. And should be served first. The church talks about mission as evangelism—sharing doctrine, baptizing people, planting churches. When we help with poverty or education without directly preaching, is that mission? I'm genuinely unsure, so I hesitate to call community outreach a ministry."

Participant #3 described competing priorities:

"We have limited time and energy. Should we use them for evangelistic Bible studies or for helping unemployed youth find work? Both seem important, but we're told evangelism is eternal while social work is temporal. That creates a hierarchy where community outreach always loses. But then I read about Jesus' healing people without always preaching, and I wonder if we've misunderstood something fundamental."

Supporting evidence from observations. During a church business meeting at Congregation #4 (Yopougon), the researcher observed a discussion about allocating funds. When community outreach was proposed, one elder objected: "That's the government's responsibility, not the church's." Another countered: "Jesus healed people; that's also community outreach." The discussion turned into a theological debate over the church's proper role, but no resolution was reached. Eventually, funds were allocated to traditional evangelism, evangelistic literature, the familiar and less controversial choice.

Interpretation. This theme exposes a core crisis in mission clarity. Without a shared theological understanding of what makes a Christian mission legitimate, members lack the framework to prioritize and unify community engagement. The inherited binary—evangelism versus social service, spiritual versus temporal, proclamation versus demonstration—creates false divisions that the church has not theologically resolved.

Phenomenologically, this reflects an existential anxiety about purpose and identity. If members are unsure whether community outreach is truly part of their calling, they will understandably hesitate to invest deeply in such work. The obstacle is not practical but foundational—a theological crisis that needs theological clarity.

Theme 2: Structural and Resource Constraints

Description of the theme. Participants consistently identified practical and organizational barriers: insufficient financial resources, a lack of trained personnel, the absence of institutional support structures, competing demands on member time, and inadequate coordination between local churches and conference leadership.

Supporting evidence from interviews. A pastor (Participant #2) explained systemic constraints:

"As a pastor serving in Cocody, my first church was struggling financially and unable to support community outreach, while my second church was economically strong and refused to support outreach. I was determined to find a solution but had to confront the real elephant in the room: a budget structured around traditional programs, such as evangelism, publishing, pastoral salaries, and church upkeep. When seeking financial help from the conference, the story was the same: arguing the shortage of funds, with few members actually returning tithe and offerings. While one church lacked the resources to invest in community outreach, another had enough but would not support it, serving as an obstacle and suggesting a theological ambiguity: our theology is not informing our community engagement, but our structural and financial resource upkeep. Such reality causes confusion for members to grasp, and this affects their community involvement."

An elder from Yopougon (Participant #8) described local-level limitations:

Our church has about 300 members on the books. Of those, maybe 50 are actively involved in any church activities. Most members work long hours six days a week, commute long distances, and have family responsibilities. Many members are unemployed, daily searching for jobs or hustling to make ends meet. They're exhausted. On the Sabbath, they want rest and worship. Asking them to volunteer for

community programs as well seems unrealistic. We don't have the volunteer capacity for ongoing ministry.

Participant #12 highlighted the lack of training:

"I would like to be involved in community work, but I don't know how. What skills do I need? How do you start a literacy program or health education? Where do you get materials? Who do you partner with? The church doesn't train us for this. We're trained to give Bible studies, not to do community development. This lack of knowledge is a real barrier."

Supporting evidence from observations. All four observed congregations' infrastructure reflected limitations. Age had a significant toll on the building. However, it was designed to provide worship space, pews, and a pulpit, but no facilities for community programs (no kitchens for feeding programs, no clinic for health ministry, or a training room). In other words, the built environment communicated priorities and constrained possibilities.

Observation of church calendars revealed intense programming: Sabbath services, prayer meetings, youth programs, choir rehearsals, board meetings, evangelistic campaigns, and church socials. Member schedules were already saturated with internal church activities, leaving little time for external community engagement. Structure competed against new priorities.

Interpretation. Structural constraints are both causes and effects. They stem from historical priorities, such as buildings designed solely for worship, and they reinforce those priorities, for example, the lack of community-oriented infrastructure making community ministry logistically challenging. Breaking this cycle requires not only changing attitudes but also strategically reallocating resources and redesigning structures. From a systems perspective, these obstacles show that the church operates

as a closed system—resources circulate internally, activities primarily serve members, and structures focus on maintaining the institution. Shifting to an open system that actively engages the community demands systematic organizational changes, not just individual volunteer efforts.

Theme 3: Fear and Self-Perception

Description of the theme. Psychological and emotional barriers were prominent in participants' stories. These included fear of failure, feelings of inadequacy, concern about judgment from others, worries about personal safety, fear of not being heard, and anxiety over maintaining doctrinal differences.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #5, a young adult, named fear explicitly:

"I have no confidence in myself simply because there has been no training to prepare me, nor an intentional plan by the church to allow me approach community ministry with confidence. I am also not sure what feedback to receive from the community. Time is an expensive commodity for me to access, and it should be used appropriately. Given the poor or no financial capability to meet the urgent needs of the community, I perceive it will only be a waste of time in the end."

A female member (Participant #13) described feelings of inadequacy:

"I'm just a simple person. I don't have an education beyond secondary school. I'm not a professional. Who am I to think I can help with community problems? We have educated people in this church—let them do it. That's what I tell myself. But maybe that's just my fear talking, my lack of confidence."

Participant #7 expressed concern about doctrinal compromise:

"If I get too close to community members who are not Adventist, will I be influenced by them? Will my children be exposed to worldly thinking? The church

teaches us to guard our faith carefully. I worry that community involvement might open doors to compromise. Maybe I'm being paranoid, but that concern is real for me."

Supporting evidence from observations. At one of the four congregations, during a Sabbath service, the presiding elder welcomed the members, and the church responded enthusiastically. Still, when asked whether members had invited anyone to church, the congregation remained silent. The truth was that members invited people to evangelistic meetings and sometimes led them to attend Bible studies. However, on this particular Sabbath, when asked, "Who has invited a non-Adventist neighbor for a meal this month?" there was no response.

The contrast highlighted a comfort with formal, structured, and safely distant evangelism versus discomfort with intimate, personal, and vulnerable relationship-building. Post-service conversation revealed that members perceived themselves as marginalized. Several comments reflected minority complex: "A closed community," "Isolated people from the mainstream or community," "There to take church members from other denominations," "Mere legalists rooted in the Old Testament." These perceptions of being misunderstood or rejected by the broader community created defensive withdrawal rather than confident engagement.

Interpretation. Fear and negative self-perception act as internal obstacles. Even when external barriers are removed, these internal constraints persist. They reflect not only individual psychology but also the collective church culture that has prioritized difference over commonality, separation over solidarity, and proclamation over presence. Added to the fear and Self-Perception is a larger obstacle: financial and institutional constraints, peddling structural and resource constraints. Without

intentionally addressing these barriers, community engagement is hindered, and members will find it hard to participate.

Phenomenologically, these fears expose existential insecurity about identity and worth. If members base their value primarily on doctrinal correctness or religious performance rather than their inherent worth as God's image-bearers, they become fragile and self-protective. Overcoming these fears requires not just encouragement but profound spiritual formation in belovedness and security.

Theme 4: Cultural Dissonance

Description of the theme. Participants identified cultural factors that complicate community engagement: language barriers (especially for expatriate members), cultural differences in social expectations, tension between traditional African communalism and Western-influenced Adventist individualism, and navigating relationships in religiously pluralistic contexts. To make matters more complex, Francophones are mostly philosophical, which influences their religious and cultural life.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #9, originally from another African country, described cultural barriers:

I'm not originally from Côte d'Ivoire. I don't speak all the local languages fluently or French very well. I don't understand all the cultural norms here. Even simple things—like how do you appropriately greet elders? What gifts are acceptable? What subjects are taboo? I'm afraid of making cultural mistakes, so I stay within the church where I understand the culture.

A member raised in Abidjan (Participant #4) noted different tensions:

In traditional Ivorian culture, community is everything. You share resources, support extended family, and take part in community duties. However, the church

often promotes more individualistic values—personal responsibility, a focus on the nuclear family, and avoiding involvement in worldly affairs. This causes conflict. If I get too involved in community life, church members may question my commitment. If I stay too detached, community members may see me as arrogant.

Participant #14 discussed religious pluralism challenges:

Our neighborhood includes Muslims, Catholics, Harrists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, traditional religionists, and Adventists, all living together. If the church organizes a community program, how do we handle this diversity? Do we pray in Jesus' name and risk offending Muslims? Do we avoid prayer altogether, thereby compromising our identity? Do we focus solely on non-religious service? These questions are complex, and we haven't yet developed strategies for interfaith community engagement, but we need to develop one immediately.

Supporting evidence from observations. Language dynamics were evident. Church services conducted solely in French excluded some community members who were more comfortable in local languages such as Bété, Dioula, or Baoulé. Announcements assumed familiarity with Christian terminology and Adventist organizational structure. These language barriers, though unintentional, created cultural barriers.

Community observations showed social complexity. Abidjan's rapid urban growth has resulted in neighborhoods where traditional communal values coexist with urban anonymity, where poverty and wealth are close together, and where multiple religious beliefs intersect. Navigating this complexity requires cultural intelligence that the church has not yet fully developed.

Interpretation. Cultural dissonance presents both challenges and opportunities. The challenge lies in the fact that simple approaches to community

engagement will not succeed in highly diverse and complex cultural settings. The opportunity is that developing cultural intelligence can enhance the church's credibility and effectiveness in its witness.

From a missional perspective, this theme emphasizes the importance of contextualization—recognizing that biblical principles must be expressed in culturally suitable ways. The church cannot simply adopt North American or Western models of community ministry; it must develop authentically African, specifically Ivorian, and particularly Abidjanian approaches.

Theme 5: Leadership Gaps

Description of the theme. The final major obstacle identified was leadership's hesitation to provide a clear vision for community engagement, lax training of members for community engagement, and poor supportive leadership for Community engagement at both the local and conference levels. Participants expressed frustration with leaders who do not model community engagement, do not provide training or resources, do not give permission for innovation, and do not celebrate or sustain initiatives.

Supporting evidence from interviews. Participant #2, an elder, expressed frustration:

"Our pastor is a good preacher. He prepares excellent sermons. But he shows no interest in community ministry. He's never suggested it, never preached about it, never participated when members try something. His silence communicates that it's not a priority. If the pastor doesn't lead in this area, how can we expect members to follow?"

A member (Participant #15) described a lack of permission:

"I once asked the church board for permission to start a family enrichment program for a community struggling with multiple socially difficult issue including family issues. Although the proposal, on the surface, was approved, those responsible for finalizing arrangements with community leaders and hospital administrators intentionally delayed doing so until I had no available time in my schedule. Their rationale was based on questions such as: How will we benefit from it? What if it fails? Will families in the community attend? The assumption was that stepping into family issues in the community causes more problems than it solves. Eventually, I gave up. The message was clear—the challenges families face is beyond our scope when it comes to the community, and it should not be considered our responsibility as a church."

Participant #1, a pastor, acknowledged his own inadequacy:

"I was never trained to lead community ministry. The seminary prepared me to preach, manage church programs, and run evangelistic campaigns. I don't know how to organize community development, partner with NGOs, or mobilize volunteers for outreach projects. If I don't know how, how can I lead? I need training, but the conference has not made community ministry a priority. So, we keep doing what we know—traditional programs—even though we realize more is needed."

Supporting evidence from observations. Leadership behavior was clear. In three out of four congregations, few pastoral or elder leaders participated in manual community work (such as church clean-up visible to the neighborhood) or informal community engagement. Leaders showed up for outreach, did their roles, and left. The message: ministry is in the pulpit, not in the streets. They further indicated that leadership for community ministry should be led by a select few, if any, such as the pastor, elders, deacons/deaconesses, etc., not by all members.

Conversely, in Congregation #1, the pastor recognized a need to connect with the community by regularly greeting community members as he passed by, building ongoing relationships with local business owners, and being known for helping neighbors with small needs. This included showing care during COVID-19 by the church providing food items and other essentials, organizing cleanup campaigns, and making visits to the mosque. This congregation demonstrated slightly more community connections, highlighting the influence of leadership by example.

Interpretation. Leadership gaps act as multiplier obstacles—a single leader's limitations impact dozens or hundreds of members. In hierarchical church structures where pastoral authority is strong, the absence of leadership vision, training, or modeling creates bottlenecks that hinder grassroots innovation.

From an organizational development perspective, this theme highlights the importance of leadership development centered on community engagement. Providing pastors and lay leaders with a theological foundation, practical skills, organizational strategies, and an inspiring vision is essential for systemic change.

Cross-Cutting Observations for RQ3

1 **Interconnected Obstacles**: The five themes are not separate; they are connected. Theological ambiguity strengthens structural inertia; structural constraints justify fear; fear continues avoidance of leadership; leadership gaps leave cultural complexity unaddressed. Tackling one obstacle alone will not be enough. There must be awareness of the problem and an intentional plan to address it.

2 **Permission versus prohibition**: Many obstacles aren't clear prohibitions but instead a lack of consent, support, or encouragement. The church

hasn't explicitly said "don't do community ministry," but it also hasn't said "please do." This ambiguity tends to keep things as they are.

