Perceptions and Challenges of Church Records Management among Seventh-day Adventist Pastors in Africa

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ABSRACT—The membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa is estimated to constitute the highest as compared to other regions of the world. This may have been enhanced by factors such as the high receptibility of its message on the continent. The amount of membership that the church holds in Africa has corresponding implication on the volume of records that its clergy and other record managers' process. However, there are concerns about the dependability of some of these records and how they impact the global church statistics and decisions. The reliability of church records could be influenced by the perceptions and certain challenges of the records creators and managers. Therefore, this paper, using an empirical research method, investigated the perceptions and challenges of church records management among pastors of the church on the continent. The return rate of the survey was 56.22 percent. The study found that the respondents have good perception of records and the role they play in organizational efficiency. Some challenges such as lack of disaster-preparedness, inadequate funding, lack of personnel training, unavailability and or/or inadequate

organizational policies on records, and inadequacy of storage facilities were identified. Therefore, it was recommended that the organizations of the respondents should address these issues for effective and efficient records management.

Keywords: Adventist Church, Africa, Records Management, Perceptions, Challenges.

I. Introduction

Effective records management plays significant roles in organizational efficient and effective service delivery. This implies that if records are not well managed it could impact organizational efficiency and even compromise the integrity of records transmitted from one organization to another. According to the International Standard Organization (ISO), (2019, par. 3), records refer to "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business." Similarly, records are described as "stored information, regardless of media or characteristics, made or received by an organization that is evidence of its operations and has value requiring its retention for specific period of time" (Read and Ginn, 2011, p. 1). Records, then, are very important to any organization. Records Management refers to the "efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records, including processes of capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records" (Sihlezana, 2006, p. 23).

Records generation in ecclesiastical circles today seems to be growing faster. This development is evident in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) which organizes its services into several departments at the local church level and functions in a hierarchy of organizations. The church has no less than sixteen departments at the local church level. These departments may differ from one local church to another. The groupings of the departments also defer at the higher organizations. Each of these departments or units creates, receives and is expected to maintain records as evidence of the transaction of its businesses and/or in fulfilment of legal obligations. Some of the records created and managed by the

church are membership statistics, minutes, administrative records, personnel issues, financial, birth, marriage, death, and records of religious activities.

Further, it is normally required that these records are transmitted to higher levels of the church where and when needed. These records created, received and maintained at the local church level or transmitted to the other levels of the organization are significant to the administration of the church. Thus, well-managed church records can promote efficiency and improvement in the performance and achievement of better results for organizations.

The significance that the Seventh-day Adventist Church gives to records may be summed by the periodic reports required from each level of the church. Each level of the church requires monthly, quarterly and/or annual reports from lower organizations. At the local church level, it is expected that the leadership of departments give reports of its activities to the church membership on a quarterly basis. However, it is doubtful if this practice is sustained in most churches. Further, the integrity of some of the records transmitted to higher organizations is also sometimes queried. Nonetheless, these records are consulted for decisions, plaining, accountability, and even to fulfil legal requirements and could minimize risk factors that the church may face. Hence, records are invaluable for the church's administrative functions. Lipchak (2002) has argued on the significance of effective records management. He contends that records provide vital information needed for decisions, give perspective to issues for adequate decisions, and assist in problem solving and information sharing.

However, for records to support the achievement of the church goals there is a need for record managers—pastors or church leaders who directly handle records or influence records generation and management in their respective assignments—who have proper perceptions of records/records management. It is also important that they have limited inhibitions for effective records management. However, it seems some of these records' management personnel have some impediments to effective records management. These impediments seem to include their perceptions and other limiting factors amongst those who have primary responsibility of the management of records. These issues may correspondingly affect the integrity and useful life of records. Our

observations point to the fact that one of the frustrating factors is the accumulation of paper records which are normally discarded without due process whenever the record managers are overwhelmed by the heaps resulting from these records. This in turn causes a problem of retrieval for decisions. It could also be that the absence and/or ignorance of appropriate policies and technical limitations cause some limitations and affect effective records management. It is against this background that this study investigated the perceptions and challenges of church records management among Seventh-day Adventist church pastors in Africa. The objectives of this study therefore were to:

    i. Determine the perceptions of church records management amongst Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Africa.

    ii. Determine and evaluate the challenges of church records management amongst Seventh-day Adventist pPastors in Africa.

