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# A Membership Retention Strategy For The Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

A MEMBERSHIP RETENTION STRATEGY FOR THE  
MARANATHA SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Conrad St. George Duncan

Adviser: Bertram Melbourne

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A MEMBERSHIP RETENTION STRATEGY FOR THE MARANATHA SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: December 2015

### Problem

For the past three decades, pastors and lay leaders of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, situated in the city of Miami Gardens, Florida, USA, have fostered the longing for a comprehensive discipleship strategy that is geared toward new member retention. Although church leaders have attempted to address the problem of attrition, due to the lack of effective discipleship, by hiring full time Bible workers, forming new member classes, and creating ministry opportunities, a sustainable, competency-driven, and user-friendly curriculum did not emerge. Due to a combined growth rate of 29.4% in

membership, between the years 2002-2012, a comprehensive discipleship curriculum was considered to be of missional urgency.

### Method

A discipleship curriculum, with emphasis on new member care and retention, was developed and implemented between 2012 and 2014. Its purpose was to educate, equip, and engage church leaders in a series of training seminars that would link theory to practice.

This discipleship curriculum emphasized the learning components of mentoring connections, spiritual formation, and membership accountability. It was instructional in the competencies of spiritual disciplines, transformational relationships, personal stewardship, biblical discipleship, spiritual giftedness, and sensitivity to missing members. While the curriculum was based on the above-mentioned competencies, its effectiveness was measured in terms of participation level, overall commitment, changes in practice of church leaders toward their new converts, and the level of increase in membership enlightenment.

### Results

Once a discipleship curriculum for training church leaders and members was developed, based on the six main competencies that emerged from the new member's surveys, a series of training seminars was conducted. Although the training was first designed and promoted for church leaders, church leadership requested the participation of all church members. Consequently, 60% of active church members attended and completed the requirements of the program. This included 100% of pastoral staff, 80%

of church officers, 30% of church youth and pathfinder leaders, and 65 regular church members. A further 180 new members responded to the new member surveys.

Generally, seminar participants commenced with much curiosity and an eagerness to learn. However, over 90% of participants reported that they were enlightened and better equipped to engage in the discipleship process of the church.

There were two curriculum weaknesses: namely, a shortage of new members to be placed in mentoring relationships with seasoned members and insufficient time for implementing the curriculum.

### Conclusions

Three important learnings emerged from this study. First, church leaders are eager to become more efficient in member discipleship. Second, a well-developed, competency-based, and easy to-follow discipleship curriculum is crucial to membership retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Third, it will require more transformational relationships than curriculum theory to retain members in the church. This research revealed that a curriculum of this sort is of missional urgency. It is crucial in the struggle to retain and disciple the people that God brings (Acts 2:27, 28) to the church.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A MEMBERSHIP RETENTION STRATEGY FOR THE  
MARANATHA SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

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

by  
Conrad St. George Duncan

December 2015

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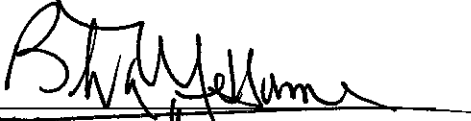
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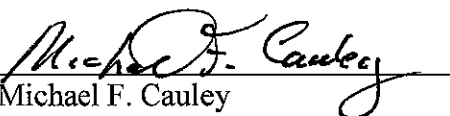
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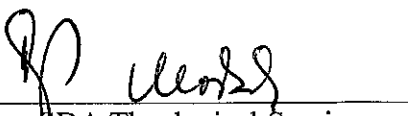
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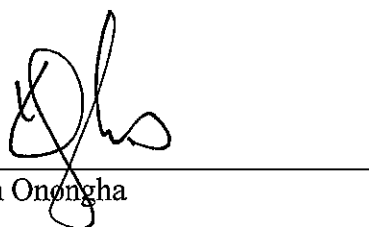
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
Chapter	
I. THE NEED FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION STRATEGY.....	1
Statement of the Task .....	2
Justification for the Project.....	2
Delimitations of the Project.....	3
Description of the Project Process.....	4
Expectation From This Project.....	5
Outline of Project .....	6
II. A THEOLOGY OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION .....	7
God’s Early Missionary Activity: Revealing His	
Missionary Nature .....	9
God’s Missionary Church of the Old Testament.....	10
The Incarnation: Revealing the Relational God .....	13
Jesus the Perfect Pattern for all Ministries .....	14
Evangelism: Jesus and Spiritual Growth.....	15
Evangelism: Jesus and Numerical Growth.....	15
God’s Church of the New Testament .....	17
Christ’s Model for Discipleship .....	18
Discipleship and the Great Commission .....	19
Discipleship: The Goal of Church Membership .....	19
Christocentric Discipleship .....	21
Indoctrination as a Discipleship Strategy .....	22
The Holy Spirit’s Role in Church Membership Retention .....	26
Jesus’ Example Revealing His Curriculum: A Case Study.....	28
Brief Context .....	28
Summary of Implications .....	30
Review of Broad Principles .....	30
Principles and Competencies Applied in Curriculum Formation .....	31

III. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE .....	32
The Global Perspective of the Church in Decline .....	33
The European Perspective of the Church in Decline.....	34
The North American Perspective of the Church in Decline.....	35
A Ray of Hope.....	38
The Seventh-day Adventist Perspective of the Church in Decline .....	38
Problems Associated With Retention of New Converts.....	42
Youth and Young Adult .....	44
Cultural Diversity .....	48
Mentoring .....	49
Implications .....	49
Summary and Implications of Literary Findings.....	49
IV. CREATING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP AS THE GOAL OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP .....	51
Introduction .....	51
A Concise Profile of the Maranatha Church .....	54
External Factors.....	54
Internal Profile.....	56
The Predominant Culture of the Maranatha Church .....	60
Towards a Healthy Concept of Growth.....	61
A Call for Urgent Change in Culture .....	62
The Development of the Intervention Process .....	64
Survey Number One.....	65
Survey Number Two .....	66
Survey Number Three .....	67
Prayer Still Works .....	67
Summary and Conclusions.....	69
V. ADDITIONAL INTERVENTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM.....	71
Challenges and Rewards.....	71
Chapter Goals .....	72
Identifying and Exploring Curriculum Competencies .....	75
Crafting a Series of Training Seminars for Church Leaders .....	76
Curriculum Theory.....	76
Seminar Schedule.....	77
Concise Statistical Report of Training Seminars .....	77
Engaging Sessions.....	78
Role-play .....	78
Ministry Practicum .....	78
Exploring Curriculum Competencies.....	79
Method and Extent of Discipleship Curriculum.....	81

Effective Application of Training Curriculum .....	82
Action Step 1: Create a Sense of Urgency .....	82
Action Step 2: Form a Leader Training Committee.....	83
Action Step 3: Shape the Path by Modeling it .....	84
Action Step 4: Grow Your People.....	85
Growth Area 1: Spiritual Commitment.....	86
Growth Area 2: Cognitive Growth.....	86
Growth Area 3: Ministry Practice .....	86
Action Step 5: Create Ministry Opportunity .....	86
Summary and Conclusion.....	87
 VI. ANALYZING AND EVALUATING CURRICULUM IMPACT .....	 91
Project Summary .....	91
Notable Success.....	91
A Work in Progress .....	92
Creating an Evaluation Method.....	93
Further Evaluation.....	94
Evaluation Summary .....	94
Invaluable Learnings .....	95
Impact of the DMin Program on my Professional Development .....	96
A Story Worth Telling.....	97
Type of Epiphany .....	97
Recommendations for Further Research .....	98
 Appendix	
A. A CONCISE SURVEY REPORT.....	101
B. TRAINING CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS .....	109
C. THE EVALUATION OF LEADER’S TRAINING CURRICULUM SUCCESS .....	119
 REFERENCE LIST.....	 124
 VITA .....	 132

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Various Ministries and Activities in the Maranatha Church .....	57
2. Special Dates and Events in the Life of the Church .....	58
3. Steady Membership Growth for Last 10 Years .....	59
4. Narrative of Precise Chronological Implementation of Intervention Process.....	74

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CHAPTER I  
THE NEED FOR MEMBERSHIP RETENTION  
STRATEGY

There is no novelty about the dropout rate in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of North America. Adventist Church growth specialists, like Roger Dudley and Monte Sahlin, have been furnishing their church with pertinent statistics on the subject since the 1980s. In fact, in one of those aged statistical reports, Sahlin (as cited in Cornforth and Lale, 1995) estimated that there may be between one to two million former Adventists in North America at a time when the total membership was only just over 800,000, and less than half of that number attended church at least once a month.

What is new, however, is the effort of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church, located at 18900 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Miami Gardens, FL, to address the issue. Church leaders are finally taking responsibility to do something. No longer will they be content with the culture of numerical growth, to the tune of 100 new members per year that they have had for many years, while many of these new members keep slipping out of sight. Our survey of new members indicated that 19.5% of the new members who joined the Maranatha Church in the last two years are missing, while a further 19.6% are irregular in church attendance. These numbers crave urgent attention. Kidder's statement that, "Lost people matter to God, so if I am to be a genuine pastor and disciple of Jesus Christ, then they will matter to me as well" (2011, p. 52), is what now drives Maranatha leaders.

Their collective desire to address the problem of membership loss at the Maranatha Church was created some years ago when Dr. Kidder conducted a series of church growth and discipleship seminars at their church. Pastors and church leaders really wanted to focus on their own drop out problem, not on the greater North American Division dropout problem.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project is to collaborate with Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders in developing, implementing and evaluating a membership retention strategy, which involves a comprehensive discipleship curriculum.

### **Justification for the Project**

The urgent need for a discipleship curriculum at the Maranatha Church emerges from two principal components.

First, the gospel mandate that was both modeled by Jesus and subsequently delivered to His church. Christ made membership retention an integral part of His mandate to the church by giving account of His followers to God. He prayed, “Those whom you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost, except the son of perdition” (John 17:12). Also, the promise Jesus made to be with His church until the end suggests strongly that quitting is not a part of His plan for His church. They must endure until He returns for them.

Second, church leaders at Maranatha are running out of options. Their new members will continue to disappear unless they do something to minimize the problem. New members have already spoken and identified certain church practices, or lack thereof, that directly affect their relationship to the church.



For example, only 22% of missing members experienced friendship while they attended church. Another 2% reported that they played any active part in the church. More than 63% of missing members claimed that they never received a contact from the church since they went missing. The message that emerges here is that church leaders have a lot to do to help their new members become fully devoted disciples of Jesus. The gospel mandate from Jesus and the need for Maranatha Church leaders to disciple their new members provide justification for this project.

### **Delimitations of the Project**

This project study is limited to the realities of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the problem of membership drop-out is a national one each congregation experiences it, and grapples with it, in its unique way. However, I do hope that the lessons that emerge from a study of the Maranatha Church may be beneficial to other Seventh-day Adventist congregations. Another limitation of this project had to do with the lack of needed church records. Much of the information about the Maranatha Church was obtained orally from foundation members who were still alive at the time of this research. There was no evidence of an earlier study to inform this study or even for comparisons.

My lack of expertise in studies of this nature also became a limitation of this project. I had to familiarize myself with research methods based upon materials given to me in my class with Dr. Monte Sahlin. I also consulted with other church researchers like Dr. Joseph Kidder, and Dr. Roger Dudley. In fact, Dr. Dudley and the Institute of Church Ministries provided most of the professional help for this research.

