

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO TRAIN LOCAL ELDERS TO NURTURE NEW CONVERTS AT EMMASDALE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MIDLANDS WEST ZAMBIA CONFERENCE

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Despite the significant growth in membership within the church, there remains a challenge in nurturing and integrating new converts into the fabric of the church community. Local elders, as key spiritual leaders, lack structured training programs tailored to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively guide and support new converts in their spiritual journey. Consequently, there was a pressing need to develop a comprehensive strategy for training the elders to fulfill their pivotal role in nurturing and sustaining the spiritual growth of new converts to mature, well-equipped disciples, thereby strengthening the overall vitality and resilience of the church community. Thus, this project reviewed the current practices employed by local church elders at Emmasdale Seventh-day Adventist Church, looked at their specific needs and challenges in nurturing new converts, how they

perceive their duty in taking care of newly baptized members, and what strategies they believe would be most effective in fulfilling their role. In the findings, nine themes emerged, namely poor nurturing, resource constraints, lack of a sustainability plan, poor collaboration, lack of modelling, lack of cohesiveness, volunteers, small group ministries, and a sustainability plan. Finally, the project identified the key components of an effective training program for local elders to enhance their skills and capabilities in nurturing new converts.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Divinity

by

Evans K. Manjimela

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This project is dedicated to my wife Ruth and children, Dominic, Jehieli and Lael who for five years equally had no husband and father for four months each year. The project is further a dedication to my pastoral ministry.

Ultimately, it's a total dedication to the grace of the Almighty God who saw me through the thin and thick of life. It was not easy but His grace was sufficient.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Jesus gave a comprehensive command on gospel proclamation to disciple all nations. Unfortunately, the emphasis has been placed more on baptisms, which has been noticed in the campaign approach. There are more pronouncements on the expected baptismal goals than the nurture of new converts. As soon as the campaign is over, baptism has taken place and certificates have been issued to the new converts, everyone is dispersed without an immediate plan for the new converts.

Admittedly, elders, the immediate custodians of the new converts, are not adequately equipped to take care of new members at the end of the campaign. And unfortunately, during the campaign training for the follow-up committee, the elders are not part of the trained officers. As such, most of the new converts are generally absorbed in the mainstream Sabbath School classes without due consideration of their growth levels as newly baptized.

In any case, it is the work of the pastor to ensure all elders are taught how to take care of new members for effective discipleship (Eph 4:11-12), and yet this is not practically feasible as the pastor has many other churches to look after. From Scripture, the apostle Peter advocates for the care of the members (1 Pet 5:2-4), and yet most of them do not receive adequate training to nurture members other than the annual general training for every leader. As stated above, the apostles apportion the

role of taking the flock to no other person but the elders of the church. Thus, this project seeks to suggest a strategy with practical solutions to nurture new converts.

Emmasdale Adventist church is situated in the middle of high- and low-density areas of the city of Emmasdale. The approach to evangelism has been rather limited to one mode, public campaign.

Methods of Evangelism Campaigns

The church largely depends on public campaigns which are conducted either around May or October. These are like annual events in most local congregations. They usually take about 2-3 weeks which culminate in huge baptisms. The church does not have a large open space for such campaigns. As such most of the campaigns are held indoors on church grounds. Other than the public campaigns, the church also reaps from the regular bible class members who are invited either by friends or family members. These are baptized every quarter with or without a public campaign.

Approaches to Nurturing New Members

The church does not have an active ongoing program for the nurture of new members. Usually, the practice has been that after baptism, the members are loosely assigned to guardians on the day of baptism, and most of them are strangers to each other. This approach has not worked well for the church as most of the converts and guardians themselves cannot be traced well. The post-baptism nurture of new members has not been effective. Sometimes, the new members are clustered in what is called a happiness class, but this is not well structured, and there is not one specifically trained to mentor or train the new converts. This class gradually disintegrates and loses its members.

Emmasdale is the largest of the four congregations under one District Pastor in the Lusaka City Mission District. By the end of the first quarter of 2021, the district had a total membership of 2524, of which 1160 came from Emmasdale church alone. By the end of the quarter above, Emmasdale baptized 21 new converts bringing the total membership to 1181.¹ Given that the District Pastor oversees multiple congregations, the primary responsibility for nurturing new members falls upon local church elders, who often lack sufficient training for this task. As such, the church should be intentional to ensure elders are skilled (*trained*) in teaching others² so that they can mature in their faith.

Statement of Problem

Despite the significant growth in membership within the church, there remains a challenge in nurturing and integrating new converts into the fabric of the church community. Local elders, as key spiritual leaders, lack structured training programs tailored to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively guide and support new converts in their spiritual journey. Consequently, there is a pressing need to develop a comprehensive strategy for training the elders to fulfill their pivotal role in nurturing and sustaining the spiritual growth of new converts to mature, well-equipped disciples, thereby strengthening the overall vitality and resilience of the church community.

¹ Midlands West Zambia Conference, *Emmasdale Adventist Church: Statistical Report, 1st Quarter 2021* (Lusaka, Zambia: Midlands West Zambia Conference, 2021), 1.

² Kongyui A. Shimray, “A Training Program for Local Church Elders/Leaders in Northeast India” (DMin diss., Andrews University, 2001), 24, accessed 17 October 2023, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/657>.

Research Questions

1. What are local elders' current practices and approaches in nurturing new converts at Emmasdale SDA Church in Midlands West Zambia Conference?
2. What are the specific needs and challenges faced by local elders in effectively nurturing new converts within the church community?
3. How do local elders perceive their duty as the primary caretakers of new believers?
4. What strategies do they believe would be most effective in fulfilling this role?
5. What are the key components of an effective training program for local elders to enhance their skills and capabilities in nurturing new converts?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study will be to review the current practices employed by local church elders at Emmasdale SDA Church, look at their specific needs and challenges in nurturing new converts, how they perceive their duty in taking care of newly baptized members, and what strategies they believe would be most effective in fulfilling their role. The project will further identify the key components of an effective training program for local elders to enhance their skills and capabilities in nurturing new converts.

Significance of the Study

This project will be significant to the following:

1. To the new converts. This project helped the new converts grow spiritually and integrate to the community of faith.

2. To the local elders. By developing a strategy to train the elders in this regard, spiritual well-being and sense of belonging among new members is visible, fostering a stronger and more cohesive church community.
3. To the church. The church places a strong emphasis on evangelism and mission. Therefore, if the local elders are well-trained, they significantly contribute to the church's mission by effectively nurturing and retaining new converts, thus contributing to the church's overall growth and outreach effectiveness.
4. Leadership capacity. Training local elders in the specific skills and knowledge required to mentor new converts not only benefits the converts but also enhances the leadership capacity of the elders themselves. It empowers them with the tools to effectively shepherd and disciple new members, fostering a culture of servant leadership within the church.
5. Long-term impact. Further, the tailored training approach ensures that it is culturally relevant and sensitive to the unique needs and challenges faced by both the church and its surrounding community. This approach increases the likelihood of successful implementation and long-term impact.
6. Best practices. This developed training strategy may have the potential of identifying best practices that can be replicated and adapted by other SDA Churches within the conference and beyond. This contributes to the broader body of knowledge within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and facilitates the sharing of effective strategies for nurturing new converts across different contexts and regions.

Methodology

This is a development of strategy research. The research has three main components: (1) biblical-theological foundation on eldership and nurture/discipleship, (2) local church setting on the issue of training, nurture, maturity, and growth, and (3) strategy development for nurture.

The data collected in this project was analyzed using descriptive content analysis. It involves analyzing systematically a text to identify patterns, words, concepts or themes within a given data. Consequently, helping the researcher quantify and analyze the presence, meaning, and relationship. The purpose of this approach was to address a critical need to fill the gap and develop an effective strategy specifically tailored to equip the local elders with necessary skills, knowledge, and resources. Based on the findings, conclusions were reached for purposes of program development.

The project paper was composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 covered the overview of the situation, and introduction: statement of problem, purpose, significance of the project, research questions, delimitations, definition of terms, and methodology. Chapter 2 focused on a biblical-theological foundation. Views by Adventists and other religious scholars of note were also be presented and consulted.

Chapter 3 described the local setting to present the issue through interviews. Then Chapter 4 suggested key components of the program to train elders so that they may be able to nurture new converts. Finally, Chapter 5 dealt with the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

In many congregations, daily management at the local church is carried out by elders. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that these elders do not receive sufficient training despite being the shepherds of the flock. Thus, after baptism, most newly baptized members feel disillusioned and tend to go missing or inactive at the local church. For far too long, the church has treated baptism as the climax of the evangelistic programs. This has made evangelism an event and not an ongoing active program for every member of the church.

This chapter examined Biblical-theological principles related to the role of elders as family, clan community, and local church leaders to establish a biblical basis for leadership. The findings from the Scriptures will be instrumental to address local elders' specific needs and challenges in effectively nurturing new converts at Emmasdale SDA Church. Further, the biblical foundation will also help identify key components as a basis for effective training programs for local elders to enhance their skills and capabilities in nurturing new converts. Information may not be very explicit for the Old Testament, but it contains valuable lessons to draw principles.

Elders in the Old Testament

This section discusses the leadership experiences in the Old Testament and will seek to identify fundamental principles that may be justify training of elders to nurture newly baptized members. To begin with, the chapter will highlight the

meaning of the term *elder* and its functionality. Furthermore, details will be discussed on elders as representatives of the people in general and end with their role as assistants to Moses with more specific examples.

God's mission to save humanity is not a New Testament phenomenon only but started when man sinned. Professor Moskala, states that God's plan to save humanity started with Adam and Eve.¹ In the same article, he quotes David Bosch when he stated that God is on a rescue mission to save people using human beings to accomplish his objective.² It has always been the will of God to redeem and nurture the fallen man. This has been the theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Later, of course, in the New Testament, the mission of the church becomes more vivid but is greeted with the challenge of nurturing new members due to huge numbers who join the church through the gospel proclamation. While it is true that mission brings about church members,"³ there is a need to nurture the new members into mature disciples.

Usage of *Elder*

In general literature, the word elder may refer to many other different uses. Thus, this section intends to provide context to the use of the term. As the *Cambridge Dictionary* states, an elder could be an older person, especially one with a respected position in society.⁴ In some cultures, elders were key in the leadership of the

¹ Jiri Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, no. 1-2 (2008): 40.

² *Ibid.*, 42.

³ Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1999), 17.

⁴ *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, s.v. "Elder," accessed 31 May 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/elder>.

community owing to their age and vast experience. They carried out religious, political, and social community responsibilities.⁵ Joseph Conrad says the word “elder” meant senior people in age and experience.⁶ In the *Seventh-day Adventists Elder’s Handbook*, it is said that the usage of the term elder also spoke of leaders in families and tribal groupings.⁷ In the texts, the elder referred to one senior of age and had the experience of leading others in the community.

Furthermore, the term referred also signified people with beards another symbol of an elderly person. So, the word means beard,⁸ is about age. Thus, the elders functioned as community leaders owing to their age and experience. So, these could have been the oldest males in the family units or extended families who provided functional leadership. McKenzie states that the elders were referred to by various titles like simply elders, elders of Israel, of the city, of the land, of the people, of the congregation, of Judah⁹ in their various representative roles.

Admittedly, the term elder was akin to the nation of Israel and among other nations as they provided some form of administration in various localities. The designation and role of the elder is said to “date to pre-monarchic times in Israel.”¹⁰ In Genesis 50:7, Joseph is said to have been accompanied by elders and senior-ranking

⁵ John L. McKenzie, “The Elders in The Old Testament,” *Biblica* 40, no. 2 (1959): 522-540, accessed 17 October 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42640726>.

⁶ J. Conrad, “Zaqen,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Johannes G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 4:123.

⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Elder’s Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, 2016), 25.

⁸ Charles F. Fensham, “Elders,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. George W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁰ J. Andrew Overman, “Elder,” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 182.

officials from Egypt to Canaan to bury his father. Also, in the number that Balak sent to bring Balaam, the elders of Moab and Midian (Num 22:7) were among them. Thus, as heads of families, tribes, or clans, they influenced the lives of many and commanded authority. Although the usage of the word varied from one place to another, all were related to the leadership roles.

Role of Elders in the Old Testament

Their role, as highlighted above, ranged from being heads of families, tribes, or clans. They were community leaders who took up local administrative roles. This section will now discuss the leadership roles of elders in the Old Testament.

As observed by Willis, these elders were in distinct categories of men in ancient Israel.¹¹ Mentioned first are those called the “elders of Israel” which also might have included the seventy (Exod 24:1; Num 11:16) elders. Then came the administrative advisors to the king at the royal court referred to simply as “elders” or “elders of the King’s house” (Gen 50:7; 1 Kgs 12:6-15). A third category was the city elders most of whom dealt with judicial matters of murder and general justice such as the “punishment of a rebellious child.”¹² In all these elders provided some form of leadership.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures, other passages speak to this group of elders and a few have been cited herein: in the cities of refuge (Deut 19:12, Jos 20:4-4), cases involving unresolved murder (Deut 21:2-8), Gideon in the defeat of the Midianites (Judg 8:14-16) and the death of Naboth letters were addressed to the city elders (1

¹¹ Timothy Willis, “Elders in the Old Testament Community,” *Leaven* 2, no. 1 (1992): 8-12.

¹² J. Hausmann, “qayis,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 8:24.

Kgs 21:8-12) by Jezebel. According to McKenzie,¹³ the elders did not just appear as some old, aged men of experience but they performed various functions in their communities. He identifies at least (2) major functions of the elders as has been highlighted below.