II. Review of Related Literature

Literature indicates that church records have varied significant values. The Berean Research Institute (2019, par. 2), posits that membership records are significant to the church for "legal protection, administrative advantage, disciplinary matters and control, and bragging rights." Records also have financial value. Similarly, Shepherd and Yeo (2003, p. xi) contend that records have value because organizations would need them when they are required for accountability in areas of legal, regulatory and fiscal requirements. Churches and their agencies in most societies are subject to external accountability and are responsible for their actions both to their members and the general public. Hence, records may be required for legal purposes to demonstrate the integrity of a church's activities. For instance, accurate membership records are critical in circumstances where many who claim to hold membership ofin the church have since left. Hence, the internal and external accountability of membership records could protect both the church and its members from litigations and embarrassment. This situation may arise when a church may be required to present its membership book as evidence in court or for public examination.

Consequently, this reality requires an efficient record's management processes which create, receive and manage records in such a way that what is important is not trivialized and which also protects important records. Thus, with increasing internal and public scrutiny of the church and its activities, since it functions within legal boundaries of societies, it does seem that records may equip organizations to account for and/or defend the actions they may have taken (Shepherd and Yeo, 2003, p. xi).

B. Ajewole (1999, p. 6) argues that records function as part of the corporate memory of an organization. This is so because it is impossible for officials to remember everything, and older generations may not always be available for consultation. This observation of records serving as "corporate memory" no doubt, also applies to church records. Church records therefore could serve as the chain of communication between the past and future generations. In other words, these records can be used to describe, reconstruct, or interpret an event or situation of the past. In this way, reliable records could provide substantial raw materials for future management decisions and planning.

Records and records management aid in quality decision-making. In order to make appropriate decisions, managers must have appropriate information. It is understood that "in today's business environment, the manager that has the relevant data first often wins, either by making the decision ahead of competitors, or in the case of a government department, by making a better, more informed decision" (Nwaomah, 2013, p. 28). In the case of a church records, it is possible that some church administrative bodies basedmight, on the basis of membership statistics supplied, might take wrong decisions. Therefore, reliable church records can help to ensure that decision makers have the information they need and when they need it since decisions are only as good as the information on which they are based.

Another critical value of church records is how they can impact on the mission of the church. The significance of this is based on the fact that membership indicates the growth of a church. Hence, a large membership number in record books not corresponding with the physical and active membership could be misleading on the numerical strength of a church and misrepresent its mission accomplishment. On the other hand, the mission progress of a church may be underreported where the physical and active memberships are less than the book membership. Reflecting

on this, Trim (2015, pp. 20–21) suggests that the church has suffered from "statistical illusion" because of the irregularity of membership audit. Thus, the church growth rates may have been misrepresented in the past before the major membership audits that were done in the last five years prior to 2015.This is very significant for the church in Africa, which has a significant percentage of the global membership of the Church. Consequently, the Church in Africa can be repositioned for mission when there is a correlation between its active and book membership.

Nevertheless, studies in other areas have shown that among the limitations of records management are lack of disaster-preparedness, inadequate or absence ofnon-existent security plan, largely due to inadequate funding, staffing and inadequate supplies (Nglube, 2005, pp. 15–23; Nwaomah, 2017, pp. 87–102). Similarly, the advantages of the utilization of ICT, personnel training, and availability of organizational policies on records management cannot be overemphasized (Oyaro, 2013). Further, certain factors such as gender, age, experience and voluntariness have been identified as influencing perceptions of user's belief and use of information systems in records management (Feng and Pan, 2016, pp. 124–151). Although these studies were not done from the perspective of church records management, their implications for church records may not be disputed. Therefore, in the absence of complete, accurate and authoritative records of church actions and decisions, it seems impossible for members, leadership and the public to ascertain whether church organizations/ institutions or officials have performed effectively and fulfilled the public trust.

Therefore, from this survey of literature review of the broad significance of records, we might conclude that an ineffective records management could adversely affect the quality of decisions, planning, and accountability, impede legal requirements, and magnify risk factors that a church may face. This situation could negatively impact on mission.

