

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Masters of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: RECLAIMING FORMER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS IN OGUN CONFERENCE, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Reclaiming former Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Ogun conference is a study that was motivated by the alarming rate of backsliders in this Conference. The Researcher developed a programme with a purpose to reclaim the backsliders. The study utilized the programme development method to conduct this research. This included an empirical study to find out the reasons for backsliding. It is a fact that people are leaving the church for many reasons but the majority of backsliders are leaving because of issues other than doctrinal teaching. A programme of reclaiming members was implemented and many backsliders were reclaimed. The result of this study established that reclaiming the backsliding ones required the involvement of all church members in the congregation. Hence, the study concluded that the duty of bringing back the former members is not a work that can be left only to pastors of the congregation. It is teamwork. It is recommended, therefore, that the

church pastors and members strengthen the programme of caring and nurturing among other things in order to sustain the gains of this programme.

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RECLAIMING FORMER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS  
IN OGUN CONFERENCE, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

John Adesegun Olawumi

January 2016

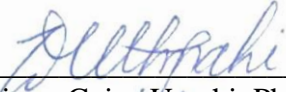



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	VII
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	2
Significance of the Study .....	3
Delimitation of the Study .....	3
Methodology .....	3
2. BIBLICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	5
Biblical Views on Reclamation of Members .....	5
Old Testament View.....	5
New Testament View .....	6
Ellen G. White’s View on Reclaiming Former Members.....	9
Review of Contemporary Scholars .....	11
Extracted Models for Reclamation of Backsliders.....	14
3. DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING IN OGUN CONFERENCE.....	18
General Overview of the Local Setting.....	18
Economic Situation .....	19
Political Situation .....	19
Socio-Cultural Situation .....	20
The State of the Church in Ogun Conference .....	20
Religious Situation .....	22
Membership Audit in Ogun Conference .....	24
Empirical Studies in Ogun Conference.....	25
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.....	26
Reasons for Backsliding.....	28

4. PROGRAMME DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION.....	33
Programme Design.....	33
Programme Implementation.....	34
Zone A.....	34
Zone B.....	37
Programme Evaluation.....	38
Reclamation of Members.....	39
Visitation to Members.....	39
Sensitivity to Members.....	40
Nurturing of Newly Baptized Members.....	40
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	42
Summary .....	42
Conclusion .....	42
Recommendations.....	43
APPENDIXES .....	48
A. CORRESPONDENCE.....	46
B. RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE.....	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51
CURRICULUM VITA .....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Membership Audit .....	25
2. Church Participants in the Study.....	26
3. Demographic Characteristics .....	27
4. Reasons Why Members Leave the Church.....	29
5. Caring and Belonging .....	30
6. Leadership Issues .....	31
7. Participation and Responsibility .....	31
8. Spirituality.....	32
9. District Church attendant Monthly Report 2014 .....	39
10. Statistical Report 2014.....	41

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Backsliding is a word which ought not to exist in the Christian vocabulary. It is a fact, however, that many people backslide from the Church and from a saving relationship with the Lord.<sup>1</sup> However, people leave the Church because of one reason or the other. After two to five years, 80 percent of backsliders are willing to return to the Church but the way of coming back is not easy for the former members.<sup>2</sup> In this situation, they need encouragement. The Church needs to care for them physically and spiritually in order to lead them back to the Church.

Through personal interaction with members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at a recent camp meeting, it has been shown that although people do at times leave over doctrinal issues, only 20 percent of former members have left the church because of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. Most of the time, they leave for other reasons. Going by the statistical record of Ogun Conference, 50 percent of the former members leave the Church because of personal problems while the remaining 30 percentage leave because they were under Church discipline for various offenses they have committed.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the reasons, the Church has the responsibility to create a

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<sup>1</sup> Joe A Webb, *Reclaiming Former Members: Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Teachers Edition. Second Quarter 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Finley, *They are Coming Home* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Centre, 1993), 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ogun Administrative Unit of Seventh-day Adventist Church Inauguration Booklet, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2011.

loving and nurturing environment that would help those who join decide whether to stay.<sup>4</sup>

Reclaiming former members is a special ministry that the Church needs to develop to avert members' backsliding. Furthermore, it will now be a ministry of reaching out to those who once worshipped with us. In fact, one could argue that in Matthew 10:5, 6, Jesus sent His disciples to win back members of the Jewish nation who had fallen away from a saving relationship with their Lord. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that we today also enter into a workforce for those people who have a special history with God and His Church.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research shows that, in an increasing number of societies, alarming numbers of young people are leaving the church. In some cases about 50 percent leave the church before they reach the age of 20, which does not necessarily mean leaving God.<sup>5</sup> Through interaction, members in Ogun Conference of SDA Church often lamented the fact that the Church is very active bringing new members into the Church without adequate care for them, due to inadequate shepherds.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The challenge of the SDA Church in Ogun Conference is a lack of nurture of the members leading to many backsliding and leaving the church. The purpose of this study is to develop a programme for the church in Ogun Conference for the

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<sup>4</sup> Finley, 8, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Clair Sanches and Jon Sanches, "Guide Them Playfully Towards The Kingdom Of God," In *Families Reaching Across: Revival and Reformation*, eds. Willie Oliver and Elaine Oliver (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2013), 15.

reclaiming of former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research, apart from being a fulfilment of the M.A. Pastoral Theology degree, was designed to add to current knowledge on the reclamation of former members and effective ways to minister to them. The findings also showed that church member sensitivity to the challenges of missing members must be increased.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Reclaiming former Seventh-day Adventist Church members is a general challenge to the church. The focus of this study is limited to Ogun Conference. The reason is that between 2009 and 2014 the researcher was a minister in Ogun Conference and, therefore, has a fair knowledge of the locale of the study and could travel around the conference territory. He also had an access to the record of missing members through Ogun Conference district leaders.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a programme development method. In order to achieve success for this project, the researcher used a questionnaire, interviews, and documentary analysis to collect data. All the district headquarters of Ogun Conference were visited in order to collect data. Some former members were interviewed so as to find out why they had left the church and what possible solution could be provided to prevent members leaving the church and for possible reclamation of those who had left.

From June 2013, consultation of some libraries was made. Also, internet and offices data were part of the data source. District offices, Ogun Conference office and

old South West Conference office. The homes of some known former members were visited in order to gather information concerning the former members and why they left and what can be done to bring them back. Lectures were prepared on both reclaiming former members and membership retention in the SDA Church, Ogun Conference. The researcher located and visited some former members and got a lot of details about what causes the members to leave the Church. They also gave some good suggestions on membership retention. These led to the completion of programme implementation in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### **Biblical Views on Reclamation of Members**

##### **Old Testament View**

The Old Testament calls the former members ‘scattered sheep that the shepherd needs to look after’. Ezekiel describes them as follows, “So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wander over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them”<sup>1</sup> (Ezek 34:5-6, NIV).

In effect, true shepherding includes a ministry of intense intercession calling for prayers for oneself, prayer for one’s flock in the fold, and prayer for the lost sheep. In such prayers, one should include the passion, patience to deal with struggling sheep, humility, tact, affection, tenderness, hope, and all the graces that are needed by the sheep and the shepherd. So, the shepherd needs to persistently and consistently pray for the lost sheep. Isaiah said “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You, who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest” (Isa 62:6, NIV).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sanches and Sanches, In *Families Reaching Across*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 95.

## **New Testament View**

The idea of belonging to a Church is assumed in the New Testament. To become a member, one need to become born again. When Nicodemus was willing to know what to do in order to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus answered him that he needed to be born again (John 3:3-5). Jesus explained to Nicodemus the meaning of being born again as being baptized with the Spirit and water. When one is baptized with water, this symbolises burying one's sin just as Christ was buried after His crucifixion on the cross and rose the third day (Rom 6:3-10). Jesus also commanded his followers to go to the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature and baptize all that believed for their salvation (Matt 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16).