Elders as Representatives of the People

Having discussed the role of the elders, this section details their functions as representatives of the people. Firstly, they represented the people in a community, political or religious activity. It is said that the leadership of the community was in the hands of elders and priests.¹⁴ They, for example, witnessed the striking of the rock at Massah (Exod 17:5-6), and they also approached Moses on behalf of the people (Deut 5:23). In these representative roles, the elders worked as assistants to Moses. Secondly, they acted as intercessors of the people. Further, in the time of Joel (2:1-17), the elders pleaded with God so that the land, people, and animals could be saved from the ravaging effects of the plague during the time of Joel.

In addition, when there was a crisis in Israel of a locust plague or war that devastated the land, the prophet Joel admonished those in authority, the elders along with the general populace, to seek the Lord's intervention.¹⁵ In these instances, elders pleaded with God and functioned as intercessors on behalf of the people in times of crisis. This was demonstrated more in the time of Moses as delivered the children of Israel in the Exodus episode.

¹³ McKenzie, "The Elders in the Old Testament," 522-540.

¹⁴ Ibid., 523.

¹⁵ Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2005), 327.

Elders as Assistants to Moses

As detailed in the book of Exodus, Moses had a more elaborate experience working with elders. They acted as his assistants in many instances. For instance, Moses assembled and worked with elders in his missionary journey to Egypt. As God sent him out, he immediately engaged the elders (Exod 3:16) to work with him. This appointment of the elders was about the effective execution of the mission. Thus, when he went to appear before Pharaoh, he was accompanied by the elders of Israel (Exod 3:18; 4:29) as his assistants.¹⁶ This was teamwork ministry. They were, thus, an integral part of leadership assisting Moses in accomplishing the mission assigned by God. Further, at Rephidim (Exod 17:5-6), when they had no water, the Lord commanded Moses to work with elders. He called them to witness the performance of the miracle.¹⁷ Here at Rephidim, with the tense situation among the people, Moses in the company of elders sought the Lord's intervention. It is this teamwork that made Moses succeed as a visible leader of Israel.

Admittedly, this crisis at Massah and Meribah saw Moses, under the guidance of the Lord, work together with elders to provide leadership to the people. It is evident from this episode that elders worked together with Moses. Thus, the main function of the elders was not to work independently but to serve as witnesses and assistants, as the text suggests. In so doing they were being trained to trust in divine intervention as they worked with Moses.

Later, when Moses meets his father-in-law, the elders are mentioned to have worked with Moses (Exod 18:12, 21). The elders and Aaron probably stood to

¹⁶ "Gather the Elders" [Exod 3:16], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1953-1978), 1:511.

¹⁷ "Go on before the People" [Exod 17:5], *SDABC*, 1:584.

represent the community or tribes at this point as leaders of various groupings. In this episode, Jethro noticed that his son-in-law kept too much work to himself and therefore suggested delegation. Jethro noticed that if Moses did not delegate, it would wear him out. Thus, he (Jethro) advised Moses to delegate certain duties of leadership to others qualified to bear them.¹⁸ Most likely were among the leaders chosen to lead people groups.

With this counsel, he would assume a general teaching role.¹⁹ In this, he had time to train the able men filled with the Spirit of God to work with him. Because he delegated and they worked as a team, it was also good for his health.²⁰ Notice that the administrative procedure being proposed did not originate with Moses but with Jethro, an outsider used by God to suggest the principle of delegation. Similarly, the work of the Pastor would be made easier by working together with the team of elders. Notice, that following the mountain experience with God (Exod 19:7), Moses worked with elders. Thus, elders were closer and an integral part of leadership in the worship of God.

Later, to keep Moses from bearing the full weight of the challenges facing the people alone in the future, God involved representative tribal leaders and elders in governance (Num 11:16-17; 24-25). In this passage, God promises to ordain elders with the same spirit as that bestowed on Moses to enable them to perform specific functions of carrying the burdens of the people. In this regard, elders became burden bearers. In the passage above, God gave the elders His Holy Spirit to enable them to

¹⁸ “Why Do You Alone Sit” [Exod 18:14], *SDABC*, 1:590.

¹⁹ Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ed., *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light, Depth, Truth* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 97.

²⁰ “Will Surely Wear Yourselves Out” [Exod 18:18], *SDABC*, 1:590.

carry out His plans as co-workers with Moses.²¹ Thus, God did not limit His spirit only to Moses but to elders too to enable them to carry out divinely guided leadership.

Thus far, the foregoing discussion has demonstrated that elders played a critical role in their communities as has been cited in the foregoing section. Two major functions stand out very clearly. First, was their role as representatives of the people at family, community, intercessors, or clan level. They also provided local leadership in their localities. Secondly, they acted as assistants in the leadership of Moses. They provided support to him with delegated functions as his assistants.

This survey from the Old Testament gives the import upon which to draw principles of the role of the elders as a basis for local church leadership. The survey from the Old Testament largely came from the first five books of Moses²² describing the history of the people of God from creation to the end of the journey into the wilderness leading them into Canaan. Other commentaries were drawn from a few isolated books.

The rest of the books include:²³

- a. Books of History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, First Chronicles, Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Nehemiah, and Esther. This category tells the story of Israel from the conquest of the Promised Land to the restoration after Babylonian captivity.

²¹ “Of the Spirit” [Num 11:17], *SDABC*, 1:859.

²² Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 4-5.

²³ Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 13-37.

- b. Poetry: Sometimes referred to as the books of wisdom. They included: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.
- c. Prophets: Categorized as major and minor prophets: The Major Prophets include: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel. Then minor prophets: Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Very little was gleaned from most of the Old Testament books except for the books of the law.

The next section will discuss the duties of elders in the gospels, the book of Acts, and the Epistles. Further, this project will draw its conclusions largely from the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), Historical book (Acts), Pauline Epistles (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews).²⁴ The other general epistles include James, First and Second Peter, First, Second and Third John, Jude, and the prophetic book of Revelation. The project will draw many of the principles from the Gospels, the experience of the early church, Pauline Epistles, and the book of Peter.

Elders in the New Testament

While Old Testament roles of elders are summed up into two major focus issues, the New Testament has more detailed functions of elders. It gives illustrations of local churches being led by local elders, especially in the Pauline epistles. They served as spiritual leaders of their congregation. In his book, *Life Changing*

²⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 150-515.

Leadership, Damazio attests that elders govern the local church.²⁵ They are the guardians of the people.

In this section, like the preceding Old Testament component, the section will begin by explaining the meaning of elder in the New Testament. This will be followed by Jesus' Approaches to Nurture, Discipleship, and Jesus as the Model Shepherd. Thereafter, the chapter will cite specific examples of nurtured bible characters: Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and the Woman at the Well. This done, the section will then focus on the Acts Model, Pastors as Equippers, Elders in the Pauline Epistles, and Elders in the Non-Pauline Epistles. To understand the phenomenon of nurture, the section will be followed by the meaning of the term nurture before discussing the ministry of the laity in the nurture of new converts.

Consequently, the section will end with a discussion on the Gospel call, highlights on the Grow Model, the gospel proclamation as a process, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the concerns of Adventist leaders on Nurture.

Use of *Elder*

According to the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, the Greek word for elder is *presbuteros*, transliterated in English as presbyter.²⁶ It carries the idea of old age or a leader. In the Adventist church, the office of the bishop could be used interchangeably with the term elder.²⁷ The *Elder's Handbook* states that the meaning of the word has

²⁵ Frank Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership: Identifying and Developing Your Team's Full Potential* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 74.

²⁶ Fred A. Grissom, "Elder," *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991), accessed 26 May 2022, <https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/e/elder.html>.

²⁷ "Bishop" [1 Tim 3:1], *SDABC*, 7:297.

the further understanding to include just a leader regardless of age.²⁸ Therefore, meaning should not be limited only to the old but even the young regardless of their age²⁹ provided they are mature and exhibit exemplary leadership qualities necessary for leading the church.

Given the foregoing, the sum of it all then implied community leaders among their people even at a family level.³⁰ This conception was synonymous with the Old Testament usage of the term. Except now in the current discussion, it carries dual aspects of older men but adds the leadership dimension. Damazio identifies local church elders in the New Testament as those who exercise authority in the local congregations.³¹ He adds that elders and the pastor are a team ministry.³² They are the assistant shepherds to the pastor of the local church. The section that follows defines the approaches of Jesus to nurture of new believers. But first the mean of nurture.

Meaning of the Word Nurture

According to the *Britannica Dictionary*, *nurture* means taking care of someone or something growing or developing by providing food, protection, and a place to live.³³ Thus, in terms of nurturing new converts, entails care and support for them following the baptism. Thus, the pastor-elder team should work out a discipling and mentoring program for the gradual growth of the new converts.

²⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Elder's Handbook*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁰ Mary Fairchild, "What Is an Elder?" accessed 26 May 2022, <https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-an-elder-700721>.

³¹ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 27.

³³ *The Britannica Dictionary*, s.v. "Nurture," accessed 4 October 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/nurture>.

It was McMullen who stated that most companies or firms thrive because of they hire and nurture of employees.³⁴ He stressed that this might be true about church and in the nurture of newly baptized members of the congregation to become mature. In his view, the church should not only make major in huge baptisms but also intentionally plan for the preservation of newly baptized members.³⁵ Thus, for the GROW Model (details are provided under this section), nurture is the very last activity for training and growing the new members. Aggressive in local church leadership in the day-to-day duties, the laity (elders in particular), play a critical role in nurturing new converts. The section below is devoted to this detail.

Jesus' Approaches to Nurture

In the Gospels, the role of elders may not be as explicitly explained as in the epistles on the nurture of new members. Admittedly, the gospels speak of elders as Jewish religious and community leaders (Matt 15:2; 16:21; Mark 7:3; 7:5; Luke 22:52; 22:66). Later, it will be observed in the epistles that elders were depicted as leading overseers at a local church.

This section will, however, discuss the approaches of Jesus to nurture believers in “the new relationship with God which includes a mature relationship with Christ.”³⁶ It was as the disciples associated with the Savior that they were acquainted with the emotions of people. Like Scazzero stated that for believers to grow in their

³⁴ L. G. McMullen, *Keeping Members in Church* (Chicago, IL: Hancock Center Publications, 2005), 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁶ Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 278.

spiritual journey, they also need to grow emotionally.³⁷ Thus, through following, the Master would demonstrate how to relate with those who error and assist them to mature emotionally and spiritually. This was observed in the call of the twelve disciples to ministry as will be observed in the following section. Below, the paper now discusses the components of nurture through Christ.

Jesus and discipleship. The call to discipleship by Jesus forms a core part of the mission. This call to discipleship involves not just a personal commitment but also a responsibility to mentor and train others. Jesus made His first call to discipleship to Peter and Andrew (Matt 4:19) his brother whom he would train to disciple others. His call was a personal invitation to the fishermen to become His followers. They were going to be learners in the school of Jesus.³⁸ They were called not only as believers but as learners and workers.³⁹ Therefore, in that school, His love would gradually transform their hearts and minds.⁴⁰ The call to discipleship was, thus, some kind of training school for the disciples in mission on how to catch men for the kingdom. In the section that follows, the paper presents Christ the model teacher in nurturing the young and weak in faith.

Jesus the Model Shepherd. Jesus spoke of Himself as a good shepherd of His people (John 10:11). In this passage, Jesus provides a model for a good shepherd which Pastors and elders can emulate. He cares, provides, and protects His sheep. As Zvandasara has said, “Christian leaders should view people as Christ them-valuable

³⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 50.

³⁸ “Follow me” [Matt 4:19], *SDABC*, 5:319.

³⁹ “Followed Him” [Luke 5:11], *SDABC*, 5:740.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

and capable of growth.”⁴¹ It is Anderson who stated that this kind of trust can only be gained when the shepherd interacts with the sheep in a relational manner by spending time with them that the sheep ultimately identifies with Him.⁴² This is what Jesus wanted His disciples to catch as they followed Him daily. Below are some specific examples or insights into the ministry of Jesus as a shepherd on how He nurtured some selected individuals into mature and rooted disciples.

Jesus and Zacchaeus. Luke 19 provides an outlook of what happens when a soul in need of a savior is nurtured through care and support. Jesus, in his journey through Jericho, noticed Zacchaeus in a sycamore tree, eager to see him. Instead of condemning him for his profession or ignoring him due to societal disdain, Jesus displayed compassion. He saw in him what Bourdeau referred to as the growth principle of the seed, the grain, and then the lofty tree.⁴³ He saw that under the influence of divine truth, gradually, this new convert will grow to the glory of God.

Admittedly, Jesus, by calling Zacchaeus down and expressing his intention to dine at his house, demonstrated a desire for a personal relationship. This was a profound gesture, breaking social norms and revealing Jesus' mission to transform lives through personal connections. The nurturing relationship between Jesus and Zacchaeus serves as a model for Adventists, highlighting the transformative power of a personal connection with Christ. Jesus befriended Zacchaeus and became what Gane

⁴¹ Nkosiyo Z. Zvandasara, *Leading the Leader: A Learner's Practical Guide to Deal with Manipulative Followers* (Berrien Spring, MI: Patterson Printing Company, 1997), 14.

⁴² Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 1997), 1:17.

⁴³ Daniel Bourdeau, *Sanctification or Living Holiness* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1970), 11.

calls the “spiritual parent.”⁴⁴ The attitude of Jesus played a critical role in discipling Zacchaeus and had time for him.