Perhaps the last limitation that existed had to do with the distance between my home and the Maranatha Church. While most of the other members of my cohort had projects closer to their home, I had to travel 230 miles to Maranatha. Though I had pastored that church for many years, many changes have taken place there since I left ten years ago.

### **Description of the Project Process**

A theology of church membership retention will depend on the following sources and steps.

1. **The Bible.** Any meaningful discourse concerning any aspect of ecclesiology will be Bible-based. Furthermore, it will necessitate a cluster of kindred themes, such as: Evangelism and church growth, discipleship, spiritual maturity, and apostasy.
2. **Other Current Literature.** While the Bible remains the principal source for a workable paradigm on membership retention, other current literature will be consulted for secondary support. These include reliable text books, journal articles written on the subjects of the assimilation of new members into the church, discipleship, nurturing, preventing apostasy, and Andrews University dissertations that relate to the theme of this project.
3. **The Theory and Practice of Jesus.** This research project will be informed by what Jesus said and did in favor of the above-mentioned themes. Jesus gave his followers a mission for the rest of their earthly lives (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). The church was also ordered, and designed, to keep its members and disciple them to spiritual maturity and ministry involvement (Matt 18:11). In short, Jesus positioned the church to save and

keep those entrusted to its care (John 21:15-17; 17:12). This project process will be exploring the words and practice of Jesus in more detail.

4. A Special Study of the Maranatha Church. Because the Maranatha Church is unique in several ways, a special series of surveys will be conducted to obtain teaching points from church members, especially the new members. The Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University campus, will be involved in these surveys.

5. Handbook/Manual for New Member Discipleship. This project will provide a workable curriculum for training church leaders to disciple their church members.

6. Seminars for Church Leaders and Members. A series of five seminars will be developed and implemented based on the findings of the new member surveys that will be conducted. Otherwise expressed, the answers that the survey respondents give to the survey questions will shape the teaching curriculum for these proposed seminars.

7. Church Assigned Reading. Church leaders will be required to read and review with the congregation everything that Ellen G. White said about new convert care in the book *Evangelism* (1970, pp. 334-381). Following the reading of this material, a general assembly of the congregation will be convened where I will discuss the specific recommendations of the book.

8. This project will be completed by December 2014.

### **Expectation From This Project**

First, this project will certainly fortify my relationship with God. It will also reinforce my love for and commitment to the new and former members of God's church.

Second, this project will inform and transform leaders of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church in their ministry to new members.

Third, this project will be published to provide a model for new member care at Maranatha and in other congregations. The greatest expectation of this project is to reduce the rate by which new believers drop out from church fellowship at Maranatha.

### **Outline of Project**

1. Chapter one shows the purpose of the project, the justification for the project, the delimitations of the project, and the methodology by which this project is developed.
2. Chapter two constructs a theological basis for discipleship and new member care, based on biblical and extra biblical sources.
3. Chapter three clumps together several relevant literary works of the last ten years to shape a workable paradigm for new member discipleship for the Maranatha Church.
4. Chapter four evaluates the need for a discipleship curriculum at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church based on the patterns that emerged from the study.
5. Chapter five provides a paradigm for church leaders of Maranatha to engage in meaningful discipleship of their members. It also describes the level of member participation in this project.
6. Chapter six focuses on the lessons that emerged from the study of the Maranatha Church, conclusion, and recommendations. This chapter also features a brief personal testimony.

## CHAPTER II

### A THEOLOGY OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

A theology of church membership retention emerges from the fusion of two distinct, yet inter-related, divine revelations: The written word of God (Gr. *graphas*, or Latin, *scriptura*), and the Living Word of God. This fusion of divine revelations highlights various aspects of God's character, the nature and purpose of His church, and His will for humanity. These two selected sources of divine revelation are inspired and therefore reliable.

On the one hand, every part of the written word is inspired. Paul declares that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16). Peter also states, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet 1:21). The Greek word *theopneustos* (translated as "inspiration"), literally means, "God breathed" (see Nichol, 1980, Vol. 7, p. 345). God's written word, both the Old and the New Testaments, is God revealing Himself. He is providing trustworthy insights into who He is, what He does, and how He operates (theopraxis).

On the other hand, the living word, Jesus Christ, is also the inspired "Word" of God. John referred to Him as "the Word made flesh" (*Logos*); (John 1:14), (see Damsteegt, 1988, p. 45). Like the written word, Jesus came from the Father, and He is a living revelation of the Father.

In fact, Jesus claimed equality with the Father. He stated that, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In another place, He made it even clearer when He said, “I and my Father are one” (John 17:11).

Jesus was conscious of God’s inspiration upon His life. In one of His self-declaring sayings He stated, “The Spirit of the Lord God is on me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18). He uttered unequivocally that the written word was really about Him, the living word. Jesus said, “The scriptures are they that testify of me” (John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27, and Heb 10:7). The life and ministry of Jesus explained the Scriptures and unraveled God’s redemptive nature. Wibberding’s conclusion that, “Jesus is the clearest disclosure of God’s intentions toward a sinful world” is most appropriate (2010, p. 18).

While the written word provides an accurate portrayal of God, Jesus, the living word, is the perfect picture of Him. These two revelations of God complement each other. They are one in purpose. They provide answers to the all-important questions about God’s character, God’s will for the human race, and the nature and purpose of God’s salvific activity generally, and through the church particularly. These revelations disclose the intricacies of God’s intimate relationship with His church. Also, they reveal and define both the doctrinal principles and operational practices of the church of God. Both divine revelations can be trusted to provide adequate theology for church membership retention.

This theological reflection on church membership retention clusters together, and sets out to explore, a wide gamut of related themes such as: God’s Church Through the Ages (its Nature and Mission), The Missionary Nature of God, The Nature of God’s

Salvation, The Incarnation and the Relational God, Jesus the Consummate Pattern for All Ministries, Jesus and Church Growth (Spiritual and Numerical), Discipleship as the Goal of Church Membership, The Great Commission, and the Role of the Holy Spirit in Church Membership retention.

The purpose here is not to exhaust any of these themes but to allow them to shape a workable theological paradigm for retaining church members in the body of Christ. The main theological subject that runs through these themes is “God’s church”, which is given a dual mission to win and keep believers.

### **God’s Early Missionary Activity: Revealing His Missionary Nature**

God’s plan for man’s redemption predates His church. God’s omniscience enabled Him to foresee the tragedy of sin. One writer indicated that a plan to redeem sinners was conceptualized and later announced immediately after the fall of man (White, 1990, p. 3), (see also Gen 3:15).

God began His redemptive acts from the moment sin entered His once perfect universe. As soon as Lucifer (Satan) sinned and caused other heavenly beings to sin, God cast them out of heaven and into the planet called earth (Rev 12:7-9). Following the sins of the first human beings on this planet, God continued to offer redemption to the fallen. Through the story of the flood, and the religious experiences of the Israelite people, God continued to offer salvation to the rest of the nations that did not know Him. This act of God was to make salvation accessible to every other nation (John 3:16).

God is a missionary God, and the Old Testament (OT) tells the story of His mission to save sinners. From the first book (Genesis), to the last book (Malachi) of the OT, God is observed to be going after sinful man (Gen 3:8-10). In Genesis 6, God is

using Noah to go after the antediluvian generation (vv. 9-14). In Genesis 12, God is calling Abraham and his family for something bigger and better (vv. 1-3). That is, to begin a nation for the sole purpose of reaching and saving undeserving sinners. Also, in Sodom and Gomorrah God is observed with Abraham who interceded on behalf of an entire nation that remained unaware of their impending destruction (Gen 18:1-20-29).

God's church basically began with a few special people, and as several Bible commentators succinctly put it, from the earliest settings God-fearing families in the lineage of Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, and Abraham were the guardians of His (God's) truth. These households, in which the father functioned as the priest, could be considered the church in miniature. To Abraham, God gave the rich promises through which this household of God gradually became a nation. Israel's mission was simply an extension of that given to Abraham: to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:1-3) showing God's love for the world (see Damsteegt, 1988, pp. 136, 137).

### **God's Missionary Church of the Old Testament**

A theology of church membership retention necessitates a brief description of both the Old and the New Testament contexts in which the church has been called to operate. First, the Old Testament presents the church of God in its formative context

As God's family grew, both in number and territory, they received special instructions and revelations from Him that identified them as His called out body (Heb. *Qahal*; Gr. *Ekklesia*). In the informal comments of McKenzie (McKenzie, 1995, pp. 786, 787) the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament in the time of Jesus, used the term *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew Old Testament term



quahal to signify the assembly or congregation of God's people (Deut 9:10; 18:16; 1 Sam 17:47; 1 Kgs 8:34).

The following designations “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” (Exod 19:5), God's holy people (Deut 28:9; Lev 26: 9, 12), and “my people” distinguished the church of God from the many nations that surrounded them. Their moves, their mission, and their lifestyles were all mandated by God. The people of God were later instructed to settle down in Palestine, which became the center of the major civilizations of their world (Ezek 5:5). Three great continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) met in Palestine (Martin, p. 27).

What the Old Testament Scriptures reveal is that God established a church and placed it in the most appropriate places for them to minister to other nations. Their mandate was to invite non-Israelite people to share their religious experience (1 Kgs 10:1-4). The prophet Isaiah suggests that God was creating the largest church on earth with the inclusion of other nations into the universal plan of Salvation (Isa 56:6-8). God's primary purpose for choosing Israel was to reveal His character (of love) to humans, (White, 1941, p. 290).

In Isaiah 42, God is offering His elect (Hebrew *quahal*) as a light to the Gentiles (God fearers), and in Isaiah chapter 49 God declared, “You should be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (v. 6). In Malachi 4, God is observed sending Elijah the prophet (John the Baptist) to offer hope, restoration, and salvation to everyone (Mal 4:5, 6; Matt 11:13, 14).

God's church is a missionary church. Rowley (as cited in Martin, 2012, p. 7) stated that, “the purpose of the election (of the church) is service, and when service is withheld, the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails.” God chose Israel to reveal

His character to men (see White, p. 290). The apostle Peter said it best when he said, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye may show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Pet 2:9). Peter distinguished both the identity and responsibility of God’s church (*Ekklesia*).

God set the example for the church concerning the missionary purpose for which He established her. His mission (*Missio Dei*) becomes the church’s mission (see Luke 15:11-21; John 20:21). Even the Old Testament system of offering sacrifices for sin in the Tabernacle fore-shadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. John the revelator mentions the “Lamb” that was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8; 1 Pet 1:19-20). Clearly, John saw Jesus playing the most essential roles in God’s plan of redemption from the very beginning of the drama of sin. God appears throughout the Scriptures to love unconditionally (John 3:16, 17).

#### Nature of God’s Salvation

A theology of church membership retention reflects the nature of God’s saving love. God’s saving love is everlasting. This signifies that God’s love is everlasting because it defines the everlasting God. John declared that, “He that loves not knows not God; for God is (*Agape*) love” (1 John 4:8, 16). As God is everlasting (Ps 90:2; Rom 16:26), His redemptive love is everlasting (Matt 19:29). God’s everlasting love for sinful human beings propelled Him to His greatest demonstration of such love in the offering of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

## **The Incarnation: Revealing the Relational God**

God enacted His redemptive plan in the most dramatic and personal way through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's saving acts (*theopraxis*) through Jesus defined ministry for the church in every age. Even now He is the best pattern for all ministries. *Theopraxis* sets the agenda for *ecclesiopraxis*.