3 **Systemic Nature**: Individual members cannot overcome these obstacles on their own. Systemic obstacles need systemic solutions: leadership providing theological clarification, reallocation of resources, organizational training, and support systems will go a long way toward changing this trajectory for the better.

Phenomenological Essence: Constraint without Conviction

The core of these obstacles can be described as **"constraint without conviction"**—members feel blocked but can't identify a single insurmountable barrier. Instead, they face a web of limitations that collectively cause immobility. No one obstacle is decisive, yet together they lead to paralysis.

This creates a profound experience of being stuck—wanting to move but unable, seeing the need but unable to act, feeling guilty but powerless. The frustration is that the barriers are mostly self-imposed (theological, structural, psychological) rather than external forces, yet they feel just as restricting. Further, it links to the apprehension shown by members who do not feel adequately trained to engage in community outreach. Without an intentional plan to train members for community outreach, tackling financial and structural constraints, which are indeed barriers, community engagement will be stagnated and members will not be willing to volunteer.

Research Question 4

What Strategy Can Be Used to Help Church Members Be Involved in Community Ministry?

Overview

This research question examined participants' ideas, suggestions, and experiences regarding strategies that could promote greater community engagement. Analysis identified five main themes: Theological Reframing, Start Small and Local, Leverage Existing Gifts and Resources, Partnership and Collaboration, and Leadership Modeling and Support.

Theme 1: Theological Reframing

Description of the theme. Participants consistently recognized the importance of theological clarity and reframing as essential to any strategy. They recommended intentional teaching that incorporates community outreach into Adventist mission theology, preaching that highlights Jesus' holistic ministry, and education that challenges false divides between evangelism and service.

Supporting evidence from interviews.

Participant #13, a pastor, proposed:

"We need to be intentional by preaching a series of sermons focused on the theology of community engagement. Start with a week-long spiritual emphasis, then follow with ongoing teaching over several months. Help members recognize that Jesus' mission was holistic—word and deed, proclamation and demonstration. Teach that the three angels' messages include the call to 'worship God who made heaven and earth,' which entails stewardship of creation and the care for God's image-bearers. Demonstrate that community outreach isn't a distraction from mission; it *is* mission."

An elder (Participant #3) suggested practical theological work:

"Create Bible study guides that examine community ministry from a biblical perspective. Focus on Jesus feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and defending the

oppressed. Study how the early church shared possessions, cared for widows, and responded to famine. Encourage members to discover these themes themselves rather than just hearing about them from the pulpit. Personal discovery leads to more transformation than passive listening."

Participant #11 emphasized narrative:

"Share stories—draw from Ellen White's writings, Adventist history, and modern churches that successfully combine community outreach with evangelism. Let members hear how others have integrated acts of service and sharing faith. Stories motivate more than abstract theology. If I hear about an SDA church running a successful literacy program that also led to baptisms, I think, 'Maybe we could do something similar.'"

Supporting evidence from observations. During the researcher's seminar on community engagement at Cocody Philadelphia Church, participants' involvement visibly grew when biblical texts were explored. The discussion of Luke 4:18-19 (Jesus' mission statement, including the good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed) sparked lively conversation. Participants expressed surprise: "I never noticed Jesus included social aspects in His mission statement." This revealed a desire for deeper theological understanding often missing from regular teaching.

Interpretation. Theological reframing addresses the core issue identified in RQ3—theological ambiguity. Participants recognize that changing practices requires a shift in understanding. Without conviction that community outreach is biblically required and theologically valid, members will not prioritize it, regardless of the practical strategies presented. This theme aligns with missiological literature, which emphasizes that mission stems from theology. How one understands God (theo-logy)

shapes how one comprehends God's mission (missio Dei) and the church's involvement (missional ecclesiology). When fully understood, Adventist theology strongly advocates for community engagement; the challenge lies in reclaiming neglected emphases. Participants have noted that the clarity of the observations in this research, under the sub-theme of theological ambiguity, is an obstacle to community involvement. Members mention that our theological stance neither supports nor condemns community engagement. However, evidence from interviews advocating for theological reframing helps connect members to a solution for theological ambiguity, giving them more time to understand the theology of community engagement. As a key factor in members' involvement in community outreach, removing the ambiguity will encourage more participants to get involved.

Theme 2: Start Small and Local

Description of the theme. Instead of pursuing ambitious programs that require substantial resources, participants preferred simple, modest, locally-based initiatives that members can realistically maintain. The approach emphasizes proximity, relationships, and consistency rather than scale or complexity. Forming small groups, offering basic Bible teachings on discipleship, caring for everyone regardless of class or culture, and creating prayer groups that meet conveniently in their local areas will be effective.

Supporting evidence from interviews.

Participant #6, a young adult, proposed:

"Don't try to fix all of Abidjan's problems. Focus on one or two needs in each neighborhood near a church and address them. It could be helping elderly neighbors with yard work, offering homework help for kids, or organizing a street clean-up day. These simple actions don't need big budgets but do require consistent presence."

An elder from Yopougon (Participant #2) suggested:

"Start with individual members rather than programs. Encourage each member to identify one neighbor they will intentionally befriend and serve over the next year. No program, no structure—just personal relationships and practical love. If every member did that, imagine the impact. After a year, bring members together to share stories. Those stories will inspire and teach better than any manual."

Participant #7 emphasized an incremental approach:

"I believe we fail because we try to start big—establish a clinic, open a school, create a feeding program. We can't sustain that. Instead, pilot test. Try something small for three months. Evaluate. Adjust. Try again. Build capacity gradually. This approach is less exciting but more realistic."

Supporting evidence from observations. During the observation period, the researcher observed that the most consistent community engagement happened informally at an individual level. Across the four congregations, testimonies from the head elders show that some members regularly assist their neighbors with small tasks—such as translating documents, making phone calls, or providing transportation. This fostered goodwill and created opportunities for spiritual conversations, even though it wasn't officially called "ministry."

Conversely, two of the four congregations launched a large-scale health fair (but, from observation, it became logistically overwhelming—coordinating multiple departments, securing resources, obtaining permissions, and recruiting medical professionals). The complexity prevented sustainability and slow further progress. This contrast supported participants' wisdom about starting small.

Interpretation. "Start small and local" reflects on both practical wisdom and theological insight. Practically, it recognizes resource limitations and organizational

capacity. Theologically, it embodies incarnational presence—God entered humanity as an infant in a humble town, not as an empire-builder. Transformation often begins small, local, and relational.

This strategy also lowers fear (Theme 3 of RQ3). Small initiatives feel manageable, which reduces anxiety about failure. Focusing locally builds on existing relationships instead of requiring members to explore unfamiliar territory. This fosters psychological safety that encourages action.

Theme 3: Leverage Existing Gifts and Resources

Description of the theme. Participants identified a strategy of leveraging existing church resources rather than lamenting what is missing. Every church has members with a variety of skills, knowledge, and experiences that could benefit the community if activated. The challenge is connecting these gifts with community needs.

Supporting evidence from interviews.

Participant #12, a church leader, observed:

"We have teachers, nurses, mechanics, accountants, farmers, and small business owners among our members. Each has skills the community needs. Why not create opportunities for members to share their expertise? A teacher could offer tutoring. A nurse could provide health education. A mechanic could teach basic car maintenance to unemployed youth. This doesn't require money, just organization and encouragement. Such an initiative of identifying one or two cardinal needs of the community and attacking them, then trying to do a huge project that cannot be sustained and will cost a lot, can be mitigated without dealing with obstacles like budget constraints or financial structural constraints. Therefore, the counsel is start small because you can't fix all the problems in Abidjan in a day."

A member (Participant #10) suggested a resource audit:

"I believe we should conduct an inventory—ask every member, 'What skills do you have? What resources do you possess? What time can you offer?' Then, match these with community needs. Maybe we could find that ten members could teach computer literacy if we borrowed equipment from their homes. We might have more resources than we realize; we just haven't organized them."

Participant #4 emphasized the APEST model:

"Not everyone is called to the same type of service. Some are gifted teachers, some are evangelists, some are caregivers, some are administrators. An effective strategy recognizes and deploys diverse gifts. Don't pressure everyone to do everything; help each person find their specific way of serving that aligns with how God has gifted them."

The APEST assessment is a profiling tool designed to help you discover your ministry style based on the fivefold ministry described in Ephesians 4 (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers). It has been developed over the past 10 years for practical use across various ministry settings.

APEST is an online, formative self-assessment designed to gather an individual's responses to a series of questions. APEST is a subjective assessment, providing questions that may have more than one applicable answer. It measures a person's current motivation and expression in ministry settings. As a result, APEST promotes new areas of learning and integration, boosting ministry engagement. It also delivers a quantified result to identify one's current influence within a larger community.[1]

[1] Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (100 Movements Publishing, 2017).

Supporting evidence from observations. At the researcher's community engagement seminar, an exercise helped participants identify their gifts and potential service applications. The variety was striking: a member with farming experience could teach urban gardening; a member with accounting skills could offer financial literacy workshops; a member with counseling training could provide support groups; a young adult with social media skills could create community awareness campaigns. At the end of the seminar, a young person with social media skills sought permission to begin promoting the church's community engagement initiative.

The energy in the room increased as members realized their potential contribution. Many had viewed themselves as "just ordinary members" with nothing special to offer. The reframing—that ordinary skills become extraordinary when offered in service—is visibly empowering.

Interpretation. This approach tackles resource limitations (Theme 2 of RQ3) and self-perception challenges (Theme 3 of RQ3). It shifts the mindset from "we don't have resources" to "we haven't mobilized existing resources." It also boosts each member's value, combating feelings of inadequacy.

Theologically, this reflects Paul's body metaphor (1 Cor 12): every part is necessary, and every member has a role. Effective community ministry is not about a few heroes doing everything but about the entire body working together in coordinated service. This enhances capacity while sharing the workload.

Theme 4: Partnership and Collaboration

Description of the theme. Participants understood that making a real community impact usually involves collaborating with others—such as churches, NGOs, government agencies, and community groups. Instead of trying to do everything alone, forming strategic partnerships boosts effectiveness.

Supporting evidence from interviews.

Participant #15, a church leader, proposed:

"While it is difficult to join other faith communities by supporting their existing efforts, it is time we consider moving in this direction. For example, the Catholic Church, Methodists, and Muslims are also trying to serve. Why duplicate efforts? If there's already a feeding program run by another group, why not support them or collaborate rather than start our own? This requires humility, but it's more effective."

An elder (Participant #8) suggested NGO partnerships:

"Many international NGOs work in Abidjan, including our own ADRA—organizations focused on education, health, and poverty reduction. They have resources and expertise that we don't have at the moment due to ADRA's current status. We could partner—they provide training and materials; we provide volunteers and community access. This is a strategic collaboration that benefits everyone, especially the community."

Participant #6 emphasized inter-church cooperation:

"Even among SDA churches, collaboration is limited. Each church functions independently, trying to handle everything on its own. Imagine if the four SDA churches in Cocody and Yopougon combined their resources for a single meaningful community project, rather than each pursuing small, unsustainable efforts. We could have a greater impact and learn from one another."

Supporting evidence from observations. During the observation of the "Forum for Reform & Service" inauguration, attendance included not only SDA members from the four congregations but also representatives from the West-Central Africa Division, local pastors from adjacent churches, and community leaders. This

multi-stakeholder presence demonstrated the potential for collaboration. The energy indicated a desire for such partnerships, although concrete implementation mechanisms remained undeveloped.

The researcher observed that existing community outreach in the neighborhoods, such as health clinics, schools, and feeding programs, are run by the government, NGOs, or other religious groups. SDAs are mostly absent from the community outreach scene. Forming partnerships could help SDA involvement without starting from scratch.

Interpretation. Partnership strategies address multiple challenges simultaneously. They provide access to resources and expertise (addressing Theme 2 of RQ3), lessen fear through shared responsibility (addressing Theme 3 of RQ3), and handle cultural or religious complexities via interfaith cooperation (addressing Theme 4 of RQ3).

Theologically, partnership embodies kingdom-mindedness rather than institutional territorialism. If the aim is community transformation instead of denominational prominence, collaboration is not about compromise but about wisdom. This demands maturity and confidence in Adventist identity—being secure enough to work with others without fear of losing distinctiveness.

Theme 5: Leadership Modeling and Support

Description of the theme. Participants consistently emphasized that sustainable change requires leadership—such as pastors, elders, and department directors—who demonstrate community engagement, offer training and resources, celebrate successes, and consistently prioritize this aspect of mission.

Supporting evidence from interviews

Participant #11, a pastor, acknowledged:

"I need to set an example for what I ask members to do. If I preach about community service but don't actually do it myself, my words are meaningless. I should be seen in the neighborhood, known for helping others, regularly joining members in outreach activities. My actions will motivate more than my sermons."

A middle-aged church sister (Participant #9) emphasized sustained support:

"Leadership must not only start but also sustain. We're good at beginning things—we get excited, launch a program, and carry it out for a few weeks. Then attention shifts to the next task. Community ministry requires long-term dedication. Leaders must keep it visible, continue encouraging, and keep allocating resources year after year. Make it part of church culture, not just a short-term project."