The issue of one becoming a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church required believing in Jesus Christ and His teaching and also being baptized with water and the Holy Spirit. This also goes with teaching the word of God to those who want to be members according to the command of God in the book of Matthew 28:20. Every person who was a Christian was part of a fellowship with other Christians in the locality. No one was left to live or minister independently, nor did Christians become a rule unto themselves. The saying that “no man is an island” is true of a Christian too.<sup>3</sup>

The disciples in the New Testament were numbered, which seems to be equivalent to adding to a membership roll (Acts 1:15; 4:4; 6:1, 7). When people were baptized, they were added to the Church (Acts 2:41, 47; 6:14; 11:26).

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<sup>3</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Evangelism and Church Growth*, 95.

The apostles had an inclusive number of 11 (Acts 1:26) or 12 in its membership (Acts 2:14). And having gotten a set number of leaders in the Church, this gave them the credibility to keep record and number its members.<sup>4</sup>

Access to Church membership is decided by congregational approval; it is sometimes decided by the members, the official board, or the membership committee. The condition for acceptance into the Church as a member is based on one's faith in the Word of God and acceptance to be baptized into the Church.

The New Testament counsels relate to the straying and lost sheep by stating that the Church must find them. In the words of Jesus, "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?" (Matt 18:12, NIV). Obviously, the care of every sheep must be the preoccupation of both the shepherd and lay members, and thus the Pastor must be accountable for every member.<sup>5</sup>

The experience of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well should bring comfort to the shepherd (John 4:4-42). When she understood the importance of the water that Jesus offered, she exclaimed, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (verse 15, NIV). The Pastor's intent should be to provide spiritual water for the sheep so that they will feel no desire to drink from any other stream.<sup>6</sup>

Apostle Paul also counsels concerning erring members. He said, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted (Gal 6:1, NIV). In the same vein, he also said in

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<sup>4</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Evangelism and Church Growth*, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the Book of James “My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this; whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:19-20).

When Christ was on earth, His ministry was centred on reclaiming the lost ones. Christ loved each one of them. He would have died for only one of them. He spent much time in His ministry trying to reach out and reclaim the drop-outs. In Luke 15, Christ gave three parables which He used to teach a lesson to the religious leaders of His day.<sup>7</sup>

The scribes and Pharisees repulsed men and women whom they considered sinners, but Jesus welcomed them. Upon an earlier occasion, Jesus had met this charge with the declaration that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17).<sup>8</sup> Jesus hated the sin but loved the sinner. He preferred to associate with them rather than with the religious leaders. He cared for those whom men often despised, like erring members, and He always longed to win their confidence. Just as Christ used to be happy whenever a sinner repents, it will also be with the Church when former members come back to the Church. Christ showed by these three parables that God is waiting for the drop-outs to be found and reclaimed. He said that there is rejoicing in heaven when one lost sinner is found and rescued.<sup>9</sup> The members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference must see the work of seeking the missing members as a must because God still loves the missing ones.

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<sup>7</sup> May-Ellen Colon, ed., *Keys to Reclaiming the Missing* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2010), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

There are three types of missing members represented in Luke 15. The lost sheep represents those who know they are lost but don't know how to find their way back. Someone must go and search for them and bring them back. Jesus commissioned us to look for the lost ones as we equally seek for new members to join the church.

The parable of the lost coin represents ~~also~~ those who don't realize they are lost. So they are unable to do anything about their condition. Not until the Church goes and meets them, they may not think of coming back to the Church by themselves, this set of former members needs the help of the other Church members.

The third group is represented by the Lost Son.<sup>10</sup> These are former members who know they are lost, know their way back, but are afraid they would not be forgiven of their offences and received back. The Church needs to share with them a positive, reassuring message that our heavenly Father loves them, is longing to forgive them, and is eagerly waiting for them to return back to the Church. The Church needs to show genuine love to these sets of former members and care for them so that they may throw their pasts behind them, come back to the Church, and be nurtured again.

### **Ellen G. White's View on Reclaiming Former Members**

Ellen White, under the inspiration of God, gave instruction to the church concerning how it should handle the backsliding members. She says:

Christ came to the earth purposely because of the salvation of humankind and He achieved this purpose through His death on the Cross. His death testifies to His selfless love to all humankind including erring members of the Church. His labours were especially for those who most needed the salvation He came to bring. The greater their needs of reform, the deeper was His interest; the greater His sympathy, and the more earnest His labours. His great heart of

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<sup>10</sup> May-Ellen Colon, ed., *Keys to Reclaiming the Missing*, 6.

love was stirred to its depths for the ones whose condition was most hopeless and who most needed His transforming grace.<sup>11</sup>

Ellen White also continues:

But there has been among us as a people a lack of deep, earnest, soul-touching sympathy and love for the tempted and the erring. Many have manifested great coldness and sinful neglect, represented by Christ as passing by on the other side, keeping as far as possible from those who most need help. The newly converted soul often has fierce conflicts with the established habit or with some special form of temptation, and being overcome by some master passion or tendency, he is guilty of indiscretion or actual wrong. It is then that energy, tact, and wisdom are required of his brethren, that he may be restored to spiritual health. In such cases, the instructions of God's word apply: 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such anyone in a spirit of meekness; consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted' (Gal 6:1). 'We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.' (Rom 15:1)<sup>12</sup>

Both members and the clergy need to be mindful of the way they approach backsliders. What the members are saying about individual backsliding members will determine their response towards coming back to the Church. E. G. White counsels:

Mild measures, soft answers, and pleasant words are much better fitted to reform and save, than severity and harshness. A little too much unkindness may place persons beyond your reach, while a conciliatory spirit would be the means of binding them to you, and you might then establish them in the right way. You should be actuated by a forgiving spirit also, and give due credit to every good purpose and action of those around you.<sup>13</sup>

Shepherds need to go the extra mile in bringing back the missing members. They need to plead with them and encourage them to come back to the Church.

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association, 1995), 219.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:65.

“When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true shepherd’s voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great shepherd. The people of God will draw together, and present to the enemy a united front.”<sup>14</sup> God will work mightily with His ministers when their hearts are filled with love for the poor lost sheep of the house of Israel. Hunt up the backsliders, those who once knew what religion was and give them the message of mercy.<sup>15</sup> If there is a backslider, the shepherd knows how to present the truth in such a manner that the soul will be convicted. He will leave the ninety-nine and seek the lost sheep. But if the shepherd does not visit his flock, he knows not their condition, he knows not what truths to set before them, nor what is appropriate to their case. And more than this, as the preacher manifests so little interest in the souls under his charge, he cannot set an example to the flock to have an interest and love and watch-care for soul—appeal and suggestion to conference officers.<sup>16</sup>

### **Review of Contemporary Scholars**

It is important to note that various contemporary writers have made discussions about backsliding members and how they affect the growth of the church. Frank Yost has this to say:

At a time when Christian faith and values are under attack and are eroded and when more and more are becoming un-churched, is it not the responsibility of the Church, the believers and the pastors to affirm and proclaim a message that is biblical, relevant and interesting? We have the light of the Bible and the truth that the world looks for. We have the most interesting and compelling

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<sup>14</sup> Ellen White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 219.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

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

messages to give to the world groping in darkness. Should we, as pastors, not emphasize biblical preaching in a planned, serious way?<sup>17</sup>

The dropouts possibly have been hurt by their Church or fellow members. In order to justify themselves, they often will find fault with their parents, Church or fellow members. God has not appointed us to be defence attorneys for the Church or anyone else. When we attempt to correct the missing members, we are aligning ourselves with an institution or individual that they felt has offended them. We, in effect, say: “We believe in these enemies of yours and not in you.” Our job in working with the missing or former members is to win their friendship and confidence not to argue with them or correct them.<sup>18</sup>

