and experience the relationship between righteousness by faith and the doctrines and standards of the church.

The second category of factors contributing to separation from the church is: Diminished interest in religion and church. When a person begins to lose interest in religion and the church, he is on a slippery road downhill and can be described as a backslider. Lack of interest is frequently a symptom of other problems. Perhaps the person has lost his "first love" for the church, or he finds no challenge and satisfaction, or he does not experience the fellowship he is seeking. Maybe personal experiences and defeats have had a negative influence on his attitude. Whatever it may be, the result is often failure to attend church. A little more than 44 percent of the respondents indicate loss of interest, and 50.3 percent admit that they failed to attend church regularly. It is not always possible to distinguish whether nonattendance is a symptom or the problem itself, but it is always an important warning signal that the person is on his/her way out of the church.

There is always a spiritual necessity for church attendance and participation. From the theological point of view, the nature of the church is in part realized or destroyed by the attendance of its constituent parts. If the members cease to attend and to take part, the church is impaired because the church is essentially and intentionally a fellowship of God's people. It is a group that has covenanted together for worship, friendship, and service. It is a fellowship that transcends the institution, supercedes
doctrine, and escapes attempts to confine it organizationally. It is a companionship in mutual sharing of spiritual experiences and a place where the persons are confronted with Jesus Christ and one another.¹

During the interviews many reasons were given for failure to attend church. A respondent would indicate any one or more excuses by stating: "I feel (1) like a hypocrite; (2) embarrassed when asked why my spouse and children do not come; (3) irritated by too many announcements and promotional speeches instead of preaching of the Word; (4) annoyed by leaders pressing for money; (5) sermons are often boring, irrelevant, and too sophisticated; (6) I get nothing from going to church; (7) unable to afford clothing that can keep up with the others; (8) we should go as a family, but my spouse and children are not interested; (9) church no longer interests me; (10) too lazy to get up and go; (11) there is no time for church (because of work, travel, sports);² (12) ignored by the pastors and the leaders; (13) uncomfortable and out of place; (14) that the church is cold and too big; (15) lonesome because no one talks to me; (16) no reverence because the congregation is too noisy; (17) unable to get along with some of the people; (18) too tired and want to stay home and rest; (19) crowded by presence of so many people; and (20) no one misses me anyway.

¹Christensen, p. 21.

²Johnsen and Cornell studied fifteen different denominations to learn what Americans think of the church. They discovered that
In general, these people are saying, "We do not go to church because we do not feel comfortable and we gain nothing anyway." They need help and reassurance, comfort, guidance, and support; but the church has failed to attract them, fulfill their needs, and build them up spiritually and otherwise. Consequently, they lose interest and drop out. The shocking statement made by many respondents was: "The Adventist church does a commendable work to attract new members, but as soon as a person is baptized, they seem to lose interest in helping the new convert grow up in Christ."

When people are backsliding, they not only quit attending church but they usually also neglect their personal relationship with God. Among the respondents it was found that 28.2 percent had stopped reading the Bible; 23.5 percent were no longer praying regularly to God; 18.1 percent had ceased reading Adventist literature; and 7.4 percent declared they were more interested in personal success than in the church.

Man does not live long without food. He does not exist spiritually without the Word of God. To be a Christian is more than being dead to certain things, it is to be alive in Jesus Christ. That means to be in communion with Him who is the foundation and the head of the church, and to feed on the Bread of Life continually. Spiritual malnutrition may be the fault of

the most frequent reason for loss of interest in the church was the excuse, "We have no time for the church." Johnson and Cornell, pp. 94-97.
the backslider, but it may also have its roots in the church. Hollis Green\(^1\) emphatically states that there is a famine in the church of the Word of God. There is a failure to communicate the Word, and a failure to hear the Word. Modern man is tuning God out of his conscious mind. Green states further that men usually fail to eat properly when they have no sense of purpose or objective in life. Perhaps that is why so many no longer crave the Word of God, because "the inadequacy of purpose instills no will to grow."

When people have no real purpose or goal in the church, they move along or drift out of the church. No real purpose is indicated by 33.6 percent of the persons interviewed who stated they had drifted out of the church. This immediately raises some questions. What did the church do when it observed these people drifting from the church? How did they become lukewarm and begin backsliding? What made them disenchanted with the church? It may intrinsically have been the fault of the member, but it would be preposterous to think that the church and the minister were not somewhat at fault as well.