Participant #11 called for conference-level engagement:

"This can't succeed with only local church efforts. We need the conference to prioritize it—create budget lines for community ministry, hire personnel to coordinate and train, recognize and reward churches doing this well, and integrate it into pastoral performance evaluations. Top-down support allows for bottom-up innovation."

Supporting evidence from observations. The presence of the South East Côte d'Ivoire Conference president and his wife at the researcher's seminar sent a strong message. Attendees paid closer attention, asked more questions, and showed greater commitment than they might have if only the local pastor had attended. Conference-level validation signaled institutional priority.

Conversely, in congregations where pastors lacked interest in community ministry during observation periods, members showed similar disinterest. The link between leadership attitude and member involvement was clear.

Interpretation. Leadership modeling tackles the final major obstacle identified in RQ3 (Theme 5). Without leadership vision, permission, training, and

ongoing support, most members will fall back on familiar patterns. Leadership shapes culture, and culture influences behavior.

This theme aligns with leadership literature, which emphasizes that leading change requires modeling the change, communicating the vision consistently, removing obstacles, celebrating small wins, and rejecting premature declarations of wins.[2] Community engagement signifies a significant cultural shift for most SDA churches in Abidjan, demanding ongoing leadership over several years.

Cross-Cutting Observations for RQ4

1 **Integrated Strategy Needed**: No single approach will succeed on its own. Effective mobilization requires theological reframing, practical action plans, leadership support, *and* resource mobilization. The techniques are complementary.

2 **Contextual adaptation is essential**: strategies must be tailored to Cocody and Yopougon, considering their demographics, needs, resources, and cultural dynamics. Imported models without adaptation will likely fail.

3 **Long-term Perspective Is Crucial**: All strategies emphasize patience and persistence. Quick fixes are rejected. Participants recognize that changing church culture and building community trust takes years, not months.

Phenomenological Essence: Hopeful Pragmatism

The core of members' strategic thinking can be described as **"hopeful pragmatism"**—the belief that change is possible, combined with a realistic assessment of challenges. Participants were not naive optimists proposing simple

[2] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 3-21, 97-140.

solutions, nor were they cynical pessimists declaring nothing can be done. Instead, they offered grounded, practical, and incrementally achievable strategies based on lived experience and contextual knowledge.

This exemplifies mature missional thinking—hope without hype, action without anxiety, vision guided by wisdom.

Table 2. Participants' Interview Demographics

Participant Code	Gender	Age Range	Location	Classification	Membership years of stay	Frequency of use in the text
# 1	Male	51-65	Yopougon	Middle Class	30 years	3 times
# 2	Female	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	15 years	4 times
# 3	Female	30-50	Yopougon	Ordinary Class	7 Years	4 Times
# 4	Male	51-65	Yopougon	Ordinary Class	30 Years	4 Times
# 5	Male	18-29	Yopougon	Ordinary Class	5 Years	3 times
# 6	Male	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	13 Years	3 times
# 7	Female	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	20 Years	3 times
# 8	Male	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	25 Years	3 times
# 9	Female	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	30 Years	4 Times
# 10	Female	18-29	Yopougon	Ordinary Class	7 Years	4 Times
# 11	Female	30-50	Yopougon	Middle Class	8 Years	4 Times
# 12	Female	18-29	Yopougon	Ordinary Class	4 Years	3 times
# 13	Male	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	30 Years	4 Times
# 14	Male	51-65	Cocody	Middle Class	20 Years	3 times
# 15	Male	30-50	Cocody	Middle Class	22 Years	3 times

Table 3. Demographics for Participants Observation

Congregation Code	Location	No of Churches	Date	Frequency
# 1	Cocody	4	11/13/2025	2
# 2	Yopougon	5	11/20/2025	3
# 3	Yopougon	5	12/06/2025	2
# 4	Cocody	4	12/13/2025	3

Researcher Reflexivity: Challenged Presuppositions and Interpretive Transformation

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister, I have chosen to be a community-engaged practitioner. At the outset of this study, it was assumed that church-community disengagement in Abidjan was primarily the result of members' lack of commitment or spiritual motivation. My assumption that clear biblical teaching and visionary leadership would naturally lead to sustained community engagement among members guided this study. This signals my earlier stance on the need for positionality in existential-interpretive phenomenology, in which the researcher explicitly declares his area of focus in a study, whether as an insider or an outsider, making himself vulnerable yet fully committed and providing a theological framing of his approach.

However, I admit that these propositions were progressively challenged throughout the interviews and participant observation. For instance, during the observation, there were moments when members strongly supported community engagement but remained practically disengaged due to time constraints, economic pressure, lack of training, and exclusion from decision-making. Silence during outreach discussions, folded arms, and rapid exits after worship contradicted my assumption that conviction automatically translates into participation. It became frustrating at times, especially with these conflicting testimonies hating you in your face.

Therefore, in line with Van Manen's phenomenological approach, as I earlier indicated, reflexivity in this study did not involve eliminating presuppositions but holding them in disciplined awareness. As a result, the research process became dialogical, as participants' lived experiences questioned and reshaped my prior understandings. This self-interrogation allowed meanings to emerge from the

phenomenon itself rather than from any predetermined theological or pastoral explanations.

Summary of Findings across All Research Questions

The phenomenological study of church-community disengagement among SDA members in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, uncovers a complex interaction of experiential, theological, structural, cultural, and leadership factors. In this context, the research notes that obstacles to engagement form a web of connections, examining summary findings across all research questions. The obstacles include theological ambiguity, structural constraints, psychological fears, cultural complexities, and leadership gaps. However, the research underscores that these obstacles are mostly self-imposed rather than external forces. Additionally, it tilts towards the core of members' strategic thinking that can be described as "hopeful pragmatism"—the belief that change is possible, combined with a realistic assessment of challenges.

The Essence of Disengagement emerges as a state of living in adjacency—physically present in the community but experientially distant, aware of needs but inactive in response, called to engagement but uncertain of the path. This state is not comfortable indifference but uncomfortable tension between inherited patterns and emerging convictions.

Formative experiences strongly influence current attitudes. Childhood role models, transformative events, past disappointments, and theological socialization shape how members see community involvement. These experiences aren't easily changed by logical arguments; they require new experiences and the rebuilding of stories.

Obstacles to Engagement form a connected web—such as theological ambiguity, structural constraints, psychological fears, cultural complexities, and leadership gaps. These obstacles are mostly self-imposed rather than external, making them both more frustrating (since we create our own limitations) and more hopeful (because we can also remove them). The core of these obstacles can be described as "constraint without conviction"—members feel blocked but can't identify a single insurmountable barrier. Instead, they face a web of limitations that collectively cause immobility. No one obstacle is decisive, yet together they lead to paralysis.

Strategies for mobilization are available and suited to the context. Theological reframing, small local initiatives, leveraging existing resources, strategic partnerships, and committed leadership can open pathways for engagement. Participants bring valuable wisdom about what could work in their specific context.

The overall story is about possibilities limited by inertia, desire slowed by confusion, and potential waiting to be realized. The church-community divide can be closed, but it requires deliberate, ongoing, multi-layered effort across theological, structural, cultural, and personal dimensions.

This concludes the presentation of findings for Chapter 5. The upcoming chapter (Chapter 6) will synthesize these findings, draw conclusions, evaluate the research process, and provide specific recommendations for action.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a synthesis of research on church-community disengagement among Seventh-day Adventist members in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan. It summarizes the study, discusses findings, presents conclusions, explores implications, and offers recommendations for practice and future research.

This phenomenological study examined SDA church-community disengagement in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire—a rapidly growing city of 6.3 million. Research focused on two communes: Cocody (population 692,523), an affluent area, and Yopougon (population 1.5 million), the most densely populated commune. Despite being situated in communities facing significant social, economic, and spiritual needs, SDA churches appeared largely unengaged in sustained community ministry. The Southeast Côte d'Ivoire Conference serves this region with 50 churches and 6,199 members ministering to over 13 million people.

The study addressed the apparent lack of intentional mobilization and structured involvement of local congregations in community ministry, risking church isolation from communities it is called to serve. The purpose was to explore SDA members' experiences in Cocody and Yopougon and to describe their disengagement, in order to develop contextualized approaches to bridge this gap.

Four questions guided the investigation: (1) How do SDA members describe their experience with the surrounding community? (2) What specific life experiences shape their feelings and perceptions about community involvement? (3) What

obstacles do they face in participating in community ministry? (4) What strategies can help members become involved in community ministry?

The study was grounded in the missio Dei—God's redemptive mission to the world in which the church participates. The biblical narrative demonstrates God's consistent pattern of sending, culminating in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and Jesus' holistic mission statement (Luke 4:18-19). Adventist missional identity historically emphasizes whole-person ministry through education, healthcare, and community development alongside evangelism. Ellen White's writings on practical Christianity provide a strong theological mandate for community engagement that integrates meeting physical needs with sharing spiritual truth.

This study employed a qualitative, existential-phenomenological design, drawing on Heidegger's hermeneutic tradition and Van Manen's interpretive phenomenology. Fifteen participants were purposively selected using maximum variation sampling to represent diverse perspectives across roles (pastors, elders, directors, lay members), gender, age, and involvement levels. Data collection employed semi-structured interviews conducted in English and French, as well as participant observation over four weeks across four congregations. Analysis followed Van Manen's Six Research Activities with methodological rigor ensured through data triangulation, member checking, reflexive journaling, and adherence to ethical protocols.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: Members' Experiences with the Surrounding Community

Three major themes characterized how SDA members describe their experience with communities. First, Discipleship as a Driver of Community Engagement emerged as participants recognized that authentic discipleship naturally expresses itself through service. However, many acknowledged a disconnect between theological ideal and practice, with weak internal relationships undermining the capacity for external engagement. Second, Community Needs Awareness revealed members' recognition of significant neighborhood needs—poverty, unemployment, broken families, health challenges—yet this awareness had not translated into systematic response. Members described churches functioning as "islands" surrounded by need but isolated from it. Third, Identifying and Linking with the Church's Social Capital highlighted untapped potential—members with diverse professional skills, resources, and networks that could benefit communities if mobilized effectively.

Participant observation corroborated these themes. Church activities focused almost exclusively on internal programming, with minimal interaction between members and community residents, even in densely populated areas. Post-service fellowship occurred within church compounds rather than extending into neighborhoods. Announcements focused on internal events, omitting ongoing community engagement initiatives. The phenomenological essence was captured as "living in adjacency"—members were physically present in communities but experientially distant, aware of needs but inactive in response, called to engage but uncertain how. Jim Park thinks this misplaced fortress mentality, supposedly for the good of the church, needs fine-tuning. He interjects here that;

> The church is called to be a safe place. A city of refuge within a city of danger. It is to be like 'Free Parking' on the Monopoly game board, a place to go where there is physical, emotional, social, and spiritual safety. It is to be a place of not only loving acceptance, but also under the watchful care of the pastors and church leaders who have been entrusted with its sanctity.[1]

Not intended to wall off people of the neighborhoods from gaining access to the church premises, serving as a fortress to protect from contaminants. He provides readers with clarity about the true significance of "fortresses, refuge, and safety. Indicating that, yes, the church is to provide a sense of security for those who have gathered within her walls—a sanctuary; a shelter in the time of storm; and a place where truth and love dwells, heals, and fills with hope for God's tomorrow."[2]

In the end, his shift of attention from his personal view of wrong fortress understanding is strengthened by pointing to Ellen White's contribution, intimating that while many churches in the city tend to be fortress-minded, Ellen White adds another picture of the church, which expands its influence beyond its doors by talking about "The City Set on a Hill.

> When the church has too much of a fortress mentality, the light that should be shining forth from its doors will be but dim. In the two dialectic pictures of the church as a "City of Refuge" and a "City Set on a Hill," we do not have opposing but complementary images of what the church in its ontological essence, its being, is called to be. The church in the city is called to be both a sanctuary and a beacon, a well of Living Water and a River of Life that flows out to every nook and cranny of the neighborhood which is so much in need of its healing virtues.[3]

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[1] James H. Park, *Mission to the Cities* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, 2024), 26-28.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Research Question 2: Life Experiences Shaping Perceptions

Four themes illuminated formative experiences shaping current attitudes. First, Childhood and Family Modeling demonstrated the powerful influence of early socialization. Participants whose families demonstrated hospitality, service, and community involvement expressed greater openness to such ministry, while those raised emphasizing doctrinal separation showed hesitation. These early experiences created experiential templates profoundly shaping adult practice. Second, Transformative Encounters described specific moments—such as witnessing community members' gratitude for service or experiencing personal conviction while reading Scripture—that fundamentally shifted participants' understanding of their mission. These phenomenological "ruptures" opened new possibilities for engagement.

Third, Disillusionment and Disappointment revealed how negative experiences—failed church initiatives, lack of leadership support, criticism from other members, and burnout from unsustainable efforts—caused emotional scarring, leading to cynicism and withdrawal. Fourth, Theological Socialization showed how implicit messages communicated through sermons, resource allocation, and institutional priorities shaped members' understanding of legitimate mission. When proclamation was consistently emphasized over demonstration, members internalized a hierarchy devaluing community service. The essence: "inherited horizons, emerging questions"—members lived within received frameworks while questioning their adequacy, creating a liminal space of vulnerability and potential.

