

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry  
Emphasis in Church, African Society and Mission

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: SMALL GROUP EMPOWERMENT: AN APPROACH TO MEMBERSHIP  
RETENTION IN ABA SOUTH CONFERENCE, NIGERIA

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Faculty advisor: Kelvin Onongha, PhD, DMin

Date completed: June 2016

### Problem

This study attempted to develop and implement a model ministry to revitalize the church for membership retention in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church is losing more members than are baptized annually. However, in a careful study of the statistical records from 2012-2015, this problem was clearly observed.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a model ministry program to be adopted by pastors and lay leaders for membership retention. This project focused on

how small groups function in the life of the local congregation. It also demonstrated how to live a good spiritual and prayer life, and how to help others grow, too.

### Project Setting

The macro setting for this work was Aba and the micro setting is Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. The intervention was implemented in five churches within Aba South Conference.

The intervention adopted three stages: material development, organizing and implementing the research, and evaluation. Seminars were delivered using the assistance of the research team. The project was monitored for seven months using observation forms. Three elements were of importance in the monitoring: 1. Attendance and participation, 2. assessing the effect of Bible study and prayer on the participants, 3. to assess the process of fulfilling their spiritual goals. Interaction was conducted with six focus groups that were organized to collect data for evaluation.

### Method

The method used for the research after determining the problem was the qualitative method. Data were collected by using focus groups of 6-10 persons. The rationale for population sample was having men, women, and youth from various professional background to participate. A set of structured questions were designed for the focus group discussions. The data collected was analyzed and the findings stated in the work.

## Results

The small groups organized were empowered, mobilized, and coordinated. When evaluated the result was that members have more insight into Bible study, prayer life enhanced, care-giving experienced, and commitment experienced in other church activities. More small groups have been established as a result of the outcome of the earlier groups established.

## Conclusion

The project was successful and the result is evident in the churches used as members are revitalized and their spiritual needs met. This researcher recommends that pastors and lay leaders should be directly involved in coordinating the small group programs. There are more opportunities for further research into how small groups can help retention of members.

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AN APPROACH TO MEMBERSHIP RETENTION  
IN ABA SOUTH CONFERENCE, NIGERIA

A dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Josiah Chijioke Nwarungwa

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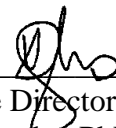
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Dedicated to my wife,  
Jane,  
and to my children,  
Josiah Jnr. and Justice

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Description of the Ministry Context**

The task of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is executed in line with her mission statement which is “to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His Church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon coming.”<sup>1</sup> This mission statement should be a motivation for mass involvement in ministry. Bearing in mind that ministry is not only for the clergy, pastors or evangelists, Ellen G. White says that “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.”<sup>2</sup> The presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been felt in Aba for over nine decades.<sup>3</sup> A general observation is that prior to the last twenty five years lay involvement in the mission of the church ostensibly in consonance

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<sup>1</sup>West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists, *Working Policy of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2008 ed. (Accra, Ghana: Advent Press), 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1915), 352.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Izima, ed. *A Brief History of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Eastern States of Nigeria* (Aba, Nigeria: 1973), 43.

with the counsels of Ellen G. White was held in high esteem among Aba Adventists. Virtually every lay person was trained to engage in soul winning.

However, there came an advent of mega witnessing campaigns where a popular Adventist evangelist would preach and many would get baptized into the church. Several of such campaigns have been conducted within the Aba area by several renowned evangelists and have baptized many persons as well. Having ministered within and around Aba for 18 years (1995-2013), I have observed and participated in these evangelistic activities where thousands of naira were spent. Many of the people baptized in these campaigns are not nurtured and assimilated into the church to become disciples. The church administrations and concerned lay persons keep asking for reasons why the new members leave the church without committed plans to reclaim them. As a former secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the defunct East Nigeria Conference, it was observed that the laity and administrators are concerned over lack of effective program for retention. Miguel A. Cerna is right when he says the church ought to win member and must retain them.<sup>4</sup> To resolve this challenge, he recommended small groups as an approach to retain new members and develop new friends. The researcher's conclusion, having thought through these retention challenges is that there seems not to be any systematic approach for retaining members. This is, perhaps, may be the reason many of the members are more of spectators than players. The preacher comes on stage and does the preaching without the older membership being actively involved in personal contact with the newly baptized ones. In fact, in many of the local churches, there are no

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<sup>4</sup>Miguel A. Cerna, "How to Assimilate Members and Prevent Dropouts" *Ministry*. December 1994, 24.

systematic retention programs and members are no longer seriously doing neighborhood personal evangelistic activities and some are gradually leaving the church unnoticed.

God intends the church to be like a mighty army on her mission not deterred by any obstacle. He expects the church to be aggressively advancing, reaching, teaching, equipping, and baptizing those that believe in Him. However, the challenge the church is facing since the turn of the twenty-first century is that congregations are becoming more of “see you next service.”<sup>5</sup> Many are satisfied to sit in the pew and remain spectators instead of becoming participants. Everyone appears to wear an aura of being in a haste and busy with personal affairs, without commitment to membership renewal and revitalization. The “bystander effect” is overtaking the membership. Yet, these members, if revitalized, are potential heroes for mission.<sup>6</sup>

The researcher, the former personal ministries and evangelism director (January 2011-December 2013) of Eastern Nigeria Union Mission (now Union Conference), has observed that the membership needs revitalization and a new direction for ministry. Members need to be involved in ministry and use their spiritual gifts. The conviction is that a critical component in resolving this predicament is to empower every church member through training, and mobilization for small group ministries. In this way, pastors and lay leaders would encourage members to develop personal contacts with the prospective members before they are integrated into the church by baptism, and continue

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<sup>5</sup>A. Allan Martin, “Reaching Out: Making a Difference with Young People,” *Ministry*, July 2008, 8.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

such relationship after baptism. The church would also develop programs and activities that will help old member sustain their faith.

Furthermore, revitalized church membership reflects the centrality of lay ministry (Eph 4:11-16). Every member is called by God and gifted for ministry. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 involves every member exercising their spiritual gifts, not to leave the work for a few zealous ones. When every member is involved in ministry, especially in a small group setting, they would identify their gifts and understand what they can offer as disciples of Christ, thereby helping to fulfill the gospel commission.

Small group ministries would create a platform to bring people together to discover their potentials in ministry, particularly in ministry to each other and to reach out to others. Small groups would help people share their faith and group members would better relate with each other. It would create an environment where people can ask questions and receive support from group members. It would build courage in members to use their spiritual gifts in sharing the gospel to others. A focus on building close relationships and participation in the life of the church would be enhanced.

The major aspect of small group ministry is evangelism. According to Scott Severance, small group evangelism is defined as “group(s) of people who meet regularly for the purpose of spiritual edification and evangelistic outreach (with the goal of multiplication).”<sup>7</sup> The membership of an effective small group is 4-15 persons.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Scott Severance. “Small Groups” 07 November, 2013, [http://www.scootseverance.us/ministry/small\\_groups.html#need.definition](http://www.scootseverance.us/ministry/small_groups.html#need.definition).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 2.

Additionally, small group ministry is a neighborhood or relational approach to evangelism where people encourage one another to live godly lives, and to do right things ethically.

A biblical example of small group ministry is seen in the ministry of Christ using a small group of twelve disciples (Matt 4:18-22). Small group ministry is considered an essential part of the church. It provides the personal element so often lacking in traditional church programs just like Christ's approach was different from the Jewish traditional approach to religious life. The ministry of Jesus to the woman at the well and the invalid man by the Pool of Bethesda is people oriented ministry as against the Jewish hatred to the Samaritans and to invalid people (see John 4:1-26; 5:1-14). Ellen White admonishes to "preach less and educate more, by holding Bible readings, and by praying with families and little companies."<sup>9</sup>

The Old Testament model of small group ministry is seen in the "Jethro principle" (see Exod 18:13-24) and could illustrate what lay empowerment and mobilization is all about. The principle is people oriented. Leaders were to be appointed over 10, 50, 100, and 1000. W. J. Werning says, meeting in small groups encourages changes to take place in which God's Word challenges the people's spirituality and value system.<sup>10</sup> Werning stresses that people oriented ministry advances the use of spiritual gifts. This model provides an environment where new members can experience the power of Christ in their lives that will help them grow in faith and stay in the church.<sup>11</sup> Such was the experience

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<sup>9</sup>White, *Gospel Workers*, 196.

<sup>10</sup>Waldo J. Werning, *The Seed-Planting Church: Nurturing Church to Health*. St. Charles, Illinois: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003, 104-105.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

of the new converts after the Pentecost. The new believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:42-43). New believers are expected to have a stimulating spiritual fulfillment after conversion that will spur them to reach out to others. This is the essence of small group ministry, the revitalization of the church for mission when pastors and lay person partner to integrating others.

### **Statement of Problem**

This study attempts to develop and implement a model ministry to revitalize the church for membership retention in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists where churches are losing more members than they baptize annually.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a model ministry program to be adopted by pastors and lay leaders for membership retention. The membership needs revitalization to function using their spiritual gifts for membership nurture and witnessing. In our contemporary society, members need to discover their potentials in ministry to encounter retention requirements.

### **Methodology**

This project will focus on how small groups function in the life of the local congregation. It will also demonstrate how to live a good spiritual life and prayer life, and how to feel for other people. Hopefully, it shall be implemented through training and mobilization in the local churches, and evaluation would be carried out to test its

effectiveness using qualitative approach. In harmony with this purpose, seminars and workshops would be organized on strategies for beginning and maintaining small groups in the local congregations, and the training of local church leaders on the dynamics of small group ministries.

### **Justification**

Evangelism as a vital component in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be an ongoing process to keep new members in the church after baptism. Through the course of my ministry, it is observed that baptism is more of a program rather than an ongoing process. My experience in pastoring churches reveals that more members leave the church than the number baptized. While serving as a conference secretary with East Nigeria Conference (2006-2010), statistical reports revealed that the same trend is permeating the churches. When I served as evangelism and Sabbath school director of Eastern Nigeria Union Conference (2011-2013), it was also observe that membership retention is a dilemma for administrators, pastors, elders, and the laity. Though there are several types of approaches of doing evangelism to bring members into the church, yet many pastors and lay members desire the best approach to harness the spiritual gifts of their congregations for effective membership retention.

The focus of this project is to investigate the reasons for the decrease in the retention of old members and new converts by the church after baptism, and to develop, evaluate, and implement strategies to increase the retention rate of members. The model ministry that will be developed at the end of this project will create a dynamic process in membership revitalization to enhance retention. The pastors and lay persons would benefit from this model ministry and it would be of immense benefit to the local

churches. Also, church members would be enabled to identify their spiritual gifts and position in ministry and soul winning in the churches in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (ASC).

### **Delimitations**

Though the challenge of retaining members is seen virtually in every local congregation in Aba South Conference, this study is confined to five churches in Aba South Conference territory<sup>12</sup> to facilitate follow-up and implementation of the project. However, this project focuses more on how to retain members and create a platform that will help assimilate new members joining the church through small group ministries.

### **Description of the Dissertation Process**

The dissertation focuses on the study of retention, while proposing solution, it will include this process, but not limited to the following:

1. The biblical foundation for small group ministries from the Old and New Testaments. It will include references from the writings of Ellen G. White on the subject of small group ministry for total member involvement in evangelism and soul.
2. Exploration of the small group concept in the African context shall also be outlined. Similarly, historical Adventist views of small group ministries in the Sabbath School action units shall be presented in this study. Additionally, a literature review of current literature on small group ministries as a strategy for membership revitalization, growth, and retention shall be conducted.

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<sup>12</sup>The districts are: Abayi, Umuakpara, Umuode, Amator, Owo-na-Umuosi.

3. Based on the biblical, cultural, contemporary and historical investigation into small group ministry in this dissertation, the following tasks would be carried out sequentially:
  - a. An effective small group empowerment strategy shall be developed for Aba South Conference (ASC) of Seventh-day Adventist Church.
  - b. Upon the approval of this strategy by Aba South Conference, it shall hopefully be implemented through seminars and workshops in the chosen churches of ASC.
  - c. The membership would be mobilized for small group activities over a period of twelve months.
  - d. The process of this strategy would be monitored through the church pastors, research team and personal ministries leaders.
  - e. Surveys would be conducted in the target churches for this research.
  - f. The data collected would be analyzed and results collated.
  - g. The results of the analysis will be evaluated to help things that need improvement become well and those that are weak to become strong. Inferences will be made to deduced spiritual and numerical growth.
  - h. The steps adopted in this project to test-run small group empowerment as an approach to membership revitalization shall be documented to constitute the chapters for this dissertation.
4. The approximate date for the completion and submission of this project is June 2016.

## **Expectations**

It is expected that this dissertation would help pastors to broaden their views for many possibilities in their churches by focusing and visualizing their goals through small group ministry. It would enhance fellowship, and create a loving environment, with passion and commitment to prayer. It will help pastors to disciple leadership as seen in that of Jesus who chose twelve leaders as disciples. It is expected to promote witnessing, time management and leadership recruitment. The small group activities would power social life among the membership outside routine church services. Moreover, it shall provide strategies to meet physical, social and spiritual needs of small group members in the church. It would provide increased awareness for hospitality ministry by the church particularly in the area of visitation and new members' integration. It would enhance membership revitalization, retention, nurture, and church planting. It shall benefit the churches as they adopt small group ministries as proposed in this work. Besides, this research shall be updated as it results in virtually seeing every member being revitalized, involved in souls winning, and establishing Christian community relationship, thereby enhancing membership retention in the church. Hopefully, then, this dissertation would serve as a model guide to pastors and lay leaders in empowering and mobilizing for soul winning in all SDA Churches and districts within Aba South Conference and beyond.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

Human beings generally desire intimate and meaningful relations. Young and old alike seek to belong to one form of group or the other, rather than live in isolation. With contemporary society so mobile, people migrate from one place to the other, disrupting close relationships. The defining feature of this technological age is loneliness. The church is not unaffected as members seek relationship and care. Pastors are regarded as primary care givers making church members to be solely dependent on the pastor. Considering this challenge, small group ministry is a powerful tool to empower relationship and retention. Small group ministry will create a platform where members can experience community, care, and fellowship through Bible study and prayer.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the biblical foundations on the subject of small group as a vehicle for membership retention from the Old Testament and New Testament, and Ellen G. White's perspective. It will investigate the concept of small group in the Trinity, in Eden, during the Israelite exodus, and the wilderness tribal arrangement in the Old Testament. From the New Testament, it will relate small group in the gospels and the epistles to retention. It also studies Ellen White's insights on small group for membership care.

Human beings are not made to live in isolation. Humans are naturally communal. Burrill says that humankind "was created in the image of God, which would thereby

indicate that the infinite God of the universe also lives in community”<sup>1</sup> What does the Bible say about God involving in relationship and how was small group activities displayed in the Bible?

### **Concept of Small Group in Eden**

Small group has its origin in the very divine nature of God. Genesis 1:1 launches the biblical record with a simple yet profound statement that God is the Creator of all that exists. Small groups are logical extension of the fact that God exists within the divine form of a small group, “let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26). The word “us” is an indication of a group that operates and relates together. This implies that the first small group was among the Godhead. The relationship that existed from the beginning between the Trinity is the perfect model of unity and harmony. Gareth Icenogle suggests, “from the beginning, God existed in community as group being in creative action. From a historically classic Trinitarian view of God, the divine group existed as three persons in conversation mission.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of small groups or biblical community is seen in the Godhead.

### **Sabbath and Relationship**

God is a God of relationship and community. He created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day (Sabbath) from the work of creating that He had done

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<sup>1</sup>Russell Burrill, *The Revolutionized Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1997), 19.

<sup>2</sup>Gareth W. Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 22.

Gen 2:2, 3). Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word “*shabbat*”<sup>3</sup> meaning to cease or rest. Adam and Eve, at this point, had no need for rest because they had done no work that required them to cease or rest. But considering the hectic nature of modern life, man is to cease from work in order to enter into relationship with the Creator. The purpose of the Sabbath after creation was to foster a relationship between the Creator and man. It is also an opportunity to enter into relationship with other believers.<sup>4</sup> God, from creation, established a framework that will always bring human beings together in relationship to Him and to one another. This is the goal of small groups: relationship to God and with us.

### **God in Relationship with Man**

After the pattern of this relationship among the members of the Trinity, it can be argued that God originally created man for relationship with Himself (Gen 3:8). The coming of the Lord to the garden was meant for relationship as stated in Gen. 3:9. Although it is fruitless to argue that God needs man’s company, the Bible seems to indicate that God finds great pleasure in relating and interacting with mankind. God’s visit to the Eden couple was to express relationship that should exist in a small group. The entire chapter expresses God’s disapproval of the conduct of the Edenic couple in His interaction with them. In this relationship, God’s disapproval for sin was seen and His instant judgment over sin and sinners. It can summarily be said that God was disappointed in His relationship with them. Similarly, God expected proper conducts in the small group relationship with Him. When small groups meeting it is believed that

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<sup>3</sup>Bible Works, Genesis 2:2 “*rest*,” Bible Works – [c:\program files (x86)\biblework\init\bw700.swc).

<sup>4</sup>Burrill, *The Revolutionized Church*, 24-27.

God's presence is there. The members are expected to conform their life to the will of God as to experience His presence always.

Before the fall of humankind, God empowered them to be in charge to “fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen 1:28). They were authorized to perform this assignment and was responsible to God. Therefore, God had to relate with them to care for creation. God gave them unlimited power over everything created and as he relates with them, they were to learn submission to His will. In the same vein, humankind are to care of each other observing relational principles.

### **Breakdown in Human Community**

Beginning from Genesis 3, there was a breakdown in human community and relationship. Sin's entrance into the community, fragmented human relationships in two dimensions. The first, was between the man and his wife. They denied ownership of their mistakes and began blaming each other (Gen 3:12-13). The second, was that they were afraid of God and also hid themselves from Him (Gen 3:10). With the entry of shame into the human community, they now hid their sexuality and spirituality in the presence of other beings—whether God or man. Since then God has been desirous of restoring the human community.<sup>5</sup> The entrance of sin marred human relationships with God, with the consequent loss of face-to-face communion with the Creator.

Russell Burrill supports “the essence of God is community. God Himself does not exist apart from community. God does not exist alone, neither can His people. He

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<sup>5</sup>Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 27-28.

operates in a community as a heart-shaping dynamic.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of small groups is to create a platform where people live in community with each other for divine empowerment. In a world destroyed by broken communities, God is seeking to restore in converted humanity a demonstration of what genuine community is all about.<sup>7</sup>

### **Concept of Small Group Outside Eden**

After the fall of Adam and Eve, the Bible does not record personal relationships between God and any human until Enoch. The account of Enoch says that he walked with God 300 years (Gen 5:22-24). Noah has the next record of relationship with God in Genesis 6. Noah was declared to have found favor with God to prepare his generation for a universal judgment; he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Gen 6:8).

The family served as the primary small group unit in the Old Testament and served as a model for the people who met in a communal and relational setting. Noah’s family of eight persons is an example of a family that stayed together in a community relationship that attracted the presence of God. They were given the divine project of building an ark to be used in saving all who accepted to live in relationship with God (Gen 6:9-22). Noah had the privilege of receiving this divine mandate of making an ark because he was willing to cooperate with God. Because Noah followed God’s instructions in preparing the ark, he and his family small group of eight enjoyed a meaningful relationship with God and they were protected in the flood.

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<sup>6</sup>Reggie McNeal, *Work of the Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 116.

<sup>7</sup>Burrill, *The Revolutionized Church*, 20.

## **The Exodus Principle of Small Group**

After Noah's relationship with God, the next account of God's intimate relationship with humankind was Abraham, who responded to God's invitation. He made a promise of establishing him as a great nation (Gen 12:1-3). The Israelites were the descendants of Abraham. They migrated to Egypt when Joseph their brother was a governor of Egypt. The Israelites experienced mistreatment in Egypt and this provided the background and impetus for their redemption. Pharaoh refused to allow them follow Moses to the wilderness to worship the Lord and denied them their religious freedom. God's intervention in their affairs introduced concepts that are very vital to the functioning of small group ministries. These concepts include: family unit principle and the Jethro principle.

### **Family Units Principle**

The Lord used a family unit concept to lead the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt, comprising Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Moses was the leader, and Aaron was to assist him until the sanctuary was established. Aaron and his sons: Nadab and Abihu (died in the cause of service), Eliazer and Ithamar were a family small unit to lead worship in the Tent of Meeting (Lev 8-10). Miriam, their sister, was in the singing ministry. After the crossing of the Red Sea, she led the people in a song of deliverance (Exod 15). What is noteworthy is that the three were from a single family unit. God did not burden Himself with using persons from different families to lead His people. Thus, it can be inferred that God used those who understood His mandate and this is essential to small group ministries.

Furthermore, the use of the family unit in the establishment of the Passover is another example of the biblical significance of small groups. Exodus 12:3-4 states that “each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are.” The number of people involved in a family was significant in the celebration of the Passover feast among the Israelites.

### **Jethro Principle**

Another OT example of a small group model is often referred to as the “Jethro Principle” (Exod 18). Jethro, a Midianite, visited his son-in-law, Moses and discovered how busy he was administering the affairs of the Israelites alone. Jethro’s advice to his son-in-law, Moses, on how to more effectively administer the people in small groups comprising of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands (Exod 18:25) was not a hierarchical leadership structure. He was to select capable men from all the people and appoint them as official (Exod 18:21), to serve as judges within the groups.<sup>8</sup> Burrill observes “in the Jethro model, Moses went from being the one who passed judgment to being one who oversaw the judgment of others. As churches adopt the Jethro model of leadership, the pastor will no longer be the chief care giver and decision maker in the church.”<sup>9</sup> The Jethro model of small group is a leadership empowerment model. It reduces the burden of ministry and enhance participation in ministry, facilitates work, and makes God more accessible to the people. This model engages more in the task of leadership and is a laudable leadership modeling approach.

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<sup>8</sup>Burrill, *The Revolutionized Church*, 24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. 99.

The Exodus experience reveals that God can best be understood from His existence in a community. God does not exist alone and He always desires to live in the community of His people. Soon after the exit of the Israelites from Egypt, He expressed the desire to dwell among the people, saying “have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). The Hebrew word for sanctuary is “*miqdash*” meaning “sacred place or holy place.”<sup>10</sup> Moses was instructed by the Lord to make the sanctuary “and all its furnishing exactly the pattern I will show you” (Exod 25:9). The sanctuary was to be a center of interaction and relationship with God. It was an opportunity to have the Israelites experience the presence of God who wanted to “dwell among them.” (Exod 25:8). The word “dwell” in Hebrew is “*shakan*” meaning “to abide.”<sup>11</sup> The implication of the demand to make a sanctuary was for God’s presence to abide with them. In the same vein, the coming together in a small group community is to create a forum where God’s presence can abide with His people.

### **The Sanctuary Model**

The sanctuary was made and it was referred to as the “Tent of meeting” (Exod 33:7). Moses often went into the tent of meeting outside of the camp to inquire of the Lord and whenever he entered the tent a pillar of the cloud would descend and remain at the entrance of the tent. Whenever the people saw the cloud they would stand and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. In this way the Israelites acknowledged the presence of God among them. This model built their faith in God and in their leaders.

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<sup>10</sup>Colin Brown, ed., “*miqdash*” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971) vol. 3, 786.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, “*dwell*” (NIDNTT).

Similarly, if the church member rally around the church, their faith and confidence in God will increase and retention challenges will cease. The small groups or home cells prepare the people to rally around the church to always experience the abiding presence of God.

### **Tribal arrangement**

God's interest to be present in human community was more clearly revealed as the Israelites continued their wilderness journey. Moses adopted the Jethro leadership model and following the Lord's instruction he arranged the tribes in camps around the Tent of Meeting. The tribal arrangement is seen in Numbers 2:1-34. The Tent of Meeting was situated at the center of the camp. The east of the tent towards the sunrise had the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. In the south were the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were in the west, while the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali were at the north of the tent. The families of the tribe of Levi, the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites, pitched their dwellings between the Tent of Meeting and the tribal camps to prevent the people coming close to the tent. The sanctuary at the center of the camp complemented God's instruction to Moses "have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Exod 25:8). God desired to be amidst His people in their midst in this arrangement as He was their leader.

In the tribal arrangement, each tribe was camped according to clans and families and each division had a leader appointed. The Bible accounts "the Israelites did everything the Lord commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each with his clan and family" (Num 2:34). In

this setting, the Lord's desire to dwell among the people was fully expressed and Jethro's leadership formula was implemented to the fullest capacity.

### **Tribal Arrangement after the Exile**

The tribal arrangement was also employed when the Israelites returned from captivity. Consequently, the family units that existed provided a leadership platform for Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah networked the families based on their craftsmanship and assigned portions of the wall close to their homes, and appointed family leaders to oversee the work. This strategy hastened the repair on the wall. Nehemiah used existing family network structures familiar to the people for accomplishing God's purpose, thus he empowered the family relationship.<sup>12</sup>

Careful study of Israel's national history reveals that down to the smallest family unit, a large and small group mentality permeated their existence. As a nation, the Israelites were a chosen people set apart by God from all other peoples upon the face of the earth (Deut 7:6). They were chosen not because they were large in number, but because they were few in number, however God loved them, (Deut 7:7-8) and formed them into a great family called "the house of Israel" (Exod 40:38). The family lines served as the model around which the nation was internally organized. As a nation they were seen as a peculiar group of people, however, the nation was divided into groups for leadership, community participation, and relationship.<sup>13</sup> The groupings were as follow:

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<sup>12</sup>Mikel Neumann, *Home Groups for Urban Cultures: Biblical Small Group Ministry on Five Continents* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 23-24.