According to Green,\(^2\) there is an active drift in a church of committed members toward an average or marginal position, and of average members toward a nominal position, when there is no opportunity in the church for active participation. Oosterwal\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Green, pp. 108-111.  
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 142.  
\(^3\)Gottfried Oosterwal, Patterns of Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in America, pp. 64-66.
found that the Adventist Church has all the potentials to stimulate the members to activity, but the church does not make enough use of these resources. "Its programs and activities appeal only to relatively few," except for some specific age groups. "Those who are neglected turn into nominal members or fringe members. Many of them leave the church, first mentally and spiritually, then also socially."

Neglect may well be one of the main causes for drifting out of the church. The member neglects to communicate with Jesus Christ when prayer and reading of the Word are ignored; he neglects to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to live a victorious life; he neglects to grow spiritually by the grace of Jesus; and he neglects to seek communion with the other members of the Body of Christ. Likewise, the church and the pastor may neglect to provide a climate for spiritual growth after the person becomes a member of the church; they may neglect to nurture and to guide, to encourage and to support, to instruct and to provide discipline; they may neglect to reach out to the fringe members to draw them into the heart of the church; and they may neglect to always show the forgiving spirit and love of Jesus Christ.

This study investigated those who socially left the church. Every church pastor and church officer need prayerfully to search out those who are in the process of drifting out, leaving the church mentally and spiritually, because they will soon leave socially unless they are ministered to in the love of Christ.
An inquiry was sent to all Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Michigan to ask them to estimate the number of members who do not attend church regularly, and 44.4 percent of the pastors answered this question. There were 34.2 percent of the Michigan Adventist churches that participated in the study. These churches were grouped into three categories: (1) churches with 1-250 members; (2) churches with 250-500 members; and (3) churches with 500-3000 members. The percentages of nonattenders appear in table 39.

**TABLE 39**

**REPORT FROM PASTORS OF 52 ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN MICHIGAN ON NON-ATTENDANCE (1977)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Churches</th>
<th>Percent Non-att.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500-3000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-499</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-199</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The estimates for the larger churches is apparently too low, as evidenced by the fact that some large churches have 10 percent missing members, that is, persons who have left the area; but it is known that many others do not attend. The estimates of medium and small churches may be more approximate. Several pastors admit that no more than 50 percent of their members attend church on any Sabbath. It is possible that 30-35 percent of the Adventists do not attend church on a regular basis. However, attendance in the Adventist church seems to be higher than the national average.
and the attendance in some other churches. A national of conference-wide study to determine annual average attendance would be of interest.

Why don't the members attend church? Based on the interviews it can be stated that the answers are multiple. Various reasons given by former members are: (1) church is a drag; (2) church is too narrow, authoritarian, boring, out of step with reality, and an obstacle to us; (3) we are fed up with the pastor; he has nothing to give, does not build us up spiritually, he insults us everytime we talk to him, he never visits; (4) the church leaders are too repressive, stay too long in office, have no rapport with the younger generation; (5) members are two-faced, hypocritical, and always condemning; (6) nonessential issues are stressed out of all proportion to their importance, while more important matters receive no attention; (7) we quit because there are more interesting and more important things to do.

The third category of factors contributing to separation from the church is: Personal feelings of inadequacy and maladjustment.

People perceive the world differently and vary greatly in how they relate to others. Some are overwhelmed by the friendliness and love they find in Adventist churches, others coming into

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1According to the Gallup Opinion Index, 38 percent Protestants attended church weekly in 1975. Attendance according to denomination indicate for Baptists 37 percent; Lutherans 37 percent; Presbyterians 32 percent; Methodists 30 percent; Episcopalians 26 percent; and all other Protestants 43 percent. Religion in America 1976. The Gallup Opinion Index. Report No. 130 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1976), pp. 29-30.
the same church, looking for friends and a sense of belonging, may be unable to find personal recognition and acceptance. Since the frustrations of man show themselves in countless ways, including effect on religious behavior, they may sometimes result in separation from the church fellowship. Crisis situations drive some people closer to God, others, who may feel let down, leave the church. Therefore, in times of emotional stress and anxiety, moral struggles, periods of depression, financial difficulties, and philosophical doubts, the ordinary church member needs all the support he can get from his pastor and the church.

