

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry
Emphasis in Discipleship and Spirituality

Adventist University of Africa

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Title: A STRATEGY FOR AN EFFECTIVE MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN THE GISENYI DISTRICT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, IN NORTH-WEST RWANDA FIELD

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The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches globally face the challenge of members dropping out. The Northwest Rwanda Field (NWRf) is no exception. For instance, a church membership audit conducted in 2017 among churches in the Gisenyi district of the Seventh-day Adventist, Rwanda, revealed that the church had lost 35% of its members. Furthermore, the second quarter of the 2017 NWRf report indicated that 45% of members were not attending church services regularly. This study investigated the strategies for retaining church members in the NWRf. The guiding study questions were: What are the participants' demographic information on gender, age, and church experience in the churches of the Gisenyi district SDA, Rwanda? Why do church members stop attending church services in churches in the Gisenyi district SDA, Rwanda? What strategies can be used to help retain church

members from leaving the churches in the Gisenyi district SDA, Rwanda? The study employed a mixed-methods approach using the descriptive research design. The study involved church members from five churches of the Gisenyi district SDA, alongside 27 pastors, 27 first-church elders, and 13 NWRF office workers, and 60 heads of departments of five churches participated in the study. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, and results were presented in percentages, tables, and themes. Results indicated that church member dropouts were primarily due to church programs, the behavior and actions of church members who included leaders, and various social and individual factors. Results on the members' retention strategies included promoting inclusive participation in church programs, providing support for the needy, and forming small group practices. The study recommended implementing a designed intervention strategy to address retention issues among church members.

Keywords: Retention, strategy, NWRF, SDA church

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A dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

Mutuyimana Nkundakozera

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This work is dedicated to my cherished family: N. Claudine, C. M. Tresor,
C. M. Bilga, I. M. Adriel, and I. M. Anne. Their unwavering support
has been my foundation throughout my academic journey.

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my life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADRA	Adventist Development Relief Agency
AYM	Adventist Youth Ministries
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
NWRF	North-West Rwanda Field
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist Church

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church globally was established with the mission of making disciples, as noted in Matthew 28: 19-20. This mission is carried out in all the SDA entities: divisions, Unions, Conferences/Fields, and at the Local churches. It is in this regard that, like elsewhere, this mission is conducted in Rwanda's SDA entities, including the North-West Rwanda Field (NWRF), which comprises 27 districts, including Gisenyi District, where new converts join the Church. However, the NWRF Adventist Church Management System (ACMS) report (2017) revealed that the Gisenyi district SDA has been experiencing a decline in church membership retention. This issue has been a concern for church leaders at both the local and field levels. As a result, this concern attracted the researcher to conduct a study, "A Strategy for an Effective Membership Retention in the Gisenyi District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in North-West Rwanda Field."

The objective of this dissertation was to investigate the reasons why people leave the church and to develop and implement a model program for church membership retention. Therefore, this chapter provides the context of the topic, the statement of the problem, the statement of the purpose, the research questions, the justification of the project, the justification of the study, the description of the study, expectations, and the definition of concepts.

Context of the Study

The Gisenyi district of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA), where the research is conducted, is located in the North-West Rwanda Field (NWRF). This district covers a significant part of the town of Gisenyi, which is a popular tourist site in Rwanda, visited by people from all over the world. Additionally, the district is situated on the shore of Lake Kivu, a place frequently visited by people from diverse backgrounds who come to relax on the attractive public beach. Consequently, within the same field of ministry, there are numerous recreational facilities such as hotels, motels, lodges, nightclubs, restaurants, and bars. As a result, the lifestyle of the population in Gisenyi city is generally affected, and in particular, the spiritual growth of some church members becomes stagnant.

In Gisenyi town, there is a diverse religious landscape, with Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, being the dominant faith. Islam also has a presence, albeit in smaller numbers. Many Seventh-day Adventists in the Gisenyi district come from various religious backgrounds, with some converting from other faiths and others joining Adventist dissident groups.

Over the past twenty years, the Gisenyi district has experienced significant growth in its membership. Before 1997, there was only one church in the Gisenyi district with 474 members, but since then, the number of members has rapidly increased. According to statistical records from the North-West Rwanda Field as of June 2017, the membership of the Gisenyi district has grown from 474 to 5,446 members¹. The local population has shown receptiveness to the Gospel, but there are concerns about a significant number of missing members. The researcher, an ordained

¹ North West Rwanda Field Statistical Report, 4th Quarter 2017.

pastor who has served as a Field Executive Secretary in the area for two years, has observed these trends and discrepancies.

Statement of the Problem

Retaining church members presents a great difficulty for Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches all around, including those in North-West Rwanda Field (NWRF). A 2017 membership audit in the Gisenyi SDA region revealed that over a five-year period, 35% of members had ceased visiting church. Furthermore, just 55% of students routinely attended Sabbath School; 45% were absent or arrived late.² This local trend reflects a worldwide concern. Between 1965 and 2013, the global SDA Church lost around 34 million members who had first joined but then left.³ About 40% of baptized members also eventually leave the church,⁴ usually because of a lack of follow-up, inadequate integration, disappointed expectations, and weak interpersonal ties inside the church community.⁵ Given these results, this study aims to identify the underlying reasons of member dropout in the Gisenyi area and across the NWRF and create a strategic strategy to improve member retention by biblically and culturally founded remedies.

² North-West Rwanda Field of Seventh-day Adventists, *Second Quarter Statistical Report* (Gisenyi: NWRF Secretariat, 2017), 4.

³ David Trim, “A Statistical Overview of Church Membership Loss,” presentation at the Nurture and Retention Summit, Silver Spring, MD, April 2013.

⁴ General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *Annual Statistical Report 2013* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2014), 12.

⁵ Nikolaus Satelmajer, “Why Members Leave the Church,” *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors*, October 2007, 6–9.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to establish why church members drop out and then develop and implement an intervention retention strategy program to decrease the rate of church member dropouts, specifically in Gisenyi district churches and generally in the NWRP.

Research Questions

1. What are the participants' demographic information on gender, age, and church experience in the churches of Gisenyi district SDA, Rwanda?
2. Why do church members stop attending services in churches of Gisenyi SDA district, Rwanda?
3. What strategies can be used to help retain church members from leaving the Churches in Gisenyi SDA district, Rwanda?

Justification of the Project

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned about members leaving the church. G.T. Ng, the former Executive Secretary of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, emphasized the need to focus on nurturing new members after realizing that half of the newly baptized members were leaving the church. He warned that a high apostasy rate of 49% would have negative financial and personal impacts on the church and its members.⁶ The SDA churches in Gisenyi District are also experiencing similar challenges.

The ongoing issue of church members leaving the Gisenyi district SDA churches is hindering the church's growth. Despite organizing regular public

⁶ Andrew McChesney. "Every Adventist urged to help stem membership losses." (Retrieved August 30, 2017 from <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2016-10-10/every-adventist-urged-to-help-stem-membership-losses/>).

evangelistic meetings where people are baptized, many new members leave shortly after their baptism, impacting the discipleship process. Therefore, this research project aims to identify the causes of church members' dropout to develop an effective retention strategy for the Gisenyi district as well as the NWRF. Although church leaders have always tried to make tentative strategies to retain members, they have not yet established an effective program for church member retention. Furthermore, there is no effort to research and examine the root cause of the dropout of the church members. Hence, the problem persists in the Gisenyi SDA district.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was conducted in the Gisenyi district SDA church, situated in the NWRF. The primary focus was to identify the factors contributing to the dropout of church members. Additionally, the study aimed to develop an effective strategy for retaining members and reducing dropout rates.

Limitations

All the limitations encountered in the phase of data collection of this research were related to the situation of the covid-19 pandemic period. First, the time allocated to specific activities has been extended due to the lockdown that was mandatory by the government of Rwanda. Second, it was not easy to distribute questionnaires because of compliance with coronavirus spreading and prevention control guidelines. Third, some meetings of focus group discussions and others were postponed many times due to the temporary suspension of church activities during lockdown periods.

The mitigation of those limitations included the following: Data collection was extended to the time when the government started to partially and fully open some public meetings like churches, markets, public transport, schools, among others free

movement. This allowed communication and meetings with the church leaders as well as members during worship services. During data collection, face masks, hand-washing during questionnaire distribution and collection using sanitizers, avoiding handshakes, keeping a two-meter distance, and avoiding direct physical contact with participants. FGDs were conducted by ensuring the members wore face masks, sat at a two-meter distance, hand-washing, among others. FGDs were then conducted in open spaces outside doors.

Study Organization

The project consists of six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and overview of the project. It explains that the topic of retention is based on the Scriptures. The second chapter delves into the theological foundation of member retention, drawing from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the writings of Ellen G. White. The third chapter examines retention through the writings of Adventist authors and other researchers. The fourth chapter describes the ministerial context of the church in the Gisenyi district SDA and the methodology. The fifth chapter outlines the strategy defined in chapter four and its implementation to address retention. Lastly, the sixth chapter evaluates the effectiveness of the member retention strategy, provides a conclusion, and reflects on key recommendations.

Expectations

The researcher expects to achieve the following results by the end of the project once it has been implemented:

1. The study greatly equips church leaders with the skills of retaining church members.

2. The research provides insights into how church members can become active disciples, fostering a renewed love for the church and preventing them from leaving it.
3. The researcher anticipates being satisfied with the contribution made to enhance the retention of church members in the Gisenyi SDA district.
4. Ultimately, the research is beneficial for all the churches in the NWRF and potentially beyond.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach using the descriptive research design. A total of 460 participants participated in the study. They were obtained from five churches constituting the Gisenyi SDA district, alongside 27 pastors, 27 first church elders, and 13 NWRF office workers. Purposive and simple random sampling were used. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, and results were presented in percentages, tables, and themes.

Definition of Key Terms

Church. The term "church" in this study signifies God's family, where all believers belong to the household of God.

Church dropout. This concept in this study means a believer who is gradually leaving the church, which is reflected in the decline or loss of the relationship he had with the church.

Membership. The concept of membership in this study refers to when a person, through baptism or transfer from one church to another, becomes part of a

church and has their name approved by the church members and recorded in the church's records.

Membership Retention. In the context of this study, membership retention refers to when a member stays attached to the church through the consistent spiritual empowerment and support provided by the church leadership and fellow church members.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

The chapter emphasizes the theological foundation for retaining church membership. The first part discusses the Old and New Testament themes related to membership retention, while the second part focuses on Ellen G. White's statements, known as the Spirit of Prophecy.

Retention Themes in the Old Testament

The issue of member retention has been a concern since ancient times. The Bible provides many examples of God's people turning away from Him through disobedience. This section focuses on the Old Testament themes of retention. There are sixteen strategic themes that God utilized for membership retention, which may assist in decreasing the gradual loss of church members in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These themes include the establishment of connection, building relationships, bridging the gap, and expressing compassion, mercy, grace, obedience, support, instructions, submissiveness, dependence, unconditional love, restoration, and faithfulness. These themes were crucial in retaining members, according to the Bible.

God's Strategy for Retention: Connection

God began a connection with humanity through both creation and salvation. He formed a deep bond with His creation through the act of creation, highlighted by the expression "Let us make human beings" (Gen. 1:26), which indicates a special connection between people and God. The breath of God within humans enables a

profound connection with the divine, as they are created in His likeness and image (Gen. 1:26). This life-giving breath, which signifies existence, is inherently sacred in humanity. It serves as the means through which the Spirit of God interacts with individuals for their well-being.

God's Strategy for Retention: Relationship

The second retention strategy discovered is building relationships. In the story of Eden, God did not leave his children alone. He established a relationship with the first couple. There is a mention in Genesis 3:8 of the Creator visiting Adam and Eve in the Garden. This suggests that God periodically visited the couple in Eden. This means that visitation helps to build relationships. Even when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, God continued to visit, building a good rapport and relationship. This act of building a connection between God and humanity is a key strategic approach to retaining members.

God's Strategy for Retention: Gap Bridging

The third strategy for God's retention is gap bridging. After the fall of the first human beings, God demonstrated His love and compassion towards humanity. Instead of destroying Adam and Eve immediately, God called them out of their hiding places to interact with them (Gen. 3:9). God's inquiry about Adam's whereabouts was not due to ignorance, but it was a strategic move to make Adam come out of hiding and bridge the gap that made Adam and Eve go into hiding. Gap Bridging is God's strategic plan of mercy to redeem and retain humans from permanently withdrawing from Him.

God's Strategy for Retention: Compassion

The fourth strategic key performance employed by God is compassion. Compassion reflects God's commitment to retaining people. It encompasses a deeper significance, rooted in love. This unconditional love was exemplified in the interaction with the first couple when they distanced themselves from their usual meeting place (Gen. 3:8). In their moment of disobedience, Adam and Eve were covered with sheepskin, symbolizing God's righteousness (Gen. 3:21). God's primary concern was to preserve Adam and Eve and prevent their eternal loss. In the midst of their transgression, He extended His righteousness by demonstrating unconditional compassion and love toward them. At that pivotal moment, God called out to Adam, asking, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). The compassion that God shows toward sinful humanity is a crucial strategy for retention. Similarly, church leaders ought to embody this compassion toward their members to strengthen retention efforts.

God's Strategy for Retention: Mercy

God's dealings with the Patriarchs show His key strategic performances that can be employed by the Church for the retention of members. Mercy is the fifth strategic value God used in the Old Testament for the retention of members. Noah, recognized as a faithful messenger of God (Gen 6:8), was bestowed with divine mercy to extend the same compassion to a densely populated world during a period marked by significant human proliferation (Genesis 6:1). This era was characterized by widespread corruption and increasing immorality (Genesis 6:2). Although God indicated that His Spirit would not contend with humanity indefinitely (Genesis 6:3), He chose to extend His mercy to the antediluvian population. Amid pervasive immorality, God employed His method of mercy to preserve humanity rather than resorting to destruction.

God's Strategy for Retention: Grace

Grace is a retention strategy. God called Noah, and he received grace from the Lord (Gen. 6:8). In the Hebrew language, the word "strive" has two meanings: "to rule" and "to judge." This means that the work of the Holy Spirit will continue to operate with people, but for a short additional time.

During Noah's time, God demonstrated immense mercy towards humankind. In His great mercy, God's Spirit continued to strive to influence the emotions and thoughts of the people. Despite the widespread sinfulness of that era, God graciously allowed human life to extend to one hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3). God gave this time to show His mercy. The giving of time to people to decide to stand on His side testifies to a greater extent of mercy required in the retention of members. Spence clearly describes God's ways of retaining His people at the time of Noah. He says that as sinners, God could in no way allow men to rush impetuously toward their devastation without putting stumbling blocks in their way. In the way of apostasy, God created many sequences of barriers to protect people from hell.¹ The message that God gave to Noah was explicit and severe, yet also filled with grace. This was God's method to nurture and protect His people from destruction.

God's Strategy for Retention: Faith Direction

God's call to Abraham was a call to faith. God's strategy was to build and maintain faith in people. He called Abraham to leave his home country, relatives, and his father's home and go to a country that God would show him (Gen. 12:1). This act of faith required believing in something that had not yet happened. Abraham's example is meant to encourage contemporary Christians to have faith in a future

¹ H. D. M. Spence, *The Pulpit commentary*, Vol. 1, 106.

heaven and a new earth. This faith walk needs to be constantly reinforced to help believers remain faithful. It's important to instill faith in people, and God did this by assuring Abraham of what was to come. God promised to make Abraham a great nation, blessed him, and made his name great. God also guaranteed protection from those who would try to curse him, promising to curse them before they could harm Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3).

God's Strategy for Retention: Obedience

Abraham responded in faith and with unconditional obedience to God's plan for His people (Gen. 12:4). By calling Abraham, God was installing His kingdom on earth where He could indeed implement the strategy for bringing together and keeping His people through nurturing them in all righteousness. The obedience to the call of God yielded an assembly of believers. This strategy for selecting one righteous man in the Lord's eyes will allow God to gather all His children from all families on earth. Thereafter, God usually used all ways to keep His holy nation from one generation to another as He promised to Abraham. The obedience of Abraham is a redemptive strategic plan to be utilized to retain members.

God's Strategy for Retention: Physical Support

Moses's call was a daring act of obedience that required both physical and spiritual support, serving as a model for those implementing retention strategies. God chose to deliver His people by sending Moses because He heard their cries for help (Exod 3:9). He instructed Moses to go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod 3:10).

Moses required assistance, and God was there to provide it. Aaron supported Moses in the mission to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. Furthermore, God

empowered Moses before Pharaoh and ensured he had his brother Aaron by his side. The Lord instructed Moses to adhere to all of His commands, while Aaron's role was to confront Pharaoh and demand the release of His people from Egypt (Exodus 7:1-2). The fraternal support that God offered plays a crucial role in the ministry of redemption and retention.

God's Strategy for Retention: Spiritual Support

God's act of deliverance served as a spiritual support for the Israelites. Moses and his brother Aaron approached Pharaoh at the Imperial Palace to communicate the Lord's command for him to allow His people to depart for a feast in the wilderness (Ex. 5:1). However, Pharaoh was unwilling to grant this request (v.2). Enns observed that not only did Pharaoh disregard their plea, but he also ridiculed them.²

After enduring ten plagues, Pharaoh ultimately released the Israelites (Exod 7:14 – 11:10). This release was not merely physical; it represented a significant spiritual liberation. As a result of this act of deliverance, the Israelites recognized God as their Lord (Exod 6:7). God affirmed His spiritual authority, as Moses conveyed that He would make Himself known to the Egyptians through His acts against Egypt, thereby bringing His people to freedom (Exodus 7:5). The acknowledgment of spiritual support and fellowship is essential for the redemptive strategies of the church today.

God's Strategy for Retention: Instructions

Instructions serve as God's strategies for the retention of people. After receiving all of God's directives, Moses returned to Egypt, accompanied by his

² Peter Enns, Exodus, The NIV application commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 200), 157.

brother Aaron. Upon their arrival, Aaron articulated the words the Lord had spoken to Moses and performed miracles before the people. Consequently, the Israelites came to trust in God; they sensed His presence among them and prostrated themselves in worship. Trusting in extraordinary circumstances can be challenging. Initially, the Israelites struggled to believe Moses's message. However, over time, their faith grew, not solely based on the words of God's servants, Moses and Aaron, but grounded in the power of God's words and the miracles they witnessed.. This is made dramatically plain by Israel's reaction. They recognize God to have experimental their difficulty compassionately and to have learned of their oppression firsthand. Now, people acclaimed only God and worshiped Him instead of looking to Moses and Aaron.³

God's instructions are powerful in the retention process. This visit, through instructions that God made through Moses, revived the relationship and the spirituality of Israel. From that time, the Lord continued to nurture them to keep a solemn communion with them throughout their lifelong. Moses reminded the Israelites how the Lord had taken them out of Egypt to be His chosen people, an inheritance, just as they were on that day (Deut. 4:15-20). During their journey in the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land, Moses consistently emphasized the importance of obedience to the Lord. God commanded Moses to teach the statutes and judgments, urging the people to keep and act according to them in the land they were about to possess (Deut. 4:5). Additionally, Moses instructed the Israelites to beware of idolatry, warning them not to forget the covenant with the Lord (Deut. 4:23). This insistence reflects God's desire for His people to remain faithful to Him at all times.

³Hubbard, David A., Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin. *World Biblical Commentary. Vol 3.* (Waco: Word Bks, 1986), 59.

God's Strategy for Retention: Submissiveness

The strategic approach employed for the retention of individuals involves a call for those who have strayed from their commitments to return and submit to a higher authority. Throughout history, particularly illustrated through the messages of the Prophets, calls have been directed toward individuals who have deviated from their principles, emphasizing the necessity of returning to a singular, true authority. This strategic engagement has been essential for retention, especially when considering the frequent rebellions exhibited by the Israelites, who, at various points, turned away from their commitments to worship alternative deities. The persistence of divine outreach is noteworthy, as it demonstrates an unwavering commitment to invite individuals back into a state of submission without the application of coercion.

When faced with rebellion, the divine response involved sending multiple prophets to convey the message of submission. The process of guiding rebellious individuals toward a state of compliance requires both patience and resilience. There are two fundamental purposes associated with the invitation extended to those in rebellion to submit: first, to reveal and elucidate their erroneous behaviors, and second, to invite them back into a harmonious relationship of obedience and submission.

God's Strategy for Retention: Dependence

The Call to Salvation invites us to depend on God as our sole Savior. Isaiah foretold of the Messiah, whose reign would be everlasting (Isaiah 9:6-7), assuring humanity that we can count on Him for salvation. This call to trust in the Messiah serves as the foundation of the Christian life and a key strategy for spiritual retention.