The first and greatest effect of sin is separation from God. The writer of Genesis describes a scene in which Adam and Eve literally hid from God when they first sinned. God came asking for them only after they sinned, "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. And the Lord God called unto Adam, saying where you are?" (Gen 3:8, 9). The barrier created by sin altered how God communicated and related to man for many millennia. But now, with the coming of Jesus to take on the form of man, God's relationship with man would somewhat change and for the better.

Merton (1961) credits God for taking the initiative to communicate with humans. God, he argues, has willed to love man in a personal and relational way (p. 13). This results in the incarnation. God became one with humans (*Emmanuel*) in order to save us. Matthew elaborates on God's motive for taking on the flesh in the person of His son Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 he lists the principal reason for this divine move as, "for He shall save his people from their sins" (v. 21). God's desire was not to only save sinners, but to also share eternity with them, physically and personally, thus demonstrating ministry model for church leaders then, and now. The term "God with us" reflects Jesus' divine-human nature and illustrates God's identification with humanity.

The Gospel of John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). This act of God, to become man, and dwell with him, removes every doubt about His relational nature and, as Paul declared, provides the purpose of the incarnation “To wit, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Gane (2011, p. 61) contends that the incarnation of Jesus in the *Laos* (people) of God is to be an incarnation of God’s love in personal relationships.

### Jesus the Perfect Pattern for all Ministries

Jesus did not accomplish only one purpose by becoming human. His was truly a multipurpose mission. Luke emphasized the most prominent of Jesus’ missions when he wrote, “The Son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost” (19:10). Jesus’ saving mission was not only spiritual. He targeted the body, soul, and mind of man. While He saved sinners from their sins, He healed them of their physical diseases and remedied their emotional ills. He even addressed their social woes (Luke 4:18, 23; 9:2, 11). By His multipurpose ministry, Jesus modeled the true paradigm for church member care for church leaders then and now.

Jesus called unto himself a band of willing men, taught and trained them, then deployed them into ministry, again, modeling ministry for the church. He created the perfect pattern based on the divine purpose for the church in the redemption plan of God. Jesus set the example as to how people should live, how the church should work, and what are the priorities for the kingdom of God. Peter said it best in these words, “Truly, Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps” (1 Pet 2:21; John 13:15). Jesus represented to the people of His generation both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. Often he said to his listeners, “The time is fulfilled, and the

kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15), indicating the imminence of the kingdom of grace. His sense of urgency was never lost. Jesus’ efforts to grow the kingdom, both numerically and spiritually, were unrelenting.

#### Evangelism: Jesus and Spiritual Growth

Unlike the Scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders of his day, Jesus made it easy for sinners to enter the kingdom. Consequently, multitudes often thronged Him (Matt 5:1; 14:5, 15, 19). Jesus’ love and care for people drew them to Him. Ellen White praised the Jesus model. She declared it to be the only one to succeed (1990, p.143). However, His spiritual standards for them were held in high esteem. He did not sacrifice quantity for quality. Both kinds of growth were equally important to Him. Jesus’ ministry model wins and keeps people.

#### Evangelism: Jesus and Numerical Growth

Jesus was deliberate in His efforts to increase His kingdom numerically. He started with 12 disciples, and increased His followers by sending out the twelve (Matt 10:1-10). Matthew in chapter 10 said that, “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying. . . . But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 6). Later, mention is made of another 70 disciples, “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He himself would come” (Luke 10:1-17). Jesus established the formula for growing God’s kingdom numerically.

Jesus came to earth with a desire to win all people to the kingdom. When Matthew announced His name to be “Jesus,” he qualified it by saying, “For He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). Matthew’s idea is amplified by John’s when he

stated, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son (Gr. monogenese), that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). In these two passages the idea that Jesus’ salvation includes every human being on the planet is very clear. God’s salvation is for all sinners, and this includes every human being (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Jesus is greedy for numbers. He is after everyone, and whenever someone accepts Him as their Savior, He does everything to keep him.

There remains no question, not even a modicum of doubt, about the value Jesus places on each of His disciples. Matthew expressed it firmly when he quoted Jesus as saying, “In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt 25:31-40). Jesus was referring to hospitality or meritorious deeds shown to any of His followers.

The point of Jesus that stands out in this text is the fact that He is equating the most delicate and vulnerable child of His to Himself. He is valuing His followers as He values Himself. He who is equal with God is making Himself equal to His “brethren.” This is significant for the church to know Jesus expressed love for each member of His household, and this love shapes the paradigm for church member care. Also, present in the surrounding texts is the idea that anyone who refuses to show grace, or favor, to a child of God runs the risk of being banished to eternal hell.

Jesus explained the reason for banishing ungracious people to hell (Gahanna) in these words, “For as much as I was hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and in prison, and you did nothing to help me, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41-43).

## **God's Church of the New Testament**

Jesus introduced the sending concept of ministry to His disciples. This concept predated Jesus' earthly ministry. God sent Moses and Aaron (Josh 24:2), the Lord sent the prophets of the Old Testament on missions (Judg 6:8), God sent messengers to His people (2 Chr 36:15). God has always been a sending God. Because Jesus was fully acquainted with the strategy of sending, as a way to grow His kingdom, He employed it most effectively throughout His ministry. In the book of John alone, approximately 60 references to the sending concept are made, and 44 refer to the title of God as the One who sends, and of Christ as the One who is sent (see Martin, 2012, p. 30). Jesus grows His kingdom by calling, training, and ultimately sending His followers to do the same (John 20:21). Therefore, a going church will become a growing church.

Two pillar concepts, or workable paradigms, have surfaced in this section concerning Jesus' evangelistic strategy. These pillar concepts reveal a workable paradigm for evangelism and provide a blueprint for church member care. They also provide direction for all ministries to people inside the church, as well as people outside the church.

The first pillar concept that emerged is that church members matter to Jesus. Jesus would do anything and everything, including risking His life, to save and secure the members of His kingdom. He would not leave a beginning believer helpless, especially if, and when, they go astray. Jesus' followers may go astray, and this reality requires a recovery plan that is proactive, not reactive.

The second pillar concept that emerged from this discussion is that church leaders have a divine responsibility to church members. In His absence, Jesus' disciples ought to

emulate Him in ministry to church members. This concept is not really new. It springs from the Old Testament Scriptures. Solomon wrote, “Be sure to know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds” (Prov 27:23). This may first be direct counsels to cattle farmers, but they surely apply to the flock of God for which Jesus is the good shepherd (John 10:11-16). It is inconceivable that God would do wonderful things such as: loving sinners, sending His only Son to redeem sinners, and establishing the church to host the redeemed, and not care for the redeemed as He does. Surely, church members matter to God, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, should matter to the church of God.

### **Christ’s Model for Discipleship**

Clearly, Matthew portrays Jesus as one who does not want people to become members of the church and stop there. For as Kidder (2011, p. 131), wrote, “We can’t stop at getting people into membership, we need to move them into spiritual discipleship.” The concept of creating a balance between quantity and quality even precedes Joseph Kidder. In their contribution to the discipleship discussion, Dudley and Mullings (1983) outlined the basic steps of the discipleship process. They advocated for a process that includes proclaiming the gospel, winning and baptizing converts, cooperating them into responsible membership, nurturing their spiritual development, equipping them for further service, motivating them to missionary tasks, and supporting them as they go out to exercise their gifts in bringing in still others (p. 32).



## Discipleship and the Great Commission

The theme of discipleship stands out in the Great Commission. Discipleship is timeless and involves disciples of every age. For, as Matthew records it, “Then Jesus came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age (Matt 28:18-20, NIV).

The Great Commission also contains other major gospel themes. These include, but are in no way limited to, the universality and all-inclusiveness of the gospel, spiritual empowerment (Gr. *exousia*), unity among the Trinity, discipleship, church growth and evangelism, gospel indoctrination, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and Bible baptism. The Great Commission portrays the Christian experience as a continuum—one that commences with the acceptance of the gospel (*euvangelion*) and continues to the “end of the age” (Matt 28:20). The idea of endurance, or perseverance, in this experience is very crucial for church leaders to know. This way they see their work of disciplining believers as a process that continues into spiritual maturity and productivity. A definition of this kind of maturity could be “the effective disciplining of disciples to make other disciples.”

### Discipleship: The Goal of Church Membership

Jesus and many New Testament writers have attached some measure of importance to church membership or becoming a part of the Christian community. They all recognized acceptance of Jesus as Savior that leads to Christ method of baptism as the starting point of the Salvation experience. As an example, Jesus was baptized of John the

Baptist before the official start of His public ministry. Matthew describes this clearly in these words, “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of Him.” (Matt 3:13. Immediately after His public baptism, Jesus launched into His public ministry.

All the disciples called people to demonstrate their acceptance of and faith in Jesus by committing themselves in baptism. Jesus preached the baptism of water and of the Holy Ghost as the way to enter His kingdom (John 3:4-8). The disciples appeared to have been baptized at the start of their discipleship, and as they spent time with Jesus, they learned everything that He taught them. They also were sent by their Master Teacher (Jesus) to recruit and enlist other disciples in God’s kingdom (Luke 9). Jesus trained His disciples in the art of making disciples. This way they could train other disciples to make other disciples as an on-going process of the kingdom of grace. Just to enlist in the army of the Lord was not enough. Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples, even as the Father sent Him to do for the church (John 20:21).

Lawless (2005) appropriately described the pastor’s role in the discipleship process. He stated, “The minister’s work is not completed until he has thoroughly instructed the candidates and they are familiar with, and committed to, all fundamental beliefs and related practices of the church and are prepared to assume the responsibilities of church membership.” Church membership is the first important intent of the gospel. Lawless also stated that, “a public pledge to find our role in the body, work alongside other members, and hold each other accountable to Christian living.” Discipleship is a strategy for church membership retention and individual development. As members are discipled, they continue to do the same thing to others that was done unto them. While

church membership is a snap shot action, discipleship is the work of a life time. It continues as long as people are joining the church.

### Christocentric Discipleship

Discipleship is a process of learning from Jesus, becoming like Him, and passing Him on to others. Therefore, church leaders are charged to educate, train, equip, and motivate church members to share their faith with others. Christ's brand of discipleship concerns the reproducing of Jesus in some other person for the purpose of reproducing Him in others. It is the process of disciple-making. The combination of two original Greek words (*mathetes* and *akolouthein*) describes a disciple in a better way. The first word *mathetes* is a derivative of the verb *mathanein*, and it signifies "a learner, apprentice, adherent," or simply, "a-disciple." The verb *mathanein* means "to learn." The second word used in the original Greek New Testament to describe a disciple is the verb *akolouthein*. It conveys the idea of "coming after," "accompany," and "going along with." Melbourne (2007, p. 12), says, "It is used by the Gospel writers to imply the call to discipleship that Jesus extends to some of His followers" (Matt 9:9; Mark 1; 17; Luke 5:10). These Greek terms imply following a teacher or a master to become that person's disciple or pupil.