Nearly 23 percent of the respondents left the church with hurt feelings. They felt rejected and disliked by the others in the congregation. Whether the problem was with the church or the person or both could not always be determined, but the fact remains that the member was deeply hurt.

All human beings need to have a loving relationship in which to grow. Persons who are not sure of themselves, who feel unwanted and unloved, and who are haunted by feelings of timidity, shyness, unworthiness, inferiority and of not being accepted may very well, in their anxious struggles for survival, show themselves as anti-social, quarrelsome, troublesome, and dissident church members. It is well known that people who already find themselves on the fringe of the church and who may have developed some grudge or misconception may react against their social and religious alienation by totally quitting the church. Granted, some of these people may have been hypersensitive and not always easy to get
along with. But it was learned from the interviews that many former members feel hurt because some leaders and church members did not master the art of human relationship. And it became evident that every Adventist minister needs to deal constructively with the problem of gossip, slander, unfair criticism, arrogance, pride, discrimination, cliquishness, and other kinds of unchristian behavior.

The Adventist church has its share of dominant, strong-willed, and self-centered persons who clamor for leadership. Some of these persons are not only thoughtless and insensitive; they can also be brutal and by their behavior and unchristian remarks drive others out of the church.

When the interviewer attempted to discover why people get hurt feelings, it became evident that they were hurt by the words or actions of others; they were treated as statistics rather than persons; they were ignored or belittled or humiliated before the church; and they were discriminated against or treated unfairly. Sometimes it is not the fault of the church, because some persons are overly sensitive, imagine wrongs, and, as a result, suffer wounded pride, jealousy, and frustrated personal ambitions.

The problem of finding new friends arose frequently both for new converts and those transferring to another church, especially if it was a large church. People interact and need each other, and if the need is not fulfilled in a meaningful fellowship in the church, they may seek friends elsewhere. Of the respondents, 21.5 percent had no close friends in the church and they dropped out.
When new converts are brought into the church on the basis of truth, they frequently come with high ideals and great expectations. They have found a church which has the Truth, and they expect the members to live accordingly. When they discover that the church is people, many of whom are not too perfect at that, they become perplexed and find it difficult to make lasting friendships. As pointed out by Bonhoeffer, "the community of saints is not an "ideal" community consisting of perfect and sinless men and women, where there is no need of repentance."

Church members often fail to include new converts and transferred members in their social life and various activities. It is for the church, however, to take the initiative in forming friendships with the newly arrived. This includes the children and the young people as well. A respondent told how the children in the Sabbath School were unfriendly and cruel to her children when they were transferred from another church. After some time the children refused to go to church, and she decided to stay home with her children. New church members constitute a potential for tension and conflict in the church. It is for the church to help them make the necessary adjustment and to help them understand that to be united in Christ as a church always means to be united to serve and to save others (Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12).

In the interviews it was repeatedly stated that Adventists are cliquish and some persons find it next to impossible to break

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into these groups. If a person does not get in with some church

group or persons in the congregation he becomes very lonesome,
even among brothers and sisters in the church. It was also stated

by the interviewees that persons who differ from certain well-
established norms in a church were either ignored or ostracised by
constantly receiving the "cold treatment." Perhaps many Adventist
churches could improve their inter-relationships and help new-
comers to adjust if they introduced some kind of Big-Brother and
Big-Sister system.

The obvious consequence of not having friends in the church
is loneliness. Paul Tournier says that "loneliness is the most
devastating malady of our age." Even in the Adventist church it is
possible to feel utterly alone. A typical example is the shy young
lady who had no friends and never spoke to anyone in the large
church she attended. When her husband divorced her, there was not
a single person who took an interest in her, and she dropped out
without anyone ever missing her (Case 62, appendix H).

When a young respondent was asked the question, "Don't you
still have some friends in the local church?" the answer was, "No,
most of the kids I was with in the academy have left the church,
like I have. They are still my friends but not members of the
church. The young people left in the church think they are too
good to associate with me." Frequently respondents admitted they
felt rejected and disliked by the church (10.1 percent). The
reason as viewed by the person interviewed was "because I am
different."
Occasionally a church fellowship is destroyed by status seekers and social climbers who may be so aggressive that the result is disappointment and ugly feelings that generate a desire to leave the church. A few had complaints about doctors in the church who thought they were better than the rest and who tried to run the church because they had the money. In fairness to the doctors there were others who claimed that the doctors did more for the church than the pastor and were of great spiritual help. The pastor always needs to give special attention to this problem and arrange for a balanced program.