God's Strategy for Retention: Unconditional Love

The unconditional love of God is a retention strategy. Hosea was used by God to depict God's unconditional love demonstrated towards humanity. Israel was compared with a prostitute called Gomer, and Hosea was to accept and marry Gomer without accusing her of waywardness and prostitution. The command that God gave to Hosea illustrates how church members need to love the unlovable in the retention process. Like Israel, a prostitute who turned against the Lord and worshipped other gods (Hosea 1:1-2) was still pursued and loved by God. This shows the love and the purpose that God has for His people, even when they backslide.

God's Strategy for Retention: Restoration

God's idea of retention is not punishment but restoration. Joel espoused God's message of restoration, in which God promised to restore their farms that had been destroyed by the swarming, crawling, and consuming locusts, which God called His great army He had sent among them. (Joel 2:25). God's plan for retention is to make up for the lost years of backsliders. This strategy of restoration can ignite hope in backsliders. God's purpose was that generations could not repeat the mistakes of their parents and grandparents (Joel 1:3). The damage of sin caused by the devil and the invasion of the earth by demons have had a multi-year impact, but God's plan for humanity and earth is restoration. This good news of God's restoration to humanity is a strategy for the retention of souls for the kingdom of God through His church.

God's Strategy for Retention: Faithfulness

God's Strategy of Retention is faithfulness. God expects humans to be reciprocal in His faithfulness towards Him and other humans. The chosen nation of God continued with their unfaithfulness to the Lord; they openly refused God, and

they lived as if he didn't exist. People acted like they could do whatever without being reproved. And they asked themselves why God rejected all offerings they brought to Him to be blessed (Mal. 2: 13). Through Malachi, the Lord called Israel to faithfulness. He reminded all of them that God is their Father and they have been made by the same God and asked why they were disloyal to one another, violating the covenant of their ancestors (Mal. 2: 10). Malachi dealt with faithfulness to God (Mal. 2:1-16), to establish faithfulness a rule to God and towards one another within the church community and beyond the church family.

God's Strategy for Retention in the New Testament

The thematic strategies from the Old Testament are also evident in the New Testament. This section explores some of the Old Testament themes, along with new ones introduced in the New Testament, that aid in retaining members. In addition to the fifteen strategic retention themes discussed in the Old Testament, the New Testament presents additional themes that are essential for member retention.

God's Strategy for Retention: Community

Community plays a crucial role in retention strategies discussed in the New Testament, particularly for maintaining member involvement. The Church serves as a community support group aimed at retaining souls. The term "church" has been in use since the time of the apostles. The Pauline epistles provide evidence that the word "church" refers to the body of Christ, God's community, the called-out ones, and the bride of Christ, and it represents the church as a family. According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, a church is any number of souls, called and united in one vow, in one place, for divine worship.⁴

⁴William Smith, *The Ages Digital Library Reference: Smith's Bible Dictionary*, 196.

The apostle Paul likens the church to a human body comprised of many distinct parts that together form a single entity. All those who have been baptized by one Spirit, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, make up one body in Christ. This illustrates that the body consists of multiple parts rather than just one (1 Cor. 12:12-26). The Church is the Body of Christ, serving as a community that supports one another.

God's Strategy for Retention: Connection

Similar to the Old Testament, the New Testament also emphasizes "connection" as God's strategy for maintaining the community of believers. Paul articulates the essential link between the body and its head, noting that the entire body grows through this relationship and is nourished by the various organs, resulting in a unified whole (Col. 2:19). The supreme joy and privilege that humankind could benefit from in life is to be adopted and become God's children. This is possible only when we accept being born of the Holy Spirit. From this privilege, God promises to provide all blessings and support for all our needs.⁵ Paul explains that as many as we are, in Christ we are one body, and each person is a member of the other. (Romans 12:5). The church is made up of individuals, and as a body, they need to be connected to the head, who is God. The church, which is God's household where His people find truth, is connected to God and each other by the truth received from Him as the head of the church. Members of the Lord's family must have a family head, who is God. Connection of the body is a strong theme used by Christ to connect with members of the church.

⁵ *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 6, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD 21740, 878

As followers of Christ, we are part of God's family (Eph. 2:19). Being His children gives us self-worth, knowing how much He loves us. We are God's children now, not just in the future (1 John 3:1, 2). Once we receive the Holy Spirit, we are transformed from fearful slaves into proud children who can call Him our Father. The Holy Spirit, in harmony with our spirit, confirms that we are indeed God's offspring (Rom. 8:14-16). This realization inspires us to live as Jesus did and to cherish our place in this wonderful family. As Christians, we are truly God's children, and He desires for us to remain in His family forever, enjoying all the blessings He has to offer.

The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ, consisting of Christians who are members of this body, as well as a family made up of those who are children of God. From this family relationship, we also see the concept of marriage. According to the Bible, marriage unites two individuals into one body. Jesus confirmed this oneness and said, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh" (Matt. 19:6). If we examine our Lord's words in this passage without preconception, and avoid conceptualizing it into modern concepts, for sure, we must understand that He makes declarations of the impossibility of destroying the marriage.⁶

The physical relationship between spouses in marriage mirrors the divine spiritual relationship. Individually, believers are members of the body of Christ, and collectively, they constitute the church, which is often referred to as the bride of Christ. The Apostle Paul elaborates on this connection by advising both wives and husbands. He instructs wives to respect their husbands as they would the Lord (Eph. 5:22). The husband is the head of his wife just as Christ is the head of the church (v.

⁶ *The Ages Digital Library Commentary: The Pulpit Commentary, Matthew*, AGES Software Rio, WI USA Version 1.0 © 2001.

23). According to this divine design, the woman was created for the man, establishing that within the family, the husband should take on the role of head and central figure, while the wife serves as a supportive helper to her husband. This relationship between husband and wife is similar to Christ and His church.⁷ This parallel indicates the spiritual intimacy relationship that Christ has with the church.

The church, referred to as the bride of Christ, has not yet entered into a complete marriage relationship with Him. The Apostle Paul expressed his jealousy for the Corinthians with a God-given zeal, as he promised to present them as a pure bride to one husband—Christ, as stated in 2 Corinthians 11:2. At this time, all believers are betrothed to Christ and carry a distinct responsibility to maintain their spiritual purity.. It is when Jesus Christ returns that the marriage relationship between the bride, the church, and Christ will be in fullness. That time, it will be declared to let people rejoice and give honor to God because it is time for the wedding banquet of the Lamb, and His bride is ready for Him. (Rev. 19:7). Christ wants us that remain faithful to Him so that we may reach this culmination of human history and be a joyful eternity of impeccable unification with Christ.

In brief, the church is identified as the body of Christ in the New Testament, and He is the head while church adherents are members of that body with functions within it. The church is Christ's bride, and all believers are engaged to Him and are waiting for the fullness of the marriage relationship when Jesus returns. Another identity of the church is the community and God's family. In this, all Christians are God's children. Finally, the church is the called-out ones by God himself.

⁷ Ibid.

Physical Support: A Strategy of Retention

One of the strategies Jesus often used to persuade people to come and stay with Him and His teachings was providing physical support. While teaching, He frequently healed the sick, which attracted many people to Him and allowed them to receive His message (Matt 4:23-25). This approach to retention was not limited to healing; it also included caring for the hungry and feeding them (Mark 6:37). The compassion Jesus demonstrated by addressing people's physical needs became a powerful way to draw people in and encourage them to follow Him wherever He went. For instance, a multitude of people followed Jesus from village to village, throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:25).

We can conclude that when the Gospel is paired with good deeds, it nurtures love for the church and motivates people to stay engaged. The church should embrace this retention strategy to help minimize losses.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Compassion

God's compassion served as a means of retention in the Old Testament, and this approach continues to hold relevance in the New Testament for redeeming sinners. During one instance of Jesus' preaching, a group of Pharisees and Scribes brought before Him a woman caught in adultery, accusing her by referencing Moses' law, which stated that such individuals should be stoned (Jn. 8:5). With compassion, Jesus defended the woman, upholding the law while refraining from casting blame. This not only spared her life but also convicted her accusers in their conscience. He then told her, "If no one is here to judge you, neither do I; you are forgiven. Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Consequently, the woman's heart became connected to

Jesus. If this retention approach were to be adopted within the church, many members would likely remain committed.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Faith Direction

Jesus' call to disciples in the New Testament parallels God's call to Abraham in the Old Testament as a call of faith. This strategy of faith direction is an effective retention plan. Jesus summoned His disciples, encouraging them to prepare for His ministry. He approached Simon, known as Peter, and his brother Andrew, both fishermen, and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:18-20). The disciples' faith empowered them to accept the call to become instruments for bringing and retaining people within the church. Their belief in Jesus's words, despite not having witnessed their fulfillment, was rooted in faith. As Paul stated, faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). For effective retention, it is essential to instill faith within the community.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Obedience

The disciples responded in faith and with unconditional obedience to Jesus' plan for retaining His followers (Matt 4:18-22). Their calling served as a foundation upon which Jesus intended to build His church on Earth, inviting all people to seek salvation. Obedience to this calling is the key to remaining a part of the church community. Each individual is called to join the church, and the appropriate response should be to follow Jesus with unwavering faith. This strategy of reaching out to people one by one allows for the gathering of individuals from all nations and families (Matt 28:19). Just as with Abraham, the obedience of the disciples serves as a redeeming strategic plan for retaining church members.

Paul's Strategy for Retention: Instructions

The Apostle Paul, for example, relied on Jesus' retention strategy when he appointed and instructed Titus in Crete to carry out his mission. Paul reminded Titus of the reason he was left there. His instructions to Titus included organizing the remaining tasks and appointing qualified elders in every city (Titus 1:5).

Titus received guidance on the qualifications for elders (Titus 1:6-9), their responsibilities (Titus 1:10-16), and the standards for a healthy church regarding how every member should conduct themselves (Titus 2:1-10). These instructions enabled Titus to help the community remain steadfast in their belief and obedience to God's word. Later, Paul expressed gratitude to God for instilling in Titus a genuine concern for the Judean saints (2 Corinthians 8:16).

It is essential for the church to instruct men and women to encourage one another to stay within God's family.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Small Groups

The practice of small groups is a strategy for retention that Jesus employed during His ministry. He began by forming a small group of twelve Apostles. Jesus invited many people to the mountain (Mark 3:13), and among the multitude, He selected twelve individuals who would be with Him (Mark 3:14). The objective was to train them so that they could be sent out to preach and heal (Mark 3:14-15), which would aid in the future retention of followers. The relationship Jesus developed with His disciples fostered their faithfulness, both while they were with Him and after His ascension to heaven.

If our churches have well-structured, efficient small groups that work with purpose, church members will grow stronger in their faith. The church has a

responsibility to teach and train members through these small groups. This strategy for retention is essential for the salvation of many souls.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Visitation

Jesus' visitation is another strategy for the retention of people. Jesus was passing through Jericho and met Zacchaeus, who was one of the most powerful people at that time. (Luke 19:1-2). He had heard about Jesus, and he sought to see who Jesus was. (Luke 19:3,4). When Jesus came to the place where the man was, he called him and decided to visit his home. (Luke 19:5). Jesus' visitation for Zacchaeus led him to dedicate his life to his Savior and to reconcile with unfaithful friends. (Luke 19:8). The feedback of this visit was the salvation of the whole family. (Luke 19:9-10). If the church implements the example of Jesus and establishes a strong plan to visit members in their homes, many will be willing to remain, while others who have left will decide to return.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Spiritual Support

Jesus promised His disciples spiritual support, which is the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), as a strategy for retention. The Holy Spirit, as a gift that Christ promised to the disciples, was to give them the power to witness Christ and to retain people of all nations. (v. 8). This promise of spiritual support was Jesus' plan to retain first of all his disciples and then after all people. He commended them to sojourn in Jerusalem, waiting for the promise (Acts 1:4), and all continued with one accord in prayer. (Acts 1:14). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered together in one place, unified in their purpose. Suddenly, the promise was fulfilled (Acts 2:1-2). They received the power of the Holy Spirit, which enabled each disciple to speak in various tongues (Acts 2:4). This ability allowed them to communicate with the diverse nations

living in Jerusalem (Acts 2:8-12). The spiritual support provided by God to the disciples served as a powerful tool for attracting many people and played a crucial role in retaining them within the church.

Jesus' Strategy for Retention: Submissiveness

Jesus' submission to the will of God serves as a powerful example of retention. He exemplified how Christians should live out their faith wholeheartedly. God sacrificed His Son (John 3:16) as an atonement for sinners, and Jesus willingly embraced God's plan for humanity's salvation and redemption. Individuals need to submit to the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ, just as He submitted to His heavenly Father. In His prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrated His obedience before His arrest and crucifixion, asking His Father to remove the cup of suffering from Him, yet ultimately yielding to God's will (Mark 14:36). This serves as a perfect model of submissiveness for all Christians and a practical strategy for retention, as those who obey God's will are embraced within His Church.

Paul's Strategy for Retention: Faithfulness

Paul considers faithfulness a vital strategy for member retention. In his work with others, he frequently emphasized the importance of Timothy's loyalty, recognizing him as instrumental in retaining individuals across diverse locations. When addressing the Corinthians about avoiding false instructors, Paul entrusted this message to Timothy, his beloved and obedient son in the Lord (1 Cor. 2:15-17). Paul had confidence in Timothy's steadfast commitment to the word of God and believed in his authority to help the Corinthians uphold their faith. To encourage the Philippians to remain resolute in their belief in Christ, Paul chose Timothy as the only individual he fully trusted with this responsibility (Phil. 2:19-20). Timothy's

faithfulness to God enabled him to preserve many people in their beliefs. The high regard Paul held for faithfulness as a retention strategy motivated him to urge Timothy to stand firm and not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (1 Tim. 1:8), directing him to remain steadfast (2 Tim. 1:13). In conclusion, faithfulness is the most essential element a church needs to retain its members.

Paul's Strategy for Retention: Restoration

In his letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians, the theme of restoration emerges as a crucial strategy for keeping believers engaged. In his correspondence with the Corinthians, who had strayed, Paul reminded them of their vulnerabilities and emphasized that they could find restoration through the power of the Lord (2 Cor. 13:2, 4). He prayed for their restoration (v. 9), highlighting the strength they could derive from remaining in Christ's love. Similarly, Paul encouraged the Galatians—who had themselves experienced spiritual restoration, to support their brethren who had fallen into sin (Gal. 6:1), thereby enabling their restoration as well. Although Paul addressed his contemporaries, this approach remains pertinent in the church today. Spiritual restoration continues to be a vital strategy for retaining church members.

Throughout the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see countless examples of strategies for the retention of God's people. In every situation, God has continually devised plans to retain His followers through various means. The themes highlighted above should serve as a guide for church leaders and members alike, aimed at reducing dropout rates within our congregations.

Spirit of Prophecy's Strategy of Retention

There exists a coherence among the Old Testament, New Testament, and the writings of Ellen G. White. The themes presented in both the Old and New

Testaments, which serve as strategies for the retention of God's people, are also reflected in the Spirit of Prophecy with a similar objective. This section will explore some of the previously discussed strategies as well as additional themes that support the retention of members.

White emphasizes the importance of the connections and relationships among church members as a means of retention. She believes that the fundamental relationship should be rooted in the bond between God and humanity. Ellen G. White deeply values her connection with God to the extent that she fears losing it. Additionally, maintaining open communication between her soul and God was a priority in her life. ...⁸ When a person is connected to God, it will automatically be the same for the church because the first connection involves the second one directly.⁹ A person cannot abandon their sins without developing a relationship with the Savior. Sister Ellen confirms that when this close connection is formed, Jesus takes our sins and exchanges them for His righteousness."¹⁰ As a result, individuals will be less likely to become distracted and drawn outside the church. A deep spiritual connection can strengthen relationships between members and God, making it easier to retain attendees.

Ellen G. White emphasizes compassion as a vital instrument for retention. When individuals are connected to Christ and cultivate a strong relationship with Him, they begin to embody His character. Jesus consistently demonstrated compassion toward those in need, reflecting a fundamental aspect of His nature,

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, Vol 7. 1891, pr. 3.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), 268, 6.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Christian's Relation to Christ," *The Watchman*, December 17, 1907, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/496.667#668>.

which stems from the heart of the heavenly Father. White notes that when Christ saw a crowd of people, His instinct was to feel compassion for them, highlighting that this was not an unusual response, but rather an inherent part of His character.¹¹ The compassion that Christ exhibited toward those who came to hear Him inspired them to continue following Him. This underscores the idea that empathy is a crucial element in fostering loyalty. Therefore, all who are fortunate enough to serve in Christ's church should embody warm compassion for those in need.¹² This will help reduce the rate of backsliders.

Another important aspect that Ellen G. White emphasizes for retaining members is the necessity of submissiveness to the will of God. Without this submission to God's law, our foundation of Christianity is unstable, akin to being built on sand. Therefore, the foremost lesson that Christians must learn is the lesson of submission, specifically, submission to Christ.¹³ Some individuals opt to leave the church due to their lack of desire to follow the principles outlined in the Scriptures. They may not be fully committed to surrendering their lives to the Lord. Ellen G. White notes, "Through the submission of our minds and wills to the Holy Spirit, we consistently become learners of the Great Teacher."¹⁴ It is clear that if members reach a certain level of submissiveness, retention will be sufficiently strong.

Additionally, White discusses how visitation contributes to keeping members engaged. The visitation ministry embodies Christian principles such as love,

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, Vol.12 (1897). par. 3.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, Vol 16. 1901, par. 25.

¹³ Ellen G. White, "Take Heed to Thyself," *The Review and Herald*, February 24, 1903, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/821.22558#22559>.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA. Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1909), 196.

compassion, kindness, and the spiritual support of church members. These are principles that many individuals entering the church should embrace from their fellow believers and leaders. In this context, Ellen White recommends that ministers arrange and conduct spiritual visits to ensure that every family member feels God's love through the visitors who enter their home.¹⁵ Through home visits, individuals are guaranteed to be acknowledged by God through His church. Consequently, the members who participate in these visits may express great enthusiasm for the church. Acknowledging the significance of this duty, White states that the effort of going from house to house, caring for those who are lost, and seeking out lost souls is the most important task anyone could undertake.¹⁶ Once we implement these recommendations, you will see changes in the retention programs.

Additionally, faithfulness is a significant theme regarding member retention that Ellen White emphasizes. For individuals to stay in the church, they must adhere to God's principles that guide His church. Loyalty acts as a tether that keeps a person from drifting away from God. Concerning this matter, Ellen White points out that Paul persisted in encouraging new converts to maintain their faith, even when he was separated from them.¹⁷ Our faithfulness prompts Jesus to hear our requests and respond to all our prayers, and His grace is heightened for His loyal followers. With immense joy, He bestows His blessings upon those who seek them as they require assistance in their battle against the evil that impacts them.¹⁸ When individuals

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 347.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 431.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 202.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 532.

possess what they require, it becomes challenging for them to depart from the church. In this assertion, White emphasizes that loyalty plays a crucial role in keeping members.

Faithfulness is intrinsically linked to obedience, which plays a significant role in retention. Adhering to God's commandments is a fundamental aspect that empowers individuals to confront worldly temptations that lead some to depart from the church. Ellen White states that those who have consistently obeyed the Lord through the generations have experienced character transformation, aiding them in resisting evil, and their perspective and understanding of the world will be grounded in adherence to the standard of righteousness.¹⁹ Without obedience, a person becomes resistant to the Bible's principles, and some members decide to leave the church on their own or be disciplined by the church board. White says that at every generation, there is a church built on Christ, and it receives the right to privileges due to its obedience to God's commandments.²⁰ Guided by the Holy Spirit, she gives the conviction that obedience plays a great part in the retention of church members from generation to generation.

In brief, the exploration of various themes related to retention highlights the interconnectedness of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Spirit of Prophecy. Each of these elements, despite their diversity, plays a significant role in enhancing member retention. Although all these themes contribute to retention, some are more dominant than others. In this context, the emphasis lies on two key themes: obedience and compassion. This distinction leads to the classification of two distinct

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1901), 6:140.

²⁰Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Vineyard," *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/821.19443#19444>.

groups—one that focuses on compassion and another that emphasizes obedience. On one side, those guided by compassion embody unconditional love, visitation, spiritual and physical support, connection, mercy, grace, and relationship. Conversely, those who prioritize obedience exhibit qualities such as submissiveness, instruction, dependence, and faithfulness.

In examining the dynamics of dominant themes, compassion, along with its derivatives, represents an action supported by others, whereas obedience stems from an individual's willingness. In essence, evidence shows that when people exhibit compassion, they naturally express love, kindness, and mercy. Furthermore, a compassionate person actively engages with others, offering both spiritual and physical support while fostering strong connections and healthy relationships. As a result, member retention becomes attainable, as the needs of individuals within the church are genuinely addressed.

