

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry  
Emphasis in Mission

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: SMALL GROUPS AS A STRATEGY FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN THE  
ADO-EKITI COMMUNITY EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Date completed: June 2016

### Problem

Over the years, hundreds of Ado-Ekiti indigenes have been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. In the church membership records; there are over 1000 baptized adults but it appears that they do not remain active in the church longer than three months. The question is why has it been difficult for Ado-Ekiti people to be retained in the SDA Church after they have been baptized? Could it be the problem of the approach, or mission strategy? The purpose of this dissertation was to develop and implement a small group ministry strategy to increase membership retention

### Method

This research employed methodology which involved five branches of data gathering: participant observation, interviews, case studies, focus group questions, and 24 well trained men and women small groups coordinators which served as key informants. Also, relevant

books, journals and selected unpublished works from the elders in council were also consulted. On the basis of these findings, an implementation strategy was developed using two week contextualized family centered small groups meetings (Outreaches). This pilot project was implemented in three SDA Churches in the Ado-Ekiti community and evaluation was carried out in these churches. At the end, the researcher employed the use of a SWOT analysis to present a clear overall reason for using small groups' strategy for membership retention.

### Results

A new strategy was developed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of retention using small groups. This was implemented, monitored, evaluated and further recommendations were given to the conference administration and the churches concerned. This strategy clearly enhanced the activities of small groups, and encouraged meaningful and reliable means of retention of members within Ado-Ekiti community.

### Conclusion

It was discovered that when effective, contextualized small groups programs were developed, relevant capacity building programs designed and implemented by giving regular training to the coordinators, local church leaders, and the entire churches are involved in soul winning using small groups strategy, retention of persons baptized into the church can be retained in the Ado-Ekiti community of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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**SMALL GROUPS AS A STRATEGY FOR MEMBERSHIP  
RETENTION IN THE ADO-EKITI COMMUNITY  
EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

A dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Christopher Osimhen Ogah

June 2016



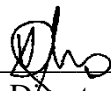
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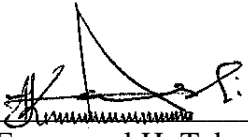
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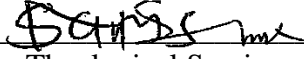
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Dedicated

to

my wife, Ruth Ilegbenose,

and my children, Joy, Joan and Jennifer

for their love, patience and tireless support.

Thanks to Ekiti Conference Administration and

the entire workers for their prayers and commitment to God's work.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of Study and the Description of the Ministry Context**

More than two thousand years ago a group of eleven disciples met Jesus at a mountain just before His ascension into heaven. There, Jesus delivered to them what has become known as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20). In obedience to that commission, within the first one hundred years of their existence those early disciples made new disciples from every nation then known to them.<sup>1</sup> Saturated with the joy of knowing and being part of the Lord's plan of salvation for every tribe, tongue and people, they overwhelmingly filled their hearts with the mission mandate (Matt 24:14, Acts 1:8). Though, they were met with series of challenges as they witnessed for the Lord, they, undoubtedly, rose above their immediate travails, knowing that He that sent them was able to lead them to a successful end.

Through their united efforts, coupled with unflinching passion to make Christ known from everywhere to everywhere, they saw the need to adopt a small group, need-based-oriented evangelistic program in enriching and retaining people for Christ and for the fellowship of His people. Sharing their understanding of the mission of Christ's disciples, Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg opined: "The goal of witnessing is not merely to tell people about Christ, that's just the process we use to reach the goal, which is to lead people to Christ

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<sup>1</sup>Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), 1.

and retain them.”<sup>2</sup> Today, it seems to the researcher that many of those who profess to be followers of Jesus give scanty attention to the mandate of this Great Commission. Churches exist without any real focus in ministry. Only a sporadic attempts at best are made to make a meaning in the lives of the community where churches are located.<sup>3</sup>

Providentially, the Seventh-day Adventist Church got to Ado-Ekiti in 1966, with a clear mission mandate to proclaim the unique message to the remotest parts of the city and to make disciples of the followers of Christ from Ado. Interestingly, the Adventist Church has continued its explosive growth in the other parts of the state; namely: Ayetoro, Ipoti, Ikun, Otun and Omuo, just to mention but a few. This has resulted to over eight thousand members in these communities with less population. On the other hand, indigenous members in Ado have continued to be on the decrease.<sup>4</sup>

However, learning and serving for 27 years in the field as a pastor, conference evangelist and currently in the office for the past five years as the Ekiti Conference Executive Secretary, the challenges of winning and retaining souls won for Christ has been a major concern. Could it be that the church has not done enough in meeting the felt needs of the people? Or that the past evangelistic programs did not consider the needs of the people enough, in planning a program in order to effectively reach and retain them? Could it be that their cultural setting, social and spiritual life are so challenging that they could not be retained in the church? Looking at this issue, Timothy C. Tennent has this suggestion:

That mission is ultimately not about what we do or feel but about who God is. He posits that our actions emerge only as we are enabled to enter into the feelings of others and are called to participate in His grand unfailing narrative of salvation. He

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<sup>2</sup>Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 183.

<sup>3</sup>Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ekiti Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Membership Record Book 2013 (Ekiti Sate, Nigeria: Ekiti Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013).

concludes by saying that this is why mission is defined as God's redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation, not minding one's situations.<sup>5</sup>

Ado-Ekiti is the capital city of Ekiti State, it also doubles as the headquarters of Ekiti Conference of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Many evangelistic efforts have been done in this city and hundreds of souls including indigenous members have been brought into the church through baptism, but to the surprise of all, majority of them do not remain in the church longer than three months.<sup>6</sup> In view of this fact, the researcher feels that there is a need for a new approach to evangelism that considers the feelings and needs of the people as they meet in small groups.

From the interviews conducted by the researcher, indications are that, Ado indigenes form about 40% of the membership in other Christian denominations,<sup>7</sup> whereas, they are less than one percent of the SDA membership.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in order to be relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century mission challenges and impact those whom the church seeks to bring to Christ, this dissertation is seeking for a new evangelistic strategy that will promote membership retention and make the church more people friendly.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the years, hundreds of Ado-Ekiti indigenes have been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the city today, there are over 1000 baptized adults. It is however worrisome that out of the over 1000 members, less than five members are indigenes of the

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<sup>5</sup>Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010) 105,106.

<sup>6</sup>Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Record Book Year* (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 1-4.

<sup>7</sup>Ogunsami, Funke HOD, Guidance and Counseling Department, interview by the author, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, 21 March 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Record Book Year* (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 1-4.

city. The question is why has it been difficult for Ado people to remain in the Adventist Church when they have been baptized? Could it be the problem of our approach, or mission strategy? Or, could it be that our evangelistic method has not been so relevant to the people? Have we considered how best we can make the Adventist message and the faith community not only relevant but also compelling? These are the challenging questions that this study seeks to find some answers to.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

It was the purpose of this in-ministry dissertation to develop and implement a small group ministry approach to increase membership retention.

### **Justification**

In spite of the clear evidences shown in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as the Master missionary to the world in winning every class of people to the kingdom of God, church leaders and members in Ado-Ekiti do not seem to learn from the pen of inspiration, as revealed in Ellen G. White's statement that: "Christ method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them 'follow me.'"<sup>9</sup>

It is hoped that if SDA Church members imbibed this strategy of regularly developing and implementing a small group community need-oriented program in Ado, there shall be a phenomenal increase in membership retention, not only in Ado-Ekiti, but wherever, such a strategy is implemented.

Besides, this project seeks to achieve these three main objectives:

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<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Ontario: Pacific Press, 1942), 143.

1. To find information that will help the SDA Church to appreciate the need to adopt a small group's evangelistic program that will enhance the retention of members.
2. To discover the limitations of a program that does not address the felt need of the people.
3. To harmonize the fact that salvation from Jesus is better appreciated and accepted if it is communicated in the language, and culture of the people, and if it meets the need of those the message was meant to save.

### **Delimitations**

The scope of this research will not go beyond Ado town of Ekiti Conference of SDA, especially, since not all communities in Ekiti Conference have this unique challenge of not retaining indigenous members. The researcher will also be limiting the test run of this family based small groups need-oriented program to three local SDA Churches in Ado town, where the need-based community outreach program will be implemented.

### **Methodology**

- A. Theological foundation for membership retention, from both the Old and New Testaments will be proposed. Along with it, the writings of Ellen G. White will be investigated to gain insights in the relationship between community need-oriented program and retention of church members.
- B. A study will be done on the writings of any SDA pioneer in Nigeria, in order to describe the place of felt needs in evangelism in the SDA Church's historical heritage. In addition, other Christian materials on membership retention will be researched.
- C. Based on the theological and theoretical research, the following will take place:
  1. A program on membership retention for SDA Church will be developed and presented to Ekiti conference of the SDA Church.

2. Three local SDA Churches at Ado will be chosen, and educated with the membership retention strategies that may be proposed.

D. Sample program of this outreach procedure

Part 1: Breaking the Ground (Pre-evangelism)

- Train 20 persons on tracts distribution in a target area
- 1000 copies of tracts on family relationships distributed to 60 families, a month before the program
- Specific visits to heads of families for prayers and formal acquaintances
- Interaction with family leaders concerning their basic challenges of live for a meaningful prayer focus
- Distribution of primary health care materials and other social needs items such as foodstuff and other related stuffs to the families.
- Following the distribution, there will be intentional visits again to the families to ascertain their responses
- There will also be grouping of the families into small group cells for meaningful interaction and informal bible studies

Part II: Two weeks outreach program

Following the initial preparation a two weeks of small group evangelism will be conducted.

The program will follow the sequence below:

- Day 1: God and family prayers
- Day 2: God and family needs identified

- Day 3: God and the head of the family
- Day 4: God and the mother of the family
- Day 5: God and the children in the family
- Day 6: God and the extended family relations
- Day 7: God and family togetherness
- Day 8: God and the immediate family community
- Day 9: God and the family's larger society
- Day 10: God and the family's law of health and happiness
- Day 11: God and the family at dinners (God in our eating habits)
- Day 12: God and the family's plan for progress (Tithes and Temperance)
- Day 13: God and His plans in our family wellness
- Day 14: God and family togetherness

### Part III Post Evangelism

- Intensify trainings for visitation and nurture through small group action units.
- Monthly community guest days for the families
- Monthly special days of prayers
- Organizing the families into action units for witnessing
- There will also be continuous evaluation, monitoring and training.

Apart from the above, there will also be:

- a. The implementation of the above strategy will be carried out in Odo Ado, Opopogbooro, and Oke-Ila local churches.
- b. The result of this strategy will be monitored before, during and after this outreach.
- c. The data will be gathered and analyzed for improvement.
- d. The result will be evaluated and presented to Ekiti conference for information.
- e. All steps of this membership retention strategy for evangelism will contribute to this project.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Small Groups:** A Small group is usually a quantity-number of people with a minimum of three and a maximum of twelve persons. In this study, a “Small group” is used interchangeably as “cell groups” to refer to a small number of people who have formed a bond and are directed towards fulfilling a purpose which is the retention of its members

**Strategy:** The process that determines how one will accomplish his or her set goals or objectives

**Retention:** This is the ability to keep, nurture, and sustained the souls won to the church

**Outreach and Meetings:** These words are used interchangeably in referring to the two weeks small groups program conducted during this research project.

**Membership:** The number of baptized persons in the SDA Church Record Book, Ado-Ekiti community.

### **Expectations**

The researcher feels that, when this dissertation project is completed, it will not only contribute to the body of knowledge, but it will also cause indigenous membership growth in the church at Ado-Ekiti in particular and the entire Ekiti Conference field. More so, the

leaders as well as church members shall be equipped with adequate information and training materials that will enhance meaningful evangelism and membership retention.

It will also serve as a practical guide for retention of members, providing a viable strategy for all SDA Churches in Ado-Ekiti, irrespective of size, geography and cultural differences. Besides, it will bring fulfillment to Ado members as the church takes to a new small groups approach in meeting the felt needs of the people which will lead to mutual relationship between the church and the community.

Above all, the researcher's life and ministry will be fulfilled seeing souls retained in God's church who will serve him based on personal convictions, mutual respects and the joy of oneness in the Lord without regard to differences in tribal feelings and social classes.

## CHAPTER 2

### SMALL GROUPS AS A MISSION STRATEGY: A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

In chapter one, it was expressed that the challenge of retaining members won into the church, after series of intensive, outreaches in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria has been a major concern to the researcher. In view of this, this chapter will be identifying some selected Bible passages to see how God used small groups strategy to enhance the church groups community, met their needs (both spiritual and material needs) and consequently retained them. The chapter will conclude with an attempt to understand Ellen White's view on using small groups for membership retention.

#### **The Old Testament**

Neal F. McBride states that the basis of today's small group ministries can be traced back to the Old Testament. He affirms that small groups begin with the very nature of God. In his opinion, Genesis 1:1 shows the biblical record with a simple yet profound statement that God (*Elohim*) is the Creator of all that exists.<sup>1</sup> He opines that the word *Elohim* is Plural showing more than one person. This word expresses the unity of three persons in the one God-the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This appears to be the origin of small groups.

Complementing this, Sampson M. Nwaomah, a professor of New Testament studies, posits

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<sup>1</sup>Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

that “the church has its root in the Old Testament (OT), but it blossomed in the New Testament.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Concept of Small Groups in the Old Testament**

McBride asserts further by saying the concept of groups is pictured clearly in the Old Testament record of God’s chosen people, the Israelites. He averred that the notion and practice of groupings was tightly woven into the fabric of their individual and corporate identities, from the entire nation down to the smallest family unit.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, the arrangement was structured as follows:

Nation- the Israelites were a chosen people. They were chosen not because they were large in number, but because they were few in number and God loved them (Deut.7:7-8) they formed a great family called the “the house of Israel”<sup>5</sup> (Exod.40:38). This family identity served as the model around which the nation was internally organized as indicated below:

Tribe- The house of Israel, by virtue of its decent from the twelve sons of Jacob, was divided into twelve subgroups or tribes (Gen. 49). These tribal subgroups were established clearly by the time the land of Canaan was divided among the Israelites according to their tribes and families (Josh. 13-22).

McBride concludes that these tribes were reduced further into groups of relatives known as clans or families which sum up to fifty-seven (small groups) families from Jacob’s generation<sup>6</sup> (Num. 26:21-49).

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<sup>3</sup>Sampson M. Nwaomah, *The Church in Lucan Narratives* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Positive Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>4</sup>McBride, 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## **Sabbath and Small Groups**

As the sun sank in the west on that first Friday evening, God announced the beginning of His Sabbath—the Seventh day (Gen 2: 1-3). At that time God set aside the seventh day as a sacred respite for humans to spend with Him and with each other. In Russell’s opinion, Adventists have spent much time talking about the “Seventh dayness” of the Sabbath, and rightly so, but seems to forget the essence, which is developing relationships in groups.<sup>7</sup> Russell shares that in the hectic schedule of modern life, we have had the tendency to emphasize the value of Sabbath rest as a respite from the mayhem of modern living. As a result we have talked much about “resting” on the Sabbath. Yet that was not the original function of the Sabbath, nor should it be the main focus of Sabbath rest today.<sup>8</sup> Adam and Eve had no need of rest. They had not even worked; their first day on the planet was the Sabbath. In giving the Sabbath as a gift to humankind, God refers to it as “My Sabbath” it is not a Sabbath to celebrate humankind’s rest. It is a celebration of God’s rest. Humankind are invited to enter into God’s rest by ceasing from their own works as God did from His on the Seventh-day. Why does God ask humans to enter His Sabbath rest? In order that they might spend time developing community with God and with one another. Little wonder then, that Reggie McNeal says God uses five basic elements namely culture, call, community, communion, conflict and commonplace to prepare His people for ministry which small groups enhances.<sup>9</sup> As they met regularly to pray, fellowship is developed, needs of one another were shared and consequently members were retained.

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<sup>7</sup>Russell, 96.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>9</sup>Reggie McNeal, *A Work of the Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 11.

Our God is a God of relationships. He is a God of community. It is necessary for God's people who emphasize the Sabbath, to talk about the function of the Sabbath as a time for humans and God to enter into relationship with one another.

This is why the Sabbath message is so necessary for today's world. Russell, states: The Sabbath was not just given to man because of the hectic pace of society that demands it, but that there must be a special day to emphasize community, where human needs and fellowship are achieved."<sup>10</sup>

On Sabbath God intends for humankind to come apart from all the broken communities that they function in throughout the week, in order that they might participate in a community that is being renewed through a relationship with God. Human tragedy occurs, many times, because real community is not being developed in the Churches on Sabbath. Many times people "Keep" the seventh day, but are totally divorced from building a relationship with God and with other Christians.<sup>11</sup> Thus, to keep the Sabbath alone is, in reality, not keeping the Sabbath at all, for the purpose of the Sabbath is to first develop a relationship with God in the setting of Community with other Christians.

As Karl Barth on the issue of Christian community states:

It is community born out of the "Sixth Day of creation and being beckoned into the "Sabbath Community" of God in the "Seventh Day." "The Goal of Creation, and at the same time the beginning of everything that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom. Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which (humanity) too has been summoned to participate in<sup>12</sup>

The God of relationships has created humankind not only to love in community with each other, but also to live in community with God. In addition, He has provided a special time, set aside from Eden, to build communities and to enter the joy of Sabbath rest, by

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<sup>10</sup>Russell, 97.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatic Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1959), 98.

taking time to develop the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with humankind. Only thus could the divine image be restored. Adventists, of all Christians, should be preaching and demonstrating the results of living in community on the seventh day which small groups encourages.

Such communities are not developed simply by being having a large group in church on Sabbath morning, listening to a preacher expound the word as worshipers examine the backs of each other's head. That is the antithesis of real community. Such an understanding of God and humans in community of Sabbath may indicate that a new way of "doing church" needs to be discovered, one far different from non-participatory model currently in use.

Since Sabbath morning worship is the primary activity for most Adventists members, it may mean creating an entirely new model of church programs that are people oriented. The Sabbath should be used for the purpose of building relationship with God in community with one another. All activities should be examined in light of this function. The apostle John succinctly states this to be the basic purpose for the church gathering: to have fellowship with God and one another (1 John 1:1-3). The word is preached, not for the sake of securing intellectual assent to certain dogmas, but for restoring community and fellowship with God and humankind. This is the essence of the creation story and the mission of Christ, according to John. As Russell says, "There can be no Church if community is not created."<sup>13</sup>

### **The Church as Small Groups in the Old Testament**

The church, as a small group in the Old Testament presents a high level community for the people, as a people called out by God, as seen in the life of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 12:1-3), Moses and Aaron (Exod. 3:10); they have unifying characteristics that bring them together. The members have a group consciousness, a collective perception of unity whereby

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<sup>13</sup>Russell, 98.

they identify with each other. They share a common purpose which may be either explicit or implicit, and demonstrate interdependence in satisfaction of needs. The members need to help one another to accomplish the purpose for which they joined the group. Attracted by the beauty that existed in community, Julie Gorman affirms “that God created humanity to live in community, as the triune God lives in perfect community.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Small Groups and Membership Care in Exodus**

Instead of the Pastor being the primary care giver in the church, the Pastor releases the role of care giving to the people, who care for each other. Such a system of caring for people does a better job than any pastor alone can do adequately (Exod. 18:17-26). The purpose of small groups is to empower one another for nurture and retention. Decentralization means giving away the priesthood. On this basis churches need to evaluate their small groups structure. Do they give away power or concentrate it? Genuine small groups that build community give away power rather than centralizing it in the pastor or another controlling person in the church.<sup>15</sup>

Leaders who give away the priesthood will have more time for their families. It was stress and long hours that caused Moses to accept those new leadership systems. Perhaps the high stress and long hours that most pastors experience today without necessary causing a positive evangelistic impact on the community, will make them to reevaluate how they do church and consider the possibility of developing a new style of ministry, one that gives away the priesthood, and concentrates on meeting the felt needs of the members. When pastors do this, they will empower their people to perform ministry to each other rather than being dependent upon the pastor to be the chief performer of ministry in the congregation.

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<sup>14</sup>Julie Gorman, *Community that is Christian: A Handbook on Small Group* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Russell, 99.

A system that gives away power demands a support structure for its members – Jethro provided such a system when he instructed Moses to create rulers of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. Though this may be seen as being administrative, the ultimate lesson here is, the smaller the groups, the better their felt needs are shared and met. There is no one who gets out of a community where his/her needs are taken care of.

As church members recognize that power is not centralized in one person, they will become more willing to help each other solve problems. “My problem then becomes the problem of the community, as we recognize that we are all in this together, then, the hosting community of the church will also be positively affected.”

In the Jethro model Moses went from being the one who passed judgment to being one who oversaw the judgment of others. As churches adopt the Jethro model of leadership, the pastor will no longer be the chief care giver and decision maker in the church. Instead, leadership will be shared among the people and all the people of God will be empowered for ministry. The church indeed should become a priesthood of all believes.

The Jethro model had a lasting effect on Israel throughout the period of the judges and later had implications in the establishment of Jewish synagogues, which could be established with ten people. Inherent in the call of God to the nation of Israel is the idea of sharing among the people. Israel’s apostasy occurred when they copied the nations around them and, contrary to God’s purpose, developed the office of king to rule over them. We see the patience of God as He allowed Israel to develop kingship, which was totally contrary to His design. Sometimes God allows us to learn the hard way by permitting the mistakes that hierarchical leadership creates.

The Old Testament has shown the idea of community as inherent in the creation of humanity and amply demonstrated in the history of Israel. God’s plan for His people is community and decentralization of power from the hands of the few to the hands of the

many. As we examine the New Testament later in this chapter, we will observe God at work seeking to establish the New Testament church on this Old Testament foundation of community, inherent in creation.

### **God's Methods of Meeting Needs of Special Groups**

God, who does not neglect even the most seemingly unrecognized groups, admonishes the Israelites in this words: "At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithes of thine increase the same year, and thou shalt lay it up within thy gates" (Deut.14:27-29) This was to meet the needs of the less privileged ones in the household of Israel.

These special groups include: the widows, the fatherless, the Levites, the strangers and the needy.

According to Keil, K F, there is a strong foundation in the Scriptures towards meeting the needs of the groups listed above:

Every third year, on the other hand, they were to separate the whole of the tithe from the year's produce ("bring forth," sc., from the granary), and leaven it in their gates (i.e., their towns), and feed the Levites, the strangers, and the widows and orphans with it. They were not to take it to the sanctuary, therefore; but according to Deut 26:12, after bringing it out, were to make confession to the Lord of what they had done, and pray for His blessing. "At the end of the three years: "i.e., when the third year, namely the civil year, which closed with the harvest (see at Ex.23:16), had come to an end. This regulation as to the time was founded upon the observance of the sabbatical year, as we see from Deut.15:1, where the seventh year is no other than the sabbatical year. Twice, therefore, within the period of a sabbatical year, namely in the third and sixth years, the tithe set apart for a sacrificial meal was not to be eaten at the sanctuary, but to be used in the different towns of the land in providing festal meal for those who had no possessions, viz., the Levites, strangers, widows, and orphans. Consequently, this tithe cannot properly be called the "third tithe", as it is by many of the Rabbins, but rather the "poor tithe", as it was simply in the way of applying it that it differed from the "second." As an encouragement to carry out these instructions, Moses closes in v. 29 with an allusion to the divine blessing which could follow their observance.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzch, *Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament 1 (Electronic Database Copyright © 2006 BibleSoft, Inc).