Backsliders, Church dropouts, inactive members, whatever we call them, cause us pain. It is the side of our Church that we whisper about but find it difficult to talk about publicly, for by admitting that backsliders exist, we speak of failure. Whether it is ours or theirs, it is still failure. And failure is hard to swallow in any line, particularly, by a Church that senses a last day prophetic calling and wants to be seen as successful, as growing, and as friendly, as sharing the true gospel of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Wilmer points out that while some have chosen to leave because of doctrinal differences, disagreements over standards, or other issues, many have left because of lack of friends, boredom, loneliness, alienation, inadequate spiritual food or conflict with fellow believers.<sup>20</sup> Ellen G. White counsels: “Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older

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<sup>17</sup> Frank H. Yost, “The Magnificent Seven: Principles to Reach the Unchurched,” *Ministry*, February 2012, accessed 1 March 2016, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2012/02/the-magnificent-seven>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> James Cress, “Pastor’s Pastor: Reconnect, Reclaim, Reflame,” *Ministry*, February 2009, accessed 1 March 2016, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2009/02/reconnect-reclaim-reflame>.

members of the Church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other Church.”<sup>21</sup>

“The Church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the Church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them.”<sup>22</sup> Churches in Ogun Conference owe God a duty of fishing the former members and conserving those whom the Lord has given us. To do less than we can to preserve them, would amount to disobedience to Christ’s command to fish for humanity.

One minister described missing members as folks who “don’t come in and they don’t go out; they just leave the flies in.”<sup>23</sup> However, some of these discouraged and backslidden members can be brought back into active Church fellowship. In many Churches, there are members who have been visited, corresponded with, prayed for, and pleaded with for years. They have never made an open break with the Church, but neither do they attempt to keep in touch with the Church. In a situation like this, letters could be devised at the Church board meeting and sent to the missing members. The first letter should be followed by a second, similar in content, in which the assumption was made that the first letter had not reached its destination, hence, no reply.<sup>24</sup> Through this method, as the backslider replies, the church may know the

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1896), 319.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Steve D. Cassimy and Abraham J. Jules, *Effective Pastoral Ministry* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), 169-178.

problems facing him or her. This will help the church to take a quick action in handling such a problem and thereby reclaiming the backsliders.

As a good shepherd, the Pastor also has the responsibility to accompany their sheep when the sheep go out to pasture. The shepherd's task includes providing green grass, still waters, and being accountable for all the sheep. With plenty of food and water, the sheep will lie still.<sup>25</sup> However, the hungry sheep will become restless and prone to wander in search for anything edible. Shepherds are not surprised when wandering sheep are hurt or lost. The shepherd must be diligent in the search for nutritious food for their flock, and be fully aware of any hungry or wayward sheep that seek to stray.

In pastoral care, a major benefit of having contented sheep is the opportunity it provides for the shepherd to spend time in earnest communication with God. The shepherd can spend time with the Word, talk to God, rest, be rejuvenated and spend quality time in recreation. The shepherd must always be alert and ready, however, because discontented sheep are always present. Discontentment leads to wandering and lustiness, resulting in pain and hurt. Thus, the task of feeding the sheep becomes even more imperative.<sup>26</sup>

### **Extracted Models for Reclamation of Backsliders**

This section summarizes the models and principles for reclaiming former members. First, both Pastors and lay leaders of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference need to be closer to their Church members through visitation and personal contacts. This will help them to know the needs of their members, and,

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<sup>25</sup> Steve D. Cassimy and Abraham J. Jules, *Effective Pastoral Ministry*, 169-178.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

likewise, members will have confidence in them. When Church leaders move closer to the members, they feel cared for and see their Church leaders being authentic. From time to time, leaders of the Church must relate with their members in order to know their condition or welfare, and be able to find a solution to their problems. The care can make them stay instead of leaving.

Friendly and receptive attitude is another model. Ellen White pointed out the powerful influence Church members have on visitors. “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the Church members who have never been converted and those who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of any effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”<sup>27</sup> If the Church members can get acquainted with former members of the Church, visit them, pray for them and invite them to their house for an enjoyable Sabbath lunch, it will go a long way. Often calling them to attend special occasions such as birthday celebrations, weddings, funerals and graduations, the former members will be willing to return back to Church. Instead of criticising them, they should befriend them and encourage them.

The next model is to cultivate creative and attractive Church services. Much through prayer, planning and preparation are essential to make a worship service creative and appealing. It is only a few Churches in Ogun Conference that invest that kind of time in their programmes.

Furthermore, prayer is essential to achieve a positive atmosphere in the Church, and bring people to a saving relationship with Jesus. The apostle Paul urged

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<sup>27</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press), 6:371.

Timothy, a young pastor, to be faithful in prayer: “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. . . . This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth” (1 Tim 2:1, 3, 4). As members and Church leaders pray for one another, every member of the Church will be up and doing in-service to God and their fellow members. Time has to be devoted to prayers during Sabbath worship and other weekly Church programmes.

There is this conviction that recreation in any enjoyable setting brings people together and makes it much easier to cultivate friendship. It has often been said and anecdotally noted that many Seventh-day Adventists who leave the Church do so not because of doctrine but because of an absence of meaningful relationships with other members. Spending time together in more relaxed settings builds such relationships.<sup>28</sup>

Social gatherings like Youth Camp, Adventist Men Organisation (AMO) Convention, Adventist Women Ministry (AWM) Convention, and Family Camp and so on bring members together for social activities. The Church can pay for the backsliders or former members to attend freely. Through this, the Church can win their heart back.

Following the biblical injunction and view of contemporary scholars, there is no doubt about the existence of former members in the church. The purpose of the church on earth is to make disciples for Christ. Therefore, every member of the church needs to get involved in the work of bringing people to Christ and nurturing them including those who have backslidden from the church.

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<sup>28</sup> Kevin Wilfley, “The Magnificent Seven: Principles to Reach the Unchurched,” *Ministry*, February 2012, accessed 1 March 2016, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2012/02/the-magnificent-seven>.

In summary, visitations and personal contacts, friendship and receptive attitude, creative and attractive church services, intercessory prayers, and recreation are some of the ways the church can use to reclaim backsliders. These models have been effective in other places as discussed and can be tried for Ogun Conference.

CHAPTER 3  
DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING  
IN OGUN CONFERENCE

**General Overview of the Local Setting**

Abeokuta is the capital of Ogun State and is also the headquarters of Ogun Conference. Abeokuta is the largest urban centre in Ogun Conference, but the impact of the Church is still very little in terms of evangelism. Because of this, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not known to many people in the area. Ogun Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is situated about 100 kilometres from Lagos, Nigeria's foremost commercial and industrial centre, and 740 kilometres from Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital. Ogun State, which makes up Ogun Conference, has a total population of 2,338,570 people according to the census figures of 1991.<sup>1</sup>

Ogun Conference of Seventh-day Adventist has a total membership of 5,854<sup>2</sup> as at the time of this research. People that are living within Ogun Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church are heterogeneous, but the dominant ethnic group is the Yoruba because Ogun State, in the Western part of Nigeria, is basically Yoruba land.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ogun Ministry of Industry and Social Development (OMISD), *Ogun State Investors Guide*, (Abeokuta, Ogun: Eni-Me Nigeria Limited, 2001), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ogun Conference, *Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria: Report of the Inaugural Constituency Session*, December 20-23, 2012 (Abeokuta, Nigeria: Ogun Conference, 2012), 15.

<sup>3</sup> OMISD, *Ogun State Investors Guide*, 4.