In comparison with the previous dominant theme of retention, obedience comes from within, while compassion comes from elsewhere, but they are complementary to the retention process. An obedient person is characterized in his/her life by following instructions given to accomplish his/her responsibility, depending always on God's will that is to say faithfulness is his/her second nature. Thus, such a person builds strength to face the deceptions of the world. Hence, compassionate and obedient people in the church are to be formed and have Christlike characters to promote the retention of members.

Summary

To summarize, this chapter has explored the biblical and theological foundations for an effective strategy for retaining members, drawing from both the Old and New Testaments as well as the Spirit of Prophecy. God's approach to

retention is expressed through various themes, predominantly categorized into two groups: compassion and obedience. These themes demonstrate the unity and coherence of the entire Scriptures, along with the writings of Ellen G. White, all of which emphasize the importance of member retention. The next chapter will present contributions from other scholars regarding the retention of church members.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of scholarly literature focusing on the challenges and dynamics of church membership retention, particularly within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The review explores both the benefits of member retention and the factors influencing it. Key themes include transitioning attendees into full membership, preparing converts for baptism, integrating new members, cultivating healthy relationships, promoting small group engagement, implementing visitation and mentoring systems, and fostering a culture of discipleship. Additionally, the reasons why individuals leave the church are examined, such as perceptions of hypocrisy, judgmentalism, unresolved personal conflicts, social disconnection, congregational disputes, and ineffective leadership. The chapter concludes by proposing strategic approaches to minimize member attrition.

Benefits of Church Membership Retention

The twelfth fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists describes the church as the family of God, the body of Christ, and the bride whom Christ loves and sanctifies. This theological framework underpins the imperative to retain members within the faith community. As Kimble emphasizes, the church comprises those redeemed and sanctified by Christ, collectively embodying His presence on earth.¹

¹ Jeremy M. Kimble, *Understanding Church Discipline: A Practitioner's Guide*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 45.

Reinder Bruinsma underscores that Jesus formed a church community intentionally, reflecting God's desire for belonging and relationship.² Kimble further notes that removing members undermines the church as a visible and communal entity.³ Similarly, Leeman stresses that church membership is not optional but essential for believers.⁴

Despite its spiritual foundation, the church faces significant attrition, particularly among young adults. Drew Dyck highlights that up to 70% of young adults leave church by age twenty-two, and by age twenty-nine, 80% are disengaged from church life.⁵ Bruinsma affirms this trend, noting a pattern of nominal membership without regular attendance within Adventist congregations.⁶

Factors Influencing Church Membership Retention

Transitioning Attendees into Members

A key strategy for retention is transforming attendees into committed members. Attendees, as defined by the Collins English Dictionary, are participants in events, while members belong to an organization. Rick Warren argues that attendees must be disciplined into worshippers and integrated into the life of the church.⁷ Paul's epistle to the Ephesians (2:19) draws a distinction between strangers and fellow

² Reinder Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009), 33.

³ Kimble, *Understanding Church Discipline*, 47.

⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 26.

⁵ Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith...and How to Bring Them Back*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 20.

⁶ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 52.

⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 310.

citizens in God's household, emphasizing the need for intentional assimilation strategies.⁸ Kidder adds that without active, believing members engaged in ministry, the sustainability of the church is jeopardized.⁹

Preparing Converts for Baptism

The baptismal preparation process plays a crucial role in long-term retention. Willard A. Dessain cautions that preparation should not be limited to duration or information exposure but should emphasize internalization and commitment to biblical truths.¹⁰ Effective instruction includes fostering a willingness to live out one's faith.

Assimilation of New Members

While baptism goals are frequently set, the lack of structured follow-up impedes long-term integration. Warren describes assimilation as a process from awareness to attendance to active participation.¹¹ Without such a framework, new members often drift away unnoticed. Truman and Hightower describe assimilation as the emotional and spiritual integration of individuals into the church's mission.¹² Hucks adds that this includes helping individuals contribute meaningfully to the

⁸ Eph. 2:19 (ESV).

⁹ S. Joseph Kidder, "The Biblical Role of the Laity," *Ministry Magazine*, June 2011, 10–13.

¹⁰ Willard A. Dessain, *Baptismal Preparation and Church Membership*, (Silver Spring: General Conference Education Department, 2013), 17.

¹¹ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 314.

¹² Brown Truman and James E. Hightower, "Building Belonging," *Journal of Christian Leadership* 6, no. 1 (2014): 23–34.

church's vitality.¹³ Wagner, Arn, and Towns assert that assimilation should begin before conversion, with pre-existing friendships serving as critical pathways.¹⁴

Churches must foster spiritual maturity and relational depth among new believers. Hiebert observes that post-conversion challenges can destabilize new members, likening their experience to cultural transition.¹⁵ Thayer recommends individualized spiritual mentorship, ministry involvement, and structured orientation as remedies.¹⁶ Clapp proposes a three-stage model: interest, involvement, and investment in church life.¹⁷

Member Relationships

Strong interpersonal relationships significantly influence retention. Burrill maintains that loving relationships are indispensable to church life.¹⁸ Feldbush, citing Mayeroff, contends that genuine care aims to support others' growth rather than serve self-interest.¹⁹ Rice argues that human beings are inherently relational, and this social fabric extends to spiritual communities.²⁰ Dudley's research on youth affirms that

¹³ Willie E. Hucks II, "Assimilation and Discipleship," *Ministry Magazine*, March 2016, 24–27.

¹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and Elmer L. Towns, *The Church Growth Principles Handbook*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2010), 118.

¹⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, "Spiritual Transformation and Cultural Change," *Missiology*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2010): 280–292.

¹⁶ Jane Thayer, "Helping New Members Stay," *Adventist Review*, February 2020, 14–16.

¹⁷ Steve Clapp, *Keeping the Faith: Strategies for Retaining New Members*, (Indianapolis: Center for Congregations, 2015), 22.

¹⁸ Russell Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches*, (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 2013), 56.

¹⁹ Martin W. Feldbush, "Pastoral Care and Christian Community," *Journal of Adventist Ministry* 9, no. 2 (2011): 12–18.

²⁰ Richard Rice, *The Reign of God*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2014), 205.

meaningful fellowship is a primary expectation and source of support for young believers.²¹

Practice of Small Church Groups

Small groups have historically served as effective instruments of spiritual growth and relational bonding. The biblical model of community, seen in Genesis 1:26, illustrates God's relational nature. Burrill notes that small groups have been central to Christianity from its inception.²² Otieno adds that contemporary retention experts view small groups as vital for integrating and sustaining new members.²³ Small groups foster connection, collaboration, and long-term belonging.

The Biblical Concept of Small Church Groups

The concept of small church groups finds its roots in the creation narrative. Genesis 1:26 records God's decision to create humanity: "Let us make man in our image," highlighting the principle of partnership inherent in divine design. This foundational act underscores the value of community and collaboration from the outset of human history.

God's formation of the first family unit, comprising Adam and Eve, exemplifies the initial small group. Rather than populating the world instantaneously, God chose to begin with a single family, emphasizing relational depth and communal growth (Gen 2:18–25). This approach laid the groundwork for the development of families, clans, and tribes, as seen in the dispersion at Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), where

²¹ Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 65–67.

²² Burrill, *Radical Disciples*, 94.

²³ Yoseph N. Otieno, "Small Groups and Church Growth in East Africa," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2019): 112–120.

humanity was scattered into diverse groups, each forming its own community structure.

Strategically, small groups were also employed in military contexts. In Judges 7:16, Gideon divides his 300 men into three companies to effectively combat the Midianites, demonstrating the tactical advantage of smaller, cohesive units.

Administrative efficiency through small groups is further illustrated in Exodus 18:17–23, where Jethro advises Moses to appoint capable men over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. This delegation not only alleviated Moses' burden but also ensured more effective governance and pastoral care within the community.

Small Church Groups in the New Testament

The New Testament church exemplifies the small group model, particularly through house churches. Joel Comiskey notes that early Christians met primarily in homes, fostering intimate fellowship and spiritual growth (Acts 2:46; 5:42). These gatherings were not merely supplementary but foundational to the church's structure and mission.²⁴

Comiskey identifies five key elements of early house churches that modern small groups can emulate:

1. Foundational Ministry: Small groups were central, not optional, to church life.
2. Life Transformation: Emphasis was on transformative living rather than rigid curricula.
3. Evangelistic Growth: Changed lives led to the multiplication of believers.

²⁴ Joel Comiskey, *Biblical Foundation for the Cell-Based Church*, Joel Comiskey Group, 2022, https://jcgresources.com/en/resources/church_planting/en_place/.

4. Leadership Development: Leaders emerged organically from within the community.
5. Connectedness: Despite meeting in separate homes, these groups maintained unity and shared resources .

Russell C. Burrill emphasizes that the early church's growth was largely due to its reliance on small groups, which provided a nurturing environment for believers and facilitated effective discipleship . He argues that modern churches should adopt this model to enhance member retention and spiritual vitality.²⁵

Advantages of Small Church Groups

Small church groups offer numerous benefits:

1. Spiritual Growth: They foster deeper connections with God through shared study and prayer.
2. Pastoral Care: Members receive personalized support and guidance.
3. Leadership Development: Individuals are empowered to discover and utilize their spiritual gifts.
4. Crisis Management: Groups provide immediate support during personal or communal crises.
5. Practical Application: Scriptural teachings are applied to everyday life within the group context.
6. Integration of New Members: New believers are assimilated into the church community more effectively.
7. Evangelism: Small groups serve as platforms for outreach and witness.

²⁵ Russell C. Burrill, "A New Yet Old Way to Do Church," *Adventist Review*, May 6, 2022, <https://new.adventistreview.org/feature/a-new-yet-old-way-to-do-church/>.

8. Church Growth: They contribute to the numerical and spiritual expansion of the church.²⁶

Burrill further asserts that small groups address the holistic needs of individuals, encompassing both emotional and spiritual dimensions. He observes that such groups create environments free from condemnation, promote love and acceptance, serve as training grounds for ministry, and hold members accountable in their faith journeys .

The Ministry of Visitation

Visitation is a critical component of discipleship and member retention. Personal visits by pastors or church members reinforce the individual's value within the community and provide opportunities for spiritual encouragement. Neglecting this practice can lead to feelings of isolation and eventual disengagement from the church.

Arrol A. Lawrance highlights the diminishing emphasis on visitation in contemporary pastoral ministry, noting that reliance solely on sermons and teachings is insufficient for nurturing congregants . He advocates for a return to the practice of home visits to strengthen the church body.²⁷

Similarly, John Todorovich compares the neglect of new believers to a parent's failure to care for their child, emphasizing the responsibility of church leaders to provide ongoing spiritual nourishment through personal engagement.

In conclusion, the biblical model of small groups, from the Old Testament through the New Testament, underscores their significance in fostering community,

²⁶ Russell C. Burrill, "A New Yet Old Way to Do Church," *Adventist Review*, May 6, 2022, <https://new.adventistreview.org/feature/a-new-yet-old-way-to-do-church/>.

²⁷ John Todorovich, "The Importance of Visitation in Church Ministry," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 71, no. 2 (2017): 123–130.

spiritual growth, and effective ministry. Modern churches are encouraged to adopt and adapt these principles to enhance their mission and member care.

Discipleship Culture

The contemporary church faces a significant challenge in retaining members, primarily due to the diminishing emphasis on discipleship. Discipleship is defined as a person's life being fully devoted to obeying Jesus Christ, a commitment that transforms one's values and character, ultimately influencing ministry within their family, church, and the broader world.²⁸ Harrington and Absalom define discipleship as "helping people to trust and follow Jesus," emphasizing the relational and transformative aspects of the journey.²⁹ Barna Group discusses this transformation in the context of discipleship, defining it as being full and capable followers of Christ.³⁰

The Great Commission and Its Implications

Russell Burrill emphasizes that baptism is merely the beginning of the discipleship journey, stating, "Just because people are baptized does not mean that your work is done. It is just the beginning."³¹ The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 outlines four actions: going, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Melak A. Tsegaw, referencing D.A. Carson, notes that in the Greek text, 'go,'

²⁸ A Fully Devoted Disciple of Jesus," *HeartQuest 101*, May 18, 2014, <https://www.heartquest101.com/2014/05/18/a-fully-devoted-disciple-of-jesus/>.

²⁹ Robby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 3, <https://d3iqwsq19z4qvn.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/02/09181052/Discipleship-that-Fits-Audiobook-PDF.pdf>.

³⁰ Barna Group, "Defining Discipleship," *The State of Discipleship*, accessed May 21, 2025, <https://access.barna.com/studies/the-state-of-discipleship/01-defining-discipleship/>.

³¹ Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 2009), 29.

'baptizing,' and 'teaching' are participles, while 'make disciples' is the imperative verb, highlighting the primary command to make disciples.³²

Understanding Discipleship and Disciple-Making

Aubrey Malphurs defines disciple-making as a continuous process that guides nonbelievers toward faith in Jesus and encourages believers to become more like Him. This process begins with evangelism, progresses through character and capacity development, and culminates in sending the disciple on a mission.³³ Bill Hull concurs, stating that disciple-making encompasses the ongoing life of the disciple and outlines the broader Christian experience.³⁴

Challenges in Modern Discipleship

Robby Gallaty highlights a shift in the understanding of discipleship, noting that it has transformed from an ongoing process into a model perceived as fully enrolled and completed, leading to vulnerabilities in the church.³⁵ Del Dunavant observes that many individuals enter the church through the front door but exit through the back due to a failure in helping them become disciples.³⁶ Melak urges

³² Melak A. Tsegaw, "Refocusing on Discipleship," *Ministry Magazine*, April 2019, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Refocusing-on-discipleship>.

³³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), <https://aucministerial.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Strategic-Disciple-Making-Aubrey-Malphurs.pdf>.

³⁴ Bill Hull, "Disciple Making Basics - The Discipleship Gospel," YouTube video, 5:46, posted by Discipleship.org, June 18, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cClrDeR94sg>.

³⁵ Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Replicate Ministries, 2013), <https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-Disciple-Makes-Disciples-ebook/dp/B078NMK88C>.

³⁶ Del Dunavant, "Why Adventist Churches Grow Differently," *EvangeLead*, accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.evangelead.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Myths.pdf>.

church leaders and members to prioritize discipleship, emphasizing that it is the foundation of Jesus' Great Commission.³⁷

Integrating Evangelism and Discipleship

Organizing evangelistic campaigns and baptizing individuals are crucial activities, but these events must be accompanied by a process of discipleship. Kirk Thomas emphasizes that relying solely on evangelistic campaigns and other church outreach efforts is insufficient for retaining church members over the long term. In addition to these valuable programs, it is essential to concentrate on transforming the lives of local church members.³⁸

The church needs to grow in numbers, but also, those baptized should become true disciples who can make other disciples. Kirk Thomas considers these two goals as distinct and states that each disciple is one of God's family, but all members are not disciples.³⁹

Mario Philip reminds us that a disciple is completely converted and proves a dedication to the master's cause. Our responsibility is to link discipling with the process of membership retention dynamism. When these two components are detached, our mandate related to the Great Commission is eviscerated.⁴⁰

³⁷ Melak A. Tsegaw, "Refocusing on Discipleship," *Ministry Magazine*, April 2019.

³⁸ Kirk Thomas, "Nurture, Retention, Reclamation," *Ministry Magazine*, April 2019, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Nurture-retention-reclamation>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Mario Philip, "The Holy Spirit Series," YouTube video, 39:52, posted by Inter-America Division of Seventh-day Adventists, September 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_A064c7DqA.

Mentoring System in the Church

Mentoring within the church is a structured process aimed at equipping believers, especially new converts, to grow spiritually and actively participate in ministry. The pastor plays a central role in initiating this process, encouraging mature members to disciple and support others. Effective mentoring is linked to increased retention and spiritual maturity among church members.⁴¹

Defining Spiritual Mentoring

Spiritual mentoring is often seen as a triadic relationship among the mentor, the mentee, and the Holy Spirit, fostering deep personal transformation.⁴² According to Ken Horton, mentoring is a mutually edifying relationship built on modeling, humility, and encouragement, reflecting biblical principles such as 1 Corinthians 11:1 and 1 Peter 5:5–7.⁴³

Biblical Examples of Mentoring

Scripture provides numerous examples of mentoring relationships: Moses and Joshua (Deut. 31:7–8), Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2), Jesus and His disciples (Luke 6), and Paul with Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). These relationships demonstrate a consistent model of relational, intentional development.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Jane Thayer, “The Role of Relationships in Church Retention,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 9, no. 1 (2013): 65–78.

⁴² Dallas Theological Seminary, “What Is Spiritual Mentoring?” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://voice.dts.edu>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2010), 32–45.

Implementing Christ's Mentoring Model

Phil A. Newton advocates for Christ-centered mentoring by pastors to raise new leaders, stating that mentoring should be integrated into the life of the local church.⁴⁵ Similarly, Robert Coleman stresses that building mature disciples requires personalized and consistent investment.⁴⁶

Jane Thayer emphasizes that retention rates improve when new members establish close friendships within the first few months.⁴⁷ Assigning mentors helps build these relational connections, aiding assimilation and spiritual development.

The Role of Church Climate

Galina Stele's research reveals that a warm and accepting church climate fosters intrinsic religion and retention.⁴⁸ Natasha Sistrunk Robinson further explains that mentoring provides structure, guidance, and emotional support, essential for spiritual growth.⁴⁹

Beyond Programs: The Need for Spiritual Parenting

According to Bobb Biehl, mentoring means asking, "How can I help you?" rather than issuing commands, enabling a relational approach to discipleship.⁵⁰ Paul in

⁴⁵ Phil A. Newton, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2017), 24–39.

⁴⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 53.

⁴⁷ Thayer, "The Role of Relationships in Church Retention," 72.

⁴⁸ Monte Sahlin, "What Makes Churches Grow: What Recent Adventist Research Reveals," *Ministry Magazine*, November 2004, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2004/11/what-makes-churches-grow.html>.

⁴⁹ Natasha Sistrunk Robinson, *Mentor for Life: Finding Purpose through Intentional Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 66–68.

⁵⁰ Bobb Biehl, *Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 21.

1 Corinthians 4:15 emphasizes the importance of spiritual fathers over mere instructors. Larry Kreider builds on this by stating that spiritual parents nurture others into maturity and eventual leadership.⁵¹

The Titus 2 model advocates for intergenerational mentoring, older men and women guiding the younger, creating a healthy church ecosystem.⁵²

Reasons Members Leave the Church

Research identifies multiple causes of church exit: hypocrisy, lack of relationships, conflict, and unmet expectations.⁵³ Errol Lawrence argues that a lack of pastoral visitation during critical life events such as sickness or grief leads many to feel neglected and eventually leave.⁵⁴

Thom S. Rainer adds that an entitlement mentality among members, where they focus on being served rather than serving, also contributes to disengagement.⁵⁵

Anthony Kent notes conflict and disillusionment as common reasons for church dropout, especially among younger members.⁵⁶

Addressing Hypocrisy and Modeling Authentic Faith

Hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another, deters people from church participation. Jesus condemned this behavior in religious leaders (Matt. 23:1–3).

⁵¹ Larry Kreider, *The Cry for Spiritual Fathers and Mothers* (Lititz: House to House Publications, 2014), 58–61.

⁵² Titus 2:1–8, Holy Bible, ESV.

⁵³ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 17–19.

⁵⁴ Errol Lawrence, *Why Adventists Leave the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2013), 11.

⁵⁵ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 21.

⁵⁶ Anthony Kent, “Church Dropouts: The Pain of Pastoral Disconnection,” *Elder’s Digest*, April 2021.

Roger Dudley found that when youth perceive hypocrisy in church leaders, it diminishes trust and reduces commitment.⁵⁷ Mashudu Ravhengani compares new members to children who are more influenced by behavior than words.⁵⁸

Strategies to Foster Authenticity and Retention

1. Build genuine relationships and friendships.
2. Model Christlike love and avoid conflict.
3. Integrate new members into active service.
4. Provide pastoral care and regular visitation.
5. Establish mentoring and discipleship programs.
6. Model high standards of faith and practice.

Judgmental Attitudes

To judge a person is to give a final opinion or decision on his or her conduct. In our context, this attitude is viewed negatively by church members, especially when this judgment has an aspect of criticism. Russell Burrill writes, “Too often the church has been quick to judge and slow to forgive”⁵⁹ In this case, people who are targeted gradually lose interest in belonging to the congregation. Roger L. Dudley reveals that “one of the major themes arising out of the comments by the youth is that they are disturbed because members and leaders in the congregation take it upon themselves to judge and criticize”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2009), 86–92.