This practice of meeting the needs of the people, thereby helping them to remain happily fulfilled in their groups was reported clearly in the book of Acts and other New Testament epistles as would be observed later in this chapter. Meanwhile, how did Jesus relate with small groups?

### **The New Testament**

While the Old Testament presents a theology of community as inherent in the Godhead, the New Testament gives us a better picture of how such community could be worked out practically in the day to day life of the church. As the New Testament era dawned, the church as a community had again been lost sight of in the power struggles of the Pharisees and others who were more concerned with power than with the development of community. How did Jesus respond to this seeming challenge?

#### **Small Groups in the Ministry of Jesus**

To this setting Jesus appeared, and He built a movement based squarely on small groups community and diffused leadership with an empowered people. While speaking to vast crowds occasionally, Jesus spent most of His life into a small band of twelve people. Yet Jesus with these small groups changed the world forever. Most churches now concentrate on dispensing their livelihood to the multitudes and then wonder why they do not seem to make a major impact on the world around them.

Having initially been organized as a small group, it should not be surprising that Jesus' disciples established a small group church that is basically house based.<sup>17</sup> This was the model which they inherited from Jesus. They unabashedly followed that model. Jesus

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<sup>17</sup>Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995), 16.

revealed that the way to reach the masses was through small groups that were experiencing genuine community.<sup>18</sup>

The band of twelve was Jesus' chief organization for carrying out the Great Commission. He gave no elaborate schemes, no great organizational charts; He simply organized and trained a small group. And He changed the world. He was not concerned with building great institutions; He was concerned with building people. Building relationships was the essence of the kingdom Jesus announced.

Because of Jesus' involvement with a small group and His example of employing most of His ministry in the development of that group, it seems imperative that churches today be involved in small groups ministry. In this way they pattern their ministry after Jesus. It is unthinkable that a church built on a scriptural base could exist without a small group ministry; when small groups are the essence of Jesus' ministerial style.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus did not simply select the Twelve and develop them so that they could individually perform ministry, most of His time was spent in attempting to develop community among them. They did not trust each other at the beginning. They were not open and vulnerable with each other, but instead were very judgmental. Jesus had to change all that if they were going to represent the new community that He was creating – the new Israel.<sup>20</sup>

To emphasize the community that He desired to create, Jesus used family words to describe the relationship they were to have with each other. They were to call each other “brother” and “sister”. One of Jesus' most misunderstood statements was His redefinition of family (Matt.12:46-50).

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<sup>18</sup>John Mallison, *Growing Christians in Small Groups* (Sydney, Australia: Anzea, 1989), 3.

<sup>19</sup>McBride, 15.

<sup>20</sup>Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 1994), 207.

Jesus' new community transcended the natural family. People who are drawn to Him are to be part of His new family. The fact that Jesus used family terms to describe the relationship which believers were to have to each other and to Him is an indication that relationships were at the very heart of these new communities. Jesus attempted to establish a new community—the restored Eden – where relationships are more important than hierarchical structure. Thus, in order to save humanity Jesus created community. The bonds that are to exist in the Christian Community are to be as close as the bonds that exist in the natural family.

In the many instances when Jesus counseled His original disciples, He referred to them as his servants, thereby implying that they should continue their ministry in the pattern that He had taught them. As Kruse has observed, “they must be prepared for lowly service to mentor one another.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Small Groups as a Means of Service and Care**

Jesus did not model a ministry that lorded it over other people; instead, He taught a ministry of oneness, whereby His followers ministered, to one another without exercising the least hint of power, class, or control. Since Jesus is the founder of Christianity, it would seem logical the plan for member care should be modeled after the one who demonstrated the establishment of community as the primary focus of His ministry. His disciples then were to go forth and create communities of mutual care and servant leadership, without the hierarchal structures so apparent in the religions of His day.

As Jesus ministered within this new community which He was developing, He taught the people how to relate to one another. They were not to live in a vacuum. Jesus also sent

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<sup>21</sup>Kruse, 50.

them out to minister to others, because part of being in community is to minister to those outside of the community.

However, Jesus did not send anyone out to minister alone. He sent them forth in pairs, two by two, for only community can create other communities. Perhaps it is our refusal to follow Jesus' "two by two" rule that has produced so many individualistic Christians. When people are won to Christ one on one, they fail to develop into community. The fact that Jesus always ministered in a groups and always sent forth His disciples in groups of at least two should cause us to question seriously our method of laboring solo.

Some may wonder how we can afford to pay the wages for two to work together. However, perhaps we should realize that we cannot afford to pay for the failure of the one who does labor out of a community setting. Furthermore, it may be that we will need to think of a new kind of paid employee who labors in a community setting rather than the usual individualistic setting. This may mean a restructuring of the role of clergy as we move back into an apostolic paradigm.

Jesus declared that He would be with us specifically as we gathered in twos and threes.<sup>22</sup> Jesus would manifest himself in this community gathered in His name. When Jesus thought of churches as the *ecclesia* or gathered community, He had the small groups in mind. Today we use this text in an apologetic fashion when attendance is sparse. Jesus proclaimed these words to help us understand that the small groups is the very essence of church.

We cannot have a church without the small groups as the special place where Jesus dwells among His people. It seems to the researcher that Jesus is saying:

The word "church" (*Ecclesia*, v.17) and assembly (v.20) are contextually identified with the promise that "whenever two or three are gathered" Jesus will be present with them in their gathering. Such a small group gathering has exceptional influence, power and accountability. Jesus' response to the disciples in this context suggested

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<sup>22</sup>Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston, TX: Touch, 1977), 61; See also Icenogle, 233.

that there was not one who was greatest, but that “whenever two or three are gathered” – whenever there is a small group gathered in childlikeness, agreement, forgiveness, reclamation and reconciliation – Jesus in their midst would bring greatness to them together (Matt.18:19-20).<sup>23</sup>

Jesus seems to be saying that the small group is church, not a part of the church, but the essence of church. It is this gathered community of the Twelve that becomes the church. In the modern church we look at small groups as just another program to be added. Jesus, however, envisioned the small caring groups as the church in total. The model of church which He created was not one of large supper churches, but of small groups who live in open and honest community with one another.

At the heart of Jesus’ small group ministry is the idea of community. The small group does not exist for the sake of a small group. It is merely the vehicle for the establishment of community. Jesus recognized that the small group is the best means for the accomplishment of that goal. Throughout His ministry Jesus was concerned that community be developed among His followers. This seems to be one of the most important tasks that Jesus attempted to accomplish.

Jesus’ concern for community stems out of his relationship to the Godhead and the restoration of the image of God in humanity. If the process of redemption involves the complete restoration of humanity to the image of God, then it is imperative that community be established in the church that Christ is building on earth. Jesus’ understanding of “Church” is in direct contrast to the present individualistic understanding of church. The person who says he can worship God on his own, without the church, misses the essence of Jesus understanding of church as community.<sup>24</sup> There is no place for monasticism, or serving God in isolation in Jesus’ understanding of community. To Jesus the essence of church was

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<sup>23</sup>Russell, 103.

<sup>24</sup>Icenogle, 227.

involvement in community, and He could not envision church in our present individualistic understanding.

Evidently, involvement in community is not an option for the Christian, it is Christianity. Adventists have been great exponents of the priesthood of all believers. It is not just part of their reformation heritage; it is their New Testament right. The church has clearly understood the priesthood to indicate each Christian's ability to go directly to God without any mediator except Christ. However, there is another part to being a priest that Adventists must never forget: people cannot be priests apart from the community they serve. There is no such thing as a people being priests all by themselves. To be a priest means to be in community. Since a priest is to serve others in the community, and since all believes in the community are priests, then the priesthood of all believers as a call for all Christians to minister to one another. It is in this sense that the "one another" passages in the New Testament become very meaningful for they describe the ministry of the priest, a ministry of mutual care. That kind of care can only be provided in a community.

In this understanding of the new priesthood which Jesus established and the small groups that became the *ecclesia* of the New Testament, Jesus has established a new model of church. It is a model that teaches believers to depend on one another instead of on themselves. This model is fully developed in the house churches described in Acts. Jesus appears to be one of the greatest exponents of small groups even though never commands the church to have small groups. However, throughout His ministry He demonstrated the development of small groups community as a primary objective.<sup>25</sup> Thus the Christian community is a place where we can start to practice the Christian life together. It needs to be

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<sup>25</sup>Icenogle, 258.

a place where we can succeed and fail in an atmosphere of acceptance and adherence to God's law.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of this aforementioned statement, one could infer that it is God's plan and Jesus desire that Christians grow in small groups. The purpose of small groups is not just meetings to study the Bible. The purpose of groups is for Christians to have a place where they could grow together. If intellectual knowledge alone is being attained then the small group is a failure, because its purpose is spiritual growth, not intellectual attainment.

In the pursuit of small groups in Adventism, concern has been expressed about relational groups. "Small groups are all right as long as they stick to Bible study," is what many have said. It seems that Adventists are afraid of developing deep relationships with one another in community. Yet this is the very essence of what small groups are meant to do, thus Jesus may be saying groups that opt only for intellectual pursuits of Bible study are, in a certain sense, dysfunctional.

The very purpose of groups, for Jesus, was the development of relationships. We need to be in a group in order to hold each other accountable for our life in Christ, to truly care for one another, and to adequately witness for Christ. All of this requires relational groups. This is the heart of Christianity and it should be the desire of all Adventist Christians if we would retain the members won for Christ. A relational church is one of the greatest needs in a world that is starving for relationships. Likewise, the development of a relational church is one of the greatest needs of the church today.

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<sup>26</sup>Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 73-74.

## **The Small Groups Churches in the Book of Acts as a Basis for Member Care**

Jesus had modeled to His disciples a church that was relational, living together in community as it restored the brokenness of humanity. Out of the new family community, evangelism was to occur. With the explosion of Holy Spirit power at Pentecost the church grew in numbers as well as in spirituality. What was this new community of believers like? Was it just a large group of people who met together every Sabbath to worship God? Those who had received his word were baptized; and these were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostolic teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:41-42 NASB). This is the earliest description of life in the apostolic church. As soon as people were baptized, they were immediately involved in four things: study, fellowship, food, and prayer. Not only were they involved, but scripture declares that they were devoted to these four things. The four are unquestionable group activities. Since they all require a smaller group setting. As Jeffrey Arnold argued, it is probably safe to assume that the other all of the: teaching, fellowship, eating and prayer occurred in a small group setting.<sup>27</sup> This is further reinforced by the passages that follow:

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as any might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (Acts 2:44-46 NASB).

Here we discovered that the sharing of food was done in homes, which implies that this meeting together was not all in one place, but in many homes, although the groups also met together regularly at the temple. However, it seems that meetings were primarily in the homes. Evidently the three thousand were immediately divided into small groups where they

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<sup>27</sup>Arnold, 75.

were nurtured and nourished by the hundred and twenty. It would have been impossible to be a Christian in the early church and not be a part of a small house group. In the small group setting the early church did Bible study with few people present, it was not one-way conversation, but dialogue, where the believers could ask questions. While, no doubt, didactic teaching occurred, it was in a strong small group setting.

The second aspect of life in the early church was fellowship. The form of the fellowship is not spelled out in scripture, but the results are clear. Acts declares that immediately they shared everything in common and provided for one another. There was a totally open society. The “secrecy” of fallen Eden had been removed, and the believers could openly share their doubts, their fears, their struggles and their problems. There was true care for one another.

The third aspect of life in the early church was that they ate together. One of the best ways for groups to bond is to eat together. It goes hand in hand with fellowship. This breaking of bread was done in the homes. It was not a large meeting with a symbolic breaking of bread, but real fellowship with shared food.

The fourth and final aspect of life in the early church is described as prayer time. Praying together builds strong community and spirituality. As people openly share their prayer needs with each other, the group becomes closely cemented. The New Testament church of the book of Acts is not a church with small groups, but a church that is small groups. Real fellowship-*koino-nia*-was occurring among the disciples: But *koinonia* expresses something new and independent. It denotes the unanimity and unity brought about by the spirit. The individual was completely upheld by the community.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Icenogle, 257.

This was real fellowship. Community had been restored. The brokenness of the fall had been restored. Jesus' mission to heal that which was broken, to free that which was bound had been accomplished in the newly created church.<sup>29</sup>

A balance existed among instruction, fellowship common activities (meals) and spiritual responsibilities (prayer). The atmosphere was charged. A sense of awe, unity, and praise prevailed. People looked out for one another. They sold their property and possessions sharing the proceeds with those in need. This dynamic situation brought the approval of all people. Spiritual and numerical growth was evident. God was at work in their midst (Luke 4:18).

Some may have entertained the idea that the early church met in homes because of the persecution that was occurring. However, in the earliest days Christianity was regarded as a sect of Judaism and therefore was not outlawed. That occurred later. It is true that Christians were persecuted by Jews, but there seems to have been nothing secret about the meetings of the believers. Three thousand people meeting daily in homes in one city would be well known. They could have easily found a place where larger groups could meet together. There were other options than home meetings, but the early church chose to meet in homes because homes limited the size of the group. Well-to-do homes in that era could accommodate thirty to thirty-five people.<sup>30</sup> Many homes would have been much smaller, housing only groups of ten or fifteen. To accommodate three thousand, many such homes would be needed. Such innumerable meeting places could very quickly give the impression that Christians were everywhere.

Why did Christians choose to meet in homes? Because Jesus had modeled that kind of community setting and they simply followed His example. As Banks has observed, the family character of the early church called for meetings to be held in homes because homes provided

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<sup>29</sup>J. Schattenmann, "Fellowship," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 642.

<sup>30</sup>McBride, 19.

these early Christian with the most conducive atmosphere to give expression to the faith that they held in common.<sup>31</sup>

Small home gatherings continued to be the practice of the early church as it was established throughout the Roman Empire. The home continued to be the primary meeting place of the early church. The very nature of the meeting place forced the church to stay small and multiply new groups as it grew rather than to centralize;

Whether house churches were independent groups of believers or were part of larger churches is uncertain. It is likely, however, that small house fellowships were the building blocks of the church in each city or region. The early disciples met in groups small enough to fit into normal homes (for instance, Pricilla and Aquila were tentmakers and probably not wealthy – Acts 18:3).<sup>32</sup>

This small group setting for the church continued for nearly three hundred years, until the church was institutionalized at the time of Constantine.<sup>33</sup> The amazing thing is that the church was able to multiply and grow most rapidly without a lot of buildings institutions, and even mass meetings. The church centered in community was the norm for Christians of the first three hundred years.

Another factor that must be considered is that these house churches became the center of all Christian activity. As the church spread beyond Jerusalem, the early leaders would start a church, train the elders to care for it, and then leave. The house churches had to provide their own care. Pastors were not imposed from outside. An institutionalized church with large numbers meeting in one place could not have provided the necessary nurture. It had to be decentralized, and the home small group meeting was ideal. This church could truly reflect the community of Christ without tying up the resources of the church in maintaining a spiritually healthy congregation. Clergy were free to continue planting new groups of

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<sup>31</sup>Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 35.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>33</sup>Arnold, 18.

believers all over the world, training them in the small group setting to be communities of faith which administered mutual care.

### **Paul's Understanding of Providing Member Care through Small Groups**

The apostle Paul planted most of the churches mentioned in the book of Acts. He continued to plant them on the Pentecostal model of house churches, existing for the sake of fellowship. Paul could have established institutional churches patterned after the Jewish synagogue model, but he deliberately chose, instead, to plant house churches based on community. That was what Jesus had taught them, and they simply obeyed Him.

Paul began his missionary journey in community with other disciples, in obedience to Christ's instruction to go two by two. Sometimes it was Paul, Barnabas, and Mark; at other times he was accompanied by Silas. Paul and his company did not seek merely to disciple individuals, but also to reach the *oikos* of those he evangelized.<sup>34</sup> The early church practiced team ministry. There were no solo workers in the first century church because evangelism was done in community.

Thus Paul established churches that were designed to be communities. They were not mighty fortresses or large cathedrals. They were small house churches where individuals could enter into real community with other Christians. This was no accident. It was deliberate strategy of Paul in obedience to the model of Christ (Acts 16:15, 31-33).

Paul's most definite statement on community are the parallel passages of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, where he discusses spiritual gifts in the setting of the unity community: For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually embers one of another (Rom. 12:4-5 NASB)

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<sup>34</sup>McBride, 19.

Here Paul emphatically declares that all Christians are members of one body; they exist in community with each other. All may function differently according to their gifts, but they are mutually dependent. There is no room here for isolationist Christians. To be a Christian, according to Paul, is to be in community with other Christians. Paul's concern is not mere membership, but that believers be brought into mutual dependence upon others in the community. If Paul is correct, then individuals who are members of churches but who are not living in community with other Christians, mutually dependent on each other, are not really Christians in the New Testament sense.

To Paul, to be a Christian is to be a member of a group that provides care for each other. Any group that is not this kind of mutually caring community is not Christ's Church, no matter what its claims to truth may be. This is the heart of Paul's understanding of community:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, give preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind indulgence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind, toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your estimation, never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men, if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (Rom. 12:9-18 NASB).

### **Small Groups and Membership Care**

In church organization in the New Testament era, the pastor was not to be primary care giver. Instead, a theology of community was developed where the basis of member care was the mutual care of one another. The early church did not neglect nurture of member care; they provided the real thing. New Christians, as well as older Christians, need nurture and care on a regular basis. The issue was not over whether this should happen, but how it should occur.

The New Testament is clear that the responsibility of providing the care needed by members does not belong to the clergy, but the responsibility of all Christians. This obligation is inherent in the call to be a Christian and is never given to any select group of people, thereby leaving others in the church free from responsibility of providing care.

All New Testament passages dealing with the care of existing Christians are directed to all Christians, and not to clergy. Most of these are the “one another” passages. In the Old Testament the term is never used to refer to the ministry of mutual care, but in the New Testament the phrase is used extensively and exclusively to refer to people caring for one another as Russell states:

These are the phrases that are used to designate member care. Each one is addressed to all Christians. Christians were to confess their faults to one another. They were to forbear and to forgive one another. They were to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another. Members were not to provoke, judge, or envy one another. They were not to bite or devour or speak evil of one another.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the texts speak of the positive things members were to do for each other, such as loving one another (Eph. 4; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32; Gal. 5:26; Rom. 14:13; Gal. 5:15; Acts 4:11), being kindly affectionate for one another, and in honor prefer one another. They were to show compassion for and have peace with one another. They were to comfort, edify, and exhort one another (Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9).

Some of the “one another” passages speak of the bond that members were to have toward each other. They were members one of another. Each member had the same care one for another. Members were to submit to each other, admonish one another. Consider one another, bear one another’s burden, be subject to one another, and have fellowship with one another. To further demonstrate their subjection to one another as servants or ministers, they were to follow the practice of Jesus in washing one another’s feet (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25).

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<sup>35</sup> Russell, 100.

Finally, as a further demonstration that ministry belonged to all the people of God, the early believers were commissioned to teach and admonish one another (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25; 1 Cor.12:25; Eph. 5:21; Rom. 15:14; Heb. 10:24; Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12). These “one another passages indicate clearly that the ministry of care belongs to all the people of God. If these biblical passages were stated to clergy, one would conclude that the clergy are primary care givers. However, the New Testament does not suggest that these acts are the exclusive domain of clergy. Instead, it indicates that care giving is the responsibility of the entire church of God both clergy and laity.

### **Small Groups and Mutual Fellowship**

A caring community where members minister to each other is itself an evangelistic tool. Non-Christians seeing people who are living in a restored community truly caring for each other, will flock to be a part of it. Such loving, caring communities are a drawing card for evangelism (1 John 1:1-4). People will beat a pathway to the door of churches that live in New Testament community. That may have been one of the reasons for the success of the early church. People today live in such broken communities that they will be eager to belong to a genuine, redemptive community. The tragedy of the church today is that it is more reflective of the broken communities of the world than of the restored communities that Christ envisioned for His Church.

As the church once again begins to live in community, it will become an evangelistic agency. One cannot live in a genuine New Testament community and not be evangelistic. Small groups that only nurture themselves and fail to reach out to others will die. Only community can produce community.<sup>36</sup> R. W. Neighbors, shares his experience on while Navel-gazing groups are dysfunctional in the following words: The theological flaw is that

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<sup>36</sup>Icenogle, 233.

these Christians meet together alone, and then go to witness alone. How wonderful it would be if they included each other in the relationships they establish with unbelievers, and included unbelievers in their groups' life as well.<sup>37</sup>

The New Testament model indicates that disciples are best made in relationship with other disciples, which there by indicates that ideally all new believes should be made a part of a small group and all small groups should consist of both believers and unbelievers. Involvement in the small groups must be seen as a part of the evangelistic process. No longer should we evangelize in isolation, for disciples are made in relationships.<sup>38</sup> Ellen writes: Groups that focus only on nurture produce religious weaklings.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Writing of Ellen G. White and Small Groups**

While the early Adventist meeting was not always a small group, the dynamics of the meeting itself had all the elements of what most people today define as a small group. A careful study of this statement by her seems to suggest this opinion as she says: of equal importance with special public efforts is house to house work in the homes of the people. In large cities there are certain classes that cannot be reached by public meetings. These must be searched out as the Shepherd searches for the lost sheep. Diligent personal effort must be put forth in their behalf. When personal work is neglected, many precious opportunities are lost, which, were they improved, would advance the work decidedly.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Neighbour, 61.

<sup>38</sup>Arnold, 21.

<sup>39</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:18.

<sup>40</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:111.

Modern small groups may well be one of the best avenues to a recovery of the relational element in modern-day Adventism. Ellen White's counsel on the social meetings is extensive. Likewise, she spoke fairly often of small groups. That term not being in popular usage in her day, White rarely used it. She did, however, talk about the concept, and she referred to these small groups instead as "small companies." The meaning of the two terms is identical. Her most emphatic statement on small companies is this defining word from God:

The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by one who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, and gaining courage and strength from the assistance of patience, speaking no hasty words, using the talent of speech to build one another up in the most holy faith. Let them labor in Christ-like love for those outside the fold, forgetting self in their endeavor to help others. As they work and pray in Christ name, their numbers will increase; for the Savior says: "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven." Mathew 18:19.<sup>41</sup>

Having read some of her latest books on small groups, the researcher has been unable to find a better definition of small groups than this one by Ellen White. She declared unequivocally that the idea of dividing the church into small companies was given to her by one who could not err. That, for Seventh-day Adventists, is a divine authentication of small groups. Nothing could be clearer than the endorsement which Ellen White gives to small groups and indicated that they should concern themselves with evangelism, prayer, Bible study, mutual encouragement and care, and that above all they should build community.

She continues, by saying when a church is built on small groups' ministry, it no longer needs a clergy person to be in control. As members are for themselves, the clergy are free to reach new people and rise up new churches. The small group provides basis for ongoing nurture and care which is far superior to clergy care:

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<sup>41</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 7:21, 22.

God's work is to be done in his way and his spirit.

In various places small companies are to consecrate themselves to God, body, soul, and spirit, and laying hold of the throne of God by faith they are to work zealously, keeping their souls in the love of God. The vital current of his love will make itself felt, and will be recognized as from heaven in the good works of his people. Those little companies who know the truth, with one voice should bid their minister go to lost sheep of the house Israel. Each one should seek to do individual work for another. Not one who has tasted the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God, can be excused from working for the souls of others.<sup>42</sup>

The counsel to form the church into small groups was repeated in many of the books and articles written by Ellen White, which reveals that this was not a passing thought with her, but a major concern. Each of these references repeats the thought that this idea was given to her by "one who could not err."<sup>43</sup>

Ellen White also spoke favorably of the practice in larger meetings of breaking the congregation into various small groups for prayers and mutual encouragement. She did not discourage large meetings. She enjoyed them, but she felt that something was missing if the small groups' element was not included.<sup>44</sup> In her opinion, she foresaw the day when, because of persecution, the large church would no longer exist, and the only way that the church would be able to survive would be in small groups.<sup>45</sup> Christian history has proven that to be true in the past, and has even held true in the present, as it was discovered how the church survived communism. The only way was through the small group house church.

