

STORIES OF CONVERSION, RETENTION, AND RECLAMATION: THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Using narrative inquiry, we explored the conversion, retention, and reclamation of Adventist church members in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Conversion themes include attracting and deciding factors; retention themes include relationship with God and the church; and reclamation themes include personal encounter with God. God is present at every stage of one's faith journey.

Keywords: conversion, retention, reclamation, Southeast Asia, narrative inquiry, Adventist Church

Proposal

Southeast Asia is one of the most religiously diverse regions in the world. Adventism first came to this region in the early 1900s. To date, there are about 1.1 million Adventists, which is a very small fraction compared to the dominant religious groups. Using qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, this study explored the conversion, retention, and reclamation experiences of 54 Adventist church members from 11 countries under the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, as a qualitative component of the 2017 Global Church Member Survey. The main sources of data were in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face. Other sources of data were observation notes, analytical memos, and documents. We used restorying, that is, rearranging the experiences of the storyteller and rewriting them in a chronological frame. From the reconstructed narratives, we

extracted the following themes: (a) conversion themes, which include attracting and deciding factors such as initial contact, personal search, church visibility, friendly atmosphere in the church, public evangelism, home influences, Adventist education, the authority of the Bible, personal encounter with God, and the witness of the lives of believers; (b) retention themes include relationship with God and the church, holding a voluntary church leadership role, personal encounter with God, engagement in evangelism; (c) reclamation themes include personal encounter with God and continued contact with church members. God leads His people to a faith journey with Him. He uses a variety of ways to convert them, to retain them, and, for those who are lost, to reclaim them. One subtheme, personal encounter with God, ran through the three major themes. This finding revealed that God is present at every stage of one's faith journey in the context of conversion, retention, and reclamation.

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