⁵⁸ Mashudu Ravhengani, “Effective Follow-Up Strategies for Church Retention,” *The Southern African Journal of Missiology* 6, no. 2 (2022): 45–56.

⁵⁹ Russell Burrill, *Church That Works: The Purpose-Driven Community* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 88.

⁶⁰ Roger L. Dudley, *The Reluctant Minister: The Role of the Pastor in the Twenty-First Century* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 97.

Even though criticism can reflect reality, it is important to know how to address the issue in a positive way that plays a role in correction and encouragement to growth. However, when there is no flexibility and wisdom in the way of seeing things toward new members, the consequences will be harmful to the church. Dudley writes, “This kind of judgmental attitude has lost sight of love as the true Christian value and turns people away from the church without realizing it.”⁶¹

Marital Difficulties

Marital issues have a critical spiritual element. Marital problems can have a profound impact on an individual's spiritual life. According to Corine Gatti, one of the effects of these problems within couples is that people may stop attending church if their partner is not willing to accompany them. This can lead to a feeling of isolation and loneliness, making it harder for individuals to stay connected with their faith. Additionally, there may be situations where one person prefers a particular church, while the other does not, which can cause further conflict and ultimately result in people leaving their place of worship. Couples need to work together to find common ground and support each other in their spiritual journey.⁶²

Bryan Craig used the results of the Journal of Divorce and Remarriage (vol. 22, 1995) to show that, of those surveyed, only seventeen percent reported a decrease in their spiritual lives due to their divorce. In addition, Bryan writes, “The study, which included people from a wide range of Protestant and Catholic Churches in the United States, also showed that 42 percent of people changed their religious affiliation as a result of their divorce...” He further notes that “Two studies conducted in the

⁶¹ Dudley, *The Reluctant Minister*, 99.

⁶² Corine Gatti, “Marital Conflict and Faith Engagement: Challenges for Ministry,” *Journal of Family Ministry* 14, no. 2 (2020): 15-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20909234>.

South Pacific Division (SPD) and the North America Division (NAD) have found that fifty percent of those surveyed dropped out of the church after their divorce.”⁶³

Other Family Conflicts

In her presentation, Jane Thayel sheds light on one of the top reasons why people tend to leave the church the situation where the new member is the only Adventist in their household. This scenario can pose significant challenges and hurdles for the individual, leading them to question their faith and, eventually, leave the church. Such people face so many trials that when they are abandoned by the church, their departure is quick.⁶⁴

Steve Clapp, in his research, discovered other factors arising from the family. Respondents indicated that they had experienced a personal or family crisis which had caused them to feel uncomfortable in church or to get out of the habit of attending church. Those crises identified included:

- The loss of employment (and the accompanying loss of the ability to pay the pledge made to the church).
- Marital separation or divorce.
- The death of a parent or other family member.
- Serious illness.
- Depression.
- Alcohol or other drug problems.
- Difficulties with children.

⁶³ Bryan Craig, “Divorce and Religious Affiliation Changes: A Quantitative Study,” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 60, no. 3 (2019): 175-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2019.1601724>.

⁶⁴ Jane Thayel, “Retention Challenges for New Members in Faith Communities,” *Ministry Magazine*, September 2021, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2021/09/retention-challenges>.

When a church member is going through one of these crises and the church doesn't take care of him, Clapp writes, "A few of them did express disappointment that they had stopped coming and that no one from the church ever asked why." This is where the weaknesses of church leaders and church members, in general, are manifested.⁶⁵

Lack of Friends in the Church

According to Monte Sahlin, most people become Christians and join a church through the influence of friends or relatives. This approach to evangelism, known as "friendship evangelism," emphasizes the importance of building relationships to share the gospel and show Christ's love. When newly baptized people come to the church and nobody takes care of them, they realize that they are in the wrong place, find themselves lost, and return to where they used to be.⁶⁶

High Level of Conflict in the Local Church

David W. Hinds wrote an article titled "Conflict can be Healthy for the Church." In it, he points out that while we may be tolerant of tension between the church and the world, we tend to find internal conflict within the church very concerning. Sometimes, conflicts arise between church members and the church pastor. David VanDenburgh realized in his research the following: Church conflicts often start small, with one or two members disagreeing with their pastor. Over time, more people get involved, and the conflict can begin to harm the church's well-being

⁶⁵ Steve Clapp, "Family Crises and Church Engagement: A Survey," *Adventist Mission Studies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 42-53.

⁶⁶ Monte Sahlin, *Friendship Evangelism: Reaching Your Friends* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 24-26.

and ministry. Members need to address issues respectfully and focus on the greater mission of the church.⁶⁷

Another aspect of conflict has been indicated by Steve Clapp, which is the difference of opinion. He says, “Difference of opinion is inevitable... It’s also inevitable that a few members will occasionally leave a church, feeling that they will be happier elsewhere.”⁶⁸

Bad Church Leadership Practice

Leadership is ideal in a system of every single existing society or organization, whether in politics, business, or church. This governance plays a great role in the prosperity or the shambles of any institution. Any society or organization with weak or without leadership results in several consequences like confusion among its members, complaints, anarchy, and it is almost impossible to achieve goals that have been settled. One of the factors that lead to a failure of leadership is bad leadership practices. This section aims to discuss this issue in leadership that counteracts the good operative of different activities of any organization. The interest will be emphasized in church leadership.

Defining Leadership

The word “leadership” has several definitions, but we will look at a few of them. McManus defines leadership as “a process that includes the work of leaders and followers accomplishing a goal in a particular context, all while being influenced by

⁶⁷ David W. Hinds, “Conflict Can Be Healthy for the Church,” *Ministry Magazine*, February 2016, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2016/02/conflict-can-be-healthy-for-the-church>.

⁶⁸ Steve Clapp, “Church Conflict and Member Attrition,” *Adventist Review*, May 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-conflict-and-member-exit>.

cultural values and norms.”⁶⁹ The definition of leadership, according to The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, is a relationship of influence that exists within governments, organizations, groups, or among family and friends. When there is leadership, it is obvious that there is a leader. Leadership capacity is shown by the ability to persuade people to participate in a course of action, even if they are initially opposed. The prevailing word in this definition is “influence,” which makes it possible to move people where you want them to be.⁷⁰

The Crying Need of the Church Today is Leadership

John C. Maxwell said that the leadership vacuum that grew during the Twentieth century is the most critical problem facing the church today. The church is currently facing challenges in fulfilling its crucial responsibility of making active disciples, which is central to its ministry. As per the Great Commission given by Jesus, the church needs to engage in various activities to encourage people to become active followers of Christ. This commission has three crucial elements: making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Therefore, the church needs to focus on making active disciples to carry out its ministry effectively.⁷¹

The Great Commission says clearly that we should make disciples by baptizing them, but this is not enough. Making disciples is a lifelong process for Christians, and this will be possible with teaching everything that is in the Bible through different aspects: “teaching them to love Scripture, why spiritual disciplines

⁶⁹ McManus, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 59.

⁷⁰ *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Leadership,” ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 3:815.

⁷¹ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 14-18.

are important, to walk in the Spirit, to discern good teaching from bad, and to teach them to do what the Lord required.” All this process is called discipleship, which is essential for church growth. In his book *The Maturing Church*, Ermias says that without discipleship, the church will not accomplish its mission, and it will have no future. Therefore, this responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of church leaders.⁷²

Summary

The study on church membership retention has many benefits that the church should consider and find an appropriate strategy to limit people leaving the church after their baptism. The first and foremost benefit is that all people as children of God should remain in the church which is God’s family, the body of Christ, and the bride of Jesus Christ so that at His return He will present her to Himself a glorious church. This chapter discussed factors that influence church membership retention and focused on reasons members leave the church including those from themselves, those from their fellow believers, and even those from church leaders. Further, we looked at some strategies to close the back church door.

⁷² Ermias, *The Maturing Church: Discipleship for Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2022), 102-104.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter highlighted the literature review on members' retention strategies in the Gisenyi district SDA. This chapter presents the specific ministry context/area in terms of macro and micro contexts. The second section describes the research methodology that includes the design, population, sampling, data collection tools and their tests, data collection procedures, research ethics, and data analysis.

Ministry Context

This section offers a concise overview of Gisenyi town, which represents the macro context, while the Gisenyi district SDA serves as the micro context.

Macro Context Analysis

Socioeconomic context. Rubavu town is located in the Western Province of Rwanda, right on the northern shores of Lake Kivu, and borders the Democratic Republic of the Congo's town of Goma. It lies within the Albertine Rift, part of the East African Rift system. It is also a gateway to the Volcanoes National Park and Gishwati-Mukura National Park.

Rubavu town is known for its scenic views, hot springs, and as a hub for trade and tourism in the region. It is also a busy town with vibrant socioeconomic activities that link it with the town of Goma. These socioeconomic factors include both small and large-scale cross-border businesses, tourism, fishing, beaching, gorilla tracking, entertainment, and cultural diversity, among others. Such activities make this area the

biggest border crossing in Africa, as it registers 90,000 people crossing daily from one town to another (KT Press 2018), thereby creating job opportunities. It also makes the area inhabited by people with different cultural, religious, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, these socioeconomic backgrounds include people of different statuses, marginalized (poor), job seekers, students, and those of high living status.

Religious context. Rubavu town and its surroundings are characterized by diverse religious beliefs and affiliations. They include indigenous/traditional, non-Adventist Christians, including the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches such as the Lutherans, the Baptists, the Anglicans, the Pentecostals, the Methodists, new religions/Pentecostals, the Seventh-day Adventist sects (dissidents), Jehovah's Witness, etc. There is also Islam. In addition to that, the SDA church exists there, and its members are attracted from the above-mentioned religious backgrounds.

Micro Context Analysis

Seventh-day Adventist Gisenyi district, where the research was conducted, is in NWRP. This district covers the whole town of Rubavu in the Western Province of Rwanda, and is composed of seven churches. According to Aaron Bizagwira and his wife Thabbee Yamuragiye, the first SDA church in Rubavu town was established in 1968 when the first pastor Japhet Kanyamihigo from Rwankeri Mission Station, conducted an evangelistic campaign there.¹ Before that time few church members who were living in Rubavu town attended the Kanembwe and Rushubi SDA churches, which are currently located in Rugerero and Nyamyumba SDA districts,

¹ Aaron Bizagwira and Thabbee Yamuragiye, Interview by the author, Kigali, Rwanda, 24 June, 2020.

respectively. After the evangelistic campaign, the Rwankeri Mission Station leaders bought a plot, and a few church members stopped attending the above-mentioned churches and started worshipping in that plot. Thereafter, the first church was built.

After two years, in 1970 Gisenyi SDA church became the headquarters of the Gisenyi SDA district, constituting Gisenyi, Kanembwe, Rushubi, Rugerero, and Budaha churches, which formally (apart from Gisenyi) constituted the Mukingo SDA district. From 1968 to 1997, the Gisenyi district had one church in Rubavu town, that is Gisenyi church. In 1997, the Byahi SDA branch was born, and it was organized as a church in that year, followed by the Mbugangari SDA branch in 2005, which was officially organized as a church in 2006. The Makoro SDA branch was born and organized in 2009. In 2012 the SDA church of Gates of Hope was born and organized. After that, two more SDA church branches (Gisa and Rurembo) were established. The reason for the church growth in the Gisenyi SDA district is attributed to the SDA church's mission activities that include evangelistic campaigns.

Despite that, however, the lifestyle of the population in Rubavu town (as depicted in the above macro and micro contexts), where the Gisenyi district SDA is located, poses challenges that affect the progress of the church growth in terms of church members' retention. This is reflected in the NWRP Membership Audit Report of April 2017, where 35% of members had dropped attending the church. The researcher, therefore, intended to fill that gap by investigating which macro and micro contexts lead to the attraction of people to become SDA church members, and which lead them to drop out. The researcher also based on the findings to design the retention strategy that will be used not only in the Gisenyi district SDA but also in the whole NWRP.

Methodology

For a researcher to achieve the goal of solving the problem he/she wants to solve, it requires that he/she have a plan to help him or her manage his or her research activities. This would help him to integrate more information about the study he is doing through data collection, measurement using different instruments, and analysis.

Therefore, this study used mixed methods. The mixed methods design was chosen because it helps researchers to gather accurate data, analyse and corroborate data, and make inferences using various mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches.²

Judith Schoonenboom and R. Burke Johnson describe mixed-method research as a methodology that combines at least one qualitative component with one quantitative component. Quoting Johnson BR, Onwuegbuzie AJ, and Turner LA, Judith S., and R. Burke, define mixed method research as the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches during data collection and analysis for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.³ In the same direction of understanding what mixed methods means, Allison S. and Joanna S. define mixed methods as a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study.⁴

² D.G. Caruth, "Demystifying Mixed Methods Research Design: A Review of the Literature," *Mevlana International Journal of Education* 3, no. 2 (2013): 112-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13054/mije.13.353.2>.

³ Judith Schoonenboom., R. Burke Johnson. How to construct a Mixed Methods Research Design. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5602001/#CR15>. Accessed November 10, 2020.

⁴ Allison Shorten and Joanna Smith, "Mixed Methods Research: Expanding the Evidence Base," accessed December 18, 2020, <https://ebn.bmj.com/content/ebnurs/20/3/74.full.pdf>.

Research Design

According to Anol Bhattacharjee, a research design is a comprehensive plan for data collection in an empirical research project. It is a “blueprint” for empirical research aimed at answering specific research questions or testing specific hypotheses.⁵ The purpose of a research design is to provide a scientist or a researcher with a well-structured, objective plan of study that enables him/her to efficiently assess cause-and-effect relationships between various dependent and independent variables, such as the Classic Controlled Experiment.⁶

In this study, a descriptive research design was used to describe and explore the existing literature, and participants’ views on why church members leave the church and what would be the best strategies church leaders can use to retain them. In this descriptive research design, two approaches were used to collect, analyse, and interpret data:

The qualitative approach was used through different approaches, including observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and secondary research in the process of data collection. The qualitative method is a method that does not involve measurement or statistics.⁷ A researcher notices a phenomenon that he/she has no explanation for. He/ she observes the phenomenon and collects data about it. With enough information about the phenomenon, the researcher can now formulate a

⁵ Anol Bhattacharjee, “Research Design,” accessed December 18, 2020, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-herkimer-researchmethodsforsocialscience/chapter/chapter-5-research-design/>

⁶aScholarship.com Staff, “Research Design: Types and Research Methods,” published June 8, 2021, <https://ascholarship.com/research-design-types-and-research-method/>.

⁷ George C. Boeree, “Qualitative Methods,” accessed December 24, 2020, <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/genpsyqualmeth.html>.

hypothesis or hypotheses.⁸ In this study, qualitative data were collected through desk review (secondary data collection), interview guides, and then analysed and presented using thematic analysis.

Quantitative methods refer to research techniques that analyze situations through the use of statistics by collecting quantifiable data and applying statistical, mathematical, or computational approaches. These methods gather information from participants using various sampling techniques, including online surveys, polls, and questionnaires. The results of this research can be presented numerically.⁹

Either the qualitative method or the quantitative method is very useful in research, but when combined, they have better results from the analysis of data that has been collected. In this study, quantitative data were collected using questionnaire, analysed and presented in tables, and interpreted using frequencies and percentages. Both the qualitative and quantitative results were corroborated to provide valid findings.

Population

The population of this study was obtained from the churches constituting the Gisenyi SDA District, found in the NWRP. The NWRP is composed of 27 districts.¹⁰ The Gisenyi SDA District is made up of seven churches. For the case of this study, only five churches were selected to constitute the study population. These churches include Gisenyi SDA Church (mother church), Makoro church, Gates of Hope

⁸ C. Myburgh and M. Poggenpoel, "Qualitative Methods: A Research Approach Worth Considering," *South African Psychiatry Review* 10 (May 2007): 65-67.

⁹ C. Myburgh and M. Poggenpoel, "Quantitative research: Definition, Methods, Types and Examples," accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/quantitative-research/>.

¹⁰ NWRP statistical report, 2019.

church, Mbugangari church, and Byahi church. Furthermore, the population included all NWRf office workers, church elders representing others, heads of six departments from five churches, and all pastors from twenty-seven districts constituting the NWRf.

Sampling

Since studying all 27 districts constituting the NWRf was difficult due to time and financial constraints for the researcher, the following sampling techniques were used: Purposive sampling was used to select one district for inclusion in the study. It was chosen because it enables the researcher to decide¹¹ which subjects or variables should be included in the study.

To determine the name of the selected district for inclusion in the study, a simple random sampling technique was applied by putting all the names of the districts in NWRf in a box and then picking one randomly. This simple random sampling was chosen because it gives equal chances to all subjects under study for selection and inclusion in the study.¹² Thus, Gisenyi SDA District was randomly selected as the target district from the rest of the 27 districts in the NWRf.

The Gisenyi SDA district is composed of seven churches. Due to time and financial constraints, purposive sampling was again applied to determine the number of churches for inclusion in the study. Therefore, only five churches from all seven constituting the Gisenyi SDA district were purposefully selected. To know which of those five churches from the seven would be included in the study, the simple random sampling technique was again employed by putting the names of all seven churches in

¹¹ Guetterman T. descriptions of sampling practices within five approaches in education and health sciences. Lincoln: University of Nebraska. 2015.

¹² A.O. Ponce and N. Pegan-Maldonado, "Mixed methods research in education: capturing the complexity of the profession," *International Journal of Educational Excellence* 1, no. 1(2015): 111-135.

the box and randomly picking one by one until five were reached. Therefore, the churches that were randomly selected included Gisenyi SDA Church (mother church), Makoro SDA church, Gates of Hope SDA Church, Mbugangari SDA church, and Byahi SDA Church.

Purposive sampling was again used to select one first church elder and pastor from each district in the NWRF. It was also used to select all 13 NWRF staff as well as the participants for FGDs, who were selected from each of the above five selected churches, constituting the Gisenyi SDA district.

In each FGD, participants included two leaders from the Youth Ministries Department, two from the Women Ministries Department, two from the Sabbath School Ministry Department, two from the Stewardship Department, two from the Deconary Department, and finally two from the personal ministries department of each of the five aforementioned churches. Thus, each FGD consisted of 12 members.

The following formulae were used to determine the sample size for participants from the five churches in the Gisenyi SDA district.

$$n=N/1+N(0.05^2).$$

where,

n= sample size

N = Population of members in five churches

0.05= sampling error.

From the above formulae, the total sample of participants was 442.

Table 1. Summary of Population and Sample Size

No	Church/participant	Population	Sample size	No of questionnaires distributed	No of questionnaires returned
1	Gisenyi Church	2,248	139	139	129
2	Makoro Church	923	57	57	50
3	Mbugangari Church	1,465	91	91	79
4	Gates of Hope Church	562	35	35	30
5	Byahi Chuch	848	53	53	45
6	Pastors	27	27	27	27
7	NWRF staff	13	13	13	13
8	Elders	27	27	27	27
Total		6,113	442	442	400
5 FGDs		5 FGDs from each church, constituting a total of 60	12 members in each focus group discussion		

Source: Gisenyi SDA district reports

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments were specifically designed to gather information. Two instruments were utilized: a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was structured to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. It included questions aimed at obtaining participants' demographic information and study variables. Additionally, there was a section with semi-structured questions to gather qualitative data. The questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale, which included options such as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The interview guide was developed to collect qualitative data during the FGDs.

Reliability and Validity of the Research Instruments

A reliability test was conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the questions in the questionnaire. This involved a pilot survey with 35 members of Kanyefutwe Church, located in the Kanama SDA district, which is one of the 27

districts within the NWRP. The pilot data were analyzed using SPSS. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 was set as the benchmark for internal consistency. However, the results revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.627. According to studies,¹³ this 0.627 alpha coefficient indicates that the tool was reliable for collecting final data.

Validity testing was conducted to ensure the tools are trustworthy and accurately measure their intended purposes. In this case, face validity was applied to assess the relevance, clarity, and consistency of the items in the instruments.¹⁴ The content validity test was performed by verifying whether the instruments' questions were measuring what they were intended to measure.¹⁵ The questions' content was reviewed to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and research questions. Furthermore, the instruments were presented to the supervisor, an expert in the field, to verify that they would effectively gather the intended information.

Trustworthiness of the qualitative instrument was ensured through the following activities: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.¹⁶ Credibility was established by ensuring the collected data represented the phenomenon under investigation. It was done by participants' check, data triangulation, and coding. Transferability was done by ensuring that findings from

¹³ Keith S. Taber, "The Use of Cronbach's Alpha When Developing and Reporting Research Instruments in Science Education." *Research in Science Education* 48 (2018): 1273–1296, [https://doi: 10.1007/s11165-016-9602-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-016-9602-2).