Social distance can be an insurmountable barrier to forming friendships and gaining acceptance by others. The new convert and the transfer member has a right to expect that no barriers exist in the Adventist church, yet the respondents told of discriminations and social levels in the church, which could have been more imaginary than real but were felt, nonetheless, by 12.8 percent. Differences in race, nationality, language, dress, education, occupation, age, and style of living are some of the factors which cause persons to lose interest in some particular congregation. One female former member said: "We don't go to church because we can't afford to dress like the others. They gave us some clothes from the Community Center, but we are not that poor, my husband holds a steady job." It seems like she felt inferior in both instances.

Some young couples had quit going to church because, as they said it, "They always put their noses down at us. They think they are better than we are."
Among the respondents, 7.4 percent felt discouraged and 6.7 percent felt they were not good enough to be in the church. Another 5.4 percent had guilt feelings, 4.0 percent felt that God had failed them, and 3.4 percent were depressed. Others had feelings of inadequacy, shame, hopelessness, and still others that the church interfered in their personal lives.

Everyone of these categories is a promising prospect for pastoral visitation and counseling. It was found that the majority of the respondents never had been visited by a church pastor and rarely by one of the church officers. A most important ministry to those who are on their way out of the church, to bring comfort, hope, and reassurance of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus Christ is being neglected.

The fourth category of factors contributing to separation from the church is: Joining the Adventist church prematurely.

Premature baptism is mentioned as a contributing factor to losing interest in the church by 26.2 percent of the respondents. Some were baptized to please parents and friends (25.5 percent), and 4.0 percent were baptized without any strong desire. Others did not think that they had reached the age of spiritual maturity at the time of baptism (34.2 percent), and 10.7 percent were not sure.

It is significant that about 45 percent of the respondents feel uncertain about their spiritual readiness at the time they joined the church, while 4.7 percent gave no answer. It can, therefore, be concluded that only about half of the persons
interviewed were reasonably sure that they were ready to be baptized when joining the church. Possibly some no longer have a correct recollection of what took place in their minds at that time; but still, it was repeatedly stated, "It was too early for me to join the church."

As they look back upon the baptismal experience, the following reasons are presented for not being ready: (1) lack of conversion; (2) young age, but agreed due to pressure from teachers, pastors, and friends; (3) to please parents; (4) no personal desire; (5) lack of instruction in what is actually meant by being baptized and becoming a church member.¹

Most of the persons who stated they were baptized prematurely came from Adventist homes, and they were generally baptized at the ages seven through twelve. The following remarks were rather typical: "I did not know what I was doing, but I went along because my friends were baptized"; or "I was persuaded and it was the thing to do." It is possible that many of their friends of the same age were ready and profited from making a decision at an early age. But it became obvious during the study that it would have been better for many of the respondents to have postponed their baptism.

The answers and opinions from former Adventists may not reflect the thinking of those who remain in the church. Therefore,

¹The person's concept of conversion was usually not discussed due to the pressure of time and the many questions to be covered.
it would be of value to conduct a study among Adventist church members on a large scale to investigate how they feel about the age level of baptism, the necessary preparation, and postbaptismal pastoral nurture. It should be based upon their own personal experience, in order to provide needed information about what this experience has meant in their lives.

The pressure for baptism was strongest from the peer group, and for the more reluctant candidates it came from the ministers and teachers. In the majority of cases the parents did not pressure the children, but the children went along to please. A few of those who were baptized as adults admitted they were baptized without really knowing what it was all about and without a strong desire. Generally, such persons were trying to please a spouse, relative, or a church layperson who had brought them to the church.

In the past, denominational leaders and some pastors considered lack of instruction a significant factor in disassociation from the church. ¹ The former members interviewed for this study did not perceive it as a principal contributing factor (Q. 394), because only five persons (3.4 percent) mentioned it at all. To the specific question, How well were you instructed before baptism? 3.4 percent answered "very inadequate" and 15.4 percent "inadequate."

