

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY FOR RETENTION OF NEW MEMBERS IN NGOMA SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, SOUTH RWANDA FIELD, RWANDA UNION MISSION

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The aim of this study was to develop a strategy that will be used as a model for solving the problem of membership retention in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church. The strength of every church is its membership. Loss of church members always affects the growth of the church. It is indeed difficult for the pastor to singly resolve or manage loss of membership in the church. The possibility of becoming ineffective to solve the problem of the loss of membership has made the pastor depend on lay leaders who often are not well equipped with skills in the treatment of new converts.

The Bible, Seventh-day Adventist sources and other materials on membership retention were reviewed. Questionnaires were given to selected church members to determine the training needs of the church elders and all church workers as well as the

church members for membership retention. A training workshop was organized for church elders and all church workers as well as the church members.

The study outlined the reality of the loss of new members and enumerated the probable causes of new members backsliding in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church. It drew a suggestive strategy on how to prevent this backsliding of new members. At the conclusion to this study, the researcher discovered that the fact that Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church has a high rate of dropouts brought a necessity of looking for the new answer to the question: “How to retain new church members in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church?” The study considered many challenges and causes of backsliding such as the lack of: proper follow-up, nurturing programs for new converts, bonds of friendship, effective visitation, and adequate fundamental instruction. The church planned a strategy which helped the newly baptized to stay in the church.

The small groups program shows that there is hope. After the evangelistic campaign conducted in Ngoma Adventist Church, thirty-seven new converts were baptized. After three months of visiting and follow-up, all thirty-seven new members were still in the church and they were actively participating. Following the implementation of programs that are described in this study, it was concluded that it is possible to decrease the loss of members in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church if there is proper planning, commitment, and dedication on the part of the leadership of the local church and the pastor.

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RWANDA UNION MISSION

A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

Charles Muvunyi

June 2016

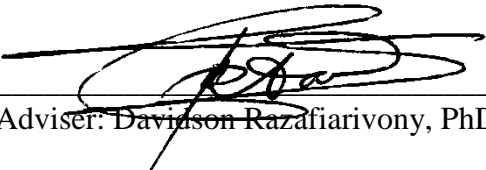



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This work is dedicated to  
Almighty God,  
My Adviser,  
My Wife,  
My Children,  
My Father and Mother,  
My Brothers and Sisters, and  
To all who helped me.

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May God, the Almighty bless us all.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In most churches, we find new members—they are the life and future of a congregation. If there are no new members, the church cannot grow both biologically and spiritually. Healthy churches not only reach new people, but they retain and involve them in the ministry. Most people who join the church come in with excitement and anticipation. A new member wants to be part of the church and that is why they joined it, but sometimes we lose people because we do not have a clear plan for retaining them. A series of church outreach events and activities is not enough to keep new members coming to church. Instead, our initiatives should focus on transforming the life and the conduct of the local church. We need a retention strategy.

#### **Background of the Problem**

Many churches have effective evangelism strategies, but still face a common frustration on how to retain the souls won to the Lord. Some members who enter the church through the “front door” leave soon after through the “back door.” This leaves the church with a great responsibility of strategizing in order to keep her members. There has been important numerical growth in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church, as shown by its records, due to evangelistic campaign series. Nevertheless, after a few months of high church attendance, there follows a low physical membership presence; being an evidence of the need to put more effort in the church membership retention.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Despite enormous budget allocation for evangelism and revival in Ngoma Church, there is a poor retention rate of membership in the church because they have not developed a good strategy for retaining their new converts. Members leave the Seventh-day Adventist fellowship for a variety of reasons. The reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship was found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable. This involves understanding the reasons for membership loss in each local church and focusing on how to develop the capacity of the church to retain members.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the causes for the low rate of membership retention in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church and enumerate the probable causes of backsliding among new members. It investigated the historical background of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Ngoma and proposed a suggestive strategy on how to prevent the backsliding of new members.

## **Significance of the Research**

The task of evangelization and discipleship is not only to call men and women into the Church of God, but also to maintain them in the Church by helping them to become mature and effective by calling others. This study is significant because: First, it will help to manage newly baptized members thus helping them to become committed members of the church, in improving the way evangelism is conducted and provide a better way to deal with member's assimilation. Second, it will also present

strategies for growth and retention not only in terms of numerical records, but in terms of growth through spiritual nurture as well. Finally, it will provide an opportunity for ‘member care,’ and member participation in soul winning and sharing.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

It is evident that membership retention is a huge problem in the South Rwanda Field (SRF). However, this project was limited to one church in Butare District, South Rwanda Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It addresses the strategy on how to keep the new membership in Ngoma Church of Seventh-day Adventists.

### **Methodology of the Study**

To achieve the aim of this project, the methodology outline for the study will be employed to survey biblical principles of member retention, Adventist sources, and writers from other denominations and secular writers on membership retention. A questionnaire was sent to church members to find out their views on low retention rates of membership. Leadership training workshops were conducted to train all church leaders to help the church pastor to address the problem.

### **Overview of the Study**

The study proceeds as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the research and the methodology. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature relating to the idea of membership retention in the church from the Bible, Ellen White’s writings and other resources. Chapter 3 presents the profile of the setting, focusing on details such as the church history and the findings and analysis of the survey. Chapter 4 discusses the design, implementation, and evaluation of the strategy for retaining church members, and Chapter 5 gives the summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

## Definitions of Terms

It is necessary to define some common concepts used throughout this work in order to explain them.

**Strategy:** A planned series of actions for achieving something.<sup>1</sup>

**Retain:** To hold, to keep in possession, to keep in a fixed state or condition to continue to have or hold in.<sup>2</sup>

**Seventh-day Adventist (SDA):** A member of that branch of the Adventists which constituted itself as a separate body after the expected second coming of Christ failed to be realized in 1844. SDAs are Protestant, believe that Christ's coming is imminent, and observe Saturday instead of Sunday as the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2003), s.v. "Strategy."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. "Retain."

<sup>3</sup> "Seventh-day Adventist," accessed 3 June 2015, <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/%20Adventist>.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REVIEW ON MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

This section is designed to support the view that membership retention is a critical event in post-modern Christendom as much as it was in both the Old and the New Testament. Membership retention was championed by Ellen White as well, as evidenced in her writings referred to as “Spirit of Prophecy” in the Adventist understanding. This chapter will provide evidence from the Bible and the writings of E. G. White confirming the importance of membership retention. The chapter will investigate what causes members to exit church congregations. In this discussion, appropriate contemporary theories combined with Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy writings will be advanced to explain factors that are contributing to the loss of members in the church.

#### **General Biblical Basis of Member Retention**

This study is a convenient way to expose the church leaders to sound biblical practices that are effective in the assimilation of new members. It shows the importance of creating an attractive climate of retention of new members within church. The issue of church member retention is considerable in Scripture, while that particular term is not used.

#### **Membership Retention in the Old Testament**

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve to be a worshipping community: He would be their God and they would be His people. The fall, however, shattered

their fellowship with one another as well as with God, a division that was deepened even further in the next generations. While God chose Abraham, of the line of Shem, and made him the keeper of His law for future generations.<sup>1</sup> The Lord promised to bless all the nations through Abraham's offspring: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3).<sup>2</sup>

In support to this, Ellen White comments;

If it were not possible for human beings under the Abrahamic covenant to keep the commandments of God, every soul of us is lost. The Abrahamic covenant is the covenant of grace. "By grace are ye saved" (Eph 2:8), disobedient children? No, obedient to all His commandments. Abraham's unquestioning obedience was one of the most striking instances of faith and reliance upon God to be found in the Sacred Record. . . . Just such faith and confidence as Abraham had the messengers of God need today.<sup>3</sup>

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the Biblical narrative of the fall of man provides the first glimpse into the desire of God to keep His people within the hold. In the Old Testament the Israelites were noted to be receiving sojourners who will keep the Passover to the Lord (Exod 12:48). They were not to assume an exclusive attitude towards foreigners. They were to welcome those who desired to join them in the worship and service to God. Being incorporated politically and economically, these strangers were also to be accepted religiously through performing of circumcision rites. Thus they become one with God's people and were permitted in the Passover rituals (Exod 12:44). The Israelites retained their membership through circumcision.

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<sup>1</sup> E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1890), 125.

<sup>2</sup> All Bible references are from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise stated (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> E. G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), 133.

The non-Israelites after circumcision belonged to the congregation of Israel and joined Israelites to whatever God asked them to do. This increased the number of Israelites.<sup>4</sup>

For retaining, and in order to make Israelites unique and peculiar people, God reaffirmed various rules and regulations to them. In fact, membership retention was so important that when even the people disobeyed God and went astray, He still looked for them and invited them to come back to Him. There are several instances in the Bible that God invites His disobedient people.

“For thus says the Lord God: Indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seek out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out my sheep and deliver them from all places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark days. And I will bring them out from the countries and will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel.” (Ezek 34:11-13)

In Isaiah 43:10, Yahweh addresses Israel forthright: “You are my witness, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen. So that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he, before me no god was formed, nor there any after me.”

In interpreting this text, Dock comments,

The relevance of this verse for the retention is for God’s redeemed people to know who He is, and whose they are as servant and witnesses, the corporate fellowship of a disciple, the body of Christ, is the supreme witness. The theology of this verse embarks upon the faithfulness of the congregation as the supreme witness in evangelism, assimilation and retention of new members in the church. The retention of the new members is the direct responsibility of every witness of God. The significant of retention rest with each member of the congregation having a good understanding of whose he or she is as a servant and witness of God sent on a mission to evangelize a world. Yahweh is God and no one can take his place, is the promise of this verse, which is

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<sup>4</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1:557.

driving force for fundamental disciple- making and gating unsaved people in the church.<sup>5</sup>

### **Membership Retention in the New Testament**

Thus, the Biblical and theological source for this study discusses how God intends for all saved people to attend church on a regular basis. As support to this principle, Luke in Acts 2 affirms that, the early believers were constantly grouped together within the community of faith.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Moreover, fear came upon every soul: and the apostles did many wonders and signs. Moreover, all that believed were together, had all things common; sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

From this text, five following major observations are being noted: steadfastly, teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. In interpreting this text, Nolan comments:

Four characteristics features of the early church are emphasized. First, concern with the apostles' teaching—chiefly, it may be supposed, their personal recollection of Jesus and his teaching. It would not be long before a comparatively fixed body of such teaching would take shape. Thus, Paul speaks of the “standard of teaching” (Rom 6:17) and the “pattern of the sound words” (2 Tim 1:13). Added to teaching they also considered steadfastness, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.<sup>6</sup>

In the same idea, Marshall adds,

These four activities are generally regarded as four separate things, but a case can characterize a Christian gathering in the early church, and on the whole

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<sup>5</sup> Albert W. Dock, *Keeping Members in The Church: A Model That Works*, (Longwood, FL: XulonPress, 2008), 26.

<sup>6</sup> B. H. Nolan, “Exegesis of the Book of Deuteronomy,” in *The Interpreter's Bible (IB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958), 9:50.

this is the preferable view. First, there was the teaching given by the apostles, who were qualified for this task by their companionship with Jesus. They may have been regarded as in a special sense the guardians of the traditions about Jesus as the church grew and developed. Secondly, there was fellowship; the word means ‘sharing’, and, while it could refer to the sharing of goods described in verses 44f., it is more likely that here it refers to the holding of a common meal or to a common religious experience. Thirdly, there was the breaking of bread. This is Luke’s term for what Paul calls the Lord’s Supper. It refers to the act with which a Jewish meal opened, and which had gained peculiar significance for Christian in view of Jesus’ action at the Last Supper and also when he fed the multitudes ( Luke. 9:16; 22:19; 24:30; Acts 20:7,11). It has been claimed that the thought is simply of a fellowship meal, perhaps a continuation of the meals held with the risen Lord, without any specific relation to the Last Supper or the Pauline form of the Lord’s Supper in the proper sense. Finally, there is mention of prayers. If the reference is not to part of a Christian meeting, it will be to the way the Christians observed the set Jewish hours of prayer (3:1). Here are the four essential elements in the religious practice of the Christian church.<sup>7</sup>

The Interpreter’s Bible further shows that the retention of new members revolves around true believers who are willing to be a part of the community of faith and who have totally surrendered their lives to Christ. The mission of God is “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus commissioned His followers as instruments of God’s mission, charging us to “Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). While God calls on the Church to seek the lost and to baptize the converted, He desires that the lost be saved and He commanded us to make disciples. The follower of Jesus is to become a member of an active community (e.g., Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35), be fruitful (John 15:1-8), attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:12), and be part of the “people of God,” foretold in the third angel’s message, “who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

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<sup>7</sup> Howard I. Marshall, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 83.

In support to this comment, Ellen G. White wrote that creating disciples is thus central to God's plan and vision for restoring humanity. It is necessary recognize that Christ's love for the Church also needs to be manifested within the Church by His followers. True discipleship entails not only Biblical teaching (Matt 28:20), but also a passionate commitment to loving our fellow believers unconditionally. This was the heart of Christ's message to His disciples as He faced the Cross (John 15:9-13). Christ's command to them applies to us: that we "love one another." Ellen White's powerful insight into this historical scene is still vital for us: "This love is the evidence of their discipleship"<sup>8</sup>

Occasionally, for pastors and church members, it is often easier to instruct others in doctrine than to nurture and mentor them in a personal, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. All believers need to be continually nurtured and mentored in the journey of faith and that though this task is not easily quantified, it is essential and His Remnant people must emulate the example of the Shepherd, who actively seeks the lost. Reaching out to those who have lost their way, who have lost connection with the body of Christ, who have been bruised by fellow believers, will align us with the mission of God; welcoming them with open arms will make us participants in the joy of heaven over everyone who is lost and is found (Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

In summary, three elements emerge from this subsection:

1. The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally disciple members, so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church.

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<sup>8</sup> E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 677-78.

2. Discipleship is based on an ongoing, lifelong relationship with Jesus, the believer commits to “abiding in Christ” (John 15:8) and to being fruitful and sharing Him with others.
3. Responsibility for ensuring that every church member remains part of the body of Christ, and for reconnecting and reconciling with those who do not, is mutually shared by the Church at large, each congregation, and every church member.

Thus, building loving and Christ-like relationships within the local church must be an urgent necessity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is also necessary to recommit ourselves to God’s vision of mission, which is founded on discipling, believing that this will enable us better to fulfill the prophetic mission of the Remnant Church.