## **Economic Situation**

There are many commercial and industrial undertakings within the territory of Ogun state where Ogun Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church is located. Commercial activities thrive in Ogun State due to its location between the two most populous towns in Nigeria, Lagos and Ibadan and its international boundary with the Republic of Benin.

Ogun State satisfies one of the conditions of large-scale buying of consumer goods and services.<sup>4</sup> By comparison with most states of Nigeria, the level of industrial activity in Ogun State is relatively high. Industries abound in areas such as Ota, Agbara, Sagamu, Ewekoro, and Ijebu, producing cement, beer, tyres, bricks, carpets, textiles, salt, pharmaceuticals, processed foods, poultry feeds, asbestos roofing sheet and ceiling sheets, and paper mills.

## **Political Situation**

Traditionally, Ogun people, like other Yoruba people, were under the rulership of their Obas (kings) and Chiefs before the arrival of the British colonial government. The pre-colonial arrangement of Ogun people had made it possible for the people to achieve democratic tendencies.<sup>5</sup>

Ogun State was created out of the former Western Region on February 3 1976, by the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime. The state is bounded to the West by the Republic of Benin, to the East by Ondo State, to the North by Oyo State and to the South by Lagos State. The state has produced a large number of “sufficiently educated

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<sup>4</sup> OMISD, *Ogun State Investors Guide*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> G. O. Oguntomisin, *Studies in Ijebu History and Culture* (Ibadan, Nigeria: John Archers, 2002), 40.

and sophisticated men and women who have contributed in no small measure to the economic, social and political development of the state.”<sup>6</sup>

The leadership of the state has been rotated between five geo-political zones of the state (Remo, Ijebu, Egba, Yewa, and the Aworis). To accomplish the rotation, the governorship seat has been influenced by the zoning system of any predominant party in the state.

### **Socio-Cultural Situation**

People within Ogun Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seem to be enlightened. The early contact with the Europeans in the eighteen century led to the spread of Western education in the state. The Free Education Programme, in the defunct Western Region, introduced by Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and later, in Ogun State, under the Administration of Late Chief Victor Olabisi Onabanjo further strengthened the high level of formal education of Ogun people.

Therefore, the people of Ogun State are highly social with many social activities and ceremonies which are done on Saturdays. The biblical day of worship is the acceptable day of celebration for indigenes of the state. This has made it difficult for Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference to really come up with high numbers of Church membership. These social activities affect the new members’ settlement into the faith after their baptism.

### **The State of the Church in Ogun Conference**

The first set of Seventh-day Adventist Missionaries came to Nigeria on March 7, 1914 when Elder David C. Babcock and his missionary team, namely: R. Dauphin (Ghanaian) and S. Morgue (Sierra Leonean) arrived from Freetown to Nigeria and

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<sup>6</sup> G. O. Oguntomisin, *Studies in Ijebu History and Culture*, 40.

moved into the interior part of Yoruba land and finally settled at Erunmu, in Egbeda Local Government Area of Oyo State.<sup>7</sup> The Adventist message was first preached in 1926 at Abeokuta, the state capital, by Elder S. O. Oyelese. Oral history has it that he was a literature evangelist. Since that time, the Lord blessed this little Church with new members. The Church did not grow very fast in Ogun Conference until the establishment of the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) which has metamorphosed to Babcock University (BU) today. Hence, BU has brought a lot of development in terms of Church growth to the conference.

However, the Church still finds it difficult to retain its membership. Part of the reason is that the belief system of the people in Ogun State is making it difficult for the converts to be committed. For instance,<sup>8</sup> the people of Ogun, as in other towns and villages that make up Yoruba land, have something to celebrate in the form of a festival. Festivals are observed by adherents of the indigenous religion in Ìjẹ̀bùland. It is a common feature of the Ìjẹ̀bù society. It has to do with personal and communal ritual, and it is also the most joyful and the most important social and religious activities among the people. The chief purpose of the festival is to be in the right relationship with divine powers, to attain, what the Ancient Romans called, the *pax deorum*—the favour of the divinities.

Hence, this traditional practice which has been on the ground before the advent of the Christian religion in Ogun Conference has been a threat to Christianity, especially to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference. Most of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ogun Conference, *Inaugural Constituency Session*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Oluwatosin Adeoti Akintan, “Traditional Religious Festivals and Modernity: A Case Study of Female-Oriented Cults Annual Festivals in Ijebuland of South Western Nigeria,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 9 (2013): 267-276.

idols worshipped in Ogun State are worshipped on Saturday (the official day of worship by the Seventh-day Adventist Church). Because of this, people are being restricted from going to Church on the Sabbath day whenever the traditional worshippers are celebrating their idols. *Oro* is the most popular idol that the traditionalists use to worship in Ogun State. Whenever any of their members gets converted to the Christian religion, they usually threaten him/her and this makes the convert backslide from the Church.<sup>9</sup>

The people that are living in Ogun Conference are lovers of social gathering. Because of this, Saturday has been their traditional day of various ceremonies. Converts find it difficult to be in the Church on the Sabbath day because of the traditional ceremonies that go on in their community.<sup>10</sup> After missing Church service for some time, they eventually backslide from the Church.

### **Religious Situation**

Ogun people, like other groups of the Yoruba, believe in the existence of an Almighty God (*Olodumare*), who they acknowledge as the Creator of all things existing on the earth. They also believe that the *Olodumare* is so great and powerful that He cannot be approached directly by human beings.<sup>11</sup> Thus, they worship various divinities, called *Irunmole* or *Orunmila*, who they regard as intermediaries between them and *Olodumare* (God). They have many divinities, both male and female. The male ones are gods while the female ones are goddesses.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Olatunji Adebawojo, retired indigenous pastor, Ilishan Remo, Ogun Conference, interview by the author, Ilishan Remo, February 12, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Oguntomisin, 74, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 76, 77.

The gods and goddesses are propitiated on religious occasions and festivals. Religious celebration and secular festivals are hardly distinguishable in the life of the people. Although festivals had religious significance, *Ogun* people did not distinguish between the worship of deities and essentially social celebrations. According to them, rituals are constant realities of life.

The arrival of Christianity in the middle of the eighteenth century brought changes. For instance, there were some modifications in the worship of the deities.<sup>13</sup> For example, human sacrifices ceased. Animals and birds were offered in sacrifices in the place of human beings. The first Church in Nigeria was built in Abeokuta, the state capital, and Ogun Conference headquarters. Also, the first bishop of the Anglican Church in Nigeria was also from Abeokuta, Bishop Ajayi Crowther.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the changes pointed out above, Ogun people's religious practices still survive. Many Christians still engage in traditional practices along with Christianity. Christians who take traditional chieftaincy titles observe the traditional practices associated with such titles. In fact, as objects of worship changed, images were broken and charms thrown away, but the adherents of traditional religion still found it difficult to discard indigenous beliefs and cultic practices totally.<sup>15</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, Islamic religion came to Ogun State. The religion was quickly spread among Ogun people because Muslims practice self-help, self-reliant method of evangelisation with emphasis on the community. The

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<sup>13</sup> Ayodele Olu, *Sagamu: Migration to Year 2000 (100 BC – AD 2000.)* (Nigeria: Olu Ayodele Enterprises, 2003), 131-135.

<sup>14</sup> Oguntomisin, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

indigenisation of the religion enabled it to make an impact on the cultures of many people in Ogun State.