Effective discipleship requires some vital personal commitments: First, obedience; second, self-denial; and third, continuity. The following scriptural passages convey these vital personal commitments clearly. Passages such as, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15 KJV), "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), "But you who endure to the end shall be saved" (Matt 10:22). Meaningful discipleship is presented in the Great

Commission as an unhurried process, and Jesus was in it for the long haul. Said He to His disciples of all times, “and lo I am with you till the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

Melbourne sees a true disciple as one who assists in making other disciples so that the kingdom can be enlarged and his, or her, God-appointed mission in the world can be fulfilled, (Melbourne, p. 111). Additionally, Martin (2012, p. 55) expands the definition of a disciple by stating, “Becoming a disciple involves more than mental assent to a set of beliefs; it means becoming like the teacher. . . and until newly baptized members are incorporated into active service, they are not full disciples of Christ.”

### Indoctrination as a Discipleship Strategy

Jesus’ commission to teach “them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded to you” served three main purposes.

The first purpose is to make His disciples grounded in their relationship with the person of Jesus. The second purpose is to equip them with doctrinal knowledge so that they could answer vital questions, defend their faith. Disciples can only give what they have received and with such indoctrination they could pass on to others what they learned.

It is obvious in the synoptic Gospels that Jesus was intense in teaching truth to His disciples. A classic example presents itself in Matthew, chapter 5 (some scholars refer to these teachings as the Beatitudes), “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: And He opened His mouth, and taught them saying” (Matt 5:12). The words and actions of Jesus, the Master, were intended to teach His closest followers valuable lessons for their lives and ministry. Jesus taught His disciples things about the kingdom of God (John 18:36; Matt 19:14). He taught them how to communicate with the Father in Heaven (Matt 6:9-13). He taught

them how to do missionary work (Luke 10:1-10). He taught them how to respond to their adversaries (Matt 5:39, 44).

The third purpose for Jesus to teach His disciples turns out to be one of the most effective strategies for church membership retention, that is, to educate them for the purpose of educating other disciples. In John 21, Jesus commissioned Peter, at his restoration after his denial, to teach His followers. Jesus commanded Peter to feed His “flock” three times, emphasizing the value that He attaches to member care. The commands, “Feed my lambs (John 21:15); feed my sheep (John 21:16 & 17), and feed my sheep (John 21:17), identify two distinct categories of believers: lambs and sheep.

The category, “lambs” (Gr. *arnian*), describes those who are new in the faith, (see Nichol, 1980, 5:1072). The apostle Peter later called these “newborn babes, who desire the sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet 2:2). Since the Jesus’ brand of religion (Christianity) was fairly new, most of its adherents were still in this category. Even among the first twelve disciples are exhibited certain characteristics that beginning believers often display. Peter himself was unbecoming as Jesus prefaced the command to him to feed His flock by questioning his love and loyalty. Some Bible commentators infer that Peter lacked loyalty hence the third question, “Do you love me?” (John 21: 16, 17). According to this interpretation, Peter was grieved, not because the same question was put to him thrice, but because the third time Jesus changed His question and appears to question the sincerity of Peter’s replies (Nichol, Vol. 5, p. 1071). For some scholars, it is the third question that gives Peter reassurance for it is there that Jesus used the Greek word for love that he was expecting which he himself had used and which signaled reacceptance into the fold following his betrayal.

Since Peter was known for being impulsive at times, the possibility exists that he might not have understood the seriousness of Jesus' message about loving His sheep the first two times. "The third time Peter omitted the 'yea' or the 'yes'" (p. 1072), and emphatically declared, "You know Lord that I love you" (vv. 15-17). After the third time hearing the same question "lovest thou me?" (Gr. *agapaō*) Peter seemed to fully understand Jesus' message. Now, "his heart was tender and full of love. He could now be entrusted with the flock" (Nichol, p.1072).

Jesus seemed to change His tone the third time in order to elicit Peter's full understanding and true empathy for the flock. It was a transition from *phileō* to *agapaō* (from brotherly love to Godly love) (Nichol, p. 1071).

John shows Jesus especially concerned for the durability and maturity of the lambs. They are often inexperienced and especially vulnerable. Elsewhere, Jesus referenced the pursuit of Satan to devour maturing Christians, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31, 32). Jesus is indicating in this passage several profound facts about the reality of the Christian life. The maturing Christians are just as vulnerable to the attacks of Satan who really desires to destroy them. The possibility is there for maturing disciples to fall and fail. Christ in love offered support noting that He had already prayed for His disciples (maturing or matured disciples).

Sheep, the second category of disciples that Jesus called to Peter's attention, was comprised of seasoned, experienced believers. Jesus twice said to Peter, "Feed my sheep." The Greek word for sheep is *probátia*, which signifies grown, mature, seasoned

and experienced disciples. While the first group of disciples (lambs) were those new in the faith, this second category signifies everyone else, the general body of believers (Nichol, p. 1072). John shows Jesus' concern for both categories of disciples.

Jesus' command to Peter applies to today's church leaders. His command to Peter (John 21:15-17), gives emergence to two powerful concerns for the church. On the one hand, God's priority is the care and preservation of His church. Pink (1945) contends that there is nothing in all the world nearer to the heart of Christ than those for whom He shed His precious blood, and, therefore, He could not give to Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His wondrous love (p. 320). Christ's love for His church is so deep and lasting that "He gave Himself for it" (Eph 5:25).

On the other hand, God charged His church leaders to care for His sheep. Not only does God care for His church, but He charges church leaders to do the same. Pink notes that, "The most important duty of the under shepherd is to feed the flock, as nothing else can take the place of ministering nourishment to Christ's people" (p. 320). While the Greek word *bosko* refers to the actual offering of substantial spiritual nourishment (the word of God), the Greek word *poimainein* refers to the general care or assistance of the follower of Christ. If the first Great Commission of Jesus to the church is to make disciples, the second Great Commission is to care for and preserve those disciples. Membership retention is supported by several New Testament passages such as: 2 Timothy 4:2; Acts 20:28-30; 1 Peter 5: 1-4; and 2 Peter 1:4-10.

## The Holy Spirit's Role in Church Membership Retention

The occurrences of Pentecost did not surprise Christ's disciples. John recorded some of Jesus' earliest conversations with them concerning the person and role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (John 14:15-17; Luke 4:18). At the conclusion of the Great Commission (Matt 28), Jesus promised the church and the disciples, divine accompaniment until the "end of the age" (v. 20). John clarified Jesus' promise by saying "And I will pray the father and He will give you another comforter (Gk. *Paraklete*), to be with you forever" (John 14:16). Canale (2010, p. 89) joined the collective discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in the church by stating, "The revelation about the existence and specific salvific role of the Holy Spirit was produced by Jesus Christ as He tried to prepare His disciples for His departure from earth." Also, in John 16 the apostle referred to the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (vv.13, 14). Even as late as a short while before His return to heaven, Jesus commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

In the very next chapter of the book of Acts, Luke records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church (Acts 2:1-3). The Holy Spirit appears to function both in the corporate body of the church as well as in the life of individual members. Melbourne implies that the book of Acts should be called acts of the Holy Spirit, (see Melbourne, 2007, pp. 53-61. Another scholar, Bell (2003, p. 193), seems to capture the wonders of the Holy Spirit in the church of God in a way that aptly describes the importance of His ministry. He maintains that the church is both Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered.

The Holy Spirit's role in the church clearly precedes Pentecost and the disciples of Jesus. In Genesis, He is striving with human beings (6:3). In Numbers (24:2), Judges



(6:34), and 1 Samuel (10:6), the Holy Spirit equipped certain individuals to perform special tasks. In Joel, (2:28) the Holy Spirit is predicted to take possession of all flesh. However, the New Testament Scriptures provide more of His specific roles concerning the retention and discipleship of church members. Adventist scholars have identified and elaborated on six specific roles (see Damsteegt, pp. 63-65):

First, the Holy Spirit advocates for the believer, helps the believer, intercedes for the believer, and counsels and comforts the believer. As was mentioned before, the Greek term for the Holy Spirit (*parakletos*) signifies an ongoing caretaker of the believer. In essence, the Holy Spirit functions like Jesus in showing grace. This explains why the Spirit is referred to as the “Spirit of Grace” (Heb 10:29). Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit to the church was to make the necessary task of winning and retaining people in the church possible. All that He does centers on the preservation of Christ’s body.

Second, the Holy Spirit brings the truth (message) of Christ to individuals (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Third, the Holy Spirit brings the palpable presence of Christ (John 16:7). Fourth, the Holy Spirit guides the operation of the church (see Acts 13:14). He is in charge of *ecclesiopraxis*. Fifth, the Holy Spirit equips church members with special gifts for the purpose of active ministry (Acts 1: 8, 2:38; 1 Cor 12:7-11). Sixth, the Holy Spirit fills the life of the believer (Acts 19:2).

The role of the Holy Spirit in the church serves two principal purposes. Both purposes apply to the church as long as it continues to fulfill the Great Commission and disciple the adherents of the gospel. The first principal role of the Holy Spirit is to represent Jesus Christ (revisit John 14:16) in the body of Christ (*ekklesia*) and in the pursuit of lost people. The Greek word *elegcho*, used by John, demonstrates the

convicting influence of the Holy Spirit on the unsaved (16:8). Through the spoken word, the influence of a Christ-like example, and a host of other ways, the Holy Ghost inspires the heart of man to respond to godly things. Pentecost is a great example. The second principal role of the Holy Spirit has to do with the preservation or retention of church members (John 16:13). By convicting, teaching, and equipping the saints with spiritual gifts, both for the purposes of maturing the believer and building up the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit helps to retain church members. All that He does for the believer is done in an on-going process that last even for a lifetime.

#### Jesus' Example Revealing His Curriculum: A Case Study

While the Scriptures inform a general curriculum for church membership retention, some statements and acts of Jesus are found to be functionally helpful. For instance, all the *synoptic* authors present a detailed account of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:40-53; John 18:1-12). This incident appears to highlight, through the words and acts of Jesus, instructive principles in church membership accountability. Jesus' statements and acts provided both an example and a challenge for church leaders in every age.

#### Brief Context

Jesus and His disciples retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane for the purpose of prayer (Matt 26:36). Suddenly, a cohort of Roman soldiers showed up to arrest Jesus. As He was being arrested, Jesus begged for His accompanying disciples to be set free while He offered up Himself willingly. Jesus said, "Take me and set these men free" (John 18:8). Perhaps the most instructive statement of Jesus on that occasion was, "I have not

lost a single one of those you (*Abba*, Father) gave me” (v. 9). These words, and acts, of Jesus give rise to certain leadership competencies to instruct church leaders in the area of membership retention.

The first competency is the leader’s own spiritual *vitality*; this references the leader’s ability to remain composed and controlled by the Holy Spirit even under severe persecution. Church leaders do not become strong at the time of spiritual and even physical attack. Leaders learn to live in the presence and power of God daily by willing commitment to the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, active ministry, and meditation upon God (Blackaby & King, 2006). The strength, or weakness, of church leaders impacts the members of God’s church even as the life of Jesus impacted His followers. Jesus prepared Himself for impacting His followers by showing a constant dependency on His heavenly Father. He lived a prayer-filled life; He often fasted of food and other personal comforts. He engaged in life-changing ministries to people, He worshiped God and supported the local church, and He taught the Scriptures.

The second competency is the leader’s *ability* to offer up his life sacrificially for his people. Jesus’ own example is a model for church leaders. John says, Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends” (15:13). While Jesus is not calling church leaders to die for the salvation of His fellowmen, since He already accomplished that at Calvary (Luke 23:33), He expects them to be willing to die to self in defense of their brethren and even to make the ultimate sacrifice if necessary.