<sup>13</sup>John Warren, "Biblical Mandate for Small Groups," <http://johnwarren.wordpress.com/2010/06/26/biblical-mandate-for-small-groups/26/12/2013>, accessed 26 December 2013.

1. Tribe: The house of Israel by virtue of their descent from the twelve sons of Jacob were divided into twelve subgroups or tribes (Gen 49). These tribes provided the leaders a platform to administer and guide the people. Tribal sub-groupings were clearly established by the time the land of Canaan was divided among the Israelites (Josh 13-22).
2. Family clan: The tribes were broken down further into groups of relatives known as clans or families. By the last year of their wilderness journey, when the second census was taken, over fifty-seven families existed among the twelve tribes by their standards (Num 26).
3. Household: This literally means “house.” The various clans were further divided into family subgroups or relatives living in the same dwelling, including servants and dependents. Households typically incorporated several generations of relatives and servants.
4. Fathers: This refers to a specific man, including his wife and children; it was the smallest group within the Jewish community. A single family unit could exist as part of a larger household or as a separate entity. Individual family units were the heart of Jewish society—the primary small groups.<sup>14</sup>

The Israelite camp was organized in group pattern from a larger group the tribe down to the household or family unit. This was meant to ease administration and identification as they moved along their journey and by the time they settled in the land.

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<sup>14</sup>John Warren, “*Biblical Mandate.*”

## **Multiplication Principle**

Genesis 1:22 stresses an important aspect of God's plan for instituting the human community. God's plan for every living creature was for them to increase and multiply. Everything God created has an inherent ability to do increase and multiply. The first part has a limit in the sense that every living thing has a maximum growth potential. The second aspect of multiplication is a God given principle of sustaining and expanding every form of life. This divine principle permeates the Bible and is vital to small group ministry as well. The group will first grow, and when the membership has increase, then it can divide into two groups. This principle is seen in every aspect of all that God has made. When divine principle of multiplication is applied into small group activities there will be growth explosion.

Many concepts in the OT establish the core values of small group ministry. One of these concepts is the community of God's people. This scheme of God creating a people for the purpose of relationship is a common trend in the Old Testament. The community is God's central domain for relationship with His people. The Jethro plan simplifies human management by decentralizing it to small units for leadership. It is clearly observed that leadership in small groups generates leaders and creates a forum for relationships which is a vital component for community life. Community is an intelligent approach for doing small group ministry. The core principles discovered in the small group formation and maintenance in the OT includes: training, delegating, coordinating, and reporting (Exod 18:20-22). God gave the blueprint to Noah and Moses and delegated to work on His agenda. They were coordinated by God and they in turn was dependent upon God. This study will also explore for similar principles in the New Testament.

## **Small Group Concepts in the New Testament**

Having seen the concept of small group as a prominent principle for community in the OT, the NT displays believers as a community gathered around the name of Jesus. It showcases Jesus a model small group leader during His earthly ministry, who trained and empowered the disciples by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Small groups or home groups were foster centers following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Christ's earthly ministry. Examples of small group models that will be discussed here is Jesus' involvement with the disciples and home groups, and the role of the Holy Spirit in small groups.

### **Small Group Concept in the Gospel**

Matthew 18:20 is a pivotal text encouraging small group ministries, stating, "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." This implies that one person is insufficient for a group gathering. Jesus, asking the disciples to gather in His name, suggests He is the reason for their gathering. Jesus is a universal link between God and humanity: "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

The concept of "God with us" (Matt 1:23) suggests God's interest in the New Testament church as a community of believers. God's physical presence in the person of Jesus expresses His desire to relate with humankind. Therefore, in the name of Jesus is a vital point in the small group program as Jesus will not always meet with a group physically, hence the promise of the Holy Spirit, which is the presence of Jesus in the gathering of believers in His name. The desire of God to be with human beings is expressly revealed in His divine-human nature. God wants humans to accept the divine

restoration and reconciliation plan and this can be experienced in the small group settings of a local church.

### **Jesus: A Model Group Leader**

Jesus as a model group leader made relationship central to His method. The gospel was of greater concern to Him. He chose to spend His time with people (Matt 14:34-36), caring (Mark 8:2, 3), teaching, preaching, healing (Luke 6:17-19), and encouraging people rather than running a human institution. Because His emphasis was on people, He gave a continuing attention to His small group. Through the small group comprising of twelve disciples, He modelled spiritual knowledge, attitude, and behavior.<sup>15</sup> The new believers he built on community structure. That followed the OT pattern, where the Israelites lived along tribal and family lines (Num 2). The NT order was different; it was centered around Christ.

Jesus is the focal point of the ministry record of the NT. He devoted Himself to the spiritual empowerment of a few persons and not the masses (Luke 9:1-3; Matt 10:1-5). He chose a small group at the beginning of His ministry. The group He organized simply consisted twelve ordinary, uneducated men. These twelve men could be likened to the twelve families that were used to build the foundation of the Israelite nation. In building a strong foundation that would change the world, Jesus chose just a few: the twelve. He spent most of the time of His ministry daily with these men. The time spent with these men taught them how to love one another. He ate, talked, slept, and walked, sailed, fished, and above all prayed with them (Matt 8:23-27; Luke 24:41-43). He taught them the need for human fellowship and support. Jesus said to the disciples, “You are

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<sup>15</sup>John Warren, “*Biblical Mandate for Small Groups.*”

those who have stood by me in my trials” Luke 22:28. The disciples stood by Jesus, under-studied Him, and were with Him till His death. The small group Jesus illustrated with the disciples is an apprenticeship model of empowerment.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus began His earthly ministry by establishing a small group: the disciples (Matt 4:18-22). From the small group emanated the ministry to large groups (Matt 15:29-38; Mark 12:37). He was actively involved with His group and the twelve was empowered to preach the gospel.

### **Jesus and the Twelve**

From the beginning of His mission, Jesus began with a community of twelve disciples. The impressive thing about Jesus’ three years with His disciples was the embryonic community that He himself formed. These twelve He trained in accordance with the community pattern that existed in the OT.<sup>17</sup> Jesus occasionally sent them out giving them “power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:1, 2). Besides the twelve were the seventy-two that He at time sent ahead of Himself “to every town or place where He was about to go” (Luke 10:1). Thus, Jesus was equipping them to work and witness as a group. Jesus’ ministry which began with a group of twelve, ended with a community of one hundred and twenty persons (Acts 1:15). They “were together in one place” at Pentecost (Acts 2:1) as were instructed, and received the Holy Spirit. The consistent meeting of the twelve metamorphosed to a spirit-filled church devoted to the apostles

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<sup>16</sup>Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 15-18.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 18.

teaching that can be referred to as Bible study. They fellowshiped with each other in love, caring, sharing, nurture, and experienced supernatural signs among them (Acts 2:43). Above all, prayer was paramount in their meeting

### **Jesus and Home Groups**

Jesus had met with the disciples in small groups. They met together in outdoors: in the grain field, in the temple, by the lake, at the sea shore, in a boat, (Matt 12:1); “that same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake” (Matt 13:1). Jesus at the open seaside told the people parables while sitting in a boat. They also met in people’s homes such as the home of a man known as Simon the Leper (Matt 26:6). Simon, had once been a leper and was regarded as a social outcast, so Jesus was not expected to be at his home. At Simon’s home He made the message of salvation available to people. Another report says, “Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it” (Mark 7:24). The first believers followed this pattern of meeting from one home to the other and from one town to the other.

Jesus performed most of his ministry in the home meetings with small groups of people at every instance. Though he ministered in the synagogues as well as in the open air, the significant part of His work and teaching was done in homes with smaller groups of people. Jesus’ explanation of the kingdom parables was given to the smaller group of His disciples (Matt 13:36). The explanation of the parables that were told in public meetings not understood by the disciples were often explained by Jesus in house meetings.

Another notable instance was when Jesus entered the house of Peter’s mother-in-law and found her sick: “He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and

began to wait on him” (Matt 8:14). Interestingly enough, the news of the healing went round and Jesus ministered there to many who were sick and demon-possessed (v.16). Furthermore, when He return home in Capernaum, the news of his arrival went out and many came to him and He preached to them.

Jesus also raised the dead in a home setting: the synagogue ruler’s daughter (Mark 5:38). When Jesus was invited for dinner in the home of a Pharisee, there was an opportunity to minister (Luke 7:36). Jesus was regular to the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus met Zacchaeus on the highway between Jerusalem and Jericho and followed him to his home (Luke 19).

The Gospel reveals that Jesus sent the disciples to people’s homes for mission (Matt 10, Mark 6). He also sent out the seventy-two to minister in homes (Luke 10). They were sent out in pairs to minister in the context of home groups. Jesus instructed them, “when you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house-to-house” (Luke 10:5-7).

In summary, it can be said that small groups are home affairs where ministry can make a direct impact on those involved. Most significant, healing occurred in the home settings, and even a tax collector (Zacchaeus) experienced salvation in his home. However, close to the end of His ministry, He focused on the small group comprising His the disciples. It was with this group He celebrated the Passover to conclude His ministry. His prayer in Gethsemane was done in the presence of this same group (Mark 14). After His resurrection, He appeared to this same group of disciples who were gathered in a

home (John 20:19). And it is the same group that was with him as he was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:11). The series of meeting with the small group of disciples at the close of His ministry was to equip them to be the coordinators of other groups that would follow after their Master. The meeting of the disciples was to enhance their commitment to the group and their mission; it may even be said that it served as handing-over meetings between Jesus and the disciples.<sup>18</sup>

### **Holy Spirit and Small Groups**

After the ascension of Jesus to heaven, the Holy Spirit became an unseen and present member and leader in the small groups as promised by Jesus (John 15:26). Joel Comiskey says, “Without a total dependence on the Holy Spirit’s work, small group ministry does not work well.”<sup>19</sup> Small groups will not be dynamic in a congregation without the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is on this platform that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit. He told them some of the duties of the Holy Spirit whenever they gather in His name: the Holy Spirit will teach them (John 14:26); He will guide them into all truth (John 16:13); He will convict in regards to sin and righteousness (John 16:8). Paul added that He will intercede to the Father on our behalf (Rom 8: 26), and He enables us with gift to do ministry (1 Cor 12:11).<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit is indispensable in the small groups. It is on this note that Jesus promised them power to witness beyond Jerusalem as Jesus promised them power to do so (Acts 1:8) as seen in the Acts of Apostles and the epistles.

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<sup>18</sup>McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 17.

<sup>19</sup>Joel Comiskey, *The Spirit-Filled Small Group: Leading Your Group to Experience Spiritual Gifts* (Moreno, CA: CCS Publishing, 2009), 12.

<sup>20</sup>McBride, 22-23.

The Holy Spirit was dispensed to them in an amazing pattern that powered mission in the homes and to the Gentile nations.

### **Small Groups in Acts and the Epistles**

The first century church was based on the pattern Jesus had established. The life of the early Christians was nourished in homes: “they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Peter met the believers praying for him in the home of Mary, the mother of John, when he was put into prison and was later released by an angel of the Lord (Acts 12:12). For the believers meeting in homes was the only option as they could not meet in Synagogues or in the temple due to persecution.

Immediately after Pentecost, Acts 2:46 states, “Every day they continued to meet together in temple court. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” Concerning the meetings in the Temple, it is obvious that it was probably a large space that could have accommodated many in the Jerusalem church. From this text, it can be understood that the believers met in large meeting, but more in homes where they shared with each other on a relational level. It is clear that large meetings were not enough to meet the needs of the believers. In doing these, the believers had favor of all people. Evangelism took place as a result of the believers meeting in their homes.<sup>21</sup>

Besides worshipping and breaking of bread together by the believers, teaching and preaching also took place in homes and in the temple courtyard (Acts 5:42). Prayer was also an important element in the home meetings. An example was the group meeting

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<sup>21</sup>McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 18-19.

in Mary's home praying for the release of Peter (Acts 12:12-17). Also the prayer meeting described here was during Peter's first imprisonment probably in the home of one of the believers. (Acts 4:31)

In another instance, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had exhorted them both "publicly and from house to house." (Acts 20:20) In this passage, "publicly" may refer to the large meeting places of the believers (Acts 19:9). Paul did not limit his ministry to public places; he also worked "from house to house." He also made reference to several home churches in his letter to Rome (Rom 16:4, 10, 11, 14, 15,) and in Galatians 6:10, he referred to it as the "household of faith."<sup>22</sup> In 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, Paul mentions "churches" in plural. It seems obvious that operating a cluster of churches in every city was a common practice for the New Testament believers which made small communities possible. Though reference is not made to a church building where they met, however, these home churches worked together under the supervision of an elder.

The believers met together in family groups or cell groups for purposes of prayer, worship, the breaking of bread and transmitting the teachings of Christ from one person to the other. The Pentecost experience was a spiritual renewal or a social revolution. The distinction between Jews and Gentiles, slave or free, male or female was not an issue as they regarded each another as "one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28).

Jesus did not baptize multitudes, but He so trained and equipped His disciples that on the day of Pentecost their preaching led to the conversion of more than 3,000 souls. Jesus worked with that small group of disciples, preparing them to receive the Holy

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<sup>22</sup>Kurt W. Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time. A Practical Guide to the Twenty-first Century* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 53.

Spirit. And when they were ready, the Spirit empowered them in an explosive and dramatic manner as never before experienced.

The disciples' readiness was the natural consequence of having lived with Jesus in a small group setting for three and a half years. The Holy Spirit was poured out equally on Jews and Gentiles alike on the day of Pentecost. An interesting episode took place in the home of Cornelius after Peter ministered to his household. The Scripture testifies that “while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:44-45). The Gentiles experienced the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit as it was necessary for the gospel to go beyond Jerusalem following Jesus’ pattern of small groups or community fellowship. This spiritual renewal and social revolution as experienced in the life of the church community was different from that which existed in the cultural community around them.

The believers clustered in groups constituted the church community and stood as a counter-culture to the surrounding culture. The Jews and Gentiles who accepted the apostle’s message met in their synagogues for fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread. Paul met with them in the synagogues during his mission in Ephesus (Acts 18:19).

The letters of the apostles in the New Testament have evidences of churches that were established in home. Such home churches are found in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3-5); the home of Nympha (Col 4:15); and the home of Philemon (Phil 2). Paul did much of his

evangelistic activities from house-to-house (Acts 20:20). Though the homes were not only where activities took place, it created the framework for the growth of the church.

The New Testament church was a home based movement. There were no luxurious buildings designated as worship centers. Although teaching and preaching were done publicly, in temple courtyards and synagogues, the real life of the church was in the homes. An example is the Aquila and Priscilla's home which was the base for the church in Ephesus and later in Rome (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3-5). Nympha's home was the base for the church in Laodicea (Col 4:15) while Philemon's home was the base for the church in Colossae (Phil 2).

The core principles found in the Jesus small group ministry is similar to the ones found in the Old Testament. Jesus in the NT had the following principles: direction (Matt 5:1, 2; 10:5, 6; Luke 9:1-4), declaration (Matt 10:7; Luke 10:3), demonstration (Matt. 15:21-31; Luke 10:19), and reporting (Luke 10:17). These principles are still valid for small ministries.

In summary, the New Testament introduces us to God's desire to be with His people, which was also seen in the Old Testament. The New Testament began with "Immanuel: God with us" (Matt 1:23), just as God was with Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8). This is indicative of God's desire to relate with humanity. Also, God, in sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to be a permanent companion to the believers, was demonstrating His intention to live among His people. This was expressed in His desire to dwell amidst ancient Israelites (Exod 25:8). Similarly, God expects to relate and dwell amidst small groups in the church. When small groups are empowered to flourish, the

presence of God has been experienced. Then, the anticipated result will be membership explosion as was experienced in the early church after the Pentecost.

### **Ellen G. White and Small Groups**

This study cannot be complete without examining the counsels of Ellen G. White related to small group ministries. Ellen White referred to small groups as small companies. She points out vital issues on the use of small groups in church programs, college development, and prayer activities as social meetings, and as an outreach program. One of her popular counsel states: “The formation of small companies as a basis for Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers.”<sup>23</sup> In this statement, she clearly declared that the idea of small groups is divine as the One who revealed it to her cannot make mistakes. She encourages small group ministries and further states that small group members “pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, and gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the other.”<sup>24</sup> In small groups, she points out that as each encourages the other members of the group, they would advance and gain strength for daily living.<sup>25</sup> Also, small groups that meet together for Bible study do so to receive spiritual muscle. They lose nothing by

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<sup>23</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, (Mountain view, CA, 1948), 7:21.

<sup>24</sup>White, 21.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

meeting but will gain much as the Angels of God is in their gathering.<sup>26</sup> Small group programs are a support ministry to both old and new members.

She further stresses the need for believers to work in companies for those who are not yet in Christ. She inquires,

Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with the Lord for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another? In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love.<sup>27</sup>

The primary objective of the small companies is found in this statement. The gathered believers are to pray and express concern for those who have not accepted Jesus into their lives. Praying for others to submit their lives to Christ should be a serious concern as small groups of people intercede for the salvation of others.

She also states that members share benefits for belonging to a small group. They share in each other's feelings and aspirations. She says members:

Meet to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, and to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another's hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the source of our strength.<sup>28</sup>

The gathering of the small companies is to enable believers edify each other as they share Christian experiences together. In the group meetings the members socialize with each other and get to know themselves. Sharing in Bible study creates an opportunity for

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<sup>26</sup>White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 274.

<sup>27</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 7:21.

<sup>28</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 2:578.

advancing their understanding of the scriptures, and provides an opportunity to empower themselves to reach out to their neighbors.

She counsels on the training of members on how to conduct cottage meetings and caring for the sick. She said such a training should be done during camp meetings:

But on such occasions at our camp meetings we must never lose sight of the opportunities afforded for teaching the believers how to do practical missionary work in the place where they may live. In many instances it would be well to set apart certain men to carry the burden of different lines of educational work at these meetings. Let some help the people to learn how to give Bible readings and to conduct cottage meetings. Let others bear the burden of teaching the people how to practice the principles of health and temperance, and how to give treatment to the sick. Still others may labor in the interest of our periodical and book work.<sup>29</sup>

Here, she encourages training for medical missionaries who will take part in missionary work of caring for the sick. Members need to be trained to understand the rudiments of small group ministries. Educating the membership is essential part to success of small group ministries; as training was important at her time so also is it imperative in our days.

She points out that meeting in small gatherings is often more successful in soul winning than preaching in public places:

Preach less, and educate more, by holding Bible readings, and by praying with families and little companies. To all who are working with Christ I would say, wherever you can gain access to the people by the fireside, improve your opportunity. Take your Bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in hall or churches.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9: 82, 83.

<sup>30</sup>White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1915), 193.

Giving Bible studies in homes touches the heart of individuals better than preaching because it creates an opportunity for a relationship that will enhance discussion and acceptance of the message.

Small companies will be of immense benefit during periods of religious attack. In her vision Ellen White “saw the saints leaving the cities and villages, and associating together in companies, and living in the most solitary places. Angels provided them food and water, while the wicked were suffering from hunger and thirst.”<sup>31</sup> Those who engage in small group activities will reap the benefits if they eventually find themselves in areas where there is religious persecution. When they cannot meet in the public, small group becomes an option to escape persecution.

She did not leave young men and women out of forming small companies as soldiers of Christ, enlisted in the work. They are expected to put tact, skill, and talent into the Master’s service, save souls from ruin. Companies are expected to be organized in every church to do this work. All young men and women who really love Jesus will work not only for those who profess to be Sabbath keepers, but for those who are not of our faith.<sup>32</sup> Young people are also encouraged to form groups or companies for evangelism activities. They have the privilege of ministering to their fellow young people and in turn equip them for mission.

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<sup>31</sup>White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D. C: Review and Herald, 1945), 282.

<sup>32</sup>White, *Christian Service*, 35.

## Ellen White on Social Meetings

Ellen White likened small groups to a social meeting. At the time it was introduced to church members, it was seen as in a new trend in ministry. She says although the social meeting is a new thing, yet they are learning in the school of Christ and are overcoming fear and trembling. We keep before them the fact that the social meeting (another term small group meetings) will be the best meeting in which they may be trained and educated to be witnesses for Christ.<sup>33</sup>

She continues, a small group for the church in times of greatest danger. The prayer group intercedes on behalf of the church for the intervention of God. Also, they pray for church, for the Holy Spirit to power the church for the later rain and the end of time. Praying small groups are very vital in the operations of a local congregation.<sup>34</sup>

She stresses, members of social meetings should not offer lifeless prayers or give testimonies that will not edify the hearers. Rather, those who lead should depend upon God to enable them speak at the right time and with power.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, prayers and social meetings should be a season of special help and encouragement. All should feel it a privilege to take part. Members are to feel the impact of each other in one form or another as that will increase their togetherness.<sup>36</sup> Worldly atmosphere are not to be carried into social meetings but heavenly atmosphere to enable the church grow spiritually.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>White, *Manuscript 32*, 1894.

<sup>34</sup>White, *Prayer* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 277.

<sup>35</sup>White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol.4:316.

<sup>36</sup>White, *Gospel Workers*. 171.

<sup>37</sup>White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5:308.

Bringing prospects to socialize with the members of a small group will be an opportunity to train them in witnessing for Christ to their neighbors. She adds:

God's work is to be done in his way and his Spirit. In various places small companies are to consecrate themselves to God, body, soul, and spirit, and laying hold of the throne of God by faith. By faith they are to work zealously, keeping their souls in the love of God. The vital current of his love will make itself felt, and will be recognized as from in the good works of his people. Those little companies who know the truth, with one voice should bid their minister go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Each one should seek to do individual work for another. Not one, who has tasted the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God, can be excused from working for the souls of others.<sup>38</sup>

In this counsel, she emphasizes that it takes the total person (body, soul and spirit) to be involved in small company activity. It is an affair that cares for the spiritual well-being of the individual and that of others as a result it must be handled in God's own way and by His spirit. In similar vein, she advises,

Let small companies assemble in the evening, at noon, or in the early morning, to study the Bible. Let them have a season of prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. If you yourselves will open the door to receive it, a great blessing will come to you. Angels of God will be in your assembly. You will feed upon the leaves of the tree of life. What testimonies you may bear of the loving acquaintance made with your fellow-workers in these precious seasons when seeking the blessing of God. Let each tell his experience in simple words. This will bring more comfort and joy to the soul than all the pleasant instruments of music that could be brought into the churches. Christ will come into your hearts. It is by this means only that you can maintain your integrity.<sup>39</sup>

When God's people meet in prayer, the Holy Spirit empowers them to experience God and the angels of God attend to them. This is an interesting point to note, that believers are not alone in small group meetings, God's presence should be experienced there.

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<sup>38</sup>Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 8 January 1895.

<sup>39</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 7:195.

## **Ellen White on Group in Schools**

Ellen White's counsel on small companies extends also to what happens in church schools. She counseled that

Cottage and buildings essential to the school work are to be erected by the students themselves. These building should not be crowded close together, or located near the school buildings proper. In the management of this work, small companies should be formed who should be taught to carry a full sense of their responsibility. All these things cannot be accomplished at once, but are to begin to work in faith.<sup>40</sup>

Her advice is that students are to be grouped into small companies and taught how to build and do other technical works; putting them in groups would increase effectiveness. This will also help the schools to develop infrastructures at very minimal cost, at the same time help the students to learn a team spirit at work, develop ideas and skills that can used for personal benefits after graduation.

She also counsels those that received training in evangelical and missionary lines to go in small companies like the Disciples of Christ. The company should unite in work of teaching and healing, praying as they depend upon God's will to reap a rich harvest of souls in their medical missions.<sup>41</sup> Those trained were expected to use their training to help others in their neighborhood.

## **Ellen White on Home Evangelism**

Ellen White also instructs companies of Sabbath keepers to raised small units in many places. Though this units may be small but to encourage and nurture them to grow to become new congregations. New groups are not to be left on their own. They need

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<sup>40</sup>White, "The Mold for our Schools," *The Advocate*, February 1, 1899.

<sup>41</sup>White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1941), 127.

grooming in the truth and management of the members before they are left on their own. Where they are left to themselves, they will disperse due to lack of knowledge in group management. New companies should mature before they are left on their own.<sup>42</sup>

Additionally, encourages church members to visit their neighbors and open to them the Scriptures. Through a systematic and wise planning, the truth may be preached to all districts around them. With perseverance in their work, many will see fruit of their labors in salvation of souls. The converted ones will, in turn, teach others. This counsel on visiting of neighbors cannot be over-emphasized. As church members visit, they create forum for relationship with their neighbors and Bible study classes established to teach the neighbors.<sup>43</sup>

She further counsels that many will be called into the field to labor from house to house, giving Bible reading, and praying with those who are interested. There are many who may be in their homes and will not come in contact with the message unless zealous Bible workers take it to their homes. Those who are called to labor in this are to be encouraged and empowered. The counsel requires only giving Bible reading and praying for those who are interested.

In another counsel, emphasis is that “many workers are to act their part, doing house-to-house work, and giving Bible readings in families.”<sup>44</sup> “Consecrated women should engage in Bible work from house to house.”<sup>45</sup> In these counsels, it is observed that

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<sup>42</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:256.

<sup>43</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 1932, 314.

<sup>44</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 9:141.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 9:120, 121.

there is emphasis in doing Bible reading and prayer in home with families thereby bringing the gospel closer to the people. Dedicated workers are encourage to be involved in homes missions.