### **Membership Audit in Ogun Conference**

Through the record gotten from the office of the Secretary, Ogun Conference, it has been shown that the ratio of people who come into the Church to the ratio of people who slip out through the “back door” is about 2:7.<sup>16</sup> According to the researcher’s information with the members in Ogun Conference of SDA Church, they often lament why the Church is good at bringing new members into the Church without adequate care for them. More often, members easily leave the Church because they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Members stated that the Church “back door” needed to be closed in order to prevent new members from slipping out of the “back door” of the Church. The Church has not been doing well in the area of nurturing and meeting the need of the members. That is the reason why members are not willing to stay. They prefer to go to Churches where their needs will be met and be properly nurtured.<sup>17</sup>

Recently, in June 2012, the Conference Secretary went round the Churches in Ogun Conference for membership audit and it was discovered that there were lots of disparity in the membership figures in the local Churches from that of the Conference record. Churches also complained about inaccurate statistical Church record keeping, which is also inhibiting them from knowing how many members leave the Church annually. Table 1 shows the statistics of the auditing exercise in Ogun Conference for

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<sup>16</sup> Ogun Conference, *Membership Audit Report: 2012/2013* (Nigeria: Ogun Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church), n.p.

<sup>17</sup> During membership retention training program in February, 2010.

the year 2012 and 2013. This report shows that 39.7% of members are missing and the church cannot explain their whereabouts.

*Table 1. Membership Audit*

District	Membership on Record	Actual Membership	Missing Members	Missing Members %
Abeokuta	133	96	37	27.8%
Babcock	3,793	2,027	1,766	46.5%
Ijebu-ode	374	218	156	41.7%
Ilaro	143	111	32	22.4%
Ilishan North	554	471	83	14.9%
Ilishan West	245	193	49	20%
Sagamu	402	274	128	31.8%
Sango-Ota	210	138	72	14.9%
TOTAL	5,854	3,528	2,326	39.7%

### **Empirical Studies in Ogun Conference**

Questionnaires<sup>18</sup> were compiled and distributed in the following Districts— Ijebu-Ode, Ilisan I, Ilisan II, Sagamu, Abeokuta, and Ilaro Districts Churches—as indicated in Table 2. The participants were selected from different districts within the conference. The total number of churches involved was six out of the seven districts that constituted the conference at the time of this research. Sango SDA church had the highest respondents (39), followed by Makun (32) and Illisan I (26). The questionnaires were meant to provide adequate data concerning the reasons why people leave and the solution to this problem.

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix B.

*Table 2. Church Participants in the Study*

Church Name	Frequency	Percent
Ijebu-Ode SDA Church	11	9.3
Makun SDA Church	32	27.1
Iisan I SDA Church	26	22.0
Iisan II SDA Church	6	5.1
Abeokuta SDA Church	4	3.4
Sango SDA Church	39	33.1
Total	118	100.0

### **Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Table 3 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. These include gender, age, marital status, education, employment, profession, and ethnicity. Regarding gender, out of 118 copies recovered (which represent 100%), the male were 62.7% of the total number represented as indicated in Table 3.

Secondly, the researcher considered age. This is presented under five categories as indicated in Table 3. The participants ranged from 15 to 41 years and above. These represent the baptized members in the church in Ogun Conference. The researcher considered backsliding and missing baptized members only. The researcher also considered the age of 15 years and above, as the age that one can reason and make a freewill decision by themselves whether to stay in the church or not. Therefore, the results indicate that young adults (40 years and below) participated more in the survey than the older group. This may also mean that they are more informed on the topic than the older group.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency ( <i>f</i> )	Percentage (%)
Gender	Men	74	62.7
	Women	44	37.3
Age	15-25	22	18.6
	26-30	32	27.1
	31-35	25	21.2
	36-40	20	16.9
	41 and above	19	16.1
Marital Status	Single	48	40.7
	Married	69	58.5
	Divorced	1	.8
Education	First School Leaving	20	16.9
	WAEC/SSCE	44	37.3
	B.A/Equivalent	38	32.2
	Master Degree/Equivalent.	6	5.1
	Doctoral	3	2.5
	None	7	5.9
Employment	Employed	46	39
	Self-employed	33	28
	Unemployed	8	6.8
	Student	31	26.3
Profession	Business-person	38	32.2
	Civil Servant	36	30.5
	Others	44	37.3
Ethnicity	Igbo	52	44.1
	Yoruba	60	50.8
	Hausa	6	5.1

The third characteristic was the marital status of the respondents. According to the results in Table 3, a majority of the members who participated in this study (58.5%) were married. It also shows that divorce is not a common scenario among the participants. As far as education is concerned, the result shows that the majority of the

respondents were educated. This enhanced the results of the research since there was a lot of information from the respondents.

Furthermore, the survey indicated that most of the respondents were gainfully employed (39%) while 33% were self-employed. Only 6.8% were unemployed. The rest were students (26.3%). This is supported by the data which indicates that majority of the respondents (62.7%) belonged to the business and civil servants categories (32.2% & 30.5) respectively. This means that the church members in Ogun Conference are gainfully employed.

The participants were selected from the different districts within the conference—one church from each district. The total number of the churches was six, out of the seven districts that constituted the conference as at the time of the exercise. Members of SDA Church in Sango and Makun responded well to the questionnaire because the researcher visited the two churches personally to administer the questionnaire.

The last demographic characteristic is ethnicity. Table 3 shows that the respondents came the following major ethnic groups: Igbo, 44.1%, Yoruba, 50.8%, and Hausa, 5.1%. This reveals that Yoruba ethnic group is dominant among the respondents.

### **Reasons for Backsliding**

According to Table 4, the first reason why members leave is because they are enticed by the so called ‘prosperity messages’ of our contemporary preachers. It received the highest percentage of “strongly agreed” response (25.4%). Hence, members attribute the backsliding of members to the love of prosperity messages, followed by lack of prayer time (20.3%), lack of time for praise and worship (19.5%), and unimproved and lack of creativity in church programmes (19.1%). Very few

members attributed the loss of membership to church discipline and the effect of so-called absence of miracle (10.2% and 6.8% respectively). Other reasons are minimal compared to the 58.9% of the first three reasons. However, attention could also be given in those areas. That means Church leadership should look into those areas which have the highest percentage of “strongly agree” in order to find a solution to the problem.

*Table 4. Why Members Leave the Church*

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Church Discipline	12 10.2%	33 28.0%	23 19.5%	40 33.8%	10 8.5%
2. Church programmes	19 19.1%	55 46.6%	25 21.2%	10 5.5	9 7.6%
3. Praise and Worship	23 19.5%	17 14.4%	20 16.9%	36 30.6%	22 18.6%
4. Insufficient Prayers	13 11.0%	20 16.9%	15 12.7%	49 41.6%	21 17.8%
5. Deliverance Services program	22 18.6%	31 26.3%	17 14.4%	36 30.5%	12 10.2%
6. Prosperity Messages	30 25.4%	16 13.6%	16 13.6%	39 33.1%	17 14.3%
7. Miracles and Tongues	8 6.8%	6 5.1%	5 4.2%	54 45.8%	45 38.1%
8. Prayer time	24 20.3%	36 30.5%	15 12.7%	30 25.4%	13 11.1%
9. Worship Style	18 15.3%	24 20.3%	23 19.5%	39 33.0%	14 11.8%
10. Mode of Worship	13 11.0%	49 41.5%	30 25.4%	18 15.3%	8 6.8%

Another reason has to do with lack of care for former members and lack of a sense of belonging. Table 5 reveals the findings. 70.33% of respondents agreed that the listed items are responsible for members leaving the church. People do not want to know how much one knows until they know how much one cares. It is easier to reach the hearts of people when one is close to them.

