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Proposed Solution to the Problem of Member Retention for the South Sao Paulo Conference

Nilson S. Ferreira

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF MEMBER RETENTION
FOR THE SOUTH SÃO PAULO CONFERENCE

By

Nilson Silva Ferreira

Advisor: Ricardo Norton

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF MEMBER RETENTION
FOR THE SOUTH SÃO PAULO CONFERENCE

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Date completed: February 2011

Problem

The South São Paulo Conference loses an average of 32 percent of its members per year as a result of dissatisfaction with the church. According to the Office of Archives and Statistics of the Central Brazilian Union,¹ the South São Paulo Conference baptized 2,057 people in 2004 and 797 dropped out of the church, resulting in a 38 percent church dropout rate in that year. In 2005, the conference baptized 2,516 people and 1,000

¹ Office of Archives and Statistics, "World Church Statistics – Central Brazil Union Conference (1999-2010)," http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=258984 (accessed April 2, 2007).

dropped out, for a disaffiliation rate of 39 percent.² In 2006, 2,746 were baptized and 456 dropped out, for a disaffiliation rate of 19 percent. In 2007, the conference baptized 2,904 people and 1,010 dropped out, a disaffiliation rate of 35 percent. In 2008, the conference baptized 3,029 people and 927 dropped out, resulting in a disaffiliation rate of 31 percent. In 2009, the conference baptized 3,258 people and 844 dropped out, for a disaffiliation rate of 27 percent. The loss of membership in this conference is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Method

The research method used to conduct this study was the quantitative survey approach, as presented by the *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement*.³ For the purpose of this study, 100 former Seventh-day Adventists from four congregations in the South São Paulo Conference were selected to participate in the survey. These former members voluntarily participated in the survey and answered questions regarding their reasons for leaving the church.⁴

Results

A discipleship seminar was created and implemented that produced an environment of spiritual acceptance among church members. Once the participants

² Office of Archives and Statistics, "World Church Statistics."

³ Delbert C. Miller, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), 40-55.

⁴ See Appendix A, 100.

understood the meaning of discipleship, especially the new converts, they demonstrated confidence in the program and became engaged with it. They understood that this seminar was helpful to them as a significant spiritual tool to strengthen their faith.

Conclusions

This document describes and records the development, implementation, and evaluation of a proposed solution to the problem of member retention for the South São Paulo Conference in Brazil. It has been evaluated as to its practicality and potential as a successful member retention program among the Seventh-day Adventist churches in the South São Paulo Conference. This model is an approach that complements rather than competes with other methods to retain members within the church.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF MEMBER RETENTION
FOR THE SOUTH SÃO PAULO CONFERENCE

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Nilson S. Ferreira
February 2011

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Membership retention has always been a major problem for religious leaders in some denominations. According to Donald Smith, membership loss is a complex trend that all churches have to deal with, but it is important to consider that every church is unique. In addition, Smith stated that the phenomenon of church dropouts is worse than a treadmill: the faster we run, the farther behind we get.¹ According to Alphonse Dupront, in any good evangelism program conducted by the church, a parade of people comes to the front door, but before we notice it, they drift out the back.²

This phenomenon was even present during the Old Testament period, as we can see in the story of the worship of the golden calf.³ The children of Israel who were born out in the Sinai Desert accepted the authority of the Levites and became socialized into the Jewish religious system set up by Moses. By the end of the forty-year period, the generations born in Egypt had pretty much all died out and the older generation of Sinai-

¹ Donald P. Smith, *How to Attract and Keep Active Church Members* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 17.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ Paul Nadim Tarazi, *The Old Testament: Historical Traditions* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1991), 30.

born Hebrews were solidly formed into the twelve tribes that recognized the Levites as their religious leaders.⁴

This brings up two major background points relevant to the discussion of member retention in today's Seventh-day Adventist churches. It is, as a basic rule, far easier to socialize children born into a religious group into the rituals and practices of that religious group than it is to recondition older people into being part of a new religious system and accepting the authority of the church leaders. Thus, once the Jewish religious system was well established, the children of Jewish parents thought of themselves as Jews, and this socialization continued in Israel for generation after generation, down through the centuries.⁵ And thus it has tended to be for Christian groups in Brazil, with the children of Methodists becoming Methodists, and so forth.

Nevertheless, one cannot count on this type of member retention when new spiritual influences and persuasive religious leaders begin to affect church members, especially when dissatisfaction already exists with the church leaders over spiritual teachings or worldly matters or both. These transformative forces have been at work in Brazil. While tradition and socialization have produced a certain level of member retention for many years, new religious groups have arisen that appeal to the church members of existing religions—especially when these groups are led by energized leaders who are also persuasive speakers. Therefore, for example, the Universal of God's Kingdom Church came into formation in Brazil by drawing members from the Catholic

⁴ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Story and Faith: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1986), 67.

⁵ Louis Goldberg, *Fire on the Mountain: Past Renewals, Present Revivals, and the Coming Return of Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2000), 83.

Church.⁶ However, many of the members who joined the Universal of God's Kingdom Church became disenchanted and moved over to the Baptist Church.⁷ Eventually, a number of disenchanted members of these churches moved over to the Adventist Church—and the process continues to this present time.⁸

A major factor in this process is that church leaders often perceive the agitation of these members as rebelliousness—not just against the church, but against the Lord. Therefore, the leaders may not make any reforms in response to this agitation or even consider that they have acted in an un-Christian manner. Church leaders may very well perceive themselves as modern-day Moses figures who must stamp down the evil ones, and crush the rebellion, as if God had given them the authority. Alongside this theme of rebellion, “considerable importance is also attached in the later history of Israel to the theme of the faithfulness God showed to the people in the wilderness.”⁹ The point is that church leaders may push the members out of the church by perceiving rebelliousness too quickly. If the members sense that the church is unfaithful to them, they will be motivated to search for God elsewhere. In any case, several members might continue to search for the right church for them.

⁶ Maria Isaura P. Queiroz, *Identidade Nacional, Religião, Expressões Culturais: A Criação Religiosa no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Graal, 1988), 59-93.

⁷ Candido Procopio Ferreira de Camargo, *Católicos, Protestantes, Espíritas* (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1993), 57.

⁸ Alphonse Dupront, *Antropologia Religiosa* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Le Goff, J. & Nora, 1998), 62.

⁹ Howard Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 53.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the large amount of member retention literature published in past years, no researcher within the Seventh-day Adventist church in Brazil has yet seriously examined the significant outflow of church members, especially during the last decade, as a result of being dissatisfied with the church and the strict Adventist lifestyle. Although Adventist church leaders insist that their strict lifestyle standards are correct for living a Christian life, the challenge goes far beyond a conflict over lifestyle: some churches tend to be categorized as been acting against the teachings of Jesus with regard to loving and caring its members.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to uncover the reasons for the high dropout rate in the South São Paulo Conference in Brazil and to suggest a plan of action that will foster the retention of church members.

Justification of the Project

The high percentage of people who drop out of the church each year in the South São Paulo Conference is affecting the life and growth of the church. This is a relevant project because it shows that the member growth rate is being affected by the considerable number of members that stop attending church, resulting in unhealthy growth. This project suggests a possible solution to the problem through the implementation of seminars on discipleship that should strengthen the church members, help them become more active than passive, and thus help them avoid becoming church dropouts.

Description of the Study

This project centers on the study of church members' reasons for dropping out, while providing solutions from the Bible and selected experts in the field of church administration. It also seeks to bridge the gap between pastors and a membership that is too large.

A literature review on the subject was conducted to examine the reasons why people dropped out of the church. Based on the findings from the literature review and the survey, a seminar on discipleship was created and implemented in order to help church members discover their talents and become more active within the church and more committed to the church mission.

Limitations of the Study

This study concerns church member retention in the South São Paulo Conference, and this is a prescriptive study. The limitation is related to distance because the researcher was on the Andrews University campus during most of the time when the investigation was conducted.

Dissertation Process

The research process proceeded in two phases. During the first phase, 100 former Seventh-day Adventists of the Santo Amaro, Campo de Fora, Jardim das Palmeiras, and Santa Margarida churches were selected in a purposive sample, interview protocols were created and tested, key informants were chosen, and assistants were trained. During the second phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with the former Seventh-day

Adventists in the sample. The research design, sample, data collection, instrument, and data analysis were as follows.

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was used to conduct this study in which close ended the questions were inquired from participants. This approach to research is suggested by Delbert C. Miller in *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* and John Creswell in *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

Sample

For the purpose of this study, a sample of the population of the South São Paulo Conference was surveyed. The sample was comprised of 100 participants who were former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and older than eighteen years of age. In order to narrow down the methodology to a manageable degree, the entire church population could not be included, inasmuch as the parts can accurately represent the whole.

Data Collection

The participants were former members of the Santo Amaro, Campo de Fora, Jardim das Palmeiras, and Santa Margarida churches. These churches are located in São Paulo and are under the administration of the South São Paulo Conference in the area of Capao Redondo. Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from Andrews University, the South São Paulo Conference, and the Brazilian Central Union. (see Appendix A)

The researcher explained the data collection process to the pastors and elders of these churches before conducting the survey (see Appendix A). A pastor or elder in each congregation gave a brief explanation of the study and asked church members with relatives or friends who had dropped out of the church to have them participate in the study. After each former member read and signed the informed consent form and completed the survey, they put them into separate envelopes, sealed them, and gave them back to the pastor/elder or any member of the pastor's team. Finally, the pastors returned these envelopes to the researcher.

Once the researcher received all the envelopes, he opened those containing the informed consent forms, counted them, and then filed the forms (and held them for thirty months). The researcher opened the survey envelopes, which indicated the pastor of origin for each survey, and counted them to make sure that one consent form had been received for each survey.

The surveys were then processed by the researcher and the results entered on his computer. Once this procedure was done, the surveys were destroyed and the researcher worked only with the tabulated information on his computer. This information was available only to the researcher's advisor; now that the research is part of the research paper, it will be available to the public.

Instrument

The instrument was developed by the researcher and his advisor, based on the context of former members of those major four churches from the South São Paulo Conference mentioned above. The criteria used to select participants were age (eighteen years or above), gender, and educational level. A pilot test of the questionnaire was

conducted with time limits for its completion. In the questionnaire, every question was used to produce quantitative and qualitative data. The questions used provided the former church members with a fixed selection of answers to choose from, which made the survey easy to administer and analyze in terms of producing quantifiable data.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data from the survey to evaluate the reasons why people leave the church among former church members. Once all data was gathered from the survey, he tabulated it according to the guidelines demonstrated by Leonard Rutman¹⁰ and John Van Maanen,¹¹ both scholars in the area of research and methods studies.

¹⁰ Leonard Rutman, *Evaluation Research Methods* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 22.

¹¹ John Van Maanen, *Qualitative Methodology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 59.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MEMBER RETENTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present a synopsis of the theological foundations for the subject of member retention in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Ellen White's perspective. It will discuss how member retention relates to three topics in the Old Testament: the Levites' tribes, the Ark of the Covenant, and the fulfillment of prophecy. From the New Testament, it will compare insights from Jesus, Luke, and Paul on love, nurturing, and insights for pastors. It will also discuss Ellen White's perspectives on and insights into pastoral care.

According to Philip Richter and Leslie Francis, the issue of member retention has been around in various forms since the very earliest days of the Christian church.¹ The Bible records that some people dropped out because they lost their faith and found the Christian life too costly and other interests more important (Mark 4:1-20). Like Demas, they were too "in love with the present world" (2 Tim 4:10).

Member retention is not a new problem within the church, as mentioned above, and the role that the church plays in nurturing its members in order to retain them is not a

¹ Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten* (London: Darton, 1999), 8.

new issue either.² From Old Testament times to the present,³ God has taught important lessons to the nation of Israel regarding this subject.⁴

Member Retention in the Old Testament

The subject of church member retention is significant in Scripture, although that specific term is not used. The leaders of the Hebrews were concerned about forming the twelve tribes into a cohesive group that would worship collectively. This is a topic that very much pertains to Christian groups today, and particularly to the retention of members within the church.

There are two chief aspects of member retention within church groups that are very much related. The first is retention of members within the universal family of the Lord; the second is retention of members within a particular religious organization that is, hopefully, connected to the Lord. For many individuals, if they do not feel that a religious organization is connected to the Lord or allows them to join the Lord's family, they will tend to drift away.⁵

It was not automatic that the Hebrews followed and listened to the Word of God.⁶ This is made clear in the book of Leviticus: "The Lord said, if you will not obey my commands you will be punished. If you refuse to obey my laws and commands and break

² Joel D. Heck, *New Member Assimilation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1984), 7.

³ Adam C. Welch, *Kings and Prophets of Israel* (London: Bristol, 1958), 59-60.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975), 413.

⁵ Alan F. Harre, *Close the Back Door* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977), 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

the covenant I made with you, I will punish you” (Lev 18:4). In other words, even though the Lord had made a covenant with the Hebrews by which he would protect and guide them in return for faith and obedience, this did not mean that they would obey the Lord without a threat of punishment.⁷

Interestingly enough, while it is undeniable that following the ways of the Lord is a spiritual matter, it is also obvious that the threat of punishment for disobedience and the promise of peace for obedience are intended to promote membership retention.⁸ If you stayed in the group and obeyed the divine law and participated correctly in the rituals, you would be under the protection of the Lord.⁹ In terms of organizational structure, this is crucial: if the Hebrews did not accept this, there would be nothing to keep them from just leaving the group.¹⁰ Probably, some did, although this is not covered in the Old Testament.

Member Retention and the Levites’ Tribes

During the Sinai Desert period, Moses had to concern himself with two aspects of member retention: keeping the Hebrews as members of the Lord’s family and establishing a religious system that would serve as both a social group and a means for incorporating members into the family of the Lord.¹¹ One means of accomplishing this

⁷ David Hinson, *History of Israel* (London: Bristol, 1990), 69.

⁸ Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 841.

⁹ Tarazi, 34.

¹⁰ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 105.

¹¹ Welch, 59-60.

was by creating an entire tribe of sacred priests—the Levites—whose mission was to maintain spiritual union with the Lord, by actually generating the presence of the Lord.¹² It was not at all easy to retain membership in the Hebrew religion founded by Moses. Indeed, the entire book of Exodus can be reasonably viewed as a struggle for member retention.

Their problems with member retention did not end when the Jews left the Sinai Desert and entered Canaan, or even when the nation of Israel was established as a Jewish theocracy. 1 Samuel 4:4 relates, in regards to a battle between the Hebrews and the Philistines, “So the people sent to Shiloh and carried from there the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, Master of Legions, Who dwells atop the Cherubim...When the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord arrived at the camp, all of Israel sounded a great shofar blast, and the ground shook.” The Philistines had defeated the Israelites, and the leaders of the tribes had requested that the Ark be brought to the battlefield so that the Lord would be in their midst.

As the Old Testament relates in several sections, generally speaking, unless the Israelites could experience the Lord in their midst and clearly see the signs of the Lord, they would quickly lose faith both in their leaders and in the Lord.¹³ So, this battle was crucial: a second defeat by the Philistines would surely mean the dissolution of the tribes, which would then result in the Philistines conquering Israel and absorbing the Hebrews.

¹² Hinson, 86.

¹³ Arnold and Beyer, 105.

Member Retention and the Ark of the Covenant

Nowadays, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not literally possess an Ark of the Covenant, and the enemy is not the Philistines, but frankly, a lack of faith in both the Lord and the leaders of the church. This leads to doubt about the entire holy purpose of the church, and the doubt in turn leads to a grave problem with member retention, especially among youth.

The Ark of the Covenant can be read as a symbol of the power and authority of the Lord, which must be present in the church and must be carried into the battle against a lack of faith. It is present according to the love that church leaders have for the church. As we live in a post-biblical time, we would say that the covenant is established by love through and of Christ, the Son of God. Also, the leaders must be skilled in communicating and establishing affinity with the members, rather than depending on the physical structure of an ark.¹⁴ Then the roaring blast of the shofar will be heard in a way that corresponds to our times, and the members will truly feel the power and authority of the Lord. While there will always be some members who will depart—possibly just because they do not want to experience the presence of the Lord—there will surely be a vast increase in member retention. Usually, people do not want to go through repetitive church ritual and ceremony that does not have an emotional or spiritual impact on them.¹⁵

The Ark of the Covenant, in a symbolic sense, must be brought to the battlefield so that the Lord will dwell in the midst of the people. Referring to the importance of the

¹⁴ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 26.

¹⁵ Gary McIntosh, *Church That Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 65.

Old Testament writings to the member retention topic, Peter Kreeft points out that Jesus was foremost a Jew and therefore, his philosophy was developed out of the writings of the Old Testament.¹⁶ The Jews, of course, do not refer to these writings as the Old Testament: they call them the five books of Moses or the Pentateuch.¹⁷ The essential teaching of the Pentateuch is that human beings can know the Creator, who is the ultimate reality and reveals Himself to humans at certain times, such as during holy ceremonies.¹⁸

While Moses actually saw the Lord's face and lived, the Lord also revealed himself to all of the Hebrews to a lesser degree.¹⁹ This revealing of the Lord was crucial for member retention among the tribes. "In fact, He told them His name. And that name was 'I AM.' 'I' is the name of a Person, not a force. God is 'He' not 'It.'"²⁰

The Hebrew term for "I AM" is "the eternal one"—specifically, the One who was, who is, and who always will be. The Lord of the Old Testament is an eternal Person who created the universe, the world, and the human race. The teachings of Christ did not alter the existence of the Eternal Person, whom Christ referred to as the Father.²¹ Unless there is an awareness of this Person within a church, no amount of religious practice or

¹⁶ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Jesus* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁷ Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko, eds., *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁹ Goldberg, 67.

²⁰ Kreeft, 15.

²¹ Arnold and Beyer, 99.

ritual will suffice for people who need to be reminded of this Eternal Person and feel close to Him.²²

Member Retention and the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Another major Old Testament problem with member retention was related to the fulfillment of prophecy. The Hebrews expected the predictions of their prophets to be fulfilled immediately in complete manifestation.²³ Moses was constantly confronted by a lack of faith among the Hebrew tribes in regard to his promises that he would sustain them and get them across the Sinai Desert into the land of Canaan.²⁴ They wanted to cross the desert and get into Canaan as soon as possible, and they wanted plenty of the wide variety of foods they had been used to in Egypt, but this was not the Lord's plan.²⁵ As soon as it looked like Moses' prophecy about Canaan was not coming true, it was easy for detractors to convince the Hebrews that Moses was not a true prophet and they should no longer worship the One Lord, called Yahweh, whom Moses claimed spoke through him.²⁶ Their faith became even weaker when they were hungry for the foods they had been accustomed to in Egypt.²⁷ In other words, member retention among the Jews was very much related to their viewpoint that prophecies should be fulfilled immediately

²² Charles F. Keil, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1988), 201.

²³ Stephen Bigger, *Creating the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 153.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975), 255.

²⁵ Emil Bock, *Moses: From the Mysteries of Egypt to the Judges of Israel* (Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions International, 1978), 174.

²⁶ Fernand E. D'Humy, *What Manner of Man Was Moses?* (New York: Library, 1955), 216.

²⁷ Ronald F. Youngblood, *Exodus* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 89.

in order to satisfy their worldly needs and expectations. If this did not happen, they would take on a different religion, listen to other prophets, and follow other leaders.

In addition, Robert M. Price affirms that “it seems that what we are dealing with in the Old Testament is a series of delays and disappointments, only partially fulfilled promises.”²⁸ A prime example is the arrival of the Kingdom of God. When this did not come right away, many or even most Jews figured that God had abandoned them or never even existed at all.²⁹ Similarly, many Christians today believe that the Kingdom of God should already exist, and a large number of Christians further believe that in this Kingdom all of their material desires should be met.³⁰ If their church does not appear to be playing an active part in bringing about the Kingdom of God as they perceive it, and if the teachings of the pastors appear to be empty, they just drop out and either move on to another religious group or become unaffiliated.³¹

This problem was recognized even by the prophets in Old Testament times, especially regarding the delay or failure of prophecy.³² There is even a command in Deuteronomy to stone prophets whose predictions constantly failed, although this warning surely refers to so-called prophets who make up predictions in order to gain power and money and have no moral or spiritual lessons to reveal.³³ Nevertheless, if

²⁸ Robert M. Price, *How the Church Was Left Behind* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 65.

²⁹ Bock, 139.

³⁰ Dorothy F. Zelig, *Moses: A Psychodynamic Study* (New York: Human Sciences, 1986), 122.

³¹ Harre, 56.

³² Dewey M. Beegle, *Moses, the Servant of Yahweh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 120.

³³ George W. Coats, *The Moses Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 100.

modern-day pastors are consistently perceived as speaking empty words just to keep the congregation intact, the effect may well be the reverse among members.³⁴

It is the mission of a pastor or minister to intelligently interpret the meaning of the symbolic prophecies in the Old Testament in terms of the Lord's plan. This is fundamental for using the Old Testament as an instrument for member retention.

Most of all the Old Testament prophecies foretell the time of Christ and the End; they are not about people's individual wants and needs.³⁵ Once the church members grasp this, they may be more willing to remain in the church and await the End. And this is the most controversial point: no church can interfere with the final prophecy and no pastor or minister can change it. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, they can only instruct, enlighten, and warn; they must leave the rest to the will of the Lord and the individual will of the members.³⁶ This approach is likely to work better for member retention than attempting to convince the members that the church, on its own, has all the answers.³⁷

Member Retention in the New Testament

Member retention was also a major concern for the New Testament writers, including Jesus Himself and others such as the apostles Paul and Peter. They paid special attention to this subject because, as evangelists, they knew the challenges of winning

³⁴ Raymond C. Ortlund, "Priorities for the Local Church," in *Vital Church Issues: Examining Principle and Practice in Church Leadership*, ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 46.

³⁵ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Sheperd Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas elson, 2005), 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ David W. Kale and Mel McCullough, *Managing Conflict in the Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon, 2003), 9.

souls and the high price that was paid for them—the blood of Jesus (1 Cor 14:2–3). This truth reflects a biblical principle that is clearly taught in the New Testament: “the whole body, being lifted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body” (Eph 4:8). Notice that it does not say “by what every pastor supplies.”

The Bible says that “day by day... breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46). It is essential to the spiritual health of all believers that they develop into functional members of the body of Christ. *Functional* means that they are not just passive consumers of kingdom resources, but that they become active in service, which, in turn, makes them valued kingdom resources.

There is no greater thrill than to discover that God created us for a specific purpose in life. This can be a powerful resource for member retention. Through a strategic plan that ceaselessly creates new ministries and ministry positions, an ever-increasingly rich environment for kingdom service will be provided.

Member Retention: Insights from Jesus

Jesus’ specific viewpoint on member retention is worthy of study. He stated, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, and that fruit remains” (John 15:16). One of the key words related to member retention that appears in John 15:16 is the verb $\mu\epsilon\upsilon\omicron$. Jesus uses a botanical illustration to teach the importance of abiding in Him in order to produce fruits. Warren Trenchard states that $\mu\epsilon\upsilon\omicron$ is used eleven times to

emphasize that the main point of this teaching is communion and fellowship.³⁸ According to Trenchard, Jesus used the verb μένω in the sense of “to belong.”³⁹ In its different forms, the verb can mean “belonging,” “staying,” “persisting,” “waiting,” “keeping going,” and “resting.”⁴⁰

John 15:16 emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus and staying united with Him. Remaining in Jesus lays the foundation for healthy, spiritual growth; unity with Christ is what we must pursue. This unity is illustrated by Jesus’ declaration that the branch can only bear fruit if it remains on the vine. He clearly said that He is the life and a branch alone cannot produce fruit. The life of the person who remains in Jesus produces obedience (1 John 3:34) and is also guided by the constant presence of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13). The presence of the Holy Spirit inspires us to reflect on Jesus’ life (1 John 2:6). The fruit that is borne includes witnessing love for brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 1:10), doing the will of God (1 John 2:17), and living a sanctified life (1 John 3:6).

The importance that Jesus placed on member retention is evident in the sequence of His statement: He first says, “Love one another” (v. 12), and then, “Go and bear fruit and that the fruits remain” (v. 16). Notice that bearing fruit is the last priority because this

³⁸ Warren Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

is a natural result of growth.⁴¹ Seeds themselves do not bear fruit, but they can become fruit-bearing trees if they have the right environment and time to grow.⁴²

Jesus referred to member retention as a matter of spiritual growth through the words “bearing fruit.” He was stating that this subject is really related to spiritual maturity.⁴³ Just as the tiny mustard seed carries a strong power within it, member retention has the same potential.⁴⁴ This potential is seen when a mature church looks over its members and helps them achieve the level of spiritual growth required to remain within the church and prevent backsliding.⁴⁵

Jesus’ intention in John 15:5–16 reinforces His viewpoint that member retention is a matter of spiritual growth; it is measured by the time that we spend with Him, and fruit will be borne as a result.⁴⁶ He said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in the vine, no more can you, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4). Ministry and fruit-bearing occur not as the product of self-effort, but naturally, out of the life within us.⁴⁷ Growth comes from God (1 Cor 3:6, 7). Scripture refers to the “*fruit of the Spirit*,” but to “*works of the flesh*” (Gal 5:22). Fruit does not try to grow; it just happens as a natural consequence of the branches’ relationship to the

⁴¹ McIntosh, 86.

⁴² James Russel Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 162.

⁴³ Trenchard, 9.

⁴⁴ Dean Hoge, *National Contextual Factors Influencing Church Trends* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 67.

⁴⁵ Lyle Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville; TN: Abingdon, 1978), 36.

⁴⁶ Hoge, 68.

⁴⁷ McIntosh, 240.

tree.⁴⁸ Unless we have an abiding, personal relationship with the Lord, we will never bear fruit (John 15:6). “Without Me,” Jesus said, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Spiritual growth is a gradual process, and it takes time.⁴⁹ There can be no fruit until adequate growth has taken place within the plant itself.⁵⁰ A long time passes from the time the seed is first sown in the ground to when the fruit appears. An immature plant is neither expected nor able to bear fruit; it cannot bear the weight, and would fall over and die.⁵¹ There is a specific time in nature when fruit is ready.⁵² In the same way, member retention is a matter of maturity; maturity comes with growth, and growth takes time.⁵³ If a church seeking maturity makes a relationship with Jesus its first priority and values people, the result will be fewer members dropping out and more people joining.

Member Retention and Love

The subject of member retention in the New Testament and in Jesus’ teachings is related to social relationships, because as human beings we need to connect with others and feel cared for and loved. Jesus Himself said, “These things I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:17). How does this command to love relate to member retention? When leaders express affectionate care for church members, they are less

⁴⁸ Hale, 163.

⁴⁹ Donald A. McGravan, *Tape Collection 178, T37-19 January 1979* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center Archives).

⁵⁰ Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoekdtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 92.

⁵¹ C. Milo Connick, *Jesus: The Man, the Mission, and the Message* (Englewood Cliffs; NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 80.

⁵² Richards and Hoekdtke, 104.

⁵³ McGravan, 120.

likely to drop out or apostatize. There is no doubt that love is one of the main keys to nurturing church members. According to Walter A. Elwell, love for neighbors is love in action, doing something specific and tangible for others.⁵⁴ Jesus is still commanding today's pastors and local church leaders to express love to others because they know how much He loves them. Jesus also said that expressing love would show people that believers are His disciples (John 13:35).

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee acknowledges that members drop out for reasons that “are found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission.”⁵⁵ Therefore, the committee concludes that “the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable.”⁵⁶ In other words, the Executive Committee of the General Conference is affirming that member loss is preventable if the church leaders invest effort and develop strategies to address the weakness that is affecting the health and growth of the church.

The world we live in is marked by loneliness and lack of love; when people find love and others who care for them in the church, they will be committed to the church and will think carefully before deciding to leave the church for any reason.⁵⁷ Love is the

⁵⁴ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 494.

⁵⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, “Conserving Membership Gains: An Appeal,” <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/other-documents/conserving-gains.html> (accessed April 10, 2007).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 76.

key to member retention.⁵⁸ Jesus knew the importance of love among the disciples and said that as He loved them, they should love one another. His command to pastors and church leaders is the same, and if we carry it out, Jesus said that people will know we are His disciples.

This raises the question of how Christ's disciples are known today. Today, His disciples include all church members, but especially pastors and local church leaders. Some are known by the training they undergo, some by their preaching and teaching, and some by the gift of administration they have, but how many are known by the love they demonstrate to others?⁵⁹ Christ's advice encourages workers to be known by the love they reveal to others because "love is the supreme gift of the Spirit which marks the church as the body of Christ" (Rom 12:9–10; Col 3:12–15).

Love is important among people everywhere because everybody likes to be where there is love. Love keeps people together. Love promotes prosperity and health among people.⁶⁰ Therefore, love is needed in a church because it helps people remain in the church.⁶¹ While words are important, the actions of the pastor and church leaders will speak even louder. Pastors and church leaders who take the development of pastoral care ministries seriously will enjoy the stability of a congregation that remains because they feel loved.

⁵⁸ Harre, 31.

⁵⁹ H. Joseph Miller, *Building the Church* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003), 638-639.

⁶⁰ Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1978), 46.

⁶¹ Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 75.

Member Retention and Nurturing

Nurturing is also essential for member retention; several verses in the New Testament mention the importance of the nurturing process to avoid church dropouts. In fact, only a few churches have adequate systems in place to monitor back door attrition. The church must balance its investments to provide adequate resources for nurturing members. Except in the smallest of churches, a professional pastor can always provide better pastoral care than a church body can provide for itself through small groups and care ministries. Churches should promote the biblical pattern of small group involvement: “Day by day... breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.” (Acts 2:46). Churches that would enjoy high member retention must first invest significant energies and resources into the assimilation process in order to become healthy churches.⁶²

Churches that nurture their members provide an atmosphere that is highly conducive to spiritual growth, addressing practical issues such as relationships, conflict resolution, and temptation, and making the Bible relevant to the daily lives of their congregants.⁶³ As a result of this nurturing effort, members will become engaged in spiritually meaningful relationships with other Christians on a regular basis.⁶⁴ The charge to the church is but a continuation of God’s original purpose to bring salvation to a lost world (John 3:16), the purpose for which Christ died (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10).

⁶² Waldo J. Werning, *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2001), 73.

⁶³ Kale and McCullough, 20-26.

⁶⁴ Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Vital Church Issues: Examining Principle and Practice in Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids; MI: Kregel, 1998), 55-56.

Member Retention: Insights from Luke

Luke indirectly addressed the matter of member retention in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). In this parable, Jesus answered the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:26). This parable is relevant to the subject of member retention in two ways: first, it gives a simple and practical definition of *neighbor*,⁶⁵ and second, it expresses sadness that people do not care about their neighbors’ needs as Jesus defined them,⁶⁶ saying that both the priest and the Levite “passed on the other side of the road” (Luke 10:21–31).

The difference between the priest and the Levite and the Good Samaritan was compassion.⁶⁷ The Samaritan had compassion, but they did not. Church members often avoid involvement in other people’s difficulties, passing by “on the other side” like the priest and the Levite. “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” said Jesus to the lawyer. The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

In this parable, both the priest and the Levite saw the man lying on the ground bleeding, needing immediate help, and they did not do anything. Applying this parable to member retention, we can say that if care is not shown to people when they most need it, they will feel lonely and rejected and eventually leave the church.⁶⁸ Hence, the story of the Samaritan becomes relevant to a study of member retention.

⁶⁵ Connick, 342.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 343.

⁶⁷ McIntosh, 236.

⁶⁸ Harre, 31-32.

Member Retention: Insights from Paul

The apostle Paul knew the importance of member retention in the primitive church, and he promoted it throughout the letters that he wrote to his church members, encouraging them to strengthen their faith and not abandon the church as Demas did (2 Tim 4:10). Paul reminded the church leaders that the church members were saved by faith in Jesus,⁶⁹ which was shown by love.⁷⁰ As we have already seen, love and caring are essential for member retention.

Member Retention: Insights for Pastors

If congregation members are to remain in the church, the pastor's lifestyle must set an example for them, as Paul's writings tell us (1 Tim 3:1–6). This is a rigorous requirement, but Paul requires this because Christ requires it also.⁷¹ If a minister does not behave as Paul instructed, church members will be more likely to move away from these standards, and they may fall completely.

If the members do not see a connection between the minister's preaching and his lifestyle,⁷² they will not respect his spiritual leadership, and this may extend to disrespecting the church and separating from it spiritually. Indeed, failing to learn this lesson about leaders in the church will *prevent* member retention: if a church does the

⁶⁹ Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 4.

⁷⁰ Marcus Loane, *Grace and the Gentiles: Expository Studies in Six Pauline Letters* (Carlisle, PA: Banner, 1981), 4.

⁷¹ Loane, 22-23.

⁷² MacArthur, 67-68.

reverse of what Paul instructs, its membership will quickly diminish.⁷³ MacArthur states that “above reproach” cannot refer to sinless perfection, because no human being can achieve that, but it is a high and mature standard that means setting a consistent example and practicing what one preaches.⁷⁴

Therefore, member retention, in light of the New Testament, is ultimately about whether the minister walks in truth.⁷⁵ If he does, then his children, the church members, are likely to walk in truth.⁷⁶ The members will not, for the most part, wish to separate from a father who guides them to the truth. Christianity is a religion of love for one’s fellow human beings, which is the path to finding God.⁷⁷ No other religion specifically states this.⁷⁸ If a leader keeps this in mind, he will retain the members of his church.

Member Retention in Ellen White’s Writings

Ellen G. White, one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote many counsels to the church that touched on the significance of member retention. Her writings are still held in high regard by the church. As a messenger of God and a leader with a great vision, Ellen White gave strict instructions to pastors about the importance of member retention in their ministries. The Seventh-day Adventist Church

⁷³ Smith, 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁷ William H. Willimon, *Pastor, A Reader for Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 51.

⁷⁸ Gilbert Meilaender, *Love Taking Shape: Sermons on the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 85-86.

holds that the writings of Ellen White pass the biblical tests of a prophecy in harmony with Scripture (Isa 8:20). The church recognizes that she possessed the gift of prophecy that, according to Eph 4:11–13, Joel 2:28, and Rev 19:10, will persist to subsist in anticipation of the church accomplishing its full maturity and unity.⁷⁹ Ellen White’s message does not oppose God’s precedent revelation through the prophets and through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes Ellen White as imperfect in the same way as the Old and New Testament prophets who were appointed as God’s messengers.