¹In comparing a series of articles in The Ministry on backsliding and apostasy, it was discovered that the writers considered lack of indoctrination a major cause of separation from the church. In comparing the replies from 36 denominational leaders to the question on what causes apostasy, 34.3 percent stated lack of instruction before baptism. In further comparing the replies from
Only 8.1 percent mentioned that they were not instructed in all major beliefs (see table 18 in chapter IV). The majority pointed out that they were well instructed in all Adventist beliefs before baptism. It appeared that the respondents had received quite adequate instruction (preparation of the mind), but that they frequently were not led to the experience of conversion (preparation of the heart).

That many had joined the church prematurely was further evidenced by the fact that they did not make any real changes in their lives either before or after baptism. For example, several told how they went right on smoking. Somehow, it was never made clear to them what Paul points out in Rom 6:3-5, that "a Christian must die to sin before he is symbolically buried with Jesus Christ in baptism, and that he is raised to a new spiritual life in Christ."

Membership in the Adventist Church presupposes conversion, as stated in chapter II, resulting in voluntary adherence to all the religious beliefs and standards of Christian living which are held by the church.

There are many roads to Damascus, and the church accepts that some may be slow and indirect. The conversion experience varies from one individual to another, depending upon personality and background. But when the person encounters Jesus Christ, he must realize that he has come to a definite turning point in his life. To accept Christ as Savior also means to accept Him as Lord.¹

¹Bonhoeffer, pp. 64-65.

Michigan Adventist Ministers (1977), it was found that only 15.6 percent of the pastors considered lack of instruction a reason for church disassociation (see appendix G).
Conversion involves decision, turning away from one's past life to a new life (Mt 18:3; Acts 3:19); a recognition and acknowledgment of sin, a change of mind and attitude to conform with the will of God (Acts 2:38; 2 Cor 7:9, 10); that is, a rebirth which comprises a change of life and character by the recreative power of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:3-7, 16; Acts 2:37-39; 1 Pe 1:3, 23).

Conversion is a total experience, a commitment, which affects the whole of life and living to the point that the convert becomes alienated from the world and, sometimes, friends and next of kin. He who encounters Christ and truth must pay the price. He can serve only one Master. Therefore the Christian faith will always be in tension with the world and that frustrates many people and causes them to leave the church.

Generally, the church takes great care in doctrinal instruction before a person is baptized, but is it possible that the meaning and importance of conversion sometimes is taken for granted and not explained to the baptismal candidates? If so, the result may be church members who adhere intellectually to a set of doctrines but have little experimental understanding of what it means to live a new life in Christ. And if members at times are obtained by coercion rather than conversion, they will sooner or later drop out from the church.

The fifth category of factors contributing to separation from the church is: Relationships to the church.
An obvious question to ask in the search for factors contributing to separation from the church is: What is wrong with the church?

Very few respondents have any complaints about the church as a denomination but, as could be expected, there are some criticisms of the local congregation. For example, 26.8 percent felt that the church members are condemning (Q. 379). That is to say, 40 out of 149 persons left the church with a strong feeling of being condemned by their fellow church members. What happened to the ministry of reconciliation which is to overcome the alienation and hostility and all other forces that are pulling the person away from a closer relationship with Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the church? This response correlates well with the answers given to the question on unfair criticism where 31.5 percent said that it was one of the traits of the church which they disliked. Almost 17 percent specifically pointed out that the pastors also are judgmental and critical (Q. 384).

Should the church not say with Paul: "Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus? ... Yes" (Rom 8:34). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). Ellen G. White points out that among the people of God there should be no condemnation of others, and they will not do so if they are one with Christ.¹ Rather what is needed in the church is the transforming grace of God, not condemnation and judging by those who have lost

¹White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 225.
the love of Jesus in their hearts. Condemnation will destroy individuality and independence.1

There are 21.5 percent who stated that the church is cold and indifferent. Each church needs to take stock. Does it drive members away because it is cold and indifferent to those who are backsliding? Does it condemn rather than minister to those who are slipping and are in great need of help?

Those who left with the feeling that the church had failed to minister to their spiritual needs were 21.5 percent. Some expressed that in the Adventist church they only found legalism, stress on certain dogmas, and always were told "don't do that," and still less than 10 percent joined another denomination. A few said they had now found a church which stressed salvation and a new life in Jesus Christ. Such people usually came from very strict Adventist homes where the parents were reported to be legalistic and excessively conservative.