### **New Member Retention in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

One of the greatest challenges we have as a church is the retention of members, both new and regular members. They need to be constantly reaffirmed in Christ (see Acts 18:23, 27, 28). When the church fails to nurture the recently converted, they fail in complying with the mission. For this reason, Ellen White declares:

Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth’s sake and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed.<sup>9</sup>

White also said that:

After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success

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<sup>9</sup> E. G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974), 351.

attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing, watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan's most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties; to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, to be visited and prayed with. These souls need the meat apportioned to every man in due season.<sup>10</sup>

The essentiality of membership retention in any religion in our world cannot be over emphasized. The merits of membership retention have been an issue of great concern even from the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church down to the local church level. Membership retention has become essential because it keeps the religion forth going over the centuries. Ellen G. White has given many comments and counsels about church's mission of propagating the gospel and keeping the members in the faith. She states that faithful instruction is very crucial for the growth of the converts. The principles of the Christian life should be made plain to those who have newly come to the truth.<sup>11</sup> Indeed people who leave their churches come into the church expecting a better Christian life than what they left. Also, if they do not find the life they expected, it would be hard to keep them in the fold. After the teaching has been done, Ellen White argues for mentoring.<sup>12</sup>

According to Anderson and Shannon, "Mentoring is a process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, the mentor, nurtures someone less skilled or experienced, the mentee. This may involve a mentor adopting a variety of roles of modeling, teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, or befriending."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), 6:91.

<sup>12</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 91.

<sup>13</sup> E. M. Anderson and A. L. Shannon, "Toward a Conceptualization of Mentoring," *Journal of Teacher Education*, 39 (1988): 38-42, accessed 8 March 2016, <http://studysites.uk.sagepub.com/denby/JTE.pdf>.

There is evidence in the Bible according to Acts 15:36-40. From this text, it is seen that the Bible reports the experience of Paul and Barnabas and how they made constant attempts to revisit the Christians they had evangelized. This was done so that the new members are established in the truth they were taught. What Paul and Barnabas used to do is authenticated by Ellen White.<sup>14</sup> The two early missionaries went to the converts so that they could mentor them and strengthen their faith. Paul and other disciples were missionaries who went out for mission and after establishing churches they made other trips to go back to those places so that they could see how new converts were doing.

Ellen G. White in her book “Evangelism” states,

“Our efforts are not to cease because public meetings have been discontinued for a time. So long as there are interested ones, we must give them opportunity to learn the truth. And the new converts will need to be instructed by faithful teachers of God’s Word that they may increase in a knowledge and love of the truth, and may grow to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. They must now be surrounded by the influences most favorable to spiritual growth.”<sup>15</sup>

New converts need a lot of care. The work of winning souls, important as it is, is not enough; new believers need to be fed with the word of God in order for them to be established in their newfound faith.

Furthermore, Ellen White argues for God’s primary mission to the church. She states that those who have been saved by the grace of God should not despise or neglect those whom Jesus is seeking to save.<sup>16</sup> So far, it is clear from the writings of E. G. White that membership retention is a basis of growth in one’s direct union with Jesus Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 201.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 337.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1895.

## **Membership Retention Strategies**

### **Membership Retention through Teaching**

In Acts 2: 42, the early church is seen as a learning church because, the Apostolic church members continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. On his side, Bruce precisely says that it is often overlooked that the undertaking of teaching 3,000 new babes in Christ must have been an insurmountable task. The key to the churches' growth is attributed by Luke to the authority of the apostles teaching (Acts 2:43). A "fear" meaning reverential esteem was displayed towards the apostles because of their teachings, which were accompanied by supernatural wonders and signs. Notice the embryonic phase of the church, as was the inception of the church, involved apostolic miraculous wonders; thus, authenticating their teaching authority.<sup>17</sup>

As newborn babies desire the pure milk of the word, by which they may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). Nobody ever ate one banquet to last a lifetime. No evangelistic series or course of Bible studies provides enough spiritual food to last the rest of one's life. Teaching Christian principles as Stewardship and Sabbath-keeping after baptism will help in discovering what gifts the Holy Spirit has given them, and employ these in helping others.

If a pastor's Bible class during Sabbath School time has been used in preparing candidates for Church membership, new members should continue in that class for a time. It is one place where they already feel comfortable. If no such class exists, a Sabbath School class for new members could be arranged, taught by someone alert to the special needs of new Christians. Help them establish the Sabbath

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<sup>17</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 82.

school habit. During the first period of stay in the Church (18 to 24 months), a new convert faces a critical period due to his young faith. He has a very little Christian experience. He/she needs the help and assistance of everyone from the Church. Therefore, it is relevant for the purpose of retention to teach newcomers about the true God, his love, and plan of Salvation for all who believe in God through Jesus Christ the Savior. Giving people an understanding of who God is helps them to assimilate and stay in the church. Talking about membership retention, Dock emphasizes that,

However, if the congregation as a whole is not inviting newcomers they relinquish their role as a servant and witness of God through Christ. As a result, the attrition rate is usually high and some newcomers never even join the church. They usually never become witness of God, because they never get to know and believe that He is the only true and living God.<sup>18</sup>

### **Membership Retention through Fellowship**

Talking about membership retention, the General Conference Executive Committee enlightens that members leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship for a variety of reasons. It is unrealistic to expect that the Church will reach a point where the membership retention rate is 100%. This, however, should not excuse the Church from consciously creating and maintaining a nurturing environment for all members. Research on why members leave Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much more significant than disagreement with denominational teachings. In fact, many who leave denominational fellowship remain supportive of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and even maintain church practices for some time following their departure.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Dock, 26.

<sup>19</sup> "Conserving Membership Gains" General Conference Executive Committee, 10 April 2007, Silver Spring, Maryland, accessed 29 January 2016, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/conserving-membership-gains/>.

The reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship are found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, one particular aspect of retention is fellowship, as it is commented by Henry Matthew through his comments on Acts 2:42, 46, he emphasizes points on discipleship as follows:

They kept up the communion of saints. They continued in fellowship (v. 42), and continued daily with one accord in the temple, (v. 46). They were much together. Wherever you saw one disciple, you would see more, like birds of the same feather flocking together. See how these Christians love one another. They had fellowship with one another in religious worship. They met in the temple: there was their rendezvous; for joint fellowship with God is the best fellowship, we can have with one another.<sup>21</sup>

Considering that persons who join the Seventh-day Adventist Church come from widely varied backgrounds and experiences, it would be known that not all members are at the same point of spirituality. But all should find within church fellowship a place to continue their growth. Peter urges, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another, without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet 4:8-10).

Therefore, our attention in Acts 2 has been drawn to fellowship in the early church. In context however, fellowship in the early church considers certain important things as paramount. This could rather help us further or better understand how fellowship can be a medium of growth and retention. First, fellowship referred to here

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 1:1644.

suggests the idea of close association that supports mutual involvement and relationships. In fact, reading further in context, fellowship suggests a community of believers beginning various activities and practices that make the community grow at the same time being capable of retaining its constituency. But we must be insightful to convey this very important thrust of fellowship already mentioned that is a close association with each other that is mutually relational. This is evident in the following activities already extensively noted but necessary for clarity. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles, teaching and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Commenting on retention strategies, Dock states.

Witnessing, welcoming, and worshiping are significant spiritual activities for retaining newcomers in the church and gaining favor with people in the community. Having the good will of all the people meant that these believers were being a blessing to the people in the community by spreading the gospel of Christ. As a result, the Lord added to their numbers day by day those that were being saved. Heb 10:24 says, “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deed.” As the new members are added to the church it becomes the duty of every believer to encourage their fellow disciples to love one another and do good deeds for those in the body of Christ. Love is the central element for the work of retaining new members in the church.<sup>22</sup>

Why are fellowship activities so important? (1) Fellowship activities promote unity, friendship and good relations among church members; (2) Fellowship motivates members to remain active and fosters cooperation on church activities and projects; (3) Fellowship is where clear role models are found, and examples to follow are discovered; (4) In fellowship, Jesus is made known among us, for wherever two or more are gathered together in His name, He is there in the midst of them (Matt 18:20).

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<sup>22</sup> Dock, 31.

## **Membership Retention through Prayer**

As said in the Bible, united prayer is the most powerful spiritual weapon that God has given to us. Worship emanates from the Christian believer as a result of their love for God and is the inner working of the spiritually regenerated heart. Jesus identifies the results of a false type of worship in Matthew 15:8: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.” It has already been noted, in Acts 2:42, the newly formed church was active in corporate worship: “They devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of bread and to prayer”<sup>23</sup>. In Acts 2:46, we find further description of this Pentecostal worship; which was permeated with a Spirit of unity: “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

In Matthew 18:19-20, Jesus made a statement that is the key to understanding the Prayer Wars concept: “Assuredly, I say to you that if any two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Talking about prayer, Ellen G. White emphasizes that we do our ruling through prayer, and it is in that sense we are kings, as in Revelation 1:6. It is because of this that we can get our prayers answered. We have authority with God. But as individuals, our authority is limited. Our full potential is only really unleashed when we pray in unity. We have unlimited power in prayer only when we pray in agreement with other Christians. As Christians, we are the Body of Christ. We achieve our full

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<sup>23</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 84.

effectiveness as Christians when we act as a Body; and the way in which we can most overtly and directly do so is when we unite in prayer and fasting. Each new convert must be integrated in Christian fellowship, develop new friends, increase his/her Bible knowledge, participate in prayer and praise, develop his individual gifts, learn to share his faith and participate in missionary work. “The talents that God has given to each one of his children are to be used to honor and glorify him.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Leadership and Retention**

Biblically speaking, leadership is expected to be at the forefront of the Great Commission and Ministry of the Church. As Christ’s Servants, leaders should have a “passion” for reaching souls for Jesus Christ. The leaders must first heed Christ’s mandate to make disciples and then involve the congregation in the work of the “Great Commission.” The commissioning of Christ involves sharing one’s faith with the unsaved, encouraging the unsaved to accept Christ as Savior, being baptized and living out that new life in service to God and fellow human being through small groups and Church ministries. The following four scriptures demonstrate that leaders play an important role in the work of renewal and retention. They are Isaiah 43:7-12, Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 2:41-47, and Hebrews 10:22-25. These passages carry the theme of influential leadership, witnessing for God, disciple-making and committed attendance of all believers in Christ. They also show the impact leaders can make towards the disciple-making process, the spirit of renewal and retention in the congregation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> E. G. White, “The Right Use of God’s Gifts,” *The Review and Herald*, 1 December 1896.

<sup>25</sup> Dock, 32.

In the New Testament model for new members' retention, a shared leadership<sup>26</sup> was used. It is said, "So when they had appointed elders in every Church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23). It is a model that allows each person to discover the spiritual gifts that God has given for building up his of church. Shared leadership has no burnout and enlarges the operation of the group.

Leadership can be said to be good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, loved or hated. Whatsoever the case may be one thing that remains outstanding about leadership is that they have responsibility to a group of people that would look up to them for direction; and it could be one of those things that may have contributed to the success of the early church. It seems clear when we consider what this writer has to suggest in line with our submission;

The administration of the church of Jerusalem was a first in the hands of apostles (the twelve), then of apostles and elders (Acts 15:2-16:4), then of elders without apostles (Acts 11:30; 21:18), James, the just, being *primus inter pares* among those elders (12:17; 21:18). The seven men with Greek names appointed to supervise the distribution of charity from the church's communal fund (Acts 6:1-6) do not seem to have functioned in that capacity after the death of Stephen and the dispersal of the Hellenists. Elders are appointed to guide the affairs of Gentile churches-e.g., in South Galatia (Acts 14:23) and Ephesus (Acts 20:17). "Elders" is Luke's term for them; in Acts 20:28 Paul refers to those in the Ephesians church as "guardians," whose main responsibility is to "be shepherds" to the "flock" of God.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Retention Crisis: A Global Concern**

For the above observation, it is clear that member retention is not limited to a specific denomination, but has rather become a global concern. The Seventh-day

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<sup>26</sup> A. B. Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundation Guide* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center, 2005), 134.

<sup>27</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 62-63.

Adventist Church, being a part of the whole, also has a lot of concern in this matter. In its 2007, the executive committee meeting held in Maryland, made the following recommendations concerning conserving membership.

First, the executive committee argues that:

Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world rejoices in the rapid membership growth of recent years. The church views this as evidence of Holy Spirit-led movements and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6, 7). Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000-2005, membership losses during that time equaled nearly 1, 4 million. Current indications are that annual membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal approximately 28% of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts; however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.<sup>28</sup>

Why such huge losses when there have been so many efforts aimed at winning those precious souls to Christ? In our union, these losses occur chiefly among the newly baptized.

Second, it claims that:

Members leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship for a variety of reasons. It is unrealistic to expect that the Church will reach a point where the membership retention rate is 100%. This, however, should not excuse the church from consciously creating and maintaining a nurturing environment for all members. Research on why members leave Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much significant than disagreement with denominational teachings. In fact, many who leave denominational fellowship remain supportive of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and even maintain church practices for some time following their departure.<sup>29</sup>

While the second point may be equally true, our church seems to make the same mistake repeatedly. Despite the excellent job done to determine the cause for many leaving fellowship our ability to walk or talk is far from reality. It is like a man who accuses others of not visiting members but will not visit himself. Contrary to our

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<sup>28</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Minutes of Meeting of the General Conference Committee, Spring Meeting 10 April 2007, Washington, DC.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

evangelistic efforts is our social and relational inaptitude that continues to derail us from our tracks. As a church, we cannot divorce ourselves from the community where these people come from, nor pretend to care and love them when we do not relate to them. Probably the two just have to work together to achieve the ultimate goal of making them feel a part of this new family and actually belonging.

In addition, the committee submits that:

The reasons most frequently cited by person who leave local church fellowship are found in the realm of relationship, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable. Seventh-day Adventist understand that events will be accompanied by multiplied thousands turning to God, seeking spiritual foundations for life, and identifying with a community of believers that holds fast to biblical teaching. Church members and leaders around the world continue to place a great emphasis on evangelism and church growth believing that even greater and more rapid membership growth lies just ahead.<sup>30</sup>

So in effect, if our relationship with each other especially newly baptized member can improve, and we can meaningfully engage our members making them have a sense of belonging, then our effort at evangelism will not be in vain.

Meanwhile, we must continue marching forward letting the world know about the soon coming of our long awaited Messiah. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the entire world then shall the end come” (Matt 24:14). There can be valuable lessons we can learn from others who may serve as model of membership retention. Arguably, we need to step out of our own arena and discover what others are doing to deal with the issue of membership losses incurred in their own congregation.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

### **Three Components of Effective Assimilation**

Thom Rainer points out that, while there is neither a secret nor a neatly-packaged process, there are four key principles to membership retention and involvement. Our research, they declared, has shown that if a church improves in all four of these areas, assimilation will likely improve, and often dramatically too. They are expectation, ministry involvement, relationship, and Small group involvement.<sup>31</sup>

Thom Rainer, in this article, further argues that his research or consultation done over the years in every single church has shown that assimilation is an issue of concern. However, he submits, “If we could just keep the people who join our church, our attendance would be twice as high,” So how do we keep the newly baptized including existing membership that seems to also be on their way out? May be Thom Rainer has been looking right in our union and has seen that assimilation is our own problem as well. We just do not know how to keep those who join our fellowship. We lose them by the end of the week, quarterly we lose them, and by the time a year expires, we cannot even boast of a quarter of them.