The example of Christ was that He mingled with the people and “if we follow in Christ's footsteps, we must come close to those who need our ministry. We must open the Bible to the understanding of others, present the claims of God's law, read the promises to the hesitating, arouse the careless, and strengthen the weak.”<sup>46</sup>

She also drew lessons from how the apostle’s message got to Antioch:

After the disciples had been driven from Jerusalem by persecution, the gospel message spread rapidly through the regions lying beyond the limits of Palestine; and many small companies of believers were formed in important centers. Some of the disciples traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word.<sup>47</sup>

The use of small groups in the counsel of Ellen G. White is not optional. She counseled “let there be in every church, well-organized companies of workers to labor in the vicinity of that church.”<sup>48</sup> The groups are expected to be well-organized to attract those living within the vicinity of the church. She continues, let members unite to work for dying souls in a corrupt world to come to the saving purity of Christ. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love. The purpose for the formation of groups is for service to gather souls from a corrupt world. The members of the groups are to be mission driven.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>White, *Gospel Workers*, 336.

<sup>47</sup>White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 157.

<sup>48</sup>White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1946), 73.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

She encouraged those who are disheartened because they are few in number to continue working until they grow stronger and multiply. Being few in a small group is not an issue but member's commitment is of great value. As they continue in worshipping God in their little company, the Lord will help them to stand firm and multiply their membership.<sup>50</sup>

### **Summary**

Pivotal concept that runs through the Bible is relationship between God and humankind. This concept is about God's concern to restore broken relationship with Him and in the human community. This interest is seen expressed in small group template to sustain the relation through the human generations as seen in the Old Testament. Small group as a concept was seen in the Godhead at creation and was also implemented in the mission of Noah's family group.

The New Testament, depicts how Christ adopted the small group approach to his ministry and for effective empowerment. Same approach was adopted by the disciples and that facilitated the multiplication and spread of the gospel after the Pentecost.

The small group approach seen in the Scripture enabled full participation and delegation of group members and easy organization of the people both in the Old and New Testaments. It is an approach that makes it easy for people to be acquainted with each other and care for themselves

Life in the twenty first century is quite different from biblical lifestyle. In our contemporary society, people are busy with lots of attractions that reading the Bible on

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<sup>50</sup>White, *Our High Calling* (Washington DC: The Trustee of the Ellen G. White Estate, 1961), 166.

their own is becoming so boring and some look unto their spiritual leaders proffer solutions to this problem. Gabriel Oluwasegun suggests three methods as seen in the ministry of Jesus – “direction, declaration, and demonstration”<sup>51</sup> as a method that can also empower small groups in the present generation.

Similarly, the counsels of Ellen G. White stressed how important it is for the church in these last days to adopt small group ministries. In the last days, small group ministries will be of benefit to believers as it will afford them the opportunity to meet away from church places. She pointed out that it is a divine mandate for the church where Bible reading and prayers will be the main focus of the group in the homes with their neighbors. It will shield them from the influences of the persecution and a privilege to meet with fellow believers to worship.

Small group ministries are biblical and the major encompassing purpose is the transformations of a person’s life through the community of believers. In both old and New Testaments, it indicates that God’s people can experience consistent change and growth in Christ through the study of the scripture and prayers. The change experienced is as a result of the significant relationship in the group community life as they share experiences together. The community life in the small groups will facilitate bonding among the members and in turn enhances retention. In the next chapter, this work will investigate the contributions scholars have made over the years on the importance of small groups in God’s relationship with humankind with particular attention to the African context.

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<sup>51</sup>Gabriel Oluwasegun. *Church Planting and Growth* (Ibadan, Nigeria: International Publishers. 2005), 123.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

Church membership losses, are an ongoing phenomenon that have created a strong sense of need for sustainable retention and growth strategies. The loss of members is considered as symptomatic of a deeper underlying problem in the church, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not exempted. The need for sustainable membership has led to several works on nurture and retention from numerous quarters. The previous chapter explored into the biblical foundations addressing issues of nurture and retention for sustainable growth. This chapter will examine existing literature on small groups. It will especially focus on contemporary views, Adventist contributions on small groups, and pay attention to African perspective to address concerns of retention and nurture within the primary entity for this study.

#### **Historical Background View**

Historically, small group ministry can be traced all through the Scriptures both in the Old and New Testaments. Previously, its main focus had been spiritual development and nurture, that is, until the church began encountering severe persecutions after the apostolic era right up to the reformation period. During the apostolic era, small groups served for the purpose of spiritual nurture and administrative coordination among God's people. However, when the church was challenged with severe persecution, it served the purpose for nurture and retention.

## Community Life: Greco-Roman Era

After the apostolic era, Christians faced severe persecution that affected their community life. Relational life has characterized every human community through the ages, so it was during the Greco-Roman era. The concept of community characterized the era that it so dominated the whole of the Mediterranean region.<sup>1</sup> Social and religious life was in communities where there were two traditional communities: *Politeia* (public life) and *Oi konomia* (household life).<sup>2</sup> People belonged to one of these community lives or to both. The community bound people from different backgrounds and race together.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Banks explains that the communities that looked more religious during that period were the Jewish communities. Those Jews who lived far away from Jerusalem and collaborated with Roman authorities and Greek culture established communities to preserve the purity of their traditional faith and maintain the vigor of their messianic hope. Concerned about protecting their people from the encroachment of foreign influence and to fulfil their religious obligation these Jews met in synagogues.<sup>4</sup> It is against this backdrop Paul conducted his ministry among the Gentiles, adopting the community approach in the first century era. It was during Paul's ministry across the Mediterranean terrain that Christian community emerged. The gospel had both a social and communal dimension. To those who embraced the gospel, it was an opportunity to

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts Bank, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

develop a new community that was different from the Roman and Jewish communities. Paul used the term *ekklesia* (Church) to describe the Christian community. The first use of this term was in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. These communities of believers operated in homes (1 Cor 16:19; Acts 18:18-19).<sup>5</sup>

Jewish community life in the Greco-Roman era can safely be said to have been adopted from the exodus pattern. Paul found them operating in communal lifestyle which made it possible for him to minister to them, and to organize the new believers into Christian communities.

### **Small Groups in the Reformation Era**

Two historical developments hindered growth and spread of small group activity before the reformation:<sup>6</sup> First, a growing distinction between clergy and laity hindered lay participation. Second, the legalization of Christianity took away the need for home meetings that were prevalent during the early church. When Christianity became the state religion during the days of Constantine, large, sacred buildings became better esteemed than the intimate house fellowships. Because of the conversion of the emperor a new chapter in the history of Christianity was opened for the previously persecuted church. Christianity was suddenly acknowledged and accepted as a state religion. Christians emphasized more on worship in public places. Clearly, this change affected the house church in a negative way.<sup>7</sup> Kurt W. Johnson says this change effected by the emperor,

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<sup>5</sup>Roberts Bank, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 32-42.

<sup>6</sup>Joel Comiskey, "History of Cell Movement," <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/dissertation/History.html>, accessed 22 June 2014.

<sup>7</sup>Joel Comiskey, "History of Cell Movement."

which gave rise to the building of churches without regard for the home fellowships as was in the early churches. When Constantine declared Christianity a state religion, ministry involvement by the church members dwindled and the priest opted to corporate worship.<sup>8</sup> It must be noted, however, that these small groups were only among the clergy. Lay participation was not part of this small group structure. The church applied small group principles only among the clergy within the church. The early monasteries operated by the church were primarily lay persons who separated themselves from the official church in order to pursue purity. The monasteries used small group structures for the monks. Initially, this structure was looked down upon by those in authority. Yet, by the end of the fifth century, monasticism had become so extensive that it became a major force in the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup>

The renewed emergence of small group or cell groups as a program of the church can be traced to the eighteenth century revival of the Wesleyan Church.<sup>10</sup> The Wesleyan movement which was influenced by Luther's Reformation theology began a movement of progression towards reviving cell groups. Within this period, the Moravians who lived a communal life were divided and in trouble. Zinzendorf worked among them in groups developing tenets of Christian behaviors that brought revival and peace among them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Kurt W. Johnson. *Small Group for the End-time: A Practical Guide for the Twenty-first Century* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 22-24.

<sup>9</sup>Joel Comiskey, "History of Cell Movement."

<sup>10</sup>William A Beckham, *Where are We Now? The Small Group Movement and Its Models* (Houston, TX: Touch Global Publications, 2004), 42-44.

<sup>11</sup>Bill, Hull. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers for Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 101-105.

As the movement continued its consolidation count, Zinzendorf experimented with the New Testament communal life in 1722. John Wesley was impressed by the growth of the cell groups program of Zinzendorf.<sup>12</sup>

The churches of the first few centuries did not look much like our churches today. They gathered in homes or civic centers and were comprised of a single household.<sup>13</sup> The home church as were expected to comprise of every member of the household—parents, children, servants, workers, and anyone else within a household. The responsibility of the home groups was to pray together, fast, give, share, and study the teachings of the apostles, prophets, and teachers. This was the reason why the letters of Paul were so important. His letters raised new issues and ideas for small groups in households to study in order to grow in their faith. The small group model existed in various formats until the movement known as the ‘Way’ was converted to become state religion in Rome and institutionalized in grand central gathering cathedrals and sanctuaries. It was at this point that household meetings ceased.<sup>14</sup>

John and Charles Wesley, Anglican priests, founded a small group at Oxford University dedicated to spiritual practices that was mockingly referred to as the Holy Club, the Bible Moths, and—among other things—the Methodists. John Wesley and his brother Charles, with their friend, George Whitefield were convinced that spiritual formation would not truly occur without the validation of a close circle of

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<sup>12</sup>Beckham, *Where are We Now?* 42-44.

<sup>13</sup>Dan R. Rick, *Small Group Ministries: Where Two or Three are Gathered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

friends and fellow Christian believers. This led to the development of the Classes, Bands, and Societies—a formal structure to ensure that all their members engaged in small groups dedicated to the practice of the means of grace. The members got committed to spiritual growth in small groups and this gradually spread across America as Methodist pioneers like Francis Asbury, Barbara Heck, Phoebe Palmer, and others organized small group ministries in the forms of clergy accountability groups, Sunday school classes, mission societies, and prayer circles. As churches grew larger and larger, and congregations numbered in their hundreds, and thousands, then small groups became “little churches within the church”—a trend that is reemerging today.<sup>15</sup>

### **Historical View of Adventist Church Literature**

When the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, its small group activities began as social meetings which were patterned after the Methodist class meetings. Some early Adventists coming from the Methodist backgrounds adopted the idea of social meetings similar to the Methodist prayer meetings. In the Methodist prayer meetings, members were required to participate in the weekly activities held in the homes where members were expected to minister to each other in Christ. The early Adventists held their social meetings after preaching service for reflection on the sermon. The social meeting was a platform for members to interact with one another.<sup>16</sup> J. Hoffer, who participated in such meetings, observed, “at the commencement of every Sabbath we meet together for prayers and exhortation for which we receive a blessing. Sabbath morning is occupied in social meeting, Sabbath School,

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<sup>15</sup>Dan Ricks, *Small Group Ministries*, 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

and Bible classes.”<sup>17</sup> Hoffer further stated “in the absence of resident clergy, the early Adventists sustained themselves through the social meetings, Sabbath School, and Bible study classes. All of these activities, of course, are small group activities. The believers in these activities—were not merely spectators; social meetings were definitely relational meetings.”<sup>18</sup> Kurt Johnson refers to Ellen White involving in a “class meeting”<sup>19</sup> as a former member of Methodist Church. He confirms class meetings originating from England among the Methodists and found its way into many denomination for which Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of them.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that in the absence of a resident pastor the social meetings served to fulfill some of the obligations of the pastor. Burrill emphasized that “the practice of holding social meetings continued even after the organization of the church in 1860.”<sup>21</sup> The social meeting help the members review sermons and make reflections for person enrichment. The meeting was to help members build relationship with one another.

### **Origin of the Sabbath School**

Sabbath school ministries in the Adventist Church began in 1852 when James White wrote the first Sabbath school materials, a series of 19 lessons for children and youth published in the Youth’s Instructor. The first regular Sabbath school was organized

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<sup>17</sup> Russell Burrill, *The Revolutionized Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 110.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>19</sup>Kurt W. Johnson, *Successful Small Groups: From Theory to Practice*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 168.

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

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

in 1853 by James White in Rochester, New York. The Sabbath School is the Seventh-day Adventist equivalent of the Sunday school of other denominations, but designed for people of all ages, rather than for only children and youth. The goal of the Sabbath school is to disciple believers for Christ. The four basic objectives of the Sabbath school are faith development, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission.<sup>22</sup>

During the General Conference session of 1901, the International Sabbath School Association (formerly Sabbath School Association) was reorganized as the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference, while state Sabbath school associations were abolished. W. A. Spicer was the first chairperson of the department, and L. Flora Plummer was the corresponding secretary.<sup>23</sup>

The Sabbath School department of the General Conference of Adventists has gone through stages of re-organization over the years. The re-organizations at each stage were meant to meet the needs of the members. The Sabbath school today is divided by age groups: adults, young adults (19-30), youth (15-18, or high school), early teens (12-14, or grades 7 and 8), junior (10-12, or grades 5 and 6), primary (7-9, or grades 2-4), kindergarten (4-6, or through the first grade), and cradle roll (0-3). There is also an extension division that takes care of members who cannot make it to regular Sabbath service over a period of time. Although the format of the Sabbath School units is similar to those of the small group, it was in 1990 that Action Units were formally introduced to the Sabbath school program. The church combined personal ministry (lay activity)

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<sup>22</sup>“Sabbath School Department”, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, (SDABC), rev. ed. Ed. Don F. Neufeld, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 10:1258.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

emphasis with a regular Sabbath school Bible study class in an effort to involve the total membership in the outreach mission of the church and increase fellowship and spiritual nurture.<sup>24</sup>

Kurt W. Johnson, a renowned small group strategist raises issues of concern about the Sabbath school program in the Adventist Church.

Sabbath school action units are based upon the premise that the Adventist Church already has a built-in small group philosophy and structure that is not being used to its full capacity. The premise is that the purpose of the Sabbath school is fellowship, ministry training, Bible study, outreach (local and worldwide), and prayer support; and since these are the biblical ingredients for a small group format, they should be incorporated into the Sabbath school every Sabbath morning in each class. The classes are given a minimum of one hour in which to follow the small group format of sharing, study, prayer, and working on an outreach project. Sometimes the class project may be a small home group during the week. The home group and the Sabbath school class can then work together as a unit for more success. The weakness of the Sabbath school action unit is that in some cases the location of the class and the time available are not conducive to healthy group life. Often the members sit in pews with other classes in the sanctuary. Because of inadequate time and location, the group interaction is not as bonding as it could be. This leads to discouragement and lack of participation by the members and a negative attitude toward small groups in general.<sup>25</sup>

The major goal of the Sabbath School units is to develop interpersonal relationship and the application of the biblical study to real life situation. The units are to be sensitive to the spiritual growth of their members. The units are to provide care-giving to the members and report to the church leadership when necessary. The duty of the church leadership is to follow-up on the report from the units.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid. "Sabbath School Department," SDABC, 10.

<sup>25</sup>Kurt W. Johnson. *Small Groups for the End-time*, 85.

## Views from Adventist Literature

The Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook states, small group is generally made up of 5-15 people who meet either in a church or home to enjoy "fellowship, Bible study, prayer, service recreation, and socialization. Examples of small groups that met in the church include Sabbath School classes, outreach groups, home Bible study groups, cottage prayer meetings, and the Church choir."<sup>26</sup> It is observed some people attend church more for its Christian support programs than its doctrines. When the support system and fellowship is no longer experienced, people may stop attending church not because they no longer believe and understand the doctrines. In such a situation, small groups become more beneficial for fellowship than the regular church service. Those who participate in small groups find it more comfortable and less threatening. The church considers the small group as a visible approach to revive members and attract non-members through Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and outreach ministries. Each small group session lasts about an hour to an hour and a half, and within the stipulated time four basic activities are conducted: sharing, study, prayer and outreach ministry. The outreach ministry involves the weekly Sabbath School groups, seminar groups for designated groups of the local church, and support groups.<sup>27</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church manual supports and encourages small group ministries particularly those isolated from the church. It states "where a number of isolated believers reside near one another or where they belong to a small group, house

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<sup>26</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD, 2013), 126.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 216-218.

church, or church planting core group, they should consider forming a company of believers for fellowship, worship, and mission with the objective of growing into an organized church or multiplying house churches in that geographical area”<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the Church manual explains that it is the responsibility of the personal ministries leader of the local church to train and direct members in every outreach ministry of the church including small group ministries.<sup>29</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes the small group ministries as an outreach ministry particularly for the nurture and retention of both old and new members in the church. The church’s favorable view of small group ministries indicates that the church accepts and supports the biblical concept of small group activities, which brings people together in community. In affirmation, the church in North America commissioned the Institute of Church Ministries at Andrews University in 2008 to conduct a survey on the significance of small groups. Among the benefits observed, one is in the area of relational evangelism. The study states that relational evangelism deals with receptive people. People feel more receptive to strangers sometimes, but are more receptive to their families. Some biblical examples are seen in Andrew bringing Peter to Jesus, Philip introducing Nathaniel to Jesus, and the jailer in Philippi bringing his household to Jesus. What this indicates is, when people around see a change in a person they are attracted to his/her God.<sup>30</sup> An individual’s lifestyle has lots of influence over those around them. It is noteworthy that

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<sup>28</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 38.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid.*, 98.

<sup>30</sup>S. Joseph Kidder, “The Power of Relationship in Evangelism,” *Ministry*, July 2008, 11-12.

the church manual outlines larger groups that operate within the church besides small groups and Sabbath School units. These large groups include Adventist Men ministries, Adventist Women Ministries, Youth Ministry, and Children Ministries. These all operate for the spiritual welfare of every member, having approaches that emphasizes shared leadership, targeted learning and emphasis on building community and accountability. This is a multifaceted approach to small group ministries which is a compartmentalization of departments in the local church. Compartmentalization (men, women or youth groups) dictates programs while small group means has a dynamic, integrated process for growing mature Christians in the local church.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, when there is renewed emphasis on witnessing through the small group approach, individuals and churches gets revived. So it was with the disciples, as they shared the gospel their faith grew, and the church multiplied. The gospels inform about the recruiting, training and equipping of the disciples by Jesus but in the Acts of the Apostles, we see product of the training. The model of Jesus ought to be the model for the church. Training should not be spontaneous rather it should be planned with a developed curriculum. This ought to be the present experience of the church. As members are recruited and trained, they are empowered to reach out to others, by so doing, their faith increases, the church grows, and retention shall be experienced.

### **Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Views**

Burrill compared the vibrancy of the New Testament Church with some contemporary Adventist Churches in Northern America and concluded that it does appear

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<sup>31</sup>SDA Church Manual, 98-99.

that some are dead.<sup>32</sup> A reasons for this conclusion is that members depend solely on pastors as primary care givers and when pastors are lapse in visiting the members there are complaints. In the New Testament, pastors were not regarded as care givers, rather biblical community was best experienced within the small group setting. However, small group ministries are not the solution for transforming or regenerating a dying member or church, rather it is the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit that empowers the members and causes the church to grow.<sup>33</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in her teachings holds the doctrine of the priesthood of believers as a cardinal teaching. This is belief that every believer has a ministry to perform. Therefore, small group ministries serve as a model ministry to equip both pastors and lay persons to be involved in ministry. A biblical perspective of this approach to ministry is seen in the Jethro principle of Exodus 18.<sup>34</sup> Jethro introduced Moses to group ministry for the wilderness congregation. Rex Edward opines that after the Pentecost experience of Acts 2, the New Testament Church grew excessively due to the house-to-house ministry strategy adopted to nurture and retain the new members (Acts 2:42-47).<sup>35</sup> The house-to house ministry of the New testament Church consolidated the large worship or synagogue meetings.

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<sup>32</sup>Burrill, *Recovering the Adventist Approach*, 93.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid..

<sup>34</sup>Rex D. Edwards, *Every Believer a Minister* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 1995), 63-65.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

The most effective strategy to teach people how to reach others is through the means of small group ministry in individual homes. This was Moses' method in the Old Testament. Also, Jesus often spoke to groups at home meeting (Matt 13:36-52). Jesus worked with the twelve as a group and fed the 5,000 in groups; He used the group approach to make sure that everyone was well fed. Church members will be well fed spiritually, also if that is done in groups. It is an approach that can gradually get every member involved. However, Miguel Angel Cerna declares "a pastor cannot delegate the responsibility of the small group ministry in his church. If an associate or lay leader is given the job of promoting small groups, this ministry will not reach its full potential and will most probably fizzle and fail."<sup>36</sup> Moses was at the lead of managing the Israelites in groups even as Jesus was at the lead of managing the twelve disciples, and they recorded maximum success. Therefore, for small groups to succeed in the local church, this demands that the pastor should be the leader. God was the leader of the Israelite and Moses was used to lead the people in groups. Jesus was the leader of the disciples and the Holy Spirit directed after Pentecost, same the Lord wishes to do with the pastor who willing plans and leads the small groups.

Gavin Anthony regards small group ministry as a discipleship approach to membership retention which entails the eschatological message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>37</sup> The objective of discipleship may be found in the eschatological

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<sup>36</sup>Miguel Angel Cerna, "How I use Small Groups in Evangelism" *Ministry*, October 1987, 10.

<sup>37</sup>Gavin Anthony "Participating in a Compelling Purpose: Discipleship's Connection to the Eschatological Mission and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" 2, [https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit 2013](https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit2013), accessed 28 March 2015.

purpose calling people to “come out” of Babylon (Rev. 18:1-5). This call is significant because the declaration to “come out” appears to be an invitation to “come into” an eternal discipleship process where the church can grow increasingly into the image of God. This is the reason for the existence of the church.<sup>38</sup> Bill Hull adds that discipleship is not a program or a set of curriculum of study to graduate from rather to equip people to spiritual living in Jesus.<sup>39</sup> When small groups disciple members, Bill says the person become “a reborn follower of Jesus.”<sup>40</sup> The reborn experience he referred to salvation as an ongoing experience in life of the disciples as they grow expecting the second coming.

To better illustrate the transformation process Anthony explores three Scriptural passages; Genesis 1:27, Romans 3:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:49. Man was created in the image of God; all have sinned, have lost the image of God, and have the earthly image; it is the purpose of God to restore that the lost image in man. The discipleship process in small group ministry is the transformational approach to restore the lost image of God in man. Referring to Ellen White’s comment, “The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God.”<sup>41</sup>

Burrill also agrees that biblical community is best experienced in small group settings however, it is not the solution for all the ills of the church. Small groups will not

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<sup>38</sup> Gavin Anthony “Participating in a Compelling Purpose: Discipleship’s Connection to the Eschatological Mission and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” 2, [https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit 2013](https://www.adventistarchives.org/summit2013), accessed 28 March 2015.

<sup>39</sup>Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*), 35-36.

<sup>40</sup>Hull, 32-34.

<sup>41</sup>Galvin Anthony, “Participating in a Compelling Purpose.”

deliver a declining church rather will help to rejuvenate it through the Holy Spirit. Contemporary Adventist congregations appear to becoming pastor-dependent such that without the pastor no real ministry is possible in the church. This has led to frustrated ministries with many pastors suffering burn out. Scholars agree that biblical community was very vital to human relationship to God and is also important to our contemporary society. As ministry progresses in the twenty-first century, such frustrations should be eliminated.<sup>42</sup>

Burrill stressed that in the New Testament Church, pastors were not primary care givers, rather, a practice of community was developed where members give mutual care to one another. Nurture and care for old and new members was not neglected. In the New Testament Church primary care was given by members to each other while the mission driven Apostles were itinerant ministers more concerned with evangelizing and planting new churches.<sup>43</sup> He adds that small group is a church model that fits into the non-pastor-dependent paradigm. In church planting movement small groups are good starters since they mainly begin in the homes. Pastoral care functions better as fellow members of the group provide care for each other. Because a group desires to grow, it creates community for itself and becomes evangelistic. Such groups foster the birth of a new church and exponential growth is experience.<sup>44</sup>

The role of clergy degenerated from its evangelistic focus to one of power and control by the time of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. The church in that era

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<sup>42</sup>Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 93-94.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 122-128.

<sup>44</sup>Russell Burrill, *Rekindling the Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1999), 72-74.

operated in an environment in which its role changed drastically; shifting from an itinerant ministry to a permanent localized one.<sup>45</sup> As of this trend, the church overlooked membership involvement and care giving became a pastoral affair. Having considered some views on small groups from an Adventist perspective, it will be expedient to explore African views of community lifestyle.

### **African Literature on Small Groups**

African society has a communal lifestyle with its structure that enhance social relations between individual members. Kwame Gyekye defines community as “a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds—which are not necessarily biological—who share common values, interests, and goals”.<sup>46</sup> He explains that “members in a community are expected to demonstrate a concern for the well-being of others, to do what they can to advance the common good, and generally participate in the community life”.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it is clear that in the African community, people live for the well-being of each other, which is similar to the emphasis of the small group ministries.

African life and relationships are built around community living where everyone is involved and carried along. To John Mbiti, Africans are notoriously religious a factor that permeates every aspect of life so that it is not easy to isolate it. Their set beliefs and

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<sup>45</sup>Burrill, *Recovering the Adventist Approach*, 129.

<sup>46</sup>Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Ghana, Accra: Sankofa, 1996), 35.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

practices, held in common contributes to their communal relationship.<sup>48</sup> It is the communal life and belief patterns that influence and organize the religion of the African Community. In Africa, “religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community.”<sup>49</sup> A person cannot detach self from the community, for to do so is to separate oneself from existence. The African community life is evidence in their child birth and naming ceremonies marriage ceremonies, and death.