¹⁴ A. Taherdoost, "Validity and reliability of research instrument: How to test the validation questionnaire/survey in research," *Journal of Academic Research in Management* 3 (2016): 28-36.

¹⁵ Jacob Creswell, Andrew J. Codlin, Emmanuel Andre, Mark A. Micek, Ahmed Bedru, E. Jane Carter, Rajendra-Prasad Yadav et al. "Results from Early Programmatic Implementation of Xpert MTB/RIF Testing in Nine Countries," *BMC infectious diseases* 14 (2014): 1-12.

¹⁶ Gunawan J. "Ensuring Trustworthiness In Qualitative Research," *Belitung Nursing Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 10-11. [https://doi.org/ 10.33546/bnj.4](https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.4).

data collected through multiple methods were applicable to other districts other than Gisenyi SDA in the NWRP. Dependability was ensured by a rigorous description of the data correction and analysis techniques and procedures so that the study would be replicated. Confirmability was ensured by checking and cross-checking data throughout data collection and analysis, and data triangulation.

Data Collection Procedures

To initiate the data collection process, the participants' workplaces and residences were identified. Two research assistants were hired and trained to aid in the distribution and collection of the completed questionnaires. Both the researcher and the research assistants introduced themselves to the participants, explaining the purpose of the study and providing instructions on how to complete the questionnaires. They invited participants to voluntarily engage in the study by filling out the questionnaires at their convenience. Participants were encouraged to reach out to either the researcher or the research assistants if they encountered any difficulties while completing the questionnaires. A date was established for the collection of the questionnaires. Data collection took place on working days, resulting in the distribution of a total of 442 questionnaires, of which 400 were completed and returned.

For the data collection on the focus group discussions (FGDs), five separate sessions were conducted at different times. Each group was composed of 12 participants, with representation including two leaders from the youth ministries department, two from the women's ministries department, two from the Sabbath school ministry department, two from the stewardship department, two from the deaconry department, and two from the personal ministries department of each of the five churches mentioned. As a result, each FGD consisted of a total of 12 members.

After consulting with each group, specific dates and times were established for the meetings. The scheduled dates for these discussions were: February 22, 2020, from 3 PM to 4 PM; February 29, 2020, from 2 PM to 3 PM; March 7, 2020, from 4 PM to 5 PM; March 14, 2020, from 1 PM to 2 PM; and March 15, 2020, from 11 AM to 12 PM.

The interview guide was used to collect data from each group. Key guiding questions included: Why do church members leave attending Gisenyi SDA District Churches' services? What do you think are the strategies Gisenyi SDA District Churches can apply to retain believers from leaving the church? Notes were taken by recording in the notebook as the discussions went on. Pondering questions were asked to get deeper insights into the questions. The researcher could ask the questions as well as take notes; the research assistants were tasked to note down everything said.

Data Analysis

Gathering data is not enough on its own; it requires in-depth exploration and understanding of what the data can reveal about an existing problem. According to Shamoo and Resnik, data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data.¹⁷

The analyzed data were obtained from 400 returned questionnaires and 60 members of five FGDs. Analysis was done based on data for each research question. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Software Package for Social Sciences). Descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies and percentages) was done for research questions one and two, while thematic analysis was done for research

¹⁷ Shamoo and Resnik, "Responsible Conduct in Data Management," accessed January 6, 2021 https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/n_illinois_u/datamanagement/datopic.html.

question three (qualitative data) and FGD data using the manual process. Results were presented in tables and interpreted about the existing literature.

Ethical Considerations

Before this research could continue on the fieldwork process, a letter of Introduction for Doctor of Ministry Research (permission Letter) was obtained from AUA and then presented together with the researcher's request letter to the North West Rwanda Field Executive Committee to be allowed to search for information concerning the effective strategy for membership retention in Gisenyi district as seen in Appendix A and B.

After obtaining permission from the NWRP to conduct research (see Appendix C), another letter was written to the district pastor (see Appendix D) before the survey, distribution of questionnaires, and conducting the FGDs in the Gisenyi SDA district. As soon as permission from the pastor was granted, (see Appendix E), the survey began and the questionnaires were administered to a different category of groups including church members constituting five randomly selected churches Gisenyi SDA district, to the workers of the NWRP and to the church elders and pastors selected to represent others from the whole NWRP.

Results Presentation and Discussion

This section presents both quantitative and qualitative results on the participants' demographic information, reasons why members drop out, and the suggested retention strategies.

Research question 1.1. Descriptive results on Participants' Demographic Information on gender

To understand the participants' background, data was collected from them regarding their gender.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Participants' Gender

Statistics	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	193	207	400
Percentage	48	52	100

Primary data source

As indicated in the table, 52% of the church members were female participants, while 48% were male. This suggests that the majority of church members in the Gisenyi SDA district are female and actively engage in various church activities, including evangelism.

Research question 1.2. Descriptive results on Participants' Demographic Information on age

Participants' ages were analyzed to determine their age categories and assess inclusivity in participant selection. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Participants' Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Between 15-20	95	23.75
Between 21-40	123	30.75
Above 40	182	45.5
Total	400	100

Primary data source

Table 3 indicates that the majority of participants (45.5%) were in the above-40 age category, followed by those between 21 and 40 (31%) and those below 20 (24%). This means that the selection of participants was inclusive, and the provided data constituted views of all age categories. This means the data provided was valid.

Research question 1.3. Descriptive Results on Participants' Demographic

Information on the church lived experience

Participants were evaluated to understand their lived experiences within the church. This understanding was essential for interpreting the data they provided regarding the reasons members leave the church and the most effective strategies for retaining them, all drawn from their personal experiences. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics on Participants' Church Experience

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 years	92	23
Between 5-10	108	27
Between 10-15 years	90	22.5
Above 15 years	110	27.5
Total	400	100

Primary data source

As results in table 4 indicate, the majority of participants (27.5%) had a church-lived experience of above 15 years, followed by those between 5-10 (27%), those below five years (23%), and finally, those between 10-15 years (22.5%). This shows that Gisenyi district church members, pastors, and elders in NWRF have varying experiences, which is sufficient to provide data regarding why some church members drop out and what can be done to retain them.

Research Question 2: Findings on Reasons Why Members Leave the Church

This research question aimed at investigating the reasons for people leaving the church. The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Reasons for Leaving the Church

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Some believers leave the church because they have no friends, making them feel alone.	76 (19%)	140 (35%)	20 (5%)	98 (24.5%)	66 (16.5%)
You believe that there are members who leave the church because they see no love in the church.	66 (16.5%)	122 (30.5%)	64 (16%)	108 (27%)	40 (10%)
Some church members complain that the church requires them too much.	102 (25.5%)	124 (31%)	60 (15%)	82 (20.5%)	32 (8%)
Believers from non-Adventist families face the challenge of being refused to stay into the church.	96 (24%)	156 (39%)	62 (15.5%)	44 (11%)	42 (10.5%)
Some members leave the church because church leaders do not fulfill their responsibilities.	118 (29.5%)	156 (39%)	68 (17%)	34 (8.5%)	24 (6%)
The problems members have with church leaders cause some to leave the church.	56 (14%)	100 (25%)	98 (24.5%)	112 (28%)	34 (8.5%)
Some members leave the church because they have a job that requires them to work on the Sabbath.	94 (23.5%)	120 (30%)	72 (18%)	64 (16%)	50 (12.5%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2020.

The responses recorded in the table illustrate that fostering good relationships among church members is crucial for retaining them within the church. When respondents were asked whether “Some believers leave the church due to a lack of friends, which makes them feel isolated,” the data analysis revealed that a significant percentage, specifically 35% and 19%, agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

This ratio highlights the importance of friendship among church members.

Conversely, 24.5% disagreed, 16.5% strongly disagreed, and 5% remained neutral..

When respondents were asked if there are members who leave the church because they see no love in the church, the results show that 30.5% and 16.5% affirmed agree and strongly agree and that is to say some members are discouraged to see that there is no love in the church and decide to go out. Other respondents did not see the problem in the same direction as those who agreed with the statement; 27% and 10% disagreed and strongly disagreed that members leave the church because of a lack of love in the church. Though 16% remained neutral.

In response to concerns raised by some church members about the perceived demands placed on them, data analysis reveals that a significant portion of respondents, specifically 31%, agree, while 25.5% strongly agree that these complaints exist. Conversely, 20.5% of respondents disagree, and 8% strongly disagree with this sentiment, leaving 15% of participants neutral in their opinions. Additionally, the data suggests that church leaders should actively foster friendships among members to enhance church engagement.

We aimed to explore the challenges faced by members coming from non-Adventist families, particularly regarding their acceptance within the church. A significant portion of participants in the study (39%) acknowledged that this issue exists within our congregation, which impacts the church's overall vitality. Additionally, 24% expressed strong agreement with this perspective. In contrast, 11% disagreed, and 10.5% strongly disagreed, while 15.5% remained neutral in their responses. Given the substantial number of baptized individuals from non-Adventist backgrounds, it appears that the church is losing a considerable number of members. This highlights the need for careful follow-up with newly baptized individuals.

An investigation into why some members leave the church revealed that 39% agreed, and 29% strongly agreed, that church leaders do not effectively fulfill their responsibilities, which contributes to members leaving. In contrast, 8.5% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed with this statement, while 17% remained neutral. This suggests that church leaders should not only be present on the Sabbath but also actively visit members, show compassion, and provide adequate guidance on living out their Christian lives..

The assertion that "the problems members experience with church leaders lead some to leave the church" reveals that 28% of respondents disagree with this statement, while 25% agree. Additionally, 8.5% strongly disagree, and 14% strongly agree that certain members depart from the church due to issues with their leaders. Notably, a significant portion, 24.5%, adopted a neutral stance in their responses to this matter.

The data reveals that some members leave the church due to job requirements that necessitate working on the Sabbath. Responses indicate that 30% agree with this statement, while 23.5% strongly agree. When we combine these affirmative responses, we find that a total of 53.5% believe there is a significant issue regarding respect for the Sabbath, suggesting a troubling trend that could lead to church departures. Conversely, 16% disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed, with 18% remaining neutral. This highlights a pressing issue within our doctrine that requires serious attention and teaching for our members.

Research Question 3. Findings on what strategies can be used to retain church members?

This research question aimed to identify strategies for retaining church members and preventing them from leaving the church. The proposed strategies

include providing guidance before and after baptism, fostering connections, offering spiritual support, conducting visitations, exercising compassionate leadership, and building strong relationships. Each of these strategies is presented and discussed in detail below.

Instructions before and after baptism. Baptism is the principal sign of entrance for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to receive new members who have accepted to join and share the blessed hope of Christ's soon coming. “Baptism is much like a marriage ceremony. You publicly marry someone as a symbol of your love, devotion, and desire to spend the rest of your lives together. You decide to be baptized as a public witness to the entire universe that you have given your life to Jesus and you want to spend eternity with Him.”¹⁸ Given the great importance of this ceremony in human life, there must be adequate instructions for those who want to be baptized to help them better understand the decision they are making. “The preparation for baptism is a matter that needs to be carefully considered.”¹⁹ Table 1 below shows the data collected about instructions for baptism candidates.

¹⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Fundamental Beliefs: Born Again,” accessed March 14, 2021 <https://www.adventist.org/articles/born-again/>.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 308.

Table 6. Instructions Before and After Baptism

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Before being baptized, people are sufficiently instructed for the baptism.	34 (8.5%)	86 (21.5%)	16 (4%)	170 (42.5%)	94 (23.5%)
Baptism Candidates are first taught the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist.	38 (9.5%)	90 (22.5%)	18 (4.5%)	188 (47%)	66 (16.5%)
Baptism candidates are taught the baptismal candidates' vows before their baptism.	60 (15%)	100 (25%)	8 (2%)	166 (41.5%)	66 (16.5%)
New members are each given a mentor to keep them in the church and instruct them.	182 (40.5%)	152 (38%)	36 (9%)	38 (9.5%)	12 (3%)
There is a special group of newly baptized better to explain their responsibilities as church members.	192 (48%)	138 (34.5%)	24 (6%)	34 (8.5%)	12 (3%)
New members are taught about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they are used.	80 (20%)	36 (9%)	44 (11%)	152 (38%)	88 (22%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2021.

Based on the information gathered from individuals who responded to the questionnaires, it seems that newly baptized individuals are not adequately instructed for the Christian life they are about to embrace. Specifically, 42.5% of respondents expressed disagreement, while 23.5% strongly disagreed. In contrast, 21.5% indicated agreement, and 8.5% strongly agreed. Only 4% of respondents remained neutral in their responses.

To determine whether baptism candidates are taught the 28 fundamental beliefs, we encountered a situation similar to the previous one. In this case, 47% disagreed, and 16.5% strongly disagreed with the statement, while those who agreed either strongly or somewhat accounted for 8.5% and 22.5%, respectively. Additionally, 4.5% expressed neutrality on the matter.

We also sought to find out if church leaders adequately explained the baptismal vows to candidates prior to baptism. The results indicated that a significant portion of respondents felt this was not done effectively, with 41.5% disagreeing and 16.5% strongly disagreeing. In contrast, those who supported the practice consisted of 15% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing.

Regarding the care of newly baptized members, the data analysis revealed that when existing church members are assigned as spiritual mentors for a designated period, 40.5% of respondents strongly agreed with this approach, and an additional 38% agreed. Among those who disagreed, only 9.5% expressed disagreement, while 3% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 9% of respondents chose to remain neutral and did not share their views.

In terms of whether there is a dedicated group for newly baptized individuals to receive better instruction about their responsibilities as church members, a significant number of respondents affirmed the existence of such groups. The results indicate that 48% strongly agreed with this statement and 34.5% agreed. Conversely, among those who did not recognize the existence of these groups, 8.5% disagreed, while only 3% strongly disagreed with the idea of special groups designed to educate newly baptized members.

Respondents were asked whether new members receive instruction on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their applications. The feedback collected from the returned

questionnaires revealed that 20% strongly agreed with this statement, while 22% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 9% expressed agreement, and 38% disagreed. This indicates that those who disagree outnumber those in agreement. Furthermore, 11% of respondents appeared to have no knowledge of the topic and remained neutral. These findings clearly highlight the necessity for such teachings.

Connection. One of God's strategies for retaining members, as outlined in both the Old and New Testaments, is the importance of connection. The Spirit of Prophecy also highlights this significance. To underscore the critical nature of the relationship between church leaders and their members, particularly newcomers, Lawrence observes that "the church's loss of members seems to correlate with the sentiment these individuals often experience that the church has abandoned them following their baptism."²⁰ To know the level of connection between leaders and members, some questions were asked to the members, and the findings are presented in the table below.

²⁰Lawrence, *Why Adventists Leave the Church*, 26.

Table 7. Connection

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The church prepares a special welcoming ceremony for connecting new members to existing members.	236 (59%)	132 (33%)	16 (4%)	6 (1.5%)	10 (2.5%)
Church members are happy to attend various meetings in the church where I worship.	76 (19%)	176 (44%)	18 (4.5%)	118 (29.5%)	12 (3%)
All church programs are interested so that the number of participants increases and makes them happy.	34 (8.5%)	10 (2.5%)	26 (6.5%)	220 (55%)	110 (25.5%)
I feel happy to invite my friends and family members to be connected to the church I worship.	224 (56%)	138 (34.5%)	30 (7.5%)	6 (1.5%)	2 (0.5%)
The local church welcomes people (believers and visitors) in a special way to the church so that it gives them the courage and willingness to come again in the future.	134 (33.5%)	164 (41%)	46 (11.5%)	36 (9%)	20 (5%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2021.

The statement that "The church prepares a special welcoming ceremony to connect new members with existing ones" is supported by research indicating that this event is organized effectively and is well-received by both the newly baptized and the entire church community. Among respondents, 59% strongly agreed with this statement, while 33% agreed. In contrast, 1.5% and 2.5% disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, with only 4% remaining neutral.

Regarding church members' enjoyment of various meetings organized by the church, survey results show that 9% strongly agree and 44% agree that they appreciate these gatherings. However, 29.5% and 3%, respectively, expressed disagreement and strong disagreement, suggesting some dissatisfaction with certain church programs. Additionally, 4.5% remained neutral, highlighting an area that may require improvement.

To assess whether church programs are effectively engaging participants and fostering their happiness, a significant number of respondents expressed discontent. Specifically, 55% disagreed, and 27.5% strongly disagreed with the assertion that all church programs are interesting. In contrast, only 2.5% agreed, while 8.5% strongly agreed. These results indicate a need for improvements to enhance the spiritual satisfaction of believers during worship; otherwise, a gradual decline in attendance could occur, leading to some individuals leaving the church due to dissatisfaction with certain programs.

Despite highlighting the need for changes to make some church programs more enjoyable and suitable for participants, this does not deter church members from inviting others to join them in worship. Evidence of this can be seen in the responses to the statement regarding members' willingness to invite friends and family to their church. Here, 56% indicated strong agreement, 34.5% agreed, and 7.5% remained neutral. Conversely, only 1.5% disagreed, and 0.5% strongly disagreed. This indicates that church members genuinely care for their church, while recognizing that some aspects need improvement.

Regarding how the local church welcomes newcomers to encourage return visits, survey results show that 33.5% strongly agree and 41% agree that the church

has a commendable approach to welcoming participants to its programs. Additionally, 9% disagreed, 5% strongly disagreed, and 11.5% chose to remain neutral.

Spiritual Support. This strategy for retention has always been effective. In the New Testament, the spiritual support offered by God to disciples was an instrument to bring many people and a key for retention in the church. The table below shows us how it is in the Gisenyi district.

Table 8. Spiritual Support

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Church members value regular prayer and Bible study in small groups.	36 (9%)	70 (17.5%)	46 (11.5%)	144 (36%)	104 (26%)
The church has a solid program in place to encourage members to study the Bible and pray.	154 (38.5%)	168 (42%)	36 (9%)	32 (8%)	10 (2.5%)
In the church, there are groups of members who meet at the church for a while for Bible study and prayer.	70 (17.5%)	106 (26.5%)	20 (5%)	160 (40%)	44 (11%)
The church is interested in involving and integrating new members into the life of the Church.	142 (35.5%)	172 (43%)	38 (9.5%)	28 (7%)	20 (5%)
New members are explained that the mission of evangelism is for every single church member.	134 (33.5%)	190 (47.5%)	32 (8%)	26 (6.5%)	18 (4.5%)
There is a firm plan to take care of members to stay in the church.	34 (8.5%)	76 (18%)	34 (8.5%)	200 (50%)	56 (14%)
The church is very focused on baptizing people, but taking care to stay in the church is limited.	66 (16.5%)	84 (21%)	32 (8%)	166 (41.5%)	52 (13%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2021.

Providing spiritual support to church members is an effective strategy that encourages individuals to remain engaged with the church for the long term, and potentially for a lifetime. The apostle Paul refers to new believers as being in need of “milk” in 1 Corinthians 3:2, stating, “I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food because you weren’t ready for anything stronger...” Justin Torres emphasizes the importance of maturing from being “spiritual babies” to “spiritual adults,” highlighting that this growth is essential for our lives to truly reflect the nature of Jesus Christ.

Such spiritual support is attainable when we cultivate a lasting relationship with God through dedicated Scripture study and ample time spent in prayer. To this end, we surveyed select members regarding their views on the value of regular prayer and Bible study in small groups. The analysis revealed that 36% disagreed and 26% strongly disagreed that members are committed to Bible study and prayer. Conversely, those who agreed and strongly agreed comprised 17.5% and 9%, respectively, while 11.5% were neutral in their responses. This indicates a clear need to establish a permanent Bible study program within small groups.

An analysis aimed at assessing whether the church has an effective program to encourage members to engage in Bible study and prayer revealed that a significant portion of respondents 42% agreed and 38.5% strongly agreed believe the church does indeed have a solid initiative in place. In contrast, only 8% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed, indicating that they feel no such program exists.

Furthermore, a look into the frequency of group meetings at the church for Bible study and prayer showed that 40% of respondents disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed with the notion that members never gather in groups for these activities. On the other hand, 26.5% agreed and 17% strongly agreed, while 5% remained neutral.

This suggests that while the church has an effective program to encourage Bible study, participation practices may vary.

Additionally, respondents were asked about the church's efforts to involve and integrate new members into its community. The results were encouraging, with 43% agreeing and 35.5% strongly agreeing with the church's position on this matter. However, a small minority 7% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed while 9.5% expressed neutrality. This reflects a positive trend in the church's integration efforts.