In addition, Gane states that the new Christian friend to the convert should be a model but at the same time spend time with the new believer discussing their spiritual concerns.⁴⁵ Certainly, the spiritual rearing of new believers needs patience. Kelvin Onongha, in his book *Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, notes that full conversion is never a point in history but always a process.⁴⁶ In the case of Zacchaeus Jesus took time to relate to him. Onongha says it may take time to reach maturity.⁴⁷ Thus, new converts need a better discipling program that will add meaning to life.

Certainly, nurturing new converts in faith is a crucial aspect of growth for new converts or those who backslide. The encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19 provides valuable insights into how nurturing relationships can contribute to the growth and maturity of individuals in their Christian journey. From this story, Jesus had the time and the correct attitude towards the man. He responded to his felt needs and filled up the gap.

During his research at Victory Sanctuary Adventist Church, Onongha discovered that the church made commendable efforts to generate programs that are not only innovative but relevant, needs-based Bible studies, welfare assistance to

⁴⁴ Barry Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundational Guide* (Riverside, CA: Hancock, 2005), 229.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁶ Kelvin Onongha, *Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Phenomenon, Prospects and Problems to Mainline Churches* (Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria: Babcock Consulting, 2011), 122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

needy members, singles week, and intentional discipleship training programs.⁴⁸ This makes the congregants feel welcome, cared for, and loved by the church community.

Jesus' intentional act of spending time with Zacchaeus served as a form of discipleship. Jesus most likely engaged in meaningful conversations with Zacchaeus during their time together. Similarly, nurturing new converts involves providing opportunities for Bible study and teaching, helping them understand the fundamentals of Adventists, and encouraging a personal study of Scripture. Often new members are lost because enough care and attention are not given to them.⁴⁹ There is a need to establish a sustainable church lifeline for mature newcomers.

Writing about the experience of the apostles, Skip Bell notes that Jesus transformed the “ordinary men into extraordinary workers.”⁵⁰ Jesus had time to transform Zacchaeus. He presented Himself as Savior because of the “legal acquittal”⁵¹ He did for him. This, elders, should be trained to possess as they disciple new converts. In the same way, nurturing new converts requires consistent encouragement and support as they navigate the challenges and joys of their faith journey. Another striking nurturing example of nurturing was an encounter with Nicodemus.

Jesus and Nicodemus. This is a successful story of what can happen when a new person has been nurtured well. Through his inquiry about eternal life, Jesus saw a seeker for truth in the statement.⁵² He must have been a troubled man. Probably, this

⁴⁸ Onongha, *Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, 145.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁰ Skip Bell, *A Time to Serve: Church Leadership for the 21st Century* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2003), 15.

⁵¹ Kwabena Donkor, *Growing in Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2012), 35.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 168.

was what Zvandasara referred to when he said, “When a drunkard, prostitute, thief, murderer, or liar leaves his house and enters the church door, the Christian leader must commend him or her ... to come and worship.”⁵³ Though a learned man and teacher, he was hungry for the truth. Jesus helped Him to walk in His footsteps for the gradual growth of his faith.⁵⁴ After that night's conversation, he was convinced that Jesus was one sent by God.

The impact of this encounter was later manifested in his attitude towards the treatment of Jesus (John 7:43-52; 19:39). He was a changed person. As Donkor says, Christianity is a religion of redemption that saves a person from his or her condition as a sinner.⁵⁵ In these verses, it is evident that he sought to protect Jesus when He was alive and honored Him after His death. It is clear from these incidents that Jesus reached out to Nicodemus even with his knowledge and wisdom. Nicodemus is an example of a nurtured new believer in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Thus, Nicodemus' experience with Jesus provides valuable insights into nurturing new believers. He helped him to bridge the gap. Richards and Bredfeldt in their book, *Creative Bible Teaching*, state that Bible teachers creatively help learners to close up the gap between what the Bible says the worldview of the learner.⁵⁶ This process involved gradual revelation and personal connection. Nicodemus was satisfied with the evidence through His works that Jesus was the Savior.⁵⁷ This

⁵³ Zvandasara, *Leading the Leader*, 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁵ Donkor, *Growing in Christ*, 39.

⁵⁶ Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1998), 132.

⁵⁷ “We Know” [John 3:2], *SDABC*, 5:927.

engagement with the master made him grow in his faith. The classic example of the woman at the well, is one clear example of nurturing a new faith.

The Samaritan woman. The encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 provides a powerful example of nurturing a new believer. The narrative offers valuable insights into the lessons learnt on how to reach out to the lost and yet tactfully nurture them into spiritual giants and evangelists. Like being on a “rescue mission,”⁵⁸ Jesus systematically initiated a conversation with the Samaritan woman by asking for water.

Admittedly the experience of Jesus with the Samaritan woman offers salient insights into how careful people ought to be who go out to share the good news of the kingdom.⁵⁹ This story demonstrates that indeed growth requires nourishment and nurture.⁶⁰ New converts will need such an enabling environment. Jesus did not condemn her but step by step nurtured her faith that she became a disciple-maker in Samaria. He did what Bill Hull calls the importance of sequence and segmentation.⁶¹ Similarly, new believers should be approached with genuine interest to build trust. In this episode, Jesus nurtured the faith of the Samaritan woman and grew her into a mature, rooted evangelist who later witnessed the entire village. This approach is what

⁵⁸ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 26.

⁵⁹ “Give me to drink” [John 4:7], *SDABC*, 5: 937.

⁶⁰ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, 2005), 150.

⁶¹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 18.

Jeffrey D. Jones meant when he said that disciples live their lives in the community.⁶² It is there where the real care love of the people can be practiced.

Thus, those who are new in the faith should be treated with care and tolerance by the experienced church members through support systems of the church while gradually guiding them as they grow.⁶³ By following this model, elders can effectively nurture new believers, guiding them toward becoming mature disciples who, in turn, are equipped to disciple others for Christ.

The Acts model. In the book of Acts, there is an increased activity on the role of elders in local congregations. Damasio cites a few such Scriptures that refer to elders as local church leaders.⁶⁴ In all these examples, the responsibilities of local churches rested on elders especially since most of the churches were new. Of particular interest under the Acts Model was the sermon preached at Pentecost (Acts 2) by Peter which saw an exponential birth and growth of the early church. This reaping campaign saw huge numbers of new converts join the church.

Most likely, the issue of nurturing new converts arose owing to the huge numbers joining the church. As Mark Finley once stated that weighing in on evangelism just to seek exponential numbers is missing the point.⁶⁵ That day, 3000 (Acts 2:41) souls were baptized. Further to this, the Bible states that church membership increased daily through the works of the apostles (Acts 2:47). To nurture these new believers, the Scripture states that the believers continued to learn and to

⁶² Jeffrey D. Jones, *Travelling Together: A Guide for Disciple Forming Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 36.

⁶³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, 2009), 120.

⁶⁴ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 26.

⁶⁵ Mark A. Finley, "Evangelism's Big Picture: From Baptism to Discipleship," *Ministry*, September 2009, 9-11.

fellowship in the teachings of the apostles and moving from house to house having meal fellowships (Acts 2:42).

Because of numbers in baptism, Finley adds that Jesus' commission to His followers was not merely to baptize, but to make disciples, to develop faith-filled, praying Christians who are daily growing in grace, studying His Word, worshipping with His people, and witnessing to the glory of His name. When the church fails to nurture new converts, he says, then the church has failed in the mission of Christ. According to him, evangelism is incomplete without a comprehensive strategy of nurture and discipleship.⁶⁶ This is what the post-Pentecost church (Acts 2:41-44) attempted to do in the Acts model. To add on, in the *Sabbath School Study Adult Guide* of November 8, 2023, the authors stated that the teachings in the early church helped to correct certain unwanted lifestyles of as they received the word of God.⁶⁷ This sets an example of how new converts can be nurtured wholistically.

In Acts 14:21-23, the narrative portrays the apostles Paul and Barnabas revisiting the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where they had previously established churches. During the visit, one crucial step they took was to appoint elders in each church. This act was significant for the stability and growth of new believers. The appointment of elders ensured there would be local leadership to guide, teach, and oversee the spiritual welfare of the believers in the absence of Paul and Barnabas. The appointment probably included the training of the elders to induct them into leadership.

⁶⁶ Finley, "Evangelism's Big Picture," 9.

⁶⁷ Sabbath School Net, "Seventh-day Adventists Bible Study Discussion," accessed 6 March 2024, <https://ssnet.org/blog/23d-06-a-picture-of-the-early-church/>.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus, urging them to fulfill their responsibility of shepherding and overseeing the flock entrusted to them by God to care and feed them. This passage underscores the significant role and duties of elders within the early Christian community, emphasizing their divine appointment as overseers by the Holy Spirit. Paul exhorted the elders to nurture the new believers challenging them to emulate him (Acts 20:35) in modeling the believers.

Thus, the text (Acts 20:28) serves as a foundational passage underscoring the pivotal role of elders as overseers, entrusted to take care, particularly because of the potential spiritual threats and challenges that would come after the apostle was gone. They needed to be watchful in guarding the flock because savage wolves would be coming. Paul's metaphor of the savage wolves highlights the looming threat of false teachers and adversaries who would seek to distort the truth and harm the believers. Hence, a need to grow the believers in faith. Given Paul's departure and what he was about to tell them, the elders were to watch with care first regarding themselves and then to the flock.⁶⁸ The elders, therefore, were to be trained and entrusted with the crucial task of protecting the congregation from such dangers and ensuring the spiritual well-being of the members.

Pastors as equippers. Critical to the training of elders is the role of Pastors. They are equippers for the perfecting of the saints so that they can be mature believers (Eph 4:10-14). This is part of the crucial pastoral function to train the assistant shepherds for effective ministry.⁶⁹ It is thus clear that the pastors have been called

⁶⁸ "Take Heed" [Acts 20:28], *SDABC*, 6:392.

⁶⁹ "Pastors and teachers" [Eph.4:11], *SDABC*, 6:1023.

among other things for equipping⁷⁰ of the saints for service. The pastor acts like a coach to mobilize the players, but he may not necessarily be a player himself in the team. In districts with many churches, this is even more difficult.

Elders in the Pauline epistles. Other than the mention of elders in the book of Acts, this section highlights the role of local church elders in some selected Pauline epistles. Concerning the administration of the local church at Crete, Paul commanded the appointment of elders under the leadership of Titus (Titus 1:5). It was a new church and thus needed proper organization for the spiritual nurture to grow the members. So, Titus was instructed to appoint elders of the local church.⁷¹ This is one clear demonstration of a local church left in the hands of elders. This pattern is common in most of the churches established by the apostle Paul. The next section now highlights the role of local church elders in other non-Pauline epistles.

Elders in the non-Pauline epistles. This section highlights the ministry of elders in the selected non-Pauline epistles. The apostle charged the elders to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet 2-4). In this passage, the apostle Peter addresses the principal role of elders, to feed the flock. It has been stated that because the flock belong to God, the elders are to care for it even more faithfully than if it belonged to themselves, and this is how church officers will ever regard the members of the church as belonging to the Lord and will minister to their needs accordingly.⁷² Thus, the work of elders in the passage above had to be without compulsion but with love and tenderness and not force. Caring for the flock of God, serving willingly leading

⁷⁰ Gary E. Tangeman, *The Disciple Making Church in the 21st Century* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1996), 218.

⁷¹ "Elders" [Titus 1:5], *SDABC*, 7:360.

⁷² "Flock" [1 Pet 5:2], *SDABC*, 7:585.

by example was their work. To give context to the meaning of nurturing of new members, the section below gives insights into the use of the word nurture.

Ministry of the Laity

A major concern in the nurture of new members for every congregation is the involvement of the laity, especially the elders who are key players in church leadership. Discussing the role of the laity, in his article, in the *Ministry Magazine*, Pastor John Fowler, once president of Missouri Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, makes a point when he says the church grew in the sixties because of the work of the lay people.⁷³ Fowler stresses the need to spend more time “training the laity”⁷⁴ especially since they have more influence on the local congregation than the pastor.

Admittedly, the pastor and the elders work as a team, especially in large districts where the pastor cannot manage to meet all the members. Working together, they give spiritual help and direction to the local church.⁷⁵ Gottfried Oosterwal strengthens the issue when he said that the pastors and the lay people are not opponents and competitors but complementary.⁷⁶ As further illustrated in the *Elder's Handbook*, the role of the pastor is to train the elders in the practical setting of the church.⁷⁷ Thus, training elders for the local church enhances efficiency in delegation and nurturing of new members.

⁷³ John Fowler, “What’s the Biblical View of the Laity,” *Ministry*, December 1977, 7-9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Elder's Handbook*, 61.

⁷⁶ Gottfried Oostewaal, “The Role of the Laity,” *Andrews University Focus*, July/August 1973, 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Hence, the gospel call (Matt 28:19-20) is not only for baptism but a call to nurture because Jesus says, “teaching them to observe all things that I have taught you” (v. 20). Notice that observation for transformation is not a short-term project but is done over a long period time. According to Matthew 28, people are first brought into initial discipleship then they can be baptized. It is this initial connection that make them grow into a desire and decision for baptism. The commission demands a process of faith and growth that brings people to a place where they can say I want now to be baptized. It’s a life commitment rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus. You will notice in the text (Matt 28:19-20) that there’s an initial discipleship leading to baptism. But it does not end there. It is ongoing. Teaching them to observe. It’s a lifetime. This is the focus of the next section.

The Gospel Call

The Gospel call to preach (Matt 28:19-20) is a comprehensive statement in the plan of God to save all people and forms a springboard for most of the evangelistic exploits. This call is for God’s people to go and make disciples of all nations. As Wells has observed, the main verb in the sentence is indeed *make disciples* but it is not an isolated verb, nor is it intended to be emphasized to the exclusion of the other important details in the command.⁷⁸ It is part of the whole passage. The rest of the supporting verbs speak to the core of the mission, disciple-making as an end and not baptism.