While Seventh-day Adventists officially hold that Ellen White’s writings are trustworthy,⁸⁰ her writings are always subordinate to the Scriptures, which are the focus of authority. Adventists consider Ellen White to be one who communicated messages from God for the encouragement and consolation of the church.⁸¹ Today, the Seventh-day Adventist position is still that Ellen White’s writings offer guidance in understanding the teachings of Scripture and the application of these teachings.⁸²

Member Retention and Pastoral Care

In addition to stressing the importance of member retention, Ellen White provided extensive counsel to church leaders about the pastoral care of church members and the

⁷⁹ Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 252.

⁸⁰ Biblical Research Institute, “Affirmations and Denials,” <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/> (accessed June 3, 2007).

⁸¹ Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 428.

⁸² Biblical Research Institute.

marginalized, especially as regards their physical and spiritual needs.⁸³ She made the following statement to a minister who was neglecting the spiritual care of his church members:

Dear Brother G: I have been shown that you were greatly deficient in your duties as a minister. You lack essential qualifications. You don't possess a missionary spirit. You have not a disposition to sacrifice your pleasure to save souls... I saw that unless you decide to gird on the whole armor, and are willing to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross of Christ, and feel that you can spend and be spent to bring souls for Christ, you should give up your profession as a minister and choose some other calling.⁸⁴

Regarding spiritual leaders' responsibility for church members, Ellen White stressed the importance of ministers caring for those members who leave the church just as the shepherd cares for his sheep, and bringing the lost members to the church again.⁸⁵ White also stated that ministers must visit the church families in their homes in order to be aware of their spiritual condition, and stressed the importance of close friends in nurturing people's spiritual needs within the church.⁸⁶

According to Ellen White's viewpoint, God would use humble, devoted Christians with the love of the truth in their hearts to work for Him by doing house-to-house work.⁸⁷ Sitting by the fireside, such men—if humble, discreet, and godly—can do

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 150.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ White, *Adventist Home*, 154.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, 218.

more to meet the real needs of families than a minister can. According to Ellen White,⁸⁸ the church should make wise efforts to prevent the loss of members and to bring back those it has lost. She stated that she witnessed the sad story of one brother who, if the church had put forth diligent effort, would not have left the church. White pointed out that there was more gossiping over his case than sincere sorrow for him. This separated him more and more from his church family, making his rescue even more difficult.

The mission of the church is to minister to backslidden people, recognizing that they may have left the church for various reasons. As we have seen, many people's reasons for leaving the church involve broken relationships with friends, family members, church leaders, or the pastor. Church leaders must make an effort to rescue these people. They can open a dialogue by telephone or by visiting them in order to find out why they left.

If the church works wisely with these people to fix the problem and follows Jesus as its model, some of the lost may be rescued. White compared the church to the shepherd who left the ninety and nine in the wilderness and hunted for the one lost sheep until he found it.⁸⁹ If there is a backslider, the shepherd knows how to present the truth in such a manner that the soul will be convicted.⁹⁰ He will leave the ninety and nine and seek the lost sheep.⁹¹ But if the shepherd does not visit his flock, he will not know their condition, and he will not know what truths to set before them or what is appropriate to

⁸⁸ Ibid., 219.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁹⁰ White, *Adventist Home*, 154.

⁹¹ Ibid., 155.

their case.⁹² Similarly, if a preacher manifests little interest in the souls for which he is responsible, he cannot inspire the flock to love and care for each other.⁹³

Fortunately, experience has shown that many who have left the church will come back. However, White states that, sadly, some ministers who are surrounded by backsliders feel no burden for their souls.⁹⁴ Some ministers who profess to be called by God do not care about these people and act indifferent to their salvation. They do not consider that, as spiritual physicians, they are required to have skill in administering the message of mercy to backsliders—souls diseased with sin. God will work mightily with His ministers when their hearts are filled with love for the poor lost sheep of His church.

In addition, White affirms that Jesus exemplified heaven’s attitude toward the backslidden.⁹⁵ They need tender sympathy and the most judicious help; they should be carefully instructed, prayed for and prayed with, watched and guarded with the kindest solicitude, because they may have concerns about Bible subjects and be thrown into perplexity and doubt. Those who have fallen to temptation and backslidden from God need help. There is more joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

White sums this up by stating that the love of Christ constrains us to feel compassion toward the backslidden: “Let not the ministers of the cross of our dear Savior forget their experience in these things, but ever bear in mind they are but men liable to

⁹² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, 219.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 263-264.

make mistake with the same passions like their brethren; and if they help their brethren, they must be persevering in their efforts to do them good, having their hearts filled with sympathy and love.”⁹⁶

Summary

Even for the prophets of the Old Testament, member retention was a serious issue. The Hebrews would not automatically follow their leaders or listen to the Word of God. This is made clear in the book of Leviticus: “The Lord said, if you will not obey my commands you will be punished. If you refuse to obey my laws and commands and break the covenant I made with you, I will punish you” (Lev 18:05). The Lord made a covenant with the Hebrews, but this did not mean that they all would obey Him without the threat of punishment.

From the New Testament perspective, church member retention comes down to the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. This mission is summed up in Christ’s dual roles: Son of God and Son of Man. As the Son of God, Christ is the Chief Priest who is responsible for the spiritual redemption of the entire human race. As the Son of Man, He is the world leader who must teach His people about important holy things to do in this world, including helping others find their way to Him. Therefore, the minister as spiritual leader is also responsible for showing people the way to Jesus and serving as a spiritual model for church members. This is a powerful instrument for member retention. As Paul’s letter to Timothy explains, a church leader must be an example for the congregation: a leader without fault, married to one wife, able to teach and manage his

⁹⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, 187-188.

own family well and have his children obey him with respect. Ellen White's teachings correspond to these Biblical views.

CHAPTER III

MEMBER RETENTION IN CURRENT LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature dealing with member retention from several angles: the diversity of religious groups in Brazil, competition in the religious marketplace in Brazil, strategies used by evangelical churches to attract followers, member retention and the Adventist lifestyle, and why Adventists leave the church. Much has been written on the subject of member retention, and sorting it out can be a daunting task. The indications seem to be that the process of rupture is gradual and that the dropout rate is significantly higher among youth. As previously mentioned, because of their idealism and hunger for new spiritual answers, young people are often attracted to new religious movements or religions that seem to offer an explanation or inspiration that their old religion did not. People who are spiritually unhappy and curious will often attend lectures or sermons given by charismatic spiritual leaders and then become excited about their teachings and the corresponding movement.

Member Retention and the Diversity of Religious Groups in Brazil

According to a survey conducted by the Brazilian Religious Census, religious groups in Brazil are now very diverse, and membership is extremely fluid.¹ Evangelical

¹ Stefano Martelli, *A Religião na Sociedade Pós-Moderna* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2005), 302.

churches have very active and well-trained recruiting forces that are constantly pulling in new members from other religious groups.² Many Seventh-day Adventists are constantly being tempted to join these other groups, and many of them do so, which causes a great problem with member retention.

Almost one-third of Brazilian adults (32 percent)³ have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion—or no religion at all.⁴ If change in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is included, 40 percent of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.⁵ The number of people who claim to be unaffiliated with any particular faith today (20 percent) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children.⁶ Among Brazilians ages 18-28, one in four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion.

About 31 percent of Brazilians currently report that they are members of Protestant denominations. More to the point, relative to member retention, there is extensive diversity and major fragmentation among Christian groups, with hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions:

² Lemuel Dourado Guerra, *Mercado Religioso no Brasil: Competição, Demanda Dinâmica da Esfera da Religião* (João Pessoa, PA: Idéia, 2006), 78.

³ Jose Carlos Calazans, *Globalização e Ciência das Religiões* (São Paulo, SP: Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, 2008), 97.

⁴ Martelli, 310.

⁵ Guerra, 89.

⁶ Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Religião no Povo* (João Pessoa, PA: Imprensa Universitária da Paraíba, 2005), 76.

evangelical Protestant churches (17 percent of the overall adult population), Catholic churches (64.4 percent) and mainline Protestant churches (8 percent). Brazilians who are unaffiliated with any particular religion have seen the greatest growth in numbers as a result of changes in affiliation.⁷

Competition in the Religious Marketplace in Brazil

The religious marketplace in Brazil is competitive. Out of the major religious denominations, Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses as a result of affiliation changes (36 percent).⁸ The Brazilian Religious Census found that Catholics outnumbered Protestants by an even larger margin (55 percent Catholic versus 21 percent Protestant).⁹ Catholics make up 64 percent of the Brazilian population, followed by evangelicals (17 percent), Neo-Pentecostals (8 percent), Spiritualists (3 percent), Mormons (1.7 percent), nonreligious groups (5 percent), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.9 percent), and other Christian groups (0.4 percent).¹⁰

Like the other major groups, people who are unaffiliated with any particular religion (20 percent) exhibit remarkable internal diversity. Although one-quarter of this group consists of those who describe themselves as atheist or agnostic (1.6 percent and 2.4 percent of the adult population, respectively), the majority of the unaffiliated population (12.1 percent of the adult population) is made up of people who simply

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Origens: História e Sentido na Religião* (Recife, PB: Lisboa, 2007), 45.

⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Antropologia Social da Religião* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Campus, 2005), 83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰ Giovanni Filoramo Prandi, *As Ciências das Religiões* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2007), 68.

describe their religion as “nothing in particular.”¹¹ This group, in turn, is fairly evenly divided between the “secular unaffiliated,” that is, those who say that religion is not important in their lives (6.3 percent of the adult population), and the “religious unaffiliated,” that is, those who say that religion is either somewhat important or very important in their lives (5.8 percent of the adult population).¹²

It comes down to this: constant movement characterizes the Brazilian religious marketplace, as every major religious group is simultaneously gaining and losing adherents.¹³ Those that are growing as a result of religious change are simply gaining new members at a faster rate than they are losing members.¹⁴ Conversely, those that are declining in number because of religious change simply are not attracting enough new members to offset the number of adherents who are leaving those particular faiths. This is the case with Catholicism, which has lost more members than other groups.¹⁵ Other major points about religious diversity and fluidity are as follows: (1) Men are significantly more likely than women to claim no religious affiliation.¹⁶ Nearly 20 percent of men say they have no formal religious affiliation, compared with approximately 15 percent of women. (2) Among people who are married, nearly four in ten (38 percent) have a spouse with a different religious affiliation (this figure includes

¹¹ Faustino Teixeira, *Sociologia da Religião: Enfoques Teóricos* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2008), 42.

¹² Carlos Bacelar Caroso, *Faces da Tradição Afro-Brasileira: Religiosidade, Sincretismo, Anti-Sincretismo, Reafricanização, Práticas Terapêuticas* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Pallas, 2006), 98.

¹³ Dupront, 42.

¹⁴ De Camargo, 54.

¹⁵ Martelli, 321.

¹⁶ Guerra, 93.

Protestants who are married to Protestants from different denominational families, such as a Baptist who is married to a Presbyterian).¹⁷

The southeast region most closely resembles the religious makeup of the overall population, having the heaviest concentration of evangelical Protestant and Neo-Pentecostal churches. The northeast has the greatest concentration of Catholics.¹⁸ Of all the major religious groups in Brazil, the Catholics are the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation; interestingly, they have lost the most members. Even though Brazil may become a country without a Catholic majority, it will remain a Christian country, because of the large numbers of evangelical and Pentecostal churches spreading throughout the country.¹⁹

In addition, people not affiliated with any particular religion stand out for their relative youth compared to those who claim religious affiliations. Among the unaffiliated, 31 percent are under age 28 and 72 percent are under age 45. Comparable numbers for the overall adult population are 20 percent and 59 percent respectively.²⁰

By contrast, members of mainline Protestant churches are older, on average, than members of other groups. Roughly half of mainline church members are age 49 and older, compared with approximately four in ten Brazilian adults overall.²¹ Jehovah's

¹⁷ Calazans, 105.

¹⁸ Alba Zaluar, *Os Homens de Deus: Um Estudo dos Santos e das Festas no Catolicismo Popular* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Zahar, 2007), 84.

¹⁹ Thales de Azevedo, *Problemas Metodológicos da Sociologia do Catolicismo. Cultura e Situação Racial no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Civilização Brasileira, 2006), 165.

²⁰ Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, *Ser Católico: Dimensões Brasileiras – Um Estudo Sobre a Atribuição de Identidade Através da Religião* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Graal, 2008), 27-28.

²¹ Mary Lucy del Priore, *Religião e Religiosidade no Brasil Colônia* (São Paulo: Ática, 2005), 53.

Witnesses have the lowest retention rate of any religious tradition: only 34 percent of all those who say they were raised as Jehovah's Witnesses still identify as Jehovah's Witnesses. Also, members of Baptist churches account for one-third of all Protestant churches.²²

The biggest gainer in this religious competition is the unaffiliated group.²³ People moving into the unaffiliated category outnumber those moving out of the unaffiliated group by more than a three-to-one margin. At the same time, however, a substantial number of people (nearly 4 percent of the overall adult population) say that they were unaffiliated with any particular religion as children but have since come to identify with a religious group. This means that more than half of people who were unaffiliated with any particular religion as a child now say that they are associated with a religious group.²⁴ In short, the unaffiliated population has grown despite having one of the lowest retention rates of all "religious" groups.²⁵

Strategies Used by Evangelical Churches to Attract Followers

The harsh reality of religious competition in Brazil can be exemplified by the Renascer Evangelical Church Fellowship, which works hard to attract new members and retain existing members. Some of this church's strategies include the following: "Their ministry leaders embrace excellence, and everything they do to honor God's Glory."²⁶

²² Zaluar, 91.

²³ Guerra, 86.

²⁴ Calazans, 103.

²⁵ Eliade, 114.

²⁶ Brandao, 39.

Therefore, they are continually developing their gifts and talents in order to provide world-class ministry deserving of an Awesome God. Their leaders are expected to be “Called, Competent, Committed and Connected.” Renascer’s administration provides clerical and administrative support to the senior pastor and ministries as needed.²⁷ The youth and young adult ministries provide carefully structured programs and activities to stimulate spiritual growth and cultural development and focus on making better followers of Jesus Christ among school students. These ministries also provide a spiritual training curriculum through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and social and church-related activities to encourage children ages four to eleven to explore and learn about their individual spirituality.²⁸ The church has a teen ministry whose mission is to challenge and meet the needs of young adults ages 13-20, emphasizing discipleship, spiritual growth, fellowship, and worship through the support of teen counselors who serve as mentors to prepare the teens for the spiritual and social transition from childhood into adulthood. The Renascer music department is responsible for musical (vocal and instrumental) worship and leads the congregation in passionate praise and worship by proclaiming His glory with a joyful noise. The music ministry includes children’s choir, youth choir, mass choir, men’s choir, and praise team. The music ranges from the most contemporary and inspirational to the traditional hymns of the church. The new member orientation ministry welcomes newcomers to the church family by providing a caring and nurturing environment, commencing with the New Members Class, which is held on the third

²⁷ Mario Franca de Miranda, *Um Catolicismo Desafiado: Igreja e Pluralismo Religioso no Brasil* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2007), 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

Saturday of each month.²⁹ Members are supplied with needed information about the church's doctrine and beliefs and get an opportunity to express themselves on spiritual and Biblical topics in an informal setting.³⁰ This ministry has become a vital ministry because it offers new members an excellent "first step" into service in this church and encourages the utilization of their spiritual gifts as soon as possible.³¹ Finally, the outreach ministry supports the membership and outsiders through its efforts to reach the spiritual lost and the needy within and outside the walls of the church. This ministry also conducts street ministry and prison fellowship. Renascer's efforts show that the church places a high priority on helping its members maintain their Christian faith.³²

Member Retention and the Adventist Lifestyle

The Adventist lifestyle itself has a significant effect on member retention. If an Adventist church lacks structured ministries and well trained, gifted staff, the members are even more likely to end up discouraged and be tempted to drop out. According to Erica Richards, there is no doubt that people are leaving the Adventist Church in large numbers.³³ Adventists have mounted a great effort to both understand and oppose this phenomenon. According to Giovanni Prandi, Adventist worship services often conclude with sermons about the matter and parents attend seminars that are intended to provide

²⁹ Teixeira, 84.

³⁰ Azevedo, 167.

³¹ Priori, 61.

³² Zaluar, 99.

³³ Erica Richards, "Drowning in a Sea of Gray," *Adventist Review*, 2009, 12.

them with solutions.³⁴ According to Guerra,³⁵ this is not getting much of a result. Caroso suggests that to address the problem, we must determine why the people of today's church feel strongly enough to leave the church families they have grown up in.³⁶ One answer seems to be surfacing more than any other: while the church members respect and appreciate their parents and upbringing, they do not necessarily understand or agree with the lifestyle standards and values they have been taught.³⁷

According to Martelli, when people within the church become adults, many Adventists no longer feel the need to maintain a strict lifestyle, even if the Sabbath is still important to them, and even if they keep some of the fundamental Adventist values.³⁸ Jose Carlos Calazans concludes that the young adults often feel pressured to conform to the secular world, and new members frequently admit their uncertainty in knowing what belongs to Christ and what to the world.³⁹

However, the question remains: why are the members leaving? Is it because they are not being spiritually fed? Richards states that that too many still give voice to the external elements of discipleship without witnessing to the heart of the matter. Far too many in the church are preaching to the smoke and not the fire. We are making proclamations about the fruit without giving thought to the root. Many of our adult

³⁴ Prandi, 97.

³⁵ Guerra, 88.