Regarding the explanation of the mission of evangelism for every church member, the results indicate that 47.5% of respondents agree that the church makes a concerted effort to communicate its mission, which includes everyone, while 33.5% strongly agree. Conversely, some respondents expressed differing views, with 6.5% disagreeing and 4.5% strongly disagreeing, suggesting that the church does not adequately address this matter. Additionally, 8% of participants took a neutral stance. These findings suggest that the church is striving to emphasize the responsibility of each member in the evangelistic mission.

In relation to the statement regarding the existence of a firm plan for member retention, the analysis reveals that a majority of respondents, 50%, disagree, and an additional 14% strongly disagree. Meanwhile, 19% agree, and 8.5% strongly agree that such a plan exists, with 8.5% remaining neutral. These results highlight the need for church leaders to develop a comprehensive strategy to support and retain members.

Lastly, when respondents were asked if the church prioritizes baptizing individuals while neglecting their ongoing care, the findings show that 21% agree, compared to 41.5% who disagree. Furthermore, 16.5% strongly agree, and 13% strongly disagree, with 8% of respondents take a neutral position.

Visitation. The ministry of visitation is vital and the key to success in the retention of members in the church. This is the responsibility of pastors, elders, and old members to help new members and other fellow believers who demonstrate a certain weakness in attending church meetings. The findings in the table below indicate the intensity of visitation in the Gisenyi district.

Table 9. Visitation

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There is in the church a program of regular visits to members.	36 (9%)	74 (18.5%)	50 (12.5%)	170 (42.5%)	70 (17.5%)
Members absent from meetings are visited by their group members to find out the reasons for their absence.	44 (11%)	80 (20%)	44 (11%)	170 (42.5%)	62 (15.5%)
Members who have been in the church for a long time know where every new member lives.	36 (9%)	72 (18%)	50 (12.5%)	144 (36%)	98 (24.5%)
When one of the members has a problem, the church visits him/her and joins his family.	152 (38%)	166 (41.5%)	34 (8.5%)	26 (6.5%)	22 (5.5%)
Members of the church recognize a member who is no longer attending the church and plan to visit him or her to return to the church.	26 (6.5%)	66 (16%)	22 (5.5%)	194 (48.5%)	94 (23.5%)

Source, March 2021.

Based on the data presented in the table above, it is evident that there is a lack of a regular visitation program for church members. A significant 42.5% of respondents disagree, and 17.5% strongly disagree with the existence of such a

program. Furthermore, 60% of participants affirm that there is no consistent schedule for visits to members. Additionally, 12.5% of respondents reported a neutral stance, suggesting that while they have not explicitly expressed agreement or disagreement, they imply that the program is essentially nonexistent. In contrast, 18.5% agree and 9% strongly agree that a visitation program is in place. The analysis of this data indicates that church leaders should implement a regular visitation program to engage with members in their homes.

Regarding the attendance of members at church meetings, a survey reveals interesting insights about efforts made to engage with those who are absent. Specifically, 42.5% of respondents disagree, and 15.5% strongly disagree with the idea that there are no outreach visits to members who miss these meetings. Additionally, 20% agree and 11% strongly agree that such visits do occur. Notably, 11% of participants remain neutral on this issue, indicating a significant portion with uncertain views.

When examining whether long-standing church members are aware of the residences of new members, the data suggests a disconnect. A notable 36% disagree, and 24.5% strongly disagree with the notion that veteran members are unaware of where new members live. In contrast, 18% agree and 9% strongly agree that they do have this awareness. Furthermore, 12.5% of respondents hold a neutral stance, leaning towards a negative perspective on the matter.

Regarding the topic of visiting and engaging with the family of a member facing challenges, the study found that 38% of respondents strongly agreed, while 41.5% agreed. Additionally, 8.5% remained neutral. On the contrary, 6.5% disagreed, and 5.5% strongly disagreed with the statement. The findings indicate that church

members are generally more emotionally motivated by significant events compared to other statements in the survey.

Furthermore, when investigating whether church members recognize those who have stopped attending and take steps to encourage their return, the results revealed a concerning trend. A notable 48% and 23.5% of respondents stated they do not recognize inactive members. In contrast, only 16% agreed and 6.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while 5.5% remained neutral. This lack of recognition poses a significant risk to member retention, as failing to identify inactive members can lead to increased dropout rates.

Compassionate leadership. The compassion exhibited by leaders is a crucial factor in fostering a deep love for the church among believers, enabling them to grow in their faith in Christ. Leaders should always remember that those entrusted to their care are children of God, and they carry a significant responsibility to guide them toward their heavenly Canaan. As the apostle Paul reminds us, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). This perspective should inform the way church leaders approach their responsibilities, allowing church members to see in their leaders a reflection of Christ. The table below clearly illustrates how members perceive their leaders.

Table 10. Compassionate Leadership

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Church leaders show members love and affection and make them love the church.	48 (22%)	94 (24%)	40 (10%)	164 (41%)	52 (13%)
Members appreciate the spiritual care of church leaders.	70 (17.5%)	146 (36.5%)	30 (7.5%)	126 (31.5%)	30 (7.5%)
Church leaders are aware of the problems that members have and keep them close.	78 (19.5%)	120 (30%)	56 (14%)	100 (25%)	46 (11.5%)
When a member is no longer in good standing, church leaders reach out to him/her so that they can bring him/her back on track.	40 (10%)	88 (22%)	30 (7.5%)	182 (45.5%)	60 (15%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2021.

Based on the study findings, we observed that a greater percentage of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Church leaders show members love and affection and inspire them to love the church," in comparison to those who agreed or strongly agreed. Specifically, 41% disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed, while 24% agreed and 12% strongly agreed. Additionally, 10% of respondents chose to remain neutral. These results are concerning and suggest that members are seeking more compassion from their leaders.

We also aimed to ascertain whether members appreciate the spiritual care provided by church leaders. The data revealed that a significant portion of respondents (7.5%) remained neutral in their responses. Among those who expressed positive sentiments regarding the appreciation of spiritual care, 36.5% agreed and 17.5% strongly agreed. Conversely, 31.5% disagreed, and 7.5% strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that the gap between negative (39%) and positive (54%)

responses is not substantial, suggesting there is room for improvement in enhancing the spiritual care that church leaders provide to their members.

Regarding church leaders' awareness of members' problems and their efforts to stay close to them, the survey results highlighted that there is still considerable work to be done in this leadership area. A total of 30% agreed, and 19.5% strongly agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 25.5% disagreed, and 11.5% strongly disagreed with the suggestion that church leaders are unaware of members' challenges. Additionally, 14% opted to remain neutral.

Finally, respondents were asked to express their views on the interest of church leaders in reaching out to lost members to guide them back. The findings indicated that 45.5% disagreed, and 15% strongly disagreed. In contrast, 22% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed. These results reveal that the majority, 60.5%, held a negative stance compared to just 32%, suggesting that church leaders may not be sufficiently attentive to the "lost sheep."

Relationship. In the previous chapters, we explored how God actively visited individuals to cultivate personal relationships, emphasizing the importance of these connections in retaining members within the community. Ellen G. White emphasizes that the bonds formed among church members are vital to fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty, playing a significant role in the overall stability and growth of the church.

Table 11. Relationship

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In my church, members live as brothers and sisters and show love for one another.	60 (15%)	124 (31%)	40 (10%)	128 (32%)	48 (14%)
A few members are the ones who show cooperation in the various activities that the church organizes, while others are observers.	150 (37.5%)	170 (42.5%)	32 (8%)	26 (6.5%)	18 (4.5%)
There are no fellowship programs that unite members in the church, such as sharing meals, picnics, and more.	132 (33%)	138 (34.5%)	36 (9.5%)	46 (11.5%)	48 (12%)
When a member is in trouble or at a good time, fellow believers are so close to him/her that he sees himself in God's family.	162 (40.5%)	146 (36.5%)	40 (10%)	40 (10%)	12 (3%)

Source: Fieldwork, March 2020.

The information above indicates that there is something to be done concerning the relationship among church members. Based on the data from respondents, if church members live as brothers and sisters and show love for one another, it is clear that on one side, 31% agreed that members live well as brothers and sisters and 15% strongly agreed. On the other side, 32% disagreed with this statement and 14% strongly disagreed while 10% which is a big number remained neutral. This indicates that the relationship between members needs to be improved. When there is no relationship, the retention will be at a low level.

The statement, “few members actively show cooperation in the various activities organized by the church, while others merely observe,” suggests that the majority of members do not participate. The table above indicates that a significant portion of respondents agreed with this statement, while only a few disagreed. Specifically, 42.5% of individuals agreed and 37.5% strongly agreed that few members were involved. In contrast, only 6.5% disagreed and 4.5% strongly disagreed, with 8% remaining neutral. This underscores a lack of relationship among members, which negatively impacts participation in church activities.

Regarding the existence of fellowship programs designed to unite members through shared activities such as meals and picnics, data analysis reveals that a majority of respondents—34.5% agreed and 33% strongly agreed—believe such programs are lacking. Conversely, 11.5% disagreed, and 12% strongly disagreed with this assertion, while 9.5% remained neutral. These figures highlight the need for initiatives aimed at enhancing fellowship among church members.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked whether they feel that fellow believers are supportive during times of trouble or joy, the results indicated that many church members value participation in each other’s lives. Data showed that 40.5% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed that members are close during both difficult and joyful moments. However, 10% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed, suggesting some indifference among members, while 10% remained neutral. This indicates that members may require a triggering situation to encourage compassion toward their fellow believers.

Qualitative Results

Qualitative results were derived from the open-ended questions and FGDs as presented in the following sections.

Results from Open-ended Questions

The reasons participants provided for leaving the church were organized into several themes, which were further classified into categories such as church-based, church leaders-based, social-based, and individual-based reasons. The themes arising from church-based reasons included a scarcity of afternoon programs aimed at spiritual enrichment, a prevalence of short-lived programs, and the burdensome nature of certain fundamental church beliefs.

One participant emphasized that “church members often leave because there are very few afternoon programs available, particularly for youth and women's ministries that could help nurture new members.” Another participant pointed out that the “church offers numerous short-lived programs that frequently change and tend to be unengaging.” Additionally, several participants noted that “the church’s fundamental beliefs can feel overwhelming, such as restrictions on marrying non-believers, dress codes, and Sabbath observance.”

Emerging themes regarding the reasons church leaders provide for member departures include a lack of proper instruction for new converts, an overemphasis on financial matters rather than spiritual growth, the busyness of church leaders, the discouragement of misconduct among some leaders, favoritism in church officer elections, a lack of transparency in addressing member disputes, and a shortage of spiritual role models within the church. Others expressed that the Church seems to care for newly baptized members only while they are actively attending, after which they are often left feeling like foster children.

Participants noted that some members leave the church because leaders tend to prioritize visits to the relatives and acquaintances of certain individuals while ignoring others. Additionally, there is a perception that church leaders frequently discuss financial matters and solicit donations without providing consistent teachings on Christian stewardship. Many leaders appear so preoccupied with their business endeavors that they only remember their congregation during Sabbath services and specific prayer hours. The misconduct of certain church leaders can also be discouraging for weaker members.

Favoritism during the election of church workers, particularly when wealthy individuals are selected, fosters a negative attitude among those committed to service, regardless of their financial status. This ultimately contributes to their decision to abandon the church.

Social factors influencing why members leave include ephemeral care and visitation primarily directed toward regular attendees or relatives. Other reasons encompass the allure of worldly lifestyles outside the church, miracles attributed to other religious organizations, marriages with non-believers, conflicts within the families of believers, pressure from former religious church members on new attendees, and betrayal by fellow church members. One participant suggested that betrayal from a trusted leader or fellow member often prompts the betrayed individual to revert to their previous religion, perceiving no significant difference. Furthermore, some participants observed that former members show little interest in engaging with newly baptized individuals or participating in other aspects of church life, often directing their attention instead toward relatives and friends.

Another significant factor that emerged is that new members often notice a stark contrast between the warm reception they experienced during the evangelistic

campaign and the more routine atmosphere of regular church services. The love and care they felt during their baptism in an evangelistic crusade seem to diminish during typical Sabbath worship. For example, one participant indicated that “my friend dropped because the welcome in church is different from the welcome he received when he attended the evangelistic campaign and got baptized.” Another participant asserted that most of the time, church members don’t take time to greet each other or have a shared potluck. They just get out of the church after service without even saying to you, “Happy Sabbath.”

Several individual-based reasons contribute to this trend. One common issue is individual spiritual weakness. Some individuals get baptized for purposes such as marrying an SDA member rather than for genuine spiritual reasons. For instance, many young couples stop attending church because one spouse converted solely to marry, and once the marriage occurs, they may no longer feel the need to attend with their partner. As a result, often only one spouse continues to come, or both gradually stop attending altogether. For instance, one participant highlighted that “I know three dropouts who no longer come to church because they got baptised so that they marry our girls who were behaving well and spiritually strong. I feel ashamed to see them coming alone with children but without husbands.”

Another reason is that members may be attracted to the miracles and prayers offered by other faiths, particularly Pentecostal churches. “ I know two ladies who went to a Pentecostal church because they were attracted by miracles. They said that we Adventists don’t perform miracles so that people get relieved from what burdens them. There is no spirit in our church,” Asserted one participant. Relatedly, another participant stressed that “people drop out of our church because our church doesn’t provide relief services like tuition for children, shoes, clothes, scholastic materials,

etc., yet non-adventist churches do so.” This assertion is about some non-Adventist churches that run charity organizations, like Compassion for the Pentecostal churches and Caritas Rwanda for the Catholic Church. They provide material assistance to families with sponsored children. Consequently, when these opportunities arise, some members of the SDA church may leave to join a different faith where they receive such material support.

Results from Focus Group Discussions

The results presented below were derived from five FGDs comprising members from each of the five churches within the Gisenyi SDA district. Each FGD consisted of 12 individuals selected from various departments, including the deaconry department, personal ministries department, women's ministries department, youth department, and stewardship department. The emerging themes and results are organized according to the guiding interview questions that were posed, as outlined below.

Results for Interview Question 1. What are the factors that motivate people to join the church? The results for this question were almost similar across all five FGDs. Emerging themes on why people are motivated to join the church included - encounter with the biblical truth during the evangelistic campaigns, wanting to get married in the church with a church member spouse, being invited by a friend or relative to evangelistic campaigns, and being attracted by acts of kindness. It was highlighted by one participant that, “some time back, our church conducted a two-week evangelistic campaign. We invited visitors to come and attend. Fortunately, one person who was attending other Christian churches accepted my invitation. We went together, and she learned a new biblical truth and made a decision to convert, and got baptized. She is now an active member of our church.”

Other emerging themes were identified as attending Seventh-day Adventist schools and being converted by biblical teachings and Christian behavior that characterize those institutions during the weeks of prayers and evangelistic campaigns, getting attracted by the diversity of Adventist youth programs and the good appearance of their uniforms-pathfinders and master guides attires, being friends to Adventists, the need of belonging, and changing lifestyle-abandoning immoral behaviors and be incorporated in a moral society by attending church, feeling need for basic needs support by the old church members, and having personal relationship with God.

Other provided reasons include invitations to attend our meetings and an appreciation for the teachings of the church, the distribution of Seventh-day Adventist literature, and systematic discovery studies offered to non-Adventist believers, including those living in Adventist households.

From these themes, it is essential to highlight the biblical fundamental beliefs that distinguish the SDA church from others during evangelistic campaigns. It is worth noting that nearly all newly baptized individuals come from different religious backgrounds. Additionally, church members should actively invite visitors to our meetings and serve as positive spiritual examples. We must pay particular attention to our young people, encouraging them to engage with all church programs rather than focusing solely on wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, we should increase acts of kindness and ensure that many members are involved in these initiatives.

Results for Question 2. What are the reasons why people leave the church? The findings of this inquiry highlighted several key themes regarding the reasons members leave the church. These include baptisms conducted without sufficient instruction or preparation, a lack of follow-up after baptism, the emergence

of false doctrines among congregants, and the challenge of poverty that compels members to work on the Sabbath. Additionally, spiritual weakness among individual members, unnoticed false teachings within the church, the absence of a consistent strategy for retention and reclamation, and various life challenges faced by members contribute to this issue.

It has become apparent that young people are often disengaged from church programs because most of the leaders are elderly. This dynamic leads to greater activity among the older members, and their planned programs commonly do not resonate with the youth, who perceive them as uninteresting. Consequently, young individuals may choose to leave the church or seek involvement in non-Adventist congregations where they feel more valued, respected, and are afforded leadership opportunities. Furthermore, some individuals noted that children are frequently compelled by their parents to attend church from an early age rather than being nurtured to love the church. This can lead to a decline in church attendance as they reach adulthood.

The themes emerging from this analysis highlight the pressing need for comprehensive instruction surrounding baptism and continued care for newly baptized members. Church leaders should prioritize the regular teaching of fundamental biblical beliefs and other church practices, ensuring that newly baptized individuals are effectively integrated into the new life they have embraced. These conclusions are further supported by the responses provided in the open-ended questions of the questionnaire.

Results for FGD Interview Question 3. What can the church do to increase the retention of its members? Key emerging themes from this discussion include the need to dedicate at least a year to teach new converts in a special Sabbath

school class and to integrate them into small groups. It is crucial to invest more effort in instructing baptismal class members, encouraging church members to participate in Bible study and prayer groups led by church leaders, and establishing a regular schedule for visiting church members.

Additionally, it was emphasized that church members require consistent spiritual attention from the moment they join the church and throughout their lives. Implementing these changes will help church members feel valued and loved by the community. It was suggested that small groups or cells be established within the church to identify the needs of each member group, which would foster spiritual growth and provide support for basic needs, reducing the likelihood of members leaving the church.

Leaders should remain vigilant and care for all believers without discrimination. The church leadership must also allow young people to recognize and utilize their talents and spiritual gifts within the church community.

Furthermore, there is a need for planning youth programs for Sabbath afternoons and holidays that focus on teaching young people how to protect themselves and to foster love for their families, country, church, and God. Some of these programs require improvement to become more appealing and inviting.

It has also been noted that church members, particularly leaders, should lead by example by demonstrating Christ-like character, being caring and peaceful, resolving conflicts, conducting church activities with transparency, and prioritizing the visitation of all church members and visitors. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that cell fellowships convene regularly during the week to nurture members and address the needs of individuals in the community, rather than waiting until the Sabbath, which often has a packed schedule.

Leaders should teach young people about the unique identity that an Adventist member should possess, distinguishing them from others. The church has a responsibility to prepare youth to build strong Christian families. Additionally, leaders should change their approach to young people, seeing them not as insignificant but as vital to church life. This involves actively engaging them in activities, visiting them, showing compassion, and organizing various events that foster fellowship and good relationships. By changing their mindset, leaders and older members can better fulfill their duty of protecting youth from all forms of temptation.

Church members and leaders must remain vigilant in caring for the flock. They should demonstrate compassion, encourage positive relationships, and promote fellowship among the young people in the church. It is essential to allow youth to utilize their talents and spiritual gifts and to keep them engaged through diverse programs. Moreover, church programs need to be enhanced. Regarding book distribution, it is crucial to prioritize the dissemination of publications that encourage individuals to search the Scriptures.

Additionally, church members should strive to represent Christ well within their families and reflect His character to those around them. Based on the insights gathered from this focus group discussion, church leaders at all levels should protect their congregation from false prophets and misleading teachings that may arise in various forms.

There should be a well-defined plan for home visitation to ensure every member is reached. Emphasis should also be placed on retaining members and reclaiming those who have strayed. Programs should be established to help members overcome challenges and strengthen their faith.

Systematic home visitation should be conducted without discrimination, and programs must be created and reinforced to help members support each other financially, socially, and spiritually. It is important to involve all members, especially those who have recently been baptized, in church initiatives. Leaders should stay informed about false doctrines and establish guidelines for members to follow. Additionally, leaders should prioritize family meetings and retreats to foster community within the church.

Designing of Intervention

The findings outlined above served as the foundation for developing an intervention strategy program to enhance membership retention within the Gisenyi SDA district churches and the broader NWRP. As a result, the researcher organized and conducted a seminar focused on effective strategies for retaining church members. The Gisenyi SDA Church was selected to implement these strategies as a pilot, anticipating that the outcomes would also benefit other churches within the NWRP.

The Objective of the Training/Seminar

The objectives that were to guide the training/seminar are stated below.

1. To train church leaders on the Adventist Church Membership System (ACMS) that would help in the good management of membership.
2. To revive members to get them to the point where they could see the value in their membership as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation.