Admittedly, the baptism of candidates is just but the beginning of the Christian journey. New members have been accepted but they need to grow and mature into stable members of the church. To demonstrate this need for growth,

⁷⁸ Robert V. Wells, “Go Means Go: A Closer Look at the Great Commission,” accessed 4 October 2023, <https://www.imb.org/2018/01/16/go-means-go-a-closer-look-at-the-great-commission/>.

notice the example for growth given by Jesus step by step: In Mark 4:28, the Bible gives an illustration from an agrarian experience of what happens from planting time to the time of harvest. Thus, the process does not start and end at harvest. It is part of the grand chain of preparing the soil, planting, cultivating, harvest and preservation.

The Grow Model

The Grow model is a product of the great commission for growth and maturity of disciples. It is an approach that speaks to disciple making as a process and not an event. In the *Grow your church* model, Howard, the General Conference Associate Sabbath School, and Personal Ministries Director at the time of the research, commenting on the agricultural examples stated that the farmer must prepare the soil, plant the seed, cultivate the growing plants, harvest the crop, preserve the harvest.⁷⁹ The principle fits well in nurturing new members.

Thus, this model should be the approach in the gospel seed sowing. Admittedly, the gospel Sower must prepare the soil of the heart with friendship and service, plant the seed of God's Word, conduct bible studies, and preserve the harvest of souls with a systematic and intentional discipleship plan for new members.⁸⁰ This analogy speaks to the need for a pre-campaign program to prepare the soil before planting ending with an intentional plan for nurturing.

Therefore, the argument advocated by Howard is that the key principle taught by Jesus in His agricultural analogy is that disciple-making is a process and

⁷⁹ James Howard, "New Member Discipleship: Disciple-making Principles and the Discipleship Handbook," in *Discipling, Nurturing and Reclaiming*, ed. General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2020), 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

not an event.⁸¹ In this process, elders are an integral ingredient in the nurture of newly baptized members. As spelled out in the mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist church the goal of the gospel is to make disciples, yet most churches have tended to focus more on baptism than the whole process.⁸² Because of this, the church ever adds new members through baptisms but without an intentional plan to equip elders on how to care for new members.

The Gospel Proclamation as a Process

In the Gospel proclamation, Jesus details the process of the Commission and not an event. In this command, there are four interrelated verbs but the teaching them to observe all things is of great importance to the growth of new members. Teaching them to observe all things is more than giving them knowledge. It “is about a comprehensive training in obedience leading to reproduction and multiplication.”⁸³ In other words, supporting verbs are the means to growing disciples. Critical as baptism may be, it is not the end but part of the process in the gospel proclamation.

Therefore, the post-baptismal nurture of members is just as important as the campaign itself. Except there has not been a deliberate strategy to train the local church elders. If the elders are the shepherds at the local church, then training becomes a necessity. In most cases, however, they are left to figure out for themselves what to do with the new members. If the elders were to become effective, there is a need to be intentional in matters of training. For instance, at Derbe it is stated that

⁸¹ Howard, “New Member Discipleship,” 4.

⁸² Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” accessed 26 May 2022, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/>.

⁸³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group), 2013), 5.

elders were chosen in every congregation and committed to God in prayer (Acts 14:23). The church should move beyond appointment, and elections and begin to train elders.

Indeed, the gospel proclamation contains the call to baptism (Matt 28:19) yet baptizing them is not the end but an important part of the process of discipleship.⁸⁴ And discipleship is in essence the process of nurturing the newly baptized. As G. T. Ng, former Executive Secretary of the General Conference once stated that newly baptized believers must be nurtured and taught to become disciples.⁸⁵ In a nutshell, the gospel proclamation is not just about going and baptizing but nurturing and growth of the newly baptized. This is the gist of disciple-making, nurturing new members. Thus, in the gospel proclamation, the going, baptizing, and teaching are all about how members should be nurtured to become disciples.

In any case, the question of nurturing and retention of members is not new in the church. It has been brought to the General Conference Executive Committee time and again through the secretariat working in collaboration with the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research (ASTR) through holding summits. So far two of such summits have been held. The first one was in 2013 and it was followed by the second one in 2019 under the title: *Discipling, Nurturing, and Reclaiming*.⁸⁶ In this research, it was observed that many leaders of the church are caught up in a numbers game⁸⁷ of baptisms as it is perceived to be the epitome of measuring success to the

⁸⁴ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022), 44.

⁸⁵ G. T. Ng, "Foreword: Lose None and Disciple All," in *Discipling, Nurturing and Reclaiming*, ed. General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2020), xii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

exclusion of other parameters like nurturing. Thus, the success of the mission is seen in the numbers baptized marking the end of the program, and yet the work would have just begun.

Following the reaping campaign, post-baptismal care⁸⁸ becomes critically important as the new life would have just begun. The study suggests that sometimes public campaigns are like hit-and-run events.⁸⁹ When the campaign has ended, baptism is over and certificates have been issued, the entourage decamps and the newly baptized are not sure where to go and what to do. The Summit Report⁹⁰ further observes that without follow-up plans, the newly baptized are left to wander especially after mass baptisms.

In that report an important question has been highlighted, whose obligation is it to conduct postbaptismal of new converts? Some say it's the evangelist's responsibility. Others argue it is the obligation of the church pastor. While arguments ensue, more newly baptized members languish and spiritually die. It is, thus, the objective of this research to suggest strategy to train elders on nurturing of new members since they are the immediate overseers and custodians of church members. This will be an acknowledgement that nurture is part of the process in the great commission.

Views of Ellen White on Training and Nurture

Ellen White makes a case in support of nurturing new members being part of the process in the gospel proclamation. Evidently, training and nurturing of newly

⁸⁸ Ng, "Foreword: Lose None and Disciple All," xi.

⁸⁹ Ibid., xi.

⁹⁰ Ibid., xii.

baptized members remain pivotal to mission. Ellen G. White wrote substantially on this subject. Like a new baby, new converts will not survive if they are left alone after baptism. At baptism, a new spiritual birth takes place but not spiritual maturity. Thus, the new members need to be strengthened in their new journey of faith. This section, thus, is devoted to discussing her writings on nurturing new members into disciple makers.

On the mission of the church, she stated that the church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.⁹¹ Additionally, she wrote that the church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message.⁹² To devise ways of reaching out with the message speaks to the needs of planning for the gospel dispensation and consequently training of members.

Furthermore, she wrote that the church must be a working church if it would be a living church. It should not be content merely to hold its ground but it should bear the yoke of Christ, and keep in step with the leader, gaining recruits.⁹³ This definitely is but the training of new entrants into the gospel military work. It was her considered view that missionaries needed to learn to sharpen their skills for mission work. Moreover, she added that these souls whom you despise, are the property of God.⁹⁴ They were purchased by His blood and belong to God (1 Cor 6:19, 20). She

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 9.

⁹² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), 1:649.

⁹³ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, DC: Home Missionary Department, 1947), 83-84.

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 187.

lamented that Angels pity these wandering ones and weep, while human eyes are dry, and hearts are closed to pity.⁹⁵ To avoid this development, churches need to plan for new members.

Discussing the role of ministers, White stated that Christ intends that His ministers shall be educators of the church in gospel work. They are to teach the people how to seek and save the lost.⁹⁶ She challenges the ministers to spend more time educating than preaching.⁹⁷ This is because, every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.⁹⁸ In the book, *Ministry of Healing* she made startling statement on the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ that Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, *Follow Me*.⁹⁹ Attending to the felt needs of people makes the gospel come alive in the lives of many converts.

Regarding the new converts, she says that when souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger.¹⁰⁰ And the reason she says this is because the more one tries to explain the Word of God to others, with love for souls, the plainer it becomes to himself.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, many are not trained in this area. Thus, she added that many would be

⁹⁵ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 192.

⁹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 825.

⁹⁷ White, *Testimonies*, 7:20.

⁹⁸ White, *Desire of Ages*, 195.

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 355.

¹⁰¹ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 354.

willing to work if they were taught how to begin.¹⁰² This is where the role of the Pastor becomes handy, training of the laity. The pastor must train elders among many other reasons to care for new members.¹⁰³ Note that Pastors take four years to study theology and yet the custodians of members are left in the hands of trainee elders.

Notably, when every newly baptized member becomes a soul winner, the church grows and becomes a blessing center. She says that one soul, won to the truth, will be instrumental in winning others, and there will be an ever-increasing result of blessing and salvation.¹⁰⁴ She was convinced that a “working church is a living church.”¹⁰⁵ That the church gives life to the members through the active ministry of the leaders over the newly baptized members or the weak in faith. A case in point is that of Jesus and Judas Iscariot who allowed such a fellow to dine with him allowing him to grow. Commenting on this she says that the Savior did not repulse Judas. He gave him a place among the twelve.¹⁰⁶ This was to nurture him in the hope that he would be transformed.

Finally, Ellen White was convicted that the church must be composed of members who have been trained in disciple-making. Her concern was not so much the higher numbers joining the church but the active training of new members to make them active disciples. She says that our success must not be judged based on numeric growth but on our faithfulness to the Lord’s instruction. If you lower the standard to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and make this increase a cause of

¹⁰² Ellen G. White, *Maranatha* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 99.

¹⁰³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minister’s Handbook*, 113.

¹⁰⁴ White, *Christian Service*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ White, *Testimonies*, 6:435.

¹⁰⁶ White, *Desire of Ages*, 630.

rejoicing, you show great blindness. If numbers were evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence, for in this world, his followers are largely in the majority. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers that should be the source of joy and thankfulness.¹⁰⁷ Ellen White therefore was a strong believer in nurturing of new members to make them active and mature disciples.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church on Nurture

Like Ellen G. White has observed in the previous section, it is the desire of the church that new converts grow and mature when they are well nurtured. Thus, the responsibility of nurturing new converts does not end with their baptism. Instead, it's an ongoing process that requires continuous care and follow-up. As stated, in the *Elder's Handbook*, when men and women accept the truth, we are not to go away and leave them and have no further burden for them, they need to be nurtured to grow and become mature Christians.¹⁰⁸ Regarding the role of elders, the *Church Manual*¹⁰⁹ states that as spiritual leaders, elders are responsible for encouraging members to develop a personal relationship with Jesus by strengthening their habits of personal Bible study, prayer, and nurture.

In the 2018 *Elder's Digest Magazine*,¹¹⁰ the main issue was nurture and retention. Among the strategic issues emerging from the global research (2011-2013)

¹⁰⁷ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913), 94.

¹⁰⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Elder's Handbook*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ *Church Manual* (2022), 80.

¹¹⁰ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Nurture and Retention," *Ministry*, April/June 2018, 8-10.

was the need to strengthen and maturity of members to become disciples, provide nurture and care, and increase the retention rate. It was highlighted in that research that local churches need pastors to equip elders to provide pastoral care for the members.

The Adventist church recognized the importance of addressing low member retention and took steps to tackle this issue through the Nurture and Retention (N&R) global summits. These summits brought together various stakeholders, including church leaders, departmental directors, and Adventist researchers, to discuss challenges, share research data, and generate recommendations for the global Seventh-day Adventist Church. This issue of nurture has been a matter of great concern for the Adventist church. In 2013 and 2019, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists through the Secretariat and the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) hosted the Nurture and Retention Summit.¹¹¹

The first summit, held in November 2013 under the theme of *Discipling, Retaining & Reclaiming* set the stage for addressing retention challenges. The second summit, held in April 2019, expanded its focus to cover three crucial areas: *Discipling, Nurturing, and Reclaiming*. Summit presenters aimed to provide practical solutions to existing problems in these areas. Arising from the Summits, a book was developed by leaders to address among other matters the challenge of nurturing new members.

In that book, James Howard devoted a chapter on *New Member Discipleship*¹¹² with an emphasis on growing new members. He states that in fulfilling

¹¹¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Discipling, Nurturing and Reclaiming: Nurture and Retention Summit* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2020), vii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to go and make disciples (Matt 28:19), it is crucial to recognize that the journey does not end with baptism important as that may be. Instead, the focus must shift from merely increasing membership numbers to nurturing and sustaining a community of dedicated, rooted, and mature disciples. To achieve this transformation, it is essential to embrace certain guiding principles.

Firstly, the growth cycle must be acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of discipleship. The process involves continuous learning, spiritual development, and the gradual transformation into a Christlike character. Secondly, establishing connections and fostering mentorship opportunities can greatly contribute to the maturity of newly baptized. Moreover, the goal of discipleship should be Christlikeness. Beyond rituals and doctrines, the focus should be to deepen the connection with Jesus as redeemer and friend that reflects His character in every aspect of life. Finally, the power of discipleship originates from God. Through prayer, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and immersion in God's Word, members can experience spiritual growth and total character transformation.

Finally, he concludes that these principles can be explored in how they can be practically applied in a deliberate and systematic new member discipleship plan. By utilizing tools such as the *Discipleship Handbook*, he believes the local church can structure a comprehensive approach that nurtures new members, helping them join the church and become steadfast, mature disciples of Christ. In doing so, the church can fulfill the mandate of making disciples, ensuring a vibrant and faithful Seventh-day Adventist mature disciple.

Church growth is vital both to the church growth and the spirituality of the members. In the *Ministry Magazine*, Monte Sahlin, vice president for creative

ministries at the Columbian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church says that a healthy, vital congregation is a growing church.¹¹³ According to him, relational growth to evangelism is crucial to spiritual formation and growth of members. Like Ellen G White rightly stated let ministers teach church members that to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth.¹¹⁴ For their growth, members must actively participate, and their participation is a mode of training.