Rebuilding the moral fabric of a degenerated society is the challenge facing nations all over the world. Though Africa is a harsh place, the ecosystem reveals an interconnected humans who live for others. This premise generated the concept of “*Ubuntu*”,<sup>50</sup> meaning human kindness. Ubuntu is an African concept portraying the potential for being human, to value the good of the community above self-interest. Ubuntu is to strive to help people in the spirit of service, to show respect to others and to be honest and trustworthy.”<sup>51</sup> The concept of Ubuntu is crucial to community building and applied to empowering the marginalized minorities. This idea is meant to bring

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<sup>48</sup>John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), 1.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>50</sup>Kelvin Chaplin, “The Ubuntu Spirit in African Community” <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Publication/BookCoE20-Chaplin.pdf>, accessed August 11, 2015.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

people into community based program that are care based with recognized values, and a social justice system that is based on equality, non-racism, non-sexism and human dignity.<sup>52</sup> This concept is building the African community system in South Africa.

Another benefit of the African community system is that it has natural aspects which aid mentoring. Community and religious relationships in Africa are vital for the success of small group ministries. Small group principles have advantages particularly in the African setting. In the traditional African educational system, people work on their problems in a corporate, small group settings. In small groups advice and encouragement is given in “an attempt to solve a person’s concerns.”<sup>53</sup> George Janvier explains that “the goal of traditional education is to incorporate someone into the greater community or tribe. The method of teaching and learning in traditional education is per individual or in small groups.”<sup>54</sup> He stresses that the African approach to learning brings the teacher and the learner into a relational setting. The teacher imparts knowledge to those who have demonstrated skills in the chosen field of learning. The mentor—mentee approach to learning is used. The content is holistic, religious, social, and economical and these are the avenues to inculcate the values of the community into the learner. The teaching method in a community education is non-formal; the teacher is not paid as it is a community responsibility. The objective is to instill discipline and promote community values. This is also the goal in small group ministries; it is holistic and promotes religious

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<sup>52</sup>Kelvin Chaplin, “The Ubuntu Spirit in African Community.”

<sup>53</sup>George Janvier, *Discipleship: A West Africa Perspective* (Bukuru, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks), 2001, 84.

<sup>54</sup>Janvier, *Evangelism and Discipleship: Training for Africa*, (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka, 1999), 62.

and social life in the church community. Its teaching method is non-formal and payments are not made to the discussion leaders.<sup>55</sup> There are learning activities that are meant for men and those for women. Experienced men and women are assigned to mentor in any of those specific areas.

Yusufu Turaki believes that “we need to examine the place and position of man in the society and before God.”<sup>56</sup> The significance of life in the Africa community centers around certain important aspects of community life. At every stage, an individual needs to be integrated into meaningful life in the community, through rites and rituals. He further explains that there are several approaches to integration:

1. An individual becomes a member of the community in association and fellowship with the human members of the community. An individual becomes a member of the community in association with both “the physical and the spiritual world.”<sup>57</sup>

Reflecting on Turaki’s meaning of life in the African community, it can be said that an individual is integrated into life in the church through small group ministries to enjoy fellowship and nurture. Through prayers and Bible studies, an individual becomes a member of the church to fellowship and associate with other members of the church community. When the individual is integrated into the church, associates with other members in worshipping God. The individual experiences faith community at this point.

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<sup>55</sup>Janvier, *Evangelism and Discipleship: Training for Africa*, (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka, 1999), 62-63.

<sup>56</sup>Yusufu Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview* (Nairobi, Kenya: International Bible Society Africa, 2001), 192.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 193

Analyzing this background, a new member can make smooth transition into the life of the church through the small group ministries.

Small group ministries will be effective in the Africa setting due to their communal lifestyle. The leadership structure of the African community lifestyle is similar to that of the small groups. In every culture are certain aspects that could benefit the small groups.<sup>58</sup> Careful observation of the Nigerian background, reveals that every tribe has a chief, district head, then village head, hamlet head, clan head, and also the family head. These heads or leaders graduate from one level to the other or from one group to the other for administrative purposes. The group format of the African community is an advantage for the implementation of small group ministries.

Christian anthropologist, Charles Kraft, states “all societies arrange people into groups, wherever there are people and whatever people are doing, it happens even when people act as individuals, the individual actions are conditioned by the fact that each individual is a member of a group of groups.”<sup>59</sup> He further explains that societies are organized into various groupings on the basis of a variety of different principles namely: biological groupings, marriage grouping, common interests Group, ranking group, and territorial group.

Some people become members of these groups voluntarily or involuntarily. Each group influences the other in its goals and objectives. This grouping approach in human society is adaptable to small group ministries, since small groups can also be organized

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<sup>58</sup>George Janvier and Bitrus Thaba, *Understanding Leadership: An African Christian Model* (Nigeria, Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks, 2001), 58.

<sup>59</sup>Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology of Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 331.

along social lines. It is noteworthy that within these groups an individual's needs are most effectively met. People living in a group are interdependent. There is a high level of group consciousness and solidarity amongst the members.<sup>60</sup>

Klaus Nurnberger insists that community is much more than simply a social group for social life but for people to bond together by reason of natural origin, or for common interest, and values. He states that the community both a unity of the visible and invisible world. This involves the physically living and the ancestral world, the divinities and children yet unborn to their kin-group. In a wider perspective, the traditional African community comprises the totality of the Africa world taking care each person within the group.<sup>61</sup>

### **Views from Christian Literature**

Gabriel Oluwasegun describes the small group or home-cell fellowship as “a unit of a church. It is a mini-church in the home. It is an extension of Church activity, a nurturing unit of Christian life development, a channel of welfare packages to church members, a channel of communication with church members and a medium of information between the church and the members.”<sup>62</sup> When small groups are functional, the church is active after regular worship sessions.

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<sup>60</sup>Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology of Christian Witness*, 331.

<sup>61</sup>Klaus Nurnberger, *The Living Dead and the Living God: Christ and the Ancestors in a Changing Africa* (Pietermatizburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2007), 22-24.

<sup>62</sup>Gabriel Oluwasegun, *Church Planting and Growth* (Ibadan, Nigeria: International Publishers, 2005), 77.

Lawrence Richards observes that the small group setting merits much attention. He states that the phrase “small group” refers to more than size. Groups do usually include a few members, but the picture the phrase conveys is primarily one of close, intimate relationships. Small groups are usually formed because Christians sense a need to get to know one another better, to move beyond the superficiality that marks so much normal our contact with other people, and to find friends who will love and care them.<sup>63</sup>

The period for small group study is usually open with opportunity for sharing, mutual self-revelation, and development of close interpersonal relationship that are vital for changing and molding life values and making decisions among group members.<sup>64</sup>

Aubrey Malphurs is convinced that small groups are biblical, are an integral part of the church and very important to its life.<sup>65</sup> He observed that the problem of the early church was the management of the membership explosion. However, the apostles and elders solved the problem by structuring the church around large and small groups. In his observation, small groups help to solve problems among individuals and can also be used to address challenges in the church.<sup>66</sup> The large meeting in Acts were basically for evangelism and teaching. The small group meetings were for purposes of meeting felt needs of provisions, fellowship, prayer and encouragement.

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<sup>63</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, *Youth Ministry: It's Renewal in the Local Church*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 190-191.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid, 191.

<sup>65</sup>Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 212.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 212.

George Janvier refers to small group ministry activities as a discipleship approach to spiritual life. He defines discipleship as a “type of relationship and educational activity that God designed to help all Christians grow in the area of knowledge, spiritual matters, and Christian activities.”<sup>67</sup> He agrees that involvement in small group disciple programs is a human part while God plays His role in the growth of the individual Christian. Janvier believes that the small group is a program that fulfills the divine mandate of Matthew 28:19-20 to go and make disciples. He concludes that Christ makes disciples in small groups and that small group ministry in a local congregation is meant to make every believer a disciple for Christ to reach out to the nations.<sup>68</sup>

Bill Hull also claims that the Great Commission was the basis for small groups in the early church, an adoption of Christ’s approach. He explains that small group activity is a disciple-making strategy. Every Christian is a disciple who introduces Christ to others and trains them to be disciples, then deploys them to make even more disciples. In small groups new disciples are trained and empowered to reach out. He, therefore, concluded that discipleship cannot be effective without small group since “every contemporary disciple is no less capable of this calling than the twelve.”<sup>69</sup>

Hull reiterated that the disciples learned and practiced the small group concept from Jesus. Immediately after the Pentecost, membership of the church exploded and grew to over five thousand. One would imagine how such a number of people would be

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<sup>67</sup>George Janvier, *Evangelism and Discipleship* (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka, 2005), 61.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>69</sup>Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 20-21.

managed. The concept of the small group the disciples leant from Jesus proffered the solution. The small groups enable the disciples to manage enlarged membership. Hull notes that the Scripture does not explain the supervision process, but there must have been cell leaders in the units that met mostly in homes.<sup>70</sup> He is convinced that “effective discipling must take place in a small-group setting. It provides intimacy; a variety of gifts, without an overwhelming atmosphere; and an ideal training vehicle for reproduction. It teaches well, provides accountability, and can become the launching pad for large group activities.”<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Hull states that groups need to reproduce. This he said can be managed through a careful apprenticeship system. Groups can expand quickly and with integrity when they have healthy Christians who can reproduce themselves in the groups. Similarly, this principle can permeate an entire small group network. However, he says that a group can only reproduce when the expectation is present. This means that the members of the group need to possess the vision to reproduce. A healthy group can reproduce when it offers spiritual nurture, and support, ministry development, accountability, and training in outreach, long-term relationships, and worship. The small group must provide a community that produces optimum environment for growth and reproduction.<sup>72</sup> As relationship develops in a community so also it is expected in small groups. Hull adds that relationship is “working together, spending time with each other,

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<sup>70</sup>Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 213-214.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>72</sup>Hull. *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 234-236.

knowing each other intimately.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, James Cress refers to relationship as friendship. He adds “when we value them, when we pray for and with them”<sup>74</sup> we become involved with new members. When this happens in a small group, the members experience positive influence in each other.

Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. says community is the reason for small groups.<sup>75</sup> Community occurs in small groups and some of the essential elements include interpersonal commitment and a sense of belongingness. This he illustrated with the Trinity where God has lived in richness only found in community. So when a group enjoys community life God is involve and it is a way Christians can enjoy church life<sup>76</sup> He warns, small groups is not owned by anyone but each person attends for personal enrichment and empowerment.<sup>77</sup>

Ed Stetzer reveals that house churches continue to be the method God uses in most parts of the world to expand his kingdom. China is one of such areas in the world where an estimate of more than 15 million Christians meet in house churches. In China, the house churches are multiplying rapidly as they regard the approach as a do-it-yourself worship experience.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 272.

<sup>74</sup>James A. Cress, *You Can Keep Them If You Care: Helping New Members Stay on Board*. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 63.

<sup>75</sup>Neighbour , Jr., Ralph W., *Where Do We Go From Here: A Guide for the Cell Group Church* (Houston, TX: TOUCH, 2000), 113.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 115-120.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 77-78.

Stetzer explains, that “community will be a central value in all organizations of the future whether secular or sacred. This is good news for the church because community is central to its mission. Also, Spiritual growth best takes place in community.”<sup>79</sup> Groups seeking to build relationships will not be short-term groups but need to have lasted up to two or more years in order to develop true community, with trust and intimacy. In spiritual matters people are interested in we-centered approaches to growth as a result emerging churches are reaching out to invite people into their community. Seeking growth in a spiritual community leads to conversion. It is for this reason that community cannot be purchased because its reality is in the relationship that makes Christ believable in an unbelievable society.<sup>80</sup>

Conversely, Dennis McCallum cites some reasons why some groups fail, or do not grow. First when New Testament examples and principles for small home-sized groups, which are key feature of the local church are not adopted. It should be obvious that an impersonal atmosphere will result if a local church holds only very large meetings. The local church should encourage a network of close relationships in its congregation because real community can only be based on close relationships. Second, when small groups fail, they will died of gradually. In many cases, a home fellowship's existence is viewed as an end in itself by some churches.<sup>81</sup> This lack of mission-

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<sup>79</sup>Neighbour , Jr., Ralph W., *Where Do We Go From Here: A Guide for the Cell Group Church* 140-143.

<sup>80</sup>Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 140-143.

<sup>81</sup>Dennis McCallum. “Eleven Reasons Why Home Fellowship Groups Usually Fail,” <http://www.xenos.org/classes/papers/10.htm#sthash.GVvx0owN.dpuf>, accessed 12 August 2015.

mindedness has a negative effect on the group. In order for groups to be spiritually healthy, they need a purpose greater than themselves. Good small groups tend to stay small, therefore, when a house fills up with people, much of the interactive character of the group is lost. In addition, outreach tends to dwindle because there is no room for new people. In such situations, it is natural to divide the group in order to preserve the small size of the group, while at the same time, reach more people. Lastly, when small groups are seen as peripheral rather than being central to the life of the church this affects its growth. If the church fails to establish a vision in the minds of its members for full involvement, the result will likely be a very poor level of participation in the home fellowship program. Often, only those with little to do will spend the time it takes to become meaningfully involved. To obtain the help of the most gifted members, the church will need to teach that involvement in home mission and fellowship is an exciting opportunity to finally realize the full extent of the Christian experience. The leadership in the local church must cultivate a mentality, or consensus in the church which places an appropriate emphasis on this kind of ministry. Such a consensus can be created without resorting to legalism. The leadership must truly believe in the concept of small group, and be willing to teach and practice it in their own lives. McCallum adds that Pastors fear home groups for several reasons; false teaching is always a danger, however, this is why the Bible teaches the need for "overseers"<sup>82</sup> or elders. The elders should also train the lay persons so that they will be able to teach sound doctrine. These are few issues pointed out by McCallum that can cause the failure of small group activities in a given church.

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<sup>82</sup>Dennis McCallum, "Eleven Reasons Why Home Fellowship Groups Usually Fail."

To Malphurs, small group meetings have a variety of advantages particularly in contributing to a vital sense of community. Some of these vital benefits include:<sup>83</sup>

1. Provision: People's material needs were met as many were willing to sell their possessions to support others (Acts 2:32-45).
2. Communion and worship: The meetings provide opportunity to break bread and worship (Acts 2:47).
3. Evangelism: The small group meetings created the platform to evangelize others (Acts 5:42).
4. Prayer: Peter's escape from prison interrupted a group in a prayer session. The meeting encouraged group prayer for each other (Acts 12:12)
5. Encouragement: Most of the group meetings were in homes and serve the purpose of encouraging one another particularly the new believers (Acts 5:42; 20:20).<sup>84</sup>

It is worth noting that churches today face the challenge of owning facilities that will accommodate every activity of the church. The members live a reasonable distance away from the place of worship and cannot attend every activity of the church. Some churches are losing members as a result of these challenges. However, when a robust network of small groups is organized, the church will not worry over maintaining the members as the groups will create an opportunity for nurture. The groups can meet just about anywhere in a wide time frame either in a person's office, home, or in any conducive environment as agreed by the group.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 128.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 128-135.

Dan R. Dick affirms, “a large body of research supports the theory that people learn best in intimate, interactive, clearly-focused settings that invite deep personal reflection; open, honest conversation; and that speak to the issues most relevant to the participant’s lives.”<sup>86</sup> Small groups provide the ideal setting to wrestle with such important issues like fundamental questions of faith, life, meaning, and purpose; which produce spiritual formation and development in Christian disciples. He demonstrates out the following benefits of small groups:<sup>87</sup>

1. Small group settings create opportunities to form lasting relationships and friendships. The journey of faith is an awesome expedition that is best shared with other travelers asking similar questions, seeking comparable meaning, and looking to deepen their understanding of the life of the Christian disciple.
2. Participants in small groups open the opportunity to practice regularly the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scriptural study, fasting, and acts of service to each other; this creates a sense of responsibility, and a network of accountability between members of the group.
3. Group effectiveness strongly indicates that participants in groups learn and retain new information, encounter new ideas and concepts, and engage in newly learned behaviors at a much higher rate than individuals on their own.

Comiskey, in commenting on Yonggi Cho’s Church in Korea, observes that cells form part of the local church unit.<sup>88</sup> The small groups are never seen as isolated units

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<sup>86</sup>Dan R. Dick, *Small Group Ministries: Where Two or Three are Gathered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 7-8.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

rather they are intimately linked to the life of the local church. The local church is the strength of Christianity but the cell groups contribute to its strength. The priority of each cell is to partner in evangelism, that is, reaching out to non-Christians besides other activities of the groups. Boren says the cell groups in Yonggi Cho's church are effective group members and leaders receive direct support from staff pastors who regularly visits the cells.<sup>89</sup> He explains that churches define their cell groups. Some are home groups, evangelism target groups, and task groups. Each of the groups has specify purposes while others are flexible, whichever approach, churches are to begin "by observing what God is doing through cell group models."<sup>90</sup> When there is flexibility in their approach to group ministry that enables each person to fit in appropriately for the purposes of involvement. The introduction of cell groups brought about growth, intimate fellowship and s membership involvement. As a result of overall membership involvement, the church experienced growth.

### **Sociological Perspective**

Donelson R. Forsyth defines a group as "two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships."<sup>91</sup> Groups range in size from two members to thousands of members. The size of a group influences its nature in several

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<sup>88</sup>Joel Comiskey, *How to Lead A Great Cell Group Meeting* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 12.

<sup>89</sup>Scot M. Boren and Don Tillman, *Making Cell Groups Work: Navigating the Transformation to a Cell – Based Church* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Recourses, 2002), 350.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 43-55.

<sup>91</sup>Donelson Forsyth, *Introduction to Group Dynamics* (Belmont, CA: Thompson Higher Education, 2006), 5.

ways, for a group with only two or three members possesses many special qualities simply because it includes so few members. However, as groups increase in sizes, they tend to become more complex and more formally structured. Each group has its level of influence, interaction, and interrelation among the members that make the group functional. Forsyth states there are two basic groups: primary and secondary.<sup>92</sup> A primary group fits the description of the small group ministry, while the secondary group is the church congregation. The dynamics of the social groups are similar to those of the small groups except for the fact that small group ministries have spiritual content.

### **Sociological Benefits of Small Groups**

Mark Howell mentions some of the sociological benefits derived from small group ministries, these includes:<sup>93</sup>

1. Life change happens best in small groups;
2. It makes church personal;
3. It provides nearly unlimited leadership development;
4. “Come over to my house” is a much easier invitation than “come with me to my church;”<sup>94</sup>
5. It provides a suitable opportunity for one another to learn and the privilege of interaction and questioning;
6. It provides caring for every member.

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<sup>92</sup>Donelson Forsyth, *Introduction to Group Dynamics* (Belmont, CA: Thompson Higher Education, 2006), 5-6.

<sup>93</sup>Marl Howell, “10 Powerful Benefits of a Small Group Ministry” *Ministry Leadership*. [ministrytodaymag.com/.../ministry.../205](http://ministrytodaymag.com/.../ministry.../205) (accessed March 12, 2015).

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

Small group activities create a platform for people to interact and socialize with each other, which ignites significant spiritual bonding needed for nurture and retention.

Doug Britton believes “small groups (also known as "cell groups" and "home fellowship groups") are growing in popularity in Christian churches and homes throughout the world as a way for us to make the connections we need with fellow believers. Small group fellowships—whether focused on Bible studies or on a wide variety of activities—have a tremendous impact on those who participate.”<sup>95</sup> He stated the following reasons why small groups make a difference.<sup>96</sup>

1. People talk more in small groups since there are fewer people, there is more opportunity to talk and less room to hide.
2. Group members realize that others face similar problems when they hear that others have similar struggles.
3. People use their gifts and talents to minister to one another. Small groups provide the perfect setting for Christians to minister one to another.
4. Small group members encourage each other in their faith journey and encourage each other to grow.
5. Small group members encourage each other in their faith. When people share, other group members see new ways they can draw closer to God and new steps they can take with others.
6. Group members hold each other accountable

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<sup>95</sup>Britton Doug, “Benefits of Small Group Studies,” accessed 26 December 2013, <http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/onlinebiblestudies-smallgroupsandcellgroups/benefitsofchurchsmallgroupsstudy>.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

7. People are more likely to practice what they learn
8. Group members can help each other in difficult times
9. Friendships start in small group and last longer.

The above stated impacts of small group activity on members make huge contribution to spiritual atmosphere of the local church. Members are happy to belong and the pastor is excited in ministering to such a congregation.

### **Summary**

Scholars agree on the point that small group ministry is biblical an integral part of the Israelites' community and of the early church. There is also an understanding that all through the centuries, community lifestyle has characterized the church and social life. During the Greco-Roman era, religious life was experienced in communities. Through the reformation period, community life gradually disappeared with institutionalized Christianity during the reign of Constantine. However, small groups have thrived through the ages until it became part of religion life in some Christian denomination like the Methodist and Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Several scholars have stressed that small groups are an option for membership care and involvement. From the African perspective, scholars explains that African have successfully lived in communities and that have given meaning to their existence. The content of community existence in any setting is holistic, religious, social, and economic. Therefore, it will be successful in the local church context to enhance membership retention.

## CHAPTER 4

### A STRATEGY FOR SMALL GROUP EMPOWERMENT

Church growth and membership retention have been an issue of concern particularly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church around Aba. Despite the existence of programs to help the church grow numerically, it has been observed that retention poses some challenges. These challenges require strategies to resolve them. Edward R. Dayton states that “strategy provides us with direction as we travel towards the future. ... A strategy enables us to concentrate all our resources on what we have determined are the essential tasks we need to perform.”<sup>1</sup> The focus of this section will outline the project setting, research design, data analysis, and program development for this project. Hence, the researcher seeks to understand and find solutions to the problem. This process will direct the research and intervention phases which includes the collection and analysis of data to resolve the problem.

#### **Project Setting: Aba South Conference**

This project is going to be implemented in Aba South Conference where there is a significant presence of Seventh-day Adventists. The territory of Aba South Conference has up to 70% urban setting. Series of evangelistic activities have been carried out at one time or the other. However, retention of members have been a significant challenge.

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<sup>1</sup>Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 299.

Hence, the researcher attempts to develop a small group approach that will aid retentions of members.

### **Historical Background of Aba**

The city of Aba is strategically located in the southeastern part of Nigeria and has a direct link to all the major cities in the southeast. Aba is one of the three major towns in Abia State of Nigeria. The town is situated within the tropical rain forest zone of West Africa. It has two local government areas—Aba South and Aba North—and has to a large extent expanded to Obi Ngwa, Osisioma Ngwa, and Ugwunagbo local government areas.<sup>2</sup> The city is one of the fastest growing cities and the commercial hub of Abia State. The city is located at the west bank of the Aba River. The town is strategically located to form an access route to the major towns of eastern Nigeria—Port Harcourt, Owerri, Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Umuahia. Its strategic nature attracts people from all parts of Nigeria. Aba is dominated by the *Ngwa* clan of the Igbo people group and is known for its natural table land. It was a market town for the Ngwa clan until the British colonial administration established a military post there. The city later became a collecting point for agricultural produce as a result of the railway route running through it from Kano to Port Harcourt. The city is a center of commerce and economic activities, and has a large supply of agricultural products. It later became the center of British Colonial Administration during the colonial era. Many people are attracted to this city in search of greener pastures. The influx of people to the city has favored economic, cultural, social,

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<sup>2</sup>Chigbu Njike, J. I. Igbokwe, and K. U. Orisakwe, “Analysis of Landuse and Landcover Changes of Aba Urban Using Medium Resolution Satellite Imageries,” accessed 6 June 2016, <http://naudigitallibrary.com/2014/01/13/analysis-of-landcover-landuse-changes-in-aba-urban-area>.

and religious activities. The dominant people group are the *Ngwa* people who are mostly Christians and very receptive.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Political Structure**

The *Ngwa* people group have existed before the advent of the British rule. They had their form of political structure, and the highest political or governmental structure was the village unit. The political structure consists of two basic institutions: the council of elders and the village assembly. The council of elders which consists of the family heads was the executive and judicial authority of the village. They met at intervals to discuss issues on administration, economy, religion, social, and judicial matters. The chairman of the elder's councils was empowered to summon a village assembly which is open to all adult males. The decisions of the council of elders are presented at a duly called village assembly. At the village assembly, final decisions were made. After the village assembly, there are other levels of administration within the village which include the kindred and household units. The kindred and household units assist greatly in holding decisions of the village assembly. Other judicial authorities were from the juju shrines and the village oracles that represent the deities through the village priests.<sup>4</sup> The people from other people's group have made a significant influence on the political structure of the *Ngwa* people. However, the increase in population and the proximity

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<sup>3</sup>Chigbu Njike, "Analysis of Landuse and Landcover."

<sup>4</sup>Ngozi M. Amaechi, "Religion in the Political Culture of *Ngwa* Society," PhD Thesis, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria, 2013, accessed 9 June 2016, <https://manlyacademia.wordpress.com/2013/05/07/religion-in-the-political-culture-of-ngwa-society/>.

of how people live in the urban area, will make it possible for small group ministry to thrive as neighborhood activity.