III. Methodology of the Empirical Study

A. Population, Sampling Techniques and Methods of Data Collection

In an effort to investigate the current situation of records management in the Seventh-day-Adventist Church in Africa, a survey was conducted to assess the perceptions and identification of some challenges that influenced the management of church records. The Church is organized into three regional divisions in Africa. These are the East-Central Africa Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and the West-Central Africa Division. Each division is further divided into levels called Unions which supervise the work of the church in countries or geographical regions within a country. The Unions are also organized into administrative units called Conferences which has local churches as their subordinate units. The Church also owns and operates tens of educational and health institutions across the continent.

The sample population consisted of pastors and workers studying for graduate degrees at the Adventist University of Africa (AUA). The programmes at the Theological Seminary at the time of this study were, Master of Arts in Missiology, Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies, Master of Divinity, Master of Chaplaincy, Master of Arts in Leadership, Doctor of Ministry, and Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical and Theological Studies. The study used the Stratified random sampling technique to obtain a good representation of the population from the three divisions. A questionnaire of three sections was used to collect data for this study. Section A sought the demography of the respondents., Ssections B and C, using a five-point Likert scale–, namely: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree–, surveyed on the perceptions and challenges of church records management respectively. About one hundred and sixty questionnaires were administered. A total of ninety copies of usable questionnaires were retrieved at the cut-off point for the date 0f collection. This represented 56.22 per cent response rate.

B. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The demographic data of the respondents, are represented in Figures 1-4, respectively.

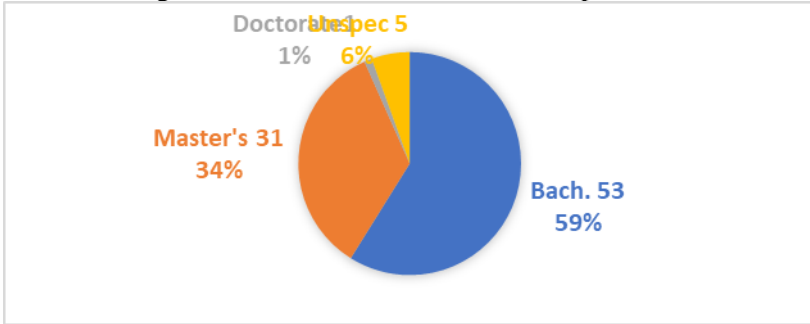Figure 1: Educational Status of the Respondents

Figure 1, above, represents the educational status of the respondents. The data here suggests that more than half of the respondents (59%) have a bachelor's degree while 34% have a master's degree.
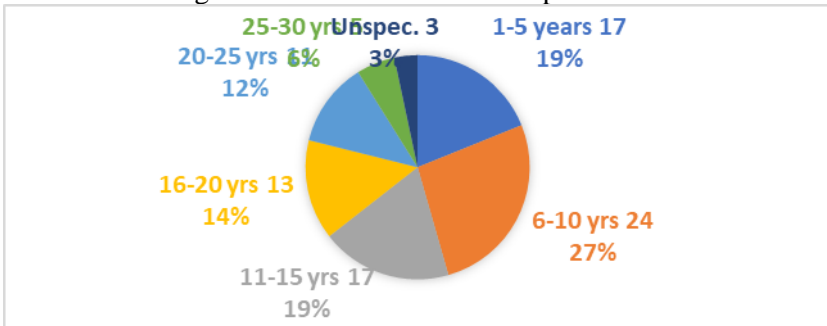
Figure 2 Years of Service of Respondents

Figure 2, above, represents the years of service of the respondents. About 46% of the respondents wereare in the first decade of their service years, while 33% are in the second decade of their years of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Further, the data indicated that 18% had between 20 and 30 years in pastoral and denominational service. However, 3% did not disclose their years of service. One may conclude from the overall response that the respondents had rich experiences in ministry and have had exposure to records management for a long time.