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<sup>42</sup>Ellen G. White, "Followers of Christ Will be Missionaries," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 8, 1895.

<sup>43</sup>Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 72, idem, *Evangelism* 115; idem, *Welfare Ministry*, 107; see also, idem, *Australasian Union Conference Record*, August 15, 1902; idem, *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 9, 1902; idem, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 12, 1902.

<sup>44</sup>Ellen G. White, "Sanctification," *Signs of the Times*, October 23, 1879.

<sup>45</sup>Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol., 17, 350.

Some of Ellen White's strongest statements on small groups relate to their use as a basis for evangelism. She did not advocate "solo" evangelism, but, as in the New Testament times, evangelism was to be accomplished out of a community base.

Therefore it is not surprising that she talked so much about small companies as a basis for evangelistic work as stated below:

In New York there should be several small companies established, and workers should be sent out. It does not follow that because a man is not ordained as a preacher he cannot work for God. Let such ones as these be taught how to work, then let them go out to labour. On returning, let them tell what they have done. Let them praise the Lord for His blessing, and then go out again. Encourage them. A few words of encouragement will be an inspiration to them.<sup>46</sup>

Note that White advocates small groups especially for large city work. The workers, whom she considers to be lay people as well as clergy, are to form small groups as the base from which they work. When they come back from their labor they are to report to the community (small group) that sent them out. She saw small groups as an excellent way to make certain that people did not become burned out in ministry, but instead received the support needed to sustain them. The small group itself was to be a ministering unit:

Christ sought the people where they were and placed before them the great truths in regard to His kingdom. As he went from place to place, He blessed and comforted the suffering and healed the sick. This is our work. Small companies are to go forth to do the work to which Christ appointed His disciples. While laboring as evangelist they can visit the sick, praying with them and if need be, treating them, not with medicines but with the remedies provided in nature.<sup>47</sup> Places that are unworked might have been entered, and souls might have been reached by the truth, small companies of workers under the wise generalship of consecrated teachers, should be going forth into needy fields. Wherever this work is taken up in earnest, careful movements will need to be made.<sup>48</sup>

Ellen White had a very balanced view of small groups, as seen in the earlier definition. Hers was a very comprehensive understanding of groups. It included not only

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<sup>46</sup>Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol., 17, 350.

<sup>47</sup>Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1951), 389.

<sup>48</sup>Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1951), 501.

evangelism, but also meetings for Bible study and prayer. Like the New Testament Church, Ellen White saw that real church exists in community, with Bible study and prayer being conducted in small groups. She said; Let small companies assemble in the evening, at noon or in the early morning to study the Bible. Let them have a season of prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

In a chapter entitled “Social Meetings,” White clearly defines the purpose of these meetings as a place to share thoughts and feelings:

What is the object of assembling together? Is it to inform God, to instruct Him by telling Him all we know in prayer? We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another’s hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the source of our strength, these meetings should be most precious seasons and should be made interesting to all who have any relish for religious things.<sup>50</sup>

Every indication from the writings of Ellen White suggests that the purpose of social meetings was to deal with the relational area of people’s lives. She saw this meeting as essential for the life and health of the church. They were the means by which early Adventist maintained their faith. They did not have the “disadvantage” of listening to a preacher every Sabbath; therefore, they were forced to develop their own communal Spiritual life, apart from clergy interference. The result was a very spiritually healthy church.

In prophetic vision White saw a great revival taking place at the end of time in God’s church. When that revival occurs the church will once again assemble in small groups to seek God as expressed thus:

In the church there was a revival of the missionary spirit. An earnest desire to learn how to work for the Lord was shown. Small companies gathered for prayer and Bible study. All moved forward with harmonious action. Believers went to places where the people have no opportunity to hear the word of God and gathered the children for Sabbath School. Efforts were made to help isolated families. Plans were laid for their

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<sup>49</sup>Ellen G White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 21, 175.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

families to meet with other families for Bible study. This way was opened for the light to shine forth from the word of God.<sup>51</sup>

It seems therefore to the researcher that White has given the Adventist Church endorsement of small relational groups meeting together for prayer, Bible Study, testimonies, mutual encouragement, and care.

### **Summary**

This examination of the old and New Testament appears to have clearly revealed God's ideal of building community among believers. People in the New Testament era took Jesus seriously and created a church organization that would foster community that was meeting the needs of the people. What God envisioned in the creation was most perfectly developed in the early church: a community where people truly cared for one another. The small house church of the New Testament era seems to be the basis for this ministry of mutual care.

It might be safe to think that the ministry of the laity is clearly a New Testament concept. It does not appear to be as clear in the Old Testament, as it is in the New Testament. The reason for this change was to keep the clergy from being tied down, baby-sitting weak Christians, and to free them to create new Christians. The churches they established would be healthy as members cared for one another, and thus mutual care would be the attraction to non-members. In the same sense, the care of Christians for one another is a part of the evangelizing strategy of the New Testament church. No wonder, new members were added to the church on a daily basis. With this strategy, membership retention was no issue because their needs were provided both spiritually and materially.

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<sup>51</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 2:578.

## CHAPTER 3

### SMALL GROUP AS A STRATEGY FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The survey of the Old and New Testament as seen in chapter two of this paper appears to have clearly shown the theological foundation of small groups' strategy used by leaders in the Bible to achieve meeting the needs of the members in order to retain them.

This Chapter would be focusing on what other scholars are saying concerning this idea. The researcher would be researching into some contemporary literatures available in sourcing information. These will include some protestant, non-Christian, some Africa traditional writings in other to have a broader understanding of this project.

However, this chapter, certainly is not meant to do an exhaustive review of all the contemporary writings, but would sufficiently examine the related ones in order to have the right focus. This research would begin from the contemporary development of small groups' formation in reaching and retaining members. It would also attempt to show as much as possible how the structure of Seventh-day Adventist Church organization encourages small groups' method of witnessing and retention.

Furthermore, this chapter would briefly highlight the effect of using small groups approach in the three major languages in Nigeria to share information for fellowship and for nurture. It would conclude by revealing how to build ethical small groups as leaders as well as indicating various methods of using small groups' strategy in addressing ethical challenges of diversities in the church.

## **Contemporary Development of Small Groups**

At the close of the twentieth century there were significant numbers of excellent books about small groups ministry, these are variously called, cell groups, home groups, growth groups, or the many other names by which this phenomena appears.

Mikel Neumann, states that 40 percent of Americans participate in a small groups. He opines that the mega-churches of Asia, Latin America, Africa, and increasingly in Europe and North America are based on small group model.<sup>1</sup>

While small groups are seen as enhancing church growth, R. Wuthnow says that they are more of the result of a healthy church than the cause of it.<sup>2</sup> Recent research in churches on five continents confirms that: small groups often are introduced in a growing church to meet the needs of that growth. It is also observed that introducing small groups into a stagnant church often have little or no effects.<sup>3</sup>

## **Purpose and Definitions of Small Groups**

A variety of names has sprouted many definitions. One of such definitions might be the following: A small group consists of five to fifteen people meeting together regularly to fulfill the one-another commands of scripture, while being integrally related to a local church, and having an outward focus on the world with the overreaching purpose of glorifying God.<sup>4</sup>

Icenogle states that small group ministries find their roots in the Old Testament but in general they are patterned after New Testament concepts, especially the ministries of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Mikel Neumann, "Small Group," in a Scott Moreau ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 881-2.

<sup>2</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Home cell Group Explosion*, 881-2.

<sup>3</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, 881-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 882

and Paul.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1990s Carl George popularized the term “meta-church” to describe a structure for cell (small) groups ministry. The meta (change) model denotes both a change of form as well as a change of mind.

The model includes home-based groups, cell group leaders trained by senior leadership, and a large celebration service that brings the cell groups together for worship. This concept allows for a flexible model which can be applied to any size church. However, having a small group-based church does not guarantee flexibility.<sup>6</sup>

Cell-based churches are those churches in which the principal life of the church is in the cell groups. The imagery comes from the living organism in which the cell is a small part of the body. Without the cell there would be nobody. Yet together the cells combined to form the body. Rex D. Edwards, looking at the importance of small group community with whom God could relate with on a human level and for the development of the individual states: Thus it was God’s plan to create an eternal Community with whom He could companion. He designed a society where-in each person could realize his highest freedom in obedience to God and achieve the greatest measures of self-development in the service of others.<sup>7</sup>

### **Similarities/Characteristics of Groups**

Small group-based churches worldwide have similarities which emphasize the important relationship between the small group and large group. Icenogle opines that these are the identical similarities in all small groups:

- 1) Senior leadership in each church has a dynamic vision of what the church is with small groups being a significant factor in that vision

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<sup>5</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Biblical Foundation for Small Group Ministry*, 882.

<sup>6</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Introduction to Group Dynamics*, 882.

<sup>7</sup> Rex D. Edwards, *Every Believer the Church* (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013), 11.

- 2) All small groups are integrally related to a local church celebration
- 3) Churches invest primarily in people not property. Many of these churches must rent facilities for the larger worship celebration
- 4) Evangelism, modeled and facilitated by the leadership, is a key factor in the church's life
- 5) Well-developed programs furnish an increasing supply of new leaders while enhancing the skills of growth
- 6) Prayer strategies are proactive undergirding all of church life
- 7) Worship is meaningful in both the small and large groups

He continues by saying that while small group churches have similarities, the small groups themselves have certain common characteristics. They present a high level of communality.<sup>8</sup>

Members of the small group have a unifying characteristic that brings them together. The members have a group consciousness, a collective perception of unity whereby they identify with each other. They share a common purpose which may be either explicit or implicit, and demonstrate interdependence in satisfaction of needs. The members need to help one another to accomplish the purposes for which they joined the group. Furthermore, members influence one another as a result of continuous interaction and communication. Finally, the small group shows an ability to work in a unitary manner, acting as a single organism.<sup>9</sup>

No wonder, Sandra M. Schneider's, emphasizing the advantage of people of the same historical and cultural experience coming together for small group Bible study states: When

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<sup>8</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Biblical Foundation for Small Group Ministry*, 882.

<sup>9</sup> Mikel Neumann, *Introduction to Group Dynamics*, 882.

the biblical text is read together by people who share the same historical and cultural experience, especially an experience of oppression and suffering, features of the text emerge that are often invisible to people (including preachers) who have experienced the text (whether consciously or not) as confirming their privileged position and experience.<sup>10</sup>

### **Reasons for Small Group Method**

Ralph Neighbor has pointed out that the small group model is effective for bringing people into the church and growing them in the faith. There are many reasons why small groups are effective. Two of the most important may be noted.

First, church outreach moves along the natural networks in any society through interpersonal relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. These natural bridges link people together. Evangelism and Christian nurture occur through these social networks.

Within the small groups, community is built which strengthens the church, including the larger community celebration. Besides following the natural networks within a given society, small groups also have the ability to move into other societies through the weaker links members have with those groups that are more culturally distant.

Second, small group churches tend to be more relevant as they take advantage of cultural and social similarities of the group. The commonality is much higher in the small groups than in larger church celebration service so specific needs can be met within the group as the Bible is applied to daily life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The classic text on the rule of faith sharing in situation of oppression is G. Guitierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. M.J.O's Connell (Mary knoll, N.Y. Orbis, 1984), 883.

<sup>11</sup>R.W. Neighbor, Jr. *Do We Go From Here? A Guide Book for the Cell Group Church*, 883.

## **Historical Background to the Rise of Small Groups Structure in the early Church**

New Testament Christianity developed in the Roman world as missionary movement. The Church existed for mission and by expansion and membership retention, the church blossomed everywhere. By the end of the first century, Christianity was implanted throughout the Roman Empire. Its clergy, its laity and its churches were all organized and structured for the accomplishment of the mission.<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament structure, as examined in previous chapters freed the clergy from being the primary care givers of the church and enabled them to focus their energies on small groups evangelism and church planting. The practices of clergy becoming priests and thus destroying the New Testament concept of the priesthood of all believers began in the latter part of the second century.<sup>13</sup>

In the first century the clergy were primarily itinerants, monitoring small groups' churches, rather than Pastors settling over large congregations. The management of local congregations was delegated to the local appointed elders. As the church spread rapidly in the first century, Russell opines that a need was perceived for a more structured oversight of the congregations. Although there is no clear evidence to prove the fact, we surmise that the locally appointed elders may have sought more power by moving into the ranks of clergy.<sup>14</sup>

As Christianity was implanted throughout the Roman Empire, there was less need for itinerant clergy. Rather than looking beyond the Roman Empire for places to evangelize, or

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<sup>12</sup> Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 127.

<sup>13</sup> E. Mellor, *Priesthood in the Light of the New Testament* (London: Holder and Stoughton, 1876), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 127.

looking at further expansion within the empire, the church began to focus only on retention, leaving the aspect of expansion. This shift from a mission base to one of nurture oriented only brought about a restructuring of clergy role from itinerants to permanent, localized ministers.

Referring to the time of Justin Martyr in the second century, Lefroy comments:

“They minister to you the ministry of the prophets and Teachers” This passage indicated the point of transition. The Prophets are passing away. The itinerants are declining . . . The permanent ministry (large congregations) is growing. The Ministry of proclamation and the ministry of spiritual Power are steadily moving in the direction of fixity and of Localization<sup>15</sup>

Lefroy claims that in the second century the itinerant ministry was declining and the permanent (large congregations) ministries were becoming the main focus. Either those who were itinerant clergy were settling down to pastor in localized places or the localized lay elders were occurring in the second century in the functional role of clergy.<sup>16</sup> Lefroy quotes Schaff to indicate that the local elders were beginning to replace the apostles in the organizational structure.<sup>17</sup>

The New Testament period ends with no indication of any change in changing clergy role from that established by Jesus, Paul and other founders of the early church. Yet in a very short time by the opening of the second century there is already indication of a departure from the biblical model of an itinerant clergy which encourages small group structure to one of localized large congregation. This also affected the local leader from functioning as primary care givers. While its origin is in the beginning of the second century, it was seen to be established everywhere by the end of the century.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lefroy, 184

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>18</sup> Knox, 23-24.

## **Development of Clergy over Churches: A Negative Impact to Small Groups Model**

The earliest indication of an established clergy over churches comes from Ignatius (A.D. 110). He portrays a highly developed clergy, even suggesting that where there is no bishop, there is no church, and obedience to the bishop is obedience to Christ.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the power of the local bishop was so advanced in Ignatius that it seemed improbable that such great power could have been developed in so short a time. Since there are scholarly questions about the authenticity of much of Ignatius's writing, it is safe to assume that these thoughts are parts of a later period.<sup>20</sup>

Probably more reflective of the second century is the first letter of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas. In both of these works, one discovers a less developed clergy and more of small groups' administration than in Ignatius, although movement toward a hierarchy is beginning. In Clement, the linking of the New Testament leader to the Old Testament system is beginning.<sup>21</sup> As a result, Clement is the first in Christian literature to suggest a distinction between clergy and laity, as well as a hierarchy of position. This certainly brought about a shift from New Testament emphasis of Priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2: 9) that encouraged small group administration involving everybody participation in the growth of the church.

Why did the early church leave the model of church established by Jesus and Paul? The reasons are varied and somewhat obscure but John Knox offers some good possibilities:

A system of government through a council of elders could be cumbersome; and with the increasing complexity of the congregations, operations and the growing need for both unity and efficiency in the face of increasing persecution by the state and the

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<sup>19</sup> Schweitzer, 153.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, et al. *Introduction*; Note to "Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians" in the Ante-Nicene fathers: Translations of the writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B Eerdmans, 1989-1990), 46-47.

<sup>21</sup> Schweitzer, 149, 156.

more vigorous activities of the Gnostic teachers –In such a situation the conception of a single head Of the church, the guardian of its unity and the responsible agent of its decisions, would have appealed to many congregations.<sup>22</sup>

Volz, adds that the appearance of heresies, such as Montanism, forced the church to decide on leaders and continued to move the church in the direction of a single leader.<sup>23</sup>

This changing role of the clergy in the second century was beginning to move in the direction of the modern pastoral primary care role. The fact that the second century clearly saw a change in the role of clergy is further indication that the modern role that is, shifting from small group method is not the New Testament role.

Most historians, such as Volz, seem to argue this change to be a favorable adjustment. Volz argues that the local elders and bishops were more in touch with the local congregation than the itinerants, so it was a natural development for them to grow in power and prestige.<sup>24</sup> Russell questions this conclusion by saying: there was a missionary reason for the clergy's role in the New Testament, and when the role changed, clergy lost its missionary function, and thus lost its reason for existence. The only thing left is a power struggle, which is what happens as the church moved toward the traditional model of church.<sup>25</sup> In the third and fourth centuries, the development of a fixed clergy with priestly powerfully develops, so that by the time of Nicaea (325), it is a recognized feature of the Christian church as it moves into the Constantine era. Whereas in the ministry of the New Testament church, Ministerial functions were diversified within the body, (small groups) gradually they are taken over by one person who now performs them for the people. As Williams further observes: Thus the ministry

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<sup>22</sup> Knox, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Volz, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Volz, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 130.

became more of a career than a calling. The ministrant became much less an organ of the local church and spokesman of the community Before God and much more of a professional cleric, appropriately trained and promoted, even from one Parish to another.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Impact of Constantine on Small Groups**

By the fourth century, this change evidently had greatly accelerated. The development of clergy power was greatly increased by the conversion of Constantine. Clergy were now given exemption status from taxes, and civil power was also granted to them. Even civil councilors applied for clergy status. The role of the clergy degenerated from its evangelistic function to one of powers and control. Small group activities, which is the life wire of the church was replaced with powerful clergy. The environment in which the church functioned also was changing drastically at this time. Before the time of Constantine the church was a forbidden sect. Constantine's "conversion" and the ready "Conversion" of the multitude of pagans in the Roman empire in obedience to Constantine, meant that the church no longer faced an unbelieving" world. There ceased to be a need for small group to supervise member's ministry and work to raise up new churches and evangelize lost people, since all people in the Roman Empire soon became fully "evangelized" and "retained" as far as the church was concerned.<sup>27</sup>

We have noticed two transitions from the New Testament model. The first was the move from an itinerant (supervisory) ministry to a permanent ministry, which changed the role of clergy to a more localized one. The second transition occurred after Constantine. It

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<sup>26</sup> George H. Williams, *The Ministry of the Ante-Nicene Church (c.125-325)*, " in the Ministry in Historical Perspectives, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Volz, 44.

further separated clergy from laity and gave them powers that God never intended them to have and which have no New Testament roots.

The church began to pattern its ministry after the Old Testament Priestly model, where clergy performed for the people ministry which they could not do for themselves, rather than the clergy being the facilitators of the ministry of the laity. The method did not encourage members to use their gifts, which is primarily the focus of small groups method.<sup>28</sup>

These transitions resulted from a change in the environment of the church from a missionary field to an established location with the missionary emphasis no longer prominent and primary. It was necessary for the church to reorganize for a maintenance ministry. This was a logical development for a church that had lost its missionary function. When a church appoints clergy as the primary care givers of the congregation instead of small groups method which emphasis the involvement of all members, it loses its mission consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and its subsequent proliferation throughout the Roman Empire resulted in a major paradigm shift in the role of clergy from missionary emphasis to large established church institutions of powers and maintenance. In Mead's opinion, Christianity faced a hostile world that was alien to the gospel. However, with the acceptance of Christianity by the empire, the church and the world became the same.<sup>30</sup> This necessitated a change in the role of clergy from evangelism to care giving and in the role of the laity from ministry to mere observer. It could be said that evangelism in this setting became the role of the professional soldier who reached new lands by conquest and then forced the inhabitants into Christianity. Since mission was the responsibility of the professional, and since all in the community were "Christians," the church had no local or

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<sup>28</sup> Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991), 13, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Mead, 13, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

small group mission function and subsequently lost its relevance. However, indications are that in the modern world we have returned to a society more like that of the New Testament which necessitates a new paradigm for the ministry of both laity and clergy.<sup>31</sup>

As the church identified more with the empire, various small groups within the church moved underground and created the dissident church of the middle Ages. While these groups had strong leaders, they viewed the “Christian” world as their “hostile” environment and consequently did not accept the established church’s abandonment of the ministry of the laity. Instead, most of the members of these groups engaged in ministry. This ministry of the laity was responsible for the rapid spread and the nurture of these groups in papal Europe. A prime example of this was the Waldenses, who disguised themselves as merchant but whose real purpose was to share the good news in groups.<sup>32</sup>

During the time of Mead’s Christian paradigm, when the world and the church were identical, there were groups within the Roman Empire who refused to accept the new paradigm, but continued a missionary emphasis. It is this concern to identify the church with the world that perhaps motivates some Christians today to force the state to enforce religious obligations. The contention of this paper is that this results from the abandonment of the biblical model of laity and clergy (Small groups), which encourages each one using his or her talents for nurture, and growth were not just societal changes affecting the church as Mead says, though it is not denied that they played a role, but the present state of the church is the result of the abandonment of the New Testament model of ministry. The New Testament model must be reinstated, not just because society today is more like the New Testament world, but because it is the biblical model. It was never appropriate, even in the Middle Ages,

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<sup>31</sup> Mead, 14, 15, 27-29.

<sup>32</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1911), 71.

for the church to adopt the “Church kingdom” model of ministry as mead contends. It seems safe to the researcher therefore to feel that if the church must focus on her mission as did Christ, Paul and other apostles, small groups strategy is a more viable option.

### **Methodism and Its Impact on the SDA Church**

The Wesley revivals in America have left an indelible mark on America religious history. Their methodical way of not just preaching Christ, but organizing the new believers into classes or small groups where members provided care for each other, was probably the reason for the lasting impact of Methodism on the America scene. In contrast, great revivals also followed preachers like John Whitfield. However, many of his converts did not endure. One possible reason may well have been the fact that Whitfield’s was a clergy revival and failed to follow up with a ministry of the laity; whereas Wesley’s revival resulted in convert being retained. This was no doubt due to the fact that Wesley organized class meetings led by laity.

Wesley’s class meetings for all new converts seem to be the main reason for Methodism’s initial success. These class meetings led by the laity, resulted in care of members being the primary responsibility of the class group rather than the clergy. This is one of the earliest movements to reignite the ministry of the laity and to return to the New Testament ideal. As a result, most of Methodism’s earliest clergy were for circuit riders rather than stationary preachers.

Once the New Testament plan of mutual member care is re-established, there would cease to be a need for a pastor over every church, and clergy will be free to evangelize again. Wesley offered two types of small groups experience; the classes and the bands. The bands were optional, the classes were required of all those who desired to stay in membership. The

result was the establishment of an on-going system of pastoral care from each other.<sup>33</sup> Each group consisted of ten to twelve people from the same Neighborhoods, coming together weekly for an hour or so. The leaders were lay people-some were men, but the majorities were women-selected because of their high moral and spiritual Character and common sense.<sup>34</sup>

It is interesting to note that most of the leaders of the early Methodist class meetings were women. This is especially enlightening when one realized that the largest local church in the world today. Dr. Paul (David) Cho's church in Seoul, Korea, is built on small groups led primarily by women. Evidently, women do a better job than men in relational small groups. What were those early class meetings like? In those early days you could not belong to the Methodist Society without being a member of the class and attending regularly. Failure to attend regularly was sufficient cause to be dropped from membership. Wesley believed so strongly in those class meetings that he made them a condition for membership.