To appreciate the role of leadership in training, one would not resist reading the works of Henry and Richard Blackaby. They said that the biggest mistake Napoleon made that led to the defeat at Waterloo was his failure to train his generals to think independently.¹¹⁵ His soldiers lacked initiative, authority, and energy because they were used only to receive instructions from him. He relied too much on himself but never made any systematic attempts to teach them his methods.

This principle can be applied to new converts. Many church leaders, like Napoleon have failed in the like manner. Members need training and nurturing for their spiritual growth so that they can stand on their own. Explaining the role of ministers to people, Ellen White guided that do not lead people to depend upon you as ministers; teach them rather that they are to use their talents in giving the truth to those around them.”¹¹⁶ Each member, therefore, should be trained to stand on their own in faith through training.

¹¹³ Monte Sahlin, “What Makes Churches Grow? What Recent Adventist Research Reveals,” *Ministry*, November 2004, 5-11.

¹¹⁴ White, *Christian Service*, 69.

¹¹⁵ Henry B. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2011), 134.

¹¹⁶ White, *Christian Service*, 69.

Jethrow, father-in-law to Moses makes another point of delegation when he counsels to avoid taking over the whole camp (Exod 18:21-23). He advised him to choose elders to assist him govern the multitudes in the wilderness. This would give him relief and rest. The Jethrow principle establishes a biblical foundation for delegation and teamwork. Robert Welsh states that no leader can do the entire job alone and that by delegating portions of their job, the leader can focus on the major issues.¹¹⁷ Seeing that most pastors leading multi-district churches, may not have the time to at every congregation, the principle of delegation becomes handy.

¹¹⁷ Robert Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dynamics of leadership are very key to the success of any institution. What leaders dream and do will determine the rise and fall of individuals, institutions, and nations. These leadership dynamics can be at an individual level, family, society, church, national or global. It will vary but whichever way, everyone experiences leadership directly or indirectly. For Christian leaders, says Henry and Richard Blackaby, it is even deeper because they carry an additional burden that they are failing their people and God.¹ In this regard, leadership for the church becomes more critical because it is more than just leading people but doing it God's way. In this chapter, the research will endeavor to share relevant literature on leadership and lay training.

Need for Leadership

The need for leadership cannot be over-emphasized. In their book, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People unto God's Agenda*, Henry and Richard Blackaby state that leadership is needed in every walk of life and is experienced everywhere.² According to them, they identify major emerging issues the church is grappling with such as lack of leadership, religious consumerism, technology, globalization,

¹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 4.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

secularism, and opposition.³ These issues need ardent spiritual leadership to help members remain steadfast in their faith especially the young people.

They add that, the 21st century has witnessed the proliferation of many church leaders including false prophets hitting the airwaves, literature, and engaging in healing ministries attracting thousands of people. The Blackabys wonder how those who have been to school and established businessmen and women get easily deceived by unscrupulous and suspecting conmen masquerading as prophets, especially in the cities.⁴ This tends to be true, especially with the Pentecostal movements. In his book, *Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, Kelvin Onongha adds that Pentecostalism has introduced the business dimension to churchgoers, especially with the promise of financial breakthroughs.⁵ And because of their vibrant programs, many tend to flock especially the youths and women.⁶ It is possible that a lucrative church service would sway many especially the weak in faith.

Thus, the question that Henry and Richard Blackaby leave begging is, could it be that there is an enormous vacuum of leadership to enhance the maturity of church members to stand strong amidst waves of secularism and materialism?⁷ Citing George Barna, in their book, Henry and Richard Blackaby state that the church is dying due to lack of strong leadership.⁸ This explains the need for visionary and strong leadership

³ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 14.

⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵ Kelvin O. Onongha, *Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, 58.

⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁷ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 15.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

to disciple members into a stable, mature, and meaningful life rooted in biblical principles.

Team Ministry

Among the many attributes of a good leader is teamwork. The pastor and the elders are a team ministry. Frank Damazio saw this when he said that the team concept or ministry has been proven throughout Scripture and history to be one of the most effective dynamics of any healthy, successful local church or other organization.⁹ He further adds that one mistake the church and the clergy have made is the suppression of the laity and the exaltation of the clergy.¹⁰ Bill Hybels calls it the team experience that no one wins alone.¹¹ And yet the church is largely in the hands of the laity, especially local elders. They complement each other as leaders of the local church. Even the most outstanding leaders cannot accomplish significant tasks apart from the capable efforts of others, says the Blackabys.¹² They have added that most heralded leaders in history learned how to maximize the talents and sacrifices of others to multiply their efforts.¹³

Additionally, Damazio re-echoed these words when he stated that their effectiveness is multiplied when the Holy Spirit harnesses various leadership ministries together. According to him, by recognizing and submitting to one another, leaders work towards a common goal and truly become a leadership team.¹⁴ Says the

⁹ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 75.

¹² Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 294.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 55.

wise man, “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will leave up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (Eccl 4:9-10).

The Pastor-Elder Team

Stan Toler and Jerry Brecheisen, in their book, *Lead to Succeed: New Testament Principles for Visionary Leadership*, state that teamwork means mutual preparedness of two parties, properly equipped, and committed to accomplishing the task.¹⁵ Called the overseer of the local church, elders function as under-shepherds to the office of the Pastor. They are his right-hand men. Usually, the District Pastor an itinerant worker is rarely at church. They govern the local church.¹⁶ Their ministry according to Damazio is broad. He says in broad terms, the ministry of the elders to the church can be classified into six; ruling, teaching, shepherding, overseeing, caring, and living for the flock.¹⁷ But this work, they do as they work under the leadership of the Pastor.

Says George Knight that in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, elders serve as shepherds under the guidance and leadership of the pastor. Their role is vital in providing spiritual care and leadership within the local congregation, ensuring that the church functions smoothly and that members' needs are met.¹⁸ Thus, the responsibility to equip them rests on the Pastor. The depth of the efficiency of how elders carry out their roles will be dependent on their skills and capabilities to execute their functions.

¹⁵ Stan Toler and Jerry Brecheisen, *Lead to Succeed: New Testament Principles for Visionary Leadership* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 67.

¹⁶ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 74.

¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸ George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 157.

The Art of Delegation

The previous section dealt with pastor-elder teamwork. Akin to the spirit of teamwork, is the art of delegation. The pastor may not do all the work and in any case, he may not always be there. In his book, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency Ministry*, Robert H. Welch, states that delegation involves sharing the work with colleagues who may have the capacity so that one can concentrate on more challenging tasks by citing the example of Moses and Jethrow his father-in-law.¹⁹ Sometimes work suffers because one individual decides to do all the work. Welch says delegation involves three important elements.

- i. Clearly assigning the responsibility the individual is entrusted with.
- ii. Granting the necessary authority and ability to accomplish the task assigned.
- iii. Holding the person accountable for the completion of the assigned task.²⁰

At the heart of the above, three key functional terms are clear: responsibility, authority, and accountability. These, however, will only become effectual in the ministry of elders if the pastor is intentional in training them. Moses was succeeded because he chose to under the counsel on delegation seriously (Exod 18:17-27).

Equipping the Laity

The foregoing section looked at delegation as a vehicle for working together as a team. In this section, the focus will be on equipping the laity. Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul elucidates that the Lord Himself gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints,

¹⁹ Welch, *Church Administration*, 27.

²⁰ Ibid.

till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God (Eph 4:12-16). Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, in their book, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, state that it is no longer the job of the pastor to feed the flock. They add that the pastor is called to equip church members and leaders.²¹ Thus, total member involvement will not materialize if the members are not trained. Unfortunately, and to a greater extent, this component of intentional training of elders has not been.

In his book, *The Caring Church: A Guide for Lay Pastoral Care*, Howard W Stone notes that in fact most of the leadership roles at a local church are in the hands of the elders. The elders, he says, are closer to the people than the clergy because they live with them.²² He bemoans, however, the lack of training for these laity. According to him, they lack the training and skills to carry out their duties because ministry is more than just accompanying the pastor to funerals and visitations.²³ Furthermore, Rex Edwards also added his voice when he said that when the laity understands the chemistry of the church and its calling, no one would need to push them around. He says the growth and dynamism of the church would be revolutionary and ever-moving forward.²⁴ The missing link it seems would be training and systematic orientation of the laity in ministry.

Admittedly, Rick Warren, was right when he stated that the reason most churches do not experience revival and spiritual growth is because most of the laity

²¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 191.

²² Howard W. Stone, *The Caring Church: A Guide for Lay Pastoral Care* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ Rex Edwards, *A New Frontier-Every Believer a Minister* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 6.

have not been taught the relevant skills.²⁵ He cited an example of Paul and Apollos when the apostle said I planted the seed and Apollos watered (1 Cor 3:6). Paul trained the young Apollos in mission work and was able to complete the work of the senior apostle. This is attested by Russell Burrill who says that the apostle Paul spent more time training leaders in local churches where he established new local churches.²⁶ Thereafter, he charged them to take care of the flock, after training.

Richard Gehman affirms that most church leaders are voted into office lacking accompanying gifts and skills for effective ministry.²⁷ While it is understood that the Lord guides during the election of the elders, it is still of paramount importance to train the elders. Pastors should ensure that training and learning become an integral program of the church annually.²⁸ Failure to do this, says Paul R. Stevens and Phil Collins will be like marriage without premarital counseling.²⁹ That such marriage may appear to work for a while, but it will not stand the test of time. Without making training a priority from the office of the Pastor, it will not work.

²⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growing without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Oasis International, 1995), 14.

²⁶ Russell Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Centre, 1996), 25.

²⁷ Richard J. Gehman, *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa* (Wheaton, IL: Oasis International, 2008), 17.

²⁸ Rowland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller, *The Leadership Baton: An International Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 29.

²⁹ R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 15.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

**Description of the Local Setting
and the Issue**

The previous chapter described the literature review on the need leadership and the role of the laity in the mission of the church. Evidently, the pastor-elder team emerged as a powerful tool to the nurture of new members in the church. The need for lay training cannot be over-emphasized. They are by and large in control of church affairs with or without the pastor. Hence the need for equipping the laity. The current chapter will not focus on the issue of the research and the methodology.

Besides delegation, one other principal cardinal to the growth of the church is the use of the laity. Welsh stresses that the laity is an integral part of a local church. He states that through the second and well into the third centuries, lay people were involved in the leadership of the church including liturgy in the absence of the clergy.¹ The apostles used this principle in the selection of the deacons in Acts 6:1-3. The local church is largely in the hands of the local elders. Hence, a need for a strategic program to train elders.

Carl George has described the need of most Adventist churches and says that the church with lay-empowered members as opposed to pastor-centered ministry grows exponentially through small group ministry.² Small group ministry may not be

¹ Welch, *Church Administration*, 14-15.

² Carl F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1995), 35.

the best, but it helps the church to be closer to the members and care is far more efficient. So, small group ministry is a response to a community-based ministry away from the mainstream church service. To manage small group ministry, one needs to involve the lay people.

The early church, says Russell Burrill, in his book, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, was able to accomplish much because its clergy, the laity, and the members were all organized and structured for the accomplishment of the mission.³ The approach of the early church can safely be attributed to the use of small groups in houses and the laity for church growth.

Admittedly, Burrill states that mission is the mainstay of the church.⁴ Some other church growth proponents like Logan have stressed that the church must insist on making disciples as the ultimate goal.⁵ He feels the church has put more emphasis on sending rather than disciple-making. As a result, evangelistic campaigns are seen as an end to themselves and not part of the process. The above scenario has resulted in exponential baptisms annually as the church has greatly invested in public campaigns in response to the Commission.

In their book *Disciple Making*, Earley and Dempsey have stated that the church has been conducting a great deal of evangelistic campaigns without a systematic discipleship framework.⁶ The resultant effect has been the exponential numerical growth of church membership without an active and ongoing equipping

³ Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches*, 127.

⁴ Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), 7.

⁵ Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth: Action Plans for Developing a Dynamic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1994), 96.

⁶ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 1.

program for the shepherds, the elders. Pastors have not paid due diligence about equipping elders in their congregations. Yet it is the work of the Pastor to equip members for effectual ministry (Eph 4:11-12).

From Scripture, the apostle Peter admonishes the elders to feed (1 Pet 5:2-4) the members they lead for effectual growth, and yet most of them do not receive adequate training to nurture members other than the annual general training for every leader. Strauch has observed that while the desire for one to become an elder is good (1 Tim 3:1), there is a need for appropriate training and leadership development.⁷ As stated above, the apostles assign the duty of taking care of the church members including training to elders.

Strauch further laments this lack of training for elders when he says that the absence of adequate training for elders is a source of major concern. We are not training the very men who lead and have oversight of our churches. We erroneously believe that our serving elders ... understand spiritual oversight and care, but in fact, our churches are filled with elders ... who confess that they are unprepared and untrained for their work.⁸ Thus, this chapter will examine and describe the local setting at Emmasdale SDA Church and their evangelistic programs in 2021. The chapter will also look at their practice as regards public campaigns and the nurture of new converts and how the local elders have been involved.

Geographical Context of Emmasdale

Emmasdale church, in Midlands West Zambia Conference, is situated in the City of Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. Zambia is a large land-locked country

⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 279.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

located in southern Africa surrounded by eight neighboring countries namely, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and Angola. According to the World Bank report, Zambia is experiencing a large demographic shift and is one of the world's youngest countries by median age. Its population, much of it urban, was estimated at 17.9 million people by 2021.⁹ This has largely been due to intense rural-urban migration looking for employment and improved social amenities and necessities of life. This explains why most of the cities and areas concentrated along the line of rail from Livingstone in the south linking Lusaka to the Copperbelt up north are densely populated. The larger part of the country is thinly populated.