³⁶ Caroso, 90.

³⁷ Pritchard, 54.

³⁸ Martelli, 95.

³⁹ Ibid., 16.

church members are challenging us to speak to the core issues of salvation with a tattoo or two and a cup of coffee in their hands. They are very clever in doing so. In this way, they can determine if we really can present the gospel in its greatest clarity.⁴⁰

In addition, Jan Paulsen, the retired president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, stated that salvation is not based on lifestyle choices such as whether to wear jewelry or eat meat: rather, the way we live is part of our response to God's gift of eternal life.⁴¹ Paulsen concluded that a person should dress with modesty and simplicity, and that the church encourages men and women not to rely on outward appearances, but to develop the inner, spiritual life, which is the secret of real beauty, as espoused in 1 Peter 3:3-5.⁴²

The Amish are a unique example of a group that has been established since the late 1600s and has not altered its ideals or standards for membership.⁴³ The rules of the church must be obeyed. Members who do not live according to the ways of the Amish are excommunicated.⁴⁴ Still, young adults who belong to the Amish sect have chosen to be members. They are given a chance to see and experience the world during adolescence, in an event called Rumspringa, after which they may choose to reside in the secular world or return home and totally accept the Amish values. Four out of five young adults choose

⁴⁰ Richards, 64.

⁴¹ Paulsen, who retired in July of 2010, held a televised forum for youth called "Let's Talk 2" where the major questions were related to lifestyle.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Amy Nickerson, "A Place to Finally Belong," *Christianity Today*, Sept.-Oct. 2006, 18.

⁴⁴ Brandao, 62.

to remain in the Amish church, and more than half of the group's membership is under 21. So, it would appear that they are doing something right.⁴⁵

Richards interviewed Roy Adams, an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, who said that he had a lot of respect for the Amish people because of their contributions to Christianity and to society.⁴⁶ Adams stated that they act according to what they believe—what their conviction tells them to do—and he thinks Adventists should copy this policy. But, he pointed out, “The trick is how to do that, and yet not isolate ourselves from the modern world. How do we guide our young people through the places where the Amish send theirs for only a while, and yet keep them from the Evil Ones.”⁴⁷

One thing is for certain: there are many conflicting issues in religion, and church members want definite answers. Thoughtful leaders tell us that the answers may not lie in how our choices affect our relationship with God, but in how that relationship affects our choices. The church members should be challenged to compare themselves with believers who have gone before and what they went through for their faith; some Christians have lost their lives for their faith. Furthermore, the church members should ask themselves, “What have you done for Jesus lately? What have you sacrificed for Him lately? Are the things that attract a young person in the world really that important?” If they can answer these honestly, it would resolve many questions about standards.

The subject of lifestyle brings up myriad claims and counterclaims, but there is one definite truth: when one puts a relationship with Jesus first, the things of the world

⁴⁵ Del Priore, 78.

⁴⁶ Richards, 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

look a lot less tempting, and there is more certainty. According to Luis da Camara Cascudo, the services a church provides for its members should be based on the proposition that if they understand Jesus, they will inevitably volunteer to set aside absolutely everything to be with Him.⁴⁸ Wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness is the basis of the Christian lifestyle. Christians should eat of His Word and drink the water of life during their time on earth; they will grow into the other lifestyle elements if these are fixed in their hearts. The church members who have spent time in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and are making decisions about their personal commitment to the denomination deserve good conversations. Guerra states that church leaders can give them authentic and relevant responses that will show them how much Jesus Christ loves them, and what He did more than 2,000 years ago and is doing now to prove that love to them.⁴⁹

Therefore, the following questions should be raised: what kinds of examples does the church wish members to witness, and what example does it want them to follow? Perhaps there is only one standard that the church can maintain, a standard greater than any other—one that can answer every question and direct every decision. Unbelievers and cynics mock this question, and it has been asked so often that many Christians no longer consider it, but it's one that youth, leaders, and members alike could stand to ask more often: "What would Jesus do?"⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cascudo, 88.

⁴⁹ Guerra, 95.

⁵⁰ Del Priore, 80.

Why Adventist Members Leave the Church

Reflecting on the considerable number of members that leave the church, Roger L. Dudley notes that 40 to 50 percent of Adventist people in the United States leave the church in their 20s.⁵¹ Dudley proposes that the way to address this problem is to find out from former and dissatisfied young Adventists specifically what is troubling them and develop programs to find definite solutions to these complaints.⁵² He claims that he spent over ten years making such an exhaustive study; he also insists that the Adventist Church does not want Adventists or anyone to know the truth about why so many young people are dissatisfied with the church, and so it is not developing programs for member retention among youth.⁵³ Faustino Teixeira traced the lives of 1,600 teenagers as they grew up and, often, grew disillusioned.⁵⁴ Refusing to let them leave in peace, Teixeira bombarded them with questionnaires. Many of them answered. Many of these young people had concluded that the church was the opposite of Christ, an outright farce. Miranda found that young people tended to stay in the church if their parents had also been Adventists, but that many of them were so dissatisfied with the church that even this factor could not hold them.

In addition, Mario Franca de Miranda found that many church members are desperate and surrounded by what they perceive as uncaring individuals.⁵⁵ Dudley

⁵¹ Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ Teixeira, 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁵ Miranda, 59.

affirmed that these members wanted to belong, to be needed, to be heard, to be loved.⁵⁶ They were aware that they had made mistakes, but they believed the church had made many more mistakes. According to Dudley, these members revealed their pain and their dreams, and allowed him to experience the intense emotional and psychological disturbances that they went through and for which they blamed the church—rightly or wrongly.⁵⁷ Many of these church members said that the church was hypocritical—the very opposite of what Christ had in mind.⁵⁸

A major aspect of former Adventists' dissatisfaction was a yearning for autonomy, without knowing just what sort of alternative church they would create. Still, a number of these members did have a definite design in mind for a church of their own. In any case, they did not believe that the Adventist church could possibly be the answer for a Christian. As one young woman stated, "I am frustrated with the church I have lost my faith in the Adventist organization....The members in my church were so cold."⁵⁹ Those who chose to disconnect from the church perceived the church as irrelevant because they were not accepted and their needs were neglected, according to Dudley's study.⁶⁰ Typically, they perceived intolerance, hypocrisy, and condemnation in the church.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Dudley, 62.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁸ Guerra, 99.

⁵⁹ Del Priore, 87.

⁶⁰ Dudley, 22.

⁶¹ Cascudo, 90.

One of the most intense topics that all Christian churches must face is the concept of Apocalypse; Revelation definitely prophesies apocalyptic terrors that will bring both the culmination of history and a final judgment, as well as a final conflict between the forces of Christ and Anti-Christ. This relates to the retention of young people because they will carefully examine what church leaders have to say about the subject and whether their membership in the church is helping them prepare for these final events and the Second Coming of Christ.

Summary

Religion today in Brazil is both very competitive and very fluid. Unlike older church members, young people are neither totally socialized into a particular group nor unwilling to find fault with church leaders. Therefore, if they do not feel that a particular church is right for them, they will move on to another church or even a non-Christian group, or just become unaffiliated.

The South São Paulo Conference has experienced a significant outflow of its members in the last decade, partly due to the strict Adventist lifestyle. However, Adventist church leaders insist that their strict lifestyle standards are correct for living a Christian life. The Amish have been used as a comparison: they have fixed rules and policies, but most Amish youth choose to remain within the group.

For other former Adventists, the trouble goes far beyond a conflict over lifestyle. They view the church as acting against the teachings of Jesus and being cold and disrespectful of others. Roger Dudley conducted a ten-year survey that indicated that large numbers of young Adventists found the church to be hypocritical, with a leadership that was cold and contemptuous.

In general, ideas about the Apocalypse and the Second Coming of Christ are important to large numbers of churchgoers. Some churchgoers accept their group's viewpoint about future events, and others do not think that membership in a particular church is important for salvation. When members do not accept their church's teachings about the Apocalypse and the Second Coming, they will tend to leave the church and seek a church whose teachings seem more sensible to them.

CHAPTER IV

PROFILE OF THE SOUTH SÃO PAULO CONFERENCE

The South São Paulo Conference headquarters is located in the city of São Paulo, which is the biggest city in Brazil; it has an estimated population of 11,105,249 residents within an area of 1,523 square kilometers (588 square miles),¹ The city lies at the center of the heavily urbanized São Paulo metropolitan area, which, with an estimated 21,616,060 people in 7,944 square kilometers (3,067.2 square miles),² is the largest metropolitan area in the nation. It ranks as either the second or third most populous area in the Americas, just below Mexico City,³ and one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world.⁴

The city is the capital of the state of São Paulo, the most populous Brazilian state, and it is also the richest city in Brazil; its attraction lies in its people and its vibrant cultures.⁵ A more cosmopolitan city than its counterpart Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo

¹ O. Arantes Maricato and E. Vainer, *A Cidade do Pensamento Unico: Desmanchando Consensos* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2000), 18.

² F. Fernandes, *Capitalismo Dependente e Classes Sociais na América Latina* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Zahar, 1975), 56.

³ David Harvey, *A Condição Pós-Moderna* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1992), 36.

⁴ J. Martins, *O Poder do Atraso: Ensaios de Sociologia da História Lenta* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1994), 67.

⁵ L. C. Ribeiro, *Dos Cortiços aos Condomínios Fechados* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2004), 48.

possesses significant ethnic minority communities, including substantial Japanese, Italian, and Arab and Lebanese Christian neighborhoods.⁶

A Brief History of São Paulo City

The city of São Paulo was founded in the year 1554 by Jesuit missionaries⁷ and named after the first-century Christian missionary Saint Paul.⁸ There is a steep mountain range called the “Great Escarpment” that extends along much of the coastal region of southeastern Brazil and separates São Paulo from its port city of Santos, which is located to the south on the Atlantic Ocean.⁹

Religion and religious activities are among the main concerns of the people living in São Paulo.¹⁰ São Paulo city dwellers are known as *paulistanos*, while *paulista* designates anyone from the whole of São Paulo State,¹¹ including the *paulistanos*; the city’s Latin motto is *Non ducor, duco*, which translates as “I am not led, I lead.”¹² A famous nickname for the city is “Sampa,”¹³ and it has the most diverse population in the

⁶ Mario Santos, *Metrópole Corporativa Fragmentada* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1990), 88.

⁷ Heitor Frugoli, Jr., *Centralidade em São Paulo: Trajetórias, Conflitos e Negociações na Metrópole* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2000), 28.

⁸ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 40.

⁹ Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, *Cidade de Muros: Crime, Segregação e Cidadania em São Paulo* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2000), 34.

¹⁰ Frugoli, 32.

¹¹ Neide Patarra, *Migração, Condições de Vida e Dinâmica Urbana* (São Paulo: Unicamp/Fapesp, 1997), 52.

¹² Frugoli, 37.

¹³ Ernest W. Burgess, *Urban Areas: An Experiment in Social Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 34.

entire country of Brazil.¹⁴ Immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought people from all over the world to the state.¹⁵ The main ancestry groups in São Paulo are the Italians and the Portuguese.¹⁶ There are about 15 million people of Italian descent living in the state—one of the largest concentrations of Italians outside Italy.¹⁷ São Paulo has had a large Portuguese population since the sixteenth century, though most Portuguese arrived in the state in the early twentieth century.¹⁸ The Spanish population is also large, with some 7 million people;¹⁹ the Arab population numbers 5 million, and the Germans 3 million.²⁰

There are not a significant number of Afro-Brazilians within the state of São Paulo, but a few communities have existed there since the last century, and the number has grown in recent decades due to migration from northeastern Brazil, where this population is concentrated.²¹ People of Asian descent make up 10 percent of the population of São Paulo; most of them are Japanese, giving the state the largest Japanese population outside Japan. Other Asian groups include Chinese and Koreans.²²

¹⁴ Mario Santos, *Por Uma Economia Política da Cidade: O Caso de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1991), 58.

¹⁵ Patarra, 52.

¹⁶ Maura Pardini Bicudo Vêras, *Trocando Olhares* (São Paulo: Nobel, 2000), 66.

¹⁷ Fernando A. Novais, *História da Vida Privada no Brasil* (São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2000), 48.

¹⁸ Alan Gilbert, *World Cities and the Urban Future: The View from Latin America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1998), 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²¹ Edmond Preteceille, *Cidades Globais e Segmentação Social* (São Paulo: Bogus, 1999), 45.

²² Novais, 53.

The city of São Paulo is the heart of the strongest behavioral movement in Latin America²³ and one of the centers for various religious denominations or congregations.

Economics

São Paulo is one of the most important financial centers in Latin America,²⁴ and it has become home to a large number of advertising and broadcasting companies in the last several years.²⁵ São Paulo has hosted many international events and fairs, and has been visited by varied audiences,²⁶ from scientists and artists to merchants and entrepreneurs, coming from Brazil and from abroad.²⁷

Some of the most important events that take place in São Paulo include international fairs for shoes and sport items, the textile industry, the car industry, and the book industry.²⁸ There has been a gradual change in the city's economic profile over the last decade, from a strongly industrialized base to service and technology-oriented activity.²⁹ Intensive manpower-consuming industries have been replaced by a great number of high-technology industries and service providers of many kinds.³⁰ Business has increased, many new colleges have been founded, and there has been a boom in many

²³ Véras, 47.

²⁴ Santos, *Por Uma Economia*, 36.

²⁵ Frugoli, 25.

²⁶ Santos, *Por Uma Economia*, 37.

²⁷ Fundação Seade, *Pesquisa da Atividade Econômica Paulista* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2001), Vol. 3, 12.

²⁸ Sassen, 46.

²⁹ Santos, *Por Uma Economia*, 78.

³⁰ Patarra, 48.

sectors, particularly shopping malls, entertainment, construction, and business-oriented tourism.³¹

Social Challenges

Any large city such as São Paulo faces many challenges, including various social challenges. In the beginning of the twentieth century, São Paulo became the major economic center of Brazil.³² During the two World Wars and the Great Depression, exports of coffee to the United States and Europe were critically affected,³³ leading rich coffee farmers to invest in industrialization in the city.³⁴ The new job positions in the industrial sector attracted many people from other regions of the country, especially from the northeast.³⁵

This population boom in the city, combined with ineffective public transport, led to a high number of cars and other vehicles in circulation and consistently congested traffic throughout the city.³⁶ Approximately 1 million people—about 9.5 percent of the population—live in poor districts and surrounding regions³⁷ that favor the actions of drug dealers, making São Paulo one of the most violent cities in Brazil.

³¹ Lucia Bógus and Suzana Pasternak Taschner, *São Paulo Como Patchwork* (São Paulo: Bogus, 1999), 88.

³² Gilbert, 59.

³³ Novais, 58.

³⁴ Luiz Cesar Queiroz Ribeiro and Luciana Correa do Lago, *O Espaço Social das Grandes Metrôpoles Brasileiras: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo e Belo Horizonte* (São Paulo: Bogus, 1997), 14.

³⁵ Santos, *Por Uma Economia*, 80.

³⁶ Patarra, 52.

³⁷ SuzanaPasternak Taschner, “Habitação e Demografia Intra-Urbana em São Paulo,” *Revista Brasileira de Estudos de Populacao* 7, no. 1 (1990): 47.

Demographic Information

Age

The population of São Paulo is aging, which is another subject that deserves special attention. According to IBGE-2006,³⁸ young people (aged fourteen and under) represented 32.40 percent of the total population in 1970.³⁹ In 1980 they made up 29.95 percent, in 1991 28.58 percent, in 1996 25.96 percent, and in 2006 22.37 percent.⁴⁰ Similarly, the aged population (sixty and older) increased from 6.08 percent to 8.08 percent between 1970 and 1991, and from 8.63 percent to 10.47 percent between 1996 and 2006.⁴¹

The trend observed in 1970, 1991, 1996, and 2006 is that the youth population is decreasing and that the population of women is higher than that of men. This is best explained by the high mortality rate among men as a result of the violence that has spread in the city in recent decades.⁴²

³⁸ Elza Berquó, *Arranjos Familiares no Brasil: Uma Visão Demográfica* (São Paulo: Novais, 1999), 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴² Caldeira, 34.

Educational Level

Educational level can be measured by years of study.⁴³ The percentage of households in the metropolitan São Paulo area with between one and four years of school attendance is 38.22. In the other cities of greater São Paulo, the percentage is 44.92.⁴⁴

Households with more than twelve years of study in the metropolitan São Paulo area represent 16.72 percent of the population, as opposed to 7.94 percent in greater São Paulo. What is even more notable is that 9 percent of households are without any education.⁴⁵

The South São Paulo Conference

The South São Paulo Conference is located in the southern part of the metropolitan São Paulo area. It was organized in 1992 after being split off from the São Paulo Conference, which covered the entire southern São Paulo region. After rapid growth in the São Paulo Conference, it became difficult to administer such a large region, so the conference was divided in order to manage the demand. The population of the territory covered by the South São Paulo Conference is 3,653,800.⁴⁶ The South São Paulo Conference covers part of the city of São Paulo from the Tiete River to the Ribeira River Valley, administering 137 churches and 92 companies, totaling 40,008 members.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴ Véras, 46.

⁴⁵ Ribeiro and do Lago, 69.

⁴⁶ Berquó, 88.

⁴⁷ Office of Archives and Statistics, “World Church Statistics – Central Brazil Union Conference (1999-2010),” http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=258984 (accessed April 2, 2007).