Most churches have new members join. It is the life and future of a congregation. No new members equal any new growth. Healthy churches not only reach new people but keep and involve them. Most people that join a church do so with excitement and anticipation. A new member wants to be a part of the church and that is why they join but sometimes we lose people because we do not have a clear plan for involving them.

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<sup>31</sup> Thom Rainer, “Four Principles to Membership Retention,” accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/july-online-only/012705.html?share=&paging=off>.

## **Expectations**

Thus, using the four principles for retention of members proposed by Thom Rainer could prove to be the solution or way forward to minimize or deal with our losses. In addition, he expressed the concern that seems essential, “our research has not been able to identify any principle more important than others. We know, however, that a small church in one area will have a certain degree of assimilation problems. “In like manner, expectation therefore as the first on the list of the four is as important as each of the four. Pointing to this Rainer recalls, “A few years ago, our research team conducted a two-year study of churches with effective assimilation rates. We were surprised to learn that one of the key commonalities among the churches was a sense of expectation of members and prospective members.”<sup>32</sup>

Further, he describes what church membership is and what is not consistent with expectation, “Church membership was not the placement of a name on a roll; the clear expectation was that the member was to make a difference through the ministries of the church. Giving was not touted as optional but expected among church members. Moreover, membership or inquirer classes were often the place where these expectations were most clearly articulated.”<sup>33</sup>

Help the new believer understand up front what God and the church expect; the growing believer is then held accountable to these expectations through participation in a small group.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## Ministry Involvement

The second on the list of principles is ministry involvement. In protection of his four keys, Rainer stipulates, “If a church member does not become meaningfully involved in some type of ministry in the church, his or her drop-out chances increase dramatically. But the church leadership cannot delay in moving new members to places of ministry. If more than six months lapses between the points of new membership to ministry involvement, the person will likely be already moving toward inactivity in the life of the church.”<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, it is a known fact that most Protestant congregations find it easier to receive new members than to assimilate them into the fellowship and to help these new members gain a sense of belonging.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, how do we bridge this gap of omission? Yes we are sensitive of the fact that an “idle mind is the devil’s play ground.” Our responsibility therefore is to put these brethren to work or as the previous writer stated, we will actually lose them.

Research on “the issue of assimilation” is now showing that the process by which people arrive at a point of Christian decision is a key for them to become responsible members or give up.<sup>36</sup> The effect of the process of evangelization of the possible outcomes is so important, in fact, it can be predicted that policymakers will grow into responsible members of the church in the first year and becomes inactive. What is particularly annoying is that many churches and methods of use of today’s

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Win and Charles Arn, *Closing the Evangelistic Back Door*, accessed 19 May 2004, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/lebooks/theleadershiplibrary/magneticfellowship/ldlib15-8.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Thom Rainer, “Four Principles to Membership Retention,” accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/july-online-only/012705.html?share=&paging=off>.

parachurch group that actually increase the likelihood of new converts will become active members of the church.

## **Relationships**

This growth could be improved by believers who become involved in a spiritually meaningful relationship with Christ and each other on a regular basis. These relationships provide mutual support, responsibility and opportunities to minister. Where there is this cordial relationship on the one hand, there is still progress, joy and fulfillment.

Thom Rainer had said this:

What many church leaders do not realize is that the development of these relationships with new members' best takes place before the member joins. If the new member has no relationship with a church member when he or she joins the church, it is exceedingly difficult to create relationships. Such is the reason why it is critically important for church members to become intentional about developing relationships with unchurched persons before that person ever visits the church.<sup>37</sup>

Believers becoming engaged in spiritually meaningful relationship with Christ, each, and one another on a regular basis could enhance this growth. These relationships provide mutual support, accountability and opportunities to minister. Where there is that cordial relationship, on the one hand, there is always progress, joy and fulfillment. On the other hand, where it does not exist, there is complete anarchy. In our various homes, families, schools, or work places for instance, we experience the reality and importance of relationship. Whenever relationship breaks down there is disillusionment amongst people and the result evidently is very devastating, debilitating and at times frustrating leading to the destruction of property, human lives in some instances and trust.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

This is what Russell Burrell seems to be confirming when he insisted that:

The seeking for people is a passion that Adventist must have. This is needed since God exemplifies that great passion throughout scripture from the fall of man even to the death on the cross we see God with passion seeking for man. In Genesis 3:1-6; God comes searching to mend broken relationship. In Exodus Moses is not himself desiring to go and deliver Israel, but God calls him to go, He send Jonah to Nineveh to a notorious, hustle and adulterous nation to come back to him, and now in the end He sends Jesus to finalize the search and mending of broken relationship with Him.<sup>38</sup>

Healthy relationships help form the “glue” that draws new believers back to church; disciple members then turn around and reach out to others. One way in which relationships, expectations and ministry involvement can be enhanced is through Small Groups.

## **Small Groups**

### **Definition**

The term “Small Group” may be misleading and can provide results that were not intended without the proper planning and execution. Small group is a small number of people who meet together, and each is aware of his membership in group. Life is not meant to be lived alone. God intends for us to experience life together. The life of the body is in its cells. If the cell dies, the body eventually dies. If the cells are healthy, the body is healthy. When the cells multiply, the body grows.

### **Purpose**

Bible study fellowships or small groups aim to both revive members and attract non-members. They provide an excellent means of reconnecting with inactive members. A strong emphasis of such groups is fellowship. Both the small size and the informal setting are more conducive to fellowship than the regular church setting.

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<sup>38</sup> Russell Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1999), 11-13.

Even individuals not ready to identify with the church feel comfortable in the non-threatening atmosphere of a small group.<sup>39</sup> Small groups can provide a desperately needed personal touch from the church to the congregation if managed well. As a church body, we must remember what Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2-3, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be:”

According to George Hinman in reflection of John 15, there are five purposes of the Small Groups: Bible study, worship the Lord, care for each other, love our neighbors, and relate friends.<sup>40</sup>

There are many factors that influence the usage of small groups in the Church. We have to close the “back door” and keep people from leaving the church. Church growth experts emphasize the necessity of assimilating converts and visitors into the church. One way is to get people involved in a small group. Then they will be plugged into the local church body. People must have a sense of belonging. The group leaders and members demonstrate their responsibility to love, care for, and disciple new converts and those new to the congregation. That is most meaningful to people as they become part of the body. Small group ministry is a New Testament principle.<sup>41</sup>

### **Urbanization and Mobility**

The majority of people today live in the urban centers and although they live close together, they are extremely mobile seeking friendship not only in their own

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<sup>39</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Elder’s Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994), 124.

<sup>40</sup> George Hinman, “Five Purposes of Life-Changing Groups,” accessed 15 March 2016, <http://www.upc.org/smallgroups/Facilitators/five.aspx>.

<sup>41</sup> “Ask the Superintendent,” accessed 11 June 2016, [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199802/008\\_ask\\_supt\\_9802.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199802/008_ask_supt_9802.cfm).

streets but also other environs. People are disconnected from their family of origin. People are hungry of relationship with unexpected level of mobility they travel in search of the friendship that the church could provide by the small groups.<sup>42</sup>

### **Technologies Touch Ability**

“High Tech” has led to isolation and now there is a real hunger for “high touch.” People are removed from human contact and are emotionally drained. They are looking for closeness and will find it most excellent in small groups. The need people have in this combative, competitive world to justify self cannot exist in a true group of Christians. Instead, the group offers opportunities for self-discovery and self-development. A realistic self-concept brings positive feelings about oneself without the need to be above or better than another and the result is that positive feelings toward others increase as well.<sup>43</sup>

People are carried away and behave in ways uncharacteristic of them when they are alone. This group potential can affect emotions may be seen in the positive outcomes of corporate worship, evangelistic meetings, and the urge to express care and love when the suggestion is made in a cohesive group. Unwholesome emotions of self-pity, anger, anxiety, and rebellion can be reduced or eliminated by this group force and replaced by feelings of hope, forgiveness, peace, and repentance.

### **Democratization-Localization**

People recognize and reflect the trend in the world to decentralism, to give responsibility and power to the lowest level. They want a say in their own destiny and

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<sup>42</sup> Barry Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundation Guide* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center, 2005), 129.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

an input into where they and the church are going. Small group acceptance and opportunity for involvement and ownership are more important to them than the big meeting.<sup>44</sup>

### **Individualism-Privatization-Isolation**

There is a real need in the society for a secure, safe place where people feel accepted and not judged where they can be themselves and with support, and experience growth. Small groups provide that place where Christians become accountable to each other, where they enable each other obtain and give support and confront some of the things that need attention. Small groups can be for old members and new members as well, the catalyst that brings health.<sup>45</sup>

### **How to Organize Small Groups**

According to *Life Changing Small Groups* by Bill Donahue and the Willow Creek Church,

No one has the time or energy to shepherd a flock of 80-200 or 500 people. They recommend a ratio of 1–10; believing every leader can reasonably shepherd groups of six to ten people. They also point out that a church's ability to provide a personal touch is often lost as it grows. And, as the church grows, it becomes necessary for the care giving to be shared by many, rather than by a few. With no one caring for more than 10 people, each person will feel cared for.<sup>46</sup>

Groups come in all shapes and sizes; married couples, singles, men, women, and kids. No matter where you are in life, it is important to have a group of people you get together with on a weekly basis to study God's Word.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> B. Donahue, *Life Changing Small Group* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 14.

A group should be not less than four or more than fifteen persons. They should meet regularly weekly, biweekly, or at least monthly. They may meet in church or home, at a workplace, or in meeting rooms in the community. Meetings normally last an hour or two and typically include four parts: sharing in fellowship, Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.<sup>47</sup>

In Acts 4:43-47, the Bible says that, the early Christian church cells comprised small groups of people who met regularly. The order of worship was, first of all, self-disclosure and confession of sin. This was followed by appropriate announcements of apology, pleas for forgiveness, and plans for making restitution. A final period of friendly fellowship closed the meeting.

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed submits that the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament and Ellen White's writings gives voice and prominence to growth and membership retention. Membership retention is a critical phenomenon in our post-modern Christendom. The review discloses the following points as integral component of retention:

1. That retention is successful when all believers and leaders are involved in teaching, fellowshiping, breaking of bread, and prayer steadfastly as a composite whole and a pragmatic approach.
2. That retention is successful when all believers are involved in church activities.
3. That nurture is needed in the wake of our efforts to retain growth.

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<sup>47</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association: *Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook*, 123.

4. Through assimilation, the new members get involved in ministry, begin to relate with fellow believers.

### **Conclusion**

According to the biblical and theological review on the membership retention, it is realized that if the above principles founded in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White are followed, many members who are new can be retained and the back door will be closed.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING

This chapter aims to give the brief presentation of Rwanda country, Rwanda Union Mission, South Rwanda Field, geographical and demography situation Ngoma Adventist Church and his historical background. It is also needed to show the situation which led to the present project of membership retention in Ngoma Adventist Church, the statistics report of members from 2008-2013, statistical report of members loss from 2008-2013, and a pre-program investigation within the Church of Ngoma. It will deal also on probable causes of suffer loss of members and effect of membership retention to the church.

#### **Brief Presentation of Rwanda**

Rwanda is a small landlocked country. Known as 'The Land of a Thousand Hills', Rwanda is in the heart of the Central African plateau surrounded by Lake Kivu, Tanganyika, and Victoria. It has grasslands and small farms extending over rolling hills covering the country, but there are also areas of swamps and mountains, including volcanic peaks north of Lake Kivu, in the Northwest border area. Rwanda is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. The country lies 75 miles south of the equator in the Tropic of Capricorn, 880 miles 'as the crow flies' west of the Indian Ocean and 1,250 miles east of the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Republic of Rwanda: Geography," accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.gov.rw/home/geography/>.

Rwanda has 26,338 square Kilometres and; the total population in Rwanda was last recorded at 12.1 million people in 2014 from 2.9 million in 1960, changing 313 percent during the last 50 years. Population in Rwanda averaged 6.43 Million from 1960 until 2014, reaching an all-time high of 12.10 Million in 2014 and a record low of 2.93 Million in 1960. The World Bank reports population in Rwanda.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Census of 2002, the country of Rwanda is a Christian nation. Statistics on religion in Rwanda as were published by US Government in 2013, confirm clearly that 56.9% of the Rwanda's population is Roman Catholic, 26% is Protestant, 11.1% is Seventh-day Adventist, 4.6% is Muslim (mainly Sunni), 1.7% claims no religious affiliation, and 0.1% practices traditional indigenous religion.<sup>3</sup>

### **Brief Presentation of Rwanda Union Mission**

In Rwanda, the mission of Seventh-day Adventist Church started in 1921 at Gitwe in Southern Province of the Country by three pioneers from European: Elie Delhove, Walter Straw, C. Robinson and Henri Monnier.<sup>4</sup> Rwanda Union Mission was organized in 1960; then reorganized in 1984, 2011, and 2014. Rwanda Union Mission is composed of 2 conferences; comprising the East Central Rwanda, and North Rwanda Conferences; and 5 fields comprising the Central Rwanda, East Rwanda, North-West Rwanda, South Rwanda, and West Rwanda Fields. Rwanda Union Mission has 1,725 churches, and 665,837 members.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Rwanda Population," accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/rwanda/population>.

<sup>3</sup> "Religion in Rwanda," accessed 29 March 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Rwanda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Rwanda).

<sup>4</sup> Jérôme Birikunzira, "*Implantation and Growth of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda (1919-2000)*," (MA Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, 2008), 50.

<sup>5</sup> "Rwanda Union Mission," accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/ViewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=RWUM>.

## **Brief Presentation of South Rwanda Field**

The South Rwanda Mission is the fifth SDA mission station in Rwanda. As quoted by J. Birikunzira in his thesis, according to D. Neufeld, Gitwe mission station had become so large in the south that it had to be reorganized. On November 17, 1970, in Blantyre (Malawi), a decision was taken by the church organization to divide this mission station into two: The “South Rwanda Mission” and the “Central Rwanda Mission.”<sup>6</sup>

South Rwanda Mission was organized in 1984, then got reorganized in 1993 and renamed in 2012. South Rwanda Field has 229 Churches, and 87,812 members.<sup>7</sup> The head office is located in Huye town about 250 km away from Kigali, the regional capital. South Rwanda Field is located in the south province of the country in Gisagara (with 322,506 of population), Huye (with 328,398 of population), Nyamagabe (with 342,965 of population), Nyanza (with 323,719 of population) and Nyaruguru Districts (with 294,334 of population).<sup>8</sup>

## **Geographical and Demography Situation of Ngoma Church**

This study was done at Ngoma Adventist Church. Ngoma is where the head office of the South Rwanda Field is located (SRF). Ngoma Adventist Church is located in Huye Town, Huye District in South Province. The majority of the populations of this region are Catholics. The first missionaries of this church started their mission in this part of the country and the first Catholic Church Parish in

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<sup>6</sup> Jérôme Birikunzira, *“Implantation and Growth of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda (1919-2000)”* (MA Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, 2008), 91.