A third leadership competency could be derived from the Gethsemane incident. That is, proactive discipleship. He prepared them for this decisive moment ahead of time.

Jesus explained His destiny to His disciples, He prayed for them, and He introduced the Holy Spirit as their comforter to them.

Successful discipleship of Christ followers involves more than strong leadership and demonstrative love. It also involves a structured, well-developed, and implemented program of discipleship for each member. The goal is to make each church member a fully disciplined follower of Christ who is actively making other disciples. The most sacred trust that Jesus passed on to church leaders is His body of believers, his church. For, as the Scripture says in many places, the church of Christ is His most valuable possession (John 10:15; Eph 5:26, 27).

Although other leadership competencies may also surface from a careful analysis of similar incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus, His words and acts in the Gethsemane incident surely lay the foundation for church membership retention. These competencies provide a paradigm for leaders to minister to and disciple church members.

### Summary of Implications

The steps that remain to develop a biblical foundation for church membership retention are: first, reviewing the principles and competencies discovered, and second, applying them to curriculum development. They clearly point to God's will and wisdom and their relevance makes them practical for our time.

### Review of Broad Principles

A theology of church membership retention has emerged from two reliable sources: The written word of God and the Living Word (Jesus, the *Logos* of John's gospel). It has been shown that God is love, and Jesus revealed this love both relationally, and redemptively. God has a church for the purpose of living and sharing the Gospel, and

that discipleship is the goal of church membership. These broad principles have been further expanded to include the journey and mission of God's church through the years, the missionary nature of God, the nature of salvation, the incarnation, evangelism, the Great Commission, and the comprehensive role of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ministry pattern was shown to place a high value on the members of His body. Also, church leaders, from the original disciples of Jesus to present day church leaders, have been shown to receive a special charge to care for the members of the body of Christ. Jesus' personal acts and words revealed competencies of spiritual vitality, preaching and teaching, team work, individual responsibility in disciple making, and mastering the spiritual discipline.

#### Principles and Competencies Applied in Curriculum Formation

Putting together these principles and competencies into a useful curriculum is a challenge addressed more fully in chapter 4. The biblical data validates the principles and competencies that are proposed in the curriculum and provides a structure for the church to operate with. Nevertheless, distinct challenges and unanswered questions were present in every stage of this overview, some of which will be answered only by experimentation.

The most challenging task is to convince church leaders that the discipling of church members is more important than baptizing them. Souls are not fully developed into mature disciples at the time of baptism. They must also be proactively disciplined and, in turn, become an active disciple-maker in the body of Christ. To convince the church leaders that keeping people in the church is equally as important as bringing them into membership continues to be the intent of this theological reflection.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Literature relating to membership retention in the church is both abundant and diverse. A careful survey of such literature discovered a wide range of connected themes that inform a curriculum for developing an effective strategy to, on the one hand, grow church membership, and on the other hand, disciple and retain church members.

While there was found no evidence of any specific investigation into the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church in Miami, Florida, several scholarly works proved to be valuable in the development of a strategy to address its problems with membership retention. The themes that emerged from the works surveyed include church growth, membership decline, discipleship, church attendance, nurturing, spiritual maturity, and apostasy. Each of these themes is widely covered in theological writings. This survey also encountered two principal, yet related, clusters of scholarship.

First, a cluster of works that highlighted the painful decline of Christianity both on the global front and on the local, or North American, front.

Second, this survey of literature also encountered a cluster of works that revealed valuable components of an effective strategy to combat the decline of Christianity and successfully retain church members.

This survey assumes that the factors associated with membership retention are not the same in all the places where the church exists and is not attempting to develop a “one size fits all” strategy for all these places.

The works reviewed are confined to those that were published between 2002 and 2012, except for historical reports, that were considered to be of special value to this study.

Though each scholar maintained his unique composure under the painstaking tasks of tracking and assessing the Christian movement, there is a common element to be detected in the first cluster of literature. It is this sense of hope that, amidst the failures and struggles of Christianity, it will finish strong. This was true especially in the assessment of Douglass J. Hall (2002), Dave Ferguson and Allan Hirsch (2011), Reggie McNeal (2009), Paul Borden (2003), and to a lesser, but significant extent, Richard Rice (2002), Russell Burrill (2009), Richard O’Fill (2011), and David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (2007). Several other works that reflect on the assessment of these scholars will appear later in this survey.

### **The Global Perspective of the Church in Decline**

While most of the above works focused directly on the church from its North American perspective, the works of Hall (2002) tracked the Christian Movement all the way to the fourth century of the Common Era when it was so strong and dominant that it permeated its societies. Hall stated,

Christianity was such a great power in the world that it influenced every aspect of public life, of art and literature and music, of folk wisdom, of personal relationships, of pageantry, and so forth. Even those who have long since ceased to have anything to do with the church may be heard to express sentiments, values, biases, and prejudices that have their origin in Christendom. (p. 6)

Unfortunately, this positive picture of the church was not to last. Hall seems to have groaned as he transitioned into the other reality of the church's life. Jones (cited by Hall, p. 12) listed some of the deathly struggles that assailed the church. He stated,

Occasionally Christianity has suffered major territorial reverses. In the seventh and eighth centuries Islam won from Christianity vast areas and numerous peoples. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the wide-flung posts of Nestorian Christianity in Asia were almost wiped out by Tomerlane and his cohorts. In the present century the church in Russia has been dealt staggering blows.

Hall's global perspective of the church framed the right context for understanding the extent of its decline. In his assessment, the once vibrant and dominant movement of Christianity underwent "metamorphosis" to the extent that it was now a mere "semblance of Christianity" in new and strange places like Africa, Asia and Latin America.

### **The European Perspective of a Church in Decline**

Joining Hall in his attempt to describe the decline of Christianity are Ferguson and Hirsch. Only that their emphasis was placed on the church in its European context. Ferguson and Hirsch (2011) blamed the French Revolution as a direct cause of the decline of the church in Europe generally. They listed the consequences of the revolution to include, but not limited to, "globalization, technological breakthroughs, international terrorism, geopolitical shifts, economic crises, the digitalization of information, social networks, the rise of bottom-up people movements, and the rise of new religious movements, and others. Ferguson and Hirsch concluded that the consequences of the French Revolution all conspire together to accelerate the marginalization of the church as we know it, forcing us to rethink our previously privileged relationship to the broader culture around us" (p. 26).



Church attendance in Europe plunged to record lows. For instance, in Australia less than 10% of the population now attend church on a weekly basis, while in Europe an average of 2% of the combined population now attend any church (p. 204). Halter and Smay (2010) described the scene in Ireland, and it is not better. They claimed that evangelical presence is now a little more than one percent, unlike former years when Ireland was a Christian country (pp. 16-27).

### **The North American Perspective of the Church in Decline**

In Kinnaman and Lyon's (2007) assessment, Christianity in North America has had its best day. The public image of the church is waning. He further states, "Our research shows that many of those outside of Christianity, especially younger adults, have little trust in the Christian faith, and esteem for the lifestyle of Christ's followers is quickly fading among outsiders (p. 11). McNeal (2009) pictures the church in North America on "life support." Although McNeal argues that many Americans often lie about their church attendance, he proceeded to make reference to a major investigation that was conducted at the University of Maryland in the 1990's.

Stinson and Preser (as cited in McNeal, 2003) found out that 26% of Americans now attend church, when it was reported earlier by some other study that attendance at church was up to 43%. The study also found that the number of Hispanics in the U. S. that were considered unchurched had jumped from 19 to 33%. The unchurched in the Northeast is up from 26 to 38%, and the unchurched people of the West Coast had jumped from 29 to 40% (p. 4).

Many other scholars provided statistical reports to describe the attendance rate of church in North America. Burrill (2009), like McNeal, has done extensive studies of the

trends of the Christian church in North America. He has found that the actual unchurched population in America is somewhere between 224 million and 251 million of the 300 million people in the country. This means that about 50 million Americans attend church regularly. In Burrill's assessment, "No matter how you look at it, the vast majority of people living in the United States today no longer attend church regularly" (p. 11). Barna (as cited in Burrill, 2003, p. 40) indicated another troubling trend. He stated "that as many as 75 percent of the regular attendees in some denominations are not biblical Christians.

O'Fill (2011) expands on the work of McNeal and Burrill to indicate more troubling trends in the North American church today. Bachelor (as cited by O'Fill, p. 6) reported that each year 4,000 churches in America close their doors permanently, 150,000 people leave the church for good every week, and nearly 70% of young people surveyed after leaving church reported that no one from their former church ever contacted them. Another set of statistics shared by O'Fill that proved to be of value to this study reports that in 2008 the Southern Baptist Convention had a membership of 16,160,088 members but a yearly attendance of only 33%. Likewise, the Evangelical Lutheran Church had a membership of 4,542,868 in 2009, but the yearly attendance was only 28%. Also, 50% of churches have not added any new members in the last two years. In his closing remarks, O'Fill got personal and shared some concerns for his own church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He stated, "With slight variations, this troubling trend of declining church attendance, affects every denomination, including my own Seventh-day Adventist Church" (pp. 6, 7).

Lyons (2010) is among the scholars who attempted to portray the present condition of the church in North America. Like the many scholars before him, Lyons sees a direct link between the church of Europe and the church of America. He states that,

Some culture watchers say that when we survey the contours of Europe's religious landscape, we are staring America's future in the face. While there is no way to verify these predictions, from my experience and all the evidence I've collected surrounding the church and citizens of our country, America is not far behind. (pp. 10, 11)

Finally, America has caught up with Europe.

Hammett and Pierce (2007) reflected on the present state of the church in North America with a sense of nostalgia for its former glory. The following statement captures their feelings well, "We lived in a churched culture. Almost everyone went to church somewhere. Churches really were thriving in a friendly environment. That day is gone" (p. 2). Roberts (2006) shares the sentiments of Hammett and Pierce. He states "the church has now lost its credibility in the American society" (p. 15).

Riddell (as cited in Brewin, 2007), expressed the sad reality of the church, when he said, "It has perhaps been our reluctance to think and thus our slowness to change and respond to a civilization that since the industrial revolution has phenomenally accelerated, that has put us in this near death situation" (p. 20).

Borden agrees with Brewin and Riddell that the church is merely on 'life support' and will become like the church in Europe eventually. While Borden stopped short of providing remedial suggestions, Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) and Rusaw and Swanson (2010) think they have the answer. They claim that the church should come out of itself, go out into the community, and become a part of the life of society. The church must

become “the externally focused church” to avoid the sure death Borden, McNeal, Brewin and Ridell are referring to.

Johnson (2011) in his efforts to explain the nature and reality of the church, joined other scholars like R. D. Baker, Truman Brown, and Robert Dale to demonstrate the “Life Cycle” of the church. In the picture they portrayed, the church ascends and descends. While the death of the church as portrayed in the Life Cycle diagram is predictable and, therefore, inevitable, unless needed changes are made, Rusaw and Swanson’s suggestion seems to be a lifesaving strategy. A church that gets externally active is more likely to survive and grow than one that is internally focused. The idea of implosion versus explosion is applicable.

### **A Ray of Hope**

While Christianity is reportedly struggling to survive in Europe, Australia, and North America, it does seem to be thriving in places like Central and South America, the Caribbean, and several countries in Africa.