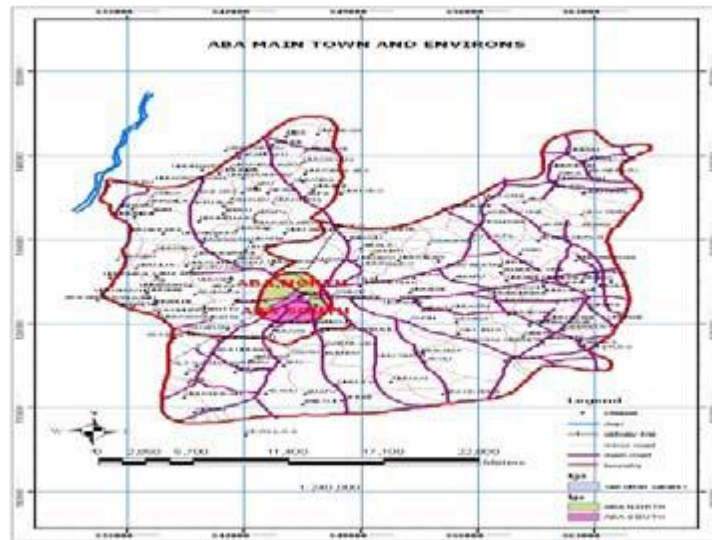


Figure 1. Location Map of Study Area<sup>1</sup>

### The Economic Values

The rich economic background of Aba has turned the place into a center of business. The city and its environment has a flat fertile soil that makes agriculture the main economic source of the indigenous people. Palm produce constitutes a major source of economic product that makes Aba a trading center. During the colonial era, the railway line that runs through Aba made the transportation of these agricultural produce to Port Harcourt for export or to northern Nigeria, where it was needed for the industries.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Chigbu Njike, "Analysis of Landuse and Landcover."

<sup>2</sup>Christian C. Ugwuzor, "*The Christianization of Ngwaland 1893-2000*" (MA Thesis, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria, 2002).

recent times, the double carriage express road running from Port Harcourt to Enugu, has enhanced conveyance of goods and wares from Aba to other parts of the country.

The population growth in Aba as 2006 national census is 593,222.<sup>3</sup> The increasing number of industrial and small scale businesses that started to flourish in Aba attracted job seekers. The city is known for its informal manufacturing and ‘Aba-made’ products that are cheap and low in quality to compare with foreign types. They were produced from clusters of migrants from Igbo communities outside Aba. The shoe making cluster was founded by migrants from the land scarce community of Mbaise in central Igbo land currently located in Imo State. The garment making cluster was pioneered by the more prosperous communities of Old Bende in the north of Abia State. The garment production was a respectable occupation to the high class social status of Bende migrants.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, Aba has oil wells along its boundaries with Rivers State and a gas pipeline from Imo River natural gas repository. Other major contributory economic ventures include textiles and palm oil along with the multi-billion Ariaria International Market that was established in 1976. Ariaria International Market is the largest market in West Africa. The city is also known for its famous handicrafts of leather, metals, and

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<sup>3</sup>Chukwudozie K. Ajaero and Patience C. Onokala, “The Effect of Rural-Urban Migration of Rural Communities of Southern Nigeria,” *International Journal of Population Research*, vol. 2013 (2013), accessed 17 June 2016, journals/ijpr/2013/610193/.

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Harriss-White and Judith Heyerreds, *The Comparative Political Economy of Development: Africa and South Asia* (London, UK: Reuteledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 158-163.

textiles. Aba is known for the historic women riot of 1929, when women were being assessed for taxation.<sup>5</sup>

Ariaria International Market is an open market that attracts investment from all over Nigeria and beyond. The Market is located along the Port Harcourt to Enugu highway. It is popularly referred to as the “China or Japan of Africa” because of its versatility in clothes making, fabrication, and leather works.<sup>6</sup> As a result, these multiple business outfits have led many to be more concerned about business affairs and pay less attention to some church activities within the week. The small group activities will be meant to create a platform for members to relate with each other within the week.

### **The socio-cultural background**

There are several sub-groups in *Igboland*, and many of them have migrated to Aba in search of greener pastures. Each of these sub-groups has their cultural inclinations which are different from each other. Igbo customs and traditions include visual arts, music and dance forms, use of dialect, as well as cultural attire. The major sub-groups in Aba are the Ngwas, Mbaises, and Bende people. These groups are diverse in their dialect, visual arts, and attire, although they are Igbos; they have different approaches to life and living. All of these create some tension when these groups meet together even in the church. People appreciate their cultural views and hold them in very high esteem and will not compromise anything that will influence it. Culturally, people do not see anything

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<sup>5</sup>Katherine Slattery, “The Igbo People – Origins and History,” accessed 6 June 2016, [www.faculty.ucr.edu/~legneref/igbo/1.html](http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~legneref/igbo/1.html).

<sup>6</sup>Emmanuel Lala, “Ariaria International Market, Aba,” accessed 8 February 2016, [www.36ng.com.ng/2015/05/06/11-biggest-and-most-popular-markets-in-nigeria-photos/2/](http://www.36ng.com.ng/2015/05/06/11-biggest-and-most-popular-markets-in-nigeria-photos/2/).

inherently evil in ethnic diversity, so long as they uphold the tenets of their cultural heritage to their satisfaction. The *Ngwa* people uphold their cultural and traditional background. However, in recent times, it has adopted part of the culture of the foreigners living among them. This has also influenced their dialect, way of life, food, dress, and more. In the midst of these influences, they still believe in one custom which is referred to as “Omenala.”<sup>7</sup>

A predominant approach to life is that they operate on a communal basis. The family unit is the smallest unit of operation, and the highest is the village. This setting determines their social life in marriage, child bearing, farming, and business.

### **Religious Background**

Religion is a word that has no generally accepted definition as it has to do with beliefs and culture of a given group of individuals. Religion regulates the moral standards of people and satisfies their basic needs. Otite and Oginowo say “religion is an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated super human beings.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Ngwa* people have a religious system that moderates their moral standards and practices. They believe and recognize God as one, and besides Him are other divinities and spiritual beings some of whom are closely associated with Him. J. S. Mbiti says these beings generally personify the activities of God, natural phenomena, and

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<sup>7</sup>Ngozi M. Amaechi, “Religion in the Political Culture of Ngwa Society.”

<sup>8</sup>Onigu Otite and W. Oginowo, *An Introduction to Sociological Studies* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 151.

objects created by God.<sup>9</sup> The focal idea in Ngwa belief in God is that He is the Creator (*Chineke*) and owner of all things.<sup>10</sup>

In the moral attributes of God, the *Ngwa* people see God as essentially good to His people. They see Him as being merciful, kind, and good, and they worship Him from this perspective. Values such as forgiveness, kindness, and tolerance are held in high esteem and sanction meted to those who fail to uphold them. People are encouraged to promote these values in the small group or family meetings.

### **The Origin of *Ngwa* man**

The present *Ngwa* land comprises seven local governments in Abia State: Aba North, Aba South, Isiala North, Isiala Ngwa South, Obingwa, Osisioma Ngwa, and Ugwunagbo. The first descendants of Ngwa people were said to have originated from a village called Umunoha in Owerri the state capital of the present day Imo State.<sup>11</sup>

The Ngwa people are of the same ancestral background with the Mbaise people. They migrated southward seeking land for settlement and acquisition of farm land. History and oral tradition hold that they arrived at the bank of Imo River during the evening hours. In their attempt to prepare an evening meal of yam, the Mbaise forebears roasted their own while the Ngwa forerunners, made up of three brothers, quickly boiled their own yam and crossed the river for the night. Before the Mbaise forebears could

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<sup>9</sup>Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 36.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>E. N. Akwaranwa, *A Politico-Cultural History of Ngwa and Ukwa People of Imo State* (Owerri, Nigeria: The Government Printer 1988), 16.

finish roasting their yam, the water level of Imo River rose to a high level and the river formed a natural boundary between the brothers.<sup>12</sup>

The Ngwa people finally settled at a place popularly known today as Okpuala-ngwa and, from there, their descendant migrated to occupy the expanse of land referred to as Ngwa land comprising seven local government areas. It is also noteworthy that the Ngwa are individualistic and competitive in nature, with a political and administrative pattern of government in each village. However, several things are done communally. They are an industrious people blessed with fertile farm land.<sup>13</sup>

Religion to the Ngwa man is a way of life. Traditional religion is practiced by the Ngwa people. Religion and worship are regarded as part of life and culture. They have strong beliefs in their ancestors and exercise lots of fear for the unknown. The religion is traced to *Onyeukwu*, their progenitor. However, the origin of their worship has not been definitely traced as there is no founder.<sup>14</sup>

God is the center of their religion, referred to as *Chineke* (God the Creator), *Chukwu* (Big God); He is worshipped directly or indirectly. Shrines are usually situated at the left side of the compound, or on the left side of the major entrance into the village. The high priest, (*Eze Mmuo*), is usually the eldest man who offers sacrifices to appease the gods. He upholds the oracles of the people and when he speaks the gods have spoken.

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<sup>12</sup>J. E. N. Nwaguru, *Aba British Rule 1896-1960* (Enugu, Nigeria: Santana Press 1973), 22.

<sup>13</sup>Akwaranwa, *A Politico-Cultural History of Ngwa*, 15-17.

<sup>14</sup>C. C. Ugwuzor, *The Christianization of Ngwaland 1893-2000*, 24-25.

The people are sincere in their desire and worship of God for fear of death by the gods. They adopt names according to the attributes of God, and from their life experiences.<sup>15</sup>

### **Presence of Christian Groups in Aba**

The presence of Christianity was felt around Aba in 1896 when British traders came through the Aba-Azumini River. In 1897, they arrived Abayi and Umuocham watersides and negotiated for land to establish their business and church. Aba witnessed the presence of three main Christian groups from 1900 to 1923: Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>16</sup>

#### **The Anglicans**

The Anglican Church is one of the mainline churches in Aba. The diocesan headquarter is St. Michael's Cathedral, believed to have been established in the 1920s. The Anglican Church in Aba was established by the efforts of oil traders from Bonny and Opobo who were trading along the water route. They evangelized their trade route with Ven. Danderson Crowther as the sole administrator of the Niger Delta Pastorate Church, who supported the missionary initiatives and, through consultations with the natives, wrote letters to the British Government to secure lands for churches and schools. From the churches established along the Azumini and Aba River banks, the gospel spread to Ukwa land, Aba Urban, Ngwa land, Umuahia, parts of Arochukwu, Bende, Isikwuato, and Okigwe. The trade settlement of the Bonny people in Aba gave rapid growth to the establishment of the church. These places, combined, made up the Aba Archdeaconry,

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<sup>15</sup>C. C. Ugwuzor, *The Christianization of Ngwaland 1893-2000*, 26-28.

<sup>16</sup>Ngodzi M. Amaechi, "Religion in the Political Culture of Ngwa Society."

which later became Aba Diocese on January 9, 1972. The Anglican Church has experienced tremendous growth over the years that led to its reorganization. The diocese was reorganized to have Ukwa Diocese and Umuahia Diocese in 1994, then Isiala Ngwa, Aba Ngwa North, and Isiala Ngwa South Diocese in 2007.<sup>17</sup> Right Rev. Christian C. Ugwuzor is the current bishop of the Aba diocese.

### **Roman Catholics**

The presence of the Catholic Church was felt in Aba in 1916 through the effort of Rev. Fr. Cornelius Liddance. He began his visit to Aba from Emekuku, Owerri, at the invitation of Mr. Thomas Emereuwa Otigbuo who sought the presence of the Catholic Church in his community: Umuko. By 1917, Rev. Fr. Liddance led a formal mission to Aba and established what is known today as Christ the King Church (CKC). Christ the King Catholic Cathedral is the diocesan headquarters for the Catholics in Aba and its environs. The church was also received in Amairi in 1917 and Mbutu Ngwa in 1918. Ohuru received Catholic faith in 1916 by a group from Calabar. In 1927, Rev. Fr. Daniel Walsh established the church in Obuzor. The Catholic Church still has strong holds in these communities and beyond. The work of the Catholic mission was supervised from *Emekuku*, Owerri, until 1958 when the Umuahia Diocese was organized and Aba axis assigned to Umuahia under the leadership of Most Rev. Anthony Nwedo. As a result of the progress of the church in Aba territory, the Catholic Diocese of Aba was organized in July 1990 under the leadership of Most Rev. Dr. Vincent Valentine Ezeonyia. Over the years, the church has established schools and hospitals to meet the immediate needs of

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<sup>17</sup>Amusan Oladayo, "The History of Aba," accessed 9 June 2015, <http://www.placesachieve.blogspot.nl/2015/01/the-history-of-aba>.

their host communities.<sup>18</sup> Also within this period came the *Qua Iboe* Church, the Methodist Church, Salvation Army, Holy Sabbath Mission, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church into Aba, and these churches have made significant role in Aba. Later came the Pentecostals, who have turned the city to a beehive of religious activities, as there is a lot of competition among themselves and with the orthodox churches.

### **Holy Sabbath Mission**

Holy Sabbath Mission was established by one Chief Ekeke Lolo *Nwaibari* one of the sons of *Nwaibari of Akwete Ndoki*. He fought as a soldier in the British Army during the World War 1. As a result of the war, he travelled to many countries and particularly Israel where he spent the most part of the war. In Israel, he got acquainted with Judaism and was impressed by the mode of worship and he embraced it. When he returned by the end of the World War 1, he began to preach his new found faith accompanied with healing. He established his church around the Aba waterside and made many converts to his church.<sup>19</sup>

Okechukwu Ekeke, a grandson of Chief Ekeke *Nwaibari*, it is claimed one day in his ministration prophesied that some white men would be coming who had the truth of the Sabbath and that they would pay him a courtesy call. To the astonishment of his members, it was not long after the prediction that Pastor Jesse Clifford came with the

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<sup>18</sup>Vincent E. Ezeonyia, "Brief History of Catholic Diocese of Aba," accessed 8 June 2015, [www.catholicdiocese.org](http://www.catholicdiocese.org).

<sup>19</sup>Okechukwu Humphrey Ekeke, Executive Secretary, Aba West Conference, interview by author, Nigeria, Akwete, 03 December 2015.

Adventist message and paid a courtesy call on him, and learned that there were some Sabbath observers around Aba metropolis.<sup>20</sup>

However, as the years went by, Chief Ekeke the prophet decided to re-locate to Akwete his hometown because he was losing his members to the Adventists that were gaining more influence in Aba. He succeeded in destroying the god *Iyieke* which was worshipped on the *Eke* day by the people of Akwete. Chief Ekeke Nwaibari established there his Holy Sabbath Mission. He was both the prophet and high priest, and could perform healing for various strange ailments. The church extended to other parts of the then East Central State of Nigeria and beyond. The headquarters of the church is still in Akwete where the members come for Passover feast and other ritual worship every month of April. Chief Ekeke Lolo Nwaibari died in 1957 but the church is still in existence with his sons leading out. However, the church have developed many brands as a result of lack of proper administrative setup.<sup>21</sup>

### **Seventh-day Adventist Church in Aba**

Before the arrival of Seventh-day Adventist Church in *Ngwa* land, the Holy Sabbath Mission was already present. It is said to have been established sometime after the World War 1. However, the precise date is not certain.

### **Early Adventist Mission in *Ngwa* Land**

The year 1923 is significant to the establishment of Adventism in the eastern parts of Nigeria, beginning within the enclaves of *Ngwa* land, and spreading to other sections

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<sup>20</sup>Okechukwu Humphrey Ekeke, Executive Secretary, Aba West Conference, interview by author, Nigeria, Akwete, 03 December 2015.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

of the region. The little effort of Pastor Jesse Clifford and his wife, Catharine, which was sited at Umuola, Aba, covers all the eastern states of Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers.

Pastor Jesse Clifford and his wife arrived Aba from England, May 1, 1923 to serve as missionaries. At the time they arrived, they were confronted with the presence of several small groups of Sabbath keepers. These groups were zealous about their Sabbath faith and needed to be taught more about the Bible Sabbath.<sup>22</sup>

However, Clifford was not deterred by confrontations he faced from the Sabbath keepers. The new congregation of believers he established supported his efforts. Pastor Clifford connected with some Adventist believers from Sierra Leone who were in Aba, who gave him great support.<sup>23</sup> William McClement, who was the leader of the Adventist work in Nigeria at Ibadan, gave this initial report of his work in Aba; “in 1923, my wife and I were asked to pioneer the work in Ibo country. There were at that time several groups of people who called themselves ‘Native Church of Christ Sabbath Keepers’ or other names.”<sup>24</sup> He arrived in Aba to meet various Sabbath keeping groups. When these group met with this white missionary, they were desirous to have him teach them about the Sabbath. However, Pastor Jesse Clifford had to work for his own converts. He also established a school that helped him to teach the new converts and his students he used as evangelist to assist in the propagation gospel. The student helped in quickly spreading the

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<sup>22</sup>David O. Babalola, *Sweet Memories of Our Pioneers*. (Lagos, Nigeria: Emaphine Reprographis, 2001), 79.

<sup>23</sup> David A. Iziama, *A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Eastern States of Nigeria*. (Aba, Nigeria: Span, 1973), 11.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

gospel to Obete, Umuobiakwa, Umuakpara, and Umuocha in 1924. By 1928, the work at Umuola was re-organized into four districts—Aba, Umuobiakwa, Umuakpara, and Umuocha.

In an interview, Pa Solomon Agharaumuna, who became a Seventh-day Adventist in November 1923, states that the church at its nascent stage was referred to as “the church of the biscuit woman” (*chochi nwayi ikika*) since Mrs. Clifford would serve them biscuit always at the end of every Sabbath worship. The church worshipped in their little garage, before they eventually erected a church building with a roof of iron sheets later referred to as the train house. Agharaumuna further explains that Pastor J. Clifford came at the time when Rev. A. V. Wilcox, who arrived in Aba in 1917 was trying to find a footing for the *Qua Iboe* Mission in *Ngwa* land, and both were residing at Ogbor village close to Aba waterside. Both had a treaty as Christian Churches in Aba within the period have dominant territories. Rev. Wilcox concentrated his mission along Ikot Ekpene Road while Jesse Clifford concentrated along the Aba-Umuahia road. Adventists received strong support from the warrant chiefs as they would take permission from them before evangelizing any community.<sup>25</sup>

From this humble beginning the church has expanded to the nine eastern states of Nigeria, comprising twelve conferences, three missions, and a mission station; in 2004, the territory attained the status of a union. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates a hospital, four secondary schools, several nursery and primary schools and is on the verge

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<sup>25</sup>Agharaumuna, a retired teacher, aged 99 years in Umuobiakwa, Obi Ngwa L. G. A., interview by the author, November 29, 2015.

of commencing a university. The current membership of the church is a hundred and thirty-two thousand, one hundred, and forty-two.<sup>26</sup>

### **Background of Adventist Church in Osioma**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church from its inception quickly extended to Osioma area which is a part of Aba. The churches selected for this project are situated within Osioma Ngwa local government area, where about 75% of the membership in Aba South Conference are resident. This part of Aba has hosted the Adventist faith since 1923. Osioma is the location of the headquarters of Seventh-day Adventist Church in eastern Nigeria. Eastern Nigeria Union Conference was established in 2004 from former Nigeria Union Mission. In the same vein, following the growth in East Nigeria Conference, there was a re-organization in 2012 that gave rise to Aba South Conference, where the researcher will implement this project. The conference, by December 2015 had 29 districts, 127 churches, 48 workers, and a membership strength of 20,339.<sup>27</sup> The Churches where this project will be implemented are Abayi, Umuode, Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, and Amato.

**Abayi Church.** Abayi Church is strategically situated along the Aba Owerri Road and has a membership of 520. The church was established around 1930 from the parent congregation, Umuocham Church. The membership is constituted by people from various ethnic background and culture which makes it peculiar to this study. The members of this church are involved in various vocations. Here, we find manufacturers, civil servants,

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<sup>26</sup>Executive Secretary's Report, 2016 Year End Meeting, December 9-12, 2015, Ayaba-Umueze, Aba.

<sup>27</sup>Statistical Report, December 2015, Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Alaoma, Osioma – Aba.

politicians, lecturers, business people, and traders. The church has experienced growth since its existence and has established eight more branches. The church is challenged to plant new churches as a result of the fact that it lacks space for infrastructural expansion. As a result, planting new churches became an option for membership outflow. The church became a district headquarter following the re-organization of Umuocham district in May 2002. The district was reorganized in 2012 and recently 2016.

**Umuode Church.** Umuode Church is one of the fastest growing churches due to the fact that Ariaria International Market is located within its territory. The church has a membership strength of 616. The church was established around 1950 by Abayi Church and became a district headquarter in 2012. Also, its territory is densely populated giving rise to the relocation of our members who trade in Ariaria Market to the area. The membership is made of people from diverse backgrounds. Many of the members are into various brands of business in Ariaria Market. The territory poses a viable opportunity for evangelism that gave rise to an active evangelism team in the local church.

**Umuakpara Church.** Umuakpara Church is one of the oldest churches in Osioma. The church was established in 1924 through the effort of one of the students of the missionary in Aba, Jesse Clifford. The church grew and expanded to other communities, and was one of the first four districts organized for administrative purposes in 1928. It is from this church that the gospel spread to parts of Osioma Ngwa, Isiala Ngwa South, and Isiala Ngwa North local government areas. The territory once covered by this church now has thirteen districts. This church once had a prominent primary school in the era when schools were managed by the missions. The membership of the local church is 451. The territory of this church is becoming densely populated as a result

of urban migration and its popular local market, *ekeakpara*, that attracts buyers and sellers from all over *Ngwaland* and beyond. This church is mission oriented and has produced an outreach group known as the Sowers Evangelism Group. This group has a membership of over seventy people and has existed for fourteen years. They have done mission to several communities and have assisted in planting many churches.

**Owo/Umuosi Church.** The church was established around 1930 through one late Nwuzor who attracted the gospel through his friend from Umuakpara. Owo/Umuosi Church once extended to some parts of Rivers State where they established five churches that re-aligned to Rivers Conference in 2008. It became a district headquarters in 1978 and since then has been re-organized twice. The current membership is 486. About 95% of the membership are from the host community.

**Amator Church.** Amato Church is one of the newest district headquarters in Aba South Conference. Re-organized from Akpaa I District in 2015. The church is situated in a village about twelve kilometers away from Aba. The church is located in the least populated area of Osioma Ngwa local government area. Amato Church was established in 1947 from Umuocha District and has a membership of 204. The membership are predominantly farmers, and many of the young people have migrated to the urban areas.

Table 1 (next page) shows the date when the churches studied were established, re-organized, and the membership as at 2015.

*Table 1. Summary of Church Data*

Name of Church	Date of Establishment	Dates of Re-organization	Membership
<b>Abayi</b>	1930	2002, 2012, 2016	520
<b>Umuode</b>	1950	---	616
<b>Umuakpara</b>	1924	1975, 1978, 1995,2012	451
<b>Owo/Umuosi</b>	1930	2009	486
<b>Amator</b>	1947	-----	204

Table 1 summarizes the historical and membership data of the churches selected for this project.

### **Strategy for Ministry Context**

The strategy for ministry context will outline the stages in research design and analysis. This will include the type of research, selection of participants, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, as well as designing the steps to intervention and observe what may likely be a limitation to the project. This project will be designed for implementation in all churches in Aba South Conference. However, the following districts will be used for testing the design: Abayi, Umuode, Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, and Amator.

### **Research Design**

The design for this research will include the type of research, rationale of the research, appropriateness of the research, population and sampling of participants, criteria for the sampling, and the instrument used for the project. The research design will guide

the implementation and evaluation of the project in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

### **Type of Research**

The research was conducted using the qualitative approach. This method is descriptive in nature, uses observations, interactions, and interviews to gather data on people's experience about issued around them. Qualitative research design has five basic approaches namely; historical research, ethnography, grounded theory, case study research, and narrative research.

### **Rationale for Selection**

The researcher seeks a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of the study. Qualitative design uses conversations, interviews, life experiences, stories, and more to investigate and understand the way people create meaning to life.<sup>28</sup>The study used small group empowerment as an approach for membership retention in Aba South Conference. Hence, the population for the study was selected by purposive sampling from the six churches selected within Aba South Conference. The pastors in these five districts were interviewed on personal basis.

### **Appropriateness to Study**

The appropriateness to the study was to determine the community experiences of members in small groups. The impact of studying the Bible together, praying together, sharing of Christian experiences through testimonies and witnessing to others. It also

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<sup>28</sup>Robert Wood Johnson, "Narrative Analysis," *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*, accessed 6 June 2016, [www.qualres.org/HomeNarr-3823.html](http://www.qualres.org/HomeNarr-3823.html).

investigated how it benefited the individuals and the church. The purpose the study is to develop a model ministry program to be adopted for membership retention. Potential converts are lost each year because there are not enough lay members to assist pastors in doing follow up. The appropriateness of the study is to empower members to organize small groups for membership retention. The churches selected for the study had no small group ministries. Small groups were organized for the purpose of this research to represent the population of the study to observe how it will enhance retention.

### **Population and Sample of Participants**

The criteria for sampling of participants include: men, women, and youths considering the various professions and trades of the members—civil servants, traders, business persons, students, and farmers in the various category of churches selected. The small groups have a population of 8-10 and a group was used as sample for each church to participate in the focus group discussion. The sampling of the churches was done as follows:

1. Churches in the city where members are busy with day to day life of the urban area.
2. Churches in the rural area where members are not directly involved with the busy life of city areas
3. Churches that have core outreach groups that were not trained for the research but will participate in the study for purposes of comparison.

The reason guiding the selection is that the churches in the first category are made up of business people, civil servants, traders and manufacturers. People within this category tend to be occupied more with economic activities. The second category are people in the

rural area who tend to be natural with their environment. The third category are people who operate evangelism groups that are similar to small group approach.