Creation of the Survey Instrument

The survey instrument created for this study was a quantitative survey⁴⁸ that was administered to a sample representing the population of the South São Paulo Conference.⁴⁹ The unit sample was comprised of 100 participants⁵⁰ who were former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and older than eighteen years of age.⁵¹

The advantage of this method was that it provided a certain degree of validity and reliability in the research findings.⁵² The survey method enabled the accumulation of factual information that emphasized a thorough understanding and comprehensive analysis of principles as supported by the collected facts and evidence.⁵³

To accomplish this, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with time limits for its completion. This instrument⁵⁴ was used to design survey procedures, validate those procedures and the administration of the survey, and check data accuracy.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Lincoln, NE: Sage, 2003), 153.

⁴⁹ Office of Archives and Statistics.

⁵⁰ Curtis Hardyck and Lewis F. Petrinovich, *Understanding Research in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide to Understanding Social and Behavioral Research* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1998), 78.

⁵¹ William D. Crano, *Principles and Methods of Social Research* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 172.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵³ Hardyck and Petrinovich, 44.

⁵⁴ Crano, 167.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

Data analysis, integrity, interpretation, evaluation, and presentation were also checked.⁵⁶

In the questionnaire, every question was used to produce quantitative answers for data analysis.⁵⁷ The questions provided the former church members with a fixed selection of answers to choose from, which made the survey easy to administer and analyze in terms of producing quantifiable data.⁵⁸

Administration of the Survey and Data Collection

The survey was administered to participants who were former members of the Santo Amaro, Campo de Fora, Jardim das Palmeiras, and Santa Margarida churches. These churches are located in São Paulo and are under the administration of the South São Paulo Conference in the area of Capao Redondo. Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from Andrews University, the South São Paulo Conference, and the Brazilian Central Union (see Appendix A).

The researcher explained the data collection process to the pastors and elders of these churches before conducting the survey (see Appendix A). A pastor or elder in each congregation gave a brief explanation of the study and asked church members with relatives or friends who had dropped out of the church to have them participate in the study. After each former member read and signed the informed consent form and completed the survey, they put them into separate envelopes, sealed them, and gave them

⁵⁶ Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995), 363.

⁵⁷ Crano, 173.

⁵⁸ Van Maanen, 59.

back to the pastor/elder or any member of the pastor's team. Finally, the pastors returned these envelopes to the researcher.

Once the researcher received all the envelopes, he opened those containing the informed consent forms, counted them, and then filed the forms (and held them for thirty months). The researcher opened the survey envelopes, which indicated the pastor of origin for each survey, and counted them to make sure that one consent form had been received for each survey.

The surveys were then processed by the researcher and the results entered on his computer. Once this procedure was done, the surveys were destroyed and the researcher worked only with the tabulated information on his computer. This information was available only to the researcher's advisor; now that the research is part of the research paper, it will be available to the public.

Data Analysis and Results

The theological and literature review conducted on the subject of member retention informed the analysis of data from this study. The choice of the data collection method was a critical part of the research process,⁵⁹ and the presentation of the data⁶⁰ discusses and explains certain underlying issues and principles that supported the structure and content of the research methodology used.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Babbie, 363.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 364.

⁶¹ Rutman, 22.

The research combined the survey data to evaluate⁶² the effectiveness of membership retention among former church members. The questionnaire shared a common thread of modifications relevant to the process of achieving the desired information intended for the realization of this presentation, as demonstrated in Table 1.

⁶² Hardyck and Petrinovich, 55.

Table 1

Demographic and spiritual practices as reported through the survey in percentages

Variables	Total % (<i>n</i> = 100)	Male % (<i>n</i> = 54)	Female % (<i>n</i> = 46)
Age			
16–25	39	21	18
26–35	28	14	14
36–45	22	13	9
46–55	8	4	4
Over 55	3	2	1
Educational level			
Elementary	7	4	3
High School	77	44	33
College	14	5	9
Master's Level	2	1	1
Doctoral	0	0	0
Daily prayer			
1 time	65	39	26
2 times	14	5	9
3 times	6	3	3
None	7	5	2
Church attendance			
1 time	47	27	20
2 times	32	18	14
3 times	21	9	12
Bible study			
1 hour	64	34	30
2 hours	17	9	8
3 hours	5	3	2
Witnessing			
Yes	53	23	30
No	47	31	16

Table 1 shows that of the 54 male participants, 21 percent were aged 16–25 and 26 percent were aged 26–35. The results show an indirect inverse relationship between increasing age and decreasing percentage of participants. Also, 82 percent of the male participants were educated at the high school level, 9 percent at the college level, 4 percent at the elementary level, and 2 percent at the master’s level.

Before they left the church, 72 percent of the male group prayed once daily, followed by 8 percent who prayed two times daily and 6 percent who prayed three times daily. As for church attendance, 49 percent of the men attended once a week, 35 percent attended twice a week, and only 17 percent attended three times a week. This indicates that there is a problem in terms of church attendance.

Most of the male participants did not engage in Bible study often. The largest percentage, 64 percent, only did so for one hour a week, which the researcher believes is not enough time to achieve spiritual growth within the community. Many of them (42.4 percent) reported that they did not witness or do other church activities, but 57.5 percent reported doing so. These results call for attention to church programs that address membership and retention.

Most of the female participants (40 percent) also fell into the 16–25 age bracket, while 31 percent were aged 26–35, 20 percent 36–45, and 8 percent 46–55. This indicates that the Adventist community that participated in the survey is composed largely of teenagers and young adults. As regards education levels for the female group, the majority of them had a high school education (71.5 percent), while 20 percent were educated at the college level, 7.5 percent at the elementary level, and 3.5 percent at the

master's level. The most common level of education among all participants in the South São Paulo Conference was the high school level.

The female participants were prayerful people in the community: 58 percent prayed once a day before leaving the church, 20 percent twice a day, and 7 percent three times a day, while 13 percent reported that they still prayed, and only 4 percent reported not praying. Before they left the church, 20.7 percent of the female participants attended once a week, while 29 percent attended twice weekly and another 29 percent attended three times weekly. This indicates that their church attendance was stable before these former members left the church.

As for personal Bible study, 64.5 percent of the female participants reported studying the Bible for one hour a week, followed by 17.5 percent who did two hours of Bible study a week and 11 percent who did none. Most of the female participants (66 percent) reported that they did not witness or do other church activities, while 35 percent said they did.

Reasons Why People Leave Church

Various explanations of why people leave the church have been given in the literature as well as in the Bible and the work of Ellen G. White. To further examine this complex issue, the participants in this study were asked to give their reasons for leaving. They had different opinions according to their experiences with the church and its leaders.

Even though Adventist church leaders insist that the strict lifestyle standards of the church are correct for living a Christian life, some former Adventists affirm that the trouble goes far beyond a conflict over lifestyle. Participants view some churches as

acting against the teachings of Jesus on love and being cold. Roger Dudley conducted a ten-year survey that indicated that large numbers of young Adventists found the church to be hypocritical, with a leadership that was cold and contemptuous.

The phenomenon of people leaving the church is so multifaceted that no single explanation can cover it.⁶³ According to Dudley's research, between 40 and 50 percent of Adventist youth who are baptized leave the church before they reach twenty years of age, which Dudley refers to as "bleeding with epic proportions."⁶⁴ Some experts have claimed that loss of faith is the main reason for church decline.⁶⁵ However, leaving the church does not mean leaving God. Even though many who leave the church have experienced traumatic tragedies and injustices, they have not necessarily lost faith in God; it is interesting that leaving the church may or may not involve a loss of faith.⁶⁶ Disaffiliation does not necessarily mean deconversion either, because individuals may not claim to have been converted in the first place or may still be committed to their faith, even if no longer to their church.⁶⁷

The study findings showed that it is more difficult for people to leave the church if they belong to a church that has exercised significant influence over the way they lead their lives. When people weigh up the pros and cons of leaving, it seems that a good deal

⁶³ Smith, 15.

⁶⁴ Dudley, 60.

⁶⁵ Richard G. Hutcheson, *Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981), 114.

⁶⁶ Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 47.

⁶⁷ Harre, 28.

of ambivalence is shown toward the church. In some cases, negative verdicts on the church are very nearly outweighed by recognition of the positive benefits received from churchgoing. Many of the participants retained highly positive memories of their churches.

The 100 respondents were asked if they would describe their dropping off from church attendance as gradual or sudden; then they were asked to give their reasons for leaving the church. Tables 2 and 3 show the results.

Table 2

The process of leaving church

Variables	Total (<i>n</i> = 100)
The Leaving Process	18 Years and Over %
Gradual	52
Couldn't say either way	8
Sudden	40

Table 3

Reasons why people leave church

Variables	Total % (<i>n</i> = 100)	Male % (<i>n</i> = 54)	Female (<i>n</i> = 46)
Spiritual weakness	15	8	7
Dating a person with different belief	18	10	8
Married a person with different belief	11	5	6
Relationship conflict with pastor	5	2	3
Financial difficulties	10	6	4
Conflict between Sabbath and work	20	11	9
Lack of connection between worship programs and their spiritual needs	16	9	7
Influenced by friendship of nonbelievers	5	3	2

Table 3 clearly indicates that the top reason for leaving the church was a conflict between Sabbath worship and work: 20 percent of the respondents chose this answer. Next was dating a person with a different belief, at 18 percent, followed by lack of connection between worship programs and their spiritual needs at 16 percent and spiritual weakness at 15 percent.

The participants were asked what the church should do in order to decrease the number of dropouts; Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4

What the church should do to decrease dropouts

Variables	Total (<i>n</i> = 100)	Male (<i>n</i> = 54)	Female (<i>n</i> = 46)
Training on spiritual formation	18	11	7
Training on social relationships	18	10	8
Creation of a variety of ministries	11	5	6
Improving worship programs	17	9	8
Seminars on Sabbath observance	22	13	9
Providing attractive programs	14	6	8

The most popular answer was seminars on Sabbath observance, which was selected by 22 percent of the respondents. Training on social relationships and training on spiritual formation were both chosen by 18 percent of the respondents, while 14 percent of them thought the church should offer more attractive programs.

Summary

São Paulo, Brazil, is a very large and industrialized city at the center of an extensive metropolitan area. About 1 million people, or 9.5 percent of the population, live in poor districts and surrounding regions where drug dealers operate freely, so that it is one of the most violent cities in Brazil. The South São Paulo Conference was organized in 1992 and covers part of the South São Paulo and the Ribeira River areas, administering 137 churches and 90 companies with a membership of 40,008.

For the purpose of this study, a mixed method of survey was administered to 100 former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The results clearly indicate that the chief reason for departing the church was conflict between Sabbath worship and work, which was chosen by 20 percent of both male and female respondents. The next major reason was dating nonbelievers, which was chosen by 18 percent of respondents. The third major reason was a lack of connection between worship programs and the spiritual needs of members, cited by 16 percent. Spiritual weakness was cited by 15 percent of respondents as a reason for leaving the church.

The respondents were asked what the church should do to prevent people from dropping out. They explained that they wanted to see the church engaging in social and spiritual events, such as trainings and seminars, and generally involving youth in church more by improving existing programs. Furthermore, 22 percent of the respondents indicated a need to hold seminars on Sabbath observance, 18 percent wanted improved training on social relationships, 18 percent wanted training on spiritual formation, and 14 percent thought the programs should be more attractive.

Thus, we see that Adventists become unhappy with the church for a variety of reasons, but they can be divided into personal issues, program issues, and spiritual issues. The results also indicate solutions that church leaders could adopt to reduce the rate of departure from the church. For example, it could be possible to add a Saturday service, provided that willing pastors could be found. Obviously, new programs can be added and older ones improved, although this will no doubt also involve a great deal of discussion, as will the matter of the spiritual needs of unhappy members.

CHAPTER V

A PROPOSED DISCIPLESHIP SEMINAR

This chapter aims to present an instrument in seminar format that includes suggestions to decrease dropout rates in local churches. The goal of this discipleship seminar approach is to create an environment of spiritual acceptance among church members. In order to achieve success with this seminar, it is necessary to have the effective participation of the church members, to be engaged in a church missionary program, and to have a clear understanding of the meaning of discipleship.

Seminar Preparation

Criteria

There are no specific criteria required for church members to take part in the seminar. All are invited to participate, especially these converts who have recently joined the church. The success of this seminar is related to the level of confidence that the pastor's leaders have in the project. Therefore, the pastor should train his leaders first, in order for them to understand the decisions that will be made later regarding what the church does with its members and lost ones.

Preliminary Phase

The pastor should hold a meeting with his church leaders at least two to three weeks prior to the beginning of the seminar to begin the preliminary phase of the program.

In the first week of the preliminary phase, the leaders should get information about the church through the use of research forms regarding problems, challenges, and opportunities. In the second week, the church should be spiritually prepared for the event through a dynamic worship service and well-delivered biblically sound sermons with a focus on Jesus' ministry of salvation and on group prayer, communion, and baptism. These events all together will properly present the idea of discipleship. In the third week, a strong and impressive mobilization program involving all the church segments and focusing on the seminar audience will be presented. This mobilization program will end on the afternoon of the Sabbath with a dynamic presentation.

This preliminary phase is fundamental to the success of the seminar. The objective is for the missionary climate to spread within the church community in such a way that it will inspire everyone with enthusiasm. Each seminar meeting will be a joyful celebration, and folders will be distributed containing information about the steps to be followed; these include congregational worship, prayer groups, group discussion, and lectures related to the church's view of missionary work, especially as it relates to rescuing those who have left the church. In other words, the goal is to create a new vision, new values, and a mission strategy to do discipleship with power.

Seminar Preparation and Action

To ensure the success of the seminar, each leader, including the pastor, must have in hand all the significant data from the preliminary research and be able to apply it at the right time to suggest solutions to the particular problems and needs of the community. This approach will help the group ascertain where attempts need to be made and how problems can be solved. The data will show the level of involvement of each church member in the preliminary phase in order to measure the challenges and progress of the discipleship project.

The registration of each participant is important because it will help the leaders create a visitation program, in which they visit the participants in their homes and confirm the decisions they made during the seminar presentation. Not all who attend the seminar will be fully committed to the missionary tasks, but it is expected that all registered participants will become active later as they discover their spiritual gifts and become involved in the church mission. All must recognize that the Holy Spirit gives each person the spiritual gifts needed to fulfill the mission on an individual or ecclesial level.

Involvement and Instruction

The seminary project will involve all the church members, including the new and former leaders. The new leaders will receive instruction in order to be involved with the active disciples. The former leaders will make adjustments in order to become community instructors. This will create a climate for engagement with the church and with the community outside of our faith. The participants will be prepared to execute a variety of tasks such as evangelism, teaching, and preaching.

Objective of the Seminar

The objective of the seminar is to strengthen the local church with the concept of discipleship in order to prevent the loss of members, especially new converts. The aims are to create an atmosphere of acceptance among the church members and to develop unique relationships among people, following the example of Jesus' ministry in the practice of teaching, witnessing, and edification through small group meetings. All these suggestions are ways of implementing discipleship as a missionary strategy.

The seminar will involve lectures, group discussion, and exchange of information with the participants. Each seminar session will last 1.5 hours, for a total of nine hours, including the meeting on the Sabbath. From Wednesday to Friday, the meetings will be held at night, and on the Sabbath, they will be held during worship and in the afternoon. Following the meetings, the pastor and his leaders will coordinate missionary activities that apply the plans for achieving the goals presented in the vision statement, as well as reviewing strategies.

The Vision, Mission, Values, and Strategies Defined

Building the Seminar Vision

In order for this seminar to be effective, it is essential for the church to develop a vision, a mission, values, and strategies. Churches usually can be classified as (1) churches with multiple visions, made up of committed people who are ready to follow

God's will and available to pay the cost in any way,¹ or (2) churches without vision, made up of passive people who are unaware of the purpose of the church.²

To build a vision, the local church will need to have strong programmatic content in terms of studying and instruction. The focus of discipleship is that the vision must become the ecclesiastical base of the church.³ In other words, one cannot ignore the importance of the vision. A right vision is one based on Jesus' great commission: that is the focus that must guide the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, how do we understand Jesus' purpose for the church? The Bible clearly states that where there is no vision, the people perish (Prov 19:18, KJV).

The right vision can enable a person to move from mediocrity to excellence.⁴ This is why the vision is important: it keeps the focus on conquering people for Christ. The church must have the right vision of what it wants to do in order to grow and influence people in a community. The strategy is one of effective methodology: conquering souls for Jesus through instruction and preaching.

Building the Mission

Building a mission for the church is also important. One must understand the difference between the mission and the vision. The former is a general statement of the goals and objectives of the ministry; the latter is a specific statement of direction and

¹ Esther Queiroz, *An Igreja Local e as Missoes* (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1998), 49.

² *Ibid.*, 52.

³ Leroy Eims, *A Arte Perdida de Fazer Discipulos* (Belo Horizonte, MG: Atos, 2001), 26.

⁴ Jose Campus-Rius, *De Jerusalem an Antioquia: Genesis de la Iglesia Cristiana* (Cordoba: Ediciones El Amendro, 1999), 78.

unity for that ministry. The mission is philosophical and its objective is to inform, while the vision's objective is to inspire.⁵ The final goal of any Christian vision is to praise God, and its immediate objective is to support the ministry of those who lead in discipleship.