*Table 5. Caring and Belonging*

Item		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Lack of Visitation	<i>f</i>	44	50	14	8	2
	<i>%</i>	37.3	42.4	20.9	6.8	2.6
Social Interaction		26	43	25	18	6
		22.0	36.4	21.2	15.3	5.1
Benevolence to Backslider		19	27	33	29	10
		16.1	22.9	28.0	24.6	8.4
Sharing Materials		12	22	18	49	17
		10.2	18.6	15.3	41.5	14.4

Leadership is the other factor that was investigated. Table 6 indicates that in terms of the amount of confidence people had in pastors and church elders. The results reveal that lack of confidence in the pastor (71.2%) and elders (73.8%) are responsible for the backsliding of members (strongly agreed, agreed and slightly agreed). This shows that members do not have confidence in their leaders. As the percentages indicate, those who disagreed and strongly disagreed are much less.

*Table 6. Leadership Issues*

Item		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Lack of Confidence in pastors	<i>f</i>	26	39	19	19	15
	<i>%</i>	22.0	33.1	16.1	16.1	12.7
Lack of Confidence in Elders	<i>f</i>	42	20	25	22	9
	<i>%</i>	35.6	16.9	21.3	18.6	7.6

Membership involvement was investigated too. Table 7 reveals that membership participation and involvement is essential to keep the members in the church (45.8%, 50%, and 31% respectively). That is the listed items are responsible for members leaving the church. This shows that members are not fairly involved either because of lack of confidence, a problem of unknown potential, members are never being asked to do anything, lack of training, limited understanding of the role, or neglect in the building relationship. The reason would need further investigation.

*Table 7. Participation and Responsibility*

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Members Involvement	<i>f</i>	54	43	6	11	4
	<i>%</i>	45.8	36.4	5.1	9.3	3.4
Involvement of youth	<i>f</i>	29	59	5	18	7
	<i>%</i>	24.6	50.0	4.2	15.3	5.9
Church Responsibility	<i>f</i>	14	37	18	34	15
	<i>%</i>	11.9	31.4	15.3	28.8	12.7

The discipline of members, individual state of mind, leaders' and parents' pretense were other factors included in the survey. Table 8 reveals the discipline of members (57.7%), the individual's state of mind (88.9), the leaders' and parents' pretense (79.7%) as responsible factors leading to backsliding.

*Table 8. Spirituality*

Item		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Discipline of Members	<i>f</i>	12	33	23	40	10
	<i>%</i>	10.2	28.0	19.5	33.8	8.5
Individual State of Mind		45	42	18	11	2
		38.1	35.6	15.3	9.3	1.7
Leaders' and Parents' Pretence		24	52	18	18	6
		20.3	44.1	15.3	15.3	5.1

From these responses in the above tables, it is obvious that members of Ogun Conference lack care and do not have a sense of belonging. They lack quality time for praise and worship during regular worship hours. They also could not keep their secrets with their leaders for lack of trust. Most of them have not been actively involved in spiritual activities and they desire to improve the general spirituality level of the church. Having identified these challenges, the aim of this research work was to provide a working tool for church leadership in Ogun Conference to effectively combat the challenges in order to enhance membership retention.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROGRAMME DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The challenge of backsliding members is real as discussed in chapter 3. This chapter answers that challenge through a developed programme. The first section describes the preparation of the programme, followed by the implementation and programme evaluation.

#### **Programme Design**

In preparation for the programme to reclaim backsliding members, letters were written to all district councils in the Conference. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, the researcher wrote to the Conference to request for permission to conduct a quarterly seminar on reclaiming former members of the Church starting from 8<sup>th</sup> June 2012 to 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The request was granted on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The two other districts sent their own approval letters on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

Through the effort of the District Pastors of these three districts, adequate publicities were made and preparations were also made by both the researcher and the districts. Every member of the district and every Church in each district was mandated to be part of the seminar.

The seminars were intended to achieve the following outcome:

1. To get the church members involved in reclamation of former members.
2. To have both the pastor and lay persons involved in intentional visits to all members in their district.

3. To encourage the church to pay more attention to the needs of the members and make provision for their needs.
4. To properly nurture the newly baptized members and making it a priority.
5. To be sure disciplining erring members will be carefully handled and followed up by church leaders.

### **Programme Implementation**

The programme was conducted in two Zones; Zone A and Zone B.

#### **Zone A**

Implementation of the programme started immediately after the approval of the Church Board. The first outing of the researcher for the programme implementation was at Ilisan Church I (Ijebu Ode/Remo Zone) and the programme was conducted between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The seminar commenced on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2012 at 5.00pm with the theme song and keynote address by the researcher who presented the programme. The programme leaflets were shared after the opening prayer. The first lecture took about one and a half hours, between 6.00pm to 7.30pm and the title of the lecture was “The Good Shepherd.” Emphasis was laid on the book of Luke 15. The lecture generated a lot of questions like, “Who is a good shepherd?”, “What are the function of the good shepherd?”, “Who are the sheep?” About thirty minutes were devoted to question and answer session. Then, the programme for the day was brought to an end with the theme song and prayer. The total number that was in attendance was 114.

Day two of the programme was on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2012 from 8.30am to 12.30pm, and 3.00pm to 5.00pm. The second lecture, titled “Why Do They Leave?” was presented. The emphasis was on love and sharing. The Bible texts were 1

Corinthians 13:1-8 and Acts 4:32-37. After one hour from the starting time, a 30-minute break was declared by the facilitator and the remaining 30 minutes were used for question and answer session. At 5.00pm, the last lecture for the day, entitled “Dealing with Former Members” was conducted, The Bible text was taken from the book of John 13:34, 35. “Care for them, pray with and for them, encourage them, visit them and socialize with them” were mentioned as the major needs for dealing with former members of Ogun Conference. Being a Sabbath day, the attendance went up to 338 both youths and adults. The programme came to an end by 7.00pm.

On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012, the programme started at 9.30am with the theme song followed by the fourth lecture: “If you are willing, they can still come back to the Church.” The book of Ezekiel 34:5-6 was used as a key text for the seminar of the day. The emphasis was on being more sensitive and more concerned about former members of the Churches in Ogun Conference. At the end of the lecture, general questions and answers were entertained. The total number of the members that were in attendance that day was 211. The seminar was brought to a close at 12.30am.

Phase two of the programme in Zone A was conducted on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September 2012. On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> September, the programme commenced at exactly 5.30pm with a hymn from SDA Hymnal no. 369 followed with prayer and a keynote address by the researcher. Between 5.30-7.30pm, the first lecture titled “Feed My Sheep” was given. The Bible passage was selected from the book of John 21:15, 16. The emphasis was on nurturing the members. At the end of the programme, members were grouped into two. Group one was meant to reclaim the former members of their Church while group two were to nurture new members in the Church. Members joined the group of their interest. Then, the researcher met with these groups at

different times and told them what to do in their group. The programme was brought to an end at exactly 7.30pm with 92 people in attendance.

The second day of the programme was a Sabbath day, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2012. The Sabbath worship started at about 8.35am and ended by 12.45pm. Lunch and rest were between 12.45pm and 3.30pm. The second lecture “The Church Attitudes towards Erring Members” was conducted. Emphasis was laid on the prodigal son in the book of Luke 15 and the lost sheep. Discomfort with someone’s attitude and not the person was mentioned in the seminar. There was a short break between 5.00pm and 5.30pm. After the short break, the facilitator asked the two groups that were earlier formed on the previous day to come out and members that were not there when the groups were formed were encouraged to join them after they had been informed of what the groups were meant for. The total number of members present was 243. The programme was brought to a close at 7.00pm.

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2012, the seminar commenced at 9.30am with the theme song Rescue the Perishing in SDAH 367. The third lecture “Solution to the Loss of Members” was conducted. The seminar took about one and half hours (9.30am–11.00am). The question and answer session took another 30 minutes after this. 30 minutes were given to the participants for a break.