<sup>7</sup> “Year Book 2015,” accessed 29 March 2016, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2015.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> “Republic of Rwanda: Southern Province,” accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.southernprovince.gov.rw/index.php?id=24>.

Rwanda was inaugurated in 1900 in this town.<sup>9</sup> Ngoma church is not the only one in the city of Huye: it is surrounded by two others churches: Kaminuza Church and Cyarwa church whose mother church is Ngoma. The Huye (called Butare before 1994) town has a population of 89,600,<sup>10</sup> while total Seventh-day Adventist members are 1,717, which means that the ratio of Adventists to non-Adventists is 1, 9%.<sup>11</sup>

### **Historical Background**

In 1970, in Blantyre (Malawi) as said earlier, a meeting took a decision to establish a new mission in southern Rwanda with headquarters in the city of Butare (which became Huye city today). However, in this city, there was no Adventist Church, but there were others such as the Catholic Church, Protestants and Muslims.

The Adventist Churches were far from Butare town. Therefore, the church leaders took a decision to buy a property there where they could construct a church and other infrastructures. For that reason, they bought a property at Ngoma village and they started construction in 1970 under Pastor Philips who was the President of Gitwe Mission and Pastor Sebujiho Samuel who was the Treasurer. Until that moment, there was no church in the town, but there were only two families who were sellers in that city (the family of Ezekiel Rugayintenga and the family of Andrew Ndemeye) and were Adventist members.

In 1971, the leaders organized the first election with the purpose of electing President and Treasurer of the South Rwanda Mission. The election took place in

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<sup>9</sup> The Dominican Friars – England and Scotland, “The Catholic Church in Rwanda,” <http://english.op.org/godzdogz/the-catholic-church-in-rwanda>.

<sup>10</sup> “Rwanda—Largest Cities,” accessed 29 March 2016, <http://www.geonames.org/RW/largest-cities-in-rwanda.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Rwanda Union Mission Church Statistical Report, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly 2013.

Burundi in its capital city Bujumbura. In that election, the president became Pastor Sembeba Stephan, and the Treasurer became Pastor Nunguyubundi Enias. During that time, the church did the first evangelistic campaign around Butare city for the purpose of searching church members, and that evangelistic campaign took four weeks, but they found few church members, many of them were the workers who built the church. People who led this crusade were students who did the pastoral school at the Adventist seminary at Gitwe. Pastor Long Albert was a coordinator of that evangelistic campaign. After this crusade, Rwanda Union Mission also organized other evangelistic campaigns, and then Ngoma Adventist Church was established near the South Rwanda Field headquarters.<sup>12</sup>

### **Statistical Report of Members from 2008-2013**

In order to have an idea on the gain and the loss of church memberships in Ngoma Adventist Church, here is a table with statistical report of members from 2008 to 2013:

*Table 1. Ngoma Membership Report from 2008-2013 (from Church Record Book)*

Year	Church members at the beginning of the Year	Members added during the Year	Member Loss	Church members at the end of the Year
2008	400	27	10	417
2009	417	69	28	458
2010	458	111	27	542
2011	542	66	24	587
2012	587	42	34	595
2013	595	30	76	549

*Note:* Members added during year=Baptisms + Profession of faith +Letters Received  
 Member lost during year=Letters Granted+ Deaths+ Members dropped+ Missing

<sup>12</sup> Simeon Muvunyi, retired Pastor at Ngoma Adventist Church, interview by the author, 15 November 2015.

### **Statistical Report of Member Loss from 2008-2013**

Table 2 below shows the information concerning the statistical report of members' loss from 2008 to 2013 in Ngoma Adventist Church. Table 2 indicated that Ngoma Adventist Church lost 42.3% on 57.7% of the gains for the period 2008-2013. The statistical record of Ngoma Adventist Church from 2008-2013 had been analyzed at the time of research; but the statistical report of 2013 gave a very good picture of the reality of the challenge of membership retention in Ngoma Adventist Church. Despite of an increase in the number of members who leave the church, research had been done to analyze the challenge of membership loss in Ngoma Adventist Church.

*Table 2. Statistical Report of Member Loss/Gain from 2008-2013*

Year	Membership Added	Membership Dropped	Gain/Loss	% of Gain	% of Loss
2008	27	10	+17	6.75	2.5
2009	69	28	+41	16.5	6.7
2010	111	27	+84	24.2	5.8
2011	66	24	+42	12.1	4.4
2012	42	34	+8	7.1	5.7
2013	30	76	-46	5.04	12.7
Total	345	199	146	57.7	42.3

### **Pre-program Investigation and Analysis**

A pre-program investigation was conducted using the questionnaires. The investigation was conducted only on Seventh-day Adventist members who were fifteen years and above and who had their membership in Ngoma Adventist Church. The questionnaires were distributed to members in the church to ascertain their perceptions on how members should be retained in their church and to know why

there were a big number of membership losses in the church. The questionnaires were distributed on Sabbath day after the divine service, because most members come to church on this day. The content and purpose of the questionnaires were explained to members. In most cases, the questionnaires sheets were collected on the same day. 120 questionnaires given, 106 respondents answered and returned them.

The questionnaires distributed were divided into two sections. Section A had six questions and had to do with personal data of the respondent. Section B had nine questions. It covered church membership retention and the respondent's personal suggestions and observations. It tried to find out why new converts leave the church as well as people's understanding and assessment of evangelism in the church. It also dealt with the methods of winning souls and retaining them in the church. After the questionnaires were distributed; and analysis was made, Table 3 below represents the gender distribution of the respondents. The composition of the respondents in Table 3 below shows that 58, 5% of the respondents were male, while 41.5% of the respondents were female.

*Table 3. Gender of Respondents*

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	62	58.5%
Female	44	41.5%
Total	106	100%

The age grouping of the respondents in the church were as represented in Table 4 below. The information showed that respondents between ages 15-25 were 14.2%, respondents of 26-35 were 21.7%, respondents within 36-45 ages were 38.6%,

46 -55 were 14.2%, and from 56 and above had 12%. The table showed that the highest age group that responded to the questionnaires was 36-45 years.

*Table 4. Age Grouping of the Respondents*

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
15-25	15	14.2%
26-35	23	21.7%
36-45	41	38.6%
46-55	15	14.2%
56 and Above	12	11.3%
Total	106	100%

After analyzing the questionnaires, the following table shows the occupational distribution of the respondents. Table 5, which was based on the occupation of the respondents shows that 44.3% of the respondents were farmers; sellers were 19.8%; students 16%; and teachers 9.4%; while 10.5% were from others occupations. The highest percentage of members are farmers.

*Table 5. Occupation Distribution of Respondents*

Occupation	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Student	17	16%
Teacher	10	9.4%
Farmer	47	44.3%
Seller	21	19.8%
Others	11	10.5%
Total	106	100%

The questionnaires were also interested in finding the number of respondents who held responsibilities in the church. The table below shows the number of

respondents who held responsibilities and those without responsibilities in the church. Accordingly, 46.2% of the respondents had church responsibilities and had enough experience since they had attained the level of being responsible in the church. They could help to give enough evidence on membership retention of their church.

*Table 6. Number of Respondents with or without Responsibilities in the Church*

Church Responsibilities	Response	Percentage
Church Responsibilities	49	46.2%
No church responsibilities	57	53.8%
Total	106	100%

Again, the research determined the number of the respondents who could read and write. The information collected indicated that all the respondents could read and write.

*Table 7. Literacy of Respondents*

Group	Responses	Percentage
Literate	106	100%
Illiterate	0	0%
Total	106	100%

The next item considered was the number of years the respondents have been in the church. Table 8 shows the number of years respondents have been in the church. It reveals that 46, 3% of the respondents have been in the church for over 21 years, and 21.6% have been in the church for at least 10 years. This meant that all the

respondents were aware of the problem of membership retention in Ngoma Adventist Church.

*Table 8. Numbers of Years the Respondents Have Been in the Church*

No of Years in church	No of Respondents	Percentage
1-10 years	23	21.6%
11-20 years	34	32.1%
21 and above	49	46.3%
Total	106	100%

The next important aspect was what the members were doing after evangelism, as there was need for follow-up activities to help strengthen the new converts. The table below shows the length of days for follow-up activities. 52.8% of the respondents were of the view that there was no follow-up activity after baptism in Ngoma Adventist Church. 36.8% said it was less than one month. This indicated poor follow-up activities of the church, which caused problem to membership retention. In order to avert this situation the newly baptized members must continue to attend the newly baptized member's class for a period of 12 months even after their baptism.

*Table 9. Length of Follow-up in the Church after Baptism*

Length of time	Respondents	Percentages
Less than one month	39	36.8%
One month and above	11	10.4%
No follow-up	56	52.8%
Total	106	100%

After baptism, new converts needed adequate nurturing for them to be rooted in the faith. Table 10 below shows respondent's views of effective nurturing after

baptism. Table showed that 35% of the respondents out of 37 people were in doubt of effective nurturing program for new converts after baptism while another 36.7% said it was less than one month. The information revealed that there was lack of nurturing in the church after baptism.

*Table 10. Effective Nurturing of New Converts*

Length of Nurturing	Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 Month	39	36.7%
1-2 Months	21	19.9%
3-4 Months	9	8.4%
In doubt	37	35%
Total	106	100%

The research was conducted further to find out whether there was a vibrant friendship for new members in the church that would help to retain them. Table 11 showed that majority of the respondents did not have a vibrant and steady friendship with new converts in their church. Only 23.6% out of the respondents had.

*Table 11. Vibrant Friendship for New Members*

Vibrant Friendship	Respondents	Percentages
Yes	25	23.6%
No	70	66%
In doubt	11	10.4%
Total	106	100%

Table 12 captured the duration of friendship with new members. It showed that the longest period the respondents spend with new members was less than one month as stated by 51.9% of the respondents. Again, visitation was one of the

activities that could help to build converts faith and help them develop interest in the church.

*Table 12. Duration of Friendship with New Members*

Duration	Respondents	Percentages
Less than 1 month	55	51.9%
1-2 months	27	25.5%
3-4 months	15	14.2%
5 months and above	9	8.4%
Total	106	100%

Table 13 below shows how pastor and elders visited members in the church. It shows that, 55.7% of the respondents are of the view that there is no visitation in their church; while 19.8% of respondents say that visitation is done monthly. From this we could conclude that pastor and elders' visitation in the church was very weak. This could also be one of the causes of poor membership retention.

*Table 13. Pastor and Elders Visitation*

Pastor and Elders Visitation	Respondents	Percentages
Daily	9	8.5%
Weekly	17	16%
Monthly	21	19.8%
No visitation	59	55.7%
Total	106	100%

Table 14 shows that 61.3% of the respondents did not know the number of new members that left or remain in the church from the past evangelization. This showed that many of the old members did not care much about new members.

*Table 14. Knowledge of the Number of New Members after Baptism*

Know the Number	Respondents	Percentages
Yes	29	27.4%
No	65	61.3%
In doubt	12	11.3%
Total	106	100%

In addition, the secret of closing the back door of the church so that new-converts should remain in the church is to baptize them after they have been methodically taught and prepared in baptismal class. Table 15 shows that 79.2% of new converts participate once a week in their baptismal class lesson, on Sabbath morning. This means that their edification and formation were not sufficient to root and fortify them in the truth.

*Table 15. Baptismal Class of New Converts during the Week*

Baptismal class	Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 day per week	84	79.2%
1-2 days per week	0	0%
3-4 days per Week	0	0%
In doubt	22	20.8%
Total	106	100%

Table 16 reports the respondents' view on how the low membership affects the progress of the church. The table shows that, 95.3% of the respondents said low retention of members affects the progress of their church. This underscored the need to control loss of membership through a well-planned retention program.

*Table 16. Low Membership Rate and Progress*

Low membership affects Progress in church	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	101	95.3%
No	-	-
In doubt	5	4.7%
Total	106	100%

Table 17 below presents the results of the respondent's view of the most effective method they suggest can help control loss of members in the church. It shows that proper follow-up and effective visitation should be intensified in the district since the majority of the respondents are of the view that these two methods help a lot in membership retention. From Table 17, the next method that respondents recommended was effective nurturing.

*Table 17. Effective Methods of Membership Retention*

Method	Respondents	Percentage
Proper Follow-up	39	36.8%
Effective Visitation	26	24.5%
Effective Nurturing	15	14.2%
Vibrate Friendship	14	13.2%
Class Baptismal	12	11.3%
Total	106	100%

## Probable Causes of Loss Members

The probable causes of lost members in Ngoma Church can be classified in five main categories:

1. Lack of follow-up
2. Lack of nurturing program
3. Lack of friendship
4. Lack of visitation and motivation
5. Lack of enough fundamental instruction for new members

### Lack of Follow-Up

Follow-up is to maintain contact with a person in order to reinforce or evaluate his previous actions or something done after an earlier event that is connected with it.<sup>13</sup>

Matthew 28: 19-20 tells us what Jesus would have us to focus on. He promises to be with us as we strive to make disciples of all nations. In our busy culture, people need a relationship with Christ, but they often do not find a church home where they can grow spiritually and serve God. In support to this, Ellen White wrote that:

As the result of the presentation of the truth in large congregations, a spirit of inquiry is awakened, and it is especially important that this interest be followed up by personal labor. Those who desire to investigate the truth need to be taught to study diligently the Word of God. Someone must help them to build on the sure foundation. At this critical time in their religious experience, how important it is that wisely directed Bible workers come to their help, and open to their understanding the treasure house of God's Word.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cambridge Dictionaries Online, accessed 29 March 2016, s.v. "Follow-up," <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/follow-up>.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen. G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1925), 219.

Ellen White in her book “Evangelism” shows Christ’s Follow-up plan: Christ sent out His disciples two and two, to go to places to which He would afterward follow.<sup>15</sup> She also states that,

There is house-to-house work to be done by faithful laborers. Our efforts are not to cease because public meetings have been discontinued for a time. So long as there are interested ones, we must give them opportunity to learn the truth. And the new converts will need to be instructed by faithful teachers of God’s Word that they may increase in a knowledge and love of the truth, and may grow to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. They must now be surrounded by the influences most favorable to spiritual growth.<sup>16</sup>

According to the North American Mission Board,

Follow up is one of the most important aspects of the evangelism process. It does not end with the mere distribution of a short tract, a brief prayer of assurance and then a happy hug. Those won to Christ must enter into an ongoing process of discipleship. Follow up should be a concise, well-planned process for the purpose of growing and maturing believers into becoming like Christ. A church that does not have such a process is guilty of nothing less than spiritual infanticide. The goal of an immediate follow-up plan is to provide the church with a workable process that will equip it to follow up, assimilate and incorporate those who make a decision for Christ into the life and ministry of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Ngoma Adventist Church, as a church, appears to have leaders and members who are all occupied by their businesses so they do not have time to maintain contact with the newly baptized members. However, the Bible calls the new believers the “babes” in Christ (Heb 5:13). As a baby, new Christians need much attention and care during their formative years. The church must develop an ongoing follow-up strategy to insure that all new believers are successfully incorporated and assimilated into our local fellowship. When the new believers come to church, we have to sit with them,

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<sup>15</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>17</sup> “North American Mission Board,” accessed 8 March 2016, <http://www.namb.net/follow-up>.

introduce them, pray for them, protect them, offer to walk forward with them, and spend time after church with them.