Admittedly, life in the city of Lusaka is not homogenous but demarcated by social strata of those in high- and low-density areas. In high-density areas or slums, life is characterized by daily market sales, food places, and other street vending activities. Additionally, most of the people in slums work in low-density areas for their day-to-day living. On the other hand, those in low-density areas enjoy the benefits of the global economy of luxury life. The economy heavily depends on mineral wealth, especially copper, which accounts for the bulk export earnings. This is why more than a quarter of the Zambian population is concentrated in the Copperbelt and Lusaka industrial towns.¹⁰

⁹ Africa Chan, "The World Bank in Zambia," accessed 20 March 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zambia/overview#1>.

¹⁰ *New World Encyclopedia*, "Zambia," accessed 23 March 2022, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Zambia>.

Social-Cultural Context

Emmasdale, the area under consideration is in the city of Lusaka with a mixed population of high- and low-density communities. This then forms the mix of the church membership at Emmasdale Adventist church. On the religious front, Zambia is a “Christian nation.”¹¹ While this remains true, the nation has tolerated people of other faiths, mostly from the Asian community like Hindus and Muslims to enjoy their freedom of worship. These communities are very prevalent in the Emmasdale area. Additionally, among the Christian faiths in this community, is the large proliferation of Pentecostal churches. Prominent among them is the Bread of Life Church International¹² founded in 1992 about 200 meters away from Emmasdale Adventist Church. It is a center of religious attraction for many young people in that community.

Religious Context

Emmasdale Adventist church is situated in the middle of high- and low-density areas of the city of Emmasdale. The approach to evangelism has been rather limited to one mode, public campaign. They have attempted to do book distribution and personal witnessing, but it has not been on a large scale. Their main evangelistic thrust has been public campaigns once in every year.

¹¹ Government of Zambia, “Constitution of Zambia (Amendment): Act no. 2 of 2016,” accessed 24 April 2022, [https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/amendment_act_Constitution%20of%20Zambia%20%20\(Amendment\),%202016-Act%20No.%20_0.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/amendment_act_Constitution%20of%20Zambia%20%20(Amendment),%202016-Act%20No.%20_0.pdf).

¹² Bread of Life Church International, “About Bread of Life Church,” accessed 20 April 2022, <https://myblci.org>.

Methods of Evangelism Campaigns

The church largely depends on public campaigns which are conducted either around May or October. These are like annual events in most local congregations. They usually take about 2-3 weeks which culminate in huge baptisms. The church does not have a large open space for such campaigns. As such most of the campaigns are held indoors on church grounds. Other than the public campaigns, the church also reaps from the regular bible class members who are invited either by friends or family members. These are baptized every quarter with or without a public campaign.

Approaches to Nurturing New Members

The church does not have an active ongoing program for the nurture of new members. Usually, the practice has been that after baptism, the members are loosely assigned to guardians on the day of baptism, and most of them are strangers to each other. This approach has not worked well for the church as most of the converts and guardians themselves cannot be traced well. The post-baptism nurture of new members has not been effective. Sometimes, the new members are clustered in what is called a happiness class, but this is not well structured, and there is not one specifically trained to mentor or train the new converts. This class gradually disintegrates and loses its members.

Emmasdale is the largest of the four congregations under one District Pastor in the Lusaka City Mission District. By the end of the first quarter of 2021, the district had a total membership of 2524, of which 1160 came from Emmasdale church alone. By the end of the quarter above, Emmasdale baptized 21 new converts bringing the total membership to 1181.¹³ Seeing that the District Pastor looks after other

¹³ Midlands West Zambia Conference, *Emmasdale Adventist Church: Statistical Report, 1st Quarter 2021*, 1.

congregations, the larger part of the responsibility to nurture new members is left in the hands of elders who are not effectively trained. Thus, the church ought to be intentional to ensure elders are skilled (*trained*) in teaching others¹⁴ for effective nurture and discipleship of new converts.

Research Design

The project will use qualitative research. This type of research has many approaches among them being: Case Study, Historical, Ethnography, grounded theory and Phenomenology. But in this project, a case study was used. This approach is commonly used to examine a person, community, or institution. It also allows the researcher to draw upon multiple sources of data such as observation, interviews and documents as need may arise. In this project, however, the researcher largely used interviews. This approach includes in-depth face-to-face interactions with participants. This allowed the researcher to gain insights and understanding on participants' feelings and experiences.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher met with church leadership to explain the purpose of the research. The church leadership was informed that the research would be in the interview form of sampled groups. The sampled groups were chosen based on their role and influence in the church and they are the main groupings of the congregation. Furthermore, these groups were likely to give more information on the topic. Then the researcher proceeded to interview the church Pastor, Church Board members, ten elders (five serving and five non-serving), ten youths (five males and five females), baptized members from 2021-2022, and five elderly women. Each group responded to all the corresponding research questions provided for their group.

¹⁴ Shimray "A Training Program for Local Church Elders/Leaders in Northeast India," 28.

After the interviews, the researcher through a descriptive approach identified common or prominent key issues from the responses and thus arrive at the emerging outcomes to form conclusions.

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling technique was used to identify the thirty (33) participants from Emmasdale SDA Church, Midlands West Zambia Conference. The main goal of employing this type of sampling was to ensure that the individuals selected suited in helping the researcher answer his research questions. According to Jean Nancy Vyhmeister and Robertson, the population is a technical term for the group that needs help and for whom the program is being prepared.¹⁵ In this case, the population speaks to the demographics of the membership of Emmasdale SDA Church. In comparison, sampling on the other hand speaks to the representative group of the population. Purposive sampling was used because it allowed selection of participants including men, women, youths, elders, and newly baptized members during the period under review. These individuals were the most relevant to fulfil the project purpose.

Regarding the interview, the researcher interviewed on May 25, 2024, at Emmasdale SDA Church. Like Alexander Oppenheim has said, the purpose of all research interviews is to obtain information of certain kinds in form of factual replies or responses to attitudes, ideas, feelings, perceptions and the like.¹⁶ The researcher met all the participants to explain the purpose of the interview. Then, the consent forms were distributed after explanation, and everyone signed the forms before the

¹⁵ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry D. Robertson, *Quality Research Papers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 46.

¹⁶ Alexander N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), 66.

interviews started. Thereafter, each group was met separately before they could undertake the interviews. These now became the focus group. Like Vyhmeister has stated, a focus group not only gives the researcher an idea of what people think and say, but it allows interaction among the participants.¹⁷ This kind of interaction is not visible if surveys are used. They give a researcher to seek further clarifications on the responses.

Research Data Collection

The researcher used interviews and focused groups for data collection which addressed the following questions. An interview guide was used (annexed in the appendixes)

The questions were framed to seek an understanding from the participants of their specific views on the nurture of new converts. Where necessary, there were follow-up questions to better understand the phenomenon under study. The interviews involved the Pastor, church board members, women, and youths. After filling in the general information the participants were grouped as stated above except for the pastor. The interviewees had opportunities to cross-check each other's views to strengthen their arguments.

Data Analysis

This section describes the process of analyzing the data collected from the focus groups.

Open coding. As has been ably stated by Willey Blackwell, coding is the process of simplifying an idea or insight through which concepts or codes are attached

¹⁷ Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Quality Research Papers*, 41.

to observed data.¹⁸ He adds that this process attempts to name or classify the observed phenomenon. It is achieved by segmenting data into meaningful expressions and describing that data with a single meaningful word or short sentence of words.

Merriam adds that it is a fundamental process in qualitative research where raw data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences.¹⁹ This method is especially useful for researchers aiming to derive meaning and insights from unstructured data such as interviews

Thus, during the time of data analysis, the researcher identified, picked, and grouped the rhyming themes or codes from the groups. Additionally, the researcher also picked excerpts or verbatim from the focus groups. This was a methodical way to deconstruct and analyze the collected data, helping the researcher gain a nuanced understanding of the issue from the groups.

Relationships identification. After the above process, the researcher went on to identify relationships between categories to understand the underlying structure of the discussions.

Core themes. With the open coding and relationship identification done, the researcher identified core themes that captured the essence of the focus group discussions. The researcher then identified nine (9) core themes from the discussions and conclusions.

¹⁸ Willey Blackwell, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communication Impact* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 217.

¹⁹ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bassy, 2016), 217.

Ethical Consideration

The research ethics committee reviewed and approved the research instruments before researching so that all ethical issues are adhered to. The following ethical issues were adhered to.

- i. Ensure credit was given to all sources cited during the research.
- ii. The research also ensured the approval of the research instruments.
- iii. The researcher was provided with a letter of permission from the Midlands West Zambia Conference to conduct the research.
- iv. The researcher ensured all participants signed informed consent forms before conducting the research. This was to ensure that the participants' privacy was confidential.

Results and Discussions

The interviews and focus groups were conducted at Emmasdale SDA Church. The participants were the district pastor, the elders, both serving and non-serving, women, and the youths. The interviewees shared their views and experiences. The interviewees were excited about the topic of nurturing new converts with some suggesting that future research could focus intentionally on the youths who are leaving the church. The elders spent more time discussing the questions and had more interest in the matter. Below are some statistics of the sampled participants

There were 33 participants altogether during the interview. As can be seen from the Figure 1 below, there were more young people (0-20) years of age competing with the (41-50) years of age adults. The lowest were the 61 years and above. They were only 2 who attended the interviews.

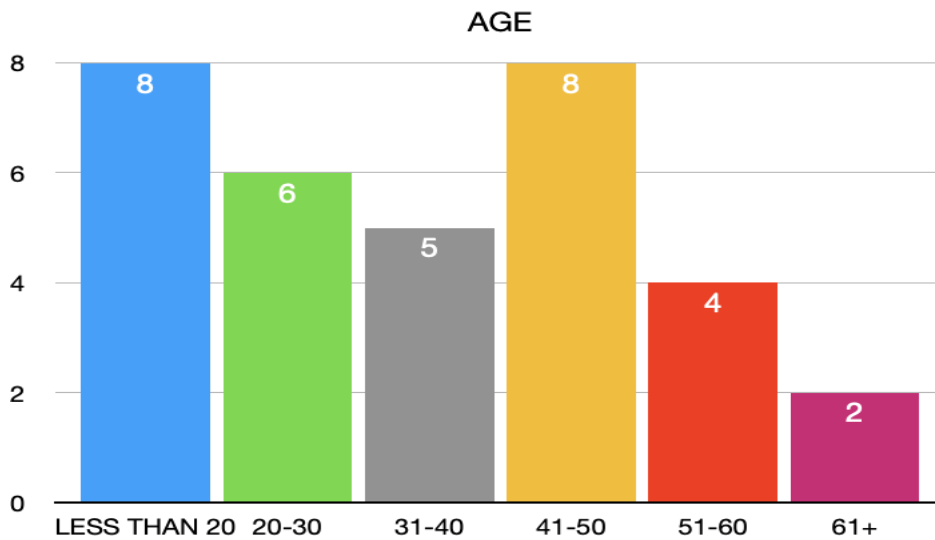


Figure 1. Age of Participants

As shown in Figure 2, of the total 33 participants, 27 were all male and only 6 were females. While to nurture newly baptized members should not be left to the pastor alone and his elders, the females felt like the nature of the interview was more masculine in nature and needed mostly elders and the pastor. Nonetheless, they made their case known during the interviews.

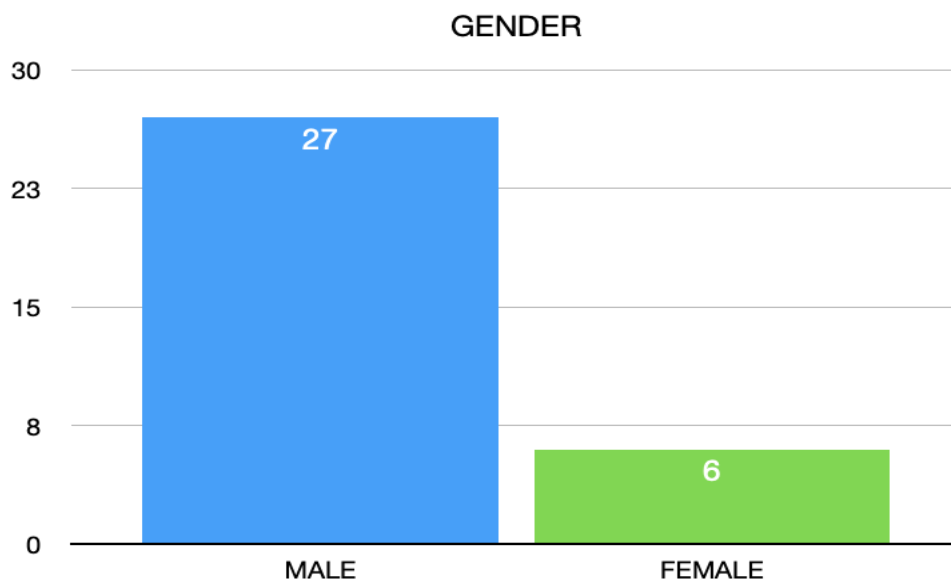


Figure 2. Gender Distribution

The Figure 3 below shows the marital status of the participants. In all the groups put together, there were no widows and widowers except for singles and the married. The singles were 17 while the married were 16. The married did not however attend the interviews as couples.