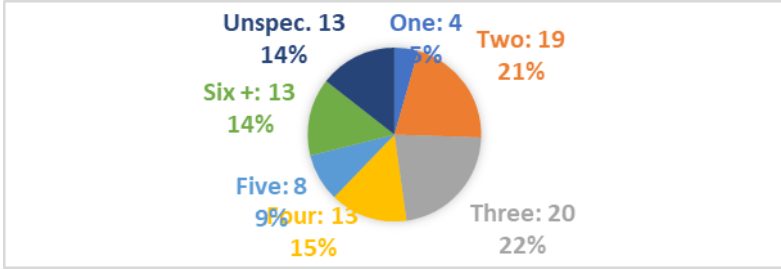Figure 3: Number of Previous Ministry Locations of the Respondents

Figure 3, as shown, represents the number of previous ministry locations of the respondents. The results signified that 5% haved served in four locations, 21% in two locations, and 22% in three locations. Further, 15% have had four locations of service, 9% have worked in eight locations and 14% have worked in six or more locations. The remaining 14% did not specify the number of locations in which they have functioned. This suggested a high mobility of the Seventh-day Adventist Church pastors surveyed and also indicated that they had been exposed to church records in multiple locations and setting of ministries.

Figure 4: Division of Respondents

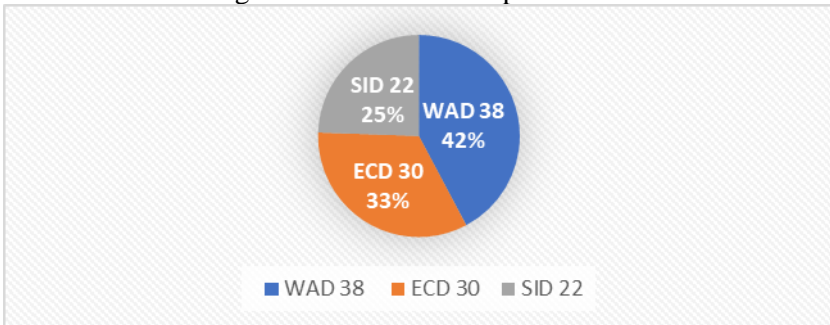Figure 4, above, revealed the number and percentage of respondents according to the three division. It shows that ECD had 33 %, SID 22% and WAD had 42% of the respondents. While this result is indicative of the return rate of the students of the three divisions studying at AUA, it does not mean that the number of pastors in the employment of the each of the divisions are in that orderther of hierarchy.

Objective :1 Determine the Perceptions of Church Records Management Amongst Seventh-day Adventist Pastors in Africa

Table 1: Perceptions of Church Records Management

Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree					
Items	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mea n	Std. Deviation
My Organization receives, creates and uses paper records	90	1.00	5.00	4.43 33	.82175
My organization creates and uses electronic records	90	1.00	5.00	4.11 11	.96506
Records play significant roles in the effective management of an organization	90	1.00	5.00	4.60 00	.73132
I am familiar with the roles church records play in organizational efficiency	90	1.00	5.00	4.40 00	.87152
I think adopting a records management system is important to my organization	90	1.00	5.00	4.68 89	.62969
There is an undue emphasis on records management in the church	90	.00	5.00	2.82 22	1.36223
I am overwhelmed with management of church records	90	1.00	5.00	2.80 00	1.22887

Mean Legend:
4.00 – 5.00 = Very High   3.50 – 3.99 = High.
3.00 – 3.49 = Moderate   2.00-2.99 = Low   1.00 – 1.99 = Very Low

The perceptions of church records management in the Adventist Church in Africa is analyzed and presented in Table 1 above. The responses to Qquestions one1 gave a mean of 4.4333. This revealed that a very large percentage of the respondents agreed with the statements

indicating that their organizations create, receive and maintain produce records such as membership, minutes, administrative records, personnel issues, financial, birth, marriage, death, and records of religious activities. The responses to Qquestion number two2, with a mean of 4.111, indicated that the respondents asserted that they created and used electronic records in their assignment. Further, on the perceptions of church records, the responses' mean of 4.6000 in question number three Question 3,and 4.4000 for question number fourQuestion 4, and 4.6889 for question number fiveQuestion 5, indicated that the respondents recognized the importance of records management to the church organization. Further, based on responses to questions six and sevenQuestions 6 and 7, which though havinge means of 2.8222 and 2.8000 respectively, it could still be concluded that about half of the respondents suggested there werewas no undue emphasis on records management; neithernor are the respondents overwhelmed with the management of church records. Consequently, there is a general healthy perception about church records and the role they play in the efficient and effective administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. Therefore, we may conclude that the perception about church records and the role they play in the efficient and effective is healthy and reassuring as reported in Table 1.