There are three essential factors that work together for the success of a mission: (1) excelling in something,⁶ (2) looking forward and thinking outside the box to find new opportunities,⁷ and (3) establishing a new standard for having a real commitment along with the mission.⁸ There are several advantages to preparing a mission statement for the church: (1) the mission unifies the local church and gives it direction,⁹ (2) it encourages giving the church responsibility for doing the tasks,¹⁰ and (3) it helps members feel secure by assuring them that they are doing God's will.¹¹

Building Values

The values of the church community will determine how the seminar is presented to them. These values are principles that people learn along the way in life, from family, school, church, and, of course, the Bible. Believing in and assimilating each person's values will motivate the group to face personal and collective challenges.

⁵ Paul Anderson-Walsh, *Até que Cristo Seja Formado em Vós* (São Paulo: Grapho, 2008), 54.

⁶ Ricardo Gondim, *Missao Integral* (São Paulo: Fonte, 2008), 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰ Dionísio Vandresen, *Bíblia, Terra e Água - Roteiros de Estudos Bíblicos Para Lideranças* (Porto Alegre: CEBI/CEMPO, 2008), 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

The seminar for new converts reflects the values that exist within the church. Sometimes church members do not recognize the potential that hides within them or the resources that sustain their commitment to executing their tasks with competence. According to Gary McIntosh,¹² the values that help churches work can be classified as follows: (1) promoting personal involvement, (2) communicating what is important, (3) involving important changes, (4) inspiring people to action, (5) increasing the credibility of the leadership, and (6) shaping the character and vision of the ministry. All these concepts can be part of the seminar; the church will express its values through commitment to Christ and discipleship, which will lead to growth in the congregation.

Building Strategies

Each church needs to build a strategy for making disciples, just as each disciple needs to understand the process of making a church. The discipleship seminar will mobilize the church to reach out to its community in two ways: edifying and evangelizing. The first enables the missionary spirit among the members, and the second promotes Jesus' great commission to go and make disciples. Therefore, the seminar makes stimulating inactive church members its first priority.

The philosophy of the church requires it to focus on people first, because one of the church's priorities is guiding its members from spiritual birth to Christian maturity. Jesus Himself recognized the importance of discipleship for the spiritual health of the church and its members, and He laid out the strategy for discipling in His Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-19.

¹²McIntosh, 67.

Steps to Discipleship

Regarding the steps to discipleship, the seminar strategy takes into account at least three levels of commitment: (1) the unconverted person, (2) the converted person, and (3) the committed Christian. The objective of this strategy for the local church is twofold: it can move individuals from level 1 (unconverted) to level 2 (converted), or it can move them from level 2 to level 3 (committed). Applying discipleship as a regular process as well as a strategy for increase should improve the quality along with the quantity of church members. When implemented in a local church, the discipleship program should help heal the church's deficiencies in both the medium and the long term.

The program, once implemented, should work in two different ways: (1) edifying members, fortifying new converts, organizing church members to fulfill the mission with clear objectives, and equipping those who hold leadership positions;¹³ and (2) attracting people from the church neighborhood through evangelism.¹⁴ The Christian disciples will teach and preach in a way that will edify the new converts and help them to mature and remain vibrant within the church, mainly through involvement in small groups.¹⁵ Each disciple-witness will be a powerful instrument to impress people's lives through his or her testimony and Christian lifestyle. Both in the local church and in the community, the signs of discipleship, such as conversion, regeneration, baptism, repentance, and forgiveness, will inspire people to give praise and glory to God for the amazing results

¹³ Vandresen, 65.

¹⁴ Pedro Lima Vasconcellos, *A Boa Notícia Segundo a Comunidade de Lucas: "O Espírito me Ungiu Para Evangelizar os Pobres"* (Porto Alegre: CEBI/CEMPO, 2008), 44.

¹⁵ Augusto Braz, *Igrejas em Celulas* (Manaus, AAM: Calderaro, 2002), 39.

that God has brought into their lives. The steps to discipleship suggested in the seminar should result in success. The criteria are ideas that should be applied to the church to verify if, in fact, it is working in accordance with God's will as stated in His Word as exemplified in the first step as follows.

Spiritual Multiplication

The first step to discipleship in the seminar is spiritual multiplication, which can be understood in two different ways: being a disciple and making disciples. The seminar divides the church into small groups with the objective of missionary activity so that each member will become a multiplier agent who is prepared to lead another small group. After a training period, it is expected that the first disciples will be able to start a new group of disciples.¹⁶

The Process of Selecting People

The second step is the process of selecting people as Jesus chose His disciples. This was a new concept of discipleship at the time, because the Greek philosophers and Jewish masters did not follow this method.¹⁷ They, and the schools they represented, were chosen by their disciples; Jesus reversed that method. He chose those who followed Him through the process outlined in Luke 6:12–13: (1) praying and vigil,¹⁸ (2) choosing

¹⁶ Rogério I. de Almeida Cunha, *O Servo Solidário: Uma Reflexão Sobre Nossa Experiência de Exílio no Livro de Isaías* (Porto Alegre: CEBI/CEMPO, 2006), 53.

¹⁷ Heitor da Silva Glória and Odja Barros Santos, *Como Um Só Povo - Reflexões em Torno da Unidade da Igreja* (CEBI/CEMPO, 2007), 56.

¹⁸ Daniel Salinas and S. Escobar, *Pos-Modernidade* (São Paulo: ABU, 1999), 66.

people with potential,¹⁹ and (3) indication of a specific task. Jesus did not ask for volunteers to join His ministry, and the only one who did volunteer eventually betrayed him.²⁰ Following Jesus' example, to create disciples, a specific group must be first chosen and then trained. This group must be formed from those who are available in the church and have really committed their lives to Christ. Such groups can be powerful instruments for member retention.

Commitment to Sharing Personal Experience

The third step to discipleship is sharing personal experience. The disciples must share the difficulties and challenges that they face on the journey to accomplishing their spiritual goals. This process should help establish unity of purpose among the disciples and bring about a mutual understanding of ideas and actions. This is a biblical process: see Matt 12:36, 1 Pet 4:5, and Rom 4:13, 13:17.

Commitment to Seminar Follow-Up

Each participant in the discipleship seminar must make a commitment to follow up on what he or she has learned and apply it to his or her life in the church to obtain the best result. If there is no commitment to the discipleship training program, there will not be any lasting progress. A leader or a discipleship learner is expected to be committed to following up after the seminar is over in order to create more disciples.

¹⁹ Gondim, 67.

²⁰ Emílio Voigt, Gervásio Toffoli, and Miriam Post, *Sonho da Unidade: Diferentes Caminhos* (Porto Alegre: CEBI/CEMPO, 2007), 56.

There are three basic elements involved in this follow-up: (1) fidelity to attendance, support, and participation,²¹ (2) personal responsibility for sharing experiences with each other during the process of fulfilling spiritual goals,²² and (3) facilitating spiritual reproduction, in the sense of creating more disciples and being open to the acceptance of new disciples.²³ This process is ongoing; it will never be finished until the end of time. Those who are involved in a discipleship program are expected to work hard and be willing to pay the price, recognizing that results may not be evident right away, but that they will definitely come in the medium and long term.

Spiritual Gifts

Discipleship tends to lead people to discover their spiritual gifts, as stated in 1 Cor 12–14 and Eph 4:7-16. With training, the disciples will become ready and able to support the growth of their community using their gifts.²⁴ When disciples discover their place in the body of Jesus, they will complete their tasks more authentically and happily. The discovery of spiritual gifts can generate results for the congregation as well as the believer. Because of their potential impact on the life of the believer, spiritual gifts are an important part of the seminar related to the Holy Spirit and discipleship.

²¹ Salinas and Escobar, 68.

²² Jorge Pinheiro, *Teologia da Vida* (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2007), 76.

²³ Valmor da Silva and Hébert Vieira Barros, *O Dom Maior e o Amor* (Porto Alegre: CEBI/CEMPO, 2002), 32.

²⁴ Gondim, 44.

Small Groups

The biblical school in the church is made up of small groups²⁵ that may meet on Saturdays, Sundays, or another day. Jesus used small groups in His earthly ministry; He set apart a group of three men, Peter, Philip, and James, who were trained as leaders and then formally organized to train others to function as missionary groups.²⁶ These small groups were created to support the disciples and other believers²⁷ in their missionary work in people's homes, as stated by Ellen White, who indicated that each church should have well organized groups of members to work in the community around the church.²⁸

Prayer

Prayer is one of the principal needs of the church and a vital part of the seminar. The objective is to create a prayer room in a local church in order to stimulate the desire to pray among those who attend church. Also, praying is an activity that should support small groups, families, and specific types of needs.

Discipleship Training

The Right Tasks for the Right People

In order to retain members in the discipleship training seminar, it is of crucial importance that the right tasks be prepared for the right people throughout the process. That is, one must be careful not to recruit people just to achieve goals; the ultimate

²⁵ Ernani C. Ebert, *Grupos Familiares: Um Modelo Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Vida, 1997), 48.

²⁶ Jesse Fletcher, *A Missao da Igreja* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: JUERP, 1998), 46.

²⁷ Miguel Cerna, *Poder de los Grupos Pequenos en la Iglesia* (Newbury Park: El Camino, 1991), 34.

²⁸ Coleho, Filho, *An Etica dos Profetas Hoje* (São Paulo: Exodus, 2007), 56.

intention is to help them. A fundamental part of initiating someone into discipleship is to focus on the initiate's needs so that he or she will be able to accomplish the task. Jesus' purpose is to know what the person is, instead of what he is capable of doing. In other words, being comes before making.

Conviction and Perspective in Training

To promote conviction and perspective in training, it is crucial that the disciple take the time to do things adequately. From the new believer's perspective, becoming a disciple should be understood as a personal philosophy of life, a set of values that motivates him or her in life. Jesus Himself spoke about this learning perspective in the sense of choosing spiritual things before earthly ones (Luke 12:24–31). Therefore, the conviction to choose the divine and become a disciple in Jesus' cause should characterize the lives of the great men and women of God, because Jesus is their model of a real disciple. Without this conviction and this perspective, no one can be trained to become a disciple.

This raises the following question: how can one acquire this conviction and perspective of discipleship in order to be successful? First, it should be understood that this training begins and ends in God. It is He who promotes the conviction and proper perspective. As it is recorded in the Bible, “unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psa 127:1). There are, however, some guidelines that should help in the discipleship process, such as emphasizing the principles without neglecting the methods. In order to create conviction and perspective, one should combine principle and methodology. In the parable of the sower, it is said that the harvest is related to where the seed has fallen (Luke 8:4–8). The focus here is on the principle of sowing as vital to the

multiplying of the seed. While the principle of sowing is invariable in any season or circumstances, the method should be flexible to achieve the best result.

Jesus' Great Commission in the gospel of Matthew is to "go and preach" the gospel to all creatures (Matt 28:18–19). In Acts 1:8 Jesus says that the mission should start in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Judea and then go to the rest of the world. However, in both situations, both the principle and the methodology are emphasized. This combination of principle and methodology is revealed clearly in the mission of the first disciples, as related in Acts 1:8. This statement teaches specific lessons for discipleship: convictions are built not just by practicing the method, but by understanding the principle, and being a disciple is seeing things from the divine perspective, because God has all the requirements for the disciple's tasks.

The General Objectives of the Seminar

The general purpose of the seminar is to instruct church leaders and members in discipleship with the objective of supporting new members. This seminar is presented from Wednesday night to Saturday afternoon in four sessions. The first session is entitled "Explaining Discipleship,"²⁹ the second is "Evangelism and Discipleship through Small Groups,"³⁰ the third is "The Relationship Aspect of Discipleship,"³¹ and the fourth is "The Discipleship Determined by Jesus."³² The last session will appeal to people's hearts and ask them to dedicate themselves to the cause of evangelism and the testimony of

²⁹ See Appendix C, 110.

³⁰ Ibid., 112.

³¹ Ibid., 115.

³² Ibid., 118.

truth. On the Sabbath afternoon, certificates will be given to those who participated in the seminar, and an evaluation will be made of the seminar and the commitments that will be formalized in the next seminar event.

Application and Evaluation of the Seminar

The application of the seminar begins with conducting research to discover the church's principal needs and evaluate the entire situation. After that, the relationship between the challenges and the willingness to work on these challenges should be examined. Then, a plan can be created in order to achieve the expected goal.

In the first research phase, data can be collected by the leaders, especially the heads of church departments and those who volunteer in the church departments. Eventually, data collected from all the members on the specific problems of the church should help to reveal the church's stronger and weaker points in the process of planning the seminar. Opinions should be sought from three groups: the main leadership (pastors, elders, and deacons), the second-level leadership (heads of departments and general services at the church), and the general membership of the church. It is expected that the results from these three groups should demonstrate some similarity, but also diverge somewhat. Using the collected data, it is then possible to define the local church's mission and its strategies.

Preparing the Calendar of Activities for the Seminar

Creating a calendar of activities for the new disciples will help them organize their time around the activities and achieve better results for the church and for their personal lives. Earlier, the necessity of taking three preliminary weeks for the

organization and implementation of the seminar was mentioned. During these three weeks, the church leaders will build the foundation of the project. First, preliminary meetings will be held and an evaluation and plan of action for each department of the church will be made. Second, meetings will be held to inspire the church members to get involved in the church mission, and third, a strong appeal will be made to them to participate in the seminar. The seminar for new believers is a missionary strategy to motivate the leaders and involve them with more people in such a way that their missionary “conscience” will be permanently reflected in the life of the congregation and become a powerful tool for the growth of the church.

Only time will reveal the importance of the seminar for the church. In each cycle of church growth, there is a need to reevaluate the process in order to ensure that the continuity of growth is commensurate with the human material resources applied. The ultimate goal of God for His church is to save those who are dying in their sins, for whom Jesus gave His life.

Summary

The basic idea is to create a seminar format that will support member retention. This discipleship seminar approach will create an environment of spiritual acceptance among the church members. The pastor and his church leaders must meet and do research into the major problems of the church. The seminar meetings will focus on spiritually preparing the church for a dynamic worship service and biblically sound, engaging sermons. A calendar of activities for the new disciples is important in order to help the church leaders organize their time. The process must be continually reevaluated to ensure

that church growth is commensurate with the resources applied and that it is in accordance with God's ultimate goal for His church, which is to save sinners.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine a major problem related to member retention in the South São Paulo Conference in São Paulo, Brazil. The possible impact of this phenomenon on four major churches in the South Conference has been analyzed. The Scriptures have been gleaned for spiritual principles that would inform this method, and strategies have been recommended based upon this study.

Yet, due to the complexity of the problem, not all of the topics have been covered, nor have all strategies been recommended. Strategies are designed to give only a general direction that may be taken. There is much work to be done to operationalize strategies into programs, which can be measured and evaluated. Based on what has been accomplished, further recommendations for study in this area as follows:

1. In the future, the survey may be repeated with a larger pool for greater generalizability.
2. The survey was conducted in the South São Paulo Conference in São Paulo, Brazil. The survey may also be conducted in other conferences in Brazil to determine regional differences.

3. The study may be repeated and results reported to determine possible correlations between the conferences and discover whether some conferences respond differently from others.
4. Young people in the church who maintain their faith regardless of circumstances may be studied in order to discover why they remain in the church.
5. More pastors may be trained in discipleship in order to strengthen the faith of the church members and cooperate to improve retention within the church.
6. Based on the participants' answers, churches may invest in a program of spiritual formation that strengthens the faith of members as part of God's will for the believers and involves definitive, measurable growth in the inner person, which will help in their spiritual growth related to character, thought, intention, and attitude.
7. Churches may invest in the improvement of worship programs; worship must be an inspiring experience where worshipers feel that the Spirit of God is truly at work in the church atmosphere in order for them to be happy attending the church service.
8. Churches may provide seminars on Sabbath observance, since a considerable number of participants reported having a conflict between the Sabbath and their working experience. The seminar should reinforce the concept that the practice of keeping the Sabbath bears much wisdom for people seeking ways through the crises of these times and the stresses of contemporary life. The bottom line of this concept for the church members must be that this material world will eventually

fade away, and that Christianity is not about the material world but about our return to heaven, which is the ultimate reality.

Conclusion

This study has sought to uncover the theoretical frameworks, theological implications, and sociological factors that inform the reasons why members are leaving churches in the South São Paulo Conference in São Paulo, Brazil. This study used a mixed-method research approach to explore and to describe the challenges facing the churches in that conference regarding the number of people who are leaving the church.

Based on the results, a suggested discipleship seminar was created that should serve as a concrete tool for promoting member retention by creating an environment of spiritual acceptance among church members. This approach is relevant because it expects the effective participation of church members in developing unique relationships among people, following the example of Jesus' ministry in the practice of teaching, witnessing, and edification through small group meetings, which should decrease dropout rates in local churches.

The seminar focuses on providing spiritual support, preparing the church for a dynamic worship service, and delivering biblically sound and engaging sermons, which should contribute to member retention. However, in order for the program to succeed, the process must be continually reevaluated to ensure that church growth is commensurate with the resources applied and that it is in accordance with God's ultimate goal for His church, which is to save sinners.

APPENDIX A

FORMS AND SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Christian Ministries Department

Informed Consent Form

Title: Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Member Retention for the South São Paulo Conference

Purpose of Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to discover why Seventh-day Adventist baptized members leave the church, and to establish what steps might be taken to reestablish faith and practice within this over 18 years old age group.