### **Lack of Nurturing Program**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is facing a great challenge of losing newly baptized members of the Church as they leave the church or backslide sooner or later after their baptism due to lack of nurture and soul conservation. Nurturing involves aspects of conservation in order to prevent loss. Just as erosion is dangerous to a bare soil, so is soul depletion dangerous to a young growing church. There is need to nurture newly baptized members in order for them to be fully integrated in the church. Newly baptized members need to be given instructions, sometimes during the midweek prayer, on what it means to be a Christian; how a person grows in the Christian life; the history of the church; organization and programs of the Christian church; what every member can expect from the congregation; what the church expects from the congregation; and what the church expects from new members in Bible classes.<sup>18</sup>

Nurturing is currently one of the major issues affecting ministry in Ngoma Adventist Church, now the way of nurturing and equipping members depends on how effectively the church plans and organizes its training program and how each member is involved in the various activities of the church.

### **Lack of Friendship**

Friendship is defined throughout Scripture as the companionship and closeness we are to have with one another. It is a commitment to build relationships

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<sup>18</sup> Javan Kamanutsi Harerimana, "Soul Conservation in a Growing Church: Discipling, Retaining and Reclaiming," A Paper Presented to Summit on Nurture and Retention 2013, Silver Spring, Maryland, 4-7, accessed 28 February 2016, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/soul-conservation-in-a-growing-church.pdf>.

by getting to know others while modeling and helping others learn the characters and precepts of God's Word. In turn, it helps us. Relationship is essential to life! (Luke 15:1-2; Rom 12). The Bible has a lot to say about real friendship or real brotherhood.

According to the spirit of prophecy, the leading factor that influences membership losses is a lack of friendship or companionship within the group. The new converts may leave the church because of missing the company of the friends and leader of their churches. Ellen White advises that the work of caring for new converts is a special responsibility given by God to the church.<sup>19</sup> If this work is neglected, then the church is being unfaithful to the trust, which God has given to it. Ellen White points out the duty of older members to the new converts:

Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches. For the truth's sake and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed.<sup>20</sup>

Good friends are not just close friends, according to Solomon's proverbs. They must also be wise friends. "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Prov 13:20). Some of the men in our churches may have some very close friends, but are they wise friends? Do these friendships make them wiser, or do they reflect more of the world's values.

As is usual at many churches, at Ngoma Adventist Church, a warm friendship is felt more before and during the evangelistic campaign. Just after baptism, the visitations are stopped, no more people to care for the newly baptized; no one greets

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<sup>19</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 28 April 1896.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

them with warmth anymore as was done before baptism. The stresses of life that occupy the mind of leaders and church members are back to fill up their time.

### **Lack of Visitation and Motivation**

Leaders of the church are not visiting the members. Both new interests and newly baptized members are being neglected and not nurtured, and as a result, many eventually left the church. As pastors and leaders of the church, the greatest challenge is to organize a planned-visitation program and to implement it. “We should continually be inspiring and instructing our members in the art of bearing church responsibilities so that we will have more time to preach the message and visit in the homes of our people and bring to them spiritual counseling and encouragement.”<sup>21</sup>

Love for Christ should be our supreme motivation for visitation of the new converts. The concern and the desire of church to care for and protect new members should depend on this love of Christ on humanity (1 John 4:20). Therefore, do not let people who stopped coming to church go back to the world and their former way of life.

### **Lack of Enough Fundamental Instruction for New Members**

The second factor leading to the challenge of membership retention in the church is the failure by the clergy and church members to create and continue teaching the new converts after they have joined the church. Ellen White’s argument for the need to care for new converts states that again, after people have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after.<sup>22</sup> She continues by saying:

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<sup>21</sup> R. H. Pierson, “It is Possible to Make Room for Personal Visitation,” *Ministry*” *International Journal of SDA Ministerial Association*, October 1971, 12-14.

<sup>22</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1881), 4:68.

Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed. The church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them.<sup>23</sup>

In Ngoma Adventist Church, most of the baptismal candidates are baptized without having a firm doctrinal foundation in the twenty-eight beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist Church. They participate once a week in their baptismal class lesson, on a Sabbath morning. This means that since during the week the baptismal class is not operational, their teaching is not sufficient to root and fortify them in the truth. All the candidates should be well instructed; they should understand and accept the importance of the Bible and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist. Thus, the secret of closing the back door of the church so that new-converts should remain in the church is that they should be baptized only after they have been methodically taught and prepared. The Church Manual advises: "No Pastor has any right to baptize a member who is not yet thoroughly instructed."<sup>24</sup>

### **Effect of Membership Retention to the Church**

The immediate and particular consequence of retention may be a larger number in the church. Strong retention provides continuity. Retention provides for the development leaders. Retaining new members into the life of the church is vitally important for health and sustained church growth. Rick Warren stated in his book,

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<sup>23</sup> White, *Evangelism*, 351.

<sup>24</sup> *Church Manual* (2005), 30.

*The Purpose Driven Church*, “Don’t focus on growing a church with programs, focus on growing people with a process.”<sup>25</sup>

A church needs to be intentional in developing an assimilation plan that moves people toward ministry involvement and spiritual maturity. The church depends on her membership for many things. The members return tithes and offerings to facilitate any mission in the church; salaries of workers of the church all come from the pockets of the members. Other social amenities like schools and hospitals, which the church offers the communities all depends on the members’ contributions. All things being equal, the more the members of the church, the better the church would be able to meet her numerous goals and objectives. When the church is not able to retain her members, no activity in the church can function properly and the entire church will collapse.

Studies indicate that when a church does not have an intentional strategy for assimilation like fellowship and friendship, a serving community, vision, and discipleship, many of new members will also be lost to Christ’s kingdom. However, together these strategies provide a sound foundation that move people into the life of the church and provide opportunity for spiritual growth. The Christian Life Center in Aloha, Oregon, demonstrated this statistic with a study conducted in their church. When they implemented an assimilation strategy, guest retention went from 12 percent to 49 percent and the church grew from 330 to over 650 in 2 years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 324.

<sup>26</sup> J. Melvin Ming, “Helping Outsiders Become Insiders: A Study of Fast Growing Churches,” *Enrichment Journal*, accessed 5 March 2016, [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/042\\_outsiders.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/042_outsiders.cfm).

## **Summary**

The issues of membership retention have been a problem of large districts, even from General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists down to the local church level. The local settings, as discussed in this chapter, confirm that the challenge of membership retention is real and needs urgent attention from the local church leadership including the local church pastors. The challenges identified in this chapter include lack of proper follow-up, lack of nurturing programs for new converts, lack of friendship, lack of effective visitation, and lack of enough fundamental instruction for new converts.

## **Conclusion**

The Mission of the church is to preach the word to all people, baptizing and preparing them for the soon coming of Jesus. If all the members leave the church or if the church is not able to maintain the members, it means the Mission of the church has not been fulfilled. Hence, there is the need to find ways and means of retaining or recalling them to the church.

Hopefully, the focus and intentionality called for in this project will be carried out by the church, and new members will increasingly be assimilated and a lock will be applied to the back door of the church. The only question that remains is, “Will churches invest the effort to assimilate and develop new members into all that God would have them to become?” They must. Anything less will surely fall short of obedience to God’s command upon the lives of His children to “Go, and make disciples of all nations... (Matt 28:16).”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur: A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 130.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION

The main purpose of this chapter is to present and to discuss details of a proposed strategy designed to address challenges associated with loss of new converts at Ngoma Adventist Church. The chapter is divided into three main segments; preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The chapter seeks to rekindle interest in every single member (pastors or leaders inclusive) to participate or be involved in the retention of members and seeks to let Seventh-day Adventist understand that there is no better way of retaining membership apart from the biblical model suggested earlier in this research. The contents of the chapter include the design of the program, the diverse initiatives of implementation, and issues around monitoring and evaluation of the proposed strategy.

#### **Preparation of the Program**

In the development of the strategy for the retention of new converts in Ngoma Adventist Church, it was deemed necessary to commence by considering key areas of need that emerged from the study findings. The key areas that were found to require attention, according to the study findings were as follows:

1. Lack of Follow-up
2. Lack of Nurturing Program
3. Lack of Friendship
4. Lack of Visitation and Motivation

## 5. Lack of Enough Fundamental Instruction for New Members

It is the argument of this researcher in this discussion that tackling of these issues would facilitate the development of a viable and comprehensive retention strategy for new members at Ngoma Adventist Church. According to Gottfried Osei Mensah, “The church today needs leaders who are able to disciple younger leaders and prepare them, not just as leaders of tomorrow, but God’s servants to serve him today.”<sup>1</sup> It is upon this that the research has taken upon to write something in order to help our leaders to lead churches, retain members and prepare them for the soon coming of Jesus Christ.

### **Methodology of Retaining in Small Groups**

A strategy is needed to maintain new members in Ngoma Adventist Church. The concept of small group ministry is as old as the day of creation. Moses organized Israel into groups of ten (Ex 18). Jesus chose a group of twelve and spent most of His ministry with them. He often taught in private homes (Matt 13:36; 17:25; Mark 9:33; 10:10). The New Testament church centered its activities on small groups, in fellowship, study, sharing, praying, and eating together (Acts 2:42, 46).<sup>2</sup> At the heart of Christ’s strategy was a dynamic small group.

The genius of Christ’s ministry was that he devoted himself primarily to a few people rather than the masses, in order that the masses could be more effectively reached with the gospel. Jesus deliberately concentrated his ministry on a very small number of people. Mark records, ‘he appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons’ (Mark 3:14, 15). With the short time at his disposal, he was not given to gathering a large following with uncertain commitment. He chose to build, into the lives of a few, solid foundations that would form the basis of his kingdom and withstand the storms which would assail them. With a whole world to save he spent most of his ministry, it would seem, in private with this

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<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Osei Mensah, *Wanted Servant Leaders: The Challenge of Christian Leadership in Africa Today* (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Elder’s Handbook*, 123.

little group. He set out to teach those men to love one another and to pass on the good news of God's love to others. One cannot miss the significance of the twelve in searching for ways to vitalize the church of our day.<sup>3</sup>

About small groups, Ellen G. White emphasizes: "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."<sup>4</sup> A pastor has to take care of many churches at the same time; this brings a lot of challenges to the ministry. Most of the work is left in the hands of the church leaders to take care of the churches. Unfortunately, majority of these church leaders are not properly trained as said Edgar J. Elliston, "It appears that we are falling further behind in the preparation of the church leaders for the number of new churches which are now being established."<sup>5</sup>

Membership retention is of great importance since it keeps the church going. Through training our church leaders will help in follow-up, in nurturing, visiting and encouraging the new converts to stay in church.

### **The Designed Program**

A program was designed to train leaders and church members on how to retain new converts. The training program had one session lasting for four days; January 3-4, 2015 and January 10-11, 2015 (Saturday and Sunday) in order to increase the attendance of the members. The week days were not appropriate because most

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<sup>3</sup> John Mallison, *The Small-Group Leader: A Manual to Develop Vital Small Groups* (Adelaide, South Australia: Open Book, 1996), 3.

<sup>4</sup> White, *Christian Service*, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar J. Elliston, "Designing Leadership Education," *Missiology: An International Review*, 12 (1988) 20:205.

members were at their places of work. During the Sabbath afternoon for church members in general, the teachings involved general Bible study and the writings of Ellen White on selected topics that were dealing with the problem of church membership retention.

On Sundays, trainings were conducted for the elders and church workers. The mid-week prayer meetings and Fridays vespers were used to encourage the members to study the Bible and pray together in order to enhance friendship and fellowship among the members. The theme for the training workshop was “Carry on His Work on the Earth.” The workshop was held at Ngoma Adventist Church. The objectives of this workshop were to:

1. Train leaders to be effective in assisting the church pastor in his duties of retaining new converts in the church.
2. Educate leaders on strategies of retaining new converts.
3. Educate leaders regarding their roles and functions in the church as leaders.
4. Assist participants to draw church program plans for retaining the new members in the church.
5. Encourage the participants to work effectively so that members will derive maximum satisfaction from the service they receive from them.

### **Implementation**

The main strategy which can help in the retention of new members in Ngoma Adventist Church is small groups. In the church, the purpose of small groups is to provide Relational Discipleship just as Jesus did in his interaction with the Apostles. John 13:15 tells us “... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” The role of small groups within the church is to provide an opportunity for the church to touch each and every member on a regular basis. One of the biggest

challenges facing large churches and those that are growing is the ability to meet each individual's needs, to get to know them and care for each of them.

### **Training Program**

The training program was divided into two main sections, the training of the church leaders and the training of the church membership. The first part of the training involved sensitization seminars among the church board members and all church workers as well as the church members. The results from the survey were shared to the members in order for them to be able to understand the local situation as far as retention of membership is concerned. After sharing the information on the local situation, the researcher discussed the retention strategies with the church members who accepted that the strategies be implemented.

The second part of the training involved a comprehensive strategy for the church to train the leaders and the members. In the training of the leaders, the book *Pastoral Ministry* by Ellen G White was used and more emphasis was given to Section 6, "Pastoral care and nurture." The topics that were covered included assimilation of new members, church discipline, counseling, former members, and visitation of special member groups.<sup>6</sup>

The training also focused on seminar of small groups. The Elders' Handbook was used as a source book especially when training the church elders. The key topic covered was, "The Elder and church nurture" in chapter 6. The topic covered a comprehensive study on small groups' ministry.<sup>7</sup> About the participants of the

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<sup>6</sup> E. G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 1995), 203-234.

<sup>7</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association: *Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994), 123-126.

training workshop, the table below shows the number of people who attended daily training.

Table 18 indicates that attendance was well according the number of effective church members and church workers elected in 2015.

*Table 18. Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church Participants in the Training Workshop*

Days	Participants		Total
	Church Elders and Workers	Church Members	
1 <sup>st</sup> Day	53	86	139
2 <sup>nd</sup> Day	47	0	47
3 <sup>rd</sup> Day	57	79	136
4 <sup>th</sup> Day	51	0	51
Total	208	165	373

The researcher also developed a training program for the entire membership that involved teaching the fundamental doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventists. In the reaching of the doctrines of the church, the third chapter in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual was also used, and the entire book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: a Biblical Exposition of the Fundamental Doctrines*.<sup>8</sup> The aim of the training was to make the members grow spiritually and to continue in the membership of the church.