Research Question 3: Obstacles to Participation

Five interconnected themes identified barriers preventing participation. First, Theological Ambiguity and Tension represented the fundamental obstacle—members

lacked clarity whether community outreach constituted a legitimate mission or merely good citizenship. Competing theological frameworks created confusion about priorities, with social ministry often viewed as secondary to evangelism. Second, Structural and Resource Constraints included insufficient financial resources, lack of trained personnel, absence of institutional support structures, competing demands on member time, and inadequate coordination between local churches and conference leadership. Church facilities were designed for worship rather than community programming.

Third, Fear and Self-Perception encompassed psychological barriers, including fear of failure, feelings of inadequacy, concern about judgment, worries about doctrinal compromise, and anxiety about personal safety. Fourth, Cultural Dissonance highlighted complications arising from language barriers, differences in social expectations, tension between African communalism and Western-influenced individualism, and challenges in navigating religiously pluralistic contexts. Fifth, Leadership Gaps identified the absence of pastoral vision for community engagement, lack of member training, insufficient modeling by church leaders, and failure to celebrate or sustain community initiatives. The essence: "constraint without conviction"—members felt blocked by a web of limitations collectively causing immobility, yet no single barrier was insurmountable.

It is from this backdrop that the need for the supernatural force, the power of the Holy Spirit, is important. As Jim Park rightly intimated in his transforming mission workbook,

> This workbook is all about rediscovering the 'gas' that should be continually fueling the growth of disciples and the mission of the church. From my observation, too many members and churches are trying to push mission along

without fueling up first, and this only leads to early burnout and frustration, as anyone who has had to push a car with an empty tank knows.[4]

[4] Jim Park, *Transforming Adventist Mission: A Practical Workbook on the Root and Fruit of Biblical Conversion* (Los Angeles, CA: Park Circle Scribes, 2024), 4.

Research Question 4: Strategies for Involvement

Five strategic themes emerged from participants' wisdom. First, Theological Reframing emphasized intentional teaching that integrates community outreach into Adventist mission theology, preaching that highlights Jesus' holistic ministry, and education that challenges false dichotomies between evangelism and service. Second, Start Small and Local advocated modest, neighborhood-based initiatives members could realistically sustain—simple service acts, individual relationship-building, and incremental capacity development rather than ambitious programs requiring substantial resources.

Third, Leverage Existing Gifts and Resources involved conducting member inventories, identifying skills, knowledge, and resources already present within congregations, then matching these with community needs. Fourth, Partnership and Collaboration encouraged strategic alliances with other churches, NGOs, government agencies, and community organizations to amplify impact and share resources. Fifth, Leadership Modeling and Support stressed that sustainable change requires pastors and lay leaders who personally demonstrate community engagement, provide training and resources, celebrate successes, and consistently prioritize this mission dimension at local and conference levels. The essence: "hopeful pragmatism"—realistic challenge assessment combined with the belief that change is possible through grounded, contextually appropriate action.

Jim Park adds that without the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit during our new birth experience, which is normally initiated at the very beginning of conversion, members' participation or contribution to engagement with the community, or involvement in community ministry would be adversely affected.

Hence, he summed up his thoughts on making the above solution to reversing SDA members' disengagement like this,

> The Bible clearly teaches that the 'gas' which should be moving the church forward is initially pumped in at the miracle birth of conversion through the power of God's Holy Spirit. The growing life of the newborn disciple is then daily replenished by the Holy Place Gas Station of the inner devotional life of the Table of Showbread and Altar of Incense, and the outward service illustrated by the Seven Branched Candlestick.[5]

Discussion of Findings

This section interprets findings through scholarly literature and biblical-theological frameworks, exploring what they reveal about disengagement's nature and pathways toward renewed engagement.

Interpretation in Light of Existing Literature

Findings confirm and extend existing scholarly literature. First, theological ambiguity aligns with Bosch's observation of ongoing debate about whether mission belongs to the church or the church belongs to mission. This study nuances that debate by revealing how theological ambiguity functions as a practical obstacle at the congregational level—not merely an academic question but a source of existential anxiety that paralyzes action.

Second, the "living in adjacency" phenomenon resonates with Newbiggin's critique of Western Christianity's tendency toward privatized faith. Like the congregations Newbiggin described as accommodated to their contexts,[6] SDA churches in Abidjan have developed separation patterns that protect institutional

[5] Jim Park. TRANSFORMING Adventist Mission: A Practical Workbook on the Root and Fruit of Biblical Conversion, 2024. (Park Circle Scribes: Los Angeles, CA, 2024), 4.

[6] Bill Muehlenberg, "Newbiggin, Lewis, Paganism, and the Mission of the Church," published Oct. 2015, accessed 12 September 2025, https://billmuehlenberg.com/2015/10/09/newbigin-lewis-paganism-and-the-mission-of-the-church/.

identity at the cost of missional engagement. Yet members don't experience adjacency as comfortable withdrawal but as uncomfortable tension—they sense the disconnect, creating potential for change.

Third, structural and resource constraints corroborate organizational research showing institutions designed for one purpose resist reorientation. The church's infrastructure, budget allocations, and program calendars reflect and reinforce priorities established decades earlier. As Willard emphasized, discipleship requires intentional structures; community engagement likewise demands systematic organizational change, not merely individual volunteerism.

Fourth, emphasis on leadership modeling aligns with the literature, which demonstrates that cultural change requires leaders who personally embody desired behaviors, communicate the vision consistently, remove obstacles, and celebrate progress. Finally, the strategic theme of "starting small and local" validates missiological literature on incarnational presence and contextual ministry,[7] recommending approaches rooted in relationships, responsive to neighborhood needs, and sustainable within local resource constraints.

Interpretation in Light of Biblical and Theological Foundations

Findings invite theological reflection on the church and its mission. First, "living in adjacency" represents a distortion of "in the world but not of the world" (John 17:14-18). Jesus' prayer requests His followers remain in the world as transformation agents while not conforming to worldly values. However, many SDA members interpreted this principle as justification for separation rather than

[7] J. Todd Billings, "The Problem with "Incarnational Ministry": What If Our Mission Is Not to "Be Jesus" to Other Cultures but to Join with the Holy Spirit?" Published Sunday, August 12, 2012, accessed 12 June 2025, https://theaquilareport.com/the-problem-with-incarnational-ministry/.

engagement. The church became “not in the world and not of the world”—isolated rather than incarnational, contradicting the theological foundation that mission flows from God’s sending nature.

Second, theological ambiguity reflects an incomplete understanding of the missio Dei. When the mission is viewed primarily as the church’s activity rather than God’s, it is reduced to programs—evangelistic campaigns, Bible studies, baptismal goals. This narrow conception marginalizes holistic ministry, creating a false hierarchy between “spiritual” and “physical” needs. However, Scripture presents no such dichotomy. Jesus proclaimed good news, healed the sick, fed the hungry, challenged injustice, and called for repentance—all as expressions of the integrated Kingdom of God.

Third, discipleship as a driver of community engagement aligns with Jesus’ ministry methodology. He didn’t separate “making disciples” from “serving people”; rather, service was the context within which discipleship occurred. Jesus’ instructions consistently linked love for God with love for neighbor (Matt 22:37-40), faith with works (Jas 2:14-26), and proclamation with demonstration (Luke 10:25-37).

Fourth, obstacles identified—especially fear and self-perception issues—reveal an identity crisis. If members understood themselves primarily as beloved children of God and as ambassadors of Christ’s Kingdom, they would have the confidence to engage communities despite inadequacies and uncertainties. When identity is based on doctrinal correctness or institutional membership, members become defensive. The biblical foundation of belovedness (Rom 8:38-39, Eph 1:3-14) must undergird mission.

The Phenomenon of Disengagement: A Phenomenological Interpretation

From an existential-phenomenological perspective, church-community disengagement is a crisis of being-in-the-world. Members experience themselves existing at the threshold between two worlds—sacred church space and secular community space—yet fully inhabiting neither. This liminal existence creates existential anxiety—fundamental uncertainty about proper place, role, and identity.

The lived space (spatiality) of members reflects this tension. Physically, they reside in neighborhoods and occupy the same geographic territory. Yet experientially, they inhabit separate social spaces defined by church boundaries and denominational identity. Church buildings function symbolically as fortresses—safe refuges rather than mission bases. The lived time (temporality) reveals similar patterns. Church calendars are saturated with internal programming, leaving little discretionary time for community engagement. Eschatological urgency paradoxically discourages long-term community investment. The lived relationships (relationality) demonstrate the consequences of adjacency. Social networks center on fellow church members; friendships form within the congregation. While these bonds create strong in-group cohesion, they also construct high boundaries that exclude outsiders. Community residents are perceived as mission targets rather than neighbors to be known and loved. The lived body (corporeality) surfaces in members' descriptions of discomfort regarding community involvement. Adventist dietary practices, Sabbath observance, and lifestyle standards create visible markers of difference, experienced as both identity and barrier.

Ultimately, disengagement is experienced as incongruence—misalignment between who members believe they're called to be and who they actually are in practice. This generates guilt, defensiveness, and frustration. Yet it contains

transformation seeds. The very discomfort signals God's Spirit, creating holy dissatisfaction and awakening desire for authentic discipleship.

Integration and Synthesis

Church-community disengagement in Abidjan is multidimensional—simultaneously theological (What is the church's mission?), ecclesiological (What does it mean to be the church?), organizational (How do we structure for mission?), cultural (How do we engage contextually?), psychological (How do we overcome fear?), and spiritual (How do we form disciples?).

The study demonstrates that tightly interconnected systems pose obstacles to engagement. Theological ambiguity enables structural inertia; structural constraints justify fear and withdrawal; fear reinforces leadership caution; leadership gaps leave cultural complexities unaddressed; cultural challenges validate theological conservatism. This systemic nature means that addressing a single factor alone produces only limited change. Sustainable transformation requires coordinated interventions across multiple dimensions.

However, findings reveal hope. Members don't suffer from apathy but from confusion and constraint. They want to engage but lack clarity, permission, skills, structures, and sustained support. The hopeful pragmatism participants demonstrated indicates readiness for change. Strategies proposed are contextually grounded, biblically informed, and practically achievable. Leadership willing to champion community engagement, coupled with systemic organizational changes, could catalyze significant transformation within five-to-ten years.

Conclusions

Based on comprehensive data analysis and interpretation, the following conclusions represent the researcher's interpretive judgments about the nature, causes, and potential remedies of disengagement.

Conclusion 1: Church-Community Disengagement is a Crisis of Missional Identity

The research demonstrates disengagement is not primarily a practical problem (lack of resources, time, or skills) but a theological and identity crisis. Members are uncertain whether community engagement constitutes an authentic mission or represents a distraction from spiritual priorities. Until this fundamental identity question is resolved through intentional theological education and leadership modeling, community engagement will remain sporadic and unsustained. The church must rediscover its calling as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's Kingdom.

Conclusion 2: Living in Adjacency Reflects Structural Sin, Not Individual Failure

While individual members bear responsibility for choices, the disengagement pattern is primarily systemic. Church structures—facility design, budget allocation, program calendars, leadership training, evaluation metrics—have been constructed to serve internal maintenance rather than external mission. These structures shape member behavior powerfully, making disengagement the path of least resistance and engagement an exceptional act. Therefore, mobilizing members requires fundamental organizational redesign, not merely motivational preaching.

Conclusion 3: Formative Experiences Shape Present Possibilities

Members' current attitudes are profoundly influenced by childhood socialization, past experiences, theological formation, and observation of leadership behavior. Presenting biblical mandates or strategic plans alone won't overcome deeply ingrained patterns. Transformation requires creating new formative experiences—opportunities to encounter God's pleasure in service, to witness the impact of compassionate engagement, to develop competence through training, and to participate in communities of practice that normalize and celebrate community ministry.

Conclusion 4: Leadership Is the Catalytic Factor

Of all variables examined, leadership emerged as the most decisive factor influencing congregational engagement patterns. Where pastors and lay leaders demonstrated personal commitment, members followed; where leaders prioritized internal programs, members did likewise. However, it appears that most SDA pastors in Abidjan received no training in community development or holistic mission. Addressing the leadership gap through pre-service education, in-service training, conference-level support, and performance expectations aligned with community engagement is essential. Leadership development must be the first priority.

Conclusion 5: Context Shapes Strategy— One Size Does Not Fit All

Significant differences emerged among Cocody and Yopougon congregations, among older and younger members, and among those with and without community ministry experience. These variations underscore that effective strategies must be tailored to the context. Effective mobilization strategies honor this diversity,

empowering local congregations to design contextually appropriate approaches within shared theological frameworks rather than imposing centralized programs.

Conclusion 6: Hope Resides in Members' Readiness for Change

Despite sobering obstacle analysis, research reveals significant grounds for optimism. Members aren't resistant to community engagement; they're confused about priorities, uncertain about methods, fearful of failure, and lacking support structures. Yet when given theological clarity, practical training, leadership modeling, and organizational permission, members demonstrate enthusiasm and creativity. The Holy Spirit is already at work in members' hearts, creating dissatisfaction with adjacency. The church's task is to remove obstacles hindering what God is initiating.

Recommendations

Findings and conclusions translate into practical considerations for ministry at multiple levels—from individual congregations to denominational structures.