Inclusion Criteria: In order to participate, I recognize that I must be an adult over 18 years old of age and sound mind, and must be a former member of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Risks and Discomforts: I have been informed that there are no physical or emotional risks to my involvement in this study.

Benefits/Results: I accept that I will receive no remuneration for my participation, but that by participating. I will help the researcher and the Seventh-day Adventist church arrive at a better understanding of why baptized members leave the church, and that this will enable the church to develop strategies that will encourage adult retention.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my involvement in this survey is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any pressure, embarrassment, or negative impact on me. I also understand that participation is anonymous and that neither the researcher nor any assistants will be able to identify my responses to me.

Contact Information: In the event that I have any questions or concerns with regard to my participation in this research project, I understand that I may contact either the researcher, Nilson Silva Ferreira at nilson@andrews.edu (269) 471-XXXX), or his advisor, Dr. Ricardo Norton, professor in Church Ministries at ricardo@andrews.edu (269) 471-XXXX). I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Subject

Date

Signed at: _____

Sample Abstract - Seminary

Abstract / Protocol

- Researcher:** Nilson Silva Ferreira
- Research Title:** Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Member Retention For the South Sao Paulo Conference
- Advisor:** Dr. Ricardo Norton
- Department:** Christian Ministries, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
- Population Group:** Former Seventh-day Adventist adult church members in the South Sao Paulo Conference.

This study will be done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course CHMN760, Church Leadership during the first month of June and July of 2006.

Four congregations have been identified in South Sao Paulo Conference for which we are expecting to have 100 – 110 participants. These congregations are: Santo Amaro Church, Campo de Fora Church, Jardim das Palmeiras Church e Jardim Santa Margarida church.

A pastor/elder in each congregation will give a brief explanation of the study and will ask for each Church member that has any relative or friend that is a former Seventh-day Adventist member to participate in this study. After each former member reads and signs copies of the informed consent form they will put it inside a specific envelope and sealed it in order to be given to the pastor/elder or any member of the pastor's team. The pastor and his team will conduct the survey and once the former members finish it, they will put the completed survey within specific envelope and after sealed will it, they will give it to the pastor or any member of the pastor's team in order to be given to me.

Once I have received all envelopes, I will open the informed consent form, count and then file these forms (and hold them for 30 months). I will open them the surveys envelopes indicating to each pastor of origin of each survey, again doing a count to make sure that I have one consent form for each survey received.

The surveys will then processed by me and the results entered on my computer. Once this has been done I will then destroy the surveys and work only with the tabulated information on my computer. Only this information will be available to my advisor. Once the research will form part of a research paper and be available to the public.



IGREJA
ADVENTISTA
DO SÉTIMO DIA

União Central Brasileira

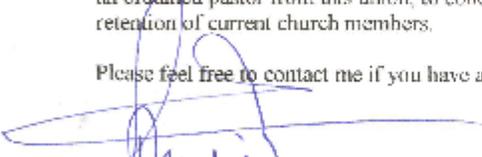
April 27, 2006

Av. Ant. Weyden de Souza, 200, 202
H. Esq. - C. Postal 101
-104-710 - São Helena, SP - 13031
Tel. (019) 677-3100
Fax (019) 674-1200
E-mail: uncb@unibh.com.br

Dr. Ricardo Norton
Christian Ministry Dept.
Seventh-day Adventist Seminary of
Andrews University

As President of the Central Brazilian Union, I hereby authorize Pastor Nilson Ferreira,
an ordained pastor from this union, to conduct a survey relating to the issue of the
retention of current church members.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this matter.


Domingos José de Souza
President
Central Brazil Union

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Church Ministries Department

INFORMED CONSENT

“Church Members Retention Survey”

I have been told that the purpose of this survey is to discover my opinions about the Positive and negative factors affecting the Seventh-day Adventist church today and that my participation is voluntary, confidential, and will not cost anything. I understand that In order to participate in this study, I must be 18 years of age or older. I understand that Refusal to participate in this study or withdrawal at any time involves no penalties and that my identity will not be disclosed in any published document. I understand that this study will help pastors devise solutions to strengthen the retention of members in the church and that my participation in this survey should no take more than 15 minutes.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns I may contact the researcher:

Nilson Ferreira

500 Garland F# 12.

Berrien Springs, MI 49104

Telephone. (269) 471-6887 or Email address: nilson@andrews.edu.

Or the researcher’s adviser:

Dr. Ricardo Norton

Christian Ministries Department

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University, MI 49104

Telephone. (269) 471-8318 – ricardo@andrews.edu

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal Explanation given by the researcher. My questions concerning to this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Adult

Date

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Church Ministries Department

The Questionnaire Proper

Church Member Retention Survey

The purpose of this survey is to discover the reasons why members leave the church. The information received is confidential and will help the researcher devise solutions to strengthen the retention of members in the church. Participants need to be 18 years or older, and are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time during the survey. Participants are people who no longer attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church services.

Gender _____ Male _____ Female

What is your age? 16-25 _____
26-35 _____
36-45 _____
46-55 _____

Education: Elementary School: _____
High School: _____
College: _____
Master's Degree: _____
Doctorate: _____

Questions

1. How many times you prayed a day before you stopped going to church?
None: _____
1 time: _____
2 times: _____
3 times: _____

2. Indicate the weekly frequency at which you attended the church services?

1 time: _____

2 times: _____

3 times: _____

3. How many hours did you study the Bible daily before you stopped going to church?

None: _____

1 hour: _____

2 hours: _____

3 hours: _____

4. The process of leaving the church was gradual or sudden too you?

5. Name the main reason(s) why you left the church.

6. What can we do as a church to prevent other members from leaving the church?

APPENDIX B

A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM FOR NEW DISCIPLES

Programa Geral Sobre Discipulado

Quarta – Feira

19:30 – Recepção: boas vindas e distribuição do conteúdo do programa

19:45 – Início do programa e esclarecimentos gerais

20:00 – Análise sobre o discipulado e oração em grupos

20:25 - Explicando o discipulado

20:45 - Conclusão

Quinta – Feira

19:30 - Recepção: boas vindas e distribuição do conteúdo do programa

19:45 - Início do programa e esclarecimentos gerais

20:00 – Análise sobre o discipulado e oração em grupos

20:25 - O Evangelismo e Discipulado Através de Pequenos Grupos

21:00 - Conclusão

Sexta – Feira

19:30 - Recepção: boas vindas e distribuição do conteúdo do programa

19:45 - Início do programa e esclarecimentos gerais

20:00 - Análise sobre o discipulado e oração em grupos

20:25 - Relacionamento no Discipulado

21:00 - Conclusão

Sábado

19:30 - Recepção: boas vindas e distribuição do conteúdo do programa

19:45 - Início do programa e esclarecimentos gerais

20:00 - Análise sobre o discipulado e oração em grupos

20:25 - O Discipulado Determinado por Jesus

21:00 - Conclusão

Pesquisa Sobre o Discipulado

I – Nome _____

1. Idade

16 a 24 anos

25 a 35 anos

36 a 45 anos

46 a 55 anos

Acima de 56 anos

2. Sexo

Masculino

Feminino

3. Estado Civil

Casado

Viúvo

Solteiro

Divorciado

4. Nível Educacional

Fundamental

Ensino médio

2o. Grau

Faculdade

Pos-graduação

Mestrado

5. Histórico Sobre Conversão

6 a 9 anos

10 a 30 anos

31 a 40 anos

Acima de 40 anos

6. Período de Afiliação com esta igreja

1 a 6 meses

6 meses a 1 ano

2 a 6 anos

7 a 10 anos

10 a 20 anos

Mais de 21 anos

II. Pesquisa

7. Descreva o início do relacionamento com esta igreja.

- Por intermédio de amizade Por intermédio de sermão
 Por intermédio de conjugue Por intermédio dos pais

8. Qual foi o fator decisivo que resultou a afiliar-se a esta igreja?

- Fator geográfico Fator espiritual
 Fator social
 Fator físico (estrutura física da igreja)

9. Durabilidade de locomoção para a igreja.

- De 3 a 6 minutos De 11 a 30 minutos.
 De 7 a 10 minutos Acima de 30 minutos

10. Descreva cinco qualidades desta igreja.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

12. Descreva cinco deficiências desta igreja.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

13. Enumere Seu Nivel de Satisfação com a programação da greja.

	Atividades	Muito Satisfeito	Satisfeito	Insatisfeito	Muito Insatisfeito
1	Sociabilidade da igreja				
2	Culto jovem				
3	Culto familiar				
4	Pequenos grupos				
5	Ministério da criança				
6	Musica				
7	Administração da igreja				
8	Interação dos conversos				
9	Escola Sabatina				
10	Terceira idade				
11	Aspecto evangelistico				
12					

14. Enumere cinco Itens abaixo que, em sua visão são prioritários para a sua igreja.

1	Administração da igreja		Suporte aos novos conversos	
2	Aspecto social		Discipulado	
3	Cultos evangelisticos		Necessitados da igreja	
4	Ministério da criança		Ministério da mulheres	
5	Ministério dos adolescentes		Aspecto liturgico	
6	Terceira idade		Departamento de musica	
7	Visitacao		Ministerio das familia	
8	Estudos biblicos		Lideranca Crista	
9	Mordomia crista		Departamento de saúde	
10	Estrutura fisica da igreja		Integracao dos membros	
11	Ministério jovem.			

15. Descreva qual e sua frequencia semanal a igreja

Uma vez 3 Vezes

Duas Vezes

16. Se a igreja esta sendo relevante atendendo as suas necessidades principalmmnete espirituais voce a apoiaria financeiramente com seus dizimos e ofertas?

Sim Nao

17. Sua auto-avaliação como contribuinte é:

Sistemático Ocasional Dizimista

18. Aponte 5 sugestões se fossem necessárias, para reformas na estrutura da igreja.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Avaliação para Novos Discipulos Sobre Crescimento Espiritual

1	Sou um(a) contribuinte sistemático(a)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Sou assíduo(a) á escola sabatina	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Consigo identificar meus talentos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Regularmente assisto aos programas da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Sou regular em minha devoção pessoal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Leio as literaturas denominacionais	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Apoio os departamentos da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	Testemunho de minha fé com satisfação	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	A adoração é relevante para mim	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Meu estilo de vida é um testemunho	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Encorajo a espiritualidade dos membros	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	Aprecio as programações da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	Meus pecados são confessados diariamente	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	Aprecio em usar meus dons na igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15	Pessoas aceitam a Jesus por causa do meu testemunho	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	O centro de mina vida é Cristo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17	Não tenho preconceito ao tartar as pessoas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18	Sinto-me feliz com minha vida devocional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19	Atendo aos necessitados da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20	Apoio aos pequenos grupos de minha igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21	Priorizo o regime alimentar em mina vida	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
22	Trago as pessoas para a programação da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23	Expresso minha fé com alegría	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
24	Aprecio orar pela organização da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
25	As orações intercessorias são prioridades em minha vida	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
26	Dou suporte ás obras assistenciais da igreja	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
27	Habitualmente visito os necessitados	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
28	Regularmente estudo a Bíblia	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
29	Apoio aos programas de evangelism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
30	Sou um pacificador diante dos conflitos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

APPENDIX C

SERMONS AND LECTURES ON DISCIPLESHIP

Palestra I

Explicando o discipulado

Text. Mateus 20:19

Jesus mandou seus discípulos fazer discípulos das nações, e empregou o verbo grego *matheteo* (Mateus 28:19). O que ele queria dizer? O que ele queria? Quando tivermos concluído a lição sobre o discipulado, os nossos alunos não devem aceitar o engano de que as idéias da “graça fácil”, tão freqüentemente associadas à religião da “fé somente”, e a aceitação superficial de Jesus no coração de uma pessoa têm algo a ver com o verdadeiro cristianismo.

Grimm-Thayer (Lexicon, p. 386) e Arndt & Gingrich (Lexicon, p. 485) usam, cada um, as mesmas três palavras para definir a palavra *mathetes* (do verbo *manthano*, aprender): “aprendiz”, “aluno” e “discípulo”. Mesmo um iniciante teria concluído isso do uso de Mateus 10:24-25 e Lucas 6:40, em que “discípulo” se opõe a “mestre”, assim como “escravo” se opõe a “senhor”.

Mas uma atenção mais ampla ao uso no Novo Testamento revela que “discípulo” implica uma ligação mais profunda com “mestre” do que às vezes podemos imaginar no uso moderno das palavras “aluno” e “estudante”. O discípulo não se senta apenas aos pés do mestre e aprende com ele. Ele na verdade se compromete ao ensino do mestre. Podem-se estudar os escritos de Karl Marx sem ser discípulo de Marx nem marxista. O discípulo implica não apenas aprender o ensino, mas a aceitação dele, dedicando-se ao mestre, aderindo ao seu ensino e ao estilo de vida devida do mestre. Portanto, palavras

como “adepto” e mesmo “aprendiz” devem ser acrescentadas para completar o significado de discípulo.

Analise algumas das passagens que completam o significado da palavra discípulo. Lucas 14:25-35 fala do custo do discipulado. Três vezes Jesus fala das pessoas que “não podem” ser seus discípulos. Observe que essa forte linguagem segue os passos da parábola sobre aqueles que não levam a sério a oportunidade de entrar no reino (Lucas 14:15-24).

Em primeiro lugar, Jesus diz que devemos “aborrecer” o parente mais próximo e até mesmo a própria vida, caso contrário não poderemos ser seus discípulos (Lucas 14:26). Obviamente, o “aborrecimento” não é tomado aqui em valor absoluto. Outras passagens nos ensinam a amar essas pessoas. Então “aborrecer” é usado relativa ou comparativamente (veja Gênesis 29:31 com a declaração imediatamente anterior, no 29:30). O discipulado implica amor e lealdade para com Jesus tão grandes que qualquer outro amor parecerá como o aborrecimento em comparação. E, se não dermos essa devoção a Jesus, as conseqüências não são que nos tornamos um tipo de discípulo de segunda ou terceira categoria, mas sim que não podemos ser discípulos de forma alguma.

Lucas 14:27 liga-se a passagens como Mateus 16:21-28 e Marcos 8:31- 9:1, as quais apresentam o conceito de que a natureza do Messias determina a natureza do discipulado. Tiago e João pensavam no reino messiânico sob o aspecto das vestes reais, os exércitos em marcha e os palácios terrenos, caso em que o discipulado teria significado lugares de destaque para os discípulos principais (Marcos 10:35-45). Mas eles entenderam mal o reino. A coroa de Jesus viria à custa da cruz. E o discipulado em relação a um tal Messias significaria tomar a própria cruz e juntar-se na marcha no

encaixo de um Messias rejeitado e crucificado. Já que esse era o destino do Messias, nem se pode pensar em ser seu discípulo se não carregar a sua cruz, seguindo fielmente mesmo para o Gólgota, se for necessário.

Após os exemplos sobre a necessidade de levar em conta os custos antes de se lançar a qualquer grande empreendimento (Lucas 14:28-32), Jesus conclui: ***“Assim, pois, todo aquele que dentre vós não renuncia a tudo quanto tem não pode ser meu discípulo”*** (Lucas 14:33). Ele continua comparando essa pessoa ao sal que se tornou “insípido” e para nada serve, senão para ser lançado fora (Lucas 14:34-35). “Fazei discípulos”, disse Jesus a seus apóstolos. Ele já tinha explicado o que era ser discípulo.

Terei de continuar esta exposição da próxima vez. Apenas concluirei com uma palavra de advertência. Aprendi por experiência a facilidade com que alguém é capaz de escorregar para uma visão unilateral na tentativa de dar a devida importância a uma faceta de peso do cristianismo. Não queremos realçar a dureza e a severidade do discipulado sem também apresentar as bênçãos maravilhosas que traz. Caso contrário, terminaremos com um quadro muito escuro e frio.

Talvez a melhor idéia seria concluir toda a exposição com uma referência à maravilhosa promessa que Jesus deu em resposta à pergunta de Pedro (Marcos 10:28-31; veja Mateus 19:27-30). II) Creio que a maioria dos cristãos conheça a famosa passagem em que Jesus comissiona seus discípulos a fazerem discípulos, localizada no versículo 19 do capítulo 28 do Evangelho segundo Mateus: *“Portanto ide, fazei discípulos de todas as nações, batizando-os em nome do Pai, e do Filho, e do Espírito Santo;”* [Mt 28:19] as, o que exatamente é ser um discípulo? Quais as características que geram um seguidor?

Imitador seria um dos termos mais adequados e é esse o termo que Paulo usa diretamente cinco vezes, algumas referindo-se a ele mesmo como modelo a ser imitado: [1Co 4:16] [1Co 11:1] [Ef 5:1] [Fp 3:17] e [1Ts 1:6]. A instituição da Grande Comissão por Jesus é perpétua e toda pessoa que julga ser cristã deve ser diretamente um membro dessa comissão e perpetuar a mensagem de Cristo. Para um cristão fazer discípulos, não é uma opção, ou trata-se de um chamado apenas para alguns, mas o *ide* de Jesus é uma ordem, visto que está no imperativo. Além disso, há nessa ordem uma das maiores promessas que existem na Bíblia inteira: “*e eis que eu estou convosco todos os dias, até a consumação dos séculos.*”, conforme [Mt 28:20b].