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

This is the criteria for sampling the procedure of selecting the participants.

1. The specific sampling used is the purposive approach. Since the entire territory proposed for the study cannot be sampled, the purposive method gives room for selection that met the standard for the project.
2. The small groups used for the discussions and the membership of the groups is 8-10 persons. The groups were selected from each of the churches to represent the population. For the outreach groups selected for comparison to this study was represented by 6-10 persons.
3. This number of persons were selected to serve as focus group in each of the churches. The groups were interviewed in their natural setting. The outreach groups will be interviewed in their local churches.
4. The selected churches targeted for the implementation of the study are: Abayi, Umuode, Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, and Amator. Following is the step-by-step analysis of why they were selected.

**Abayi Church.** This church was chosen to represent the churches in the urban center. The membership is composed of civil servants, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and traders. Every area of business life is found in this local church. The membership in this church is made up of people of various ethnic and cultural background; and there are variations in their dialects. The research is to determine how effective the membership

will be involved in small group ministries considering their economic background which poses challenge to other church weekly programs.

**Umuode Church.** This church is in the urban area. The membership is predominantly traders and artisans. There are few civil servant and business people. The purpose is to determine to what extent they will be involve in the small group program in the local church. This church also has people coming from various ethnic backgrounds. Second, there is an active outreach group that meets regularly for studies and witness to the neighborhoods on a weekly basis. The organizing and training of the group was not done by the researcher nevertheless they will be used for purposes of making a contrast.

**Umuakpara Church.** This church is located in a sub-urban area. About 70% of the membership are from Umuakpara Community. The church was selected because of the Sowers Evangelism Group in the church. This group has operated for fourteen years and has a membership strength of over seventy persons with varied ethnic background. This group is self-sponsored. They are hired by other districts for evangelisms. Whenever they raise money to embark on campaigns to the un-entered areas of Anambra state, Ebonyi state, Enugu states, and northern part of Abia state, where a greater percentage of their members come from. Little is done around their base church. The purpose is to determine in contrast how this type of group can meet the needs of retention.

**Owo/Umuosi Church.** This church has a rural setting that is predominantly farmers and rural traders. Few civil servants and low scale business people are found in this local church. The purpose of choosing the church is to discover the effectiveness of the project in contrast to the urban churches. About 95% of the membership are from its host community.

**Amator Church.** This church is far away from the urban center. It is a rural church that is mostly farmers. The church has more of elderly persons as urban migration has taken most young people to the city. The members are indigenes of the host community. The church was selected to test how effective the small group project will work in this setting.

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments that was used to collect data include structured set of survey questions and observation forms. These instruments were appropriate in that the semi-structured survey questions was used for personal interviews with the pastors. At the end of the project, another set of structured questions was used to interview the focus groups about their experiences on the program. The observation forms were used to monitor the activities of the small groups during implementation. These instruments are valid in that the population can manage it within their context. It will be reliable also as it showed the progression of the activities of the small groups.

### **Data Analysis**

Having selected the research methodology and the population for the project sampled, this segment investigated into the procedures the data was collected, presented, and the limitations experienced during the implementation of this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection began in August 2014 and ended April 2015. First, observation forms were useful in collecting data on the weekly activities of the small groups

organized for the purpose of this research. Four observation forms were designed as follows:<sup>29</sup>

- a. Registration form for each group (Form A)
- b. Reporting form for each local church (Form B)
- c. Reporting form for each district (Form C)
- d. Director's Monthly Analysis form (Form D)

The supervisors used the observation forms to supervise and coordinate the groups based on the determined criteria. This project will be evaluated using the qualitative research design which is an interactive approach on people's experience over certain issues.<sup>30</sup> The responses gather helped to understand the impact of small groups in the spiritual lives of the members.

Therefore, to get a complete and accurate information, the interaction was recorded into audiovisuals. The evaluation team made up of three pastors were trained for the purpose and have skills in cinematography. The interviews were conducted and recorded and produced into compact disc. The six recorded interviews have been transcribed to enable analysis. The interviews were recorded at the approval of the focus groups. Six focus groups were organized for interviewed. Each group representing the churches that was selected putting into consideration age and gender to present fair representation of the opinion of the members. The date, time, and venue for the focus group meetings were arranged with the groups through the pastors.

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<sup>29</sup>Appendix A.

<sup>30</sup>Carol M. Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey: A practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Cowin, 2010), 143.

## Presentation and Description of Findings

It is pertinent to know the statistical data for the churches being studied, in order to understand the flow of membership, baptism, and apostasy and to be able to determine the problem. Aba South Conference was established in 2012, and this statistical data covers 2012-2015. Within this period, there was a membership audit to determine the actual membership of each local church. The data displayed below were collected from the office of the executive secretary of Aba South Conference.

Table 2 gives details of annual membership growth, baptism, and apostasy in Abayi Church from 2012-2015.

*Table 2. Abayi Church Data Analysis*

Year	Membership	Baptism	Apostasy
<b>2012</b>	1,173	35	--
<b>2013</b>	1,247	62	12
<b>2014</b>	1,298	71	20
<b>2015</b>	1,287	56	67

Abayi Church dropped about 30% of the total baptism over the period studied and as at 2015 the ratio of baptism to membership is 1:23. This is an indication that needs to be arrested timely.

Table 3 (next page) shows details of member growth, baptism, and apostasy in Umuode Church from 2012-2015.

*Table 3. Umuode Church Data Analysis*

Year	Membership	Baptism	Apostasy
<b>2012</b>	671	31	
<b>2013</b>	636	74	74
<b>2014</b>	687	44	1
<b>2015</b>	743	79	32

Umuode Church lost about 20% of her membership from 2012-2015. Though the rate is low, it needs to be checked constantly and improved upon. Baptism to membership ratio is 1:9.

Table 4 shows details of membership, baptism, and apostasy in Umuakpara Church from 2012-2015.

*Table 4. Umuakpara Church Data Analysis*

Year	Membership	Baptism	Apostasy
<b>2012</b>	1,392	22	
<b>2013</b>	742	82	734
<b>2014</b>	788	42	--
<b>2015</b>	728	40	100

Umuakpara Church lost about 368% of the membership over baptism. Instead of retaining those baptized, old members were leaving the church. Ratio of baptism to membership is 1:18.

Table 5 (next page) is details of membership, baptism, and apostasy in Owo/Umuosi Church.

*Table 5. Owo/Umuosi Church Data Analysis 2012-2016*

Year	Membership	Baptism	Apostasy
<b>2012</b>	1,574	59	
<b>2013</b>	1,622	62	14
<b>2014</b>	1,647	22	--
<b>2015</b>	769	35	913
		178	927

Owo/Umuosis church lost a considerable part of her membership over the period. They baptized 178 and lost 927 having a difference of 749 which is about 420% loss. Though there was membership audit in 2015, this loss has accumulated over a period of time. This is an indication of lack of membership care.

Table 6 below gives details of membership, baptism, and apostasy in Amator Church.

*Table 6. Amator Church Data Analysis 2012-2015*

Year	Membership	Baptism	Apostasy
<b>2012</b>	485	--	--
<b>2013</b>	254	--	--
<b>2014</b>	248	--	--
<b>2015</b>	265	17	--

Amator, as a new district, have no data for comparison. However, it could be observed that the church lost 220 members within four years which is about 80% loss.

The above tables give information on membership trend in the churches. It is observed that there is a significant membership loss as against gain in Umuakpara,

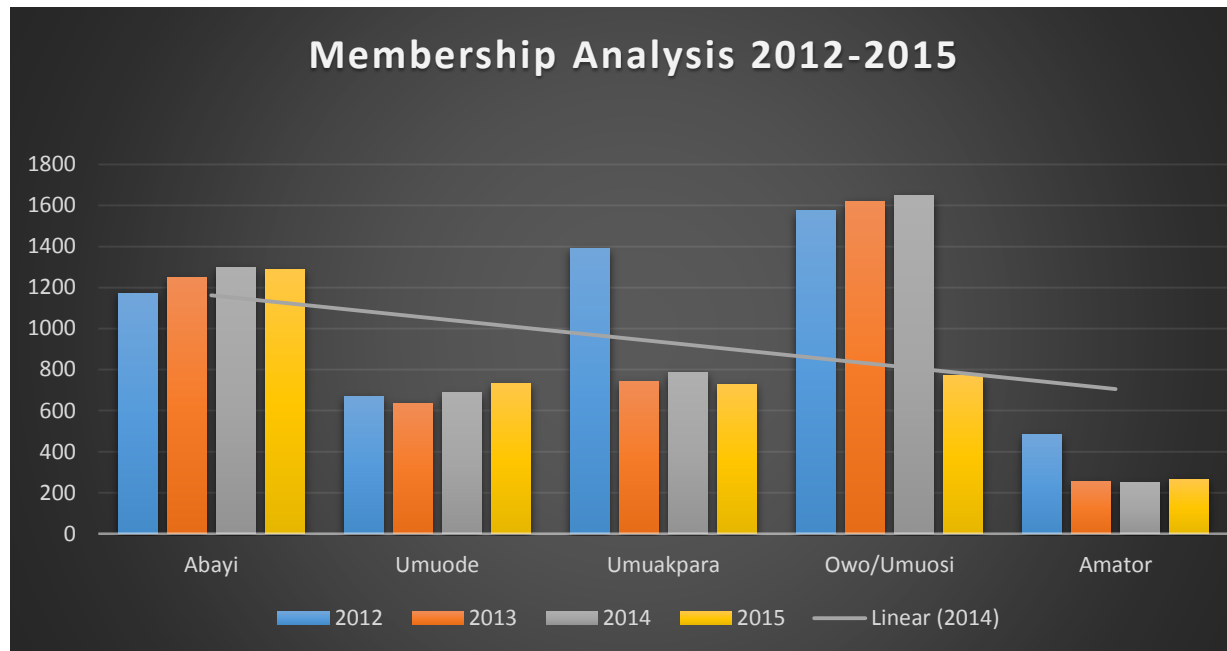
Owo/Umuosi, and Amator. The data is showing an approximate loss of 50% of their members in 2012-2015. These tables depict the level of apostasy in these church. It is observe that membership loss is greater than membership gain. This is an ugly trend that needs an intervention. Amator church has no data on this table as the church was organized into a new district and the data were not available from the former district.

Table 7 below show summary of annual membership, baptism, and apostasy in the five churches studied from 2013-2015.

*Table 7. Cumulative Statistical Data Analysis 2013-2015*

Item	2013	2014	2015
<b>Membership</b>	4,501	4,667	3,783
<b>Baptism</b>	281	179	227
<b>Apostasy</b>	834	21	1,112

Table 6 depicts an annually data for membership, baptism, and apostasy. Membership loss is greater than membership gain. The membership declined from 4,501 to 3,783. Within the period, total baptism stood at 687 while total apostasy stood at 1,967. The difference between gain and loss is -1280 which is approximately 200% loss. The implication is that this loss was from those who had been in the church for some time, not necessarily those who were baptized within the period of study. Annual membership loss is greater than annual baptism. The linear chart below explains it further.



*Chart 1. Membership*

This line graph depicts the membership trend from 2012 to 2015. It is a line graph which is commonly used to display change on dependent data over a period of time. Analyzing the chart, approximate membership of the five churches as at 2012 is 1,200 and at 2015 is 700. This shows that there is an average loss of 500 members every year. The membership audit revealed cumulative apostasy; an evidence that these churches direly needs a retention strategy. Before close attention was given to these five churches involved in this study, no one could have imagined the level of apostasy or backsliding that had occurred within them.

The pastors in these churches were personally interviewed about the drop in membership of their churches. When asked what brought about the drop in the membership, they similarly responded that it was a trend that they met and they cannot easily describe how it happened. When inquiry was made concerning programs that can help members study the Bible, it was discovered that such programs were not in place.

The ones available were not coordinated and the pastors were not involved. The major programs available are the routine activities such as the mid-week prayer meeting, Friday vesper service, and monthly baptized member's class. Lack of programs led to the establishment of the Sowers group in Umuakpara Church and the one at Umuode Church, but they are not coordinated by the local church leadership and that is why they have not made significant impact among the membership. These churches have only one program that tend to attract more attendance than the other programs and that is the prayer and fasting meetings. Incidentally, the program is conducted at least twice in the month. This is an indication that the membership need something beyond the regular programs of the church that will address their needs.

From the interaction with the pastors, it is observed that the prayer and fast programs address their needs better. Then, considering the African background where people believe that there is a reason for any life challenge which requires a force beyond them to address it, this African worldview is dictating people's response to church programs, and the church needs to establish programs to address such issues. On this note, it can be implied that those dropping out of church have not met their needs and as a result, they drop from membership in search for where their needs will be addressed and those who could not drop formed evangelism groups to help themselves. Small group programs are not present in these churches and considering the African background where people live for each other in a community setting, small group ministries seemed to be the most appropriate program that can help revitalize the membership to enhance retention. It is on this note that the researcher decided to do a project on small group empowerment as an approach for membership retention.

The pastors overseeing these churches have served them for a minimum of three years. The personal interviews with them, inspired the researcher interest to do a small group study with their churches using them as pilot leaders. They were used as pilot group leaders as they have more information on the dynamics of the churches.

### **Analysis of Data**

The researcher will analyze the data collected after transcription of the interview following five steps: review of transcription, organization of responses, grouping of responses, analysis, and validity of findings. The analysis of the data was done thematically based on the responses of the focus groups. The steps adopted for the analysis are as follows:

Step 1: Transcription—the six recorded compact disc were transcribed and reviewed. The response were categorized in themes as it reflects the questions.

Step 2: Organizing the responses—the responses were grouped according to the themes. The responses were reviewed highlighting specific issues to march the categories.

Step 3: Grouping of the responses—the responses of each focus group was categorized in themes to facilitate analysis. Nine groups emerged from the groupings for analysis.

Step 4: Analysis—the analysis to the responses in reference to the research questions was conducted and findings made.

Step 5: Validity of findings—nine themes that were consistent in the data collected. Comparison was made to validate the findings with the theological foundation and literature review of this project.

## **Designing of Intervention**

The comprehensive effort needed to improve membership retention include small group ministries, training and empowerment, mobilization, and monitoring. This intervention will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated over a period of fourteen months (March 2014-April 2015). The strategies to this intervention include material development, organizing an implementation team, and evaluation. This intervention will apply to all churches in Aba South Conference with particular interest to the five churches selected.

## **Material Development**

The material development for the research will adopt the following steps:

1. The researcher will designed a training program to be used in empowering the pastors and laity for small group ministries.
2. Collect statistical data from conference secretariat and from the district pastors mentioned for this study.
3. Provide materials for small group studies.
4. The selected study materials for small group studies include: *Bible Study Made Easy* (Translated Version- *Oziza Chineke Zara Ajuju Gi Nile*) and *Christ Our Saviour (Kraist Onye Nzoputa Ayi: Translate Version* by the permission of the author, Onaolapo Ajibade)
5. Organizing small groups in the churches (6-10 members)
6. Develop a program that will facilitate the implementation of the project tagged: “Pentecost 2015”
7. Produce schedule for implementation of the project.

8. Design a zonal structure for implementation, mobilization, and supervision
9. Develop observation forms for supervision
10. Design structured test questions for evaluation

### **Research Team**

The research team will be organized in groups for easy follow-up of activities.

Group 1: All the pastors

The district pastors were in this group. They were trained on the processes for implementation. They assisted in organizing the small groups in their various local churches and coordinate the groups using the personal ministries leaders of the churches. The personal ministries leaders of the local churches worked with the pastors in coordinating the groups in their various local churches.

Group 2: Selected pastors

The selected pastors mobilized and coordinated the small groups in each zones to assist the district pastors in small group management. They monitored the small groups using the observation forms meeting the group at study venue and at stipulated time. The personal ministries leaders assisted the pastors in the coordination.

Group 3: Conference Personal Ministries Department

Those involved in the group were the director of the department and the researcher. They conducted training in the constituted zones to consolidate what the district pastors have done. They supervised the pastors in groups 1 and 2. The pastor in group report monthly to the office and the analysis made for follow-up. The personal ministries director reports to the researcher with

the pastors in group 2. By this structure, the groups were managed through the implementation stage of the project.

#### Group 4: Evaluation Team

This team will include three pastors in addition to the researcher. The team members will be trained on the process of data collection and organizing the various groups to be interviewed.

### **Limitations**

However, there are few negative impacts though it cannot be seen as weakness for the project. The churches are yet to experience 100% involvement to the project. Second, the financial implications were not considered when the program was launched. However, the conference intervened in assisting with study materials and printing.

### **Summary**

This chapter highlighted the historical, political, social and economic background of the ministry context for this project—Aba South Conference. It also provides an overview of the religion of the people and the role of other Christian groups operating in the environment. The project was implemented in selected church to validate its effectiveness. The research design is outlined stating step-by-step approach to apply an intervention using qualitative approach to collected data for membership retention and how it can be effectively implemented. The concept of small group empowerment will be an on-going process in the local churches. The main focus of chapter 5 will be the implementation of the model in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The last chapter explained the method and procedure used in designing the strategy implementation. The model was presented to the conference and the local churches through seminars and trainings. Members were informed and encouraged towards an awareness that retention strategy needs to be effected in our churches. The strategy on how to accomplish the desired task of developing a model ministry to assist pastors and lay persons for sustainable membership retention and growth for Aba South Conference was successfully executed. The strategy was based on five activities: (1) Material design, (2) Implementation schedule (3) Formation of implementation team/training, (4) Implementation, and (5) Monitoring/evaluation. This chapter will give a description of how the project was implemented, observations made from the execution, reports presented, conclusions drawn from various stages in the execution, and recommendations made to the executive committee of the Aba South Conference and the local churches.

#### **Project Preparation**

The execution of this project was quite an illuminating exercise because it afforded the researcher an opportunity to know that small groups are biblical approach to organize people for fellowship and nurture. Though public evangelism appears to be the principal method Seventh-day Adventists have settled on for presenting the gospel, small

group ministries will be an effective approach to complement evangelism and assimilate new members in the church.

### **Brief Description of Theological Foundation**

The theological foundation of this study was traced from small group ministry God was involved. The group in Eden had a member of three individuals—God and two humans, who interacted with each other. In the wilderness, it was God’s organizational structure to move the people in line with His plan. Moses organizing the people from a large group to small groups which afforded him the opportunity to involve everyone. In the New Testament, Jesus also started with a small group of twelve people. The disciple continued with the approach in the new church after the Pentecost. Small groups afforded them opportunity to bond with each other, empower one another, and groom the new members that were baptized.

### **Brief Description of Literature Review**

The literature review for the ministry context emphasizes that small group is biblical and an integral part of church life. Malphurs observes that the problem of the early church was a challenge of membership explosion, but they were able to manage it by restructuring into small groups.<sup>1</sup> George Janvier refers to small groups as a discipleship approach to spiritual life. He notes that involvement is the human aspect while God plays the role for the individual’s spiritual growth.<sup>2</sup> From an African

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<sup>1</sup>Malphurs Aubrey, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 212.

<sup>2</sup>Janvier George, *Evangelism and Discipleship: Training for Africa* (Nigeria, Kaduna: Baraka, 1999), 61.

perspective, Kwame Gyekye says that Africans live in communities that afford members of the community opportunity to demonstrate a concern for the well-being of others.<sup>3</sup> The African communal lifestyle and family bonding creates a forum for small groups to thrive. Therefore, small group empowerment will equip the members for discipleship to resolve the challenges of retention.

### **Brief Description of Project Context**

The project will be implemented in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the following churches have been selected for this purpose—Abayi, Umuode, Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, and Amator. These churches are situated around Aba a major town in Abia State.

### **Permission**

Permission to implement this project was sought from the following entities:

1. The Executive Committee of Aba South Conference authorized the implementation of the project based on the researcher's request on October 19, 2014.<sup>4</sup>
2. The researcher sought for authorization from the five local churches selected for this project.
3. The local church board and church at business authorized the request.

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<sup>3</sup>Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 35.

<sup>4</sup>Appendix B.

## **Material Development**

Material for this project was designed following biblical foundation for small groups. Relationship is an outstanding idea that runs through the Bible was experienced in community settings. Kurt Johnson observes we need each other in small groups because it is God's plan.<sup>5</sup> Relationship is at the heart of small group ministries. For instance, the Eden garden was a meeting point for God with Adam and Eve, the tabernacle was the point of meeting the Israelites in the wilderness, and the upper room for the disciples who were waiting for the promised power. The community approach found in the Bible that generated relationship form the background to plan the design of this project. The upper room template was used to prepare a power point seminar material captioned, "Pentecost Again: A Small Group Approach." The goal was that the Pentecost experience powered the church beyond Jerusalem to the amazement of the disciples. The small group template were used to consolidate the church after Pentecost as believers met regularly in homes. The 120 members in the upper room represents the church that is trained in small group ministry. Because they have been equipped and empowered, the Pentecost experience energized them to implement what they were already prepared to do. Comparing this to the church in the twenty-first century, if the church is trained and empowered, will also do same as they are energized by the Holy Spirit.

The study materials chosen were in English and the local dialect. The researcher produced these materials and more at the authorization of Eastern Nigeria Union Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Director.

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<sup>5</sup>Kurt W. Johnson, *Small Groups for the End-time. A Practical Guide to the Twenty-first Century*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 25.

The books are: 1) *Bible Study Made Easy (Oziza Chineke Zara Ajuju Gi Nile)*  
2) *Christ Our Saviour (Kraist Onye Nzoputa Ayi)*.

These study materials are user-friendly and self-explanatory, particularly to meet the theological understanding of the users.

The next material produced were observation forms to enable monitoring of the activities of each small group. The personal ministries leaders of the local churches were to submit observation forms to the pastor monthly and the pastor in turn made compilation for all the reports in the observation forms to the district pastor, then to the conference.

For purposes of follow-up and further studies for prospects, the researcher appealed to the conference executive committee to authorize the establishment of correspondence school at the conference. The request was approved and two pastors were put in charge to coordinate the school.

### **Process of Implementation**

Implementation is a process of executing a giving assignment for the purpose it was meant. This section will discuss the implementation process of the project which includes implementation schedule, implementation team, and evaluation team. It will highlight stage by stage demonstration for the intervention. It will also discuss the activities of the small groups used in this intervention and how they were monitored before evaluation.

#### **Implementation schedule**

The researcher planned the presentation of the project in all the churches of Aba South Conference with particular interest to the selected churches. The project was

planned for one year captioned “Pentecost 2015.” The implementation of this project was planned to run from March 2014-April 2015. It was planned in this order:

- March 2014 – Training of members of implementation group 1—(the pastors).
- April-June 2014 – Pastors to run the same training in their local churches and to organize small groups. They were to appoint leaders for the groups and train them. The districts were put in zones and the conference appoint supervisors to work with the small groups.
- July 2014 – Seminars for the small group leaders and the conference supervisors was conducted in the zones with: (1.) Managing Small Group Ministries, and (2.) Aba South Conference Outreach Plan: “Pentecost 2015.” These seminars were handled by the researcher and the personal ministries director of Aba South Conference, Pastor Dobson Levi-Ahuama.
- August-October 2014 Small Group Activities at the group centers. The local church personal ministries leaders were coordinating the groups and the conference supervisors monitoring and mobilizing.
- November-December 2014 – Small group activities continues after a two weeks break in November.
- January 2015 – A two week break in preparation for the General Conference “Operation Global Rain.” The “Operation Global Rain” ten days program was organized to have morning and evening sessions. The morning was for fellowship in the church and evening was for fellowship in the small groups. The idea was to create a platform to introduce non-Adventist friends in the groups to church

fellowship. The “Operation Global Rain” program created a platform to prepare for the “Pentecost 2015 Small Group Campaign.

- February 2015 – Small Group Activities continued
- March 2015 – March 7-21, 2015 was used to execute the “Pentecost 2015” Campaign.
- April 2015 – Evaluation using the evaluation team.

### **Formation of Implementation team/training**

When the implementation schedule and plan was formulated and presented to the pastors during the usual month-end meeting of February 2014, the plan was adopted through the support of the conference administration. The groups were formed with the help of the pastors in group 1. The pastors were to formulate their support group in the districts using the church personal ministries leaders and the district personal ministries leader as his associate. The training was executed in the month of March.

The selected pastors, district personal ministries leaders, and Small group leaders constitute this group and they were trained in the zones. The conference was divided into six zones for effective management and supervision.

Training of these various groups was very important for effective implementation of the project. The training for these groups in zones was conducted in the month of July 2014. Bill Hull says “the most important connection between a player and a coach is emotional; they experience the mutual benefit of relationship. The connection grows strong with success, which leads to celebration and trust.”<sup>6</sup> He further stressed that the

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<sup>6</sup>Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 211-212.

concept of training is found in the Scriptures as in the case of Paul and Timothy for effective ministry.<sup>7</sup> The training exercises at the various groups and stages created the opportunity for all that were involved in the implementation to be aware of the nature of the program.

### **Project Implementation**

Training for the management of the project started in March 2014 and was completed in July. The formal implementation of this project started in August 2014 as follows:

First session: Training of pastors (35 persons)

Power point Materials used:<sup>8</sup>

1. “Pentecost Again: A Small Group Approach”—this presentation illustrated how the disciple and the group that waited for the out pouring of the Holy Spirit was consistent and persistent in their waiting and praying. When they receive the empowerment on the Pentecost day, the waiting experience continued even when the church membership exploded.
2. “2014 and 2015 Outreach Plan; Aba South Conference”—this presentation is the outline of the small group activities covering and the program was to be carried out at each stage of implementation.
3. “Caring for New Members”—this presentation highlighted to care for group members particularly the new ones using biblical illustrations.