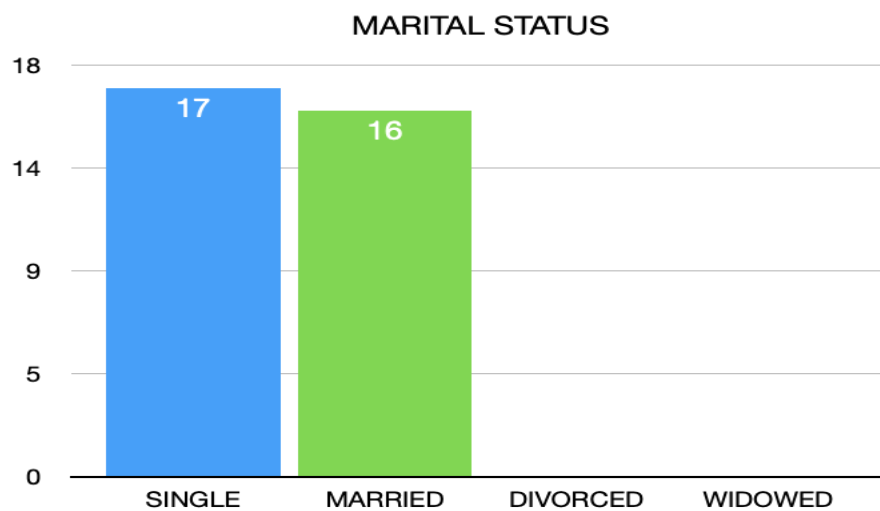


Figure 3. Marital Status

Figure 4 shows the education status of the participants which also informed the nature of the interviews. The chart shows their highest education attainment. There were 7 individuals whose level of education was secondary, 6 for colleges and 18 for universities. There were none with the primary school education level.

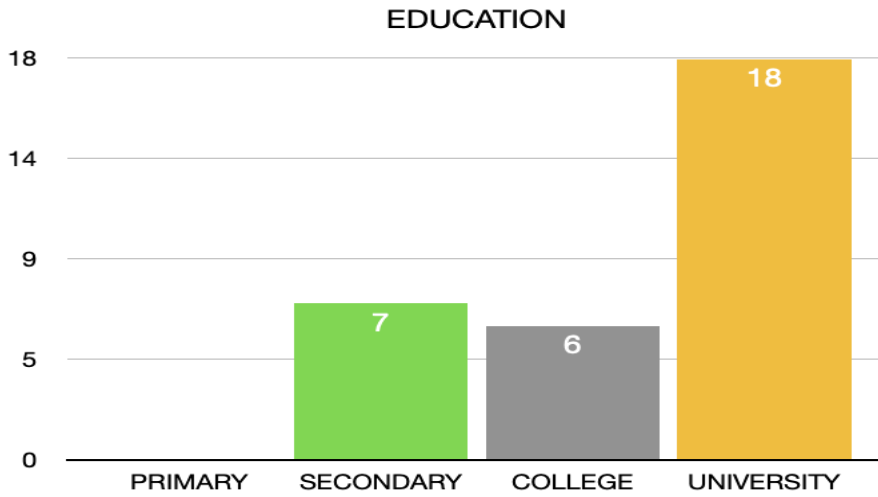


Figure 4. Education Status

Figure 5 below shows the employment status of the interviewees. There were three categories: employed, self-employed and unemployed. Those in formal employment were 14, self-employed 9 and the unemployed 10. The study to a greater extent was influenced the employed seeing they were the majority.

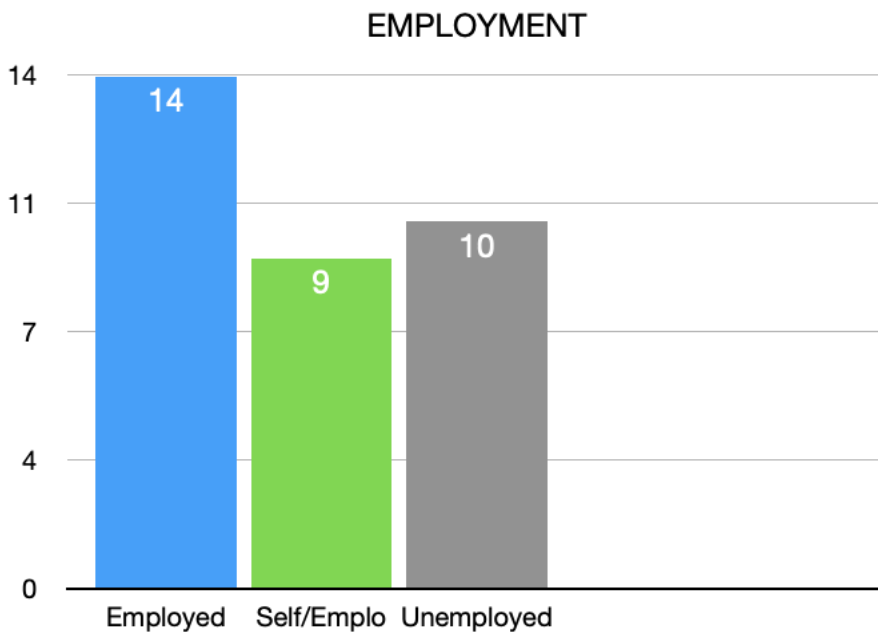


Figure 5. Employment Status

The interviews were conducted on May 25, 2024, at Emmasdale SDA Church and the following were the questions, and results analysis.

Question 1

What are local elders' current practices and approaches in nurturing new converts at Emmasdale SDA Church in Midlands West Zambia Conference? To answer this research question, one theme emerged namely poor nurturing.

Theme 1: Poor nurturing. The interviewees all acknowledged the need for nurturing the new converts which was lacking at Emmasdale SDA Church. This interview report covered responses from the interviewees. Below were some of the current practices recorded of how they are nurturing new converts.

- i. After baptism, the newly baptized members are lined up in front of the church and are assigned to guardians some of whom they have never in their own lives. These act as spiritual parents to them. This approach appeared to have been very common among all interviewees.

Unfortunately, this program is not structured and cannot be monitored as members still go missing or backslide without any update report from the guardian. The guardians themselves are not even trained to nurture the new converts. Interestingly, it was discussed that the elders are not usually part of the guardianship team.

- ii. The other practice prevalent at church was creating what they call a happiness class where the new converts continued to learn.
- iii. Further, sometimes the new members are addressed after baptism and challenged to become active in the church and join small group and departmental meetings.

Implications. There was no proper channel on how the new converts were to be nurtured. The current practices lack coherence and consistency. Thus, it was prone to fall along the way. Hence, the need for a sustainable training program that can easily be monitored and evaluated. Admittedly, failing to accomplish the mission of God efficiently is not only a failure but an acceptable before God. This explains probably what Henry and Richard Blackaby called failing God.²⁰ And this arises where there is no planning and coordinated training program. It's the role of the pastor according to the *Elder's Handbook* to equip the elders.²¹ The pastor should further develop a program which can be delegated to elders for use in his absence.

Question 2

What are the specific needs and challenges faced by elders in effectively nurturing newly baptized members within the church community?

The second question addressed the needs and challenges faced by elders on how to nurture new members. Interviewees made some observations with the specific needs of elders and the following were excerpts from the interviews. The following five themes emerged namely, resource constraints, sustainability plan, poor collaboration, lack of modelling, and lack of cohesiveness.

Theme 2: Resource constraints.

- i. It was reported that the work schedule for most elders does not allow them time to visit new converts.

²⁰ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 4.

²¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Elders' Handbook*, 77.

- ii. Notably, not only are elders unable to make visitations due to distance and transport logistics, but there was also mentioned of the large church membership, yet the elders are too few.

Theme 3: Lack of a sustainability plan.

- i. They also face another challenge lack of feedback from the guardians. That there's no system in place to check the work of the guardians and they are not accountable to anyone.
- ii. Also, it was stated that follow-up committees are disbanded after the public campaign. And so, the whole new comes on board who never knew the new converts.
- iii. That the attitude of feeling that after baptism, everything is over, has been robbing the church an opportunity to nurture new converts. The interviews noted that usually, immediately after the campaign, the evangelism crew was dismantled and dismissed. So there's no continuous connection and blood line from the preacher and his team.
- iv. The lack of a comprehensive discipleship program makes the church view baptism as the end. Thus, public campaigns come as events once a year and are not an ongoing part of the whole church life.

Theme 4: Poor collaboration.

- i. There is also a lack of collaboration between the elders and departments to nurture their new converts.
- ii. That they see themselves working hand in hand with the interest coordinator except this office is almost non-functional. There's no record of interest and follow-up programs are non-existent.

Theme 5: Lack of modelling.

- i. Sometimes the lifestyle of the elders does not model the new believers.
- ii. That most candidates are baptised without due completion of the doctrines of the church especially when they were products of a public campaign. Hence, they need a guide to help through the spiritual journey.

Theme 6: Lack of cohesiveness.

- i. Moreover, the interviews also stated that clusters in the church make it difficult for new members to bond and identify with people they relate with. Considering this development, it was stated, that many new converts find their way out of the church.
- ii. Most new converts were noticed not to have friends before, during, and after baptism. This came to be a problem as elders could not relate or associate the new converts with anyone in the church.

Implications. This was a demonstration that the church had no laid down program to be followed for nurture and retention. The church needs a comprehensive program to accommodate everyone to actively participate in the growth of new members. Leadership should schedule the programs to accommodate all stakeholders to provide opportunities for everyone to participate. This agrees with Stan Toler and Jerry Brecheisen, in their book, *Lead to Succeed: New Testament Principles for Visionary Leadership*, when they stated that members should be properly equipped so that they can be committed to accomplishing their tasks in the spirit of teamwork.²²

On doctrines for new members, the church should consider providing an ongoing active discipleship class before, during, and after baptism. Commenting on

²² Toler and Brecheisen, *Lead to Succeed*, 67.

the training, Ellen White has stated that pastors should spend less time preaching but teaching and training the members.²³ By this the leaders and members alike will be equipped for nurture and retention.

Question 3

How do local elders perceive their duty as they labour to nurture newly baptized members?

This third question was largely a response from both the serving and non-serving elders in as much as the other groups also took the interviews over the same. Generally, most of the expressions in the interviews were summed up as stated below. One theme emerged from the third question that elders view themselves as volunteers.

Theme 7: Volunteers.

- i. Most of them echoed similar sentiments that they are under shepherds working with the pastor in nurturing new converts except they do not know what the pastor knows. The pastor, they said, cannot manage alone except they lack the skills to nurture the new converts.
- ii. Most elders perceive this work as belonging to the pastor and the guardians. Their role ends with assigning the converts to caregivers.

Implications. The elders are aware of their role as under-shepherds except for their inability to perform functional duties owing to the absence of training. It is this lack of training that makes them feel they are not fit for the work. The success of any organization, says Frank Damazio, depends on a healthy relationship of teamwork.²⁴ This agrees with George Knight when he says, “In the Seventh-day Adventist Church,

²³ White, *Desire of Ages*, 825.

²⁴ Damazio, *Life Changing Leadership*, 55.

elders serve as shepherds under the guidance and leadership of the pastor. Their role is vital in providing spiritual care and leadership within the local congregation, ensuring that the church functions smoothly and that members' needs are met.”²⁵

Question 4

What strategies do they believe would be most effective in fulfilling this role?

Question 4 came live in most of the interviewees with similar responses.

Generally, it was reported that no specific strategies were employed to nurture new converts, but the following summed up the responses from the interviews. Two main themes emerged from the responses in this category: small group ministries and sustainability plans. Under sustainability plan, there were three categories namely capacity building, meal fellowship, and resource budgetary allocation.

Theme 8: Small group ministries. There was no total member involvement to integrate new converts into the mainstream church programs like in leadership or small group ministries including departments. They are usually left to fend for themselves and there are largely no strategies to nurture them. An example cited was “departmental leaders were not given handover notes of new members, so they had no idea who they were.” This would make new ones feel they were not cared for. Additionally, members felt new people were not inducted well into small or departmental meetings. So, they did not know what was expected of them. So, they tended to fall off along the way.

Theme 9: Sustainability plan. The participants also indicated that there was a need for programs that attend to regular check-ups, disciple-making approaches, and involving the new members in leadership and mission roles. As a way of developing

²⁵ Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 157.

the programs, members suggested that the church should carry out territorial assignments to assign each elder an area of operation to target specific new members. Mere so, in strategically ensuring that the elders are able to effectively nature, the following may be adopted as part of a sustainability plan.

Capacity building.

- i. Capacitate the elders to support converts spiritually. It was stated that the church through the elders should plan to secure Bibles and other spiritual pieces of literature like steps to Christ for new believers. They observed that in most cases the only thing new converts walked away with was the baptism certificate.
- ii. Put in a place a management system. The interviewees observed that even when the happiness class (class after baptism) was formed, it was not formerly conducted as there were no registers, monitoring the new converts were absent, and no follow-up. Someone said, “The guardianship program was not clearly defined and guardians did not feel obligated and accountable to anyone.” So, they felt, the church must put in place a consistent system easy to manage, care coordinators, and a prayer team.
- iii. Capacitate the elders to plan, develop, and engage an effective robust visitation program for the new members.

Meal fellowship. Additionally, it was noted the church can learn from the early church who thrived on fellowship through meals to strengthen the new believers. They shared all they had and ate together from their houses (Acts 2:42). In the meeting one said, “when we eat together, we get to hear some things we would not otherwise have heard because we are closer to one another.” This was one way, they said, the church could help the new members have a sense of belonging.