Recommendations for Church Leadership

Pastors and church elders must recognize that they bear primary responsibility for establishing vision, culture, and structures that enable community engagement. Leaders must personally model community involvement, ensuring they're known and visible in neighborhoods. Leaders should prioritize community ministry in sermon planning, dedicating at least a quarterly sermon series to biblical foundations and regularly celebrating member engagement stories. Leaders must function as permission-givers, explicitly authorizing members to experiment with initiatives even when outcomes are uncertain. Leaders should invest in continuing education,

attending community development workshops, and developing partnership-building competencies.

Recommendations for Congregational Life

Local churches must undertake intentional assessment and restructuring processes. Each congregation should conduct comprehensive audits examining facility use, budget allocation, program calendars, and communication patterns to identify ways structures hinder engagement. Based on assessments, churches should reallocate resources—dedicating budget lines specifically for community ministry (suggested minimum 10-15% of total budget), reserving facility space for community-facing programs, and adjusting calendars to create margin for external engagement. Churches should establish standing Community Ministry Committees with clear mandates and board representation. Worship services should integrate community awareness through intercessory prayers, member testimonies, and periodic commissioning ceremonies.

Recommendations for Member Mobilization and Training

Effective mobilization requires systematic equipping. Churches should implement spiritual gifts inventories and skills assessments to help members identify unique service capacities. Churches should develop multi-level training, including orientation sessions introducing biblical foundations, skill-building workshops teaching practical competencies (needs assessment, program design, partnership development), and mentoring relationships pairing experienced practitioners with newcomers. Churches should create entry-level opportunities requiring minimal commitment—one-time service projects, short-term initiatives—allowing hesitant members to experiment without overwhelming obligation. Churches should establish

small groups focused on community ministry, providing ongoing support, shared learning, and mutual encouragement.

Recommendations for Theological Education and Pastoral Formation

Seminary curricula must be revised to prepare pastors for holistic mission leadership. Doctor of Ministry and Master of Divinity programs should require coursework in community development, urban ministry, and missional ecclesiology alongside traditional pastoral theology. Continuing education programs for serving pastors should prioritize community engagement topics. Pastoral performance evaluations should incorporate community engagement metrics alongside traditional measures. Ordination processes should include explicit questions about candidates' understanding of and commitment to the holistic mission.

Recommendations for Denominational Policy and Resources

Conference and union-level structures must provide systematic support. The West-Central Africa Division and constituent conferences should establish Community Ministries Departments with dedicated personnel and budgets. Denominational strategic plans should explicitly name community engagement as a key performance area with measurable goals. Conferences should create incentive systems—recognition programs and excellence awards—that celebrate churches and leaders who excel in community ministry. Partnerships should be developed with ADRA, Adventist Health Systems, and educational institutions to leverage expertise and resources.

Recommendations for the Specific Context of Abidjan

Abidjan's unique characteristics demand contextually adapted strategies. The religious pluralism (42.5% Muslim, 39.8% Christian) requires SDA churches to develop interfaith partnership protocols that maintain doctrinal integrity while cooperating on shared humanitarian objectives. The stark socioeconomic disparities between Cocody and Yopougon call for differentiated approaches. Cocody churches, with greater resource capacity, might focus on leveraging member professional networks and providing scholarships. Yopougon churches might emphasize mutual aid networks and microenterprise development. Cultural diversity requires churches to develop cultural intelligence and multilingual capacity. Rapid urbanization presents opportunities for churches to partner with organizations addressing housing and infrastructure needs while providing social capital.

A Proposed Framework for Community Engagement

Based on research findings, a five-phase framework is proposed: Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Theological Reframing and Vision Casting—leadership teams engage in intensive study, develop vision statements, and launch sermon series. Phase 2 (Months 6-12): Assessment and Planning—churches conduct internal and external assessments, developing three-year strategic plans. Phase 3 (Year 2): Capacity Building and Pilot Initiatives—churches implement training, recruit teams, and launch pilots. Phase 4 (Years 3-4): Expansion and Partnership Development—successful initiatives scale up, formal partnerships develop. Phase 5 (Year 5 and beyond): Integration and Sustainability—community engagement becomes embedded in congregational culture. This framework is flexible, allowing congregations to adapt pacing and strategies to local context.

1. Investigation of Interfaith Community Partnerships in Muslim-Majority Contexts: Given Abidjan's significant Muslim population and the theological-practical challenges participants identified, focused research on successful models of Christian-Muslim collaboration for community benefit would be valuable. Case studies and interviews exploring barriers and opportunities could generate practical guidance.
2. Examination of Gender Dynamics in SDA Community Ministry: Future research could investigate how male and female SDA members experience community ministry differently, the barriers women face, how church structures enable or constrain women's leadership, and the theological and cultural factors that shape gender roles in this domain.

Final Reflections

This phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of church-community disengagement among Seventh-day Adventist members in Abidjan has uncovered both sobering realities and hopeful possibilities. The study affirms that disengagement is not simply about apathy or lack of commitment but is instead a complex web of theological ambiguity, structural barriers, formative experiences, and leadership gaps that together produce "constraint without conviction."

Yet the study also shows strong readiness for change. Members are eager to move from "living in adjacency" to incarnational presence, from passive awareness to active engagement, from theoretical mission to practiced discipleship. The strategies they envision—theological reframing, starting small, leveraging existing gifts, forming partnerships, and following committed leadership—are grounded, contextual, and achievable.

The church in Abidjan is at a pivotal moment. The Holy Spirit is inspiring a deep dissatisfaction with the current state. The focus now is on removing barriers, providing clarity, equipping members, restructuring systems, and celebrating the progress already underway. May this research help renew the Adventist witness in Côte d'Ivoire and beyond, as the church rediscovers its mission to be salt and light not isolated from the world, but sent into it with the good news of God's Kingdom.

Personal Reflections

This research journey has been as much about personal growth as it has been an academic pursuit. As a Seventh-day Adventist minister serving in Abidjan, I started this study with assumptions I thought were solid. I believed that the main reason for the divide between the church and the community was members' lack of spiritual dedication and insufficient vision. I thought that if I could clearly show the biblical call for community involvement, members would respond with renewed enthusiasm. The data proved me completely wrong.

Challenged Assumptions and Humbling Discoveries

The most important lesson I learned is that I had fundamentally misunderstood the problem. Through the voices of fifteen participants and weeks of careful observation, I realized that members are not indifferent—they are confused. They are not uncommitted—they are restricted. They do not lack desire for community involvement; they lack clarity, permission, training, structures, and sustained support. This insight forced me to face an uncomfortable truth: as a church leader, I had been part of the problem, not the solution.

Participant #5's candid admission that seminary education "did not require me to engage in community ministry as part of my obligation" struck a nerve. I, too,

graduated from seminary with strong training in exegesis, homiletics, and church administration but almost no preparation for community development, partnership building, or holistic mission. I had been perpetuating the very theological ambiguity I now criticize. The disengagement I see in congregations reflects my own formation—we reproduce what we've been taught, whether through explicit curriculum or implicit modeling.

The phenomenological method challenged me in unexpected ways. I began this research thinking I understood my participants' experiences because I shared their contexts, faith traditions, and cultural backgrounds. Van Manen's emphasis that the researcher cannot fully bracket presuppositions but must practice disciplined reflexivity taught me to constantly question my interpretive certainties. The reflexive journal I kept became a space for ongoing self-examination: Am I truly hearing what participants are saying, or am I hearing what I expect them to say? Am I imposing my pastoral agenda on their lived experiences?

Several moments during data collection challenged my comfortable assumptions. During observations at Congregation #2, I saw members pass by community residents—some clearly in need—without more than a brief greeting. My first reaction was judgment: Why don't they care? But later interviews showed that many of these same members desperately wanted to help but felt paralyzed by fear of inadequacy, uncertainty about boundaries, and lack of support from the institution. The issue wasn't cold hearts but limited ability. This realization changed my view from the moral failure of individuals to systemic problems.

The Weight of Participants' Wisdom

I was repeatedly amazed by the depth of wisdom participants displayed. When I asked about strategies for fostering community engagement, I expected generic

platitudes or naive idealism. Instead, participants provided grounded, contextually insightful, theologically informed proposals that showed careful consideration of barriers and opportunities. The elder's wife (Participant #2), who advocated "regularly and actively listening to the surrounding community" rather than "relying on past evangelism strategies that failed to open doors," demonstrated greater missiological sophistication than many of the published articles I had read.

The phenomenological essence of "hopeful pragmatism" that emerged from Research Question 4 reveals something I found deeply moving: despite years of frustration, failed initiatives, and institutional inertia, members have not lost hope. They believe that change is possible and see practical ways forward. This hopeful pragmatism sharply contrasts with the cynicism I sometimes experience as a minister dealing with denominational bureaucracy. My participants showed me that maintaining hope is itself a form of resistance against despair—a theological virtue worth celebrating.

Confronting My Own Complicity

Perhaps the most painful realization was recognizing my own role in sustaining disengagement. When Participant #1 (a pastor) admitted, "I was never trained to lead community ministry. The seminary prepared me to preach, manage church programs, and run evangelistic campaigns. I don't know how to organize community development," I saw my own experience reflected. I have preached countless sermons on missions, yet how many specifically addressed communities engagement as a vital part of discipleship? I have managed church budgets, yet how often have I prioritized line items for community ministry over traditional programs? I have led elder meetings where community outreach was mentioned but not acted

upon, and I did not push the issue because internal church matters seemed more urgent.

The research showed that leadership is the key factor—the most important variable affecting how engaged the congregation is. This finding places a heavy responsibility on my shoulders. I can no longer say that members lack commitment if I haven't provided the theological clarity, practical training, organizational structures, or personal role modeling they need. The disengagement I see is, at least in part, a reflection of the leadership I have offered.

Transformation through Phenomenological Presence

Phenomenology taught me a different way of being present with others. Instead of approaching participants as a pastor-researcher with solutions, I learned to immerse myself in their experiences, to listen for meanings beneath words, and to pay attention to silences and hesitations. This phenomenological attentiveness has already started to transform my pastoral practice. In conversations with church members, I find myself asking more questions and offering fewer answers, aiming to understand the lived texture of their faith journeys rather than merely diagnosing spiritual problems.

The idea of "living in adjacency" has become a perspective I use to understand not only church-community relations but also my own spiritual life. How often do I exist beside God's calling rather than fully embracing it? How often am I physically present in ministry settings but emotionally distant from the people I serve? The phenomenological journey has increased my awareness of my own habits of adjacency—how I keep a safe distance instead of risking genuine connection.

Hope Rooted in Lived Reality

This study has strengthened my hope, but it is a different kind of hope than I started with. I no longer expect quick fixes or quick programmatic solutions. I no longer believe that a single compelling sermon series or a well-designed initiative will solve the disengagement crisis. Instead, I now hope for slow, sustained, systemic change—something that takes five to ten years of patient effort across theological, organizational, leadership, and cultural areas.

This hope is based on what I have seen: the Holy Spirit is already working in members' hearts, stirring a holy dissatisfaction with complacency and awakening a desire for genuine discipleship. The church's role is not to generate engagement out of thin air but to remove barriers that hinder what God is already starting. This is humble, often unseen work, but it is the work I now feel called to with renewed clarity.

A Changed Researcher, a Redirected Ministry

I completed this dissertation as a different person than I was when I began. I am more aware of my limitations, more attentive to voices beyond my own, more patient with complexity, more hopeful about possibilities, and more committed to the long obedience required for genuine transformation. The findings of this study have already begun to reshape my ministry priorities. I am advocating at the conference level for community ministry training, restructuring my own church's budget to allocate resources for community engagement, and personally modeling neighborhood involvement.

More importantly, I have learned that research is not merely about discovering truth but about being transformed by encounters with others' lived experiences. My participants were not simply data sources; they were teachers who generously shared

their struggles, wisdom, and hope. I am deeply grateful for their trust and pray that this research honors their voices and, even in small ways, contributes to the renewal they long to see.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Adventist University of Africa
Consent to Participate in Research Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled: BRIDGING THE GAP: UNDERSTANDING CHURCH-COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MEMBERS IN ABIDJAN THROUGH A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LENS.

The information below tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do, and the potential risks and benefits of participating in this study. You are encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification about the study's nature. Please note that choosing whether to participate in this research is voluntary and entirely your choice. You may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time during the study.

The purpose of this study is to help pastors and members understand the need and importance of community ministry as a social enhancement and spiritual boost for their church, and to contribute to the creation of one in their local church and district in Abidjan.

Your Participation: You will be asked to participate in a Semi-Structured Interview and will be observed as a participant. This means you will be asked to share your views, opinions, or experiences about community ministry, why it has not been a core ministry for your church, and how you would like to address it going forward. The semi-structured interview and participant observation will take about 1.5 hours to complete.

Benefits and Risks: By participating, you will gain a deeper understanding of why community ministry is a vital component of members' spiritual growth and the church's impact and influence in their community, ultimately meeting needs that have been waiting for years to be addressed. Your participation deepens your understanding of the numerous opportunities the church cannot afford to miss, as well as the magnitude of challenges families and individuals in the community face. This knowledge will enhance and inform individuals and assist members in integrating into

the community and collaborating with other faith-based institutions and bodies for the community's good. However, there are no identifiable risks in participation.