The total members in attendance were 106. The first part of the programme ended at exactly 12 noon and a break of one hour followed. During the break and lunch, the groups that were earlier constituted on reclamation of former members and nurturing came together to choose their leaders for each group. The planning began immediately. After break and lunch, the last seminar followed. The title of the seminar was “Leadership by Example” and it lasted for one and a half hours (from

1.00pm to 2.30pm). Then, 30 minutes were devoted to questions and answers and the seminar ended at exactly 3.00pm.

There was a gap of one month between the last lecture for zone A and the first lecture for zone B, which was dedicated for preparation for both the researcher and the districts concerned. The researcher made a phone call with the leaders of the districts to remind them of the seminar. Two Sabbaths before the programme, announcements were sent to all the Churches in the districts in order to prepare their minds towards the programme.

### **Zone B**

Between 11<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2013, preparations were made for the Egba/Yewa/Awori Zone. Phone calls were made to remind the districts' leaders in the zone so that they could prepare for the programme. They all assured the researcher that preparation was on and that the awareness had been created among their members. As part of the preparations, the researcher also visited the venue before the starting day.

Day one was on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013. The programme commenced about 5.42pm. The same lectures for zone A were used for zone B throughout the three days of the seminar. At the end of each lecture, questions were asked and all the questions were answered. The seminar ran for three days; from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March. Though the turnout of the members was not as much as that of the first zone, it was still encouraging. The first day, the researcher recorded 84 members, the second day, which was Sabbath day, 270 members, and the last day, the record showed 110 members. According to the leaders of these two districts, the distance where members came for the programme are far apart and not like the first zone where members are living at a close distance to each other and to the venue of the seminar.

The period between the first and the second zones' seminars was used by the researcher to do more preparation. Communications were made through phone calls to the districts leaders of the first zone (Ijebu/Remo Zone) so that they will start to announce the programme through their districts bulletin as the day was approaching. During the preparation, the researcher chose the theme for the seminar: "Tenderly Care for Them."

Phase two of the programme in Zone B was conducted between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November 2012. The same seminar that was delivered to zone A was presented to zone B. The attendance of the members was better than that of the first attempt. On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 96 members were present, on Sabbath day 10<sup>th</sup> November, 248 were in attendance, and the last day, Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>, 111 members were present. The formation of groups for reclamation of former members and for nurturing was done on Sabbath 10<sup>th</sup> November and it was so interesting. Members gladly joined the group of their interest. The same topics that were discussed in Zone A were also discussed in Zone B. The question and answer session followed and the programme came to an end by 3.00pm on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

### **Programme Evaluation**

The evaluation was conducted through my personal observation and the responses of the members towards the programmes and their interaction with one another. The evaluation of the programme was done a month after the seminar with zone B. Following the objective of the seminar, the researcher was able to evaluate the result of the seminar conducted as following.

## **Reclamation of Members**

At the end of the programme, thirteen former members who had left the church for 2 years or 3 years, came back to the church. Members are still working in their various districts to see that more former members are brought back to the church. The results showed that members were committed to the ministry of reclamation more than before.

## **Visitation to Members**

After the six month of the seminar, the forms of the report of church attendance that was designed by the conference was collected. The form was used to evaluate the activity of the visitation group. The report showed that there was an increase in the number of church attendance weekly. As indicated in Table 9, churches witnessed a weekly increase in membership attending church programmes through visitation made to both regular and backsliding members.

*Table 9. District Church Attendance Monthly Report 2014*

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Abeokuta	61	72	68	84	73	82
Ijebu Ode	114	132	133	146	147	156
Ilishan1	83	104	128	134	131	138
Ilishan2	96	108	120	132	139	146
Ilaro	76	83	78	89	109	118
Sagamu	104	109	104	115	117	122
Sango	74	79	84	84	89	93
Babcock	2013	2018	2074	2194	2198	2198

### **Sensitivity to Members**

During the visit made by the researcher to Ilishan1 District and Sagamu district, the testimonies of brothers Kunle and Uche (not real names) respectively was that there was an improvement in the church response to the needs of the church members. A brother Falomo (not real name) who had not been coming to church for the past 3 years because of Sabbath work, got another job through the first elder of his church (Sagamu church).

At Abeokuta district, one church member said that there had been a separation between her and her husband. This made her leave the church for 4 years. But the church stepped into the matter and she decided to come back to the church.

### **Nurturing of Newly Baptized Members**

A special class was created for newly baptized members where they were being taken care of in terms of nurture. Materials that are simple to understand (like baptismal manual) were being used. In-depth Bible studies, every Sabbath evening, were also added to the nurturing of newly baptized members.

The statistical report for 6 months from the conference after the seminar (Table 10) showed that the conference had less mix-up of newly baptized members with the old members than before the seminar. This shows that the nurturing programme was working for the churches.

Table 10. Statistical Report 2014

District	January		February		March		April		May		June	
	GB	MB	GB	MB	GB	MB	GB	MB	GB	MB	GB	MB
Abeokuta	13	2	3	-	18	4	8	1	-	-	5	-
Babcock	18	-	2	3	-	-	27	6	-	-	14	-
Ijebu Ode	7	-	16	2	3	-	5	-	-	-	8	1
Ilaro	5	-	-	-	13	2	24	-	4	-	-	-
Ilishan North	9	3	2	-	18	-	22	4	-	-	11	-
Ilishan West	17	3	-	-	6	-	14	-	3	-	-	-
Sagamu	6	-	18	2	-	-	27	8	4	-	-	-
Sango Ota	13	-	3	-	-	-	14	-	7	1	-	-

Note: GB means General Baptism, while MB means Membership Before.

### Handling of Discipline

At the end of the seminar, all the church leaders in Ogun conference requested to have a copy of the church manual, especially the latest edition (18<sup>th</sup> edition). The reason was that they wanted to learn more on how to handle church discipline. Having discovered that the problem of backsliding in Ogun conference was basically due to the lack of nurturing, visitation, sensitivity to members' needs and caring for missing members, the seminar conducted by the researcher brought some improvement in these five areas.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

The researcher took a look at the rate at which members were leaving the church and the reason why they were leaving after their conversion in Nigeria, particularly in Ogun Conference. The purpose of this study was to develop a programme for reclaiming former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun Conference.

The researcher organized a programme for three quarters on Reclaiming Former Members. This programme development was implemented. After the programme, evaluation made by the researcher showed that some known former members of the church had returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This study discovered that some of the challenges faced in properly reducing the rate of backsliding include lack of proper care for newly baptized members, lack of proper teaching to establish the person in the faith and lack of proper nurturing.

#### **Conclusion**

It was found out that reclaiming the backsliding ones requires the involvement of members of any congregation. It is a fact that people are leaving the church because of many reasons. The majority of backsliders are leaving because of issues other than doctrinal teachings. The findings lead to the conclusion that the duty of bringing back the former members can be done more effectively when all members are involved other than leaving it to the church pastors alone.

## **Recommendations**

The followings are the recommendations by the researcher:

1. Since it has been observed from this research that the members leave for the fact that they were not taken care of, the church leaders, therefore, must be conscious of the members who are not in attendance every Sabbath and make sure that they are visited and encouraged.
2. Church leadership in the local church should make sure that every member of the church belongs to one of the two groups formed during the seminar conducted in the course of this project. This would form the beginning of a special ministry to the people whom God has never ceased to love.
3. Local Church Leadership should ensure that before baptizing any member into the faith, that the person who wants baptism is well taught and understands the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Therefore, the Church must not allow anyone to be baptized without affirming that the person is well grounded in the Word of God.
4. Nurturing of the members after baptism must be the highest priority of the Church in Ogun Conference. Through this, the Church would be able to consolidate new members in their new found faith. Church Pastors should ensure that there is in-depth Bible study in all the Churches in Ogun Conference weekly.
5. Local Church Leadership should ensure that prayer meetings are not turned into sermons or announcements hours. The church should give more time to prayer since this is the key for members to open the heavenly treasure.