However, in most denominations now that requirement would be considered oppressive. Yet such a commitment was obviously part of early Christianity. People could not be Christians if they failed to live in community with other Christians, and the small relational group was the ideal place for that community to occur.

Wesley wisely understood the biblical principle that Christians would not grow in isolation from a community of other Christians who could hold them accountable. He formed these classes so that his converts would grow into spiritual maturity. This emphasis was clearly relational and the purpose was discipleship.

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<sup>33</sup> Mallison, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Malison, *Article in Christian Education Journal, Vol. V, 2.*

Wesley Methodism was a holiness movement and Wesley implanted a strong desire that Christians not merely accept Christ as Savior but that they mature in their relationship to Him. He perceived that spiritual growth takes place best in a group setting where these can be mutual support and encouragement for those pursuing the life of holiness. What was the content of such a meeting? Watson opines: Everyone was to speak “as freely, plainly and Concisely as he (could) the real state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances, since the last time of meeting.”<sup>35</sup>

But at every meeting, there were five questions to be asked of every one:

1. What known sin have you committed since our last meeting?
  2. What temptations have you met with?
  3. How were you delivered?
  4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be a sin or not?
  5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?<sup>36</sup>
- The purpose of the class meeting was to hold people accountable for their life in Christ. This is perhaps one of the greatest needs of today’s church, yet it scares people because the openness that it demands is totally foreign to today’s cultural setting.

It was the optional bonds that continued the more direct questioning of its members.

The required class meeting did not have such direct questioning. Their initial purpose in meeting together each week was primarily to receive an offering. But community quickly developed in these meetings as well.

It was therefore agreed that the members of each class should meet together once a week, not only to collect the weekly contributions, but also to give advice, reproofs or encouragement as needed. A dynamic of Christian fellowship quickly developed, as members began to “bear one another” burdens “and to” care for each other. “The

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<sup>35</sup>David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 15.

<sup>36</sup>Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 94.

openness which was engendered by meetings led to “a more endeared affection” between the members, and they felt free to be honest with each other.<sup>37</sup>

These class meetings very quickly developed a definite style of their own that encouraged people to be open and supportive of each other. Questions were asked, but they were not as specific as in the earlier meetings.

Watson asserts:

Nonetheless, the points to be made is that the classes enjoyed this fellowship precisely because they did have the prior purpose of accountability. Initially there would be some awkwardness as the catechetical process was implemented, and people would be different about answering such directed and evaluative questions. But as the accountability was exercised, they began to realize that they were indeed on a common journey and that their mutual accountability was not pejorative, but supportive. The fellowship was rich because they understood the real purpose of their gathering; and the meetings were informed because their structure was assured.<sup>38</sup>

The death of Wesley eventually led to the demise of the small groups meeting as a part of the Methodist experience. The nineteenth century saw the requirement become less demanding, until it was eventually eliminated as a condition of membership in 1889.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to notice that as Adventism was beginning, the Methodist class (small groups meeting) was in the process of decline, ultimately to be replaced by the prayer meeting. Yet the Methodism that shaped the thinking of the early Adventist pioneers such as Ellen White, who came out of Methodism at this time, would have been the Methodism of the small groups meeting, where there were definite relational implications and accountability for their life in Christ. Other pioneers sprang from Baptist and Christian connections, but Methodism prevailed as the primary influence on SDA organizational development. This, no doubt, is due to the Charismatic of Ellen White.

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<sup>37</sup>Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 94.

<sup>38</sup>Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 116.

<sup>39</sup>Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 146.

Watson offers his conclusion to his study of the early Methodist group meeting with these words: “Thus early Methodism developed all the essentials of Relational small groups that met together regularly for Mutual support and encouragement and to hold each other accountable for their life in Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

It must not be forgotten that much of Adventist ecclesiology was borrowed from the Methodist roots. Adventist conference organization, committees approach to handling issues, even the itinerant, circuit riding preacher of early Adventism can be traced to Methodist roots.

In examining early Methodism’s small group meetings we have seen a return to a more biblical ecclesiology; the building of a church based more on community than on the development of large institutions.

### **SDA Organizational Structure: A Design for Small Group Mission**

Arising in the aftermath of the great Second Advent awakening in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed a church structure that bears considerable resemblance to the first century model. The earliest Adventists believed that if they were to organize, they must do so biblically rather than simply copying existing organizational structures. Obviously, they could not help but be influenced by such structures, but the one that influenced them most was the most biblical—the Methodism organization. Therefore, they developed a lay-driven, non-clergy dependent, community-based church.

The reasons for this development are threefold: First, the Adventist Church arose with a clear mandate for mission. In the aftermath of the 1844 disappointment, Adventists faced scoffing and ridicule from a hostile world. This situation was the same as Mead understanding of the relationship of the church to the world in the first century, as noted

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<sup>40</sup>Watson, *The early Methodism Class Meeting*, 149.

earlier. They quickly developed a missionary strategy, which was small group method of evangelism and nurture for their existence.

The second reason for the Adventist Church to develop a ministry of the laity model was its roots in Methodism. Many of the earliest pioneers had been Methodists; foremost among them was Ellen White.<sup>41</sup> Therefore the system of organization that these early Adventists developed was similar to that of the Methodism church. Most of the first Adventist Churches were no more than small groups of believers organized very similarly to the Methodist small group (class) meetings.

The third reason for the Adventist Church to adopt a lay ministry model was the inspired guidance of Ellen White. From its inception the Adventist Church has recognized the spiritual gift of prophet to exist in the life and ministry of Ellen White. While she is not looked upon in Adventism as a source of theology, White is respected for the guidance that she gave the infant church in the area of practical ministry. She did much to bring early Adventists church back to the New Testament church model which was based on small groups, house to house fellowship model.

Early Adventists believed emphatically that Jesus was coming again soon; as a result, when a church was organized, local lay elders were appointed to oversee the congregation, and the clergy went on to start new congregations. Since the churches were small and the believers scattered, it was unnecessary to appoint clergy over an individual church. The only exception to this may have been the headquarters church in Battle Creek, Michigan, where thousands of Adventists had gathered.<sup>42</sup> Even at that she would always advocate for a spread into small groups.

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<sup>41</sup> Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 130.

<sup>42</sup> Arthur White, *Ellen G. White—Volume 6: The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 126.

For the first nineteen years the small group of people who embraced Seventh-day Adventism refused to be organized into a church or denomination, regarding all organization as part of Babylon. However, by 1863, due primarily to the influence of James and Ellen White, the church was organized into the General Conference.<sup>43</sup> The early small group Adventist Church, then, was deliberately organized without settled pastors. This was done in an attempt to create a biblical organization similar to the New Testament. All clergy were itinerant preachers whose work was to raise up new churches or administer the affairs of the church. The local indigenous church was expected to care for itself. It might receive an occasional visit from a clergy person, but none was assigned over the church. As a result, the local elders were expected to preside over the local churches in much the same way as the clergy pastors do today.

This was the basic organizational structure that was operative in the Adventist Church throughout the nineteenth century and even into the early part of the twentieth century. It led the Adventist Church in North America and around the world into explosive growth. All of the church's resources were channeled into the expansion of the church rather than into the care of existing members. Adventism was primarily a church planting movement.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Effect of Small Groups Strategy in Yoruba Land**

Christianity entered Yoruba land during the fifth decade of the nineteenth century. The first Christian missions were the Methodists in Abeokuta in 1842 and the church Missionary Society (CMS) in the same town in 1843.<sup>45</sup> Thomas B. Freeman was the first

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<sup>43</sup>J. N. Loughborough, *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald of October, 15, 1861), but quoted in its entirety by Loughborough in this work. Loughborough also states that this was the working document for the organization of the General Conference.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>David Agboola, *A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Seventh-day Adventist in Yorubaland, 1914-1964* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Day Star Press, 1987), 1-4.

Methodist Missionary in Abeokuta and Townsend was the CMS Missionary in the same town. By 1860 the Baptists (Thomas J. Bowen) followed them and within the same year these missionaries established small group centers in Lagos, Badagry, Ibadan and old Ijaiyi at the time.<sup>46</sup> The Baptists entered Ogbomosho which was an inland far from coast at that time. This was possible because of their small group strategy approach which was aimed at entering unneutered areas through house to house (small group) fellowship and nurturing.<sup>47</sup>

Looking at the time SDA Church was established in Yoruba land as compared to other denominations, David Agboola opines that Yoruba land was already a Christian Mission field, having small groups in various areas, before the arrival of the Adventist Missionaries in 1914.<sup>48</sup>

He asserts that the Adventist missionary came after the other denominational Christian missionaries had been in the country for over fifty years, the Adventist missionaries have been described by an elderly Adventist evangelist as one of the late comers.<sup>49</sup> However, the church was spreading because of the small group, house to house mission oriented approach which agrees with the culture of the Yoruba people. The Yoruba has the practice of gathering people in a sizeable group for information dissemination, for family nurture and for mission.<sup>50</sup> When Elder D.C. Babcock, a leader of the Adventist missionaries came, he carefully studied the culture of the Yorubas, combined witnessing with tenth making, that is woodwork, bridge making, gardening in order to provide food for his followers and to teach them how to care for themselves and for others.

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<sup>46</sup>Agboola, 2.

<sup>47</sup>Agboola, 3, 4.

<sup>48</sup>Agboola, 1-4.

<sup>49</sup>Agboola, 2.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

No wonder, the membership in groups grew rapidly, from Erumu in Oyo state in 1914, to Sao in Kwara state and to Ipoti in Ekiti state in 1915. These areas became the original hub of Adventist in Yoruba land.<sup>51</sup> This method was followed by his converts after he had gone. Pastor I. A. Balogun, Moses Ayibiowu and others continued to establish small group fellowship with lay persons in charge while the few pastors were busy entering new areas.

### **The Effect of Small Groups Strategy in Ibo/ Esan Land**

Christianity came to Eastern part of Nigeria in about the fifth decade of the nineteenth century. As earlier indicated, the first Christian missionaries were the Methodist and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) at about 1844.<sup>52</sup>

The missionaries first settled in Anambra State in Onitsha. This was as a result of the business activities of that community. Though scanty information is available regarding their exact take off point, Professor Anuligo, opines that the effort started in a very little way, in a small group, but gradually spread to the other parts of the eastern areas. By 1923, Jesse Clifford and his wife brought Adventism to South-Eastern Aba, the present Abia State. This was through the effort of the missionaries whose strategy was small group Bible Study, house to house evangelism, compound meetings with family heads, emphasis on family unit developments, establishment of small action units, home schools and these schools eventually became Adventist Churches.<sup>53</sup> Within three years Adventism had grown in various parts of

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<sup>51</sup>Agboola, 4.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>D. T. Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa (1888-1988) A Mustard Seed* (Ibadan, Nigeria: LASOB Productions, 2001), 28.

the east, all in small group. Each group was zealous to reproduce itself in various compounds and villages nearby.<sup>54</sup> There were no big churches at the beginning of this missionary work.

### **Building an Ethical Small Group as Church Leaders**

Author Virginia Burden Tower, asserts that “Cooperation is the thorough conviction that nobody can get there unless everybody gets there”<sup>55</sup>this opinion holds true in small group activities. Groups are often charged with making ethical decision because they have the potential to make better choices than individuals.

To make the most of the small-group advantage, however, leaders must foster individual ethical accountability among group members, ensure ethical group interaction, avoid moral pitfalls, and establish ethical relationship with other teams.<sup>56</sup> In his metaphor of the leaders light or shadow, Parker argues that leaders shape the settings or contexts around them. According to Palmer, leaders are people who have “an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being, conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell.”<sup>57</sup> In this section of this paper, the researcher will be describing some of the ways we can create conditions that illuminate the lives of followers in small-group. For if a small group is properly developed and trained, there influence is always a savior of light, no wonder, British Prime Minister Winston Church hill states “Never underestimate a minority.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa (1888-1988) A Mustard Seed*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Craige E. Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2015), 275.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership*, 375.

## **The Leader and the Small Groups**

Leaders spend a great deal of their time in small groups, either sharing or participating in meetings. You can expect to devote more of your workday to meetings with every step of the organizational hierarchy. Meeting expert John Tropman opines that high-quality management/training is the product of high-quality meetings that render high-quality decisions. He continues, meetings are not distractions from our work, he argues; they are the work. Purposeful meetings are absolutely central to the achievement of organizational goals.”<sup>59</sup>

In a group, members can pool their information, divide up assignments, draw from a variety of perspectives, and challenge questionable assumptions. They are more likely to render carefully reasoned, defensible decisions in advancing God’s work.<sup>60</sup> Listening experts Larry Barker, and Kittie Watson make the following suggestions for improving performance in a small group setting. 1) Avoid interruptions 2) Seek areas of agreement, 3) Search for meanings and avoid arguing about specific words 4) Ask questions and request clarifications 5) Be patient, 6) compensate for attitudinal biases 7) listen for principles, concepts, and feelings 8) Compensate for emotion arousing words and ideas 9) Be flexible and 10) listen, even if the message is boring or tough to follow.<sup>61</sup>

### **Small Groups Strategy as Antidote for a Divided Church**

Johnson, a known writer on leadership and mission states: Globalization may be the most important trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We now live in a global economy shaped by multinational corporations, international travel, the internet, immigration, and satellite

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<sup>59</sup>Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership*, 276.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership*, 280-281

communication system.<sup>62</sup> Greater cultural diversity is one product of globalization. The church as an organization is not exempted from this influence.

How does the church effectively minister to its followers and still be able to reach out in meeting the need of others? Looking at this challenge, Ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle asserts: “one may also observe in one’s travel to distant countries the feelings of recognition and affiliation that link every human being to every other human being.”<sup>63</sup> It has been observed that many people come to the church only to be isolated and forgotten and consequently, they leave the service unnoticed because of its diverse nature. The oneness of fellowship is not experienced. Are small groups the answer? Yes, because it is one of the strongest means that could be used to revolutionize the church. The primary objective is to create a community that cares, irrespective of cultural differences, as it reached out to share with those who do not know Him.<sup>64</sup>

In his book, *How to Lead Small Groups*, McBride quotes Marie Stingle who says: Being involved in Small Groups is an opportunity for in-depth fellowship and friendships. It is a place to bear burdens and celebrate victories. It is a place to give and receive inspirations, to live up to God’s best.<sup>65</sup> Warmth and acceptance is the best atmosphere for fun and relaxation, spontaneous get-togethers, and building life-long friendships. He asserts that for me small group has meant the difference between church attendance and being a part of our church family.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership*, 369.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Carl F. George, *the Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revel, 1995), 35.

<sup>65</sup> Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995), 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

## Summary

Having critically reviewed several literatures in this chapter, the findings could be summarized as follows:

1. Small groups are more productive than those with individualistic or competitive focus
2. Small groups are more willing to take on difficult tasks and to persist in the face of difficulties
3. Small group participants retain more information which empowers their action.
4. Small groups helps participants to engage in higher level reasoning and more critical thinking
5. Small group helps a church to generate more creative ideas, tactics, and solutions
6. Small group helps to transfer more learning from the group to individual members
7. Small group participants are more positive about the task and spending more time working on the tasks, that is retention and witnessing

In addition to being more effective, small groups foster more positive relationships and cohesion among members. This cohesion reduces absenteeism, they enjoy better psychological health, promote both emotional and spiritual maturity among members, thus witnessing and membership retention become a lot easier.

## CHAPTER 4

### MINISTRY CONTEXT

This chapter is meant to develop a strategy for membership retention through small groups in Ado Ekiti. To do this, the researcher will briefly narrate the history of SDA Church in Ekiti State, Nigeria and equally seeks to describe the socio- cultural setting of Ado- Ekiti community. This will be followed by a brief history of SDA Church in Ado-Ekiti metropolis. This however, will not be too detailed for the sake of ethics and space limitations. This research will investigate the attitude of SDA Church members to identify if it takes into cognizance the culture of the people it seeks to reach and retain. This will be done through personal interviews and participant observations.

In doing this however, the researcher would attempt to understand the general attitude of SDA Church members toward the Ado indigenes to know if their lifestyle, according to Mr. David Aina, is a” win-win or a win-lose type of attitude.”<sup>1</sup> It will also try to study how Ado people were retaining their families and communities before the advent of Western civilization and Christianity to ascertain the extent of its retention success. Furthermore, there will be a review of some of the major evangelistic efforts conducted so far in Ado-Ekiti community with attention paid to the immediate results then and what it is now. After which focus groups instrument on membership retention will be developed and administered, based on the findings, intervention strategies will be developed.

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<sup>1</sup> David Aina, Permanent Secretary Ekiti State Ministry of Education, interview by the author, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, 24 March, 2013.

Finally, materials for the training of small groups outreach coordinators will be developed. This will be presented to the conference and local churches for their impacts, evaluation and contributions before the program will be carried out and final observations on the program and evaluation using SWOT analysis will be made in chapter five.

### **Description of the Macro-context**

This session begins with a brief history of how the SDA Church was established in Ekiti State, Nigeria before it finally got to Ado-Ekiti community which is the setting of this research project.

#### **A Brief History of SDA Church in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church got to Ipoti in Ekiti State as a result of disappointment the people of Ipoti- Ekiti who were predominantly Anglican, had suffered from the Anglican Church leadership<sup>2</sup> by transferring a missionary whom they paid for one year salary (24 pounds) to the Anglican Church authority a day after his arrival to another place without replacement.<sup>3</sup>

When they had this disappointment, one of the strong Anglican members in Ipoti Ekiti – Mr. Aina Israel Balogun who had had contact with Adventists earlier at Erumu, a community located in the present Oyo State, Ibadan, where missionary David C. Babcock was serving at the time. Mr. Balogun invited the Adventist missionary D. C. Babcock to pioneer his church in the town. Babcock answered the call promptly and came to Ipoti Ekiti.

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<sup>2</sup> David Agboola, a Former Lecturer in Church History at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, Ilisan-Remo, Nigeria, interview by the author, Ilisan-Remo, Nigeria, 24 January, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Within a short time, this was the beginning and the birth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ekiti State.<sup>4</sup>

John Oriola, one of the pioneer pastors with Babcock, opines that, “Babcock came to Ipoti Ekiti the third day he received his Macedonia call.<sup>5</sup>

It was on the market day and he was led to meet John B. Oriola who was in his shop busy with his tailoring work. Oriola joyously led Babcock and Mr. Donka A. to Pa Daniel Olomojobi’s home where they were lodged. Chief Daniel Ojo, the Esaya of Ipoti- Ekiti was the first interpreter to elder D. C Babcock and the people were convinced of the truth of the message, which they accepted with joy and enthusiasm. The Sabbath of the Lord was observed for the first time at Ipoti- Ekiti on November 6, 1915.

Among the first church workers were: Daniel Olomojobi Onigbojonsan – he accommodated D. C. Babcock during his maiden visit in 1915, Daniel Omolewa (Secretary) was the first church clerk for the Sabbath school and Daniel Olarinmaye O. Olaoye Esaya graduated from St. Andrew’s College Oyo.<sup>6</sup> He was the interpreter.

This marked the birth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ekiti State, where Ado-Ekiti community serves as the Conference headquarters of SDA Church.

In 1922, eight years after D. C. Babcock brought Adventism to Nigeria, late Pastor I. A. Balogun took the message to Otun-Ekiti. This was happily accepted. Oba Ariyowaye, who

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<sup>4</sup>David Agboola, a Former Lecturer in Church History at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, Ilisan-Remo, Nigeria, interview by the author, Ilisan-Remo, 24 January, 2015.

<sup>5</sup>A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventists in Ekiti State, by the Council of Pioneer of Elders in Ekiti State, Nigeria, 17 November, 2012, I.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

was the king, then gave a parcel of land to the Adventist Church it was on the land that the church building, personage, and Primary School are now built.<sup>7</sup>

It was from this little beginning, the Seventh-day Adventist Church spread to many other communities in Ekiti land among such communities are: Ayetoro, Omuo, Erinmope, Ise and other communities, just to mention but a few. These communities have indigenous members who are now leaders in the SDA Church serving the church in various capacities. Statistics have shown that in each of the communities in Ekiti where the SDA Church is, the indigenous members are usually not less than 75%.<sup>8</sup> Ado-Ekiti community is on the contrary having less than 1% indigenous member, with a membership of over one thousand since the entrance of the church in 1966.<sup>9</sup>

### **Description of the Micro-Context**

The following narration describes the cultural setting of Ado-Ekiti community where this research project will be conducted.

### **Cultural Setting of Ado- Ekiti Community**

Ado-Ekiti, one of the major cities in the Western part of Nigeria, is the largest city in Ekiti State. It has a population of over three hundred thousand people.<sup>10</sup> Describing the cultural uniqueness of Ado-Ekiti people, Professor Isiola Olomola, opines that Ado is a name of a political society, as a matter of fact, a kingdom on the account of size and development,

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<sup>7</sup> David Agboola, *A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Seventh-day Adventists in Yoruba land, 1914 – 1964* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Day Star Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Record Book Year* (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics of 2006, National Census of Ekiti State, Nigeria.

it is the largest in Ekiti State.<sup>11</sup> From its beginning the kingdom covered all the present-day Ado-Ekiti Local Government Area, Irepodun/Ifedun, and Ayerire Local Government Areas. Traditions asserts that at the height of its power in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ado kingdom consisted of 150 communities. Ewi, the Oba (The Paramount Ruler) was the sovereign head, his palace was (and is still) situated in the capital city.<sup>12</sup> Akinleye Bamidele, a lecturer at the Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti argues that its nature as a kingdom has helped in no small measure to smoothly affect the growth of the people, groups, churches and communities, because a kingdom, in itself, emphasizes unity and ethnic fellowship.<sup>13</sup>

Commenting on the introduction of Christianity in the city, Isiola averred that Christian missions of the CMS, Roman Catholic, Baptist, African Church and Methodist, later the Cherubim and Seraphim and Apostolic Church took root and expanded during the 20<sup>th</sup> century with indigenous members playing key roles.<sup>14</sup> He asserts that each of these Christian communities established numerous churches such that by 1970, the CMS (Anglican) and the Roman Catholic had grown so fast that they had dioceses with their headquarters and seats of bishops in Ado-Ekiti. The two missions had five Grammar schools by 1990 the growth of Christian communion was very rapid between 1970 and 2000, new mission and denominations like the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical and Anglican arose, swelling up existing communion. Altogether over one hundred churches were recorded in the city in the year 2000.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this growth that is witnessed in these other denominations is not so

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<sup>11</sup> Isiola Olomola “*Ado-Ekiti: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*” 2001-2015, Copyright Unique Solution Int’l Ltd (Nigeria and Unique Systems Int’l Inc Canada) 1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Akinleye, O. B., A Senior lecturer at Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. interview by the author, Ado-Ekiti, 10 June, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Isiola Olomola, 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1-4.

noticed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, instead, the members won continued to leave the SDA Church for other churches. There is indeed, a need for a new strategy for the church evangelistic mission and membership retention.