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<sup>7</sup>Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 52.

<sup>8</sup>Appendix C.

4. “Why Small Group Ministries” (Adapted from General Conference Sabbath Department website)—illustrated the general needs for small group ministries in the life of a church with references from the Bible.

#### Second Session: Training Church Members

The training and formation of the small groups was carried out between April and June 2014 in the various districts and churches by the district pastors. Those who participated in these seminars were personal ministries leaders and Sabbath school leaders. It was meant to create a general aware for effective implementation of the project in local churches. The same material used in session one was also used in session two. It was after the training at the districts and churches that the small group formation began. The study materials was sponsored by the conference and was meant for only groups that were registered at the conference. The materials were provided for everyone in the registered groups. The purpose for registering the groups was to create a platform for an effective use of the study materials. Additionally, correspondence school materials were provided for personal and further studies particularly for the prospects.

#### Third Session: Training of Supervisor

The conference was divided into six zones and six pastors were involved in this group for supervision. The groups are:

1. Aba Central Zone: 4 districts (Aba Central, Eziukwu-Aba Township, Umuagbai Township, and Ihieorji/Umuogele)
2. Umuocham Zone: 4 districts (Umuocham, Abayi, Ariaria, and Umuode)
3. Umuakpara Zone: 5 districts (Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, Arongwa, Mbutu, and Umuagbai)

4. Akpaa I Zone: 5 districts (Akpaa I, Okpu-Umuobo, Okpuala-Ukwu, Amavor, Amator,
5. Ngwaiyiekwe Zone: 7 districts (Ngwaiyiekwe, Umugo, Osusu-Aku, Asa, Ogwe, Mbano, and Ihie-Ukwu)
6. Ndoki Zone: 4 districts (Ohanku, Azumini, Mkporobe, Akanu Ngwa

The Observation forms used were designed as follows:

- a. Registration form for each group (Form A)
- b. Reporting form for each local church (Form B)
- c. Reporting form for each district (Form C)
- d. Director's Monthly Analysis form (Form D)

They were taught how to use these forms to coordinate the groups, churches, and districts. The observation forms for the local church go to the pastor at the end of the month from the personal ministries leader. The pastor makes a compilation of the activities of all the groups in the district and reports to the conference. It was with these reports that the groups were monitored by the supervisors to determine if what was reported was real and to offer assistance where necessary.

The zonal supervisors were to visit the groups in the districts from one district to another. They were to meet the groups in session to determine the regularity of each group member, to identify where there are challenges and offer solutions where necessary. However, the entire conference was to be involved in the implementation of the project. The selected churches were the primary target for the implementation of the work: Abayi, Umuode, Umuakpara, Owo/Umuosi, and Amator. The mentioned churches were chosen based on the following criteria:

Abayi Church: This church was chosen to represent the churches in the urban center. The membership is composed of civil servants, entrepreneurs, manufacturer, and traders.

Every area of business life is found in this local church. The research is to determine how effective the membership will be involved in small group ministries considering their economic background which poses challenge to other church programs.

Umuode Church: This church is also in the urban area. The membership is predominantly traders and artisans. There are few civil servant and businessmen. The purpose is to determine to what extent they will be involve in the small group program in the local church. Second, there is an active outreach group that meets regularly for studies and witness to the neighborhoods on a weekly basis. The organizing and training of the group was not done by the conference but will be used for purpose of making a contrast.

Umuakpara Church: This church is located in a sub-urban area. The church was selected because of the Sowers Evangelism Group in the church. This group has operated for fourteen years and has a membership strength of over seventy persons. This group is self-sponsored. They are hired by other districts for evangelisms. Whenever they raise enough money they embark on campaigns to the un-entered areas of Anambra state, Ebonyi state, Enugu states, and northern part of Abia state to plant churches. Little is done around their base church. The purpose is to determine in contrast how this type of group can meet the needs of retention.

Owo/Umuosi Church: This church has a rural setting that is predominantly farmers and rural traders. Few civil servants and low scale business people are found in this local church. The purpose of choosing is to discover the effectiveness of the project in contrast to the urban churches.

Amator Church: This church is far away from the urban center. It is a rural church that is mostly farmers. The church has more of elderly persons as urban migration has taken most young people to the city. The church is selected to test how effective the small group project will work in this setting.

### **Activities of the Small Groups**

When the small groups were set to start activities July 2014, the program was to last for a minimum of one hour but most times some of the groups exceeded with about fifteen minutes or more. The group meetings were in the homes and each group was allowed to choose their time between Mondays and Tuesdays for their meetings. It was observed that most of the groups gather before the scheduled time while waiting for others to arrive. Those free moments were used to chat and incidentally they learnt more about themselves. Time consciousness to the meetings was an indication of the people's interest in the program. The meetings had a simple program. They begin with prayer and housekeeping, then commence their Bible study. The study materials are brief and precise with about eight questions and answers for reflections. Equal time was allotted to both Bible study and prayer, however, prayer took more of the time as members were interested in praying and thanking God for the prayer requests and testimonies of every previous meeting. One interesting observation was that the members were attending because they were receiving external supervision. After first two months, the trend changed because they understood their meetings was not to meet supervision requirements but it was about themselves and God. The group participants changed their perception and they started enjoying the fellowship and others were attracted to join. James Cress says "lack of fellowship was the strongest factor influencing personal

decisions to leave the church.”<sup>9</sup> Aubrey Malphurs adds “the reality is that life change takes place most often as the result of a significant relationship with either an individual or a small number of individuals in community.”<sup>10</sup> Fellowship has improved in the groups, a sense of community has been established and more groups are coming up in the sampled churches. The groups have not been limited by finances and facilities but have powered church programs and finances as members are always encourage upfront in the groups to support church affairs.

### **Monitoring**

The monitoring of this project in the selected churches was strictly done by the researcher, the personal ministries director of the conference, and three other pastors. The researcher did not ask for volunteers at this stage of the work. The purpose of selecting the three pastors is that they have potentials needed for the project, have specific gifts, and have indications to handle specific tasks. They were inducted on the criteria for the monitoring.

There were three elements involved in the monitoring exercise: 1. To check commitment to attendance and participation, 2. To assess study and prayer approach, and 3. Process of fulfilling spiritual goals through sharing of personal experiences. These element were employed to facilitate the end result of the program.

Attendance and Participation: Group members were expected to consistently commit themselves to the small group activities. Attendance and

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<sup>9</sup>James Cress, *You can Keep Them If You Care: Helping New Members Stay on Board* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association Resource Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 40.

<sup>10</sup>Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. 231.

participation was to enable community experience grow as the groups meet. By this approach the groups needed to develop the community experience in Old and New Testament and as referred to by Ellen White, “meet to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings.”<sup>11</sup>

**Bible Study and Prayer:** Assessing this aspect of the project was to enable determine the impact of Bible study and prayer in meeting the spiritual needs of the members. Prayer is a vital need of the church and a principal part of small group activities. This study attempts to discover how this aspect of the program will enhance retention.

**Spiritual Goals:** The spiritual goals expected to meet: 1. Overcoming sin, 2. To developing the culture to study the Bible, 3. To develop the habit of prayer, 4. To be able members to share personal experiences.

The above criteria was monitored with the observation forms produced for this project.

1. The Registration Forms were used to register members in each group at the conference for their study materials. Wherever the groups were supervised, the form was used to confirm the membership of the group and to observe the registration of new members. It helped to check the consistency and progression of each group.
2. The local church report form was meant to monitor the activities of the group. The local church personal ministries leader will submit to the pastor and a careful analysis of the data will reveal the progress of each group.

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<sup>11</sup>White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 2:578.

3. The District Leader's report is a compilation of all the activities of the groups within the district. It was also meant to help the pastor monitor the groups.
4. At the conference level, a compilation of all the groups from the districts is made.

This reporting system assisted in studying the progression the work in the field to discover where immediate attention was need. It helped for systematic follow-up of the groups. Also, the supervisors would take videos of any positive or negative thing of interest they observed from the groups for possible follow-up.

Consequently, when monitoring cease after the implementation of the program, monitoring and reporting continued with the targeted churches. The field work ended with "Pentecost 2015" small group campaign in March 2015. While the targeted churches were being monitored for evaluation, the other churches within the conference that shared in the implementation gradually grew weak. The slack in activities of those group was due to the fact that they were no mobilization and supervision. Loving relationship are not optional for the small groups rather it was to radiate among them and everyone feeling accepted and valued. This is a lasting quality character that will make church members demonstrate Christianity and this was observed in the groups. Evaluation was planned for April 2015. However, logistic issues hindered it. The groups continued and by April 2016 when they were evaluated they have developed more.

### **Pentecost 2015 Campaign**

Pentecost 2015 campaign was the climax of this project before final evaluation. The Campaign was held from March 7 to 21, 2015. The small groups functioned from

August 2014 to February 2015 (7 months). The campaign was organized in three segments: 1. The pre-campaign 2. The campaign, 3. The post-campaign.

Pre-campaign: The evangelism was targeted “Pentecost 2015” and the theme made a significant impact on the participants. The General Conference Operation Global Rain was used for prayer and fasting towards the program. The prayer was conducted from January 7 to 10, 2015. It was organized to hold morning and evening session. The morning was for fellowship in the church while evening was for fellowship in the small groups. This program afford the opportunity to introduce the prospects to church programs. During this period, members prayed for the success of the campaign and for spiritual revival.

The second aspect of the preparation was securing venues for the campaign. Though the evangelism was a conference wide evangelism, the primary assignment was conducted in three center: Owo/Umuosi, Abayi, and Amator. The third aspect of the preparation was the printing and distribution of the fliers. The three center had guest speakers sent to them and the researcher preached at the Abayi center.

The Campaign: The evangelism experienced good turnout from both membership and prospects. The prospects were distributed to the small groups as they come during the first week. Members of the small groups were making calls and visits to the new prospects that came to the campaign site. By the second week, the small groups moved activities to evangelism sites as their prospects were invited to study with them in the various units. Bringing small groups to the campaign site was to get the groups committed in giving care to their prospect and making the prospects develop a sense of belonging before getting down to the church. This approach was strictly apply for the

prospects that came from the campaign. Some were registered into the correspondence school to receive additional lessons they can study at home.

The fourteen days campaign ended with a total of 104 souls from the three centers. They were distributed to the groups for nurture and follow-up. They were registered formally with conference to enable effective monitoring of the groups caring for them. The groups were to report the activities of meeting on a monthly basis to the office, while coordinators followed up from information in the reports to address any challenge.

Post Campaign Activities: The post campaign activities came in three formats: 1. Sunday meetings, 2. Continuation of small group activities, 3. “100 days of prayer.” The post-campaign activities were necessary to help the new members from other denomination to acclimatize to their new faith. The Sunday meetings were meant to help new members make a smooth transition from Sunday to Saturday and to help them adjust contact with former friends. The Sunday meetings were meant to help them leave home as they usually do. The meetings were characterized with Bible study and prayers.

Second, the small group activities continued without a break to facilitate attachment to the group in order to establish friendship and experience community.

Third, the conference adopted the General Conference “United in Prayer” (100 Days of Prayer) program for March 25 to July 11, 2015. However, small groups meeting were held at their respective locations. The program was planned to have every member make at least three contacts to the church between Sunday and Friday. The program ended with a communion service on July 11, 2015 as grand finale to the exercise. It was an exciting experience to members and especially to the new ones.

## **Evaluation**

This project was evaluated using the qualitative research design which is an interactive approach on people's experience over certain issues.<sup>12</sup> Since narrative analysis has been adopted for this project, focus groups were interviewed to ascertain the impact of the project in the sampled churches. A focus group is a small group interaction to learn about a community experience guided by a trained leader. The interaction in focus group is both verbal and non-verbal responses. It provides information that is closer to how the people think and feel about a particular issue. The researcher decided to use focus group with aim of gathering in-depth information about the small group ministries as an approach to membership retention. This approach helped to understand the thoughts and opinions of the people about small groups. The responses gather helped in understanding the impact of small groups in the spiritual lives of the members. Therefore, to get a complete and accurate information, the interaction was recorded into audiovisuals. The groups to be interviewed were representative groups from the churches selected putting into consideration age and gender to have a fair representation of the opinion of the members. The date, time, and place for the focus group meetings was arranged with the churches through the pastors. The evaluation team made up of three pastors were trained for the purpose and have skills in cinematography. The interviews were conducted and recorded and the compact disc produced. The six recorded interviews have been transcribed to enable analysis.

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<sup>12</sup>Carol M. Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey: A practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Cowin, 2010), 143.

**Description of Findings from Focus Group.** The church cooperated and supported the implementation of the project. Though all the membership were not involved in the churches, a considerable number of groups were generated from the church for the work. The discussions with the focus groups was held from April 27-May 04, 2015. The findings made out of the project according to the churches and groups on the project shows as follows:

1. Abayi Church generated five active groups that consistently followed the program. Eight persons participated in the focus group interaction. The group on discussion reported that:
  - a. They had experienced an in-depth approach to Bible study.
  - b. They had developed more faith as they prayed for each other in the group.
  - c. Their coming together had created a bonding experience among group members.
  - d. They had developed the courage and strategy to get their neighbors involved.
  - e. They had experienced a growing personal spiritual lifestyle.
  - f. They had developed an increasing interest in church programs.
  - g. They had been able to constitute group members as an outreach team for public campaigns.
  - h. They had been able to nurture and maintain close contact with newly baptized church members and converts.

- i. They appealed that we help empower more church members to create more groups as it will help impact the church more.
2. Umuode Church has an outreach group that was established in 2013. This group was not trained for this project but chosen for purposes of contrast. The group had a membership of fifteen at its inception and currently has a membership of thirty-four. The group meets for studies on Tuesdays and embark on outreach on Thursdays following the two-by-two approach. Ten persons represented them in the focus group interaction. During the discussion, they responded as follows:
  - a. The group-study had sharpened their understanding of the Scriptures.
  - b. Members had developed skills for teaching and preaching.
  - c. The host community was more acquainted with the church through their regular outreach.
  - d. The church had consistently witnessed the baptism of new converts.
  - e. Members had experienced spiritual fellowship and nurture.
  - f. The group chose to be an outreach group for the concern of many that are yet to come in contact with Adventist message.
  - g. Members prayed for each other and the group had experienced God's favor. The prayer life of the group had attracted regular and non-members to their group prayer programs.
  - h. Members had developed faith in God and a passion to intercede for others in prayer.

- i. There was expressed concern over those who are not interested in Bible study groups.
- j. They appealed that the church leadership should develop strategy to carry everyone along as it will impact the spiritual life of the members, encourage commitment, and will help to keep members in fellowship.

3. Umuakpara Church established two small groups that are consistent. The most prominent and active was at Umuigwe Village. However, the Sowers Evangelism Group was established in 2002 and has attracted members from other local churches within and without the conference. The group was born out of the passion to bring people together for Bible study and evangelism. So, people from all walks of life and various ethnic backgrounds have joined this group over the years. Ten persons represented the group in the interaction. In the discussion, the following was reported about the group:

- a. They had developed a passion to preach the gospel particularly to the un-entered areas outside Aba.
- b. The desire to study the Bible had increased and they had experienced a better understanding of the Scriptures.
- c. The desire to help members grow spiritually had increased.
- d. Members had experienced an in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures
- e. Members had been trained to give Bible studies.
- f. Members had developed the interest to sacrifice time and resources for the gospel.
- g. Members had cultivated interest in soul winning and church planting.

- h. Members had developed more commitment to the church as they were regular to church activities and were always willing to assist.
- i. Members had increased belief in the power of prayer, and this had attracted many to join the group, and they had experience the power of God in their lives.
- j. The group had an organized medical team with natural medication for their outreach programs. They went out ahead to give seminars and medical care before presenting the message.
- k. Members had learnt how to apply natural medications for healthy living and were using same to reach out to others.
- l. Members had shown more commitment to church life as they were no longer attracted to look elsewhere for spiritual benefits.
- m. The group served as ground breakers to their host district whenever they went out for a public campaign.
- n. The group lent a helping hand to other districts on request through their host district committee for public campaigns.
- o. The local church was empowered as they embarked on two-by-two outreach; souls had been converted to the church, and some of the converts were now members of the group.
- p. The local church leadership had given financial support as they embarked on their mission trips while the local district had supported with evangelism equipment.

q. The Sowers appealed that the conference should encourage more churches to organize similar groups as it will help influence the spiritual lives of members positively.

4. Owo/Umuosi Church started with five small groups after the empowerment and later increased to eight active groups and two were interviewed: God's Messengers Small Group and Light Bearers Small Group. God's Messengers Group is made up of men and women including young people. The group started with eight members and have grown to thirteen members with two converts and three church member not initial belonging to any group but were won over by the group members. While Light Bearers Group is made up of the teachers in the church nursery and primary school. Four persons represented the Light Bears group while eight person represented the God's Messengers in the focus group interactions. These two groups had the discussion separately and they responded as follows:

1. Light Bearers Small Group

- a. The group had help increase their understanding of the Scripture and develop their faith in God.
- b. Members were enthusiastic to meet for Bible study on appointment days and had increased their effort in personal study of the lessons before the meeting.
- c. It had increased relationship among them as teachers.
- d. The insights received were used for moral instructions for their pupils.

- e. They had learnt to pray for the pupils and their parents.
- f. The church leaders had helped in encouraging and helping them stabilize. They had also provided materials for group studies.

## 2. God's Messengers Small Group

- a. They had developed an improved personal spiritual life that was observed among them.
- b. The program had increased their insight about the Word of God.
- c. They had developed the ability to do personal Bible studies.
- d. As a result of participating, they had learnt to lead in Bible study and could do the same outside group activities with friends.
- e. Praying for each other had increased their faith, and having seen their prayers answered had helped in attracting additional members to their group. It had also reduced the quest of seeking for prayers elsewhere.
- f. Members had testified about how God was blessing them, particularly in their businesses.

Analyzing these responses, some themes are seen consistent in all. Some identified themes are in-depth Bible study, prayer, commitment, finances, care, enhanced leadership, improved outreach ability, enhanced Christian experience, and witnessing. Major and minor themes will be analyzed and evaluated in chapter 6.

**Summary of Findings.** This project has revealed many potentials that need to be harnessed in the churches. At first, members thought it was going to be a herculean task, but as it progressed, the interest started gathering momentum. The project was executed,

data collected and analyzed, and below are the findings from this research and the significant impact of the project so far.

1. Bible Study: There is an improvement in the approach to Bible study. The systematic study of the Bible, using the study materials, afforded a progressive understanding of the Bible. They were able to teach themselves and, as a result, were able to comprehend and apply to real life situations. It also enhanced the possession of Sabbath School study guides, and the courage to contribute knowledge during discussions have been developed. The awareness received have influenced their lifestyle and improved relationship.

2. Prayer: Praying for one another is one of the deepest joys of the Christian life. Interceding for each other has led them to develop faith in God and to trust God's promises. It has helped them establish confidence in each other. It has added power and faith in them. The urge to seek for prayers elsewhere has gradually faded away as personal testimonies have revealed evidences of answered prayers that are attracting more people to join the groups. The group are now experiencing more committed prayers than ever before.

3. Community Experience: The members are experiencing relationship and care for each other. Members can visit each other to pray when the need arises. They have developed trust and confidence in each other. Both new and old members now feel identified by someone. James Cress, one time a ministerial secretary of the General Conference, said: "those who knew people stayed; those

who did not, did not stay.”<sup>13</sup> The group members are experiencing fellowship with each other and some have learnt to share in the burden of others.

4. Visitation: Because members in a group are care-givers to each other, it has increased visitations among them. Newly baptized members are attached to these groups and they are receiving care from older members through telephone calls and visitations. N. Ashok Kumar points out that visitation empowers spiritual growth, cements relationships, an integral part of nurturing, reveals the relevance of stewardship, and enhances personal spiritual growth.<sup>14</sup>

5. Finance: As members are developing in care giving, they are also developing in giving to support evangelism plans. Local church finances in these churches have improved greatly following data analysis in the treasury department. There are testimonies that personal businesses are improving as members pray for God’s favor in their businesses.

6. Outreach: There is a progressive improvement in outreach. The theme for the implementation program is “Pentecost Again.” The idea that the apostles gathered praying, then Pentecost came and powered the spread of the gospel. This mentality is gradually influencing some the groups and for outreach opportunities in their neighborhoods.

7. Commitment: There is an increased commitment to church programs particularly Sabbath mornings. Testimony and Prayer time holds by 8.30 -9.00 a.

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<sup>13</sup>James Cress, *You can Keep Them If You Care*, 40.

<sup>14</sup>A. Ashok Kumar, “The Pastoral Benefits of Visiting Church Members,” *Ministry*, (October 2010), accessed 31 May 2016, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/10/the-pastoral-benefits-of-visiting-church-members>).

m Sabbath mornings was meant for small groups to share testimonies from their groups. Prayer session follows and this has inspired group members particularly in *Owo/Umuosi* Church. Attendance to mid-week prayer meetings have increased as more people are benefitting from it. The spiritual atmosphere is gradually improving.

8. Pastoral Care: The church pastors of the churches selected show significant interest in the project. They worked in close consultation with the researcher and coordinators in managing the groups. Because of the vested interest and closeness to the groups has provided advanced pastoral care to the groups in a variety of ways. First, the pastor is in close contact with group leaders counselling and is following up. Second, they rotationally meet with the groups in session and that has afforded corporate visitations as his presence and prayer energizes the groups. Third, group leaders are empowered to extend pastoral care between members and pastor. Some of the groups have been able to take care of needs and challenges the Pastor would not have known and those involved may be suffering in silence and discouragement.

9. Leadership Awareness: The leadership of the church has come to develop interest in membership care. James Cress points out one major reason why people leave the Adventist Church—interpersonal relationship.<sup>15</sup> Some who left the church are returning through the small groups. A new church was planted at *Umuigwe* village in *Umuakpara* District in April 2016 as a result of a small group organized there by an elder who attended the training. The group reclaimed old

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<sup>15</sup>James Cress, 41.

members and strengthened existing members who were travelling over four kilometers to church. The small group prompted a two-week evangelism campaign that gave birth to a new congregation. The leadership around there are excited about the development. It was also observed that the leaders had undermined delegation over the years. The people leading out in the groups had to do much because they were delegated to do so. Also, the leaders are now aware that members need support group where multiple relationship experienced. The need to train and re-train has been identified.

**Validity of Findings.** This project is validated on a triangulated approach: the research findings, the biblical foundations of this project, and the literature review. The purpose of this project is to develop a model ministry to be adopted by pastors and lay persons for membership revitalization and retention using small groups. The end product is to facilitate membership retention. The research findings come in nine themes. These themes are in consonance with the theological foundations. God used small groups to create community among His people where His presence can be manifested and permeate into the lives of the members. God used the approach to close the rank of the Israelite communities from external spiritual adulterations. Consequently, scholars referred to in the literature review made similar findings in their works. Alberg Malphurs and Dan R. Dick pointed out similar issues are some of the benefits of small group ministry in the local congregation.

However, there are few negative impacts though it cannot be seen as weakness for the project. The churches are yet to experience 100% involvement to the project. Second is

the financial implications was not considered when the program was launched. The conference had to assist in providing materials and printing.

The Outreach groups: Findings from outreach groups do not give a comprehensive approach to membership retention. From the above finding on small group, outreach groups share in Bible studies, prayer, visitation, and outreach. They experience retention among group members but are not concern about retention generally. They explore new areas, plant churches but leaving new members without systematic mentoring. The advantage of small groups over outreach groups is that small groups are a church in making and have membership involvement and retention as major goals. Community is experienced more in small groups as it is a neighborhood program.

### **Project Report**

The report of this project was be presented to the executive committee of Aba South Conference for an action to make it a model to membership retention. They will be encouraged to make it a regular activity for the local churches throughout Aba South conference.

### **Summary**

The implementation process of this project was successfully completed. The various stages of the strategy was systematically followed and applied. The various entities involved in the project gave maximum cooperation to the implementation of the project. The project team members rendered great assistance for the success of the project. The intervention design was applied over the stated of period of time. The result of the findings outlined and the goals were met. The next chapter will emphasize on

suggestions for future study, relevance of the study, lessons learnt, and the conclusion of this project and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose for this study was to develop a model ministry program for membership retention in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This study was based on the statistical study of membership data over a stipulated period of 2012-2015. The statistics revealed a decline in membership in comparison with numbers of people baptized annually. It was discovered in an interview with the pastors concerned that members leave the church unnoticed and there was no systematic program used by the churches to retain them over the period studied. In order to address the challenge, a small group ministry program was designed as an intervention. Research assistants were recruited and trained for the assignment and awareness was created among members. The organized small groups were empowered and coordinated. After implementation of the intervention, the project was evaluated using focus groups. This chapter will discuss the analysis of the evaluation, realization of the goals, and lessons learned from the project.

#### **Project Evaluation**

After analysis and evaluation, nine themes were discovered that will assist as components that will help local churches use small groups to revitalize the members for retention. The nine themes are states in the findings in chapter 5. In evaluating the project four elements were established as project goals:

1. To analyze commitment to attendance and participation in church programs
2. To evaluate interest in Bible study programs by church members
3. To assess member's desire for prayer and spiritual enhancement programs.
4. To understand the process of fulfilling their spiritual goals in overcoming sin, developing the culture for personal Bible studies, cultivating the habit of praying, and the ability of sharing personal experiences.

These four elements were employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. These elements guided the design of the focus group questions for an objective evaluation of the project.