6. Church Pastors should ensure that the attitude of the apostles at the upper room in the Acts of the Apostles chapters 2 and 4 is inculcated into the Churches in Ogun Conference. Prayer, unity, and sharing are essential ingredients keeping members and reclaiming former members.
7. Local Church Boards should be encouraged by each Church Pastor to make a special ministry to former members of the Church as an integral part of evangelism for the Church. This will adequately take care of nurturing new members and reclaiming former members. It will also take care of the follow up of any evangelism conducted and the consolidation of new members after their baptism.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
CORRESPONDENCE

The Executive  
Ogun Conference of Seventh-day Adventist church  
Oke-Ijeun, Abeokuta  
Ogun State

Dear Sir,

**RECLAIMING FORMER MEMBERS ENRICHMENT SEMINAR**

I humbly write to request for an approval to conduct a three days quarterly programme for three quarters in your conference on Reclaiming Former Members Enrichment Seminar in Ogun Conference. The purpose is to bring back the backsliders into the church and to close the outlets in which members are sliding out of the church.

By your approval, the programme is as follows:

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, ILISHAN REMO  
RECLAIMING FORMER MEMBER OF SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
IN OGUN CONFERENCE**

Date: September 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
 Venue: Ilishan SDA church Auditorium  
 Resource Person: Pastor J. A. Olawumi  
 Theme Song: SDAH 369  
**FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 4.00 – 5.00 Welcome and Keynote Address  
 5.00 – 5.30 Lecture 1 - Feed my Sheep  
**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 8.30 – 12.30 Sabbath Worship  
 12.30 – 3.00 Break and Lunch  
 3.00 – 5.00 Lecture 2 – The church Attitudes towards Erring Members  
 5.00 – 5.30 Short Break  
 5.30 – 7.00 Group Meeting  
**SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 16<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 9.00 – 9.30 Devotion  
 9.30 – 10.30 Lecture 3 – Solution to the Loss of members  
 10.30 – 11.00 General Questions  
 11.00 – 12.00 Break and Lunch  
 12.00 – 1.00 Group Meeting  
 1.00 – 2.30 Leadership by Example  
 2.30 – 3.00 Questions and Answers/ Closing Ceremony

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, ILISHAN REMO  
RECLAIMING FORMER MEMBER OF SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
IN OGUN CONFERENCE**

Date: June 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
 Venue: Ilishan SDA church Auditorium  
 Resource Person: Pastor J. A. Olawumi  
 Theme Song: SDAH 367  
**PROGRAMME**  
**FRIDAY JUNE 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 4.00 – 5.00 Arrival and Registration  
 5.00 – 6.00 Welcome and Address  
 6.00 – 7.30 Lecture 1 – The Good Shepherd  
**SATURDAY JUNE 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 8.30 – 12.30 Sabbath Worship  
 12.30 – 3.00 Lunch and Rest  
 3.00 – 5.00 Lecture 2 – Why Do they Leave  
 5.00 – 5.30 Break  
 5.30 – 7.00 Lecture 3 – Dealing with Former Members  
**SATURDAY JUNE 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**  
 9.30 – 11.00 Lecture 4 – If you are willing, they can still come back to the church  
 11.00 – 12.00 General Questions and Answers/Closing Ceremony

APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

All attached questions are essentially meant to gather information on the **Reclaiming Former Members in Ogun Conference**. They are primarily for research purpose. All your responses will therefore be treated with utmost confidentiality. Your maximum cooperation is highly appreciated.

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please fill in the spaces below:

- (1) Gender: Male  Female
- (2) Marital Status: Single  Married  Divorced
- (3) Status: Employed  Self-Employed  Unemployed   
Student
- (4) Age: 15-25yrs  26-30yrs  31-35yrs  36-40yrs  41 and above
- (5) Highest Education Level:  
First School Leaving  WAEC/SSCE  Bachelors Degree/Equiv.   
Master Degree/Equiv.  Doctoral  None
- (6) Local Church:  
Ijebu-Ode SDA Church  Makun SDA Church  Ilisan 1 SDA Church   
Ilisan II SDA Church  Abeokuta SDA Church  Sango SDA Church
- (7) Ethnicity: Igbo  Yoruba  Hausa  Others: specify \_\_\_\_\_
- (8) Profession: Business Person  Civil Servant  Others: specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION B:** For each statement, kindly tick the box that most represents your opinion.

S/N	QUESTION	SA	A	SLA	D	SD
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Members' personal need can lead to backsliding.					
2	Disciplining of members can lead to backsliding.					
3	Non-vibrant programme in SDA Church can lead to members' backsliding.					
4	Lack of visitation to absent members can lead to backsliding.					
5	Introduction of "praise & worship" may be the solution to the loss of members in the SDA Church.					
6	Involving members in witnessing and evangelism may keep members in the Church.					
7	Making our prayer short during Church programmes may contribute to members' backsliding.					
8	The issue of backsliding may depend on individual state of mind and not the Church.					
9	Lack of confidence in a Pastor may contribute to backsliding of the members.					
10	Lack of confidence in Elders or other Lay leaders may be the root cause of backsliding					
11	Low social interaction among the members can cause backsliding.					
12	"Deliverance" programmes can make the members to stay in the Church.					
13	Lack of response to individual needs can lead to backsliding.					
14	Most people leave because SDA Church messages are not based on prosperity.					
15	For members to stay in the Church there must be demonstration of miracle and speaking in tongues.					
16	Lack of benevolence to members can lead to members' backsliding.					
17	Both leaders and parents are not what they are preaching.					
18	Lack of involvement of youth in Church activities may lead them to backslide.					
19	Not having enough time for prayer during worship may contribute to members' backsliding.					
20	Most people may stay in the Church if only they are given position of responsibility.					
21	Traditional mode of worship programme may lead to backsliding.					
22	Most people may leave the Church because most parents are not living what they preach.					
23	Lack of welfare packages may lead to backsliding.					
24	Mode of worship programme may lead to backsliding.					

**Legend:**

- SA = Strongly Agree (5)  
A = Agree (4)  
SLA = Slightly Agree (3)  
D = Disagree (2)  
SD = Slightly Disagree (1)

Instructions: Please circle or write the appropriate answer on the space provided

a. Demographic Information

1. Gender :      Male    Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_years
3. Educational Status: Primary, Secondary, Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate, others
4. Gainfully Employed: Yes      No
5. Ethnic Group: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you baptized member of SDA church:    Yes    No
7. In what capacity do you serve your local church: Elder    Deacon    Others

b. Interview of Former Members

1. For how long were you a member of SDA church\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why did you decide then to be baptized into the SDA church\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which evangelistic programme did you attend before joining the church: home fellowship, church in-reach, revelation seminar, public campaign, other:\_\_\_\_\_
4. Compare the worship style of SDA church and other denominations. What is your comment about the SDA church worship style\_\_\_\_\_
5. What can you say about the family life aspect of SDA church\_\_\_\_\_
6. If you intend returning to the SDA church, what do you think will be the hindrance to your return \_\_\_\_\_

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## CURRICULUM VITA

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Sex: Male

Age: 45 Years

Marital Status: Married

Education: Bachelor of Arts - Andrews University 2002  
West African School Certificate 1987

Working Experience:

District Pastor SDA church, Sango-Ota	2012 – Date
District Pastor SDA church, Ijebu-ode	2010 – 2012
District Pastor SDA church, Ketu, Lagos	2008 – 2010
District Pastor SDA church, Omuo-Ekiti	2004 – 2008
Church Pastor SDA church, Ikare-Akoko	2002 – 2004
Church Pastor SDA church, Idanre	1993 – 1998