Confidentiality: Your personal information will be kept confidential. Your interview responses will be anonymized, so they will not be identified in any report or publication of this study. We will collect your information through recordings of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. This information will be stored in a locked office cabinet. Any use of your direct quotes will be assigned pseudonyms. Please carefully read and sign this Form if you are willing to participate in the study.

1. My participation in this research project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.
2. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
3. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable during the interview, I can decline to answer any question or end the interview or discussion.
4. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded to capture my own words, and an accurate transcript will be produced for data analysis.
5. The researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information from this interview or discussion.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, contact the Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee, Adventist University of Africa <ethics@aua.ac.ke>

I have read and fully understood the statements on this Form. All my questions were answered satisfactorily. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and to permit the researcher to audio record discussions.

Participant's Signature or thumbprint _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Contact the research supervisor if you need more information or have questions (Dr. Melak Tsegaw; Email: tsegawm@aua.ac.ke)

Thank you. Jallah S. Karbah Sr., Urban Missions Mobile: +2250747051383; Email: karbahj@aua.ac.ke.

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

Université Adventiste d'Afrique

Consentement à la participation à une étude de recherche

Vous êtes invité(e) à participer à une étude de recherche intitulée :

COMBLER LE FOSSÉ : COMPRENDRE LE DÉSENGAGEMENT ENTRE L'ÉGLISE ET LA COMMUNAUTÉ CHEZ LES MEMBRES DE L'ÉGLISE ADVENTISTE DU SEPTIÈME JOUR À ABIDJAN À TRAVERS UNE APPROCHE PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIQUE.

Les informations ci-dessous vous expliquent en quoi consiste cette recherche, ce qui vous sera demandé, ainsi que les risques et bénéfices potentiels liés à votre participation à cette étude. Vous êtes encouragé(e) à poser des questions et à demander des éclaircissements sur la nature de l'étude. Veuillez noter que votre participation à cette recherche est entièrement volontaire et relève uniquement de votre choix. Vous pouvez refuser de participer ou mettre fin à votre participation à tout moment au cours de l'étude.

L'objectif de cette étude est d'aider les pasteurs et les membres à comprendre la nécessité et l'importance du ministère communautaire comme moyen d'enrichissement social et de renforcement spirituel pour leur Église, et de contribuer à la mise en place d'un tel ministère dans leur église locale et leur district à Abidjan.

Votre participation

Vous serez invité(e) à participer à un **entretien semi-structuré** et à être **observé(e) en tant que participant(e)**. Cela signifie que vous serez amené(e) à partager vos points de vue, opinions ou expériences concernant le ministère communautaire, les raisons pour lesquelles celui-ci n'a pas été un ministère central dans votre église, ainsi que la manière dont vous souhaiteriez l'aborder à l'avenir.

L'entretien semi-structuré et l'observation participante dureront environ **une heure et quinze minutes**.

Bénéfices et risques

En participant à cette étude, vous développerez une meilleure compréhension de l'importance du ministère communautaire comme composante essentielle de la croissance spirituelle des membres et de l'impact et de l'influence de l'Église au sein de la communauté, en répondant à des besoins qui attendent depuis des années d'être pris en compte. Votre participation approfondira également votre compréhension des nombreuses opportunités que l'Église ne peut se permettre de manquer, ainsi que de l'ampleur des défis auxquels les familles et les individus de la communauté sont confrontés. Ces connaissances contribueront à informer et à guider les individus et aideront les membres à mieux s'intégrer dans la communauté et à collaborer avec d'autres institutions et organisations confessionnelles pour le bien de la communauté. Aucun risque identifiable n'est associé à la participation à cette étude.

Confidentialité

Vos informations personnelles seront traitées de manière strictement confidentielle. Vos réponses aux entretiens seront anonymisées et ne permettront pas de vous identifier dans les rapports ou publications issus de cette étude. Les données seront recueillies à l'aide d'enregistrements audio des entretiens semi-structurés et de l'observation participante. Ces informations seront conservées dans une armoire

verrouillée au bureau du chercheur. Toute citation directe utilisée sera associée à un pseudonyme.
Veuillez lire attentivement et signer ce formulaire si vous acceptez de participer à l'étude.

1. Ma participation à ce projet de recherche est volontaire. Il n'existe aucune forme de contrainte explicite ou implicite à participer.
2. Je peux me retirer et mettre fin à ma participation à tout moment, sans aucune pénalité.
3. Je comprends que si je me sens mal à l'aise pendant l'entretien, je peux refuser de répondre à toute question ou y mettre fin.
4. Je comprends que l'entretien sera enregistré afin de recueillir fidèlement mes propos et qu'une transcription exacte sera produite pour l'analyse des données.
5. Le chercheur ne mentionnera pas mon nom dans les rapports utilisant les informations issues de cet entretien ou de cette discussion.

Si vous avez des préoccupations éthiques concernant votre participation à cette recherche, veuillez contacter le **Comité institutionnel d'éthique scientifique**, Université Adventiste d'Afrique : *ethics@aua.ac.ke*
Je déclare avoir lu et pleinement compris les informations figurant sur ce formulaire. Toutes mes questions ont reçu des réponses satisfaisantes. J'accepte volontairement de participer à cette étude et j'autorise le chercheur à enregistrer les discussions.
Signature ou empreinte digitale du/de la participant(e) _____
Date _____
Signature du chercheur _____ Date _____
Pour toute information complémentaire ou question, veuillez contacter le directeur de recherche : **Dr Melak Tsegaw** - *tsegawm@aua.ac.ke.* Merci.
Jallah S. Karbah Sr., Urban Missions Mobile: +225 07 47 05 13 83 Email: *karbahj@aua.ac.ke*

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW (SSI) GUIDE

Title: BRIDGING THE GAP: UNDERSTANDING CHURCH-COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MEMBERS IN ABIDJAN.

A. Purpose of the Interview

This interview seeks to explore how members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Abidjan experience, interpret, and respond to church-community engagement and disengagement. The goal is to understand the lived meanings, barriers, and possibilities for renewed participation in community ministry within the congregations of Cocody and Yopougon.

B. Introduction to Participants

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this conversation is to understand your personal experiences and perspectives regarding the relationship between your church and the surrounding community. There are no right or wrong answers; please feel free to share your honest reflections and stories. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to skip any question or end the interview at any point. All responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes.

C. Interview Logistics

- **Format:** Individual, face-to-face or virtual (audio-recorded with permission)
- **Estimated Duration:** 45-60 minutes
- **Data Collection Tools:** Interview recording, field notes, and reflexive journal
- **Analytical Framework:** Existential-phenomenological thematic analysis

D. Overview

This semi-structured guide was adapted for four participant groups — church members, church leaders, community members, and conference administrators. While the core phenomenological questions remained constant, additional prompts were used to address the unique perspectives of each group (e.g., leadership responsibilities, community relationships, and organizational strategies).

This flexible structure ensured both depth of lived experience and contextual insight across participant categories.

E. Interview Questions

Section 1: Description of Lived Experiences

1. Can you describe a personal experience that reflects how you have seen or felt the connection between your church and the surrounding community?
   Follow-up: How did that experience affect your sense of belonging or mission as a member?
2. Have you ever felt that the church's connection with the community has weakened or been lost? How did that situation unfold from your point of view?
   Follow-up: What emotions or thoughts did that experience raise for you as a believer?
3. Thinking about your time in the church, what moments stand out to you as times when the church was most alive and engaged with the community?
   Follow-up: What do you think made those moments possible?
4. How would you describe the way the church's presence is perceived by people who live around it — in your neighborhood or community?
   Follow-up: What have you personally observed or heard from community members about the church?

Section 2: Experiences Shaping Feelings and Perceptions Toward Community Service

5. What meaning do you give to community involvement as part of your faith journey, and what do you believe could renew members' participation in Abidjan?
   Follow-up: What personal or collective changes might help that renewal?
6. Can you describe a time when you felt less motivated or unable to participate in your church's community outreach activities? What was that experience like for you personally?
   Rationale: To explore participants' lived experiences and existential meaning of disengagement (van Manen, 2016).
7. How do you understand the connection between discipleship and service to others?
   Follow-up: In your opinion, how is this connection emphasized or neglected in your church's current ministries?
8. How do leadership messages, sermons, or church programs influence how members think about serving the community?
   Follow-up: Can you recall an example that inspired you—or discouraged you—from serving?

Section 3: Obstacles to Participating in Community Ministry

9. What factors or circumstances do you believe contribute most to members' reluctance or withdrawal from community ministry activities within your congregation?
   Rationale: To uncover contextual and internal factors (e.g., leadership, workload, perceptions, or theology).

10. How do relationships within the church and the wider community influence your willingness or unwillingness to participate in community outreach programs?
    Rationale: To examine the social and relational dimensions of disengagement.
11. In what ways do you think church structure, leadership style, or planning methods help—or hinder—community engagement?
    Follow-up: How could these structures better support participation?
12. What personal barriers (such as time, confidence, finances, or skills) make it difficult for you or others to engage in community ministry?
    Follow-up: How do you think the church could help overcome these barriers?

    Section 4: Strategies to Help Members Participate in Community Ministry
13. Can you describe a time when you felt genuinely involved or connected in a church program that strengthened both your spiritual life and your relationship with the surrounding community?
    Follow-up: What made that experience meaningful or different from others?
14. In your view, what areas or aspects of church life currently hinder members from becoming more actively engaged in community ministry or outreach?
    Follow-up: How do these challenges affect members' spiritual growth and connection to others?
15. If you could design a program or strategy to help members participate more effectively in the church and the community, what would it look like, and why do you think it would work?
    Follow-up: How could the church leadership support such initiatives?
16. How can the church better prepare new converts or young members to take part in meaningful community service?
    Follow-up: What kind of training or mentorship could help?
17. What would it look like, in your opinion, for your local church to become known as "a community church"?
    Follow-up: What practical steps could bring that vision closer to reality?

F. Closing Remarks

Thank you for sharing your experiences. Your insights are valuable and will contribute to a better understanding of how the Church can engage more meaningfully with its surrounding community. Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed but feel is important to this topic?

GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN SEMI-DIRECTIF (ESSI) FRENCH

COMBLER LE FOSSÉ: COMPRENDRE LE DÉSENGAGEMENT ÉGLISE-COMMUNAUTÉ CHEZ LES MEMBRES DE L'ÉGLISE ADVENTISTE DU SEPTIÈME JOUR À ABIDJAN

A. Objectif de l'entretien

Cet entretien vise à explorer la manière dont les membres de l'Église adventiste du septième jour à Abidjan vivent, interprètent et réagissent à l'engagement et au désengagement entre l'Église et la communauté. L'objectif est de comprendre les significations vécues, les obstacles et les possibilités de renouvellement de la participation au ministère communautaire au sein des congrégations de Cocody et de Yopougon.

B. Introduction aux participants

Merci d'avoir accepté de participer à cet entretien. Le but de cette conversation est de comprendre vos expériences personnelles et vos points de vue concernant la relation entre votre Église et la communauté environnante. Il n'y a pas de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses ; n'hésitez pas à partager librement vos réflexions et vos récits personnels. Votre participation est entièrement volontaire, et vous pouvez choisir de ne pas répondre à certaines questions ou de mettre fin à l'entretien à tout moment. Toutes les réponses resteront confidentielles et seront utilisées uniquement à des fins de recherche.

C. Logistique de l'entretien

- **Format** : Entretien individuel, en présentiel ou virtuel (enregistrement audio avec autorisation)
- **Durée estimée** : 45 à 60 minutes
- **Outils de collecte de données** : Enregistrement de l'entretien, notes de terrain et journal réflexif
- **Cadre analytique** : Analyse thématique phénoménologique existentiell

D. Aperçu général

Ce guide d'entretien semi-structuré a été adapté à quatre groupes de participants : les membres d'Église, les responsables d'Église, les membres de la communauté et les administrateurs de la fédération/conférence.

Bien que les questions phénoménologiques de base soient restées constantes, des questions de relance supplémentaires ont été utilisées afin de tenir compte des perspectives spécifiques de chaque groupe (par exemple, responsabilités de leadership, relations communautaires et stratégies organisationnelles).

Cette structure flexible a permis d'assurer à la fois une profondeur des expériences vécues et une compréhension contextuelle à travers les différentes catégories de participants.

E. Questions d'entretien

Section 1 : Description des expériences vécues

1. Pouvez-vous décrire une expérience personnelle qui reflète la manière dont vous avez perçu ou ressenti le lien entre votre Église et la communauté environnante?
   Relance : Comment cette expérience a-t-elle influencé votre sentiment d'appartenance ou votre sens de la mission en tant que membre?
2. Avez-vous déjà eu le sentiment que le lien entre l'Église et la communauté s'est affaibli ou s'est perdu? Comment cette situation s'est-elle manifestée selon votre point de vue?
   Relance : Quelles émotions ou pensées cette expérience a-t-elle suscitées chez vous en tant que croyant(e)?
3. En repensant à votre parcours dans l'Église, quels moments vous semblent avoir été ceux où l'Église était la plus vivante et engagée auprès de la communauté?
   Relance : Selon vous, qu'est-ce qui a rendu ces moments possibles?
4. Comment décririez-vous la perception de la présence de l'Église par les personnes qui vivent autour — dans votre quartier ou votre communauté?
   Relance : Qu'avez-vous personnellement observé ou entendu de la part des membres de la communauté au sujet de l'Église?