### **Project Goal**

The goal for the study was realized and fulfilled. First, the goal of this project was to find out whether members would be interested in church programs or not as alleged in pre-survey exercise. Analyzing from the observation forms used to monitor attendance and participation to the small group meetings, it was observed that every week there was over 75% recorded attendance. This indicates that the small groups created a platform for people to socialize. The small groups created a community where members gathered to associate and develop an experience with God. Reference to the community of Acts 2 as an example where members devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, sharing of common beliefs, meeting together daily, sharing food together in sincerity, and had everything in common. Christian community was experienced and interest was awakened as an aspect of the goals expected from the research.

Second, it was to evaluate the interest of members in studying the Bible. The human mind is inquisitive and desirous to learn. The project afforded the opportunity to

discover that members desired forums where they would have the privilege to probe into issues that are unfamiliar to them and fulfil their spiritual cravings. The Bible lessons were made in question and answer format and interactive, considering the African moon night stories. Africans love stories, riddles, and proverbs, and they share lots of wisdom from them. The moon night programs were meant to teach moral lesson and the traditions of the people. This background made the Bible study session attractive, and the studies served as moral lessons.

Third, the study planned to evaluate the interest of the members in prayer. The challenge in the background is that many are bearing burden and are searching for where they can access relief. This have led many into unexpected places as they testified in the interactions. The small group forum served as a place to come and experience God and where prayers are answered because some of the groups started hosting visitors who came just for prayers. Africans believe that there is a reason behind any misfortune and that it takes a divine power to solve that problem. The group members helped each other to pray for challenging issues. From their testimonies, it is believed that this goal was achieved.

The fourth goal was to understand the process of fulfilling the spiritual goals in overcoming sin, improving personal Bible study, and the ability to share experiences. This goal was met in that members had desired forum where they would interact and ask question over issues challenging their faith. They were looking for opportunities that would help them grow spiritually. Some wanted platforms that would make them feel involved. Others were searching for programs that would challenge their weaknesses and make them grow stronger in faith. Many have developed the habit of doing personal

Bible study. While some have developed the skill and courage to share their experiences and the Word with other people. It was observed that love and support provides the strongest platform for accountability and intimacy in small group communities. When members understand the reason of their existence in the church and they are empowered, they share their faith with others in the bid of bringing them into the church.

One penitent observation is that members are seeking for where to meet their spiritual needs and they want to see their leaders involved. It is hoped that as the small groups are sustained that these churches will grow leaders and experience strong organized activities.

#### Evidences of Goals Realization

The goals were realized as responses from the focus groups, revealing that spiritual affairs had been enhanced and commitment to church life improved. These evidences are seen reflecting in the churches sampled.

The project ended March 2015 and evaluation of the project was to be in the month of April but due to certain logistical issues, the evaluation could not be carried out until April 2016. When the project was finally evaluated in April 2016, these were the results of the program:

*Umuakpara* Church had a small group at Umuigwe village that was performing well. The progress of the group led to follow-up evangelism and a new church has started there. Old members were also reclaimed. A phone call to the associate pastor in that district reported that they were going to begin a new small group in another territory of the district at the request of those living there.

In *Owo/Umuosi* Church, the program began with five groups and at the point of evaluation, it had grown to eight groups. Incidentally, two more churches within the district have started consistent small group programs—*Umuojima* and *Amapuife* Churches. *Umuojima* has developed five small groups while *Amapuife* has two groups.

Umuode Church had an active group at *Okpokorala* but the group had challenges of a comfortable place of meeting. The group grew to a point where it would have reproduced three groups but hired a hall for weekly activities. The group officially started a new church after a pulpit exchange evangelism in March 2016.

Abayi Church started with two groups but have three additional groups. Some members in Cedar Wood Adventist Church were inspired and start a group March 2016. *Amator* church started with three group, however, one of the groups is weak as a result of lack of leadership. It is also worthy to put on record that the prospects from this project both old and new members are registering into the correspondence school. As at March 2015, the school has registered over a hundred and seventy students who are eager to study and learn more.

### **Model Ministry Developed**

The model ministry developed in this project is referred to as the “4Ds Model”—direction, declaration, demonstration, and deployment. This is a consistent approach that can contribute to making small groups effective in the local churches.

1. Direction: The membership needs direction from the church leadership. This involves impacting on how to discover God’s will by helping the members reach full potentials in the use of their spiritual gifts for service (Mark 1:17).

2. Declaration: When members are empowered, they need to be assured that God is with them to direct them (John 17:6-19). When Jesus called the disciples, He said to them “follow me” (Matt 9:9, Luke 5:10-11). When members are called out for spiritual program, they put confidence in the leadership and expect that the call will meet their expectations.

3. Demonstration: The ultimate goal of ministry is to reproduce disciples who will continue the ministry. This Jesus did to the disciples and such is also expected with leaders in ministry. Jesus demonstrated how to live a spiritual life appropriate for the ministry (Matt 6:1-7:27; Mark 6:46, John 6:15). He demonstrated compassion by feeding the five thousand (Mark 6:30-44), He demonstrated healing to his disciples (Mark 9:14-29; Matt 8:14-17; Luke 10:17-20). Ministry demands that leaders demonstrate what they expect the followers to do.

4. Delegation: Jesus delegated the disciples to work (Luke 10:1-12) and he expected reports or result (Luke 10:17, Acts 1:8). When members are trained without delegation, they loss interest and ministry is destroyed. When members share in the responsibilities of their congregation, they grow spiritually, the support the agenda, and they produce result.

An important aspect of delegation is supervision. There should be reports and feedback to enable re-strategizing. When effective supervision is implemented, reproduction will be experienced. Supervision encourages committed of both members and leaders. When these 4Ds are applied in small group management, it will impact the small groups and encourage continuity.

## **Evaluation Assistance**

The evaluation team comprised of three pastors (Emmanuel C. Nna, Charles C. John, and Obinna Sampson Fredrick-Heart) who assisted in the evaluation. The district pastors assisted in the planning and arranging meeting with the focus groups. The team prepared the setting, filmed the interview, and prepared it in compact disc. The transcription and analysis was done by the researcher presenting findings in nine themes.

## **Lessons Learned**

1. This project helped me learn how to make ministry relevant to my context. When pastors understand how to do ministry in their context, ministry challenges will be resolved.
2. The small group forum serves as an acceptance platform for old members and incoming members.
3. The process of retaining a member in the church takes time, effort, finances and committed personnel.
4. Members expect programs and forum where they will feel involved and appreciated. They look up to the pastor and the elders to lead out. For small groups to thrive, pastors must be at the forefront. When the conference leadership shows interest in such programs, they show more commitment.
5. Small group activity is not a program, it is a lifestyle. It calls for doing it repeatedly and consistently
6. Small groups make people feel important because care-giving is experienced there. It is a place of socialization as few people had to celebrate birthdays with group members.

7. The ultimate goal of small groups was not to baptize people into the church but to nurture and assimilate new members. When members are nurtured, they remain in the church and attract others.
8. It is easier to assimilate new member into the church before baptism than after baptism.
9. Members desire new programs and activities in comparison to what they previously knew.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose for this study was to develop a model ministry program for membership retention in Aba South Conference of Seventh-day Adventist. Five churches were used as samples to implement the project. The proposal of this study stated that the church was experiencing member loss despite the fact that there were series of evangelism campaign going on around the conference. Statistical reports indicated that the church was losing more members than it gained, hence this study. The expectation was that would enhance fellowship, and create a loving environment, with passion and commitment to prayer. The small group communities would enhance membership revitalization, retention, nurture, and church planting.

The theological foundation of the study on small group ministries is traced from God. Relationship is at the heart of God's interaction with man and the first group involving humans comprised of God and two humans—Adam and Eve. It was fully practiced in His relationship with the Israelites in the wilderness journey. They were organized in small to large groups—household, kindred, and tribal groupings. The New Testament small groups were introduced by Jesus with the twelve disciples. They were

equipped and after the Pentecost, they were empowered to nurture the new church. The New Testament church flourished because of the home fellowship where people met in small groups. Paul in his missionary journey did the same. Scholars have written extensively on the benefits of small group ministries to the life of a congregation. The study of the African context revealed that community life gives meaning to the African society.

Based on this background, an intervention was developed to implement a small group empowerment project as an approach to membership retention. The study was evaluated by members of the evaluation team and findings made for recommendation to the churches.

In conclusion, the project was successful and the goals of the project were met. This study was initiated by the data from statistics of members showing high percentage of loss over gain. The facts discovered meant to be addressed by this project are:

1. Retention plan—there was no systematic program to facilitate membership retention.
2. Bible Study—there were no organized Bible study program to impact the spiritual life of the members
3. Care giving—was seen more of cleric duty without membership involvement.

Members were leaving the church, seeking for fulfilment of the missing gaps in their spiritual life. New members were looking for friends who would develop them in the church. After this program, members have expressed joy over the program and have been encouraging others to be involved. Relationship is now experienced in the small group communities established. People are involved and engaged in church activities that

directly involve them and address their personal desires. The leadership of the church is to invest interest into the program as members are willing to follow when directed, coordinated, and mobilized to grow in the program. A program for membership retention has been developed and implemented with the hope that it will contribute to enhance retention.

The program is not conclusive. It has room for ongoing study to motivate and involve members in small group ministries. When members are fully groomed in the program, it will enhance the spiritual life of the church in the areas of church attendance and participation, in giving and support to evangelism activities. It will improve community relationship and will help the members grow spiritually.

Small groups will not make an automatic change in the lives of the members and it is not an end to retention. The expected result can only be achieved by the grace of God as members keep connected to God. The grace of God is available to God's people through the Holy Spirit and if the people consistently meet in His name, their life changing expectations will be met. The concern, care, and love for each other will be revitalized. Pastor, elder, and layperson are to realize that evangelism is not complete until members meet their needs in the church and in turn become disciple makers.

### **Recommendations**

Retention has been an issue of concern for the church. My expectation from this project is that it will enhance membership retention in the church. My ultimate desire is for this project to stimulate members to involve in retention programs such as small group activities. Small group ministries is not a program; it is a lifestyle that can motivate the church to effectively involve in evangelism as retention is already part of church life.

Bearing this in mind, the researcher humbly recommend the following ideas to assist in protecting membership loss.

1. Church members should be trained on the biblical foundations for membership retention.
2. Small groups ministries should be made a lifestyle for the church as to serve as a platform to assimilate new members after evangelism.
3. Awareness should be created among pastors and members to understand that evangelism does not end with baptism. Rather, it is an on-going process in the sense that if evangelism and retention activities are separated, we lose the new members.
4. The leadership of the church should understand that retention is not meant only for new members. When retention activities are not present in a church old members grow weary and lose focus
5. Small group activities should not be left to laypersons to manage or it will die. Pastor are the direct coordinators of small groups, or else it will not grow.
6. Approaches to membership retention should be made part of the college curriculum for intending pastors.
7. Conference leadership should pay particular attention to retention programs in their territories, and should have subvention to encourage involvement and empowerment of laypersons who will assist in the mobilization of small groups.
8. There are more opportunities for further research into small group ministries and membership retention.

## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
REPORT FORMS

(Form A)

**Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Aba South Conference  
Systematic Monitoring Form: Small Groups  
“Pentecost Again”**

**Registration Form**

**Name of Group** \_\_\_\_\_

**Church** \_\_\_\_\_

**District** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pastor** \_\_\_\_\_

S/No	Name	Contact No.
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Note: Make photocopies of this form to: Local Church Personal Ministries leader;  
District Pastor; Group Leader

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_  
District Pastor

PM Leader \_\_\_\_\_

(Form B)

**Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Aba South Conference  
Systematic Monitoring Form: Small Groups  
“Pentecost Again”**

**Local Report Form**

**Church** \_\_\_\_\_

**District** \_\_\_\_\_

**Month:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Group**

**Membership**

**No. of**

**Remarks**

**Prospect/Baptism**

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

PM Leader

(Form C)

**Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Aba South Conference  
Systematic Monitoring Form: Small Groups  
“Pentecost Again”**

District Leader’s Report Form

District \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_

Church	No. Groups	No. of Prospects	No. of Baptism	Remarks
--------	------------	------------------	----------------	---------

Total

(Form D)

**Seventh-day Adventist Church**  
**Aba South Conference**  
**Systematic Monitoring Form: Small Groups**  
**“Pentecost Again”**  
**Conference Monthly Analysis Form**  
**Month** \_\_\_\_\_

S/N	District	No. of Groups	No. of Prospect	No. of Baptism	Remarks
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					

APPENDIX B  
CORRESPONDENCE



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH  
In Nigeria

**Aba South Conference**  
Along Alaoma Road,  
Abayi, Aba,  
Abia State, Nigeria.  
08038895089 , 08064060187 ,08034033080

January 18, 2015.

Pastor Josiah C. Nwarungwa.

**RE: PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH WORK (DMIN).**

Calvary greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Dear Pastor,

I write to inform you that the executive committee of our conference during her seating of January 15, 2015 has approved your application and has permitted you to carry out your research work in any of the district(s) of your choice in our conference which is part of the requirements of the Dmin programme of the Adventist University of Africa which you are currently pursuing.

We hope you will receive adequate and necessary cooperation from the churches and districts.

Please you are expected to present this letter to the appropriate church leaders on arrival for their maximum cooperation.

We wish you success in this endeavour.

God bless you.

Pastor Alozie G.O.  
Executive Secretary.

## APPENDIX C

### SEMINAR MATERIALS

Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Aba South Conference  
**Small Group Ministries**  
**OUTREACH PLAN 2014/15**

- OUR WORLD-WIDE COMMISSION
- “And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the WORLD for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matt. 24:14
- OUR GOSPEL COMMISSION
- TO OUR WORLD: (Mt. 28:18-20)
- “All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth . . . I AM with you always . . .”
- Where is your world that must be reached? From GC to the Small Group Area.
- [Great work for 2014 - 2015] But . . .
  
- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- For the eyes of the LORD run throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him.
- UNIONS & OTHERS

#### RELEVANT EVANGELISTIC

##### APPROACHES IN ALL:

- UNIONS / CONFERENCES
  - Eastern Nigeria Union Conference
  - DISTRICTS / CHURCHES
- GC EMPHASIS
    - ANY PLAN MUST EMPLOY THE

#### SMALL GROUP APPROACH.

- 2. LAST DAY COUNSEL
- The formation of Small [Groups] companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One Who cannot err. (Testimonies, vol. 7, pp. 21, 22.)

- WHY Small Group Ministry?
  - a. Less Expensive
  - b. Membership Retention
  - c. To increase enthusiasm for soul winning
  - d. Member involvement commitment
  
- GOALS OF SGM
  - A. Revitalization of Membership
  - B. Effective in reach / outreach
  - C. Membership Empowerment
  
- SOLE REQUIREMENT
  - Commitment to attend meetings
    - **PSALM 50: 5** – GATHER TO ME MY CONSECRATED ONES, WHO MADE A COVENANT WITH ME BY SACRIFICE.
  
- A. THE SGM COORDINATING COMMITTEES
- CHAIR- Pastor / Head elder (2)
- MEMBERS
  - PM Leaders/AMO (2)
  - S.S. Leaders (2)
  - AWM (1)
  - Another Church Member
  - Church SGM Coordinator
  
- B. Organize Small Group in Churches (6-10)
  
- C. Organize further Training for SGM Coordinators
  
- 3). 2014 – 2015 OUTREACH PLAN “PENTECOST 2015”
- DO THESE . . .
- A). Group Church Into Zones
- 
  
- Create the Zones by listing all the small communities forming the territory and divide into zones.
- TERRITORIES
  - Aba South Conference
    - 1. Aba Central Zone
    - 2. Umuakpara Zone

- 3. Akpaa 1 Zone
- 4. umuocham Zone
- 5. Umugo Zone
- 6. Akanu Ngwa Zone

➤ TERRITORIES (eg.)

Aba Central Zone

Aba Central District

Aba Central Church

Nkoro Church

Old Court Church

Port Harcourt Rd

Ohabiam

➤ Iheorji Umuogele District

Iheorji/Umuogele

Umunkama

- Each Zone should organize Clustered Small Groups.

B). Leaders of Clustered SGs Select Street Corners or Neighborhood Sites and fix dates.

- C). SPEAKERS:

STREET CORNER CAMPAIGNS

- Speakers may be:
- Elders
- AMO Speakers
- W/M Speakers
- Youth Speakers etc.
- \*\*\* List and train such gifted Speakers
- Plan for 10-Day Small Group Campaigns

- PREPARATION

- A Week-End of Prayers be planned to precede meetings for the Holy Spirit power;
- And for the Spirit of Giving to fund the **campaigns, and a projector, etc.**
- Street Corner Campaign Sites
- Hold Campaigns following the plotted sites [of churches]

- DISTRICT APPROACH

- 1. District Evangelism Committee shall list all Un-entered Towns/Villages/Areas in their territory.
- 2. District plans and holds 'Pentecost 2015' Campaign

Campaigns in un-entered places each quarter according to the district's listing inside or outside the district's territory.

- THINGS NEEDED:
- Campaign Sermons in English/Igbo
- Power point presentations of Health Messages
- THINGS NEEDED:
- Tracts & Gift Books
- Computer & Screen
- Campaign Posters
- SGM FOLLOW-UP WORK
- Interests and converts are shared over nearby Small Groups for nurturing and discipleship
- Enrolment into VOP School with the Conference
  
- FOLLOW-UP WORK
- Kraist Onye Nzoputa Ayi
- 'Oziza Chineke Zara Ajuju Gi Nile'
- VOP Lessons/ Amazing Facts Lessons to be used for follow-up studies.
- REPORTS
- Monthly / Quarterly reports are sent to District Pastors for Conference Workers Meetings.
  
- ANALYSIS:
- If half of 118 churches hold 'PENTECOST' Campaigns in 2 of her Zones a month = 236
- $236 \times 5$  souls = 1,180;
- For a year:  $1180 \times 10 = 11,800$  Souls
- that exceeds our annual goal
- Also more of our world would have been covered.
  
- REVIEWS
- Hold quarterly assessment of implementation of the outreach plan at local church and district for effectiveness and efficiency.
  
- PROMOTIONS
- Use Sabbath School to promote SGM: by
- TESTIMONY
- DREAMS
- Devote brief prayer moment for the success of small group ministries in your church
- GOD RE-ASSURES . . . "I will be with you always"
- Isa. 60: 22
- "The least one shall become a thousand, and the smallest one a mighty nation;
- I Am the LORD,

In its time I will hasten it."

Could this be the time? ? ?

- APPEAL
- LET'S: ORDER ONE PROJECTOR
- For each Church & District
- Train Willing Gifted Speakers
- Hold Pentecost 2015 in Zonal Rotations
- Share Reports / Experiences to enhance implementation and Continuity.
  
- PENTECOST 2015  
OUTLINE
- March – April 2014: Organizing small groups and training coordinators
- May: Church Centered Revival/Small group Activities
- June: Small Group Activities
- July: One week pre-reaping small group campaign
- Outline contd
- August: Small group mega Campaign
- September/October: small group activities and union reaping campaign
- November/December: SG Activities and camp meetings
- January 2015: Operation Global Rain 7-17
- Pentecost Rally: Jan. 16-17
- Outline cont.
- January 17 – February: Small activities resumes
- March: Pentecost 2015 mega Campaign in **150 Centers** in Aba South Conference

## Caring for New Members Pastor

- The development of new members into mature and serviceable disciples is a process rather than a specific event.

### ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- This training resource is designed to expose pastors and lay leaders to the theological underpinnings of new members' discipleship, psychosocial theories of discipleship and relevant skills necessary for the development of new members into mature disciples.

### ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

Dimensions of a New Convert:

1. New Life (mind)
2. New Love (affection)
3. New Spiritual Energy (psycho-motor)

### ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

Needs Of New Members

New members are on fire for the Lord, full of energy and excitement, and are ready for action. If they are to grow and mature into serviceable Christians, certain basic needs must be considered.

### ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- These three dimensions seek avenues of expression:
  - The impulse to pray
  - The impulse to worship
  - The impulse to serve
  - The impulse to share the new life in Christ with others
  - The impulse to enjoy social fellowship

### ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The new converts are imitating

Christ's customs and desires:

- Desire to pray (Matt 14:23)
- Desire for Bible study and worship (Luke 4:16)
- Desire to serve (Matt 10:45)
- Desire to witness (Matt 6:6)

- Desire to enjoy fellowship (John 2:1)

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- *No new member can love, grow and develop* without the exercise of these spiritual avenues. Pastors and members are responsible for providing these opportunities. We are to keep the new converts actively involved in the life the church (Evangelism, p. 351).

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- **God is** primarily responsibly for the conservation of new members.
- Caring for members is a supernatural work.
- New converts “walk in the flesh,” but they do not “war in the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:3).

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- *The Pastor* – “When men and women accept the truth, we are not to go away and leave them, and have no further burden for them. They are to be looked after. They are to be carried as a burden upon the soul; and we must watch over them as stewards who must render an account (Evan. 345).

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- *Workers* – Faithful teachers of God’s Word – “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...” (Evan. 337).

■ Caring For New Members

- *The Church* – “It is the duty of older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help, sympathy, and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth’s sake. They have thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed.....

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Church

- 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” (Evan. p. 351).

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- *The New Converts* – “While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put the minister in the place of God. Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities. Christ is the one whom we are to look for guidance.” Test. Vol. 7, p. 20

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

### Reasons Why People Join the Church

- Some join for social reasons.
- Some become members because of material or secular reasons

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

### Reasons Why People Join the Church

- Others join for family reasons: they simply feel nice knowing their parents are members of the church.
- Still others come in for spiritual reasons: they love Jesus and desire to grow into His likeness.

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

How your church treats new believers will either keep them or drive them away. How they relate to them; how much concern they demonstrate; the level of respect for their spiritual, social, economic, emotional and mental lives will help to determine whether these spiritual babes will remain or go.

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The Purpose and Mission of the Church
  - To take the gospel to the whole world – Matt. 28:18-20, Rev. 14:6,7
  - To make disciples of all people – Matt. 28: 18-20
  - To ensure that converts remain – John 15: 16

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The church nurtures its lambs and sheep. Thus, it is more than a soul-winning church: it is a soul-keeping church, seeking to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28).

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The church plans for growth. Therefore, it should also plan for the arrival and survival of its new converts.

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- Follow-up work for new believers should:
  - be structured well in advance of the actual evangelistic project
  - commence as soon as they are baptized
- ● continue for about one year when a reasonable degree of assimilation should have taken place.

## ■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- New members should be enrolled as Sabbath School members, but it is understood that they will belong to a special new members' class for their first

year. They will come to Sabbath School and participate in the program until the time comes for separation to their special class.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The leader of the new members' class will keep a Sabbath School record and will follow the usual practice of giving the welcome, taking the record, receiving the mission offering, and taking the personal ministries report.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- Guide the new members in a discussion of the key texts in the lesson, keeping the spotlight on the Word of God.
- Keep the pages of the Bible turning, having class members read key discussion texts.
- CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS
- Listen to God's ideas first, and then share your thoughts and feelings.
- Impress upon new members the need for humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The new members' class is an important part of the nurturing and assimilative process. This class will provide a unique opportunity for the following:

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- To afford the occasion for a warm welcome and acceptable style of listening to and caring for each new member
- To meet each week at the Sabbath School class time to study and discuss the Profile lesson
- To make a life-application of the Bible truths being studied and discussed

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The leader and associates will not only be responsible for the spiritual nurture outlined above, but also will be certain to introduce the new members to the various avenues of personal ministries.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The pastor will arrange a stewardship visit, inviting the new members to make a commitment as part of their involvement.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- The leader will study the personality and needs of each new member; and will assign a suitable associate to act as sponsor to the new member.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

- This sponsor will assume responsibility for the watchful care outlined above to ensure that the new member will grow in faith, discipleship and Christian service.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- **Fellowship Phase** - This phase involves the acceptance of the new believer, interaction with the new believers, affirmation and support of new believers. Although some aspects of nurture may be present here, the intention is to emphasize 'fellowship'. Assimilation of new believers is quickly effected through inter-relationships.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- **Nurturing Phase** (1 Thess. 4:1,2) This phase involves personal and spiritual growth through the presentation and application of Bible centered/Christ centered principles. Although this may overlap some aspects of fellowship, the emphasis here is on 'nurture'.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- **Worship Phase** – This phase involves celebration – the corporate, dynamic praise and adoration of God, identity, relationships, confession, communion, renewal, and commitment.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- Based on the order of worship seen in Isaiah 6:1-8, four stages emerge:
  - praise and adoration
  - confession and acknowledgement
  - renewal and communion
  - dedication and commitment

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- Warmth and winsomeness, manifesting a sense of grace,
- Dynamic and inspiring music (some leaders of worship suggest that music should constitute 40% of the worship service.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- Character and quality of preaching, from which worshippers are helped, loved, comforted, challenged, in which preachers serve as shepherds, leaders and prophets
- Power and movement of liturgy in which there is a sense of progression and movement toward the climax

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- Scripture reading should be carefully selected and carefully read
- A pastoral prayer as carefully prepared as the sermon

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- Assimilation Phase:
- Making Serviceable Christians
- Equipping Christians – Members must be trained for service.
- Assigning Christians – Members must be given work to do according to their abilities.

■ CARING FOR NEW MEMBERS

The Diversity of the Feeding

- **Mission Phase** -- This phase involves the witness of personal faith and experience, proclamation and demonstration, in life and deed, of the gospel of Jesus Christ as God's power of salvation to believers. "When souls are converted, set them to work at once. (Evan. p. 355).

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