### **A Brief history of SDA Church in Ado-Ekiti Community**

The church in the spirit of mission started in Odo- Ado in Ado community in August, 1966 at the then residence of Late Chief Abolarinde Ojo (Bola Clinic) in the compound of Chief Asamo at Odo- Ado in Ado-Ekiti as a result of what happened one bright afternoon when Pastor J. A. Alade came from ACWA (Adventist College of West Africa), now Babcock University, in Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria to canvass (selling religious books) in Ado.

Ado-Ekiti at that time was not only a peaceful community, but was known for its respect for visitors and those who had something good to offer to the community.<sup>16</sup> Ado, being a major part of the entire Ekiti State that is known for her obsession for knowledge, being the fountain of wisdom, was a veritable place for students on vacation, to sell their books and through these materials lead people to Christ.<sup>17</sup> David Agboola opines that the Spirit of the Lord directed Pastor J. A. Alade to one battery charger as he was looking for the Seventh-day Adventist in Ado-Ekiti.<sup>18</sup>

This battery charger had his workshop near the motor park; he was known as Master Joseph Adeniyi (now Elder Joseph Adeniyi a.k.a. Omo-Igbala, which is interpreted a saved child. Mr. Adeniyi and pastor Alade, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, went in search of

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<sup>16</sup>David Agboola, a former lecturer in church history at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, interview by the author, Ilisan-Remo, 24 January, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Mr. Abolarinde Ojo, this was how the Lord led out in organizing a formal worship at Ado-Ekiti community.<sup>19</sup>

The few members used what they had, their talents, and profession in fellowship. Agboola states that “it is worthy to note that the popularity of the church grew very well because of the two different inscriptions on both sides of the main door to master Joseph Adeniyi’s shop from Sunday to Friday at the door of his workshop would be open with the inscription:

No work on Saturday – the Sabbath day. While on Saturday the inscription on the closed door read “No work today Saturday, the Sabbath of the Lord. This was followed with love, communion, sharing together and constant fellowship, so the church grew.<sup>20</sup>

The foundation members with their families were Elder J.A. Adeniyi and Chief John Abolarinde. The other pioneer members of the church in Ado were not new converts but sons and daughters of the Seventh-day Adventist parents from so many towns and villages across Ekiti, Osun and Kwara States.<sup>21</sup>

After the church grew, services were held at the residence of Chief Abolarinde in Chief Asamo’s house at Odo-Ado until 1973 when the church was moved to Elder Adeniyi’s house. The land for the church building was acquired in 1980 at Odo-Ado along Igirigiri road, and the foundation was laid in July, 1981 through the generous donations from members. The church was dedicated on March 3, 2001, while the organization was done on September 20, 1986.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventists in Ekiti State by the Council of Pioneers of elders in Ekiti State, Nigeria. 17 November, 2012, I.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>21</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Record Book Year (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 1-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Agboola, a veteran church historian in Nigeria, comments:

The church at Ado-Ekiti community with its possibilities and opportunities ought to have been a beacon of hope, and of light and salvation to the indigenes and other believers, but the church seems to have failed in continuing to understand the community and thereby devising Christ's method in meeting her felt needs. He opines, "There is need to go back to the New Testament method of small group fellowship and sharing for the church must be reverent to its community."<sup>23</sup>

It is gratifying to note that that small group church has given birth to six other churches in Ado-Ekiti with two district headquarters. However, the serious challenge of the church in Ado is that more than 99% of these members are not Ado indigenes. If for any reason the non-indigenes are forced to go home, there may probably be no Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Ado.<sup>24</sup>

This "fear" concerning the present and the future of the church in Ado is the issue of this project. Could it be the church is not sensible to the feelings and culture of the Ado people? Is it that the church is not conscious of the dire need of the community that hosts the headquarters of the church in Ekiti State?

Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ado merely satisfied with establishing churches without meeting the basic needs of its followers? It seems to the researcher that in spite of the clear evidence shown in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as the Master Missionary to the world in winning every class of people to the kingdom of God, church leaders and members do not seem to learn from the pen of inspiration, as revealed in Ellen G. White's statement that says:

"Christ method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs and won their confidence. Then He bade them "follow me."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David Agboola, a former lecturer in church history at the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, interview by the author, Ilisan-Remo, 24 January, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Record Book Year (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 1-4.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Ontario: Pacific Press, 1942), 143.

It is hoped that if SDA Church members shall imbibe this strategy of witnessing, retention of members, including the indigenes in Ado community will be successful. It is in the light of this that this research shall examine the attitude of SDA Church members in Ado community.

### **The Attitude of SDA Church Members toward Ado Indigenes**

Nwaomah defines attitude among others as “a way of feeling, thinking or behaving,”<sup>26</sup> which may be positive or negative towards others (emphasis is mine). These three elements “feeling, thinking and behavior,” play a significant role in human relationships. These serve as major determinant in winning and retaining members for Christ as seen in Christ’s method of witnessing.

Duane Elmer opines that these three elements form the building block for “relationships and effective membership retention.”<sup>27</sup> No wonder the attitude of the New Testament church, as seen in Acts 2: 44-47 was positive. It took into cognizance the feelings of the people they witnessed to. It also took time to understand the follower’s thought which was expressed in their behavior. Jesus, the Master missionary counsels His church by saying that leaders should take time to study the feelings of their followers. According to Jesus, “Out of the abundant of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34) Little doubt then, while the New Testament church was very successful; meeting the felt needs of the followers in small groups which was easier to manage.

The attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Ado-Ekiti towards the Ado community generally, and the few Ado indigenes in the church appears not to be as positive as Christ would want the church to be. The issue of oneness which is their core value: oneness in culture and fellowship seems not be properly grasped by the SDA Church.

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<sup>26</sup> Nwaomah, Class Lecture Notes on Ecumenism, Babcock University, 15 May, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 137.

Furthermore, the doctrine of the church which seems to emphasize the separation of the church and State poses a major challenge even in our relationship with our neighbors and the people around us that the church seeks to win and retain.

Ado people, unlike every other culture around the Yoruba land are generally not pleased with a practice that does not acknowledge their worth and recognize their oneness. As a people with a kingdom culture, they live their lives sharing with one another in a family setting and in the community. Any religion that does not encourage this is highly resisted. In the researcher's opinion, learning from Duane's words, she seems to suggest that such people are saying to the SDA leaders in Ado:

Why do you (SDA) not try to understand the minds of Ado people more than their ability to work or to accept your rules? You people do not understand that your words do not belong to our minds.<sup>28</sup>

Besides, Ado-Ekiti community has special people groups that require special study and understanding of their thinking. In his book, *The Power of People Group Thinking*, John D. Robb, comments on people's group thinking shares that: A people group is a "significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another, because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation or combinations of these."<sup>29</sup> Robb asserts that from the standpoint of communicating the message of Christ, it is "the largest group within which the gospel can flow along natural lines without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance due to culture, language, and geography, etc."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Elmer, 137.

<sup>29</sup>John D. Robb, *The Power of People Group Thinking* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Notice that these definitions emphasize the things a group of people hold together in common and that act as boundaries which set these groups apart from other groups, of course, individual members within any social group often differ from one another in many ways. In view of these challenges, this project would use focus group method to source information.

### **Traditional Practice of Using Family Groups in Meeting Peoples' Need in Ado-Ekiti**

Before the advent of Western Education, Isiola argues that Ado people had the practice of using homogeneous or family groups in sharing information, fellowships and for transferring cultural education, thereby leading to family bonding which enhances relationships and family member's retention.<sup>31</sup>

Isiola continues, that as a society that is kingdom-structured, effective communications, fellowships, task-oriented ministry groups, outreach groups in terms of wars and territorial securities were highly valued and protected. In order to achieve this, the society was structured into small groups. Each was given a sacred responsibility of protecting the people, providing for the need of the communities, ensuring there was unity and fellowship among families. Thus, no member of a particular family or community could move out to join other families except by ex-communication as a result of violating the family group's rules and regulations.<sup>32</sup> Isiola, in the following diagrams pictures clearly how Ado-Ekiti community used some of these cultural small groups in securing, meeting needs and retaining its members.

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<sup>31</sup>Isiola, 6.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

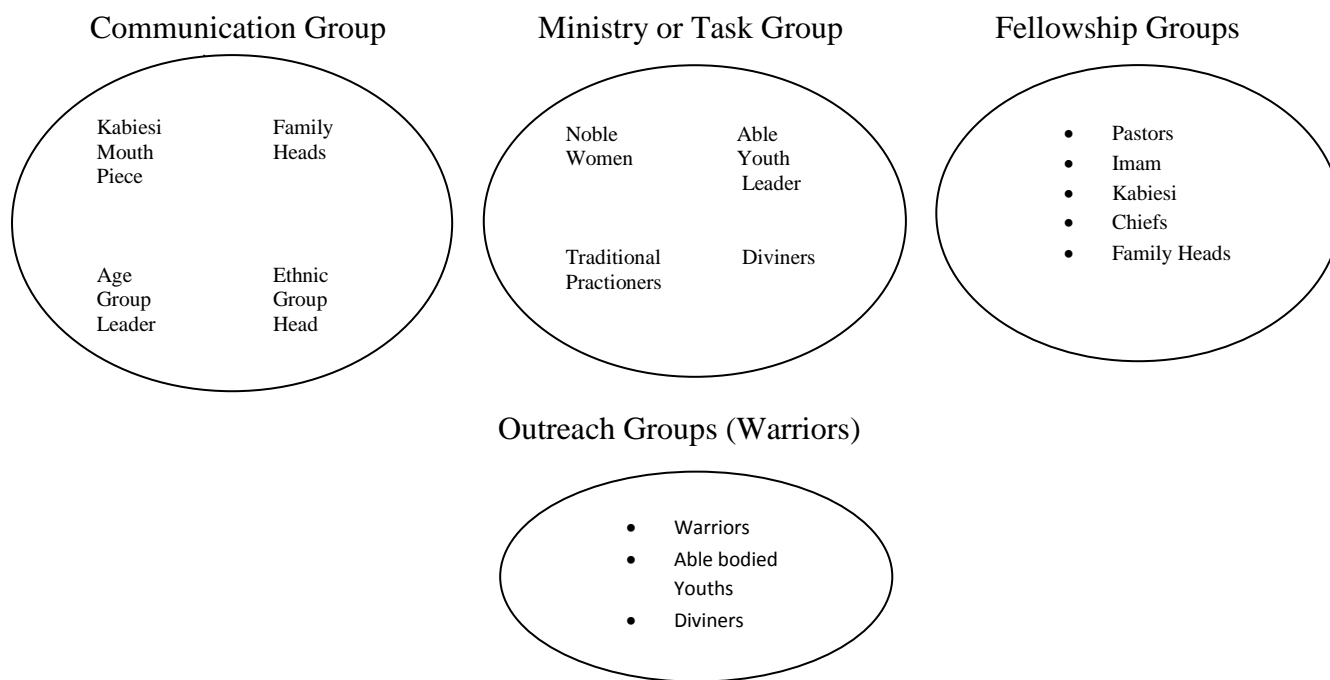


Figure 1. Ado-Ekiti Community Use of Cultural Small Groups

Source: A Self-designed concept

### **The Success of these Groups to the Overall Development of Ado Community**

Isiola’s information creates a cultural background for the launching of small groups in Ado-Ekiti community. The success of these traditional small groups to the overall development of Ado community cannot be over-emphasized. Isiola, quoting J. O. Olubobokun’s work “Itan Iyin” as corroborated by A. O. Oguntuyi, asserts that forming these small groups was meant to care, protect and nurture its own people and territories. They had a total of 16 quarters (small groups) which later developed into one indivisible city known today as Ado-Ekiti community with different ethnic or people groups.<sup>33</sup>

He continues by saying that the essence here is that ethnic or peoples groups were part of Ado kingdom that gained royal autonomy to co-exist as a separate community under the realm of the Ewi (Oba of the Ado-Ekiti Kingdom) without severing traditional ties and blood

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<sup>33</sup>Isiola, 16.

relations with Ewi of Ado-Ekiti. Each of these groups had leaders (chiefs) that helped to achieve their objectives.<sup>34</sup>

In view of the above discoveries, the researcher of this paper feels strongly that intentional family small groups’ strategy in SDA Church which agrees with the culture of Ado people in their nurture, fellowship, protection and care will go a long way to retain our members for Christ. This will reduce the exit of our members to other churches, or worst still, to their “pagan” practices.

**Results of Some of the Major Previous SDA Evangelistic Efforts in Ado-Ekiti**

*Table 1. Results of Some of the Major Previous SDA Evangelistic Efforts in Ado-Ekiti*

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Major Efforts =3	Major Efforts =2	Major Efforts =4	Major Efforts =2	Major Efforts =5	Major Efforts = 2
Baptism = 500	Baptism = 50	Baptism = 35	Baptism = 30	Baptism = 50	Baptism = 40
Membership = 800	Membership = 850	Membership = 885	Membership = 915	Membership = 965	Membership = 1005

Source: Ekiti conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership Record Book, 2011 to the first quarter in 2016

It is however, very painful to note that when it comes to the actual head count, what we have is about 400 people. We have a membership loss of over 600 persons. It becomes even more worrisome, when one understands that less than six of these members are indigenes of the community where the church headquarters is located as the case is at Ado-Ekiti community.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Isiola, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ekiti Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Membership Record Book 2013 (Ekiti Sate, Nigeria: Ekiti Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013), 1-20.

## **Research Design**

In view of the challenges of membership loss as shown above, the researcher is attempting to design a focus groups questionnaire, an instrument that will be used to source for information that will be insightful and easy to analyze.

### **Type of Research**

The type of research that is designed by the researcher is purposive or qualitative research. This allows the use of focus groups strategy to source for information. This method helps the researcher to have meaningful interactions with the respondents in a group of not more than twelve persons. It creates open ended questions that allow the respondents to express his or her opinion freely. From the results that will be shown, a two week small groups family based outreach programs will be developed for implementation in chapter five.

### **Rationale for Selection**

In view of the need to get quality information from church members and former SDA members, who have spent a minimum of fifteen years in Ado Ekiti, three churches were selected. The researcher took this focus group questions to three of the major SDA Churches in Ado Ekiti, namely: Odo-Ado, Opopogbooro and Oke-Ila churches. The reasons for this choice are that Odo-Ado is the first church with a membership of over 400 on record that is made up of 100 men, 250 women and 50 youths. Yet one could hardly find 150 persons in the church. This is followed by Opopogbooro church where the SDA Church headquarters are housed. This church has on record 200 youths, 50 men, and about a 100 women. Yet the number of head counts on any given Sabbath for about three years now has never been more than a 150 people. It is observed that membership loss is lower in this particular church. The third Church is Oke-Ila, where the researcher worships. This church is made up of about 120 young people, about 50 women, and 40 men on church record book, however, membership

loss still poses a serious challenge. One could hardly find a 100 people in worship. In administering the focus groups questions the individuals were given the opportunity to write their views on the causes of membership loss and those who were not able to write were verbally interviewed and their opinions recorded.

### **Appropriateness of Study**

The choice of this research topic is necessitated by the need to provide a reliable and a sustainable solution to the seeming ugly membership loss at Ado-Ekiti community. This has been a serious challenge to the church seeing that members who are baptized into the church do not stay longer than two months before they leave for other denominations.

### **Population and Sample or Participants**

As indicated earlier in this research the population of these three churches ought to be 960 persons, but the truth is one may hardly get up to 300 members in these three churches. So, in order to reach as many people that are informed, committed and have spent a minimum of fifteen years in the church, 30 of this one page document having two categories of questions were given out to 30 people. This strategy helps to minimize waste of papers, reduce the tension of responses from the respondents as the questions are limited to five but very relevant in each segment.

### **Criteria for Sampling Procedures and Selection**

The researcher was assisted by Professor Bruce Bauer, Chairs, Department of World Mission at Andrews University, Michigan, USA, and Professor Matwetwe Haron, a graduating PhD student in Mission at Andrew University, Michigan, USA to draw ten relevant questions on issues that seek to ask pertinent questions concerning membership retention

Five of these questions were meant to get responses from active members of Seventh-day Adventists, while the other five were for former SDA members at Ado Ekiti. These survey questions were all inclusive to every class of people in the Church they are aimed at understanding why people are leaving the Church and what could be done to curb this ugly trend. It takes into account the aged that is 60 years and above, the young adults from 18 to 30 years and those between 30 to 60 years. It also cuts across gender, professions, race, and tribes. It includes SDA members who are presently leading out in various ministries in their local churches and those who were former leaders in this church, but are now pastors and leaders in other denominations. The detail of this survey is attached to this project in its appendix.

This one page focus group document was shown to my supervisor, Pastor Femi Adesina, who holds a PhD in Mission and Ministry Studies for his advice and approval after which it was presented to the conference leadership to verify its relevance to the context that it seeks to address. This was evaluated and approved for its use by the Conference's leadership.

### **Instrumentation**

This research employs the use of focus group questions, seminars, workshops, case studies and participant's observations. Besides, 20 small groups coordinators would be trained to help to implement this project. They also served as the researchers key informants. At the end 24 people out of 30 copies given out responded with their detailed written responses. Some who could not write were verbally interviewed while their suggestions were recorded. Below is the summary of these reports as organized under the following headings:

## **Data Analysis**

This part of the paper will be briefly narrating the procedures taken by the researcher in getting its data and its analysis.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Having successfully administered the focus group questions, in about two weeks the respondents started turning in their data individually to the researcher through their pastors, head elders, and deacons while some came personally to the researcher's office to submit.

The following issues became obvious from the analysis of these data:

#### **A) The Role of the Church (Responses to question one)**

1 What the church did not do was listed thus:

- a) The church neglected its members
- b) There was lack of mutual fellowship and protection
- c) There is nominal Action units groups that are not need- oriented
- d) Lack of quality prayer life, sharing and bonding among members
- e) Lack of relevant small groups programs

2 What the Church should do (Responses to question 2)

- a) The church should put in place relevant need-oriented small groups
- b) The church should encourage small groups that are regularly trained and are sensitive to the cultures of Ado- Ekiti people
- c) The church should review Small groups programs once every three months.
- d) Encourage and increase the number of house fellowships, Bible studies and prayer life of group members when necessary.

#### **B) Membership Recovery (Responses to question 3)**

- a) The church should encourage and mobilize members for intensive visitations

- b) The church should restore worship centers and fellowship in homes that involves both members and non-members using the health and prayers seminars strategies
- c) There should be informal meetings of family heads, professionals and business men in a friendly manner for prayers, supports and fellowships
- d) The Church should encourage contextualized programs, Bible studies and community development
- e) Above all, the Church should be seen as the light as they show God's love in restoring the former SDA members.

C) Changes Expected (Responses to question 4)

- a) They hope to see love, oneness, fellowship and empowerment of members
- b) The Church should have special budget for the less privilege ones like the widows and the widowers, the helpless strangers, the aged and the empowerment of members especially the young people.
- c) There should be regular small groups' fellowship, Bible studies, intentional prayer life and sincere fellowship among members
- d) There should be no monotony of worship programs by a few people; worship should actively involve every one.

In view of these responses from the focus group studies, it seems clear to the researcher that intentional, viable small groups that consider the culture of the people, the Church as a family, and the community may be a more reliable option to the membership retention problem. The details of these responses will be shown in the appendix of this research project with their names, ages, phone numbers and their roles in the church as permitted by some of the respondents. However, here are some narrative details of this report as shown below:

## **Presentation and Description of Findings**

Surprisingly, of the 24 persons that responded, all agree that there is no problem with church's doctrines as rumored by some persons that send people away from the church. The 24 persons agree that the challenges are with the way we relate with these new converts and even the old ones.

About five of the respondents claim that the church seems to be in a hurry to baptize people because of the number syndrome that seems to be plaguing the church in the recent times. This, they observed that since it has to do with the promotion and ordination of a church Pastor and church leaders. This appears to be one of the reasons while people are rushed into the baptistery without understanding the commitment level of their professed faith.

However, 15 persons out of the 24 respondents are of the opinion that it does not necessarily have to do with the number of years one spends in the baptismal class or Bible study classes, that guarantee the retention rate, though that may help. They however, stressed the role of the Holy Spirit in one's live and the need to spend qualitative time with God for the enhancement of the Holy Spirit.

They adduced that, mutual fellowship, care for one another and vibrant contextualization of worship style, bearing one another's burden, meaningful prayers services, and mutual love, among others, are some of the requirements for a healthy church. They further assert that "a healthy church would retain its members, even if there would be losses, it would be minimal."

The importance of this research project is further seen as 24 of the respondents opined that they would like to be in a church where these aforementioned practices exist. When asked "would you like to rejoin the church if these conditions are met? 10 persons out of the former SDA members indicated that "it is too late" They averred that they are comfortable

where they are because they are already Pastors and leaders in their churches. They individually assert that for the “ truth”, the SDA Church have it, but nurture, care, love, meaningful and regular Bible study, intercessory prayers, warm fellowship, dynamic worships, among others, are painfully lacking in the SDA Church. So, sustaining and retaining members who are already used to this model of worship would always become a challenge.”

Furthermore, of the 24 persons that responded, all opined that vibrant, people oriented small groups’ method would help to retain both old and new members. Some of the reasons they adduced are:

1. It is the more reliable strategy for soul winning, keeping and caring, as it encourages meaningful fellowship.
2. It makes group members to be closer to each other, enhances friendships and meaningful prayer life. It deepens understanding of group members and encourages free communication.
3. It creates quality members and thus helps to lead people to understand why and what they are called to do in the church.
4. It would enhance visitations and follow up as it is done in small groups which new members and old members need seriously today.
5. Talents would be discovered more in small groups than in large congregations which always encourage one- man show.
6. Small group method brings us back to the unfailing Biblical model which is easier to manage, no wonder, the church was growing exponentially daily in Acts
7. Small groups create rooms for family relationship and meaningful bonding, knowing that the church is a family irrespective of race, age and status.

8. Small group strategy encourages active participations in Bible study, unlike what happens in large congregations where many members hide their talents in the crowd.
9. It helps people to grow homogeneously without losing sight of the mother church
10. It encourages and validates African cultural way of meeting people's needs in small groups unit.
11. Small group method ensures that everybody in the circle has his or her needs fulfilled for the group to move ahead.

### **Insights from Analysis of Data**

The following are the insights deduced from the analysis of the data collected:

**Membership Loss.** From the responses of these focus groups, the researcher is of the opinion that the problem of membership loss is not necessarily because of the doctrine of the church nor does it have to do with the years of study in Bible Class. Though it may seem difficult for a beginner to grasp the peculiarity of the Adventist messages, but it should not be forgotten that it is the Holy Spirit that convicts people. Ellen G. White asserts:

As His representatives among men God does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like Passions with those they seek to save. She continues, Christ took humanity that He might reach humanity.<sup>36</sup>

This seems to emphasize the need of the church today. The problem is not in human's inability. It is God that supplies the ability. Those that God will use to win and retain members will be people who recognize their helplessness and the helplessness of others and seek for the grace to bring them to Christ who alone can save humanity. This kind of passion

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<sup>36</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Takoma Park, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000) 7.

and thirst for souls are common only in small groups organizations where everyone knows the need of the other individually and passionately.

**The Problem Level.** The basic problems as shown in this research, and as testified by Ellen White's statement is that the church seems to be failing in meeting the needs of church members. She states "Christ took humanity that He might reach humanity." For a small group to succeed, leaders must be conscious of the age group in the church, needs, gender, profession, tribe and the culture of the people that are grouped together.

The example of Christ, which was also practiced in the New Testament church as seen in Acts should guide the church. Although not explicitly stated in Acts 4:32-35, one could safely infer that the churches leaders were conscious of the challenges of the church and so, needs were met as such.