Nevertheless, this factor must be taken seriously, especially when compared with the answers which suggested that the church is boring, out of touch with reality, inconsistent, and that the sermons are uninteresting, superficial, irrelevant, or incomprehensible. The most frequent statement regarding lack of spiritual development was that the church did not do much for them after they were baptized. They felt that the churches often forgot that a newborn Christian needs continued spiritual food and loving care to develop and grow up into Christ.

1White, Testimonies for the Church, 5:347.
Some express that the church is too strict (18.8 percent); others made the claim that the church is too conservative (13.4 percent); and as a result too inflexible (10.1 percent), and not compatible with the young (11.4 percent). The church is also discriminating, said 14.1 percent. Only a few thought that women or men were discriminated against. There were some who felt that young people had less of a chance in the church, but generally discrimination was leveled at people who had either higher education or higher income than the average church member. It was suggested that there is a certain amount of snobbishness and cliquishness in some of the churches and that the average people feel left out.

The claim that many Adventists are hypocritical (21.5 percent) and have double standards (18.1 percent in answer to question 374, and 27.5 percent in answer to Q. 222) are serious enough to warrant further explanation. Disassociates willingly give numerous examples of members and leaders who, according to the respondents, were living lives during the week that did not correspond to their pious talk in church on Sabbath. It is known that the transgressor sometimes tries to excuse his own wrong doings by finding fault with others. Likewise that there is a tendency to expect absolute perfection from ministers and their families as well as from those who are very active in the church. However, it is undoubtedly true that not all Adventists live what they profess to be, and that there are many "seventh-day" Adventists whose lives outside church do not attract others to Jesus Christ.
It is easy for any person to become a stumbling block even if the intentions are good. However, Christians always need to bear in mind what Christ said: "It would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he was thrown into the sea." (Luke 17:2).

Lack of fellowship was directly mentioned as a factor leading to loss of faith by only 4.7 percent. However, the problem of Christian fellowship was constantly brought up in various contexts by many disassociates. For example, 4.7 percent claimed that they found no fellowship and no friends in the church, and 8.7 percent found only a little fellowship, but still had no friends. Perhaps that means they observed the fellowship but were not part of it. It was startling to find that 16.1 percent had no friends among their former brothers and sisters in the church. The question comes to mind, Where did they find their friends? Why not in the church? Another 24.8 percent stated that they only found little fellowship and had just a few friends in the church, while 9.4 percent mentioned that improved fellowship would have strengthened their spiritual growth. Most significant was the answers to the question: How can the Adventist church improve to retain their members? About 30 percent of the persons who have left for some reason or another stated: "By improved Christian fellowship."

In evaluating these data, there appears to be discrepancy between those who felt that lack of fellowship was a significant factor leading to their disassociation (4.7 percent), and those
who felt the church would improve by better fellowship (30 percent). It is possible that not enough care was taken in recording the responses to this question. But it is also possible that the respondents were unaware of this problem until they finally were asked, How can the church improve to retain its members? The fact that 16.1 percent had no friends in the church, and that 24.8 percent had only a few friends and found little fellowship is a significant indicator that insufficient Christian fellowship is a problem in some Adventist churches and that it may be a cause for disassociation.

Adventist churches have worships, Sabbath Schools, a variety of other meetings, and multiple programs and activities.¹ The churches are full of people who outwardly look contented, but how many are in reality lonely and inwardly crying for some sign of Christian love and longing for real fellowship? Every pastor needs to ask himself the question: Does my church provide a true biblical fellowship?

God created man for fellowship with himself and other created beings. This fundamental relationship was broken by man when he chose to do his own will in preference to the will of God. As a consequence man alienated and separated himself from his creator and the other children of God in the universe. Through

¹Gottfried Oosterwall, in his research report, Patterns of SDA Church Growth in America, calls to attention the importance of church fellowship, the need to "socialize" with the new converts because new members with no Adventist background do not always feel at home. Likewise, certain groups, for example, the men, do not always find meaningful activities and fellowship, pp. 36-39; 52-53.
Jesus Christ, God is restoring the broken relationship (2 Cor 5; Eph 1:9-10; 5:22-31) and man is once more invited to become part of the koinonia which is the biblical fellowship of the New Testament (1 Jn 1:3, 7; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 13:14). It is a functional, loving relationship of committed believers, a togetherness which goes far beyond mere camaradie. It is a fellowship of unity in diversity and the unifying agent is Christ. It supercedes all that divides people into classes and caste systems; such as, nationality, race, color, age, job, income, and education. It looks upon each member as of equal value and of infinite value to the extent that Christ was willing to give His life for just one person. This fellowship is likened to the body of Christ, with Jesus Christ being the head, and the Spirit the cohesive power. Therefore, it is a fellowship which becomes a partnership with God in loving service to reconcile the world with him through Jesus Christ. It is a unique fellowship because it is the love of Christ that controls us (2 Cor 5:14) and by this love shall all men know who are the true children of God (Jn 13:35). Chitwood concludes: "Our world desperately needs a living demonstration of what God would like the entire world to be, a taste of Heaven, of the kingdom."¹