Objective 2: Determine and evaluate the challenges of church records management amongst Seventh-day Adventist Pastors in Africa

Table 2: Challenges of Church Records Management

Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree						
	Items	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mea n	Std. Deviati on
1	I understand the term records management	90	1.00	5.00	4.20 00	.76731

2	My organization has records management policy specifying standards and procedures to use in the creation, control and maintenance of records	90	1.00	5.00	3.3778	1.21394
3	My organization has some measures for preserving and protecting records and archives against deterioration and destruction in the event of an emergency or disaster	90	1.00	5.00	3.4000	1.11979
4	I have had difficulties in accessing certain records needed for work in my new location	90	1.00	5.00	3.3889	1.26930
5	There are adequate filing cabinets and other equipment for the management of paper records in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	3.4778	1.20138
6	It is easier for me and more convenient to manage physical records than electronic records	90	1.00	5.00	2.8556	1.19513
7	My organization subscribes to On-line Hosting for critical documents	90	1.00	5.00	2.7444	1.12740
8	We do have some systems for the management of electronic records in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	3.6222	1.14732
9	I am familiar with the term records appraisal	90	1.00	5.00	3.0111	1.10661

10	My organization has a regular schedule for appraisal of its records	90	1.00	5.00	2.74 44	1.0971 0
11	There are established criteria to assign values to records during appraisal in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	2.73 33	1.0364 2
12	There are clear policies to determine obsolete records and which records to be disposed in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	2.82 22	1.0448 1
13	There is a documented filing system in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	3.86 67	1.0726 4
14	There is a records room in my place of work	90	1.00	5.00	3.35 56	1.2021 6
15	In the unlikely event of a disaster, my organization has document replacement coverage	90	1.00	5.00	2.96 67	1.1460 7
16	I have attended an in-service workshop or seminar on records and archives management	90	1.00	5.00	2.61 11	1.3298 2
17	There is an annual budget provision for records management in my organization	90	1.00	5.00	2.70 00	1.0434 4
18	My associates have received some form of training in records management	90	1.00	5.00	3.01 11	1.0652 3
19	The current records management practices in my church is adequate and sustainable	90	1.00	5.00	3.05 56	1.0743 3

Mean Legend:
4.00 – 5.00 = Very High   3.50 – 3.99 = High
3.00 – 3.49 = Moderate   2.00-2.99 = low   1.00 – 1.99 = Very Low

The challenges of church records management in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa were analyzed and presented in Table 2, above. The responses in Table 2 are very revealing about the challenges of managing church records in the church in Africa. From the data, there was a very high understanding of the term records management as indicated in the responses of Qquestion 1 with a mean of 4.2000. The moderate mean of 3.3778 of the responses to Qquestion 2 could indicate an absence of or ignorance of records management policy specifying standards and procedures to use in the creation, control, and maintenance of records in most Adventist organizations. In the same manner, it could be concluded from the response to Qquestion 3, with a mean of 3.4000, that a good number of respondents were uncertain about the availability of measures for the preservation and protection of records and archives against deterioration and destruction in the event of an emergency or disaster. This could also mean that such measures were lacking in the respondents' locations of work.

Similarly, it could be reasoned from the majority of responses to Qquestion 4, which gave a moderate mean of 3.3889, that some respondents were uncertain if they have had difficulties in accessing records that were needed for decisions when they were transferred to new locations or given new assignments. Similarly, there seemed an uncertainly ofon the availability of adequate filing cabinets and other equipment that are essential for the management of records in their organization, as indicated in Qquestion 5 with a mean of 3.4778. We may conclude from these responses that there werewas inefficiency of records management in the respondents' organizations. However, about half of the respondents to Qquestion 6, with a mean of 2.8556, indicated they could manage both physical and electronic records. However, based on the mean of 2.7444 from the responses to Qquestion 7, it seemed none of the organizations of the respondents subscribed to Oon-line hosting for critical documents. This may lead to loss of critical documents in the event of disasters that may affect records. Although, there seemed to exist some forms of systems for the management of electronic records in the respondents' organization, as the mean of 3.6222 for Qquestion 8 reveals.

This may imply electronic filing of some documents in within the organizations.