**Causes of Membership Loss.** It could be said that the present action groups or small groups in our churches now, especially as seen in Ado Ekiti, may not have taken into cognizance the following:

1. The growing needs of the different people groups in the church
2. The cultural analysis of the various groups in the church in order to effect better harmony
3. There is lack of regular and consistent review of the dynamics of small groups activities
4. So we find nominal "action" groups, where there is no action for Christ and so the members are compelled to live for better actions elsewhere

In view of these challenges identified the researcher in this part of this paper is designing a training that will inform, educate and equip church leaders and small groups' coordinators with the tools that are needed for effective small groups model.

## **Designing of Interventions**

In an attempt to proffer solutions to these challenges, the following interventions were considered appropriate as the researcher engages in the following activities:

### **Strategy 1: Procedure for the Focus Group Training**

- Selects 20 participants
- Train them personally in understanding the dynamics of modern day small groups
- Train them on the Biblical model (Old and New Testaments)
- Helps them to understand how traditionally our grandparents were retaining their children, extended family members, and the entire community (church)
- Teaches them the dangers that go with neglecting people group thinking, culture/norms, and insensitivity of age difference, gender, profession and tribal challenge
- Also train them on how to harmonize these issues without creating barriers among members
- This training was carried out at different workshops, seminars at different settings which helped to enhance their understanding
- This training would last for a period of three months, (November 2015 to January 2016) after which the researcher, would design a small group program that is based on God's relationships with families and the immediate community (church)

### **Strategy 2: Proposal for Training of Small Groups Leaders**

The researcher would work with a team of 20 persons in carrying out the two weeks Small Groups meetings. Nevertheless, this would come up after seven days of intensive training of the team members on using small groups for membership retention, after which the program will be implemented. The details of this training are in chapter five.

### **Strategy 3: Development of Family-Based Small Groups Meetings**

#### Day 1: God and family prayers

1. What is God intention for family? Psalm 62:8, 1 Thess. 5:17
2. Who created families? Gen. 2:18-24, Gen 1:27
3. How is family life strengthened? Roman 15:1, 2, Matthew 6:6
4. What is the role of prayers in meeting family objectives? James 5:17-18

#### Day 2: God and family needs identified

1. Who alone knows the family adequately? Gen 2:18, Eph. 5:22-28
2. Does God care about the wellbeing of family? Psalm 91:1-6; Ps 127:1-5
3. How did God supply the needs of Hannah, Abraham and Zachariah. 1 Sam 1:9-20, Gen 12:3; Luke 1:5-17
4. What does Philippians 4:19 say concerning meeting family needs?
5. Is God still willing to identify with families today? Phil. 4:19, Mal 3:6

#### Day 3: God and the head of the family

1. According to the scripture, who is the head of the family? Gen 1:27, Eph 5:22-28
2. Is God concerned about family structures? Eph 5:22-28; Eph. 6:1-4
3. What is the essence of this structure? For service to God and humanity Eph 5:22-27
4. What is the primary role of the head? 1 Tim 5:8; 1 Tim 3:5
5. How does this compare with God as the head of the universe? Phil 4:19, Math 6:28-33

#### Day 4: God and the mother of the family

1. Does God have regard for mother? Exod. 20:12
2. What is the role of mothers in the Bible (Hannah) 1 Sam 1:9-20
3. As mothers less needed today in the society? Exod. 20:12, Eph. 5-23
4. What about in Christian witnessing? Judges 4:4-7; Luke 1:39-45
5. What is the role of mothers in the home/community? Luke 8:1-3

Day 5: God and the children in the family

1. Are children part of God's plan for families (Ps 127:3-5)
2. Did God ever like children or young people in carrying out his mission? (Josiah, Joseph, Moses, Timothy)
3. What is the role of the young people today in saving souls? Gen 44 and 45
4. How are parents to relate with the young ones under their care? Eph. 6 1-4.
5. What lesson can be learnt in a united family? Ps. 133:1-3

Day 6: God and the extended family relations

1. Does God have regard for relations in the family? (see Jacob. Gen. 27:41-28:5)
2. The African culture, which encourages community is it biblical? Gen. 25:19-27
3. According to the Bible, who is our relation/neighbor? Ex. 32:27, lev.19:15-18 and Rom. 13:8-10
4. What is God's plan for everyone? Jeremiah 29:11-13 Rom. 13:8-10
5. Should a Christian be actively concerned about those relations outside his immediate family? Gal 3:26-29, Mat.5:43-48

Day 7: God and family togetherness (Part 1)

1. What is God's purpose of creating families? Ps 133:1, Gen 1:28
2. What role does family worship play in family growth? Roman 12:1
3. What day of the week did God specially set apart for family worship? Ex. 20:8-10
4. Is God concerned about the family's togetherness in heaven? Isaiah 66:22-23
5. How should families prepare for such a union today? Gen 2:1-3, Exod. 20:8-10; Isaiah 1: 18-20

Day 8: God and the immediate family community: the church

1. Does God have plans for the church community? Matt 16:18-19
2. What is His desire for the church community? Matt 28:18-20

3. What must the families of the church do to share Christ with the community? Acts 2: 44-47
4. How are the families in the church described in the Bible? Matt 5: 13-14
5. How many people are in God's plan of salvation? John 3:16, Matt 11:28

Day 9: God and the family's larger society

1. What mandate is given to God's children for the entire world? Matt 28:18-20
2. Who initiated this mission movement Gen 3:15; John 3:16
3. What is God's purpose for this mission? John 3:16; Rom. 6:23
4. What advantage(s) does this have on the entire world? Rom. 6:23
5. Would you be part of God's family that will take his message to the world? Isa 1:8-9

Day 10: God and the family's law of health and happiness

1. What does the Bible say concerning our body? 1 Cor 3:16-17
2. How did God create the body? Gen 2:7
3. What are some of things to avoid in order to be healthy? See Lev. 11
4. What are some of the things to encourage in having optimum health? see 1 Cor. 10:31
5. What role does our lifestyle play in longevity? Gen. 5:1-32

Day 11: God and the family at dinners (God in our eating habits)

1. Before the entrance of sin what was prescribed by God for humankind? Gen 1:29-30
2. How did this kind of diet help humanity? Gen. 5 Dan. 1:8-15
3. What happened when sin came and man was given an alternative? Lev. 11,; Ps 90:10-12
4. What is still the ideal diet today? Gen. 1:29-30
5. Would you desire to have good health? 3 John 1:2

Day 12: God and the family's plan for progress (Tithe and Temperance)

1. What is God's purpose for every one of us? 3 John 1:2

2. What method of partnership has God put in a place for our growth? Mal. 3:8-12
3. What promise did He give those who obey this instruction? Mal. 3:11-12
4. How does avoiding excesses help us to grow? 1 Cor. 10:31
5. Is this instruction still relevant today? Mal. 3:6

Day 13: God and His plan's in our family wellness

1. How much regard does God have for families? 1 Tim. 1:8
2. Does the unity of God's larger family matter to Him? Ps 133:1-3
3. What about today's disasters, earthquakes and diseases, what is His plans to get human kind out of it? John 14: 1-3; Rev. 21:1-4
4. How will it sustain families before He comes again? John 16:33, He will give us "Peace that passes all human understanding"
5. How shall humanity be liberated from these pains? John 14:1-3

Day 14: God and family togetherness (part 11)

1. What is God's ultimate plan for humanity? John 14:1-3
2. Will tears, sorrows, pains and death ever come to an end? Rev. 21:1-4, Isaiah 65:17-22
3. Who will put an end to it? Rev. 1:7-8, John 14:1-3
4. After this, what will be the home of God's redeemed families? Rev. 21:1-4
5. Will there ever be separation from God's? Isaiah 65;17-22, Rev. 21:1-4

### **Limitations**

This intervention project will be limited to three churches out of the eight at Odo-Ado community due to financial constraints and personnel to manage the implementation. It will also be reduced to certain number of days and period of hours during the time of implementation because of security of lives and transport challenges.

### **Expected Period of Evaluation**

The researcher would, after the training of these twenty small groups leaders, embark on conducting three small groups people-oriented family outreaches. After which the following phases of evaluation would commence.

1. The first phase of this evaluation would be expected to last for a period of one year to ascertain its reliability. From February 2016 to February 2017
2. Evaluation will be continued after the first one year, that is, February, 2016 to February 2017
3. As the unit grows to 12 persons, it will be re-organized into other smaller groups while monitoring will continue.
4. Regular training of small groups leaders will be done on quarterly basis on:
  - a. Meeting the felt needs of small groups
  - b. Membership Retention
  - c. Visitations and
  - d. Small group programming.

### **Project report**

Within the first three months, (March to May, 2016) the outcome of this project will be reported to:

- a. The Conference Administration
- b. Odo Ado church (First church in Ado Ekiti)
- c. Opopogboro Church
- d. Oke-Ila church and
- e. All the church leaders in Ado Ekiti

## Summary

The discoveries in this chapter did not only expose the researcher to the need of small groups strategy to membership nurture as a tool for retention, but also clearly shows that culturally, people were kept intact in their various families and communities through small groups method. It could be however reasonable, to share the following observations as discovered from the focus groups responses which may be summarized thus:

1. The growing needs of the different people groups in the church are not taken into cognizance.
2. There is no adequate cultural analysis of the various groups in the church, so ministering to these people is inadequate.
3. There is no regular and consistent review of the dynamics of small groups programs, and activities. What seems to be practiced in Ado Ekiti is foreign to what was the practice culturally.

As a result, we have nominal small groups where there is little or no action at all. So, the members are compelled to leave the church for search of better actions elsewhere.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT NARRATIVE

In this chapter, the researcher will be briefly alluding to the previous chapters in order to have a link and to bring the objective of the project to a focus. It will also, for the sake of clarity, be referring to the project's theological foundation as well as briefly describing the literature review of the ministry situation. The researcher will regularly refer to the details in the focus group findings in chapter four, without necessarily repeating the chapter. It will clearly narrate the steps taken to train the small groups leaders, the materials used and the period for this training.

Moreover, it will highlight the rationale for choosing small groups family program meeting whose objective is to emphasize the fact that the smaller, the better in terms of bonding, understanding, nurture, meeting needs and membership retention.

Furthermore, the researcher will endeavor to list all the activities carried out to implement the project, that is, the seminars and workshops conducted. The number of persons that attended would be reported as well as where and when it was carried out. The cost of the project, topics presented and the outlines will also be briefly shown.

At the end, the researcher will try to show the results after the project has been monitored and evaluated using SWOT Analysis as the instrument for final measurement. This SWOT analysis will be used in detail in chapter six of this project. It will also take into consideration the general opinion of the participants.

This chapter will conclude by taking notes of the general observations, evaluations, and corrections while final recommendations will be in chapter six of this project. The final outcome will be presented to:

- a. The Ekiti Conference Administration
- b. The three main churches used for the project, namely: Odo Ado, Opopogboro , Oke -Ila and
- c. The leaders of the various churches in Ado Ekiti

### **A Brief Reference to the Ministry Context in Chapter One**

This project began by showing that SDA in Ado-Ekiti is experiencing a massive loss of indigenous members, while other denominations are retaining theirs. As it was also observed that in other denominations, Ado-Ekiti indigenes form over 40 percent of their members' population. It is quite worrisome that Ado-Ekiti where we have less than one percent indigenous church members is still experiencing a general membership loss. In view of this problem, this research has attempted to find out a solution by studying the history and culture of Ado-Ekiti community in chapter four to ascertain how they were keeping their families, communities, and the entire clans without membership loss except by death.

Fortunately a brief interviews and historical study of Ado-Ekiti community showed clearly that they actively embarked on family small groups' strategy. It was discovered that families that were nurtured grew to form different households; these households grew to be strong communities with common understanding and relationship. This revelation created a passion for the researcher to make a serious study on using family small groups outreach as a strategy for membership retention in the Ado-Ekiti community. Looking at the importance of small groups in membership nurture, bonding and retention, Marie Single, in her testimony opines:

Have you ever wished you could just look into Jesus eyes And see His concern when you told Him about something that hurts? Have you ever wished you could feel His strong arms give you a comforting hug? Have you ever wanted to see His eyes shine when you trusted Him and He showed himself faithful? How much easier depending on Jesus and communing with Him would be if only He were here where we could see Him! That's exactly why He gave us each other: to be His serving hands, empathizing heart, listening ears, and encouraging words. She concludes by saying caring group (small group) is Jesus body, she asserts that the people in my group are what Jesus, who is in heaven, cannot be to me.<sup>1</sup>

According to Single, being involved in a small group is an opportunity for in-depth fellowship and friendships. It is a place to bear burdens and celebrate victories. It's a place to give and receive inspiration, to live up to God's best. It encourages warmth and acceptance. It is the best atmosphere for fun and relaxation, spontaneous get-togethers and building life-long friendships.

Single, in her joy as a member of a vibrant, people-oriented small group adduced: "for me, caring group (small groups) has meant the difference between church attendance and being a part of our church family."<sup>2</sup>

### **A Brief Reference to the Theological Foundation**

In chapter two of this research project theological foundation, the writer attempted to show that the small group ministry is founded on a rock-hard biblical base. This firm foundation guards against the storms of change brought about by the many theories that blow through our churches. Although, initially these fads seem exciting and potentially beneficial, they quickly subside because they lack a clear biblical basis.

Small groups are not one of these fanciful teachings. In fact, of all the potential ministry formats available to the local church, small groups have the greatest biblical support. The basis of today's small groups ministries could be traced back to the Old Testament. The

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<sup>1</sup>Mcbride, 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

small groups begin with the very nature of God. Genesis 1:1 established the biblical record with a simple yet profound statement that God (Elohim) is the creator of all that exists.

McBride, in his opinion says: The word *Elohim* is plural, designating or incorporating more than one person. He asserts that although *Elohim* is interpreted as singular throughout the Old Testament, the word expresses the unity of three persons in the one God – the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. They have a unique relationship beyond our mere human comprehension which is replicated in today’s small groups.<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as the greatest family small groups’ leader in history. He is our model. Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV) admonishes us, be irritators of God and live a life of love. For me, Jesus’ involvement in a small group is the most convincing rationale for local churches needs to seriously consider including groups as an integral part of their congregational lives.

Confirming the aforementioned view, McBride opines that “because of Jesus’ emphasis on people, not programs, the only organization that merited Jesus’ continuing time and attention was His small groups. They were together constantly; they travelled together, shared meals, experienced mutual hardship, and literally lived together. As His crucifixion drew closer, He spent more and more time with His small groups, but less and less time with the multitudes that sought Him out”<sup>4</sup> Finally, the small group was Jesus’ method for leadership training. He devoted Himself primarily to the task of developing a select group, the Apostles. His goal was to equip this small group for future work, knowing that their success was to be measured in terms of their future ministries, not in present achievement.

Interestingly, the small groups family project which was done in Ado Ekiti on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February to the 19<sup>th</sup> goes to confirm the fact that there can be no better way of winning,

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<sup>3</sup> McBride, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 17.

nurturing, sharing, protecting and sustaining family members, communities, clans and even groups of homogeneous persons than using small groups method. Ado, being a city where people live and have their fulfillment in groups of families, households, clans and communities, small groups strategy is a better option.

### **Efforts to Actualize this Objective**

The three churches used for this research project namely: Odo-Ado, Opogbooro and Oke-Ila were sensitized as follows: (1) by sharing useful information on small groups' strategy for retention with the church leaders; (2) the researcher also briefed the local church small groups leaders what they are expected to know and do as they prepare for the small group outreach; (3) three prayer groups of five persons each were put in place while specific assignments on the success and retention of members were given to them.

After an intensive sensitization of the three major churches used for this small groups family meeting project, the following procedures were embarked upon:

#### **Part 1: Breaking the Ground (Pre-small groups evangelistic meetings)**

- Train 20 persons on tracts distribution in a target area (Nov. 20, 2015)
- 1000 copies of tracts on family relationship were distributed to 60 families, a month before the program (Jan. 2<sup>rd</sup> and 3<sup>th</sup>, 2016).
- This was followed by international specific visits to heads of families for prayers and formal acquaintances by the researcher and his team members (from December 2015 to January 2016)
- Interaction with family leaders concerning their basic challenges of live for a meaningful prayer focus (Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016)
- Distribution of primary health care and social needs to those families. E. g. foodstuff and other related items with the help of the health department in the church (January 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

- Intentional visits again to the families to ascertain their responses by the researcher and his team members (Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016)
- Grouping the families for meaningful interaction and for informal Bible studies. (January 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

### **Permission from the Conference Administration**

#### **Step I**

Having successfully trained and sensitized the group leaders and church members the next indispensable arm for the success of the program was the Conference Administration. The researcher officially wrote a letter to inform the officers about the details of the program and sought their cooperation and approval (see appendix section for details of the said letter).

#### **Step II**

On receiving the approval, the second stage of action was to send out the focus group questions to the individual members in the three major churches selected by the Conference Administration for effective and meaningful responses.

As indicated in chapter four, 30 focus group questions were given out. These questions were divided into two categories of five each. The first five questions were for the active SDA members in various ministries in their local churches while the other five questions were meant for former SDA members who have left the church and now active leaders in their present denominations or faith.

The researcher personally met with each of the individuals that collected the focus group survey and gave the needed information and education. All accepted to take it home and planed for two weeks period before submitting their responses in a written format. The few who could not write were personally interviewed and their opinions were recorded for use as permitted by them.

At the end of the two weeks, 24 people out of 30 responded with clarity of their individual and unbiased opinions concerning the reasons people leave the church. All of the 24 persons recommended small groups strategy for membership retention. Their responses actually helped the researcher to understand and prayerfully think of the materials that are most appropriate for the training of small groups leaders and to come up with the two weeks small groups family meeting outreach project

### Step III

The training for the small groups leaders were based on the following:

1. What a small group is:
  - a. Why are small groups important?
  - b. The Biblical basis for small groups
  - c. What small groups are not
2. Types of small groups
  - a. Nurture group
  - b. Outreach groups
  - c. Mini churches
  - d. Mission groups
3. How to organize small groups
  - a. Basics of small groups
  - b. Program and schedule
  - c. Leadership and training
  - d. Importance of small groups to church nurture and retention

These materials, though basically taken from the books *Small Groups for the End-time*, and *How to Lead Small Groups* by Kurt W. Johnson and Neal F. McBride, were

adapted by the researcher to suit the understanding and the context of the people being trained.

This training lasted for seven days beginning from Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November to the 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. It was a full day session for the seven days. The Conference President, Pastor Olufemi Alofe gave the introductory welcome and led out in the devotional aspects of the training.

The sum of N150, 000 was spent for their feeding, accommodation and materials.

Besides this training for the small group leaders, seminars, and workshops were conducted in the three main churches where the small group's family-based meetings were conducted. The essence was to prepare them to invite their friends in their neighborhoods. The theme was: "My family and my friends are all for Jesus". With this theme properly understood, small groups leaders and members of the church were mobilized with 1000 copies of tracts basically on relationship and Jesus' love for family and friends. The first day of this tracts sharing, 30 heads of families were visited and prayed with, the second outing recorded 50 different families that were given tracts and were informed of the small groups meetings. The excitement was high and the stage was set for the program itself.

Adediran John, one of the family heads, in his words of gratitude to God said "this is indeed a period for my family re- union" He continues I have been separated from home, though I leave with my wife and children, I am sure this small group family program will heal the wounds and bring permanent restoration to my home."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John, Adediran, A senior lecturer, Federal Polytechnic, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, interview by the author, Ado Ekiti, 29 November 2015.

## **The Rationales for Choosing Small Group Family Meetings**

### **Rationale 1: God and Small Group Family Meetings**

Johnson, a renowned author on small groups method, asserts that the human race was created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen. 1:27), God said something that provides us with something of a rationale for small groups: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18, NIV). Men and women were created as social creatures; they live happier and more productive lives in groups.

Johnson adds that the family unit was given to fulfill basic human needs. Just as a newborn baby needs the love and attention of a family for healthy development, so a newborn child of God needs the nurture that only a small attentive group from the larger church family can give them.<sup>6</sup>

Genesis 2:18 does not mean that everyone has to be married to find fulfillment in life, but it does imply that as humans we need each other socially. When God in Eden created the first man and woman, He formed a small community in relationship to Himself. They walked together (Gen. 2:15). They were also told to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28) increasing the size of the groups (church). A small group is a minimum of three individuals – two humans and God. Their desire is always for others to join their group and add to their social and spiritual development.<sup>7</sup>

### **Rationale 2: Jesus and Small Group’s Family Meetings**

Kurt says that “When Jesus was ready to found the Christian Church, He began with small groups made up of families. Mathew 4:8-22 and Luke 6:13-16. List the 12 disciples Jesus chose they were all members of various families. Family unit is the strongest that exist

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<sup>6</sup> Kurt W. Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time* (USA: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1982), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

in any community. If families are won and strengthened for Christ, then we surely have a strong, reliable, caring church.<sup>8</sup>

According to sociologists, once a group becomes larger than 12, there are dynamic changes and it is no longer small group but a midsize group.<sup>9</sup> That is why it is important for a small group to divide once it reaches approximately 12 members. If it does not, the survival rate is not good, because the small dynamics is no longer present. This challenge is clearly seen in most of the churches in Ado Ekiti where the nominal action units groups are more than 20 persons and are not properly organized and trained. So, they end up doing what small groups are not meant for which leaves the church in a state of confusion and worry. The ultimate results are usually membership loss as misunderstandings, quarrels, gossiping, pride and one-man show takes the front discussion in church agenda. However, some groups manage this issue by meeting as a larger group, and then dividing into smaller units that meet throughout the house for discussion and interaction.

Another interesting small groups (family program) phenomenon occurred within the 12 disciples. Jesus and the other disciples had close friends among themselves. Jesus had a special closeness to Peter, James, and John. In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26) Jesus asked the three to pray with Him, while the others were left in another part of the garden, likewise on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3). Kurt asserts that organizing small groups in the order of family special relationships helps to strengthen the groups, makes it more natural to function and easier to manage and this gives room for growth and retention.<sup>10</sup> However, Johnson counsels that: it should not be forgotten that when it comes to evangelism, both the small groups and the larger groups are needed. These should not be any

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

competition.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis of this project is the fact that when it comes to nurturing the new members and even the old ones, small groups method which gives room for weekly accountability and ready-made family to assist in the spiritual growth of the individual cannot be overemphasized.

### **Rationale 3: The Early Christian Church and Small Groups' Family Meetings**

The early believers called the church a “household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Paul offered encouragement to the young members by continually reminding them they belonged to a spiritual family. They were members of “the households of God” (Eph. 2:19). Peter used the same metaphor “house” (I Pet. 2:5) a “spiritual house” in which God lived. This metaphor edged over into reality, because in the first century Christian life centered on private homes. Christians were not allowed to build church buildings until after A. D. 313. The home became the meeting place of the early believers. Four examples are the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), the church in the house of Philemon (Philemon 2), and the church in the house of Nympha (Col. 4:15). Acts 2:41-47 indicates that the early Christian community was a tightly knit community that shared their resources and met daily for Bible study, fellowship, prayer and praise;<sup>12</sup> no wonder, membership loss was not an issue.

Looking at the success that attends the church as they meet in homes, Clement, one of the early church fathers, describes a house meeting that he visited: “The master of the house welcomed us, and led us to a certain apartment, arranged like a theater, and beautifully built. There we found considerable groups waiting for us, who had come during the night<sup>13</sup>.”