In conclusion, man was never intended to be alone, the Scriptures declare that it is not good for him (Gn 2:18). God designed men for fellowship which was to be enjoyed first in the

marriage relationship, then in the family relationship, and later
also in the church fellowship which includes intimate fellowship
with Jesus Christ. The minister who is concerned about fellow-
ship in his church will agree with Marty, who states that the
Christian who seeks this fellowship derives his impulse and his
values from a "vertical" relationship to God, and out of this
relationship grows a "horizontal" relationship to his fellow Chris-
tians.¹

The sixth category of factors contributing to separation
from the church is: Relationships to the pastor and church leaders.

Generally, the respondents hesitate to downgrade the pastors
and their work, and still one-fourth of the interviewees feel that
their former pastor had nothing to give (23.5 percent). It was
stated that they did not feel spiritually fed (21.5 percent) and
43.6 percent experienced no spiritual growth after baptism; that
the sermons are uninteresting (16.8 percent); irrelevant (8.7
percent); superficial (7.4 percent) and at times incomprehensible
(5.4 percent).

When the congregation does not hear God speak through the
preacher, a gap grows between the pulpit and the pew, and the pur-
pose of the church as the Body of Christ is somewhat thwarted.
Many people see no reason to attend church unless they gain

¹Martin E. Marty, The New Shape of American Religion (New
something by it. Andre Feige found this to be a significant reason for people leaving the church in Berlin-West.

People come to church to be spiritually nourished by the Word of God and to have their thirst quenched by the work of the Holy Spirit. They also come with questions and problems, but if the preaching is not relevant to everyday living, they will sooner or later stop attending. Unless they hear the Word of God presented as a solution to their own problems, they no longer have time for church and drop out. It is the Word that nurtures the believers in their faith, makes them grow up in Christ and stimulates them to Christian living. Therefore failure to communicate the Word of God will result in loss of members.

Ellen G. White spoke of ministers who are merely sermonizing, failing to present to the congregation the saving power of the Redeemer. Gottfried Oosterwal discussed the claim that the minister does not give enough leadership through his sermons, and that this criticism becomes a theological problem in the church, because of the minister's multitudinous role in the church, leaving too little time for sermon preparation. H. M. S. Richards

1Feige, 1976.


3Gottfried Oosterwal, Patterns of SDA Church Growth in America, pp. 66-70.

4H. M. S. Richards' correspondence with the writer, October 31, 1974. H. M. S. Richards is the speaker emeritus of the Voice of Prophecy, a religious broadcast sponsored by Seventh-day Adventist Church.
considers poor preaching the main reason Adventists are leaving the church. Hollis Green\(^1\) wrote that a weak pulpit produced "poor converts who can never stand alone," and further, "the quality of the convert is in direct relationship to the quality of proclamation."

There is always a need for the pastor to evaluate his church services in order to discover how well they meet the spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs of the congregation. When the members grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, the result will be an active life as a Christian witness. Active Christians rarely leave the church. Perhaps the real problem is that the church service does not allow for enough interaction. Members do not participate and have little opportunity to show loving concern and make personal contacts.

The persons who disassociated from the church further stated that leaders press too much for money (17.4 percent); are partial (10.7 percent); indifferent (7.4 percent); and 11.4 percent disapproved of the leaders.

Pastors have a tendency to exalt Ellen G. White's writings over the Bible (14.1 percent); they are too critical (16.8 percent); indifferent (14.1 percent); and inquisitive (2.7 percent). The teaching ministry is absent, feels 10.7 percent. Only 8.7 percent disapproved of the minister. Toward the close of the interview the respondents were asked to evaluate the last minister in the church to which they belonged (table 31, chapter IV). Again they

\(^1\)Green, pp. 76-77.