### **The Seventh-day Adventist Perspective of the Church in Decline**

In the previous section both O’Fill and Burrill referenced the Adventist Church in their discussion of the North American church decline. While no specific statistics were made available, the scholarly works of several Adventist writers, including O’Fill and Burrill were found to be of value to this study. The following report on the “state of affairs” of the Adventist Church is by no means exhaustive, but it will shed significant light on this discussion.

Other Adventist scholars of the modern era helped to portray a clearer image of their church than the one O'Fall portrayed. His was a mere introduction of the problem, but there is indeed much more about the churches struggle to retain its members than the appearance of a problem. Rice (2002) was pretty balanced in his assessment of the Adventist situation. Whereas his comments were positive and affirming of the churches efforts to grow the kingdom of God throughout the world, he also provided an in-depth look at the present state of affairs in the church. He believes that this church, like other mainline churches in the U. S., is facing serious challenges to maintain and retain its present membership. The following quotes proved to be informative. Rice stated,

It is possible to view this waning interest in the church as a natural phase in the evolution of religious organizations. . . perhaps the declining interest in church as church is a predictable social phenomenon. However, for those of us who care about the church, it is more than that. It is a crisis. Unless we meet it, the Adventist Church in North America has a disturbing future. (pp. 6, 7)

Rice joined previous and present Adventist and non-Adventist scholars in concluding that “What is happening in a particular church, or denomination, is very much a part of a rather wide-spread loss of interest in institutional religion” (p. 55).

Ripley (2007) has also grappled with the reality of the “waning” interest in the Adventist Church. He even expressed some level of frustration with what he calls “stagnant growth” in the church. He states, “There is a growing frustration with the declining growth rate in the Adventist Church in North America. For the past two decades and longer, it has hovered around two percent” (p. 17).

In the opinion of some church leaders, “The Adventist Church in North America is not growing as it can. Though they refer to numerical growth as an indicator of how well the church is doing, others broaden the concept of church growth to include spiritual

health growth and even emotional health growth. Scazzero (2006) views the Christian as a composite whole, even when “Human beings have an uncanny ability to live compartmentalized, double lives” (pp. 29, 30). In this way Scazzero thinks that even Christian church members are good at hiding or covering their “brokenness.” He stated,

For years I would observe unusually gifted people perform in extraordinary ways – whether in arts, sports, leadership, politics, business, academics, parenting, or church – and wonder if somehow they were not as broken as the rest of us. Now I know they weren’t. We are all deeply flawed and broken. There are no exceptions. (p. 34)

Ripley, though he expressed it differently, agrees with Scazzero. He mentions certain internal weaknesses that stifle Christian growth. He states, “Spiritual sleepiness, laziness, selfishness, secularism and materialism that hold back the church” (p. 17). As Ripley studied the inhibitors of church growth and sought answers from church leaders, he was told that these internal weaknesses are among the reasons healthy growth does not always happen in the church.

Dybdahl (2008) and Henry and Richard Blackaby (2008) seemed to have the answer for these internal weaknesses which set back the church and kill growth. Dybdahl invites church members to “cultivate the spiritual path of communion with God” (p. 19). It is God alone that cures and removes weaknesses and obstacles to his work. The Blackabys also advocate for constant communion with God on a personal level. While Dybdahl, Scazzero, and the Blackabys recognized and addressed the internal weaknesses of church members which inhibit church growth, Burrill, on the other hand, talked of external “odds” against the mission of the church. Odds such as “Atheism, non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Islam, unchurched people, homosexuals and others who may be indifferent to religion” (p. 10).

While these are recognized obstacles to God's work which inhibit significant growth inside and outside of the church, the above-mentioned scholars see God as capable of removing these obstacles and grow His church internally and externally. Burrill concluded saying the church is called to "go forth and fulfill the Great Commission. So go, in His name and make disciples – now" (p. 110).

Joining the above Adventist writers in the discussion about the Adventist struggle to prevent membership loss is James A. Cress (2005). Cress did not add much to the discussion, but his assessment provides a unique insight to the reasons people leave the church. He dares to call the problem of apostasy a "deeper denominational disease, foreseen long ago by prophetic insight" (p. 121). It is easy for Cress to be understood as saying that membership loss is unpreventable since it was predicted. He refers to this reality as "a shaking of God's people." While Ripley, Rice, and Burrill expressed strong hope in God and godly church leaders to solve or even reduce the rate at which members turn back, Cress appears to accept this as God's will for the church. White (as cited in Cress, 2005) states, "The shaking of God blows away multitudes like dry leaves. Prosperity multiplies a mass of professors. Adversity purges them out of the church" (see Nichol, 1948). Cress seems to accept membership loss as a necessary evil. While scholars like Ripley agreed that the church is losing and will lose members (p. 17), the emphasis must be on the "substantial growth happening in several bright spots around North America" (p. 17). Efforts will be made to include actual numbers of church drop outs later in this study.

The first cluster of selected literature in the production of this study was examined for its relevance to the theme of membership retention in the church. Protruding from

these works was the scope of the reality of membership loss and the decline of the Christian church both globally and locally. This discovery has done three things for this study. First, it created a clearer understanding of the problems associated with membership retention. Second, it revealed areas of failure in the church's ministry to its members. Third, it propels an urgent search for solutions to the wide-spread problem of membership loss.

The second cluster of literature that was selected was examined for its value to the discussion surrounding membership retention. The bulk of the literature addressed two particular groups of church members – the new converts and the youth and young adult members. This survey will also recognize a third group of members that are equally vulnerable – the long standing members.

### **Problems Associated With Retention of new Converts**

Willis (2006) begins the discussion on membership retention with a thought-provoking question that will be addressed by several scholarly works. This question incites a variety of useful answers. Willis asked, "If you were responsible to teach and train a new Christian, would you know what to do to maximize the chances that this new convert would reach maturity?" Before responding, Willis wants his leaders to consider the solemn report that "a significant percentage of new Christians walk away from faithfulness within three months of their initial decision to join the church. Additionally, Willis reports that 600 pastors were asked this same question at a conference in the Philippines and only 15 raised their hands to indicate that they knew what to do. He also expresses that the church today does an excellent job at reaching the lost but fails in actually keeping the lost (p. 5).



Willis appropriately challenges his readers to think about people they know who have joined the church and continue to do well. In the same way he challenges them to think of those who “took a leap of faith and dove into the pool, but are no longer afloat. They no longer attend church” (p. 7). Dan and Barbara Dick (2001) have laid on church leaders the responsibility of nurturing the new convert from spiritual infancy to maturity. They stated,

Spiritual growth as a process can be seen clearly through the lens of the stages of human growth. Just as people move from conception through birth, early childhood and adolescence to adulthood and full maturity, so individuals and faith communities begin at spiritual conception and grow through the various stages to maturity, the full stature of the body of Christ. (p. 97)

They further suggested that “The birthing and infancy of the life of faith is a stage of deep dependency on the guidance and patience of others” (p. 98).

Discussions about assimilating new church members into the life of the church are not new. As early as during the decades of the seventies, eighties, and nineties, missiologists, church planters, and evangelists began to talk about the need to do more than baptizing people into the church. Writers, like Lyle E. Schaller, Peter Wagner, Monte Sahlin, Fred Cornforth, Tim Lale and several before and after them, studied the trends of membership loss and concluded that enough was not being done to integrate new converts into the life of the congregation. Each of these authors, in their own way, has sought to impress upon church leaders the importance of helping new believers on their journey to spiritual maturity. If their message was relevant 30 or 40 years ago, it is even more relevant today. It is already clear that one of the most vulnerable groups in the church is the newly converted. They must be helped. They must be assimilated effectively.

## **Youth and Young Adult**

Perhaps the next most vulnerable group of believers in the church is the youth and young adults. With an aging congregation that will soon be too old to be active, the youth are supposed to be, and often are, referred to as the church of today and the future. However, the youth are often the most misunderstood group of members in the church. The issues they face, the hurts they endure, and the lack of inclusion they experience in the church only hasten their departure from the fellowship of their church.

In this section an attempt will be made to expose some valuable counsels for church leaders regarding youth and young adults. Elmore (2010) is of the conviction that the church just does not understand the modern young person. Though his focus is on youth in general, his counsels were found to be of value to this study. In his assessment,

While kids grow up fast intellectually and socially, I believe that they are retarded in their emotional growth. It is clear to me that generation IY is growing up lopsided – heavy on one side and light on the other, advanced in some areas (intellect), pitifully behind in others (emotional maturity). There is therefore no correlation between giftedness and maturity. (p. 63)

Agreeing with Elmore is Kinnaman (2011). Kinnaman's focus is on church youth. In his investigation and interaction with thousands of young people, he identified six distinct reasons why youth disconnect with and leave the church.

1. Overprotective: Young people want to re-imagine, re-create, re-think, and they want to be entrepreneurs, innovators, and starters. The church is viewed as a creativity killer, where risk taking and being involved in culture are anathema. How can the church peel back the tamper-resistant safety seal, making space for imaginative risk-taking and creative self-expression, traits that are so valued within the next generation.

2. Shallow: The most common perception of churches by young people is that they are boring. Few young people felt they could coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities, and passions. The question here is how can the church nurture a deep, holistic faith in Christ that encompasses every area of life?

3. Anti-science: Many young people have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible. Yet they see the most helpful role science plays in the world they inhabit, in medicine, technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. How can the church help the next generation interact with science positively and prophetically?

4. Repressive: Religious rules—particularly sexual mores—feel stifling to the individual mindset of young people. Sexuality creates deep challenges for faith development of young people. How can the church contextualize its approach to sexuality and culture within a broader vision of restored relationships?

5. Exclusive: Because this generation is trained by society to be open-minded, tolerant and accepting, Christianity's claims to exclusivity become a hard sell. How can the Christian community link the singular nature of Christ with the radical ways in which He pursued and included outsiders?

6. Doubtless: Young people say that the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. How can the Christian community help this generation face their doubts squarely and integrate their questions into a robust life of faith (pp. 92, 93)?

It is hard to argue the validity and importance of these reasons young people give for feeling disconnected from their faith. Kinnaman's assessment provides an important

perspective that should inform church leaders to do more than they are now doing to effectively disciple young people.

Sahlin (as cited in Cornforth & Lale 1995, p. 8) connects the focus of Elmore with the focus on Kinnaman to make a valuable point. He states that “When we learn to integrate faith with the non-religious elements of personal life, we begin to build the kind of bond that will hold a much larger number of the youth reared in Adventist families.” In Elmore’s assessment, today’s youth are more complex than youth of any other age in man’s history. He declares that, “They are lost in a virtual world of online fantasy video games or a social world of texting, Facebook, and Twitter. They push themselves to be super kids. They go online to perform.” Some call this generation the “Connected” (p. 21). They are in every way connected, just not with the church.

The second cluster of literature featured several themes that proved to be of vital importance to the development of a strategy to retain young people in the church. The themes that emerged include discipleship, mentoring, connection or relationships and cultural diversity. There was no shortage of scholarly works for the definition and explanation of these themes. The thorough expositions of Bertram Melbourne (2007), Roy Willis (2006), and David Buehring (2004) on the benefits of effective discipleship upon church members were very informative. Also, David Bosch’s (2010) work on keeping new converts coming, and Richard Swenson’s (2004) perspective on the lasting benefits of healthy relationships in the church were invaluable, not to mention Steve Case’s (2009) work on connection from the church’s perspective. Randy Frazee’s (2001) *The Connecting Church* also proved helpful in this discussion.