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 208.

There were a variety of types of house meetings, aimed for growth, membership nurture and retention. The book of Acts reveals these various types as follows:

- Prayer meeting (Acts 12:12)
- Evening of Christian fellowship (Acts 2:46)
- Common meals, possible communion services (Acts 2:46)
- A night of prayer, worship, and instruction (Acts 20:7)
- Impromptus evangelistic gatherings (Acts 16:32)
- Planned meetings to present the gospel (Acts 10:22)
- Following up of those inquiring about the gospel (Acts 18:26)
- For organizational instruction (Acts 5:42)

Later, Paul was seen doing the same thing. He also taught and witnessed “from house to house” (Acts 20:20 NIV) meetings in the homes provided the backbone of the church structure. It is on the basis of these Biblical convictions that the family, program of this project is structured. It is however, necessary to say that the homes were not the only context in which the church functioned.

### **Activities Carried out to Implement the Small Groups Family Outreach Meetings**

The following activities were embarked upon by the researcher in implementing the small groups family based outreach program:

#### **Selection of 20 Small Groups Leaders for Training**

1. By seeking for those who believe in small groups as Biblical and relevant in meeting needs
2. These leaders were recommended from their various local churches in Ado Ekiti, by the church pastors and head elders as voted by the church board

3. They were also interviewed by the conference leadership to be sure of their commitment to the program

### **Training Facilitators**

1. By the Conference President, Pastor Alofe, Samuel Olufemi, who gave the general introduction.
2. By Pastor Ogah, Christopher Osimhen, the project coordinator and the researcher.

### **Implementation of the Program**

- What a small group is
- Why are small groups important
- The Biblical basis for small group
- What small groups are not

### **Types of small groups**

- Nurture groups
- Outreach groups
- Mini churches
- Mission groups (target groups)

### **How to organize small groups**

- Basics of small groups
- Program and schedule
- Leadership and training
- Importance of small groups to church nurture and retention

Other areas covered in these training include:

- How to analyze small group thinking, and cultural norms in the church

- How to understand the growing needs of the different people groups in the church
- How to regularly and consistently review the dynamics of small groups activities
- How to harmonize the cultural variables without creating barriers among members
- Signs to watch out for, indicating that there is a need for re-organization
- How African culture affirms the use of small groups for nurture and membership retention<sup>14</sup>

Apart from these 20 would be leaders, the three main churches for the project were also highly sensitized and mobilized for the project.

### **Details of the Daily Activities during the Training (Nov. 22-28, 2015)**

Day 1: Areas covered are:

- General introduction, purpose and objective of the Training
- What a small group is
- Why are small groups important?
- The Biblical basis for small group
- What small groups are not

Day 2: Types of small groups:

- Nurture groups
- Outreach groups
- Mini churches
- Mission groups (Target groups)

Day 3: How to organize Small groups

- Basics of small groups

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Slaughter, *Beyond Small Groups Seminar Tapes* (Pasadena, CA: Charles E. Fuller Institute), tape 3.

- Program and schedule
- Leadership and training
- Importance of small groups to church nurture and retention

Day 4: Analysis of Small groups:

- How to analyze small groups thinking, and understanding their unexpressed moods.
- Understanding small groups needs
- Reviewing small groups program
- Group discussion on the previous lessons

Day 5: Small groups and African cultural practices

- How African culture affirms the use of small groups for nurture and membership care
- How to harmonize the cultural variables without creating barriers
- Signs to watch out for indicating that there is need for re-organization:
- Group discussion on the previous lessons

Day 6: General Review of the previous lessons:

- Through questions and answers format
- Through individual questions posed to the group
- Through groups dialogue
- Through written take home questions
- Closing exercises/commitment

### **Attendance**

Apart from the 20 would be small groups' coordinators other interested members from the various churches were in attendance. We had in all 26 persons. This training was held at Opopogbooro, the Conference headquarters of the SDA Church, Ado Ekiti, between

November 22-28, 2015. The total cost for feeding, materials and transportation was about N150, 000.00.

After this intensive training and education for both the church members and the immediate communities where the small group family outreach program was scheduled to hold. There was the need to visit some specific families who would be hosting the three centers. The time and the date to start were mutually agreed upon. Finally, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February to the 20<sup>th</sup> of the same month, 2016, the small groups two weeks outreach commenced. The details of this were shown in chapter four. However, for the purpose of this chapter, the topics are here referred to:

Day 1: God and family prayers

Day 2: God and family needs

Day 3: God and the head of the family

Day 4: God and the mother of the family

Day 5: God and the children in the family

Day 6: God and the extended family relation

Day 7: God and family togetherness

Day 8: God and the immediate family community

Day 9: God and the family's larger society

Day 10: God and the family's law of health and happiness

Day 11: God and the family at dinners (God in our eating habits)

Day 12: God and the family's plan for progress (Tithes and Temperance)

Day 13: God and His plans in our family wellness

Day 14: God and family togetherness (Part ii)

### **Daily Program for the Two-Week Small Groups Meetings**

5 Min - Welcome, fellowship, Refreshments, Family sharing

15 Min- Opening, sharing experiences, Prayer time

45 Min- Study/Meditation

8 Min - Personal application

7 Min - Intercessory Prayer

10 Min- Planning and housekeeping, fare well

Note: A small group meeting should be about 1 1/2 hours. Staying on time is very important to the success of the group.

### **The Program and its Impact on the Participants**

In every center, at least eight new persons attended the daily meetings. Unlike public outreach, that gives rooms for some uncontrolled crowds, noise and distractions; this small groups program was held in a very conducive homes. There were no distractions of any kind. Besides, every participant had that friendly atmosphere that encouraged fellowship, sharing, intercessory prayers and bonding. Furthermore, every day's program was introduced and concluded with addressing the specific needs of the family's groups, and the individual member.

The daily topics which was geared towards revealing God's special love, and care for His people was such an eye opener for the new persons who probably saw God before now as a callous, and a difficult being to please.

The exciting, warmth and fellowship visibly shown by all the participants were other strong evidences of God's great love for all. This attitude of grace, mercy and care won the hearts of these people to Christ. In all the three centers, Jesus became the song of love in their homes. At the end of the two week's meeting, 18 precious souls were baptized. The others who were not baptized immediately because of the influence of their families and the church they attend are still happily attending the small groups meeting that holds as scheduled by the groups.

## **The Program and its Impact on the Church**

- It has helped to break down the walls of partitions in the families and in Ado Community as expressed by Mr. Adediran John, a participant in this small group program.
- It has helped to reconcile and retain families together and to the church
- It has increased people's trust in the Lord and has brought Adventist messages to the homes as they continue to meet in people's homes since February, 2016. This is helping to retaining more friends to the church
- It has helped to create a regular platform for Bible Study, that is need- oriented as the emphasis now is on oneness and retention of members
- It has helped to produce quality membership who knows what the church stands for as they discuss the Bible in small groups.
- It also has increased the financial state of the church as the churches now have people who do not only give themselves but their means in serving the Lord. This gave rise to 2% increase in the income of the Conference between January to May, 2016 after the program was implemented.

## **The Program and its Impact on Retention**

It is gratifying to report that the 18 persons that were baptized in February 27, 2016 are still being retained in the church. Besides, they are happily leading out in their local churches with great passion for soul winning. What is most fulfilling among this group is their love for each other. They relate more closely to each other than ordinary blood relations.

They study, pray, fellowship and care for one another so much so that they are regularly attracting others to join them. In this type of understanding, the issue of nurture and membership retention possess a little or no challenge at all.

The 20 trained small groups leaders are increasingly becoming fulfilled daily as they see their converts grow in the Lord. The experience in Acts 2:40-47 could be ours if members are actively organized in groups for witnessing, nurturing and fellowship, this indeed will enhance membership retention.

### **Findings from Post Project Focus group Questionnaire**

After these small groups family outreach program, a second focus group question based on the same idea, pattern and setting was given out to the same group of people. It was unanimously agreed by the 24 respondents that small groups that are not only homogeneous in nature, but that are need-oriented, family structured, and are relevant to the people be used as a regular practice in order to enhance membership retention.

Again, it was observed that of the 24 participants that attended at the three centers 18 persons were baptized and retained so far. This is made up of people from various tribes, families and cultures. It also includes indigenes of Ado Ekiti community.<sup>15</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Record Book statistics of February 2016 shows that out of the 18 persons baptized, and are happily retained, six of these numbers are indigenes of the Ado-Ekiti community.<sup>16</sup> This is quiet revealing in view of the fact that for the past 49 years of Adventist presence in Ado community, the number of Ado indigenes has been less than 5 persons.

### **Observation from the Church**

It is also observed that of the 18 persons baptized since February ending, to be precise, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, all the members are still in the church till date. Unlike the

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<sup>15</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Record Book Year (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

previous experience where high number of people joined the church this Sabbath, only to exit immediately even before the following Sabbath.

There was the ugly case where over 400 persons were baptized into the church in 2010 through public evangelism by the following Sabbath, less than 50 persons attended the church. By today's statistic, less than 10 of those baptized in that outreach at Ado-Ekiti are in the church.

Besides, the fact that these 18 persons are regularly fellowshiping and are deeply involved in Bible study and witnessing, they have been grouped into three small groups. They have been meeting regularly and are consistently inviting more persons to their fellowship. With 100 percent retention so far as the present statistic reveals,<sup>17</sup> their intention is to nurture each group to become a full fledged church that will be organized soon.

### **Observation from the Community**

Apart from the fulfillment this small group meeting brings to its members, the positive impact on the community that houses the small groups cannot be over emphasized. Severally, these groups have organized themselves for community clean up, distribution of gift items to the best of their ability to the needy. They have equally visited those in prisons and other shut-in places. Within this period, they have shared with the community both in kind and in cash over three hundred thousand (300, 000, 000) naira only, this was sponsored by the health department of the Church. This has brought a relief to those who are in need both in the church and in the community.

They have also organized themselves into various praying groups that meet with different homes and families to pray with them. They organize community guest days once in

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<sup>17</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, Record Book Year (Odo-Ado District, Nigeria: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2013), 5.

a quarter to have a feel of the community so as to know what program to put in place for their service.

With these activities and many more to be carried out by these small groups, retention of members will have fewer challenges in the community. The church, to the host community, is no longer a secret 'big' organization that has no relevance to them, but now a church that feels, knows and lives with them. The church that lives in their homes. It is now the church that lives among them. The church that knows their felt needs and is part of the solution to their needs.

### **Observation from the Participants**

It is further observed by the participants that there is the need to produce more materials that will enhance the success of small groups activities. This cannot be over emphasized in view of the growing nature of our time and the communities that are housing these small groups. Materials that are culturally relevant but not against the principles of the Bible should regularly be provided. It is also observed that small groups teachers should be regularly trained to train church leaders, so that this objective of retention can be sustained.

Nevertheless, it is painfully noted that people are not willing to be grouped together due to lack of confidence they see in people. This they say, are expressed in gossips, backbiting, backslapping and power tussles and displays. These evil practices flourish more in large congregations and subsequently serve as hindrances to the growth, nurture and retention of church members. Hence, there is a mass exit from the Seventh- day Adventist Churches to other denominations.

So, for a small group to be consistently successful, small groups coordinators should be conscious of these evils and train members to prevent them from happening. The coordinators must make intentional effort to group people with similar interests, understanding, purpose and vision. This however must be done without creating class

barriers, cultural, and language barriers. Above all, the symptoms of small group re-organization should be carefully studied so that when a small group needs to be re-organized due to age, too much familiarity and monotony of programs and ideals, that opportunity should not be lost.

### **Project Final Evaluation using SWOT Analysis**

The researcher in this final evaluation has employed the use of SWOT analysis as a strategy in assessing the issues raised in this research. SWOT analysis is a useful technique for understanding the organization's Strengths and Weaknesses and for identifying both the Opportunities open to it and the Threats it faces.<sup>18</sup> SWOT analysis seeks to basically emphasize the following:

1. What is the strength of using small groups' method in achieving maximum membership retention?
2. What are the weaknesses of this small group's strategy to membership retention?
3. What are the opportunities of using small groups' method for membership retention?
4. What are the possible threats the Church in Ado Ekiti may face if they fail to use this small group strategy?

### **The Strengths of This Method**

In a nutshell, from the discoveries in this project, the SDA Church in Ado Ekiti will have the benefit of the following if they accept and adopt the small groups' method for membership retention.

- i. There will be strong and rapid membership growth/ nurture. There will be a predictable growth, as sharing and fellowshiping in homes within the church community will be a thing of joy.

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<sup>18</sup> SWOT Analysis, [https://www.mindtools.cor.com/pages/article/new/tmc\\_05.htm](https://www.mindtools.cor.com/pages/article/new/tmc_05.htm), accessed 19 May 2015.

- ii. Meaningful Bible Study in homes which will involve both members and non-members would be encouraged and enhanced.
- iii. Need-Oriented programs based on the individual groups would be developed regularly and carried out.
- iv. It will enhance the relevance of the SDA Church in the Ado Ekiti community that houses the SDA headquarters in Ado. This will encourage people-oriented programs like community cleaning, welfare services, primary health programs, community guest days. All these will be part of the spiritual programs of the groups
- v. Furthermore, witnessing will no longer require big budget as it is seen now. It will be no longer a periodic gigantic program that consumes millions of naira, but a way of life for the group members.
- vi. There will be no room for idle members because everybody is involved which is the thrust of small groups. As a result, membership retention will be a lot easier.

### **The Weaknesses of This Method, If Any**

From the researcher's discovery in this project, this method is divinely initiated and commissioned by God Himself, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the New Testament church members and Ellen G. white. This is necessary for the sustenance of His church. If there will be any weakness at all, it will be from the part of the coordinators and the unwillingness of the church to cooperate with God. So, in order to forestall this challenge, the following precautions are being suggested by the researcher:

1. There should be regular training of the coordinators and the groups (church)
2. Small groups program should be reviewed regularly, as the coordinators put in place monitoring and evaluation teams
3. Both the Conference Administrators and the groups' coordinators must ensure they work together for its success.

## **The Opportunities of This Method**

As earlier seen above, where the researcher enumerated the strength of using this method. Other opportunities are:

1. The church will be free of idleness, backbiting, gossiping and back slapping since all will be busy for the Lord.
2. It will reduce the “Spirit” of one-man show that is rampant in the SDA Churches now. This ugly trend has given room for so called “supper – human” leaders while majority of others are seen as men and women of no talents.
3. If this approach is strictly accepted and practiced, membership loss will be highly minimized while membership retention will be very high. As shown so far in this project. Every baptized person that came in (18) through this small groups during this project is in the church.
4. It will increase the numbers of indigenes that will be won and retained to the church since the approach of the groups would be intentional missionary outreaches. This has been proven true in this project’s small groups family outreach program, where 6 persons of the 18 baptized are natives and are happily in the church.

## **Threats SDA Church in Ado Ekiti May Face if This Method Is Not Accepted**

Among others threats that the SDA Church, Ado Ekiti, may be saddled with if they fail to accept and adopt this method are:

1. There will be continuous decline of active members to such an alarming rate that in the next 20 years, the church may lose more than half of its active members to the other denominations.
2. The church will continue to be irrelevant to the community thereby making witnessing difficult, and no one to retain

3. The church may be filled with People who claim they belong to God, yet without an understanding of their calling, talents' and their goals/objective as Christians.
4. There may be an alarming increase in divorce rate, back biting, gossips, and lawlessness will be the order of the day since members are not adequately biblically motivated and directed.
5. There will be acute conflicts and crisis on issues that are minor yet tearing the churches apart which cannot be resolved because the church is idle and cold (Rev. 3)
6. The essence and the power of God that is bestowed on the church through the Holy Spirit will be greatly compromised. Therefore in order to avoid these ugly pitfalls of active membership loss to other denominations, the SDA Church in Ado Ekiti should embrace the small groups strategy of retention of members. It is a common knowledge that one does not continue to use the same strategy year in year out and expect a different or a better result.

### **Post Project Evaluation Report**

The outcome of this post project evaluation report would be presented to:

- (a) The Conference Administration
- (b) Odo Ado Church (First Church in Ado Ekiti)
- (c) Opopogboro Church
- (d) Oke ila Church (where the researchers is presently)
- (e) All the Church Leaders in Ado Ekiti.

### **Summary**

This Chapter revealed the essence and benefit of using small groups family outreach program that is family- oriented. It does not only bring the message to the barest level of

meeting the family needs and aspirations in their homes, it also helps to assess, unite and strengthen various families within the church community.

This strategy, as small groups method of witnessing, undoubtedly, goes a long way to develop the local church and its community as the members won are retained. There is no denying the fact that when the family, which is the most fundamental unit of the church and the community is grown up spiritually, then retention of members may be easier.

Furthermore, it is also true that a healthy church, no doubt, produces a growing church. It is even more obvious that when the church is healthy and growing, membership retention becomes a thing of joy.

This chapter concludes by suggesting that before small groups could be said to be succeeding there must be regular training of both the small groups' coordinators and the entire membership. They should be people who know and understand the dynamics of small groups for effective retention of its members. Above all, relevant materials that are both people and need- oriented, that are proven and tested by the people that will enhance the nurture and retention of the members should be provided. When these are in place, membership retention becomes a lot easier.

CHAPTER 6  
SUMMARY, LESSONS LEARNED, RECOMMENDATIONS  
AND CONCLUSION

**Summary**

From the findings in this study, it seems obvious that there is the urgent need to expedite actions to curb the ugly trend of the increasing membership loss in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in general and Ado-Ekiti in Particular. This trend calls for concern in the SDA Church, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, where on a daily basis, the church is losing precious souls to other denominations.

In view of this, Kurt, an experienced and a prolific writer on small groups posits: “it is time to change some of the ways we do church business”<sup>1</sup> This assertion was made in view of what happened in China, when the Global Mission project of the Adventist Church organized and trained people into various small groups and the laity were empowered to witness for the Lord in groups. He observed that in 1996 more than 2,000 new congregations were established and retained, and 659, 899 men and women became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world. In China alone, 114 churches that were made up of both natives and non-natives were established with less membership retention challenges in areas each with a population of one million people where five years before we did not have even one member<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt, 13.

<sup>2</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *133<sup>rd</sup> Annual Statistical Report-1995*, Advertising brochure, Global Mission 1996.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ado-Ekiti, has been plagued with serious membership decline. This becomes much more worrisome considering the fact that, of the 1005 members in Ado-Ekiti Community, the natives are less than five persons, except for this project outreach that brought in six new indigenes, making a total of eleven indigenous persons since its inception in 1966.

From this result, it could be said that if this trend of using small groups' family meetings is regularly followed, retention of members will be meant with fewer challenges. Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that, Ado-Ekiti community, with its traditional kingdom structured system of nurturing, administration, protection, fellowshiping/sharing and retention of its members, if SDA Church would make an impact in retaining the members won from this culture, their traditional system of family-oriented small groups communal practices should be taken into consideration in reaching and retaining their members. Little wonder then, that Jethro (Moses father in-law), advised him in Exodus 18: 17-24 to take time to study and understand the structure of the people he was ministering to in order to meet their needs in groups. Otherwise, Moses, a great leader, would have succeeded in wearing himself out, yet the work would not have been done adequately.

From the discovery so far, it might be pertinent to say that the only way to “mingle” effectively without “isolating” these precious souls for whom Christ died, in order to win them is through an organized, well trained, functional small groups. When this is done, nurturing and retention of members will be a thing of joy.

### **Lessons Learned**

The writer's personal experience during the implementation of this project shows that it is easier to plan an activity than to implement it. The realities on ground are quite different from the challenges anticipated during the planning stages. The following are the plans or activities where the researcher had some challenges:

1. The challenges of Translation: When the researcher was developing the focus group strategy questions used to source information, it was planned to translate them into the five people's groups dialect in Ado Ekiti. These people groups are the Yorubas, which form the majority of the population in Ado-Ekiti. Others are the Hausas; the Ibiras; the Ibos; and the Fulanis, who are nomads. The two persons that promised to assist in the translation of this document into their dialects travelled for further study.
2. Financial Constraints: While planning for the small groups' family outreaches meetings; the researcher had planned that the meetings would hold in five centers, to be financed by the Ekiti Conference of SDA Church, Ado and Opogbooro districts and the researcher. However, when it was time to implement, it was obvious that the finance to run these five centers was not available, so it was reduced to three centers, namely Oke Ila, Opopogboro and Odo Ado axes.
3. Involvement of Laity: It was discovered that there would have been more success if the coordinators had involved more lay persons. The idea of running five centers at the planning stage should have been part of the initial budget which should have accommodated more lay coordinators. More so, that the initial 20 persons trained, four of them could not function properly due to other pressing family engagement during the small groups outreach. This necessary because the more the involvement of lay persons, the higher the retention of members would have been.
4. Language Barrier on the Part of the Researcher: Another major hindrance was the language challenge. The researcher, who was the Chief Coordinator during the outreach, does not understand these other dialects except English and the researcher's local language (Esan, in Edo State). This actually served as a limitation. The intention of the Chief Coordinator could not be truly expressed during the training by the interpreters due to language limitations of the team members.

5. Time Factor: The fact that the researcher of this project is also a Conference Executive Secretary who is equally saddled with two additional departments: Ministerial and Family life and a Pastor of a local church in Ado Ekiti. This posed a serious challenge on the time that was available for the researcher. The success of this project was strictly by the grace of God.
6. Lack of Adequate Illustration materials: Because of the diversities of cultures and the general human limitations, more materials on illustrations that meet the cultural needs of the people should have been provided. The pictorial illustrations were few and there were not enough other visual teaching materials for the children in the homes. Pictures that express God's love for the families should have been used to drive home our peculiar lessons on family relationships, God's love for families etc. the Bible lessons are better understood and appreciated when illustrated. This however, should not have been just any picture but African pictures that would make God real to the families and the church communities.
7. The Need for Continuity: It is the passion of this researcher that small groups training should be on every quarter. So that in a year, there will be four major trainings for groups' coordinators and the churches. This will translate in groups outreaches every quarter. This is yet to be fulfilled in all the churches. It was discovered that if the churches would focus on families in every community, great will be the results. Should this project be conducted again, the researcher would work on all the family life leaders in the local churches and their pastors to ensure life's continuity of the program for easy retention of members.

### **Recommendations**

As the writer reflects continuously on this project, it would be pertinent to make a number of recommendations based on the insights gained and lessons learned from both the time of planning and implementations of this project.

1. Contextualization of Materials: Many books and articles have been written on different types of small groups, but not many of such the researcher perused attempted to make an in-

depth write up on how people retained their family members, households and their entire community before the advent of Western education. This challenge, has served as a defect in understanding the dire need of contextualization using small groups for retention of members in the postmodern era, where people feel that their “strength” is in belonging to the crowds. The researcher is therefore recommending that further effort should be made on how to adequately come up with Africa materials on small groups retention for the African minds by a future researcher.

2. Availability of Materials: It is recommended that materials on small groups, that are culturally sensitive to the retention of members be made available by the local churches through the conference to all church leaders, pastors, Sabbath school coordinators and personal ministries leaders in every local church. This could be possible if 2% of the local church budget is committed to this project. This will go a long way to enhance membership nurture and retention.

3. Intentional Sermons on Small groups: Pastors and all church leaders should be educated and equipped to preach, teach and train people on the need to go back to this Biblical mandate of using small groups’ strategy for membership retention.