3. To train and equip church leaders to create ways to customize the channel of communication between church members to meet their daily needs in spiritual, social, and financial.
4. To train, educate, and equip church workers on the responsibility of home visitation, following Christ's good example, which would help church members feel valued and wanted by the church.
5. To encourage church leaders to promote and awaken all church members to participate actively in Bible study and prayer life through personal devotion.
6. To train church leaders concerning biblical methods of nurturing and retention of membership.
7. To awaken church leaders to elaborate a consistent program on the teachings of SDA beliefs to equip newly baptized and old members.
8. To train and educate members on how to enhance the level of understanding of fellowship based on biblical principles.
9. To help church members to become more committed to evangelism as the mission of the church that is given by Christ. This mandate concerns going and making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things we have been commanded by Christ.

Election of the welfare committee to reinforce lay activity department programs in the church and visitation teams.
10. To enhance the level of a good understanding of church leaders they would be role models of church members in all aspects of life and serve as resource personnel of the local churches.

11. To train and equip church leaders to reflect Christ's servant leadership in the practice of their responsibility in leading the church.

Summary

Chapter four provides a comprehensive overview of the ministry project, including a detailed examination of both the macro and micro contexts of the Gisenyi SDA district. The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach to carry out this project. Through surveys, distributed questionnaires, and conducted focus group discussions, it became evident that the Gisenyi SDA district experiences a notable number of members leaving the church unnoticed. Additionally, the data gathered from various sources revealed the reasons behind this departure and suggested potential remedies. An intervention program was designed to assist the church in reducing membership loss and enhancing member retention. Consequently, the strategy developed will be outlined in Chapter Five to ensure effective results.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The previous chapter outlined strategies aimed at enhancing effective church membership retention. This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the strategy defined in Chapter Four and focuses on implementing interventions to improve retention in the SDA Gisenyi district. The project preparation is outlined first, followed by the implementation of the intervention, which includes planning the training/seminar, defining the role of the church, and executing the program. This is succeeded by an evaluation of the strategies and a detailed report on the project. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary.

Project Preparation

Jesus emphasized the importance of planning when He asked the question: For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it ... (Luke 14:28). Following this instruction, this project began with scratching different sources to gain an understanding of the problem before designing a strategy to solve it. The theological foundation of membership retention based on relevant biblical text in the Old Testament and New Testament and writings of Ellen G. White described in chapter two, the literature review established in chapter three that have been exploited through other Christian writers, the survey, questionnaires, and personal interview with focus group discussion in chapter four laid the foundation for the strategy outlined in this project for effective church membership retention in SDA Gisenyi district.

Implementation of the Intervention

The implementation of the intervention commenced with a meeting organized for the church board members. The purpose of this meeting was to outline the designed intervention program through a training seminar aimed at enhancing the understanding of the church's responsibilities, in which every member is expected to engage. The goal of this meeting was to encourage a significant turnout of church members for the seminar.

The intervention program was planned to span one month in the Seventh-day Adventist Gisenyi district, with the objective of each training seminar topic being to increase the retention of church membership within the Gisenyi district and other churches. Following the church board meeting at the researcher's request, the training seminars were scheduled for March 2021. We encountered the challenge of not being able to meet throughout the week due to restrictions on gatherings as part of COVID-19 prevention guidelines. Consequently, meetings took place only on Sabbath afternoons, specifically on April 3, 10, 17, and 24, 2021, from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

Planning the Seminar

In collaboration with church elders, we established several committees to enhance the planning and monitoring of training sessions and seminars. An advertisement committee was formed to make announcements during church services, display posters, and regularly remind congregants about upcoming meetings. Additionally, an organizing and monitoring committee was elected to arrange activities and oversee the daily program.

Following each daily session, this committee convened to assess successes and challenges, discussing ways to make future sessions more appealing to participants. Recognizing the need for pastoral support, the seminar planning commission also

established a welfare and visitation committee to coordinate and supervise visits to church members.

The church leadership played a crucial role in inviting and engaging all members in the program's implementation, encouraging attendance at the seminars from start to finish. This was achieved by involving all church ministry departments and choirs, with participants being encouraged to act as spiritual helpers and guides for their fellow believers.

Project venue. The researcher, who is well-acquainted with the churches in the Gisenyi district and knowledgeable about their history, selected the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gisenyi as the pilot church for this project. This choice was made due to the church's numerous advantages compared to others in the district and the wider region. The researcher is a member of this church and thus has insight into the challenges it faces. Accessibility is another benefit, as the church is open to everyone at minimal cost. Furthermore, its large membership allows for the generalization of research results. The church is equipped with ample facilities, including spacious grounds and several classrooms, which greatly facilitated the smooth operation of the seminar and provided adequate space for small group activities when needed.

Sensitization meeting. With the approval of the church board, the organizing committee arranged a meeting for Sabbath afternoon, February 20, 2021, at 3:00 PM. The meeting was facilitated by the church pastor, and all church workers were invited to attend. Present were the elders, deacons and deaconesses, heads of various departments, as well as representatives from women and youth ministries and choir committees. The purpose of the meeting was to enhance the awareness of church workers about the importance of church membership retention, as well as to foster understanding for an upcoming training seminar. Additionally, the meeting aimed to

inform attendees about the details of the training seminar being conducted within the church, so they could play a vital role in its implementation.

The meeting highlighted a collective commitment among participants to collaborate in addressing the issue of believers leaving the church, as well as finding pathways for those who have already departed to return. Additionally, the church board convened to discuss the schedule for the implementation program, which was approved during the meeting. The agreed-upon dates for the program's rollout are April 3, 10, 17, and 24, 2021.

Visitation teams. In light of the substantial number of members in the Gisenyi district and the recent decline in church attendance, the church leadership made a strategic decision to establish nine active units. This initiative aimed to enhance engagement by facilitating visits to members and providing the necessary support. From these active units, thirteen visitation groups were created, each comprising four individuals from the same unit, led by either an elder or a deacon.

The mission of each group was to reach out to every church member's family, evaluate their living conditions and spiritual well-being, offer prayers, and remind them of their responsibilities as Disciples of Christ. The visitation program was conducted from February 6, 2021, to March 28, 2021. The designated times for the program were Sabbath and Sunday afternoons from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM, as well as Tuesdays from 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM.

Despite the success of the event and the considerable number of visitors, we encountered challenges regarding the availability of residents in the area. After each of the two consecutive visitation days, each group reported their experiences back to the deacons' director. The positive outcomes from this program inspired the teams to

continue visiting fellow believers, ensuring that no member would be overlooked or feel disconnected from the church community.

Table 12. Visitation in Nyakabungo Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Robert James	12	19	19	62	73

Primary data source

All nineteen homes were visited, although some members of the families were absent during the visits. Out of the 73 members in this action unit, 62 were visited. Up to 11 members from the visited families were not present at the time of the visits.

Table 13. Visitation in Bugoyi Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Livingston N.	12	14	14	39	52

Primary data source

The visitation group that visited the Bugoyi action unit did an excellent job, successfully reaching 100% of the families. In total, they visited all 14 homes in the area. The team connected with 39 individuals, while the remaining 13 were engaged in other programs outside of their families.

Table 14. Visitation in Kivumu Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Pavlov Charles	12	21	25	63	82

Primary data source

In this action unit, only four homes remained in the visitation program. The team successfully visited 21 of the 25 homes that make up the Kivumu action unit. During these visits, 63 church members participated, while the total membership of the constituency stands at 82. There were 19 members who were absent at the time of the visits.

Table 15. Visitation in Iyobokamana Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Jane Marguerite	12	22	28	78	104

Primary data source

The report from the team at the conclusion of the visitation ministry period indicates the following: a total of 22 out of 28 families were visited, reaching 78 individuals out of 104 members of the Iyobokamana action unit. However, 26 church members were not at home during the visit.

Table 16. Visitation in Gisenyi Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Washington Max	12	39	45	104	127

Primary data source

With the Gisenyi action unit now comprising 127 members from 45 households, the organizing committee formed two visitation groups to facilitate the assigned tasks. The report indicates that 39 families were visited, while 6 families have yet to be reached. In total, 104 members received visits, meaning that 23 individuals did not benefit from this outreach.

Table 17. Visitation in Rubavu Action Unit.

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Peter Carlos	12	24	30	85	119

Primary data source

The number of families played a key role in the organization of two visitation groups within the Rubavu action unit. According to the figures documented in the report, 24 homes were visited, while 6 homes were not. Out of the 119 members scheduled for visitation, 85 welcomed the teams into their homes. Notably, 34 members were not visited because they were unavailable at the time of the visit.

Table 18. Visitation in Kabuga Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Steven Nike	12	24	27	56	85

Primary data source

The table above demonstrates that the task assigned to the team in the Kabuga action unit has not been effectively executed. This action unit consists of 27 homes, of which 24 have been visited, leaving three (3) unvisited for various reasons. Additionally, the table indicates that 56 out of 85 church members benefited from the visits, while 29 individuals remain unvisited.

Table 19. Visitation in Stade Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
John Martin	12	25	25	81	96

Primary data source

The report outlined in the table above indicates that the visitation team performed exceptionally well. Every one of the 25 families in the Stade action unit was successfully visited. However, one challenge they faced was that some members were not present at home during the visits. Ultimately, fifteen (15) members were recorded as unvisited.

Table 20. Visitation in Gisa Action Unit

Group Leader	Number of Days	Number of Families Visited	Total Number of Families	Number of People Visited	Total Numbers of Church Members
Psalms Guy	12	63	80	179	230

Primary data source

Gisa is the largest action unit in the Gisenyi district, comprising 80 homes. As a result, the organizing committee decided to establish three visitation groups. Each group was tasked with visiting at least 26 homes; however, a total of 63 families were visited, falling short of the target of reaching all 80 homes. Over the course of twelve days, 179 individuals were visited out of a possible 230. This indicates that 51 church members from these families missed the opportunity to be visited by the church..

The church successfully conducted a visitation program during the scheduled twelve-day period. Thirteen groups were appointed to undertake this important task, managing to reach 251 out of 293 homes within nine action units selected from the

Gisenyi SDA district. Unfortunately, the other 42 families were unavailable for visits. Despite their efforts, they did not achieve the goal of visiting all members. Out of 968 members in the nine action units from the Gisenyi district, 747 were visited, leaving 221 members still needing a visit. However, the program did not end there.

The visiting program associated with welfare activities organized in the Gisenyi SDA district yielded positive results. Out of the 747 church members who were visited, it was discovered that 103 had stopped participating in church activities. Out of those, 87 chose to return to the church immediately, while others promised to come after they had gotten ready.

The Welfare Committee. The welfare committee from each church of the Gisenyi SDA district was established after church members conducted house-to-house visits, which revealed the struggles of poor families in need of assistance from fellow believers. Comprised of six members, this committee is chaired by a Deaconess and assisted by an elder of the church. Working alongside the researcher, the committee sensitized church members to the needs of these families, resulting in donations of money, food, and essential items for daily living.

In March 2021, contributions from church members were distributed in two ways: one group of deacons provided support to needy families, while members of the Adventist Youth Ministries donated supplies to patients at Gisenyi Hospital and nearby clinics. This event was successful, fostering a responsive implementation program that received positive feedback from participants.

Training seminar program. A month-long training seminar was organized to raise awareness among church members about issues related to member dropout rates, retention strategies, and the importance of visiting and caring for each member and

their visitors. The aim was to inspire spiritual revival, encouraging members to reconvert and engage in the church's mission of evangelism.

The program was scheduled for one month on Sabbath afternoons, allowing gatherings since the church was closed on other days due to COVID-19 measures. Each seminar included gospel music to uplift the participants, group discussions, and a presentation delivered by various pastors and church leaders. Sessions ran from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

To ensure the program's efficiency, several committees were formed. A planning committee organized the venue and necessary equipment, while a visitation committee made sure that attendees were informed and encouraged to participate. A sensitization committee was responsible for inviting people to subsequent meetings. These collaborative efforts kept participants engaged.

While the program officially started at 3:00 PM, there was a gospel music session featuring various choirs beginning at 2:00 PM, coinciding with a prayer band dedicated to praying for the program and the church. The actual program commenced with a prayer and introduction led by the Elder in charge. It comprised three main phases: a 15-minute introduction, a 60-minute presentation or study, a 30-minute question-and-answer session, a 10-minute prayer session, and concluding remarks lasting five minutes.

The active involvement of church leaders, members, and the consistent presence of designated groups for specific duties played a crucial role in organizing and encouraging attendance. Announcements made during church services, posters displayed in various locations, and visits from church members contributed to increased interest and participation in the meetings. Notably, the meetings also

attracted members from other churches in the Gisenyi district and non-Adventist visitors.

Table 21. Record of Program Attendance

Day	Church Members	Church Member Visitors	Non-Adventist Visitors	Total
Day 1, 3/4/2021	362	12	7	381
Day 2, 10/4/2021	427	53	18	488
Day 3, 17/4/2021	512	68	15	595
Day 4, 24/4/2021	602	62	23	687

Primary data source.

The program, in general, awakened the minds of leaders and members to the point where they discovered their weakness in disregarding their call to mission. This was strongly reinforced by the fact that some believers had been absent from the church for a long time, but the visit they received led them to come to participate in the meetings, including this specific program. Some testified that they were very happy to be visited by fellow believers, and they decided that they would never again miss various church meetings.

The church has benefited from this program that aimed to sensitize leaders and believers to make visits from house to house. They understood that “If half the time now spent in preaching were given to house-to-house labor, favorable results would be seen, for the workers could come close to people... the time spent in quietly visiting families, ... will often do better than a public effort.”¹

After the training program, a regular visitation program was established at the church. Visiting groups were formed, visitations were scheduled to be conducted

¹ White, *Evangelism*, 463. 4.

weekly, and reports were provided. When they visited the family, they prayed together with them and encouraged them to attend meetings organized by the church. Another task was to identify families with specific problems so that the church could find a solution instead of abandoning them and pursuing solutions that might drive them away from the church.

A group of deacons and deaconesses and a group of Adventist Youth Ministries have joined together to continue to help needy members. In collaboration with the group of Dorcus, the lay activity department, and the women's ministry collected food, money, clothes, soaps, and other household necessities. There was also support provided by Gisenyi Adventist Secondary School, consisting of rice and cornflowers. All those activities were organized and coordinated with the welfare committee in collaboration with the church board.

Every Sabbath, there was an opportunity to report on all the activities conducted during the week, including the number of believers visited and the support provided. Testimonies from individuals who were visited and assisted were also shared at the meetings.

The Gisenyi SDA district has greatly benefited from various programs, including visits, welfare initiatives, and training seminars that had not been conducted previously. Church members were pleased to see that the issues they had previously criticized within the church began to be addressed. The love, compassion, relationships, fellowship, and unity that were often preached but not practiced have now become a reality. As a result, 101 members from all churches in the Gisenyi SDA district returned to the church to participate in various programs.

After realizing that members who were often absent from the meetings began to attend warmly, there was another phase of finding people who had been absent for

a long time, and the church did not know their addresses. With the assistance of the church clerk, a list of people who are recorded in church books but are lost was made. The names identified were read in front of the assembly, and if there was a person who had information about one of them, they gave it. Discoveries from this analysis were categorized into three:

- Those who have moved to other places without transfer,
- Graduates who were baptized and left without transfer,
- Backsliders

For the first and second categories, the church began utilizing the Adventist Church Membership System (ACMS) to manage its membership. This software identifies duplicate names within the system and makes it easy to locate members who are recorded in other churches, both within our field and beyond. In the case of names found in multiple churches in the Gisenyi district, the system facilitates transfers, ensuring that those members are removed from the district's membership list as needed. Additionally, for the third category of backsliders, the church is dedicated to locating these individuals and working to bring them back into the fold of God's children.

Evaluation

Evaluation is very important to make sure that there are positive changes in a particular program. Concerning our case, an evaluation of the project was carried out to highlight the progress made in increasing the level of church membership retention in the Gisenyi district, and could be implemented in other churches. This project has been extensively monitored to see if any changes have taken place. In conducting an evaluation program, there are opinions given that can be used to solve specific

problems, highlight the successes and failures of a project, and help to take steps to create strategies that will help in the future.

In addition to the means used for data collection in the evaluation process, interviews were conducted with various participants from different levels of the church, including church members, church elders, church pastors, and field leaders. After gathering all reliable information, it is better to make it available to all stakeholders so that it can be useful for future implementation. Key outcomes of the program implementation are the statistical church member increase in the Gisenyi district SDA churches as depicted in the table below. In each church, there is a tremendous increase in the number of new church members. Implying that the implementation of the training seminars program was tremendously successful.

Church membership growth as a result of the intervention is shown in Table 23 below.

Table 22. Church Membership Growth

No	Church name	Population/membership 2019	Church membership after intervention 2024
	Gisenyi Church	2,248	2,773
	Makoro Church	923	1,013
	Mbugangari Church	1,465	1,938
	Gates of Hope Church	562	711
	Byahi Chuch	848	1,221

Source: NWRP Statistical Report 2019, 2024

A Strategy for Retaining Church Membership

The researcher developed a plan to act as a reference for keeping church members in the NWRP based on the results of the investigated literature on Biblical tactics, the spirit of prophecy, scholarly works, and original data gathered by surveys and interviews. The researcher contends that all members, regardless of their roles,

should participate in initiatives including these if church members are to be properly retained.

1. Implement monthly spiritual revival programs for consistent church members to inspire behavior modification and develop Christ-like traits including love, compassion, caring, sacrifice, friendliness, forgiveness, and patience. These initiatives seek to enable members to reflect Christ in their activities and guide others toward praise and glory of God. This approach will help members to develop their relationship to God, strengthen their spirituality, discourage them from backsliding or displaying worldly activities as described in Galatians 5:19.
2. Encourage the inclusive participation of all church members regardless of their new or long-standing, young or elderly, wealthy or poor, or educated or not in conducting church programs. Every member has certain abilities that, given permission to serve, will attract others to Christ. This inclusivity helps members of the church to develop love and care for one another as well as to experience family where they are loved, appreciated, and free to express their spiritual gifts. Furthermore, this strategy reduces dependency on church leaders, whose services some members may find boring or uninteresting, therefore maybe causing them to leave the church.
3. Church leaders and members should create a plan to spot and meet every member's physical and spiritual needs. Monthly distribution of a needs assessment form lets members submit comments together with their contact details. Establishing a committed committee to monitor the needs voiced and seek cooperation from the whole congregation can help The church may establish a setting in which every member feels loved and

cared for by ministering to the found needs, both spiritual and bodily, so strengthening their sense of belonging. This loving environment will help them to grow in faith and inspire them to tell their story, therefore drawing others to Christ and lowering the possibility of their interacting with other faiths.

4. Regardless of whether the visited persons have particular requirements, church leaders should make sure that a visiting roster is created every Sabbath or at least once a week to enable the group visitation of every church member. Small teams should be set up to visit non-church members as well as every church member. By means of these visits, friendships can be developed between the visitors and the visiting teams as well as among the latter. Visiting creates a bond of friendship that guarantees someone facing a difficulty won't feel alone but rather can reach out to the church members for support. This visitation also gives a chance to introduce the family members under visit to Christ and evangelize them. The individual being visited feels free to share their spiritual and bodily issues as friendships develop; the church can then take care of these. Biblical records demonstrate the advantages of visits via Jesus' mission whereby He visited numerous people like Lazarus's family (John 11:1–45), the household of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10), the family of Levi Matthew (Luke 5:27–32), and the family of Simon Peter (Mark 1:29–31).
5. Establishing small groups will help church members participate much more actively. This method is biblically based and conformable with a God-initiated scheme (Stark & Wieland, 2004). The North West Rwanda Field should follow Old Testament methods by selecting highly devoted

church members like Moses (Numbers 13; Judges 7; Exodus 18) for inclusion in small groups to properly raise member participation in ministry. This approach seeks to retain and include new members into the church community while linking and inspiring members to cooperate toward small-group objectives.² Small groups should make sure every church member is included. For prayer sessions, Word of God sharing, community needs identification, and sick visitation, they should set gatherings midweek. This strategy will enable backsliding members to be identified and promote the nurturing of every church member instead of absolving church leaders of all duty during Sabbath services. Those interested in the Gospel should also be invited to participate in these small groups so they could get ready for baptism. An evangelistic campaign "to reap the harvest" and baptism should be planned only until they have spent time with church members attending these small groups.

6. Converted and baptized members should be included into church activities and receive continuous care. Designed for them, a nurturing plan should be created; their contact details should be noted for frequent follow-ups. This guarantees that, should difficulties arise, the church will intervene promptly.
7. Counseling Services: Particularly for people who intend to be married, regular offers of counseling services should come from assigned committees. Instead than seeing conversion as a means to wed a Christian spouse, they should be taught about giving their relationship with God first

² Yoseph Nyambega Otieno, "New Member Retention Strategy for the Makoko Church" (DMin diss., Andrews University, 2014), 67.

priority above all else. Members must understand that Jesus Christ died for all and provides atonement from perpetual death which is unparalleled with any earthly relationship. This knowledge can assist lower the dropout rate among members of the church looking for a Christian mate.