Each seminar meeting was a joyful celebration, and these seminars were composed of congregational worship, prayer groups, group discussion, and lectures

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<sup>8</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press, 2005).

related to the church's view of missionary work, especially as it relates to retaining new members and rescuing those who have left the church. The registration of each participant was important because it helped the leaders to create a visitation program, in which they visited the participants in their homes to confirm the decisions which they made during the seminar presentation.

### **Small Groups Technique in Ngoma Adventist Church**

Small groups need special planning and organization. The need must be known. In forming home small groups, the first meeting is often given over to preparing a group commitment. This might include the agreement to meet weekly for given number of weeks, attend every meeting in the series unless in or out of town. Do the appointed studies for each meeting, protect for each meeting, protect confidences, and refrain from negative statements about other people or organizations and invite the group. A small group has several advantages as of the following: Everyone participate, mutual relationship leaders training, well organized and easy to work.

Before a crusade, the church pastor, church personnel ministry coordinator, and elders, sat down for to organize seminar in small groups. They divided Ngoma Adventist Church into 35 small groups of 15 members. Each small group had the president, a secretary and a personal ministries coordinator. These small groups are arranged by age or by location in the town. A small group of 15 is also subdivided into smaller groups of 3 or 4 who can meet in special moments for prayer and distributed the Bible studies in homes.

The commission of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 28:19 implies that ultimate effectiveness of new congregation is determined by how well it grows. In

finding strategies to retain members in the church, the pastor has to educate church members to be aware of loss of membership in the church and its causes and bringing all members on board on how best to prevent it.

### **Befriending New Converts**

To help new converts to be firm in Ngoma Adventist Church, very small groups are created and become their friends. So they had to feel that they are accepted and loved by the older members. Older members and pastor hope that the single hopeful way to assist their integration into the congregation is to befriend them and give them a sense of belonging.

### **Reinforcing the Baptismal Class**

The baptismal class must be reinforced as a necessity of keeping new members in the church. It is better to baptize someone who is very well instructed. When a new member becomes mature now we can baptize that candidate. The teacher of the baptismal class must be someone who has experience (church elder or pastor). The pastor must ensure that the baptismal class is ready before the baptism ceremony.

It is not good to put newly baptized members in the adult Sabbath School Class. Post-baptismal class also should be organized for the new converts to help increase their knowledge in the doctrines of the church. Involve them with someone more experienced in order to form a missionary couple. This companion will be his or her spiritual guardian who will take care, encourage and involve him or her in church activities and evangelism. According to E.G White “the heavenly universe is waiting for the members to become channels through which the current of life shall flow to the world, that many may be converted.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> White, *Christian Service*, 21.

## Visiting New Members

Through small group, new members should be regularly visited to encourage them in their growth. All humans are social beings who need interaction and love. When pastor, elders and members visit new converts it makes them feel loved and valued. Their social relationship becomes strong and their needs are met. If new converts are deserted by members of their new church who could not meet their social needs, they turn to look for friends outside to keep them company. In attempt to do so, they at times become prey to their former friends who could lure them into their former life style. As far as the church wants to retain its new converts, intensive visitation of both new and old members should be instituted. This could be done through proper pastoral visitation, elder's and team members' visitation.

Through house to house visitation, the elders will know the problems of the new members. "House to house labors are needed. The Lord calls for decided effort to be put forth in places where the people know nothing of the Bible truth. The elders should visit the new converts in a friendly way and also become acquainted with them."<sup>10</sup> On this issue, Ellen G. White states,

Personal, individual efforts and interests for your friends and neighbors will accomplish much more than can be estimated. It is for the want of this kind of labor that souls for whom Christ died for are perishing. Your work may accomplish more real good than the more extensive meetings if they lack any personal effort. When both are combined with the blessing of God a more perfect and thorough work may be wrought, but if we can have but one part done, let it be the individual labor for opening the scripture in households making personal appeal.<sup>11</sup>

At another occasion, Ellen G. White commented,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 121.

Visit every family where ever a church is established, all the members should engage actively in missionary work. They should visit every family in the neighborhood, and know their spiritual conditions, if professed Christians had engaged in the work from the time when their names were first placed in the church book, there would not now be such widespread unbelief. If every church member had sought to enlighten others, thousands upon thousands would today stand with God commandment-keeping people,<sup>12</sup>

Through the visitation, the church can enroll for correspondence school, give literature, give Bible studies, find interest in souls, find the needy and do health and welfare work, find new friends and organize branch Sabbath school and by so doing retain both old and new converts.

### **Involving the Newly Baptized**

The newly baptized members need to be involved in the church's activities. They should be helped to identify their spiritual gifts. Newly baptized members should be invited to join the various ministries in the church. They should also be assigned to Sabbath school class or small group. It is the responsibility of the small group where the new converts will participate to develop friendship, pray with him or her and invite him or her if possible to social activities of the church. Involve them in the missionary activities, preparing them to testify for Christ and to win souls for his kingdom while they are still in their converts' fire.

Bible studies should be paramount to the new converts. As they become conversant in the scriptures, they build a strong faith in Jesus and become active in the church. The statement that "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42 NKJV), clearly implies that more time and nurture were required in the church. In his book *Evangelism through Sabbath school*, Gerald R. Nash states that Sabbath school workers have a heavy burden for the eternal welfare

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), 6:296.

of their members and that a soul holding program is just as important as a soul winning one. Evangelism concern is not merely to teach the gospel but to every person continuously in such a manner that those who hear the truth may endure unto the end and be saved in the kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup>

### **Holding Seminars in Order to Keep the New Member's Faith**

Most of the baptismal candidates in Ngoma Adventist Church are baptized without having a firm doctrinal foundation in the 28 fundamental beliefs; and the result is that they are not strong in the faith. According to this, a schedule must be made to conduct seminar for them once per month, if possible, last Sunday of every month. They have to be taught with someone who is a mature teacher. This is to make sure that they master the 28 fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church.

### **Conduct Seminar Concerning Public Evangelism**

The intensification of evangelistic campaign should be preceded by training seminars of the church members in order to help them through small groups on how to prepare a crusade, how to hold up a crusade, how to do the follow-up and teach them how to assimilate new members.

### **Provide Spiritual Trainers**

Sponsors have to be provided for new members. They are selected from among experienced and spiritual church members. Sponsors are trained to be spiritual trainers to the new believers by inviting them at home for Sabbath lunch, encouraging

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<sup>13</sup> Gerald R. Nash, *Evangelism through Sabbath School* (Washington DC, Review and Herald, 1964), 60.

them to fellowship and worship programs. Sponsors share in many activities of the converts. Thus, new members will grow and get maturity in their spiritual lives.

### **Visiting and Encouraging New Members**

Visit teams are set and they visit new members all two weeks. This helps the new members to overcome difficulties connected to their faith when inundated by temptations. It helps to build confidence in God and in caring for the group.

### **Consider Confidence**

In cases where a member was involved in an incident shameful, and he/she opened your heart to you, consider his/her confidence. She/he has spoken to you in trust and do not betray the trust by speaking about the incident to others. Your part is to assure him/her that his/her sin is not too big for Jesus to forgive. Assist him/her in laying his/her sin at Jesus' feet and claim His promises for cleansing.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation is aimed at looking at the program of membership retention and how it was implemented. The result of the implementation, and the effect of the results to the study, and what to do to improve will also be considered. After conducting the program to address problems that were discovered in chapter 3, there were some results that revealed the impact the program made in the life of the church members.

### **Improve Visitation**

Ngoma Adventist Church has four elders, and it is divided into four areas; each elder is on call for an area, but they are alternated in these regions; the elder covering area one this week may be taken to another area the following week. A message is always made on Sabbath in the church, in order to inform members to

know the elder in charge of their area. This method has helped to stimulate the elders to do their everyday jobs. The new converts and the old members are well visited by the pastor, elders and church workers. This method creates a kind of competition among the elders to put in their best.

### **Small Groups Ministry**

Ngoma Adventist Church that had no small group before the program was conducted, now after the training, to God's glory the church is organized into 35 small groups of fifteen members. Each small group has the president, a secretary and a personal ministries coordinator. These small groups are arranged by age or by location in the town. A small group of fifteen is also subdivided into smaller groups of three or four; this has helped to enhance the friendly relationships among members.

As at the end of this project, Ngoma Adventist Church is experiencing what is called the area of spiritual growth among members. There is now spirit of unity in Ngoma Adventist Church and the greatest evidence is that, the problem of insufficient chairs that the church was experiencing every Sabbath day is already finished, and now attendance at church services has improved. Integration of new members into church activities is working well.

### **Retention of New Membership**

After the evangelistic campaign which was conducted in Ngoma Adventist Church, thirty-seven new converts were baptized and the Godfathers are chosen by the church to be their spiritual trainers. Each new member had three or four Godfathers. These Godfathers are chosen according to their age, sex and their location in the town in accordance with the new members. The aim of this mentoring was to help the new members to overcome difficulties connected to their faith when

inundated by temptations, to be their spiritual trainers, and to encourage them to fellowship and worship programs. The task of Godfathers started on 5<sup>th</sup> July ended 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2015. During this period, the Godfathers were assigned three days of visiting and fellowshiping with their partners by studying the word of God and sharing meals in the homes of the Godfathers.

After three months of visiting and follow-up, all the thirty-seven new members were still in the church; and they were very active, and hopefully will bring the other family members, friends and neighbors' to Christ. During this time, Ngoma Adventist Church has recovered from its lukewarm situation. Small group leaders and coordinators continue to meet on regular basis for the follow-ups of their ministry.

### **Summary**

The result of the discussion in this chapter indicates without a doubt that the challenge of membership retention is authentic in Ngoma Adventist Church and that there is an urgent need for attention from the church leadership. Despite the fact that the church is doing so much to win souls for God's Kingdom, it is imperative to consider the challenge of membership retention as equally important and a need of the church in Ngoma. The program was designed to satisfy the need of Ngoma Adventist Church. While members leave the church for various reasons, this study confirmed that the main strategy which can help the retention of new members in Ngoma Adventist Church is small groups.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus commanded the church to reach the lost. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And

remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20). A necessary component in fulfilling this command is assimilating new converts into the body of Christ, so that they are moved toward spiritual maturity. It is through this process that believers and the church can realize fully all that Christ has for them. The challenge of member drop out and inactivity needs to be addressed at the beginning of an individual’s relationship with the church and the small groups should be developed in such a way that relationships needed for discipleship are encouraged.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Retention of members has been discussed in previous chapters, and in this chapter suggestions on how the challenge of retaining church members can be broken will be presented to help the leader understand what needs be done to reduce the church's challenge retention of members. Thus, the chapter summarizes the results of research and also drew a conclusion based on the findings and made recommendations. The recommendations, which will be highlighted in this chapter, are those that have been tested in Ngoma Adventist Church, and hopefully they will work in other churches also

#### **Summary**

The first chapter of the study was the need for the church to retain its members. There are many challenges that hinder the members to keep their faith. The main objective of the researcher is to find the causes of poor retention of members and develop membership retention strategy. The second chapter is a review of relevant documentation on membership retention, and the literature reviewed submits that the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament, and Ellen White's writings give voice and prominence to growth and membership retention.

Chapter three presented the setting and investigated the probable causes of loss members. The reasons came about through investigation which was conducted using the questionnaires distributed in Ngoma Adventist Church and the key areas that were found to require attention, according to the study findings were as follows:

1. Lack of follow-up
2. Lack of nurturing program
3. Lack of friendship
4. Lack of visitation and motivation
5. Lack of enough fundamental instruction for new members

From these, the researcher identified the need of training workshop for the leaders and church members on how to retain new converts.

The fourth chapter focused on the development of training program for leaders and church members based on the data from the survey. A detailed training program was designed. After the program was developed and implemented it was evaluated.

Retention of members was ordained by Jesus before the great Commission so that His disciples could be added to the fold (John 15:16). However, this was not perfect during the early church and is how it has been down to this age. Though it was not so for the early Seventh-day Adventist yet membership retention is becoming a global problem in the church. Therefore, there is a need for all Adventists at all levels to contribute their part and be co-workers with God, by winning and keeping souls for His soon coming. For this reason, visits of both old and new converts should be paramount in churches. Pastors and elders should develop strategies of visiting every member and training old members on nurturing new converts.

The need to educate old members in all churches on how to help new converts to be established in the faith cannot be overemphasized. New members should also be taught how to be involved in soul winning and keeping so that the work can be accomplished. The neglect of emphasis in nurturing in many churches has given rise to lack of growth in membership and it has resulted in many dropping immediately after baptism.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher concluded in this study that the challenge of retention of church members is real at Ngoma Adventist Seventh-day Church and requires urgent attention. However, this challenge can be curbed if the church leaders put the proper strategy to solve it. Given the many challenges and the causes of decline in the church, this study includes strategies that would help the newly baptized members to remain in the church.

In addition, the research discovered that the Bible provides the needed tool to address this problem of member loss in very practical ways. But it suggests that it becomes the business of all church members to be successful, and that seems to be the major problem. Thus, the main strategy adopted in this study are small groups that included its components: befriending with the new converts, strengthening the baptismal class, visiting new members, involving new members in church programs, training elders and church members to assist the pastor in the nurturing task, training new converts to strengthen their faith, providing spiritual Godfathers, and doing house to house visitation.

## **Recommendations**

The consequences of poor retention of new members in Ngoma Adventist Church are manifested. To change this situation, and to help the new members to maintain the actual warmth in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church, the following suggestions are recommended to the church pastor, church elders, and all church workers as well as the church members:

- a. Reinforce the baptismal class for new-converts in order to be baptized only after they have been methodically taught and prepared, and ensure dynamic and spiritual teachers for them.

- b. Choose the Sponsors for mentoring newly baptized, and this should be organized by leadership of the local church.
- c. Continue edifying the new converts after they have joined the church.
- d. Keep newly baptized members in a special instructional class for one to three months after baptism.
- e. Nurture the newly baptized members in order for them to be fully integrated in the church.
- f. Develop the habit of follow-up and of visitation in order to assess the needs of the new and old church members.
- g. Assimilate new members immediately after baptism by creating a loving relationship with them, engaging them, involving them in ministry thus helping them to belong.
- h. Keep the Sabbath school groups, and train the teachers to be relational discussion leaders.
- i. Maintain the weekly meetings of small groups.
- j. Teach new members the leadership skills and give them lighter leadership responsibilities in order to develop their identity and a sense of belonging.
- k. Give a training seminar for personal and public evangelism to the church once every quarter.
- l. Recommend to other churches which have the same problem to use small groups program as a strategy which can help them to maintain the new members in the church.

## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

##### **Survey Questionnaire on a Strategy for New Members Retention in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Dear respondent,

This questionnaire intends to collect views from Church members on what causes most of the new converts to backslide after baptism. This will assist to develop a model of intervention that will help improve membership retention in Ngoma Seventh-day Adventist Church. The questionnaire is divided into two sections A and B. In addition, you are expected to tick only one of the best answers for these sections. You are also assured that any information given will be kept confidential.

N.B: Please do not write your name on this questionnaire.

#### **Section: A**

**I.** Please tick (x) your choice of option in the box.

1. Indicate whether you are a male or female. Male  Female
2. How old are you? 15-25  26-35  36-45  46-55  Above 56
3. What is your occupation? Student  Teacher  Farmer  Seller  Others
4. Are you engaged in any church responsibilities? Yes  No
5. Can you read and write? Yes  No
6. How long have you been an Adventist? 1-10 years  11-20 years   
21 and above

**Section: B**

**II.** Please choose the option which clearly expresses your response.

7. How many months do your church use to do follow-up for new members after baptism? Less than 1 month  1 month and above  No follow-up
8. How long does your church offer effective nurturing for new converts after baptism? Less than 1 month  1-2 months  3-4 months  in doubt
9. Does your church have a vibrant friendship for new converts? Yes  No
10. What is duration of friendship with new members in your church?  
Less than 1 month  1-2 months  3-4 months  5 months and above
11. How often do your church pastor and elders visit your church members in their houses or work place? Daily  weekly  monthly  no visitation
12. Are you aware of new converts in your church from last baptism?  
Yes  No
13. For how many days during the week are new converts prepared in baptismal class before baptism? Less than 1 day per week  1-2 days per week   
3-4 days per Week  In doubt
14. Do you think poor membership retention can affect the progress of your church? Yes  No
15. If yes which of the following do you think will help control this loss of membership? Proper Follow-up  Effective Visitation   
Effective Nurturing  Vibrante Friendship  Class Baptismal

## APPENDIX B

### TRAINING WORKSHOP ON MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

#### Program Outline

Date	Training Program	Participants
January 3, 2015	The Results from the Survey Assimilating New Members	Church elders and all church workers as well as the church members
January 4, 2015	Visitation of Special Member Groups Personal Ministry to Members	Elders and all church workers
January 10, 2015	Former Members, Inactive Members Counseling	Church elders and all church workers as well as the church members interested
January 11, 2015	Church Discipline Small Groups	Elders and all church workers

## Daily Program

Ngoma, January 3-4 and 10-11, 2015

Date	Time	Event /Activity
Saturday	14: 00 – 14:30	Prayer
January 3, 2015	14: 30 – 15:30	Presentation 1: The Results from the Survey
	15: 30 – 16:30	Presentation 2: Assimilating New Members
	16: 30 – 17:30	Questions and answers
	17:30 – 18:00	Closing Remarks and Prayer
Sunday	8:00 – 8:45	Devotional
January 4, 2015	8:45 – 9:00	Pause
	9:00 – 10:00	Presentation 3: Visitation of Special Member Groups
	10:00 – 11:00	Presentation 4: Personal Ministry to Members
	11:00 – 11:30	Questions and answers
	11:30 – 12:00	Closing Remarks and Prayer
Saturday	14: 00 – 14:30	Prayer
January 10, 2015	14: 30 – 15:30	Presentation 5: Former Members, Inactive Members
	15: 30 – 16:30	Presentation 6: Counseling
	16: 30 – 17:30	Questions and answers
	17:30 – 18:00	Closing Remarks and Prayer
Sunday	8:00 – 8:45	Devotional
January 11, 2015	8:45 – 9:00	Pause
	9:00 – 10:00	Presentation 7: Church Discipline
	10:00 – 11:00	Presentation 8: Small Groups Ministry
	11:00 – 11:30	Questions and answers
	11:30 – 12:00	Closing Remarks and Prayer

## APPENDIX C

### TRAINING WORKSHOP MATERIAL

**Theme:** “*Carry on His work on the earth*” (John 13:15)

#### Presentation 1

#### The Results from the Survey

#### Probable Causes of Loss of Members in Ngoma Church

(Matt 28: 19-20)

The key areas that were found to require attention, according to the study findings were as follows:

- a. Lack of Follow-up
- b. Lack of Nurturing Program
- c. Lack of Friendship
- d. Lack of Visitation and Motivation
- e. Lack of Enough Fundamental Instruction for New Members

#### **Lack of Follow-up**

Matthew 28: 19 -20 tells us what Jesus would have us to focus on. He promises to be with us as we strive to make disciples of all nations. In our busy culture, people need a relationship with Christ, but they often do not find a church home where they can grow spiritually and serve God.

Ellen White in her book “Evangelism” shows **Christ’s Follow-up Plan**: Christ sent out His disciples two and two, to go to places to which He would afterward follow. (*Evangelism, page 58*)

The church must develop an on-going follow-up strategy to insure that all new believers are successfully incorporated and assimilated into our local fellowship. When the new believers come to church, we have to sit with them, introduce them, pray for them, protect them, offer to walk forward with them, and spend time after church with them.

#### **Lack of Nurturing Programs**

There is need to nurture newly baptized members in order for them to be fully integrated in the church. Newly baptized members need to be given instructions, sometimes during the midweek prayer, on what it means to be a Christian; how a person grows in the Christian life; the history of the church; organization and programs of the Christian church. And what every member can expect from the congregation; and what the church expects from the congregation; and what the church expects from new member in Bible classes.

### **Lack of Friendship**

Friendship is defined throughout Scripture as the companionship and closeness we are to have with one another. It is a commitment to build relationships by getting to know others while modeling and helping others learn the characters and precepts of God's Word. In turn, it helps us. Relationship is essential to life! (Luke 15:1-2; Romans 12). The Bible has a lot to say about real friendship or real brotherhood.

According to the spirit of prophecy, the leading factor that influences membership losses is a lack of friendship or companionship within the group. The new converts may leave the church because of missing the company of the friends and leader of their churches. Ellen White advises that the work of caring for new converts is a special responsibility given by God to the church. (*Review and Herald*, April 28, 1896)

### **Lack of Visitation and Motivation**

Leaders of the church are not visiting the members. Both new interests and newly baptized members are being neglected and not nurtured, and as a result, many eventually left the church. As pastors and leaders of the church, the greatest challenge is to organize a planned-visitation program and to implement it. "We should continually be inspiring and instructing our members in the art of bearing church responsibilities so that we will have more time to preach the message and visit in the homes of our people and bring to them spiritual counseling and encouragement." (*It is Possible to Make Room for Personal Visitation*, page 12-14)

### **Lack of Enough Fundamental Instruction for New Members**

The second factor leading to the challenge of membership retention in the church is the failure by the clergy and church members to create and continue teaching the new converts after they have joined the church. Ellen White's argument for the need to care for new converts states that again, after people have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, page 68)

The Church Manual advises: "No Pastor has any right to baptize a member who is not yet thoroughly instructed." (*Church Manual*, page 30)

## **Presentation 2**

### **ASSIMILATING NEW MEMBERS**

(1 Peter 2:2, Matthew 28:20)

#### **Give new members something to do**

Those who are most actively employed in doing with interested fidelity their work to win souls to Jesus Christ are the best developed in spirituality and devotion. Their very active working formed the means of their spirituality. There is danger of religion losing in depth that which it gains in breadth. This need not be, if, in the place of long sermons, there is wise education given to those newly come to the faith. Teach them by giving them something to do, in some line of spiritual work that their first love will not die but increase in fervor. Let them feel that they are not to be carried and to lean for support on the church; but they are to have root in themselves. They can be in many lines, according to their several abilities, useful in helping the church

to come nearer to God, and working in various ways to act upon the elements outside the church which will be a means of acting beneficially upon the church.  
“**Evangelism, 356, 357**”

### **Doctrinal Grounding**

#### **Give Bible studies to the newly converted to fully and firmly establish them in the truth**

Direct the mind to Him who guides and controls all things. Christ will be the manna and the spiritual dew to these newly converted souls. In Him is no darkness at all. As men of spiritual understanding conduct Bible studies with them, telling them how to yield to the power of the Holy Spirit, that they may be fully and firmly established in the truth, the power of God will be revealed. “**Evangelism, 284**”

#### **Have special meetings with new members**

Candidates who have grown to manhood and womanhood should understand their duty better than do the younger ones; but the pastor of the church has a duty to do for these souls. Have they wrong habits and practices? It is the duty of the pastor to have special meetings with them. Give them Bible readings, converse and pray with them, and plainly show the claims of the Lord upon them. Read to them the teaching of the Bible in regard to conversion. Show what is the fruit of conversion, the evidence that they love God; show that true conversion is a change of heart, of thoughts and purposes. “**Testimonies for the Church 6:95**”

#### **Teach new converts to study the Scriptures**

Upon all new converts should be impressed the truths that abiding knowledge can be gained only by earnest labor and persevering study. As a rule, those who are converted to the truth we preach have not previously been diligent students of the Scriptures; for in the popular churches there is little real study of the Word of God. The people look to the ministers to search the Scriptures for them and to explain what they teach. “**Evangelism, 367**”

#### **Converts Copy Their Minister**

##### **When ministers walk with God their converts partake of their spirit**

Converts seldom rise at once in spirituality above the level of their teachers. How important, then, that those teachers should habitually put their trust in God, and seek for the manifestations of His divine power upon their labors; that they should be meek, spiritually-minded, and in constant communion with Heaven. Then those who are converted under their labors will partake of their spirit, and emulate their graces. “**The Review and Herald, August 8, 1878**”

### **Presentation 3**

#### **Visitation of Special Member Groups**

(Mark 1:29-31)

#### **Family visitation may be the most profitable work a minister does**

This part of the pastoral work is not to be neglected or shifted upon your wives or some other person. You must educate and train yourselves to visit every family that

you can possibly get access to. The results of this work will testify that it is the most profitable work a gospel minister can do. **“Evangelism, 440”**

**The way to measure the effectiveness of your preaching is through visiting with families to whom you preached**

How are you to know that the word spoken in the desk has been a savor of life unto life unless you visit in families, praying with them, and drawing out the true state of their minds, the real condition of their experience, that you may point them to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world? There is need that the breath of God should blow upon them, and give them spiritual life. The churches need to be enlightened in regard to practical religion in the home life. **“Address To Ministers, 17 (Ph 118)”**

**Speaking helpful, encouraging words in the home is far more effective than preaching**

This is home missionary work, work that God’s ministers are to strive faithfully to do. They are not only to preach; they are to minister by going from house to house, becoming acquainted with the different families in the church, some of whom may be converted, while others are still without God and without hope in the world. It is possible to preach many sermons without accomplishing the work essential for the well-being of the people of God. The discourses given are to be followed with personal labor. A work may be done by visiting people in their homes, and speaking helpful, encouraging words to them, which will be far more effective than the work done by preaching. **“The Review and Herald, January 31, 1899.”**

**Prayer should be a part of each family visit**

But there is another point that I had almost forgotten. It is the influence which the preacher should exert in his ministry. His work is not merely to stand in the desk. It is but just begun there. He should enter the different families, and carry Christ there, carry his sermons there, carry them out in his actions and his words. As he visits a family he should inquire into their condition. Is he the shepherd of the flock? The work of a shepherd is not all done in the desk. He should talk with all the members of the flock, with the parents to learn their standing, and with the children to learn theirs. A minister should feed the flock over which God has made him overseer. It would be agreeable to go into the house and study; but if you do this to the neglect of the work which God has commissioned you to perform, you do wrong. Never enter a family without inviting them together, and bowing down and praying with them before you leave. Inquire into the health of their souls. **“Testimonies for the Church 2:618”**

**Every minister should be a friend of the poor**

Every gospel minister should be a friend to the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed among God’s believes people. Christ was always the poor man’s friend, and the interests of the poor need to be sacredly guarded. There has too often been a wonderful dearth of Christ’s compassion and loving interest in the poor and afflicted. Love, sacred, refined love, is to be exercised in behalf of the poor and unfortunate.

**Nothing gives greater spiritual strength than ministering to the sick and desponding**

Nothing will give greater spiritual strength and a greater increase of earnestness and depth of feeling than visiting and ministering to the sick and the

desponding, helping them to see the light and to fasten their faith upon Jesus. There are disagreeable duties that somebody must do or souls will be left to perish. Christians will find a blessing in doing these duties, however unpleasant they may be. **“Testimonies for the Church 4:75”**

**When visiting the discouraged, bring a cheerful countenance, hopeful words, and the grasp of your hand**

The mission of Christ was to heal the sick, encourage the hopeless, bind up the brokenhearted. This work of restoration is to be carried on among the needy, suffering ones of humanity. God calls not only for your benevolence, but your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of your hand. Relieve some of God’s afflicted ones. Some are sick, and hope has departed. Bring back the sunlight to them. There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the Word of God. There is a soul sickness no balm can reach, no medicine heal. Pray for these, and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts. **“Welfare Ministry, 71”**

**Church members should be trained to visit the sick**

The churches have been so trained that they feel no special responsibility to visit, to talk the truth, to pray with and for one another, to visit the sick, to encourage them, to give sympathy and love, and make it manifest that in Christ they are members one of another. **“Manuscript Releases 6:69”**

**Presentation 4**  
**Personal Ministry to Members**  
(John 21:15-16)

**One pastor said he would rather be horse-whipped than visit**

Elder H used to live here and preach to the people, but he was not a shepherd of the flock. He would tell the poor sheep that he would rather be horse-whipped than visit. He neglected personal labor; therefore pastoral work was not done in the church and its borders. The deacons and elders of the church have acted wisely and worked judiciously to keep the church in order, and we find the people in a much better condition than we had expected. We are happily disappointed. But when I look over the years, and think of what might have been done, if the man entrusted with the flock had been a faithful steward of God, watching for souls as one that must give an account, my heart is made sad. Had the preacher done the work of a pastor, a much larger number would now be rejoicing in the truth. **“Manuscript Releases 9:343, 344”**

**Seclusion and study must not supersede visitation**

The duties of a pastor are often shamelessly neglected because the minister lacks strength to sacrifice his personal inclinations for seclusion and study. The pastor should visit from house to house among his flock, teaching, conversing, and praying with each family, and looking out for the welfare of their souls. Those who have manifested a desire to become acquainted with the principles of our faith should not be neglected, but thoroughly instructed in the truth. **“Evangelism, 350”**

### **Ministers who sermonize without shepherding should be dismissed**

But there have been solemn duties neglected in accepting ministers to labor in word and doctrine who can only preach. They do not watch for souls as they that shall give an account. They sermonize; but the work is left undone which the sheep and lambs need to have done for them. And this half-hearted kind of work has been done all through America, and money paid to men employed, when they should have been dismissed to find work less responsible and care taking.... The flock of God has a right to expect to be visited by their pastor, to be instructed, advised, and counseled, in their own homes **“Appeal and Suggestions to Conference Officers (Ph 2)17, 18”**

### **Visit with a purpose**

Many love to preach, but shun the labor that is required to lift souls out of sin. Men are dying all around us, and we have not made any special efforts to address them earnestly, interestedly, affectionately, as Christ would have done had he been on the earth. We are Christ’s ambassadors, watchmen unto the house of Israel, to see the dangers that await souls, and give them warning. The pastor is a shepherd of the sheep, guarding them, feeding them, warning them, reproofing them, or encouraging them, as the case may require. There is visiting to be done, not to have a pleasant chat, but to do the work required of a watchman. There should be earnest conversation and prayer with these souls. This is the kind of work that gains valuable experience in the up building of Christ’s kingdom. **“The Review and Herald, October 20, 1896”**

### **Women should be appointed to visit**

This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. **“The Review and Herald, July 9, 1895”**

### **Members trained to rely on preaching, do little for Christ**

And the minister’s work does not end with the presentation of truth from the pulpit. He is to do earnest, personal, house-to-house work, studying the Scriptures with the people, and praying with them. Thus many will be brought to knowledge of God. Souls ready to perish will be imbued with the Spirit of Christ. But this work has been neglected; and therefore the churches are lacking in power. **“The Review and Herald, January 21, 1902”**

## **Presentation 5**

### **Former Members, Inactive Members**

(Matthew 18:12)

### **Wise efforts should be made to prevent straying and to bring back those who have strayed**

Here were the cases of several who had backslidden, who had been in darkness, and who had strayed from the fold. But especially was the case of Brother A prominent. All the efforts were not made which should have been made in wisdom to prevent his straying from the fold; and after he had strayed, diligent efforts were not put forth to bring him back. There was more gossiping over his case than sincere sorrow for him. All these things kept him from the fold and caused his heart to be separated farther and farther from his brethren, making his rescue still more difficult.