Stetzer and Rainer's (2010, p. 174) exposition on the benefits of relationships in the church carries great value to this study. They go on to show how "people investing in people" resulted in lasting life together in the community. If life in the community of the early church was sustained by personal relationships, the church today has a model to follow.

Joining Stetzer and Rainer in their assessment of the value of relationship and community as beneficial to church members is Johnson (2007, p. 99). He states that church members need to interact on many levels and in a variety of ways. But the most promising vehicle for developing in-depth relationships within the Body of Christ is through participation in small groups where 10 to 12 people meet regularly to grow together in Christ. Johnson goes on to show how individualism is detrimental to the Christian life. He calls it a disease which creeps into the church and destroys the very benefits of community (pp. 101-105).

This review of literature did not encounter one mission-minded church scholar who disagreed with Stetzer, Rainer, or Johnson on the themes of relationship, community or connection.

Another featured quality of the church that was pointed out by Patrick (2010, p. 211) is the caring or nurturing ministry to members. Patrick sees nurturing of members as a priority of the church. He states, "Jesus is indicating that He wants the church to strategically seek, reach, teach, and serve people. This must become the known culture of the church." Gane (2010, p. 73) could not agree more with the sentiments of Johnson, Patrick, and the others. His assessment on loving relationships that finds a model in Jesus is of value to this study. He declares that Jesus loved and accepted people and drew

them into enduring relationships. Is not this exactly what the church needs to do to keep its members from leaving? Gane is convinced that this is the best method. An additional perspective was shared by Joseph R. Myers (2003, p. 25). Young and new people need to feel they belong, not in a corporate or group way, but personally. He states, “Belonging is an individual experience.”

### **Cultural Diversity**

The theme of cultural diversity has been getting more attention now than at any other time, especially in the church circle. One reason for this is the increased response of immigrants living in America to the witness of the church. On the contrary, born Americans are responding to the gospel at an alarmingly lower rate, as was shown earlier in this study. Michael V. Angrosino (2001) and Leslie Pollard (2000) are among the many scholars who raise awareness to the issue of diversity. Angrosino identifies four basic factors that explain why the church struggles with this issue:

1. Lack of knowledge
2. Self-protection or denial
3. Fear of the unknown or the new
4. Feelings of pressure due to time or other constraints

Finally, Angrosino recommends the Apostle Paul’s example in dealing with cultural and racial diversity as a useful paradigm for dealing with diversity in all its forms (pp. 1-4). Other works such as Halter and Smay’s (2010) work on diversity and the mission field was also informative to this study.

## **Mentoring**

Lawless' (2005) provides a few insights on the effects of the new member class and of the mentoring relationship between long-term members and new ones. From his studies, Lawless found that by placing new believers with experienced members the dropout rates were reduced dramatically. He stated, "We greatly reduced the numbers dropping out, or going out the back door, members are getting involved" (p. 45).

Cress's (2000) classic on helping new members stay on board was found to be valuable to this study, especially from an Adventist point of view. This literature explores the dynamics of effective discipleship and highlights the church's responsibility to the converts it makes. Unlike many of the works reviewed in this section, Cress' assessment of the "step by step" journey of the new believer, from baptism to full maturity in the faith, was found to be unique. The only work that was found to be similar in its practicality and simplicity was that of Willis. The others tend to be more general.

## **Implications**

The most recurrent themes identified in these scholarly works provide a solid structure for developing a strategy for membership retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The most prominent competency areas are discipleship with the inclusion of new convert mentoring, and personal connectedness. Another area of absolute importance has to do with the churches willingness to change where, when, and how it should be relevant to the youth.

## **Summary and Implications of Literary Findings**

The scholarly works that were reviewed in this study do not represent all the available literature of related theory. In consistency with the proposed approach

expressed in the introduction of this study, consulted works were confined to those published in the last ten years, with the exception of a few historical studies that were considered to be of special value to the study. Also, the works were limited to general themes and issues with direct bearing on the purpose of this study; namely, to develop a strategy for resolving problems related to membership retention in the church. Because this review exposed a global phenomenon in Christianity, that is, a general decline in church attendance and church membership, it became necessary to identify and discuss emerging themes in more general than specific ways. The Adventist perspective was reviewed in the larger context of the global and North American perspectives. While these scholarly works did not reveal an abundance of new theories for solving membership related problems they certainly raised the level of urgency with which the church should be responsive if it wants to continue to be a viable and effective movement in the present as well as in the future.

The major concerns raised regarding the negative image of the church include, the lack of appeal that the church has to young people, the need for more proactive discipleship of new members, mentoring and other nurturing programs, becoming more relevant rather than being strictly fixed to tradition, winning back the departed members, and preventing future attendance and membership loss. These reviewed scholarly works also recognized the areas of success in the church that do not need to be re-invented but to be continued.

Scholarly works on membership retention reveal components of effective programs that may be helpful where there are none. One component that may be in existence but is never outdated is small group ministries for the purpose of teaching Bible



principles and spiritual disciplines. Another component that incorporates theory with practice has to do with training classes for personal witnessing.

Another component has to do with creating personal support relationships to link new believers with seasoned believers in mentoring relationships. The Scriptures advocate for the two-by-two principle that New Testament leaders employed. Many times, as is evident in Paul's letters, younger less experience believers were placed with more senior and experienced believers. This is referred to as the peer or mentoring paradigm. Since the success of needed competencies depends largely on the skills and expertise of church leaders, the church is compelled to train or acquire trained facilitators from elsewhere.

Another component of effective programs is the worship service. The quality of the service must be constantly reviewed by competent people who will not be slow to recommend necessary changes for the improvement of service quality.

Some competencies are the pastor's responsibilities or his designee's, such as: preaching/teaching, new member classes covering spiritual disciplines, prayer life, personal devotion, and meditation upon Scriptures. This survey recommends involving new converts as soon as they join the church.

Perhaps the most effective competency is to require church members, especially new members, to be involved in church ministries, not as spectators, but as participants. As one scholar (anonymous) said, inactivity is the beginning of apostasy. As this study develops, more and more competencies will be mentioned as they are revealed in related literature.

## CHAPTER IV

### CREATING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP AS THE GOAL OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

#### **Introduction**

Discipleship, and not church membership, must become the goal of Adventist evangelism. It has everything to do with spiritual maturity, hence spiritual longevity. The message of discipleship emerges from the Great Commission Jesus gave to the original twelve disciples with the same importance as the message of baptism.

As His church, we must understand our mission, as Jesus intended for us, not just as merely an axiom for numerical growth but as a process of developing Christians into mature disciples. Burrill (2009, p. 9) gives a summary of how the church should disciple new members. Jesus is calling people into the full process of discipleship, and our understanding of this process must be “built around the ministry model of Jesus.” Jesus’ model of discipleship includes both numerical growth and spiritual growth or spiritual maturity.

Unfortunately, our effort to fulfill Christ’s commission often reveals a lopsided understanding of what He commands us to do. This lopsided understanding surfaces in what Thayer (2010) describes as a culture of “Numbers.” This culture of numbers has permeated every level of the organization, from the General Conference to the local

congregation. As Cauley (2010, p. 81), aptly phrased it, a culture like the quantity culture is “not the churches intent, but it is the reality that the church is facing.” The big questions that must be answered in this study are: what has happened to the post-baptismal discipleship process? Are new converts disappearing because they have not been discipled? Clearly, Christ’s mandate to church leaders is all-inclusive. It includes witnessing to people, winning people, teaching people, training and discipling people, and ultimately deploying them into their own ministry.

The principal purpose of this chapter is not only to seek helpful answers to these questions but to feature the reality of the Maranatha Church and address it. To accomplish this purpose attempts will be made to describe the journey of new converts at Maranatha. This feature will include a brief history of the church, selected revelations that emerge from the study, and the process of intervention that was developed and executed.

This research project has generated a great deal of interest among the leaders and members of the Maranatha Church. Several individuals, after understanding and learning of the study, commented to me that this project involving their church was long overdue. They have always wanted to do more to assimilate and conserve the new members who join their church. The fulltime Bible instructor actually claimed that this research was God’s answer to her prayers, and she has supported the project whole heartedly.

My sincere hope is that this research will reveal valuable lessons that will inform the development of an effective program of discipleship for the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is also hoped that every member of this large congregation will come to understand, and assume their roles, in the spiritual development of new members

and that discipleship is everybody's business. And, that by aiding the discipleship of new members, the long-standing members in the church will themselves be more grounded in their personal spiritual discipleship. Church Growth expert Rodger Dudley (Personal communication, June 11, 2013) said, "We need to stop the loss of church members." For as C. S. Lewis (cited in Hirsch, 2009) understood it, the church's principal reason for existence is to draw people to Christ and inspire them to be like Him. It is also our responsibility to model a love relationship that is contagious. Christ introduced the Holy Spirit to aid us in our character development and our efforts to lead others to Him. He said that the church exists for no other purpose. Unlike Donald McGavran, who argued that the church was established for growing numbers, C. S. Lewis (2009) declared, "If the church is not doing this (discipling people), then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible, are a waste of time." My aim is to enlighten the Maranatha Church on their primary responsibility, which is discipleship.

### **A Concise Profile of the Maranatha Church**

This is an attempt to describe the ministry context of this research project. This approach will highlight both the internal and the external factors of the Maranatha Church.

#### **External Factors**

The Southeastern regions of the United States of America, because of their closeness to Central America and the Caribbean, are highly transitory. That is, a high percentage of the people who migrate from the areas described above to the United States make their first stop in these Southeastern cities. However, as soon as they discover better opportunities for more comfortable and lucrative living, they tend to relocate,

usually to more northern regions. Also, these Southern regions are often plagued with high unemployment due to the prolonged slump in the real estate market. Another factor to contend with is the high and ever increasing population of retirees who come to these regions mainly for the weather conditions.

Another factor is that many of the cities of these regions experience a fairly high rate of undocumented people, who either entered the United States illegally or overstayed their allotted time. Because these undocumented people usually lack needed support, they gravitate to churches and other humanitarian agencies such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. They also often feel insecure in their immigration status and tend to hide or escape to more secluded regions. It is not unusual for these, transient people to join area churches and become dependent on the resources they provide. It is also not unusual for these transitory visitors to disappear without informing the church where they may hold membership. One pastor of a Seventh-day Adventist Church told me about three years ago that as many as 70% of his members left his church in a short span of time, some to their countries of origin and others to unknown destinations.

The Southeastern regions of the US are among some of the most multi-ethnic and multi-cultural areas of the United States. This reality explains the reasons for the variety of languages spoken in this region. The Maranatha Church is located in the heart of the city of Miami Gardens. This city is made up predominantly of peoples of West Indian and African American descent. However, the cultural values of the residents in this city are basically the same as they are in any other United States city.

Many people in this city attend church on a regular basis. One source (*Percept Group, Inc.*, 2012) indicated that there are as many as 100 registered churches in the city

of Miami Gardens. The population of the city of Miami Gardens stands at 107,167. Although this city is home to many middle class and upper class residents, it is also home to a high percentage of lower class to poverty level residents. The afore-mentioned source also indicated that “the city of Miami Gardens is somewhat marred by criminal activities such as drug use and trade, house break-ins, prostitution, various forms of assaults, and occasional murders.” The churches, including Maranatha, are teaming up with the local police to help in the fight against these criminal activities. Maranatha provides facilities for the monthly crime watch meetings.