The respondents seemed to have some understanding of records appraisal, according to responses to Qquestion 9, with a mean of 3.0111. However, fFurther, the indications from the responses to Qquestions 10-12, with means of 2.7444, 2.7333 and 2.8222, respectively, hinted there areis no regular schedule for appraisal of records and no well-established criteria to assign values to records during appraisal. Hence, there could be challenges in determining obsolete records, which records to be disposed of, or which to extend their lives. However, there were indications of some forms of documented fling systems in the respondents' work places. These are implied in the responses to Qquestion 13, which has a mean of 3.8667. Further, the responses to Qquestion 14 with a mean of 3.3556, seemed to suggest the existence of records rooms in the surveyed respondents' places of work. However, the mean of 2.9667 derived from the responses to Qquestion 15, implied a dearth of, or weak document replacement coverage in case of a disaster in most organizations. It could also imply that some respondents were unaware of such document replacement coverages for their organization.

On the aspect of training in records management, the indication of the responses to Qquestion 16, with a mean of 2.6111, is that most of these pastors have hardly received training in records management in spite of the high level of education as shown in Figure 1 above. From Qquestion 18, with a mean of 3.0111, some of the respondents were also not certain if their associates have also received any training in records management. This could imply that most of the respondents sampled, and their associates, have had no or less exposure to training forums that would adequately equip them to function best in the task of records management. It may be concluded that one of the major reasons for this deficiency in training is the absence of an annual budget for records management in the organizations as indicated in the responses to Qquestion 17 with mean of 2.7000. Therefore, there is doubt that the current record management practices in most of the organizations are adequate and sustainable, as the mean of 3.0556 to Question 19 revealed.

The challenges affecting church records management in the population of study may adversely influence the administration of the church. These challenges which include lack of disaster-preparedness,

and inadequacy or absence of a security plan, largely due to inadequate funding, staffing, and inadequate supplies, agrees with the study of Ngulube (2005, pp. 15–23). It was also found that lack of personnel training, unavailability and/or inadequate organizational policies on records management also hindered effective records management of the respondents. This also agreed with a study on the relevance of these elements to records management (Oyaro, 2013). This study also found that the some of the respondents surveyed indicated that there were no designated records room and off-site storage for their physical records. Further, there seemed to be inadequacy or ignorance of policies or guidelines for records management. Such challenges could affect the useful life and integrity of records. The implications are that this situation could in turn negatively affect the quality of decisions, planning, and accountability, impede legal requirements, and magnify risk factors that the Seventh-day Adventist Cchurch in Africa may face. This situation could also negatively impact on the mission of the Cchurch.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has found that the pastors of the Seventh-day Adventist Cchurch in Africa have a good perception of records and the role they play in organization. However, it is clear from the findings they face some challenges in the management of records. Therefore, we make the following recommendations.

First, the various levels of organizations and institutions of the Seventh-day Adventist Cchurch in Africa should familiarize themselves with the records management policy of the world Cchurch and undertake the development of specific policies and guidelines that would enhance effective records management.

Second, the Cchurch should also encourage the establishment of an appropriate, healthy, and secure records centers/ storage facilities in levels where they do not currently exist. This would guarantee the useful life of records and make them easily accessible for the various functions they play. This could also minimize challenges that church workers may encounter recovering records when they find themselves in new locations of service without adequate handover notes.

Third, there is an urgent need for the establishment of an off-site storage for physical records especially at the Conferences and Union administrative levels of the Church which serve as the custodian of most of the records that are generated by the local churches and transmitted to the higher organizational arms of the Cchurch. Similarly, local organizations where appropriate should engage the services of on-line document hosting agencies. This can guarantee recovery of records in the event of disasters.

Fourth, the secretariat of the various church organs, departments/institutions of the church in Africa, that deals with records should provide more robust training and facilitate the same for records managers. The emphasis for Ddivisions, Unions, and Conferences should not only be on membership statistics atto the detriment of other records that are vital to the church.

Sixth, the importance of records to organizational effective service delivery requires intentionality for annual budget provision specifically for records management. Therefore, it is imperative for the various levels of church organizations to make adequate budgetary provisions for records management. The church should invest onin records management in the training of records management personnel in the essential principle of records management and provisions of adequate supplies.

We conclude that the need for a positive perception and adequate provisions to minimize the challenges for effective records management cannot be over-emphasized for the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its internal and public accountability in Africa.

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