Section 2 : Expériences façonnant les perceptions et les sentiments à l'égard du service communautaire

5. Quelle signification donnez-vous à l'engagement communautaire dans votre cheminement de foi, et selon vous, qu'est-ce qui pourrait renouveler la participation des membres à Abidjan?
   Relance : Quels changements personnels ou collectifs pourraient favoriser ce renouveau?
6. Pouvez-vous décrire une période où vous vous êtes senti(e) moins motivé(e) ou incapable de participer aux activités d'action communautaire de votre Église? Comment avez-vous vécu cette expérience personnellement?
   Justification : Explorer les expériences vécues et la signification existentielle du désengagement (van Manen, 2016).
7. Comment comprenez-vous le lien entre le discipulat et le service envers les autres?
   Relance : À votre avis, comment ce lien est-il mis en valeur ou négligé dans les ministères actuels de votre Église?
8. Comment les messages des responsables, les sermons ou les programmes de l'Église influencent-ils la manière dont les membres envisagent le service communautaire?
   Relance : Pouvez-vous donner un exemple qui vous a inspiré(e) — ou découragé(e) — à servir?

Section 3 : Obstacles à la participation au ministère communautaire

9. Quels facteurs ou circonstances contribuent, selon vous, le plus à la réticence ou au retrait des membres vis-à-vis des activités de ministère communautaire dans votre congrégation?
   Justification : Mettre en lumière les facteurs contextuels et internes (leadership, charge de travail, perceptions, théologie, etc.).

10. Comment les relations au sein de l'Église et dans la communauté élargie influencent-elles votre volonté — ou votre réticence — à participer aux programmes d'action communautaire?
    Justification : Examiner les dimensions sociales et relationnelles du désengagement.
11. De quelles manières la structure de l'Église, le style de leadership ou les méthodes de planification favorisent-ils — ou entravent-ils — l'engagement communautaire?
    Relance : Comment ces structures pourraient-elles mieux soutenir la participation?
12. Quels obstacles personnels (temps, confiance en soi, finances, compétences, etc.) rendent difficile l'engagement dans le ministère communautaire pour vous ou pour d'autres?
    Relance : Comment pensez-vous que l'Église pourrait aider à surmonter ces obstacles?

Section 4 : Stratégies pour encourager la participation au ministère communautaire

13. Pouvez-vous décrire une expérience où vous vous êtes senti(e) réellement impliqué(e) ou connecté(e) à un programme de l'Église qui a renforcé à la fois votre vie spirituelle et votre relation avec la communauté environnante?
    Relance : Qu'est-ce qui a rendu cette expérience significative ou différente des autres?
14. Selon vous, quels aspects de la vie de l'Église freinent actuellement un engagement plus actif des membres dans le ministère ou l'action communautaire?
    Relance : Comment ces défis affectent-ils la croissance spirituelle des membres et leur relation avec les autres?
15. Si vous pouviez concevoir un programme ou une stratégie pour aider les membres à participer plus efficacement à la vie de l'Église et de la communauté, à quoi cela ressemblerait-il et pourquoi pensez-vous que cela fonctionnerait?
    Relance : Comment le leadership de l'Église pourrait-il soutenir de telles initiatives?
16. Comment l'Église peut-elle mieux préparer les nouveaux convertis ou les jeunes membres à s'engager dans un service communautaire significatif?
    Relance : Quel type de formation ou de mentorat pourrait être utile ?
17. À votre avis, à quoi ressemblerait une Église locale reconnue comme une Église de la communauté?
    Relance : Quelles étapes concrètes pourraient rapprocher cette vision de la réalité

F. Remarques finales

Merci d'avoir partagé vos expériences. Vos perspectives sont précieuses et contribueront à une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont l'Église peut s'engager plus profondément et plus efficacement avec la communauté environnante. Avant de conclure, y a-t-il autre chose que vous souhaiteriez ajouter, que nous n'avons pas abordée, mais que vous jugez importante pour ce sujet ?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL AND FRAMEWORK

Purpose of Participant Observation

This participant observation protocol complements the Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) Guide by capturing the lived, embodied, and communal dimensions of engagement and disengagement as they occur naturally within church and community life.

Participant observation seeks to understand how Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) members in Cocody and Yopougon, Abidjan, experience their sense of connection or disconnection between the church and the surrounding community. The researcher will observe naturally occurring activities—such as worship services, ministry meetings, community outreach programs, and informal gatherings—to gain insight into relational dynamics, embodied expressions, and situational contexts that influence members' participation or withdrawal.

Phenomenological observation emphasizes presence and attentiveness—the researcher becomes a co-participant, seeking to encounter the lived meaning of church-community life as it reveals itself in real time (van Manen, 2016).

Observation Framework

Observation Details	**Description**
Observer's Name	_____
Date and Time	_____
Location / Congregation	_____
Activity / Event Observed	(e.g., Worship Service, Community Outreach, Meeting, Fellowship)
Duration	_____
Number of Participants (approx.)	_____

Observation Checklist (Aligned with Research Questions)

A. Understanding Church-Community Disengagement

Focus Area	**Indicators / Behaviors**	**Observed (✓/✗)**	**Notes / Illustrations**
Member interaction patterns	Little or no interaction before/after service; cliques; lack of warmth		

Focus Area	Indicators / Behaviors	Observed (✓/✗)	Notes / Illustrations
Atmosphere around community topics	Silence, discomfort, or disinterest when community ministry is mentioned		
Non-verbal cues	Avoidance, folded arms, distraction, minimal eye contact		
Integration of community in church life	No community participants visible or acknowledged		
Leadership modeling	Leaders show or fail to show enthusiasm for outreach		

Phenomenological lens:
This captures disengagement as lived experience—withdrawal, silence, or selective participation that reveals deeper meanings of alienation or disconnection.

B. Factors Responsible for Disengagement

Focus Area	Indicators / Behaviors	Observed (✓/✗)	Notes / Illustrations
Organizational / cultural barriers	Centralized decision-making, exclusion of lay voices		
Communication dynamics	Who speaks vs. who stays silent during outreach discussions		
Resource priorities	Budgets/time used mainly for internal events		
Social divisions	Gender, age, or status-based clusters		
Emotional climate	Signs of frustration, fatigue, or indifference		

Phenomenological lens:
Reveals unspoken barriers—fear, lack of recognition, or misalignment between faith and practice.

C. Active Participation and Engagement

Focus Area	Indicators / Behaviors	Observed (✓/✗)	Notes / Illustrations
Program introduction & participation	Clarity of goals, openness of invitations, inclusiveness		
Levels of enthusiasm	Singing, volunteering, emotional expression, energy		
Transformative moments	Members moved or motivated during ministry		
Member-community interaction	Genuine empathy, listening, cooperation		

Focus Area	Indicators / Behaviors	Observed (✓/✗)	Notes / Illustrations
Reflective feedback	Members express joy, meaning, or renewed purpose		

Phenomenological lens:
Engagement as *lived fulfillment*—moments where service becomes spiritually enriching and socially relevant.

Observation Schedule

Setting	Focus	Estimated Duration
Worship Services	Observe atmosphere, sermons, and tone of community references	60-90 mins
Leadership Meetings	Observe planning, participation, and outreach discourse	60 mins
Community Outreach Events	Observe member-community interactions	90 mins
Informal Gatherings / Fellowship	Observe natural expressions of inclusion or exclusion	60 mins

Observations will occur across at least four congregations to capture contextual diversity.

Recording and Reflexivity

Each observation will be documented using:

- **Descriptive Notes:** Observable actions, interactions, and speech.
- **Analytic Notes:** Emerging patterns and meanings.
- **Reflexive Journal Entries:** Researcher's emotional and interpretive reflections, bracketing assumptions to maintain phenomenological rigor.

Summary
This revised framework integrates descriptive richness with practical usability. The inclusion of a structured observation checklist ensures systematic data collection and enhances triangulation with interview findings, allowing the researcher to validate or contrast what participants express verbally with what is lived and enacted within church settings.

PROTOCOLE ET CADRE D'OBSERVATION PARTICIPANTE

Objectif de l'observation participante

Ce protocole d'observation participante complète le guide d'entretien semi-structuré (ESSI) en capturant les dimensions vécues, incarnées et communautaires de l'engagement et du désengagement telles qu'elles se manifestent naturellement dans la vie de l'Église et de la communauté.

L'observation participante vise à comprendre comment les membres de l'Église adventiste du septième jour (EASD) à Cocody et Yopougon, Abidjan, vivent leur sentiment de connexion ou de déconnexion entre l'Église et la communauté environnante. Le chercheur observera des activités se déroulant naturellement — telles que les cultes, les réunions ministérielles, les programmes d'action communautaire et les rassemblements informels — afin de mieux saisir les dynamiques relationnelles, les expressions incarnées et les contextes situationnels qui influencent la participation ou le retrait des membres.

L'observation phénoménologique met l'accent sur la présence et l'attention : le chercheur devient un co-participant, cherchant à rencontrer le sens vécu de la vie Église-communauté tel qu'il se révèle en temps réel (van Manen, 2016).

Cadre d'observation

Détails de l'observation | **Description**

Nom de l'observateur | _____

Date et heure | _____

Lieu / Congrégation | _____

Activité / Événement observé | (p. ex. Culte, Action communautaire, Réunion, Fraternisation)

Durée | _____

Nombre de participants (approximatif) | _____

Liste de vérification de l'observation

(Alignée sur les questions de recherche)

A. Compréhension du désengagement Église-communauté

Domaine d'observation | **Indicateurs / Comportements** | **Observé (✓/✗)** | **Notes / Illustrations**

Schémas d'interaction entre les membres | Peu ou pas d'interaction avant/après le culte ; cliques ; manque de chaleur

Atmosphère autour des thèmes communautaires | Silence, malaise ou désintérêt lorsque le ministère communautaire est mentionné

Indices non verbaux | Évitement, bras croisés, distraction, contact visuel minimal

Intégration de la communauté dans la vie de l'Église | Aucun participant communautaire visible ou reconnu

Modélisation par le leadership | Les dirigeants montrent ou non de l'enthousiasme pour l'action communautaire

Lentille phénoménologique :
Cette section saisit le désengagement comme une expérience vécue — retrait, silence ou participation sélective révélant des significations plus profondes d'aliénation ou de déconnexion.

B. Facteurs responsables du désengagement

Domaine d'observation | **Indicateurs / Comportements** | **Observé (✓/✗)** | **Notes / Illustrations**
Barrières organisationnelles / culturelles | Prise de décision centralisée, exclusion des voix laïques
Dynamiques de communication | Qui parle et qui reste silencieux lors des discussions sur l'action communautaire
Priorités en matière de ressources | Budget et temps principalement consacrés aux activités internes
Divisions sociales | Regroupements fondés sur le genre, l'âge ou le statut
Climat émotionnel | Signes de frustration, de fatigue ou d'indifférence
Lentille phénoménologique :
Révèle des obstacles non exprimés — peur, manque de reconnaissance ou désalignement entre la foi professée et la pratique vécue.

C. Participation active et engagement

Domaine d'observation | **Indicateurs / Comportements** | **Observé (✓/✗)** | **Notes / Illustrations**
Présentation des programmes et participation | Clarté des objectifs, ouverture des invitations, inclusivité
Niveaux d'enthousiasme | Chant, volontariat, expressions émotionnelles, énergie
Moments transformateurs | Membres touchés ou motivés pendant le ministère
Interaction membres-communauté | Empathie authentique, écoute, coopération
Retour réflexif | Les membres expriment joie, sens ou renouveau du but
Lentille phénoménologique :
L'engagement est compris comme un accomplissement vécu — des moments où le service devient spirituellement enrichissant et socialement pertinent.

Calendrier d'observation

Cadre | **Focalisation** | **Durée estimée**
Cultes | Observer l'atmosphère, les sermons et le ton des références à la communauté | 60-90 min
Réunions de leadership | Observer la planification, la participation et le discours sur l'action communautaire | 60 min
Événements communautaires | Observer les interactions membres-communauté | 90 min
Rassemblements informels / Fraternisation | Observer les expressions naturelles d'inclusion ou d'exclusion | 60 min
Les observations auront lieu dans au moins quatre congrégations afin de saisir la diversité contextuelle.

Enregistrement et réflexivité

Chaque observation sera documentée à l'aide de :
• **Notes descriptives** : Actions observables, interactions et discours.
• **Notes analytiques** : Schémas et significations émergents.
• **Entrées de journal réflexif** : Réflexions émotionnelles et interprétatives du chercheur, avec mise entre parenthèses des présupposés afin de maintenir la rigueur phénoménologique.

Résumé

Ce cadre révisé intègre une richesse descriptive et une utilité pratique. L'inclusion d'une liste de vérification structurée assure une collecte de données systématique et renforce la triangulation avec les résultats des entretiens, permettant au chercheur de valider ou de contraster ce que les participants expriment verbalement avec ce qui est réellement vécu et incarné dans les contextes ecclésiaux.