How different was this course from that pursued by the shepherd in the parable, when in pursuit of the lost sheep. The whole ninety and nine were left in the wilderness to care for themselves, exposed to dangers; yet the lone sheep, separated from the flock, was in greater danger, and to secure the one, the ninety and nine were left.

**“Testimonies for the Church 2:218”**

### **Many who have strayed will come back**

When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd’s voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd. The people of God will draw together, and present to the enemy a united front.

**“Testimonies for the Church 6:401”**

### **Find Them**

#### **Some ministers, surrounded by backsliders, feel no burden for their souls**

Some ministers who profess to be called of God have the blood of souls on their garments. They are surrounded with backsliders and sinners, and yet feel no burden for their souls; they manifest indifference in regard to their salvation. Some are so nearly asleep that they seem to have no sense of the work of a gospel minister. They do not consider that as spiritual physicians they are required to have skill in administering to souls diseased with sin. The work of warning sinners, of weeping over them and pleading with them, has been neglected until many souls are past all cures. Some have died in their sins, and will in the judgment confront with reproaches of their guilt those who might have saved them, but who did not. Unfaithful ministers, what retribution awaits you! **“Testimonies for the Church 2:506”**

### **Hunt up the backsliders with the message of mercy**

God will work mightily with His ministers when their hearts are filled with love for the poor lost sheep of the house of Israel. Hunt up the backsliders, those who once knew what religion was, and give them the message of mercy. **“Counsels on Health, 533”**

### **A good shepherd will leave the 99 and seek the lost sheep**

If there is a backslider, the shepherd knows how to present the truth in such a manner that the soul will be convicted. He will leave the ninety and nine, and seek the lost sheep. But if the shepherd does not visit his flock, he knows not their condition, he knows not what truths to set before them, nor what is appropriate to their case. And more than this, as the preacher manifests so little interest in the souls under his charge, he cannot set an example to the flock to have an interest and love and watch-care for souls. **“Appeal and Suggestions to Conference Officers (Ph 2)18”**

### **Win Them**

#### **In the parables of the lost sheep and lost piece of silver, Jesus illustrated heaven’s attitude toward the backslidden**

They should be carefully and tenderly led and educated as pupils in school. Many have to unlearn theories which have been grafted into their lives. As they become convinced that they have been in error concerning Bible subjects, they are thrown into perplexity and doubt. They need the tenderest sympathy and the most judicious help; they should be carefully instructed; and should be prayed for and prayed with, watched and guarded with the kindest solicitude. Those who have fallen under

temptation and have backslidden from God need help. This class is represented in the lessons of Christ by the lost sheep. The shepherd left the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and hunted for the one lost sheep until he found it; he then returned with rejoicing, bearing it on his shoulder. Also by the illustration of the woman who searched for the lost piece of silver until she found it, and called together her neighbors to rejoice with her that the lost was found. **“Testimonies for the Church 4:263, 264”**

### **Members and Personal Ministry**

#### **Education of membership is essential**

Our work is incomplete if we do not educate others to be laborers together with God, visiting and praying with families, showing to the world what Jesus has done for us. God’s Word declares, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep him unspotted from the world.” These words are spoken to every follower of Christ. Not only the minister, but every soul connected with Him, is to be a worker in His vineyard. “Herein is My Father glorified,” Christ said, “that ye bear much fruit.” By His own life Christ has paid for your earnest, hearty cooperation. If you do not work as faithful missionaries, you are untrue to your trust, and you disappoint your Savior. **“The Signs of the Times, December 27, 1899”**

#### **The work requires the resources of ministers and members**

The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.... It is training, education, that is needed. Those who labor in visiting the churches should give the brethren and sisters instruction in practical methods of doing missionary work. **“Testimonies for the Church 9:117.**

### **Presentation 6**

#### **Counseling**

(Galatians 6:2)

#### **Counselors especially need the mind of Christ**

Especially should those who have accepted the position of directors or counselors feel that they are required to be in every respect Christian gentlemen? While in dealing with others we are always to be faithful, we should not be rude. The souls with whom we have to do are the Lord’s purchased possession, and we are to permit no hasty, overbearing expression to escape the lips. Brethren, treat men as men, not as servants, to be ordered about at your pleasure. **“SpT-A5, 18, 19”**

#### **The pastor needs to understand an endless variety of temperaments**

As the physician deals with physical disease, so does the pastor minister to the sin-sick soul? And his work is as much more important than that of the physician as eternal life is more valuable than temporal existence. The pastor meets with an endless variety of temperaments, and it is his duty to become acquainted with the members of the families that listen to his teachings in order to determine what means will best influence them in the right direction. **“Gospel Workers, 338”**

### **The Word should be considered a family counselor**

Parents need to reform; ministers need to reform; they need God in their households. If they would see a different state of things, they must bring His Word into their families and must make it their counselor. They must teach their children that it is the voice of God addressed to them, and is to be implicitly obeyed. They should patiently instruct their children, kindly and untiringly teach them how to live in order to please God. The children of such a household are prepared to meet the sophistries of infidelity. They have accepted the Bible as the basis of their faith, and they have a foundation that cannot be swept away by the incoming tide of skepticism. **“Patriarchs and Prophets, 143”**

### **Counselors should not be mind and judgment for others**

Instead of acting as a wise counselor, he assumes the prerogatives of an exacting ruler. God is dishonored by every such display of authority and self-exaltation. No man standing in his own strength is ever to be mind and judgment for another man whom the Lord is using in His work. **“Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 491”**

### **Ministers may give counsel but seek wisdom from God**

In the place of bearing your perplexities to a brother or a minister, take them to the Lord in prayer. Do not place the minister where God should be. The minister of Christ is like other men. True, he bears sacred responsibilities, but he is not infallible. He is compassed with infirmity, and needs grace and divine enlightenment. He needs the heavenly unction, in order to do his work with success. Those who know how to pray, who know what are the invitations of the gospel of Christ, show dishonor to God when they lay their burdens upon finite men; it is always right to counsel together; it is right to converse together; it is right to make the difficulties that present themselves in any enterprise plain before your brethren and your ministers. But do not depend upon man for wisdom. Seek God for the wisdom that comes from above. Ask your fellow laborers to pray with you; and the Lord will fulfill His Word, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.” **“The Youth’s Instructor, February 15, 1900”**

## **Presentation 6**

### **Church Discipline**

(Matthew 18:15-20)

### **Necessity of Discipline**

#### **Pastors having too little courage to reprove wrong are held accountable for the evil that may result**

Those who have too little courage to reprove wrong, or who through indolence or lack of interest make no earnest effort to purify the family or the church of God, are held accountable for the evil that may result from their neglect of duty. We are just as responsible for evils that we might have checked in others by exercise of parental or pastoral authority as if the acts had been our own. **“Patriarchs and Prophets, 578”**

### **Church discipline is a disagreeable but necessary part of ministry**

Paul charged Timothy to “preach the Word,” but there was yet another part to be done, “to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” This work

cannot be neglected with safety. Ministers must be instant in season and out of season, watching for souls as they that must give an account. They must exercise great carefulness. Watch in all things, watch for the devices of Satan, lest you be beguiled from doing the disagreeable part of the work. Difficulties must not intimidate or discourage you. Having well-balanced minds and established characters, meet the difficulties, and in overcoming them gain a rich experience. **“The Review and Herald, September 28, 1897.”**

### **Attitude in Discipline**

#### **Jesus taught love and tenderness toward the erring**

I call to mind the shepherd hunting the lost sheep, and [the story of] the prodigal son. I want those parables to have their influence upon my heart and mind. I think of Jesus—what love and tenderness He manifested for erring, fallen man; and then I think of the severe judgment one pronounces upon his brother who has fallen under temptation, and my heart becomes sick. I see the iron in hearts, and think we should pray for hearts of flesh. Oh, how I long for Jesus to come! How I long for Him to set things in order! Come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly, is my prayer.

**“Manuscript Releases 16:339”**

## **Presentation 8**

### **Small Groups Ministry**

(Exodus 18, Hebrews 10:24-25, Acts 2:42, 46)

Moses organized Israel into groups of ten (Ex. 18). Jesus chose a group of twelve and spent most of His ministry with them. He often taught in private homes (Matt. 13:36; 17:25; Mark 9:33, 10:10). The New Testament church centered its activities on small groups, in fellowship, study, sharing, praying, and eating together (Acts 2:42, 46). Acts has nine references to Christians worshipping in homes.

Ellen White emphasizes, “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 also.” (**Evangelism, p.115**)

The 10 largest local Christian churches in the world have grown to their present size through small groups. In fact, a large church loses many of its disadvantages if subdivided into small cell groups. Picture the congregation as a large circle. Inside are smaller circles representing small cell groups? Members who are part of one of the smaller circles seldom leave the large circle. One pastor of a large Adventist congregation was pleasantly surprised when studying the spiritual health of recent converts to discover that not even one who had been involved in small group had left the church.

The life of the body is in its cells. If the cells die, the body dies. If the cells are healthy, the body thrives. When the cells multiply, the body grows. A study of church movements shows that every major revival has been influenced by a ready access to the Bible and the gathering of believers in small, intimate groups.

### **Purposes of Small Groups**

A Christian small group may be defined as a group of not less than four nor more than fifteen persons who come together, usually in a church or home, to share in fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. Examples of small groups in the church would

include Sabbath school classes, outreach groups, home Bible fellowship groups, cottage prayer meeting, woman's Bible study groups; felt need support groups, and even the church choir. Meeting times and the kind of people participating in the group are determined by felt needs. Meetings are more flexible in style and more personal than the regular services of the church.

Small groups provide an atmosphere in which group members are able to share in meaningful worship and Bible study in a setting where they experience a sense of belonging. Small groups provide an excellent medium for both learning and healing. Individual's needs for spiritual growth and fellowship are met in small groups in a way that is often far more personal than that provided in the larger gatherings of the church. As group members study and prays together, there is created between them a bonding that encourages practical Christian living.

### **Home Small Groups**

Home study groups should typically aim to both revive members and attract nonmembers. They provide an excellent means of reclaiming inactive members. Research shows that most people attend church, not so much for doctrinal reasons, because church attendance offers them a Christian support system. Conversely, most people stop attending church, not because they disbelieve the church's doctrines, but because they do not find in that church the support they need. And one of the most time-tested Christian support systems is the home group.

A strong emphasis of such group is fellowship. Both the small size and the home setting are more conducive to fellowship than the regular church setting. Even those not ready to identify with a church feel comfortable in the no-threatening atmosphere of a home group.

Home group meetings typically last about an hour to an hour and half and include four basic parts:

1. *Sharing*. Most home groups have their sharing time at the beginning of each meeting. The sharing of joys, blessings, and disappointments is a natural way to begin a meeting. It relieves tensions, provides honest affirmation, and creates a warm group spirit. Dialogue is the key to success. No one must be allowed to dominate the group.
2. *Study*. Preferably, study should be from the Bible. The group may choose a book of the Bible. Members study it alone during the week, and discuss it with the group at the weekly meeting. The leader probes for answers to such questions as "What does the author say in this text?" and "What does God say to me through this passage?"
3. *Prayer*. The group usually keeps a prayer list. Members are asked to remember each other by name every day in private devotions.
4. *Ministry/Outreach*. The group intentionally tries to invite and include non-members in the small group.

### **Church Small Groups**

Small group can, of course, meet at the church. For example:

1. *Sabbath school groups*. An energetic Sabbath school class, properly taught, has an almost unlimited potential for good. Unfortunately, too few Sabbath school classes really work. Keep the classes small, and train your teachers to be relational discussion leaders, not mini-preachers.
2. *Seminar groups*. People often have special interest in attending a church after marriage, birth of a child, change of residence, divorce, death of a loved one,

etc. Thus, a church may want to sponsor a regular program of seminars to attract those with such special interests. The family life seminars, parenting classes, coping seminars, Bible study classes, and a range of seminars covering physical, mental, and spiritual health.

3. *Support groups.* Organize an ongoing family life or marriage enrichment support group. Consider support groups for singles, woman, men, senior citizens, and for those recovering from grief.

### **Organizing Small Groups**

To be successful, small groups need special planning and organization. First, your church members will want to identify and decide what kind of needs exist in their church community and decide upon what kind of small groups can best meet those needs. For example, there may be the need for a new member support group, a church officers' prayer group, a mid-week Bible study group for students in the local school, or an outreach group for the purpose of building relationships with non-Adventist friends.

Once the kind of group is decided upon, there is a need to select and train suitable leaders for each group. This is probably the principal contribution of the pastor and elders to the small group program. Typically, leaders recruit members for their group through personal invitation. Leaders need to meet together regularly to review how their groups are progressing and for mutual support and encouragement. The meeting of each group will need to be announced during church services.

In forming home small groups the first meeting is often given over to preparing a group commitment. This might include an agreement to:

- Meet weekly for a given number of weeks
- Attend every meeting in the series unless ill or out of town
- Do the appointed study for each meeting
- Protect confidences
- Refrain from negative statements about other people or organizations
- Invite others into the group

Those unable to support the covenant agreed upon at the first meeting should be allowed to withdraw gracefully. Through careful preparation and organization, small groups can become an important way of developing the spiritual life of your church and a means of developing friends in the community.

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