A igreja cristã tem abandonado sistematicamente o discipulado, tal como foi instituído por Cristo e seguido à risca pelos apóstolos, trocando-o por modelos até interessantes, porém que não cumprem o propósito principal contido em Mt 28:19-20 que é “Ensinando-os a guardar todas as coisas que eu vos tenho mandado” [Mt 28:20a]. Não existe nenhum outro método mais eficaz para imprimir em uma pessoa o caráter de Cristo que o discipulado. Entenda bem o que estou afirmando: não existe nenhum outro método mais eficaz!

As instituições religiosas cristãs têm diversos formatos e modelos de atuação e isto não é, a princípio, algo ruim. Podemos encarar isso como a multiforme graça de Deus que se manifesta de forma diversa e que dá características peculiares aos diversos ministérios levantados por Cristo. O problema é quando uma igreja perde sua identidade de discipulado e vive de métodos humanos. Tais igrejas podem estar até cheias, lotadas e se expandindo, abrindo filiais em diversos países, porém conta em seu quadro de membros com um não pequeno número de zumbis espirituais, gente estéril e alienada,

que nunca irá cumprir o IDE, por não ter a menor noção do que isso signifique. Não há problemas se determinada igreja tem como ênfase ministerial a palavra profética ou o ensino, ou ainda o evangelismo ou missões. Somente com o discipulado correndo nas veias dessa igreja, a começar pela liderança e havendo a “transusão” desse sangue para todos os membros, é que tal instituição pode dizer que está agindo segundo o plano de Deus.

Existem igrejas que vivem de cultos. Não tenho nada contra uma igreja que faz um ou dois cultos por dia, todo dia e no domingo tem 6 cultos. A questão é que Jesus não disse “Ide e fazei cultos” mas sim “Ide e fazei discípulos”. Se uma igreja que vive de cultos, de campanhas, de revelações ou qualquer outro método não gera frutos que permanecem na doutrina dos apóstolos (discípulos) esta igreja está fora do propósito estabelecido por Cristo para sua igreja, razão pela qual Ele viveu e morreu.

Palestra 2

O Evangelismo e Discipulado Atraves de Pequenos Grupos

O método de “Células” ou “Grupos Familiares” (também chamados de “grupos de comunhão” ou “grupos de compartilhamento”) visa implementar o discipulado na Igreja. Trata-se de um método bíblico que, em suma, promove o comprometimento real dos crentes com o Senhor Jesus Cristo e uns com os outros.

1. CONSEQÜÊNCIAS DA FALTA DE DISCIPULADO:

- a) anemia espiritual (I Co 3:2; Hb 5:12)
- b) contendas, desunião entre os irmãos (I Co 3:3, Gl 5:13)
- c) apego a heresias (Gl 5:7)

2. AS BASES BÍBLICAS PARA O USO DO MÉTODO DE CÉLULAS:

- a) Atos 5:42 - A Igreja Primitiva utilizava os lares dos irmãos para reuniões;
- b) Atos 10:24 - Pedro participou de uma célula com resultados maravilhosos;
- c) Rm 16:5 - Um testemunho de Paulo do uso das casas para reuniões da Igreja;
- d) Col 4:15 - Em Laodicéia, a Igreja se reunia no lar de Ninfas;
- e) Fm 2 - O lar de Filemon era usado para reunir os crentes.

3. Alguns dos benefícios deste método para a Igreja de Jesus:

i. permite à Igreja romper as barreiras do tempo e dinamizar sua penetração na comunidade, reunindo-se em dias, lugares e situações distintas;

ii. proporciona ao discípulo a oportunidade de desenvolver um relacionamento profundo com outros e a alcançar um público que através dos cultos no templo da Igreja seria mais difícil (vizinhos, familiares, colegas de serviço ou colégio);

iii. estabelece condições da liderança exercer o pastoreio de forma mais adequada;

iv. equipa os discípulos para o serviço no Reino de Deus e desenvolve lideranças;

v. leva o discípulo a ter contato direto com a Palavra, através dos estudos bíblicos, resultando em comprometimento real;

vi. proporciona aos novos discípulos a possibilidade de integrarem-se com facilidade na Igreja, sendo assistidos e supridos em suas necessidades.

4. TIPOS DE CÉLULAS:

Uma Igreja pode criar e desenvolver vários tipos de células!

a) células de crescimento: formadas, basicamente, por membros da Igreja local, com ênfase no crescimento espiritual e no discipulado.

b) células de evangelismo: formadas, basicamente, por discípulos mais velhos na fé e outros interessados no Evangelho de Jesus Cristo. Nestas células a ênfase é o Evangelismo pessoal e os primeiros passos no discipulado.

c) células de oração: formadas, basicamente, por membros da Igreja local, comprometidos com o Evangelho de Jesus Cristo e com ênfase na oração e no discipulado.

d) células de treinamento de líderes: formadas, basicamente, por membros da Igreja local, comprometidos com o Evangelho de Jesus Cristo, com visão do discipulado, que aspiram a liderança segundo as qualificações bíblicas, com ênfase no treinamento.

5. CRITÉRIOS GERAIS PARA A ABERTURA DE NOVAS CÉLULAS:

- a. A necessidade de abertura pode ser detectada pela liderança do Ministério de Ensino, pelas células já existentes ou até mesmo por pessoas interessadas em formar um novo grupo.
- b As novas células devem, sempre, ser supervisionadas pela liderança do Ministério de Ensino (que é, no caso da IBVN, o Ministério responsável).
- c. Todas as células estarão vinculadas à filosofia do Ministério, sendo integradas umas às outras.

Palestra III

Relacionamento no discipulado

TEXTO: “Nisto conhecerão todos que sois meus discípulos, se tiverdes amor uns aos outros.” (Jo 13:35)

VERDADE CENTRAL: Não existe discipulado sem relacionamento. Discipulado vem de disciplina a outrem, ou seja, trazer a pessoa para moldar o caráter em um nível de saúde e de resposta eficaz.

INTRODUÇÃO: A palavra-chave no relacionamento é discipulado. Você precisa saber o que é discipulado. Discipulado é traduzido em relacionamento. Discipulado é dar para receber. Discipulado não é discurso. Se você está no discurso, você está gastando a palavra discipulado. Não faça isso com a Visão e com os seus discípulos.

A Visão Celular é uma Visão de relacionamento, de ganhar, consolidar, discipular e enviar. Há muito temos sido ensinados que todos que encontram dificuldades em se submeter é porque têm rebelião. Os rebeldes não se interessam pela Visão. E, quando não decidem abandonar o estado de rebeldia, acabam por causar danos em qualquer lugar. Porém, quando decidem mudar de natureza, aonde forem, frutificarão.

Trabalharemos juntos para melhorar o conceito de discipulado e levar o nosso povo ao compromisso com resposta. Vamos restaurar a linguagem do discipulado, não permitindo que seja usada fora do contexto, para que, quando as pessoas disserem que estão sendo

discipuladas, possam dessa forma expressar-se corretamente, ou pelo menos, da forma mais apropriada do significado real da palavra, segundo o modelo de Jesus.

1. Discipulado é intimidade

“E o Verbo se fez carne, e habitou entre nós, cheio de graça e de verdade;” (Jo 1:14)

“E eu rogarei ao Pai, e ele vos dará outro Ajudador, para que fique convosco para sempre.” (Jo 14:16)

Precisamos voltar aos princípios bíblicos do Senhor, pois eles são eternos. Jesus está trazendo a Sua Igreja ao discipulado novamente. Ao vir à Terra e nos salvar, Ele morreu, ressuscitou e decidiu morar dentro de nós. Quer discipulado melhor do que esse? Não existe!

Jesus habita dentro de nós. Este é um ato que nos consolida diariamente. O discipulado de Jesus é: fazer morada. Este é o discipulado do Mestre: gerar intimidade de morada, conhecer a nossa morada e Se fazer conhecido por nós.

Muitas vezes, no corre-corre do dia-a-dia, muitos discipuladores não conhecem a casa dos discípulos, mas creio que se esforçarão para parecer com Jesus. É muito importante que o discipulador conheça onde mora o discípulo, porém, para o discípulo, isso não pode ser motivo para criar argumentos dizendo que o seu discipulador não o ama por causa disso. Não se prenda a esses fatos, pelo contrário, aquilo que você vê como uma possível falha na vida do seu líder, busque não repeti-la em sua liderança. No lugar de criticar, busque agir. O Discipulador Maior, Jesus, mora dentro de você. Ele é o seu referencial.

2. Discipulado é abrir portas

“Voltando-se Jesus e vendo que O seguiam, perguntou-lhes: Que buscais? Disseram-Lhes: Rabi (que, traduzido, quer dizer Mestre), onde pousas? Respondeu-lhes: Vinde, e vereis. Foram, pois, e viram onde pousava; e passaram o dia com Ele; era cerca da hora décima.” (Jo 1:38-39)

Faça o seu papel de discipulador. Sente-se à mesa com seus discípulos. Discipulado é abrir as portas para relacionamento. Discipulado é caminhar lado a lado. Se as pessoas não conhecem a sua casa porque você fecha a porta, significa que há coisas em sua vida que elas não podem saber. Então, resolva-se. Ter discípulos fala de caminhar de portas abertas, de relacionar-se. Quem não se relaciona não pode fazer discípulo.

Não deixe que por uma situação mal resolvida entre você e o seu discípulo ou entre o seu discípulo e você, a palavra discipulado seja queimada. Faça bom uso da palavra e dos ensinamentos do Mestre, o Melhor discipulador da história. A palavra discipulado não é para ser usada só na fala, mas na prática. Os discípulos precisam se sentir amados.

3. Discipulado é frutificar

“Nisto é glorificado meu Pai, que deis muito fruto; e assim sereis meus discípulos.” (Jo 15:8)

No Salmo 1, a Palavra diz que o justo é como árvore frutífera que dá o fruto na estação própria, cujas folhas não murcham. As folhas são as células (Ap 2:2). A árvore busca

água no rio através da raiz, mas para isso não muda de ambiente. Assim você e os seus discípulos precisam ser. Vocês precisam ir buscar água onde ela estiver, mas sem sair do lugar em que estão plantados, e ali FRUTIFICAR.

Esta é a visão do discipulado: FRUTIFICAR ONDE ESTÁ PLANTADO, GERANDO RELACIONAMENTO, SEM GASTAR A PALAVRA DISCIPULADO DE FORMA DESNECESSÁRIA.

4. Discipulado é prática

“Antes da festa da Páscoa, sabendo Jesus que era chegada a Sua hora de passar deste mundo para o Pai, e havendo amado os Seus que estavam no mundo, amou-os até o fim.”

(Jo 13:1)

Se o discipulador é coerente, ele sempre consolida o ministério do discípulo através de reuniões, macrocélulas, gabinetes etc. Discipulado é prática e todo líder que investe em seus discípulos alcança um discipulado com resposta, pois todo discipulado trabalha por uma resposta. Em todo o ministério de Jesus, vemos o Mestre andando junto com os Seus discípulos, ensinando-os e comissionando-os. Ele os amou e investiu na vida de cada um deles.

O lugar que amamos é o lugar no qual sentimos prazer de ficar. Faça com que seus discípulos sintam-se amados. Gere relacionamento com eles cumprindo cada um dos passos acima. E chegará um momento em que o relacionamento no discipulado se tornará um estilo de vida para você e para os seus discípulos. Você é um discipulador de excelência e um consolidador de êxito.

Palestra IV

O Discipulado Determinado Por Jesus

Introducao: Finalizando seu ministério e próximo ao sacrifício do Gólgota, tendo em mente o preparo dos homens que haveriam de dar sequência e expandir seus ensinamentos além das fronteiras da Palestina (At 1.8), Jesus lhes dá uma determinação específica:” Ide, fazei discípulos de todas as nações”. Por que Jesus ordenou àqueles a quem caberia a liderança de sua igreja recém-nascida a ordem de fazer (construir) discípulos (seguidores, aprendizes ou alunos) e ensiná-los a praticar as mesmas e todas as coisas que haviam dele aprendido?

Nota-se bem no texto uma ênfase em “*todas as coisas*’ e não apenas em “*algumas coisas*” que os neo-conversos deveriam ser ensinados a conhecer e a praticar.

O método aplicado hoje na igreja oferece uma ênfase acentuada à conversão pela pregação, o que é correto. No entanto, o discipulado ou a preparação para a vida cristã enfatiza a adequação a normas e princípios considerados cristãos pela instituição igreja. Há uma preocupação com o crescimento numérico e estatístico em comparação a outras agremiações religiosas. Usam-se muito as campanhas que buscam a prosperidade financeira construída em cima de doações e compromissos que redundarão em benefícios ao doador que, uma vez ofertando, conquistará seus objetivos quase sempre humanos e terrenos.

Ao considerar a expressão de Jesus “*as coisas que eu vos tenho mandado*”, somos forçosamente transportados para sua vida, Seus valores e os exemplos do seu dia-a-dia, quer caminhando com seus seguidores ou com as multidões, com os religiosos daqueles dias e mesmo com publicanos e pecadores, ou com as autoridades do povo e o poder público de Roma. Ao chamar seus primeiros seguidores, ao confrontar publicamente ideias preconcebidas e apresentar novos ensinamentos e mandamentos, seu comportamento diante dos sofrendores, dos humilhados, dos pecadores ou com os poderosos de Seu tempo. Em casa, na casa dos amigos, no Templo de Jerusalém e nas sinagogas. Quando admirado ou escandalizado, em publico ou a sós. Enfim, muitas seriam as situações e condições que poderíamos relatar.

Ao realizar tais comparações não podemos deixar de constatar que o discipulado determinado por Jesus é muito mais moral e ético do que institucional onde a ênfase está na relação com Deus e com o próximo. No partilhar da vida e da existência humana. Fica claro que, para Jesus, o maior prejuízo do homem é o mau desígnio, a contaminação e a impureza de dentro do seu coração. E que ser realmente grande no reino de Deus é servir ao invés de ser servido.

O discipulado determinado por Jesus se preocupa com os valores reais da existência humana, passando pela humildade de espírito para pertencer ao Reino dos Céus. Da justiça e igualdade social, da consolação dos que passam por necessidades cotidianas e tem sede por oportunidades igualitárias e, por esta razão, choram, clamando por misericórdia. Da necessidade de pacificar e fazer uso da mansidão. Da simplicidade e

da pureza de coração, aprendendo a ajuntar tesouros no céu de onde virá a verdadeira recompensa, o galardão. (Mt 5.3-11)

O discipulado determinado por Jesus passa pelas verdadeiras prioridades da vida humana e o incondicional amor revelado no Reino de Deus e sua justiça, tendo como recompensa o suprimento das verdadeiras necessidades cotidianas (Mt 6.33). O discipulado determinado por Jesus parte sempre da mudança da forma de ver, interpretar e aplicar a lei e os costumes, pois sem mudança de mente (Rm 12.1,2) não pode haver novo entendimento com respeito aos verdadeiros valores do Reino de Deus. Estes novos valores foram ensinados por Jesus a um povo subjugado politicamente por um poder imperial impiedoso, por uma tributação injusta e vida social sem perspectivas, em meio à pobreza continuada. Um povo orientado a partir de valores espirituais e religiosos distorcidos, *segundo a conveniência de uns poucos*, que detinham o domínio e o direito de interpretar a Lei e os profetas, conforme suas próprias tradições.

O discipulado determinado por Jesus procurou agregar valores ao alcance de seus seguidores, construindo dentro de cada um a motivação necessária para uma ascensão, se não social pelo menos ética, moral e espiritual, acrescentando-lhes uma melhor visão de si mesmos. (Mt 6.26). Jesus construiu na mente de seus seguidores a verdade, o perdão, o amor ao próximo, a solidariedade e a fidelidade a Deus acima de tudo. Enfatizou o amor ao próximo e a preocupação com aqueles que formam o mais íntimo círculo de relacionamento humano: a família. Isto fica claro na parábola do bom samaritano e na

determinação dada ao recém-liberto e converso gadereno. Estar com Ele seria transmitir as boas novas àqueles que compunham sua família, ou seja, os de sua casa. (Lc 8.35).

Em contraste com o discipulado determinado por Jesus, hoje temos observado a grande preocupação de homens que buscam sobrepor a homens. Lideranças que são estabelecidas por motivações pessoais e títulos distribuídos apenas por honrarias humanas, onde se busca sobressair por critérios da afeição da camaradagem ou mesmo pela vaidade ou oportunismo.

Em seu discipulado, Jesus trabalhou o coração de seus seguidores ao invés de buscar a supremacia. Simplesmente os chamou de amigos, nivelando assim o relacionamento. Ofereceu a possibilidade de crescimento moral, intelectual e, acima de tudo, espiritual para, quando necessário fosse, se tornarem seus próprios substitutos (João 15:13-14),

O discipulado determinado por Jesus transformou homens de dentro para fora afim de que esses transformassem o mundo a partir de suas experiências pessoais com Deus. Os homens que, com idealismo, convicção, fé e autoridade deveriam estabelecer a igreja que é a representação do reino de Deus na face terra.

O discipulado determinado por Jesus não mudou. Quem mudou fomos nós que perdemos a visão do verdadeiro discipulado. No verdadeiro, a ênfase repousa em fazer conhecido o amor de Deus pela pregação da fé em Cristo para salvação e ênfase na ação

do Espírito Santo, sarando as frustrações da vida humana, gerando esperança e motivação na vida daqueles que são chamados para serem cidadãos do reino de Deus. Esse é o discipulado determinado por Jesus.

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