Resource budgetary allocation. It was noted in the interviews that the church must provide a budget for Bibles to be given to new members after baptism otherwise they would not have spiritual food to feast on. Further, that the church must fund the whole process of evangelism not just the public campaign.

Implications. Evidently, there was no total member involvement to integrate new converts into the mainstream church programs like in leadership or small group ministries including departments. The church also lacked a sustainable program in place to monitor and evaluate the welfare of new members. While there was an attempt to nurture the members, the system was haphazard and uncoordinated. Lack of budgetary support affected the smooth mobilization of resources, and implementation coupled with capacity building rendered the process moribund.

Admittedly, the foregoing scenario exposes a weakness in the leadership of the church and hence the need for an inclusive training program. Howard W Stone notes that most of the leadership roles at a local church are in the hands of the elders. The elders, he says, are closer to the people than the clergy because they live with them.²⁶ This then informs the need to train and equip them for effectiveness in ministry. Furthermore, Rex Edwards also added his voice when he said that when the laity understands the chemistry of the church and its calling, no one would need to push them around. He says the growth and dynamism of the church would be revolutionary and ever-moving forward.²⁷

²⁶ Stone, *The Caring Church*, 4.

²⁷ Edwards, *A New Frontier-Every Believer a Minister*, 6.

Question 5

What are the key components of an effective training program for local elders to enhance their skills and capabilities in nurturing new converts?

The groups generally highlighted the need to include in the training program of the elders.

- i. To consider ongoing refresher courses or training for elders for capacity building and skills development. One respondent said, “The training must be practical,” and yet another retorted “they should have refresher courses during the course of the year.”
- ii. To assess the needs of the church so that the training can be needs-based, practical, and relevant. Many re-echoed saying “elders should carry out a need assessment survey than to assume the needs of members.”
- iii. To make the training inclusive of elders’ spouses seeing they are an integral part of local leadership to promote team ministry.
- iv. To broaden the comprehensive understanding of the mission making it an ongoing lifestyle of the church and not an annual event focusing on public campaign alone.

Following questions 1-5 and the responses from the interviewees, the researcher proposes the following model of training with the specific components to build elders’ capacity as they disciple new converts:

1. Needs Assessment and Goal Setting:
 - i. A thorough needs assessment to identify the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities for nurturing the new converts at Emmasdale SDA Church.

- ii. Clear measurable goals and objectives for the training program should be set, and aligned with the church's mission, vision, and core values.
2. Curriculum development:
- A. A comprehensive curriculum should be designed covering essential topics such as:
 - i. Understanding the journey of faith and the needs of new converts.
 - ii. Biblical foundations for discipleship and spiritual growth.
 - iii. Effective communication and counseling skills.
 - iv. Practical strategies for mentoring and supporting new converts.
 - v. Cultural sensitivity and contextualization in ministry.
 - vi. Leadership development and pastoral care.
 - B. Interactive teaching methods should be incorporated including, case studies, role-playing, and real-life scenarios to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.
3. Training Delivery:
- 1. Implement a combination of training modalities, including:
 - i. In-person workshops and seminars led by experienced facilitators and guest speakers.
 - ii. Online courses and webinars for flexible learning opportunities.
 - iii. Peer-to-peer learning and mentoring circles to facilitate mutual support and knowledge sharing among local elders.
 - 2. The church administration should consider scheduling regular training sessions to accommodate the availability of participants and ensure continuous learning and reinforcement of key concepts.

4. Practical Application and Skill Building:

Provide opportunities for local elders to apply their learning through:

- i. Hands-on practical exercises, such as mock counseling sessions or role-playing scenarios.
- ii. Shadowing experienced mentors and observing effective disciple-making in action.
- iii. Fieldwork and ministry practicum assignments to engage directly with new converts and apply newly acquired skills in real-world settings.

5. Assessment and Feedback:

- i. Implement a system for ongoing evaluation and feedback to assess the effectiveness of the training program and identify areas for improvement.
- ii. Collect feedback from church members, mentors, and new converts to gauge the impact of the training on their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors.
- iii. Use evaluation data to refine and enhance the training curriculum and delivery methods for future iterations of the program.

6. Continued Support and Resources:

Establish a support network and resource hub for local elders, providing access to:

- i. Additional training materials, readings, and resources for ongoing learning and professional development.
- ii. Peer support groups, discussion forums, and mentoring relationships to foster community and collaboration among local elders.

Conclusion

The study was conducted at Emmasdale SDA Church in Midlands West Zambia Conference on the training of elders to nurture new converts. The study

confirmed that there exists a gap between the baptism of new members and a nurturing plan for new converts. The data collected during interviews revealed the elders, who are the main players in the nurture of new members are not adequately trained to nurture new members. The little annual training done is not sufficient to equip them for effective ministry of nurture.

Additionally, both the literature review and the theological foundations provided a framework upon which the principles of leadership could be drawn to equip the laity. These principles were drawn from both the Old and the New Testaments and other religious scholars and the policy documents of the Adventist Church. From this rich library of literature, it became evidently clear that the work of the pastor will be incomplete without the support ministry of the local church elders as teammates. However, as an equipper the pastor must train the elders on how to nurture new converts. Suggested in this study was a program with key components for effective training for elders.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of the study was to develop a strategy to train local church elders at Emmasdale SDA Church in Midlands West Zambia Conference. It was observed from the study that elders are the critical shepherds at a local church. They are involved in day-to-day administration and spiritual growth of members. Admittedly, they spend more time with the church members than the pastor. It was learnt during the research that it is very difficult for one pastor adequately take care of newly baptized members because they have many other congregations to look after.

Further, the research showed that the elders even though they are responsible for the spirituality of the members, they receive very little training to effectively nurture new members. They lack the adequate skills and capacity building programs to enhance their efficiency in nurturing. Admittedly, pastors spend almost four years in their undergraduate to study theology and yet the elders who are the key shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the need to train elders become of paramount importance. For the overview of the research, this study was covered in five chapters.

Chapter one was essentially an introduction to the study. It contains the background, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, the delimitations of the study, methodology and the definition of terms. Chapter two was essentially the literature review of works pertaining to leadership in the church, delegation and teamwork. Different scholars

were consulted both Adventists and non-Adventists on church growth, leadership, and the work of the lay people.

Chapter three focussed on the theological foundations of leadership and elders from the Old Testament through to the New Testament. The chapter focused on the leadership of heathen kings in the Old Testament. Concentration, however, was on the leadership of Moses. Principles of leadership like teamwork, delegation, and training were gleaned from the Bible stories. It was, however, in the gospels, Acts and the epistles that shed more light on the role of elders and the need for training.

In the New Testament emphasis was placed on the mission of the church, the great commission, and the call for involving all the members. In the great commission (Matt.28:19-20), it was observed that the emphasis by the saviour was on the making of disciples of all nations. The chapter drew examples from Jesus and how he trained his disciples and cited examples in the gospels of how Jesus nurtured some selected individuals to grow them into mature disciples. Such examples included Zacchaeus (Luke 19), Nicodemus (John 3), and the woman at the well (John 4). These examples demonstrated Jesus' approaches to nurturing.

It was, however, the experiences of the early church in the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles that gave more substance to the role of elders and the nurture of the believers. The early church experiences (Acts 2:40-45) gave glimpses of the apostles and the new believers continuing in the doctrines of the apostles, fellowship meals, and community service where nobody lacked anything. The epistles of the apostle Paul gave it all covering the ministry of elders and the laity. Additionally, the chapter also dealt with the position of the Adventist church on the nurture of the new members. Ellen G White was equally cited on her views regarding the nurture of new members.

Chapter four focused on the research methodology providing the research design, the population samples, validity of the research, research instruments and ethical consideration of the research. The research used the qualitative approach (interviews and group discussions) to collect data for analysis. And finally, Chapter five provided for the summary, conclusions and recommendations on the way forward regarding the training of elders to nurture new converts.

Conclusions

The research was conducted at Emmasdale SDA Church in Midlands West Zambia Conference. The outcomes of the research revealed that the nurture of new converts is a real challenge at Emmasdale church. The data revealed that a lot of lacunas on the nurture of new converts. It was observed from the analysis of the data that the new converts are loosely attached to guardians without any laid-out program for monitoring and evaluation to notice whether the new members are benefiting and growing from these attachments.

Since the purpose of the study was to focus on the training of elders, it was equally observed that elders do not receive adequate training. On one hand, they are perceived to be the under shepherds and yet on the other hand they seem not to know what to do. Data from the interviews showed that

Recommendations

The great commission (Matt 28:19-20), carries not only the command to preach but places an emphasis on disciple making and nurture. Sometimes the church has invested more in public campaigns without due consideration to nurturing of newly baptized members of the church. The data from interviews demonstrated that the nurture of new converts is a real time issue at Emmasdale SDA Church. From the

interviews, it became evident that some loose arrangement exists for some kind of nurture of new converts but may not be sustainable. Hence, the need to make specific recommendations.

Table 1. Research Questions, Findings and Recommendations

Research Questions	Major Findings	Recommendations
Current practices and approaches	<p>Use of guardianship principle.</p> <p>Creation of happiness class.</p> <p>Direct absorption into small group departmental meetings.</p>	<p>To design a comprehensive curriculum designed to cover essential topics such as: Understanding the journey of faith and the needs of new converts, biblical foundations for discipleship and spiritual growth, Effective communication and counseling skills, practical strategies for mentoring and supporting new converts, cultural sensitivity and contextualization in ministry and leadership development and pastoral care.</p> <p>To engage in interactive teaching methods including, case studies, role-playing, and real-life scenarios to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.</p>
Specific needs & challenges	<p>The work schedule of elders does allow them to have sufficient time to visit and nurture new members.</p> <p>New believers lack support systems of friends before, during and after baptism.</p> <p>Lack of monitoring mechanisms affect feedback from new converts and guardians.</p> <p>The large number of members does not match with the number of available elders.</p> <p>New members find it difficult to find support due to existing clicks or groups where they do not have friends.</p> <p>The follow-up committees which usually were in touch with new people at the time of the public campaign get disbanded.</p>	<p>To carry out a thorough needs assessment to identify the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities for nurturing the new converts at Emmasdale SDA Church.</p> <p>To set clear measurable goals and objectives for the training program should be set, and aligned with the church's mission, vision, and core values.</p> <p>To implement a combination of training modalities, including in-person workshops and seminars led by experienced facilitators and guest speakers, online courses and webinars for flexible learning opportunities, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring circles to facilitate mutual support and knowledge sharing among local elders.</p>

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued). Research Questions, Findings and Recommendations

Research Questions	Major Findings	Recommendations
	<p>Lack of collaboration between elders and departmental leaders creates a gap in the growth process.</p> <p>The lifestyle of leaders and members fail to model the new believers.</p> <p>Candidates do not adequately cover all the doctrinal topics during the campaign.</p> <p>Lack of a comprehensive discipleship program</p>	<p>To engage the church administration to consider scheduling regular training sessions to accommodate the availability of participants and ensure continuous learning and reinforcement of key concepts.</p> <p>To establish a support network and resource hub for local elders, providing access to additional training materials, readings, and resources for ongoing learning and professional development, peer support groups, discussion forums, and mentoring relationships to foster community and collaboration among local elders.</p>
Perception about their roles	<p>They perceive themselves as under shepherds to the pastor.</p> <p>They see themselves collaborating with the interest coordinator.</p> <p>Others feel it's the work of the pastor that's his job. They can help when they free.</p>	<p>To provide opportunities for local elders to apply their learning through hands-on practical exercises, such as mock counseling sessions or role-playing scenarios, shadowing experienced mentors and observing effective disciple-making in action, fieldwork and ministry practicum assignments to engage directly with new converts and apply newly acquired skills in real-world settings.</p>
Foreseeable strategies	<p>Every member to be involved not just the pastor and the elders.</p> <p>Involving the new members in active church programs through a comprehensive discipleship program.</p> <p>That the church budgets for nurture especially literature for new members</p>	<p>To implement a system for ongoing evaluation and feedback to assess the effectiveness of the training program and identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>To collect feedback from church members, mentors, and new converts to gauge the impact of the training on their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors.</p> <p>To use evaluation data to refine and enhance the training curriculum and delivery methods for future iterations of the program.</p>

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued). Research Questions, Findings and Recommendations

Research Questions	Major Findings	Recommendations
Training program- Key components	<p>Lack of ongoing refresher courses or training of elders for capacity building and skills development.</p> <p>Lack of needs assessment survey leading to uncoordinated approach to nurture.</p> <p>Lack of inclusive training for elders' involving spouses seeing they are an integral part of local leadership to promote team ministry.</p> <p>Lack of comprehensive understanding of the mission making it an ongoing lifestyle of the church and not an event for focusing on public campaign alone.</p>	<p>To carry out a needs assessment survey.</p> <p>To develop a comprehensive curriculum development for capacity building.</p> <p>Training delivery.</p> <p>To provide opportunities for local elders to apply their learning.</p> <p>To provide for assessment and feedback.</p> <p>To enhance continued support and resource mobilization.</p>

Recommendations for Future Studies

The researcher recommends for future use that:

1. This project may become a basis for future quantitative research on other related topics on nurture and retention of members.
2. Research on implementing the disciple making process through the GROW model discussed in this project to growing strong, rooted and mature believers.
3. Research on strategies the church can considers to source a budget to support the GROW model in all the 5 agrarian stages of prepare, plant, cultivate, harvest and preserve was discussed in this project. This will help support the process and not an event. It is also an opportunity for every member to participate

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