4. Develop Small groups Curriculum in Our Institutions: Since small groups strategy is not only limited to church use, but also used in the military, paramilitary and in politics, it is therefore, recommended that a formal curriculum be developed, at least in all the SDA institutions of higher learning. This will help to reduce the present crisis and chaos in our society. As people are taught of the need to care, protect, share and fellowship mutually together on a regular basis, it would bring about both individual and groups fulfillment. This would enhance peace, love, and togetherness. In a setting of this nature, retention of members would be a lot easier.

5. Financial Provision: It is also recommended that a budgetary allocation be made available at the Union, Conference, Mission, and District levels to print these training materials so that as small groups' leaders and coordinators are recruited they will have something to work within their local churches.

6. Administrators Seminars: For future implementation of this project, it is recommended that the leadership seminars should begin with the church administrators whose moral, financial and physical support are needed for the regular monitoring, evaluation and equipping the groups to carry out their duties effectively. This training should also include all gospel workers in the SDA Churches in Ekiti Conference.

7. Indispensable Requirement: It is also recommended that the office of small groups' coordinators be created at the conference, district and local levels. This person(s) where possible should be different from Conference evangelism director. It should be person(s) who have been trained and certified as dynamic small groups professionals that can transmit the same practical idea to the churches.

8. Terms of office: It is also recommended that this Conference groups coordinator, who equally will train districts and local churches' coordinators should be allowed to stay in the office for a minimum of two terms. Experience has shown that it takes a minimum of six years to fully plan and carry out this plan effectively. So, regular change of the officers in this kind of sensitive office may adversely affect membership retention.

9. Equal Attention: The researcher also recommends that equal attention should be given to all the small groups in the local churches. It could be that their challenges may not be the same; however, almost all small groups have some basic features and needs. All should be encouraged to grow to full fledged churches. This is the essence or the objective of every small group. When this goal is attained, they should be re-organized into smaller groups by so

doing, God's Church will continue to multiply while membership loss will be reduced to its barest minimum as needs are met more effectively in groups.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher's humble, communal, biographical background, which includes living in a friendly small groups family network, education, religion and social-cultural context, has had a great influence on his personal, theological, and spiritual understanding for the ministry. His innate passion and love for church growth and retention of members actually endeared him to embark on this project. Happily, through it all, the writer discovered, to his highest fulfillment that, small groups strategy is God's unfailing end time method for fellowship, retention, and for the redemption of His people on earth and His sacred Church.

## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION LETTER FROM EKITI CONFERENCE

November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015

To The Ekiti Conference Administration  
SDA Church, Olora Street  
Opopogbooro, Ado-Ekiti  
Ekiti State, Nigeria

Dear Sir

**PERMISSION TO EMBARK ON MY DISSERTATION'S FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT**

I Pastor Ogah, Christopher Osimhen, humbly write to seek your approval and your support in sourcing information that will help me in my dissertation project. This information source will be limited to Ado-Ekiti metropolis where my research project scope is based.

The churches that will be involved are:  
SDA Church, Odo-Ado  
SDA Church, Opopogbooro and  
SDA Church, Oke-Ila

I promised to adhere to the ethics of strict confidentiality in sourcing and handling this information

Thanks for your usual cooperation

Pastor Ogah, Christopher Osimhen  
Executive Secretary, Ekiti Conference

Approved by:

Pastor Alofe, Olufemi Samuel  
President, Ekiti Conference of SDA Church

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS

A survey meant to guide in choosing participants for focus group

Name .....

Phone number.....

Age.....

Occupation.....

Membership status (Baptized or not).....

Ministry Role in church.....

1. In the past we have baptized many new members but most of the indigenous new members have left. Why do you think this has happened?
2. Is there a problem with how we prepare people for baptism? If so, what are those problems?
3. How can the church do a better job of caring for new members? Retaining new members?
4. Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?
5. Do you think there is adequate fellowship among members in our churches?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR FORMER SDA MEMBERS AT ADO-EKITI

Name.....

Phone number.....

Age.....

Occupation.....

PRESENT DENOMINATION.....

1. What are the things you feel the church did not do well which may have made you stop coming?

2. Is there a better way the church could have served you?
3. Are you planning to rejoin the church?
4. What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?
5. Do you have any comment?

## APPENDIX C

### RESPONSES FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS' QUESTION

*Researcher obtained permissions from participants to publish demographic information and responses.*

Name: Olajide Akinlayo  
Phone number: 08032382584  
Age: 50 years  
Occupation: civil servant  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church:

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, if the leader of the group is talented and resourceful and allows the Holy Spirit to take his place.

Name: Ogunsakin Oluwaseun E.  
Phone number: 08038504084  
Age: 30 years  
Occupation: Student  
Ministry role in church: Worker

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Small group method is not a bad idea but still the whole members of church should be involved in the ware fare services or love or care of these new members, because that makes all member one in Christ as a body. More also, new members will be the leaders of the church to enrich the faith of newly converted members. I will say, let every church members participate in the movement of caring for new members, not only small group.

Name: Awoniyi Taiwo Joshua  
Phone number: 08067615364  
Age: 34 years  
Occupation: Public servant  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Youth Leader

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, the small groups method can help in retaining new members by dividing them into small group it will allow us to identify new members and it will make the follow up to be easier.

Name: Olaore Racheal B.  
Phone number:  
Age: 36 years  
Occupation: Public servant  
Present denomination C.A.C

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

Changes that I hope to see are as follow:

- True word of God – undiluted
- Love of God among brethren
- There should not be discrimination among children of God.

Name: Akande Dele Elijah  
Phone number: 08035838444  
Age: 62 years  
Occupation: School proprietor  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Elder

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

No, the small group method is not really working especially in cities, rather, there should be more activities in the churches. However, breaking from the cathedral method to the small Sabbath school is good.

Name: Femi Taiwo  
Phone number: 08034418416  
Age: 61 years  
Occupation: Engineering  
Present Denomination: Redeem Christian Church

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

I expect that the church should go back to its beautiful songs and have articulate choir and also pray more and do more of night vigils and use of drums.

Name: Evan. Adeyemo M.S  
Phone number: 07064393333  
Age: 34 years  
Occupation: Evangelist  
Membership status: Baptized

Ministry role in church: Evangelist

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, small group help very well with this reasons:

- They will open up to their leader what they are passing through.
- Study bible together, make them have personal encounter with Jesus.
- They will have new experience with Jesus.
- They will not be afraid of asking any question they have
- They will grow spiritually
- Their faith will also strong in Christ Jesus
- They will invite friends to join them
- They will be optimistic and also desire to know more about Jesus.

Name: Adetiba Temitope  
Phone number: 08038423963  
Age: 28 years  
Occupation: Business man  
Present Denomination: Redeem

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

The changes and experience I saw in my new church are that:

- I sing and dance very well
- I pray very hard
- The church member visited me regularly
- Pastors do come to me and pray for me
- The church gives me food stuff when I did not have food.

Name: Afolabi Omoniyi J.  
Phone number: 08136898330  
Age: 26 years  
Occupation: Pioneering  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Pioneering

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, taking the small group to their house will give a sense of belonging and it will help them to retain in the fold.

Name: Ajayi Moturayo  
Phone number: 08139013290  
Age: 17 years  
Occupation: Student  
Present Denomination: C.A.C

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

Yes, I hope to see and experience changes on the point that I had mentioned before i.e. I will be able to involve in activities of the church.

Name: Bakare Olumide O.  
Phone number: 09032303306  
Age: 22 years  
Occupation: Student  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Member

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, small groups will provide an avenue for the new believers to ask their pressing questions and get their answers. Some of them might be shy to ask or give contribution and offer their opinions in a large crowd or congregation.

Name: Matanmi Oluwabukola  
Phone number: 08050493386  
Age: 30 years  
Occupation: Nursing  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Deaconess, Children teacher

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, action unit helps a lot because it allows you to see each other and if someone is absent, you can contact and visit. Caring attitudes will make the new members feel welcomed and at home.

Name: Olatiilu O.I  
Phone number: 08035238861  
Age: 49 years  
Occupation: Teaching  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Serving Elder/ Amo leader/ Personal Ministry Leader

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes because

- Regular fellowship will retain them
- It makes old members to be more closer to them and understand them better
- The new members will be able to speak out their mind when they belong to small groups
- They will be able pray and study bible effectively
- To make friends with them will be more faster in small groups.

Name: Mrs Fatunde Bolanle F.

Phone number: 08033622673  
Age: 42 years  
Occupation: Civil servant  
Present Denomination: C.A.C, Aramoko Ekiti

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

Not applicable.

Name: Ayeni  
Phone number: 09023684878  
Age: 45 years  
Occupation: Civil servant  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Deacon

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes.

Name: Akande Beatrice  
Phone number: 08036891727  
Age: 59 years  
Occupation: Self employed (surveyor)  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Treasurer/ Deaconess

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, talents will be discovered. Each member will feel relevant. That will reduce one-man discussion group.

Name: Abifarin Olawale Femi  
Phone number: 08035141485  
Age: 30 years  
Occupation: Teaching  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Secretary to the Sabbath school superintendent

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, it will surely help, by visiting the new members from time to time.

Name: Adeoti Janet Ibronke (Mrs.)  
Phone number: 08038165827  
Age: 63 years  
Occupation: Retiree

Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Iya Ewe (Children Mother)

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?  
Yes.

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?  
Pray for me.

Name: Alabi Festus O.  
Phone number: 08035645813  
Age: 36 years  
Occupation: Clergy  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Clergy

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

The small groups method is a very good strategy and avenue in winning souls to Christ Jesus. The as they engage in caring for others and fellowship will encourage the new members to remain with God in the church.

Name: Ogusanmi Dayo  
Phone number:  
Age: 27 years  
Occupation: Business  
Present Denomination: C.A.C.

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

I hope to see praying church and not criticizing church.  
I hope to see caring church and not less caring church.  
I hope to see Godly encouragement from the members and not discouragement.

Name: Aina Oluwayemisi  
Phone number: 08034987945  
Age: 30 years  
Occupation: Entrepreneur  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Deaconess/ Assistance Clerk

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, but it will be better if all the members can participate in it. Different members may be assigned at different occasions, it will make it to be participatory.

Name: Alabi Mojisola  
Phone number: 07061570615  
Age: 26 years  
Occupation:  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Shepherdess

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Small group method will give room for more intimacy and rapour with newly baptized members.

Name: Dele Olajuyigbe  
Phone number:  
Age: 56 years  
Occupation: Business Man  
Present Denomination: None

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

The old way of worship in the church seems encouraging than the new, especially Sabbath school.

Name: Olaoluwa john  
Phone number: 08104839242  
Age: 26 years  
Occupation: pioneering  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Evangelist

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes

The new members will at least see the small group as their family and best group been close to them. They will feel belonging.

Due to their closeness they would know their challenges and ways to handle them.

They will have a quick and rapid spiritual growth.

Name: Olayomi Taye  
Phone number: 07031263957  
Age: 21 years  
Occupation: Student  
Present Denomination: Redeem

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

1. Faith in practice (in the members)
2. Love
3. Caring

Name: Kolawole Oluwasanmi  
Phone number: 07067809197  
Age: 24 years  
Occupation: Student  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Member

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, it will help.

Name: Oladimeji  
Phone number: 08067534109  
Age: 26 years  
Occupation: Fresh graduate  
Present Denomination: Redeem

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

More hospitality and welfarism.

Name: Elder Oyeniya Alien Alebiosu  
Phone number: 08038278628  
Age: 72 years  
Occupation: Retiree  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Serving Elder

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes.

Name: Dr. Benjamin Bankole  
Phone number: 0805645551  
Age: 45 years  
Occupation: University lecturer  
Present Denomination: C.A.C

What changes do you hope to see/ experience in order to be comfortable in the church?

The church should step up its activities to seek after the past members who had left the church.

Name: Elder Daniel O. Aina  
Phone number: 08035802218  
Age: 66 years  
Occupation: Retiree  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: Serving Elder, Stewardship

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes. By teaching sound doctrines, discipline among members and pastors, correcting attitudes and solutions to the problems.

Name: Mrs. Bamisaye Monisola  
Phone number: 08034668260  
Age: 44 years  
Occupation: Teaching  
Membership status: Baptized  
Ministry role in church: A member of treasury dept.

Do you think small groups method would help retain new members?

Yes, small groups will help because it would make us to know the new members and be familiar with them. They would be able to share their ups and downs with us without hesitations.

## APPENDIX D

### TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TEAM MEMBERS

#### GENERAL OUTLINE FOR SMALL GROUPS TRAINING WORKSHOPS/SEMINARS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TWO WEEKS FAMILY OUTREACH LEVEL ONE

Course title	Course description	Hours required
1. Small groups and church growth/retention	Nature and objectives of small groups ministry	48 hours
2. Workshops/seminars for local churches	The importance of using small groups strategy for membership retention in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	9 hours
3. Implementation of the project	Two weeks small groups outreaches in 3 centers at Ado-Ekiti	18 hours 20min. per center 54.6h =55 hours

DAILY LESSON SCHEDULE  
FOR  
SMALL GROUPS TRAINING AT OPOPO GBODRO  
THE CONFERENCE HEAD-QUARTERS, ADO-EKITI  
NOVEMBER 22-28, 2015

Time	1 <sup>st</sup> Day	2 <sup>nd</sup> Day	3 <sup>rd</sup> Day	4 <sup>th</sup> Day	5 <sup>th</sup> Day	6 <sup>th</sup> Day
7:30-8:00	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional
8:00-10:00	Philosophy, purposed and objective of small groups	Types of small groups	How to organize small groups	Analysis of small groups	Ado-Ekiti culture and small groups	Review of lesson taught
10:00 - 11:00	Essence of small groups	Nurture groups	How to organize small groups	What small groups lack	Harmonizing culture in groups	Questions and answers
11:00 - 1pm	Biblical mandate model	Outreach groups	Program/schedule	Group discussions	Small groups and Ethics	Personal testimonies
1pm – 3pm	Lunch/break	Lunch/break	Lunch/break	Lunch/break	Lunch/break	Lunch/break
3pm – 5pm	What small groups must avoid	Mini churches	Importance of small groups to retention	Reviewing small groups program	Signs to watch out for	Group discussions on the day
5pm-7pm	Supper/break	Supper/break	Supper/break	Supper/break	Supper/break	Supper/break
7pm-7:30pm	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship
7:30-8:30pm	Work/revision	Mission groups on strategy	Workbook on assignment	Workbook on assignment	Groups discussion on assignment	Closing exercise and commitment

DAILY SIMPLE OUTLINE SCHEDULE  
THE WEEKS FAMILY OUTREACH MEETINGS FOR THE THREE CENTERS

5min – welcome, family fellowship, refreshments family acquaintances

15min – Opening Prayers, Sharing experiences/Testimonies, personal prayer

45min – Study/Medication

8min – personal application

7min – intercessory prayer

10min – planning, house-keeping and farewell.

*NOTE: The Topics are in chapter four of this project*

**Daily Lessons for the Small Groups Training**

**What Will We Learn?**

- What a small group is
- Kinds of small groups
- How to organize a small group
- How to run a small group

**Unit 1**

**Introduction**

- I. What is a small group?
- II. Why are small groups important?
- III. The biblical basis for small groups.

What is small group?

- ✓ A "small group" is usually understood as a quantity-number of people, about 6 to 10.
- ✓ To function properly, a small group must be more than a collection of individuals.

Principle #1

A successful small group is more than numbers - it is an organism, a fellowship, a type of community.

Definition of small group

**In this study, a "small group" means:**

- A small number of people...
- who have formed a bond . . .
- directed toward fulfilling a purpose.

The group will only be effective, and survive, as it focuses on that purpose and its accomplishment.

**What small groups are not!**

Not automatic-

**Not easy to run.**

- They lack stability.
- They take time.
- They take commitment.
- They take a lot of work.

Not cure-all for all church problems

Small groups are not automatic in the sense that they do not run themselves. They lack stability because it is not easy to keep a group of people coming consistently to a small group session. They take time.

They take commitment for the same reason that they lack stability. You can't have an effective small group without the people being present.

They take a lot of work for all of the above reasons.

Not a cure-all. Small groups are not a pill you can give to the collective congregation and expect instantaneous results.

Not a substitute. Small groups are either

- an addition to regular church functions,
- or a better way of accomplishing the church function.

Not a substitute for regular church functions.

- Sabbath or Sunday schools should still be the mother of all "small group" functions.
- The worship service, the regular activities of the church, *the* departments all still function.

**Big Precaution!**

- ✓ Don't try to enroll your entire church in a small group system all at once. It won't work!!!
- ✓ Start with one or two groups and let the program grow over a period of time.

Why are small groups important?

“Small groups force people to think about and articulate what they believe in a way not usually possible with sermons and traditional Sabbath School lectures. They prompt dialogue and can bring a person to greater ownership of belief.” Ron Havermast, *Christianity Today*, Feb-7, ] 994, p. 29.

God Applies the Principle of Grow and Multiply to Human Relationships

Paul Applied the Same Principle to the Church

*“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”*

2 Tim. 2:2

### **Biblical Basis for small Groups**

Biblical basis for small groups

Acts 2:41-47

- ✓ Received the Word
- ✓ Baptized
- ✓ Instructed
- ✓ Fellowship
- ✓ Reached out
- ✓ Positive witness
- ✓ Grew daily

### ***Spirit of Prophecy basis for small groups***

"Preach less and educate more, by holding Bible readings, and by praying with families and little companies, . . .

--- *Gospel Workers*, p. 193.

"The formation of small companies as a basis for Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers also.

### ***Small groups in an SDA context***

We have a Spirit of Prophecy mandate to do so. Small groups ought to be highly successful in the SDA context.

We have a biblical mandate, through the *oikos* system, to use small group technology.

### **Do small groups work?**

- Not notably successful in some SDA Churches - why?
- SDA Churches are "institutionally" organized.
- SDA members are caught up in the secularized world-view of society without realizing it.
- A significant number of SDA members are not disciplined
- to take the time required for small group ministry.
- No church, SDA or otherwise, except one or two in the entire world, has successfully achieved majority participation in small group ministry.
- Much of what passes for small group ministry in the SDA Church is in reality a small quantity of people listening to a lecture!

## Unit 2

### Types of small groups

- ✓ Nurture groups
- ✓ Outreach groups
- ✓ Mission groups
- ✓ Mini churches

### Principle #3

Small groups are linked to the members' personalities, needs and level of discipleship.

#### Nurture groups

- ✓ Family/marriage issues.
- ✓ Church life issues.
- ✓ Bible studies for spiritual growth.
- ✓ Obedience/thought life issues.
- ✓ Work issues.
- ✓ "One another" biblical injunctions.

#### Outreach groups

- ✓ Outreach groups deliberately attempt to grow, regardless of the topic under consideration.
- ✓ Outreach groups use the *oikos* principle of soul winning.
- ✓ *Oikosis* the Greek word for a person's social network of friends, relatives, work associates, and social acquaintances.
- ✓ Outreach groups use the "empty chair" technique,

- ✓ David Yonggi Cho, who has the largest church in the world, has built it based on small groups, whose goal is to win two converts a year.

Mission groups

Mission groups are primarily interested in church planting, or groups like branch Sabbath/Sunday Schools.

Mini Churches

We'll study more about mini-churches later on.

#### **Principle #4**

Nurture groups have short life-spans. Outreach groups have longer lives.

### **Unit 3**

#### **Organizing small groups**

I - Basics

II - Program and schedule

III - Leadership and training

#### **What will we learn?**

- Understand why small groups succeed or fail.
- Meeting people's needs,
- Converting small groups into effective evangelistic agencies.
- Building a long-term small group system in a church.

#### **Principle #5**

“There are many ways to encourage, build, and run a small group system.”

#### **Basics of small group**

##### **Setup Time**

It takes from three to six months to adequately plan, organize, and launch a small group system.

.

Why?

- ✓ Small groups must have clearly defined, well-articulated purpose.
- ✓ Small groups must have adequate, consistent leadership.
- ✓ Small groups must have informed, spiritually gifted teachers.
- ✓ Small groups must have an organized, well-developed curriculum.

#### **Life Span**

- ✓ Small groups do not have a long life span.
  - Usually 8-10 weeks.

- Must re-covenant after that period of time.

### **Basic logistical questions**

- ✓ What is the purpose of this group?
- ✓ Where will the group meet?
- ✓ When will the group meet?
- ✓ How long will the meetings be?
- ✓ For how many weeks will the group meet?

### **What do you actually do in a small groups**

#### **Small group time frame**

- ✓ 90 minutes
- ✓ Dévidé into six activités

#### Typical small group session

5 min Welcome, fellowship, refreshments, ice breaker.

15 min Opening, sharing, experiences, prayer time.

45 min Study

8 min Personal application

7 min Intercessory prayer

10 min Planning and housekeeping

#### **Keeping time**

- ✓ A small group session should *be* about 1 1/2 hours.
- ✓ Staying on time is very important.
- ✓ Someone in the leadership group should be the time keeper
- ✓ Do not prolong the meeting. Start and stop on time.

#### **Principle #6**

Once warmed up, small groups do not like to quit. Stay with the time schedule anyway!

#### **covenants**

- ✓ A small group covenant is a promise members either sign or commit to for the length of the group's existence.

#### **Principle #7**

Covenants are important because they help the group retain continuity and commitment

- ✓ A covenant may be written or verbal, but it is indispensable to
- ✓ the success of the small group.
- ✓ A written covenant is better.

- ✓ An unwritten covenant may only express the wishes and desires of a couple of strong-willed people in the group.

I (we) will:

- Attend for the period of time decided on.
- Participate in discussions.
- Pray daily for the group and its mission.
- Fulfill assignments.

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

### **Basic of small group leadership**

#### **Principle #8**

Consistent, dedicated, trained leadership is indispensable to the success of small groups.

#### **Small group leadership**

- ✓ A small group needs a four-member leadership team:
  - Administrator/organizer.
  - Teacher/discussion leader.
  - Hospitality person
  - Prayer leader/pastor.

#### **Leader's covenant**

- ✓ Attend all sessions of the group on time.
- ✓ Spend at least 3 hours a week preparing for the group session
- ✓ Be knowledgeable about your assignment.

#### **Principle #9**

If your leadership team falls apart, or does not function, the small group will disintegrate.

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## VITA

Name: Christopher O. Ogah

Date of Birth: December 24, 1966 in Ibhiedu- Ohordua, Nigeria.

Family: I married on March 11, 1996, to former Ruth Ilegbenose

### **Education**

1982-1986 Edokpolor Grammar School, Benin City, Nigeria

1992-1996 B.A Theology, Andrews University, (Babcock University Campus)  
Nigeria.

2001-2003 M. A Religion, Andrews University (Babcock University Campus)  
Nigeria.

2013-2016 D.Min. In Mission and Society (Adventist University of Africa, Kenyan)

### **Ordination**

2000 Ordained by the SDA Church, currently holding ministerial credentials  
Ekiti Conference of SDA Church.

### **Employment/Experience:**

1987-1989 Literature Evangelist, Edo State, Nigeria

1989-1992 District Pastor at Owan/ Uromi, Edo/Delta Mission of SDA

1992-1996 Studying at Adventist Seminary of West Africa,( Babcock Campus)

1996-1998 District Pastor at Asaba, Edo/Delta Conference

1998-2004 Evang/Strategic/ Global Mission Director/District Pastor

2004-2006 Evang/Strategic/ Global Mission Director/District Pastor

2006-2010 Family life/Stewardship/Trust Services Director/District Pastor

2012-to date Executive Secretary/Ministerial Secretary/Family Life Director, Ekiti  
Conference of SDA Church