APPENDIX D

PHOTO CONSENT FORM

Adventist University of Africa

PHOTO CONSENT FORM

I_____(the "Releasor"), with a mailing address of - _____, City of _____, in _____ Province, grant permission and give my consent to Jallah S. Karbah Sr (the "Releasee") for the use of the following photograph(s) or electronic media images as identified below for presentation under any legal use:

Focus Group Discussion Interview Photos/Interactions before, during, or after Focus Group Discussions Revocation (check one)

☐ - I understand that with my authorization below, the photograph(s) may never be revoked.

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Releasor's Signature _____ Date _____

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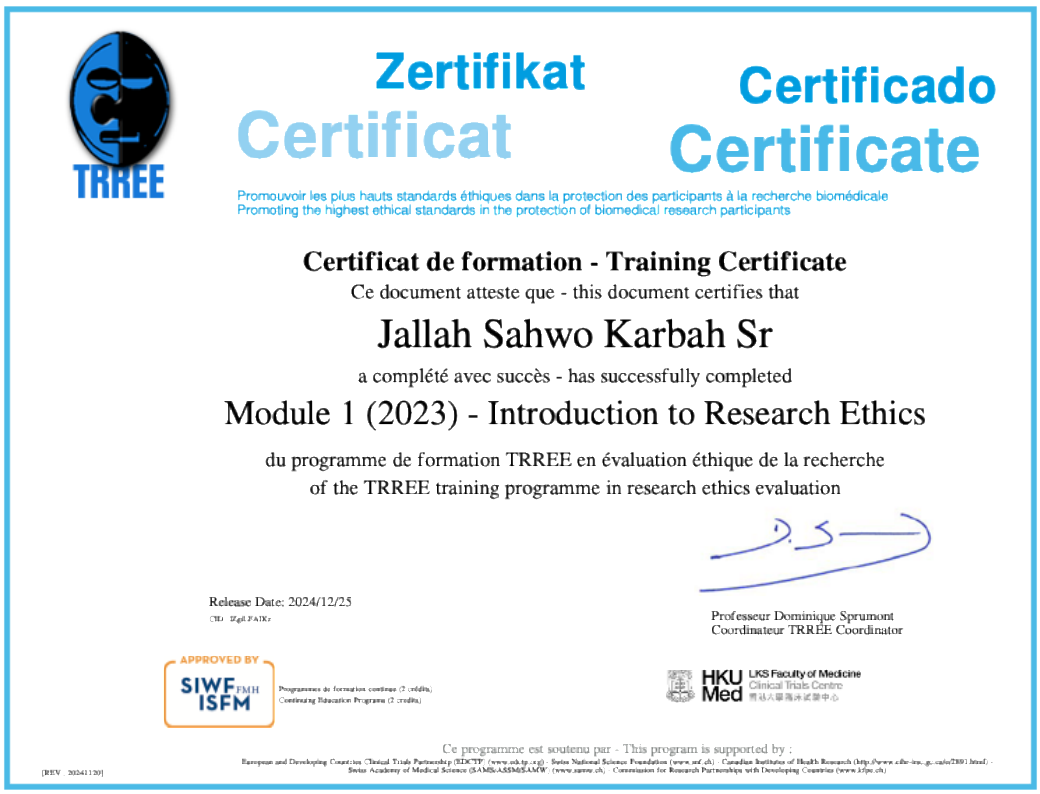
APPENDIX E

TRAINING CERTIFICATES



TRREE

Zertifikat

Certificat

Certificado

Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Jallah Sahwo Karbah Sr

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

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of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2024/12/25

Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordinateur TRREE Coordinator

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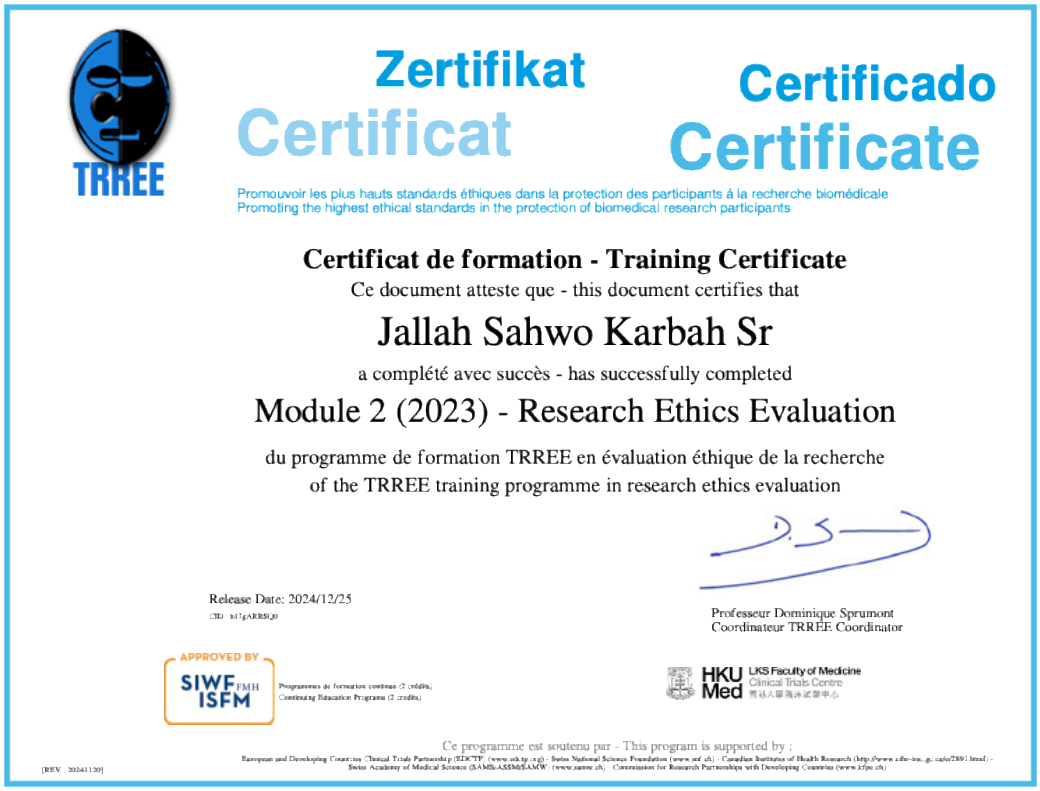

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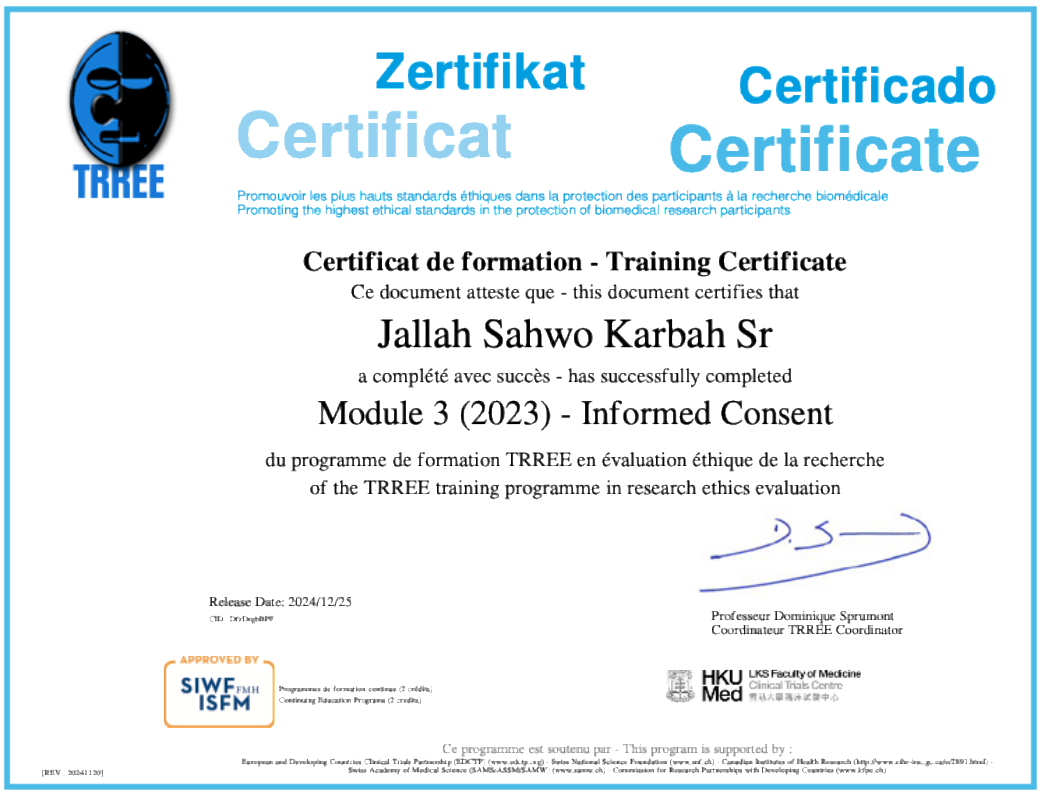

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Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

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MINISTRY PROFILE AND OBJECTIVE

A passionate and visionary minister devoted to holistic human development and the restoration of spiritual and social harmony through Christ. I am deeply committed to serving people of all backgrounds—educated or uneducated, rich or poor—by leading them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. My ministry emphasizes inclusivity, compassion, and empowerment, aiming to reveal each individual's divine purpose and to promote service to humanity. I believe in translating theology into action—sharing God's love tangibly with the needy and marginalized and fostering communities that reflect the character of Christ. I desire to see the church become present in the community as an embodiment of Christ.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Ministry (DMin) - *Urban Mission (Church Growth and Evangelism) Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya* | 2019-2026

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology
Adventist University of Africa | 2006-2009
Major: Theology

Key Coursework: Church Leadership & Administration, Urban Mission, Equipping Pastors, Youth & Health Ministry, Hermeneutics, African Traditional Religion, Research Methodology, and History of Religion.

Bachelor of Arts in Theology
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan (ASWA Campus) 1991-1994
Major: Theology | *Minor:* History
Related Coursework: Christian Ethics, Greek and Hebrew, Communication Skills, English Composition, Macroeconomics, Psychology, Computer Literacy, and Nutrition.

MINISTERIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

West-Central Africa Division (WAD), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Director, Family Ministries & Possibility Ministries (2022-2025)

- Provided continental leadership and strategic direction for family and possibility ministries across 10 Unions.
- Initiated the *Back to the Altar* program, mobilizing all unions for family worship renewal (Jan 2023).
- Conducted leadership orientation and training for Union Directors in ENUC and WNUC (Jan-Feb 2023).
- Strengthened ministerial collaboration with SS/PM and Evangelism Departments in implementing the *40 Days of Prayer* and *Family Togetherness Week* initiatives.

Director, Stewardship Ministries (2016-2022)

- Championed transformational stewardship education across WAD fields.
- Developed training resources and workshops emphasizing faith-based financial management, integrity, and accountability.
- Supported evangelistic campaigns and mission funding strategies through stewardship revival programs.

Director, Family Ministries (2011-2015)

- Supervised division-wide family enrichment initiatives, marriage seminars, and pastoral family support programs.
- Coordinated certification training for family ministries leaders in collaboration with the General Conference.
- Enhanced awareness of holistic family well-being through seminars and media engagement.

West Africa Union Mission (WAUM), Monrovia, Liberia)

Director, Chaplaincy, Family Ministries & Spirit of Prophecy (2005-2010)

- Designed and implemented chaplaincy programs for Adventist institutions.
- Organized annual family conventions and marriage enrichment retreats.
- Promoted Ellen G. White literature distribution and study programs.
-

Director, Evangelism, Sabbath School, Stewardship, and Strategic Planning (2001-2005)

- Led evangelistic campaigns that resulted in substantial membership growth.
- Coordinated personal ministries programs and mission strategy planning for Union fields.
-

Country Director, ADRA Liberia (2009-2010)

- Managed humanitarian and community development projects.
- Strengthened ADRA's collaboration with church departments for integrated mission impact.
- Assistant ADRA board chair at WAD from 2015-2016

Earlier Ministry Appointments

- **Family Ministries & Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Director**, Liberia Mission (1997-2000)
- **Family Ministries & Personal Ministries Director**, North Ghana Mission (1994-1997)
-

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Leadership & Administration

- Proven ability to lead multicultural teams and manage diverse church programs.

- Strategic planner, mentor, and motivator with integrity and spiritual vision.
- Counseling couples for marriage, Young people for a better future

Teaching & Communication

- Dynamic preacher and teacher with expertise in conducting seminars and workshops.
- Excellent written and verbal English communication skills.
- Conducting public evangelism
- Leading members to become involved in church activities and helping them grow spiritually.

Spiritual Development

- Committed to personal and family devotions, daily Bible study, and intercessory prayer.
- Leads spiritual retreats and family worship renewal initiatives across the Division.

RESEARCH AND MINISTRY INTERESTS

- Urban Mission and Community Engagement
- Family Systems and Pastoral Counseling
- Disability Inclusion and Possibility Ministries
- Stewardship and Sustainable Ministry Models
- Members' Involvement in church ministry (Community Services)
- Members' spiritual growth through witness and faith growth
- Community outreach
-

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Marital Status: Married
Languages: English (fluent), French (working knowledge)
Nationality: Liberian
Number of Children: 3, 2 boys, one girl
Hobbies/Interests: Reading, mentoring young ministers, music, community outreach, and Evangelism