8. Regular Sabbath afternoon events should highlight friendship through potluck dinners, spiritual nourishing talks, Bible study, visiting, sharing of God's works, and prayer sessions. Every member ought to be offered chances to participate in these initiatives.
9. Children, young people, widows, the impoverished, and other vulnerable groups should get particular attention and support to help them stay away from the church free from other religions or secular initiatives.
10. Visitations should be inclusive and not confined to well-known people or families of church leaders and members.
11. The selection of church leaders should be inclusive, encouraging the involvement of most young people and women instead of depending just on elderly males who have maintained their posts over many years.
12. Aiming at rehabilitating the concerned individuals rather than punitive actions, disciplinary measures against members should be taken in a godly, impartial, and open manner.
13. To carry out their goal of disseminating the gospel, all church departments should develop yearly and quarterly action plans concentrated on evangelism, spiritual development, and revival.
14. Participating in community services is another great way to motivate church members to serve their area and promote compassion for others.

15. Church programs that give fundraising first priority at the expense of Bible study, sermons, and music should be reduced and carried out quite seldom.

16. Children of poor church members should be taken into account while fundraising to help their medical insurance and education. This will enable their parents from the Pentecostal and Catholic churches to avoid seeking help from other religions that offer humanitarian organizations, such as Compassion and Caritas.

The Gisenyi SDA district churches and the whole NWRP will draw many new members if the above mentioned approaches are followed. Current members will be encouraged and grow more cooperative, therefore strengthening their feeling of church membership as the family of God. Church membership will thus increase; members will undergo spiritual development; dropout count will be low; and God's goal will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

The study aimed to uncover the reasons why church members leave and to develop a program that addresses the issue of low retention. After implementing and evaluating this program, significant improvements in the care of believers were observed, leading to increased retention rates and the return of former members to the church. The strategy for retaining church membership proved effective, particularly in the Gisenyi district, and it can be applied to other churches in the North West Rwanda Field and beyond. The outcomes of this project are highlighted below.

1. The church has experienced increased member attendance, with some former members returning and expressing happiness in rejoining.

Following a visiting program, welfare activities, and training seminars,

101 members rejoined, and Sabbath school attendance rose from 55% to 68%.

2. There has been a revival among church members during Bible study, focusing on the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has highlighted a gap that causes instability. Additionally, participation in prayer groups has significantly increased, rising from about 25 members in 2017 to over 190 in 2023.
3. Establishing action units has brought church leaders closer to their members. As a result, the problems faced by members were identified and addressed, leading to a more evident sense of love and unity between the members, their leaders, and among themselves.
4. The revival of the visitation ministry has been felt in the Gisenyi district. Both the visited people and the visitors expressed happiness with the program, which should continue to define God's family.

The findings have been compiled into a project report and shared with all stakeholders. A document summarizing the report was provided to the church leadership, outlining plans for future implementation in the Gisenyi district. Additionally, this report was presented to the field leadership, which authorized the project to be carried out throughout the entire North West Rwanda Field. The researcher took the opportunity to express gratitude to the key stakeholders involved in the project, including the church administration and others who contributed to addressing various issues throughout the process.

Summary

The chapter focused on implementing an intervention program that included several key components: a home-to-home visitation initiative, the planning and

execution of training seminars aimed at retaining church membership, and the organization of welfare activities. It also addressed strategies for increasing church membership. The program was divided into three phases: the first phase involved one month of visitation ministry, followed by a period dedicated to welfare activities, and concluding with a month of seminars. At the end of the program, an evaluation was conducted through interviews and direct observation by the researcher. The chapter concluded by presenting findings that demonstrated the project's success.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter presents a comprehensive summary, conclusion, and recommendations for implementing strategies aimed at member retention within the Gisenyi Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) district, located in the North West Rwanda Field.

Summary of the Dissertation

This study assessed membership retention strategies by first analyzing the reasons why members leave the church and identifying specific strategies to retain them, particularly in the Gisenyi SDA district and generally within the North West Rwanda Field. The study is organized into six chapters, which include a literature review, primary data collection, an intervention project, and proposed effective strategies for member retention.

The study participants included church members, elders, pastors, and staff from the NWRP. A mixed methods approach was employed to collect, analyze, interpret, and present the data. Data was gathered from selected participants using both a questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs). The analysis methods utilized were thematic analysis and descriptive statistics.

The findings revealed that the dropout of church members was linked to several factors, including church programs, the behavior and actions of church leaders, social influences, and individual circumstances. The results regarding retention strategies highlighted the importance of reconverting regular church leaders

and members, actively involving members in church activities, providing care for those in need, and fostering small group formation and practices.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the dropout rates of church members were influenced by the behaviors and actions of church leaders, along with various individual, social, and program-related factors. To retain members in the North West Rwanda Field, it is essential to encourage the inclusive involvement of all church members in church programs. Suggested actions include organizing monthly spiritual revival programs and Sabbath afternoon activities, preparing action plans for departments focused on evangelism and nurturing, offering support for those in need, promoting positive behavior changes among church leaders, establishing counseling services, and conducting disciplinary measures in a godly, objective, and transparent manner. Additionally, fostering inclusivity in member visitation is crucial.

Addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals is also vital. This can be achieved by encouraging church members to identify, visit, and provide solutions for individual needs while also engaging in community services to help prevent member attrition. The church should also organize inclusive elections for church officers, promoting participation from youth and women.

Furthermore, creating small groups and implementing practices within these groups is essential for fostering both individual and collective spiritual growth, as well as integrating and caring for new members. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the church can effectively retain its members.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are meant to enhance membership retention and promote spiritual development inside the church community based on the effective execution and assessment of the intervention program in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Gisenyi district. Grounded in biblical ideas, project-based empirical data, and best practices in church leadership, these suggestions reflect

1. Provide institutionalized regular visitation ministries.

The program for visiting members turned out to be rather successful in reawakening inactive members and building church ties. To keep this effect:

Create a planned visitation schedule and assign committed teams to visit once a week or every two weeks. To increase involvement, teach pastoral care, active listening, and spiritual counseling visiting leaders.

Record visits to monitor member needs, attendance trends, and spiritual development.

2. Support Small Group Ministries

Deeper friendship and responsibility are promoted in small groups. The church should: Form prayer and Bible study groups meeting midweek to foster spiritual development. Delegating leadership duties inside these groups will help members participate. Invite non-members to participate to create a conversion route and thereby integrate evangelism.

3. Improve Member Involvement and Attachment

Members that feel valued and involved tend to retain better. The church need to: Assign all demographics youth, women, new converts leadership and ministry responsibilities. Regular needs evaluations help to find and

solve members' physical and spiritual problems. Support mentoring initiatives whereby new members are matched for discipleship with seasoned Christians.

4. Execute Ongoing Spiritual Revival Projects

Every month revival meetings should center on: Christ-centered teachings (love, forgiveness, unity) help one to transform personally. Testimonies and camaraderie help to close communities. Practical seminars about using faith in daily life.

5. Grow Welfare and Community Outreach Programs

Efforts of the welfare committee had a real influence. The house should: Create a sustainable welfare fund to help the wider society as well as less fortunate people. Work with Adventist organizations schools, hospitals to offer medical and educational help. Plan frequent community service events to show how much Christ loves in useful terms.

6. Enhance Membership Data Management

Regarding cases of absent members and transfers: Make best use of the Adventist Church Membership System (ACMS) for correct record-keeping. Update records and find inactive members by means of regular membership audits.

Simplify member moves to other congregations' transfer procedures.\

7. Encourage a Discipleship and Responsibility Culture

Create post-baptismal initiatives to include fresh members into church life. Offer members dealing with spiritual, financial, or marriage issues guidance. Apply church discipline redemptively with an eye on restoration rather than punishment.

8. Support inter-church cooperation.

The success in Gisenyi can be repeated on the North West Rwanda Field (NWRF) using: By means of seminars and training, sharing best practices with other districts. Promoting cross-church visits to deepen local unity. Scaling the program under field leadership for more general use.

The Gisenyi SDA district's intervention program showed that membership retention was much improved by organized visitation, inclusive ministry, welfare support, and spiritual rebirth. The church may build a dynamic, dedicated, and expanding membership by including these approaches into daily operations. Long-term retention trends and the influence of digital tools in member participation could be subjects of future studies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
CORRESPONDENCE

Letter to the Field for Research Authorization

Mutuyimana Nkundakozera
North-West Rwanda Field
P.O. Box 106 Rubavu
Phone: 0788455302
Email: mutuve5@yahoo.fr

October 14, 2019

North-West Rwanda Field President
P.O. Box 106 Rubavu

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PROJECT AUTHORIZATION

I would like to present my request for research project authorization in your Field. This project is in partial fulfillment for my Doctorate degree in Ministry. The topic of the work is "A STRATEGY FOR AN EFFECTIVE MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN GISENYI SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, NORTH-WEST RWANDA FIELD"

In fact, having observed the situation of church members leaving the church after baptism, I have been concerned with this issue and I am convinced that a critical analysis of this problem with the appropriate intervention strategy would help to make changes of the situation. Focus group discussion will contribute a lot and questionnaire for members need to be answered.

Thank you for your consideration to my request!

Yours,



Pastor Mutuyimana Nkundakozera

Cc:

NWRF Officers

Authorization Letter from the Field to Conduct Research



Seventh -Day Adventist Church
North-West Rwanda Field
Po Box 106 Rubavu

October 22, 2019

Pastor Mutuyimana Nkundakozeza
North West Rwanda Field,
Executive Secretary

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN NWRF

Sir,

On behalf of the North-West Rwanda Field Administrative Committee held on October 21, 2019, I am pleased to let you know that your application to conduct your research project have been approved. It is your choice to select any church in our Field that will help you to meet the requirements of your university.

Yours sincerely,

Pastor Setako Sophonie,
North West Rwanda Field



Cc:

NWRf Officers

Letter to SDA Gisenyi district to Conduct Research

Mutuyimana Nkundakozera
North-West Rwanda Field
P.O. Box 106 Rubavu
Phone: 0788455302
Email: mutuye5@yahoo.fr

October 23, 2019

The Church Board
SDA Gisenyi church

Dear brethren

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PROJECT AUTHORIZATION

I humbly request your authorization to conduct my research project in your church that have been selected. My topic for the research is "A STRATEGY FOR AN EFFECTIVE MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN GISENYI SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, NORTH-WEST RWANDA FIELD"

Your assistance to my work will be to provide statistical records, participate in different programs outlined for the research.

Thank you for your consideration to my request.

Sincerely,

Pastor Mutuyimana Nkundakozera



Authorization Letter from SDA Gisenyi district to Conduct Research



*Seventh -Day Adventist Church
North-West Rwanda Field
Gisenyi District, Gisenyi Church
Po Box 106 Rubavu*

October 29, 2019

Pastor Mutuyimana Nkundakozera
North West Rwanda Field,
Executive Secretary

RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN GISENYI CHURCH

Dear Pastor,

This is to inform you that the church board has accepted your request looking for permission to conduct a research project. The church board also promised you to give all necessary that will help you to accomplish your assignment.

We expect a positive change about church membership retention in our church through different activities related to your topic of research.

May God bless you abundantly.

Yours sincerely,

Pastor Jacques Kabayiza,
Gisenyi District Pastor.



APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire in English

I greet you in the name of Jesus.

My name is Mutuyimana Nkundakozera, and I am a student at the Adventist University of Africa (AUA), where I am completing my doctorate in Theology. My research title is: “*A strategy for an Effective membership retention in Gisenyi district of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in north West Rwanda Field.*” Your contribution in answering the questions below is highly needed to reach its goal. The answers you will provide will only be used in this study and will be confidential. The way to answer is very simple. Read the question or statement carefully, and then you will answer based on what you know is in your church. Don't answer the question as you would like it to be. In response, you choose between 1,2,3,4,5 (in the table below) depending on what your answer is: (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neutral, (4) Disagree, or (5) Strongly disagree. I assure you that the answers you will give will only be used in this study. Just one hour is enough to complete all the questions.

Part 1. Personal Information

1. Age: under 25 years old, from 25 to 45 years old, from 46 to 60 years old, over 61 years old

2. Sex: woman, man.

3. Years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: under 5 years, from 5 to 10 years, from 11 to 20, from 20 to 30 year, over 31 years

Part 2. Structured questions

No		1	2	3	4	5
1	Baptism candidates are sufficiently instructed about the church beliefs					
2	Baptism Candidates are first taught the 28 fundamental beliefs of the church					
3	Baptism candidates are taught the baptismal vows before they get baptized					
4	The church prepares a special welcoming ceremony for new members after baptism					
5	New members are given mentors from church members to nurture them					
6	The newly baptized members are explained their responsibilities in the church					
7	New members are taught about various spiritual gifts they might possess					
8	New members are given responsibilities to serve in various church programs					
9	Church members are happy to attend various church programs					
10	All church programs inspire church members to attend					
11	I feel happy to invite my friends and family members to the church services					
12	The church members church welcomes every person at church in a special way					
13	Church members value regular prayer and Bible study in small groups					
14	The church has a solid program that encourages believers to study the Bible and pray					
15	In the church, there are groups of members who meet at the church for study the Bible and pray					
16	The church is interested in involving and integrating new members into the life of the Church					
17	New members are taught about the mission of evangelism as a responsibility of every church member					
18	There is a sustainable plan to take care of the believers to stay in the church					
19	The church is very focused on baptizing people					
20	The church has a regular program of visiting church members					
21	Members who cease attending church meetings are visited					
22	Members who have been in the church for a long time know where every new member lives					
23	Fellow Church members visit a member who has a problem					
24	Members of the church identify a member who drops attending the church and visit him or her.					

25	Church leaders show members love and affection and make them love the church						
26	Church Members appreciate the spiritual care of church leaders						
27	Church leaders are aware of the problems members have						
28	Church leaders reach out to a backsliding member so that they bring him/her back on track						
29	Church members show love for one another as brothers and sisters						
30	Few members participate in the various activities that the church organizes						
31	There are fellowship programs that unite members in the church						
32	Fellow church members become close to a member who is in trouble						
33	Some believers leave the church because they feel lonely						
34	Some members leave the church because of the way they are treated						
35	Some church members complain that the church leaders require them to give too much to support the church						
36	Believers feel welcome in the church						
37	Some members leave the church because church leaders' unfulfilled responsibilities.						
38	Some members leave the church because of issues they have with church leaders						
39	Some members leave the church because they have a job that requires them to work on the Sabbath.						

Part 3. Open-ended questionnaire

42. Why do church members leave attending Gisenyi SDA District Churches's services?.....

.....

43. What do you think are the best strategies Gisenyi SDA District Churches can apply to retain believers from leaving the church?.....

.....

Thank you for agreeing to take your time to answer these questions.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDE SCHEDULE

I greet you in the name of Jesus.

My name is Mutuyimana Nkundakozera, and I am a student at the Adventist University of Africa (AUA), where I am completing my doctorate in Theology. My research title is: *“A strategy for an Effective Membership Retention in Gisenyi District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North West Rwanda Field”*, your contribution in answering the questions below is highly needed to reach its goal. The answers you will provide will only be used in this study and will be confidential. The way to answer is very simple. Read the question or statement carefully, and then you will answer based on what you know is in your church. Don't answer the question as you would like it to be.

Questions:

1. What are the factors that motivate people to join the church?
2. What are the reasons why people leave the church?
3. What can the church do to increase the retention of its members?

Thank you for agreeing to take your time to answer these questions.

APPENDIX D

RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.627	39

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Baptism candidates are sufficiently instructed about the church's beliefs	133.6000	120.188	.244	.616
Baptism Candidates are first taught the 28 fundamental beliefs of the church	133.5429	127.314	-.114	.641
Baptism candidates are taught the baptismal vows before they get baptized.	133.4286	126.076	-.059	.636
The church prepares a special welcoming ceremony for new members after baptism.	134.3429	125.585	-.043	.637
New members are given mentors from church members to nurture them.	133.9143	113.198	.342	.602
The newly baptized members are explained their responsibilities in the church.	133.8286	113.911	.382	.601
New members are taught about various spiritual gifts they might possess	133.6286	120.123	.260	.615
New members are given responsibilities to serve in various church programs.	133.6000	118.600	.344	.610
Church members are happy to attend various church programs	133.0286	124.676	.005	.632
All church programs inspire church members to attend.	133.2857	122.034	.159	.622
I feel happy to invite my friends and family members to the church services	133.6571	125.291	-.040	.639
The church members church welcomes every person at church in a special way.	134.2000	127.165	-.107	.644

Church members value regular prayer and Bible study in small groups.	133.8000	119.635	.200	.618
The church has a solid program that encourages believers to study the Bible and pray.	133.6000	119.835	.144	.623
In the church, there are groups of members who meet at the church for study the Bible and pray.	133.6571	124.526	-.007	.635
The church is interested in involving and integrating new members into the life of the Church.	133.3714	119.299	.257	.614
New members are taught about the mission of evangelism as a responsibility of every church member.	133.7714	118.593	.195	.618
There is a sustainable plan to take care of the believers to stay in the church.	133.6857	115.575	.406	.602
The church is very focused on baptizing people	133.8286	118.911	.216	.617
The church has a regular program of visiting church members.	133.6000	116.718	.301	.609
Members who cease attending church meetings are visited.	133.4286	114.252	.323	.605
Members who have been in the church for a long time know where every new member lives.	133.7429	120.255	.135	.624
fellow Church members visit a member who has a problem.	133.6857	113.398	.463	.596
Members of the church IDENTIFY a member who drops attending the church and visit him or her.	133.1143	124.281	.025	.631
Church leaders show members love and affection and make them love the church.	133.6857	125.575	-.043	.637
Church Members appreciate the spiritual care of church leaders.	133.6000	117.012	.252	.613
Church leaders are aware of the problems members have.	133.5143	120.669	.162	.621
Church leaders reach out to a backsliding member so that they bring him/her back on track.	133.2000	120.106	.241	.616
Church members show love for one another as brothers and sisters	133.4286	121.605	.144	.623
Few members participate in the various activities that the church organizes	133.9429	117.879	.212	.617
There are fellowship programs that unite members in the church	133.5714	109.487	.539	.584
Fellow church members become close to a member who is in trouble	133.8286	128.617	-.178	.644
Some believers leave the church because they feel lonely.	133.8571	124.244	.019	.632

Some members leave the church because the way they are treated.	133.3714	115.593	.360	.604
Some church members complain that the church leaders requires them too much to support the church	133.6571	121.291	.093	.628
Believers from non believers fill welcome in the church	133.2857	122.210	.101	.626
Some members leave the church because church leaders' unfillfilled responsibilities.	134.2857	121.034	.115	.625
Some members leave the church of issues they have with church leaders	133.5429	123.314	.067	.628
Some members leave the church because they have a job that requires them to work on the Sabbath.	133.3143	122.222	.122	.624

CURRICULUM VITA

Personal/ Family Background

Name	Mutuyimana Nkundakozera
Date of Birth	January 15 th , 1972
Place of Birth	Rwanda
Gender	Male
Civil Status	Married
Citizenship	Rwandese
Spouse	Nyirakamerewe Claudine
Children	Cyuzuzo Mutuye Tresor Cyubahiro Mutuye Bilga Ishimwe Mutuye Adriel Ineza Mutuye Anne
Father	Nkundakozera Antoine
Mother	Nyirajyambere Esther

Academic Experience

2017 – 2023	Doctor in Ministry, Emphasis on Discipleship and Spirituality Adventist University of Africa (AUA) Nairobi, Kenya
2010 – 2016	Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology, Adventist University of Africa (AUA) Nairobi, Kenya
1997 – 2000	Bachelor of Arts in Education, Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) Kigali, Rwanda
1995	College Adventiste de Gitwe, Rwanda
1993 – 1994	Institut Adventiste Maranatha, Goma DRC
1990 – 1993	Institut Adventiste de Kanyatsi, Masisi DRC
1981 – 1989	Rwankeri Adventist Primary School, Rwanda

Professional Experience

2021 – Today	President, North West Rwanda Field, Rubavu, Rwanda
2016 - 2021	Executive Secretary, North West Rwanda Field, Rubavu, Rwanda
2011 – 2015	Departmental Director, North Rwanda Conference, Musanze, Rwanda
2009 – 2010	Dean of Studies, Rwankeri Adventist Secondary School, Musanze, Rwanda
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