### **Internal Profile**

The Maranatha Church is not only the largest English-speaking West Indian church in the Florida Conference, but it is one of the four largest churches in the city of Miami Gardens. There are over 2,000 members on record at Maranatha, while the weekly worship service attendance stands at an average of 900. The church operates both a Junior Academy, with nearly 200 students, and a child development center, with a current enrollment of 105. Maranatha baptizes an average of 100 persons annually. The following table features the daily activities of the church.

Table 1

*Various Ministries and Activities in the Maranatha Church*

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Sabbath</b>
Pathfinders	School Board	Food Bank & Food Distribution	Prayer Meeting	Youth Committee	Decoration of Sanctuary	S. S.
Adventurers	Choir Practice			Social Activities	Hospitality	Worship Service
Church Work				Prison Ministries	Small Groups	Weekly Bible Classes
Youth Social Activities						AY
ACS						Shut In Visitation

Table 2

*Special Dates and Events in the Life of the Church*

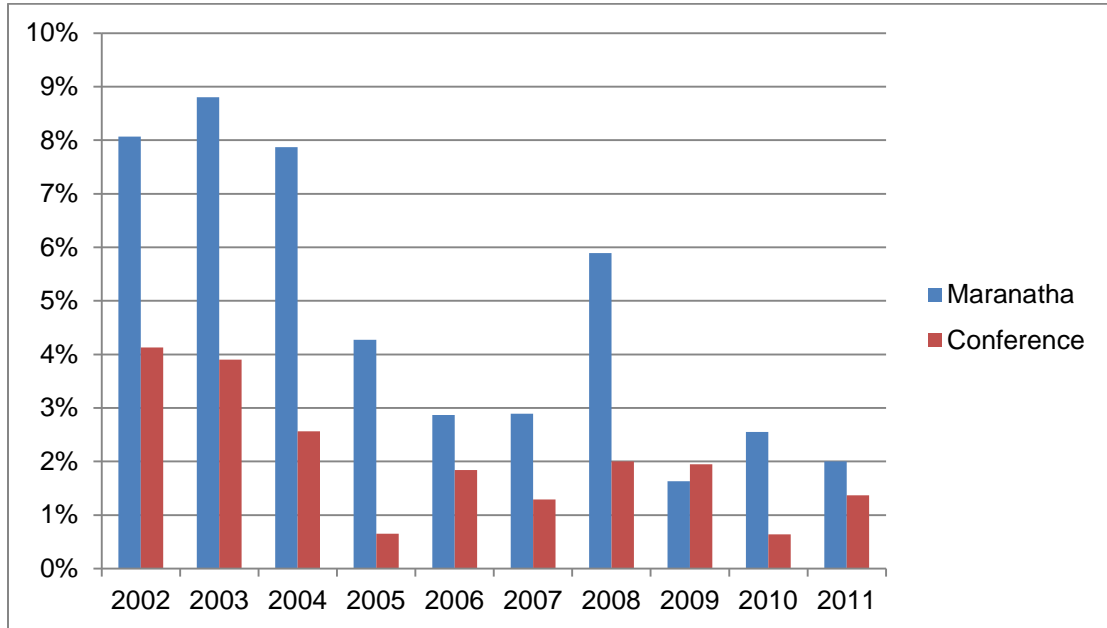
1976	Church started by Pastor William A. Kirlew and 8 other members.
1977	Church was organized with 51 members in Miami Dade store front.
1978	Church relocated to basement of Baptist church in Liberty city.
1978	Church moved to gymnasium of the Greater Miami Academy.
1979	Church relocated to what became their permanent location, the Lutheran church building at 18900 NW 32 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Miami Gardens. Church also conducted first evangelistic campaign by Pastor Philip Hosten, and 36 people were baptized.
1980	Child Development Center was established.
1982	Church purchased Lutheran church property at 18900 NW 32 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue.
1983	Maranatha planted their first of 12 daughter congregations.
1986	Main worship sanctuary was built and dedicated.
1993	William A. Kirlew Junior Academy was established.
1997	William A. Kirlew (first and longest serving pastor) retired after 21 years.
1998	The year I became a pastor at Maranatha.
1999	The year I held my only evangelistic campaign at Maranatha, and a total of 55 people were baptized but over 100 were added for that year.
2002	Maranatha planted their latest daughter congregation (Covenant SDA).
2008	The most numerically successful evangelistic campaign was held by visiting evangelist Claudius Morgan and over 150 were baptized.



Table 3

*Steady Membership Growth for the Last 10 Years*

*% Increase in Membership: Maranatha & Conference*



Summary and Trends

Upon the analysis of the trends regarding church growth in Maranatha, it was observed that the majority of members that joined the church came by way of baptism. There was no negative growth even as the church maintained an average weekly attendance rate of about 41%. Due to the most successful evangelistic campaign in Maranatha history (2008), which was conducted by Evangelist Claudius Morgan, over 140 people joined the church that year. The phenomenal growth of 2003 and 2004 were due to large numbers of baptism in two separate congregations. Having planted a new company (Covenant) in 2002, the Maranatha Church still held the membership of the new company, therefore, benefiting from the growth numbers of that new congregation.

Also, the church hired a full-time Bible worker during this period and she increased significantly the numbers of home Bible studies. This resulted in a more than usual number of baptisms. On the other hand the growth rate of the Florida Conference was observed to fluctuate, and even diminish, especially in 2009 and in 2011. In 2009, a far less number of local churches failed to engage in soul winning activities. The same could be said of 2011. It was observed also that most of the people that joined the Maranatha Church, as well as the Florida Conference did so by way of baptism. Another significant trend is that many of the new converts to Maranatha are of school age (8-14).

### **The Predominant Culture of the Maranatha Church**

Clearly, the Maranatha Church maintains a strong culture of soul-winning evangelism. Each year church leadership sets out to increase church membership by at least 100 new people, and for several years they have either accomplished or surpassed this goal. In my research of the church so far I discovered that the church pursues people through public evangelism, house to house visitation, friendship evangelism, and regular weeks of prayer meetings that target students and parents of the two institutions they operate. The drive for numerical growth permeates the very fabric of the church. The denominational motto “to take the gospel to everyone” (Damsteegt, 1988, p. 142, 143) is taken personally at Maranatha.

The Maranatha culture of numerical growth is akin to the broader culture of Adventism. It was reported in (Thayer, 2010), “The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has established a goal of 100,000 baptisms by the end of 2010. Other parts of the world also have goals for their territories.” In this report, however, serious concerns were raised about the lack of an effective program for discipleship of the new

believers. Thayer, in her report asked, “Are the local Adventist Churches prepared to nurture and assimilate these new members? We have set goals for the baptizing, which will bring us converts, but have we also set goals for teaching them to obey Christ?”

My own interest in this discussion peaked when I made a return visit to the Maranatha Church and discovered that some of the new converts God used me to bring to the church were missing and unaccounted for. Right then and there I decided to do something about it. I realized that those who take the Great Commission seriously cannot focus only on baptisms. Jesus used four distinct, yet related, verbs in His command to the disciples, hence the church. Each of the four verbs highlights one quarter of the discipleship process. The verbs (Matt 28:18-20) go, make disciples, baptize, and teach indicate comprehensive and continuous activities. Furthermore, Jesus promised His presence with them as long as they practiced obedience to these activities, “even unto the end of the world.”

#### Towards a Healthy Concept of Growth

A couple of scholars have enriched the understanding of this subject with their pertinent comments. First, Kidder (2011, p. 19) identified three different categories of church growth. The first category is that of numerical growth, citing Acts 1:13-15 and 2:41-47. The second category is that of geographical growth, citing Matthew 24:14 and 28:18-20, also, Acts 1:8. The third category of church growth is spiritual growth, as it is described in Romans 8. All three categories of growth emerged from the Great Commission of Jesus.

Second, Melbourne (2007, p. 103) seems to have drawn great insights from the personal relationship between Jesus and His disciples. He declared that Jesus did not

just provide growth-producing insights, but He abode with them and worked patiently with them until they experienced growth. He stated that, “The disciples were slow to understand. Their growth was slow and painful. But Jesus stuck with them and worked with them until some growth occurred” (p.108). The salient point that these men seem to be making is that the church must be about comprehensive growth, not just growth as we are cultured to view it in terms of numbers.

The Maranatha Church is not accustomed to think, or even talk, of growth without numbers. Here, revival and transformation are viewed as something different. Discipling the believer does not earn special credit. The numbers are more worthy of honorable mention. The following incident illustrates the value that our church places on numbers.

Once, after a six-week evangelistic series, the evangelist reported to the conference president that hundreds of souls were revived, people renewed their commitment to Christ, and many more decided to resume church attendance. The young and excited evangelist reported to the president that a young lady gave her life to Christ and was baptized. He even quoted Luke 15:7 to the president saying, “I say unto you, likewise, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” The conference president inclined his head and said, “Pastor, there may well be great joy in heaven over one, but there is mourning in the conference office.” In the language of the commission, the going, making of disciples, baptizing, and teaching are all worthy of celebration.

### **A Call for Urgent Change in Culture**

The purpose of this section is not to replace the crave for membership growth with a crave for discipleship in the Maranatha Church. Rather, this is an appeal for the

church to value both as equally important in God's mission. Church leaders are called upon at Maranatha to understand their God-given responsibility in the context of Jesus' model of discipleship. Breen and Absalom (2010, p. 70) expressed the idea that, "a disciple is someone who does the same things Jesus and His disciples did." First, church leaders must have lived and are living the experience of a disciple.

This experience cannot be faked. It has to be experienced firsthand by leaders even before they can disciple their members. The discipleship experience begins when the Holy Spirit convicts the heart of a sinner, leads him into a saving relationship with Jesus, joins him to the body of Christ, which is His church, following the rite of baptism and further equips him for ministry. The new convert is now taught, trained, and then sent to fetch still others for the kingdom of his Lord and Savior. A disciple is a participant in the mission of Christ through His church.

Discipleship is not an act but a manner of living--a process for life. Even after a new believer becomes a mature disciple that disciple must still practice discipleship to accord with Jesus for life as described in the Great Commission, "even unto the end of the world."

Maranatha leaders are invited to join this lifelong partnership to disciple their members. These leaders are not called upon only to embrace discipleship but to engage the whole church into this God-given, Jesus' modeled ministry. It is time for Maranatha Church leaders to pioneer a radical change in the culture of the church. This change is inevitable. The mass of the people will demand it as this project seeks to educate and inspire the church to demand discipleship. The fact is that denominational leaders will not come to the church to disciple our members. It is local church leaders that disciple

church members as they come to reflect Christ and His model of discipleship. I am hopeful that great changes will occur regarding Maranatha Church culture. For as Rendle (2002, p. 137) thinks, “A congregation cannot remain in a stage of ministry without change. Change will occur.”

### **The Development of the Intervention Process**

Developing an intervention strategy for changing the “numbers” culture of the Maranatha Church was not an easy task. The more I thought about it the more impossible changing it appeared to be. I resorted to fervent prayers. I even enlisted several people in my church to join me in prayer. Consequently, I began to sense God’s answer to our prayers about the fall of 2012. The reality is that no amount of change, especially change that involves the masses, is easy. Furthermore, I realized that the idea of a discipleship culture was very new for the church. In the first place, it became necessary to define and explicate the term and the process very early into my interaction with the church.

The process started in August of 2012 when I approached the three members of the pastoral staff and expressed to them my desire to engage their congregation in a discipleship campaign. I further explained the purpose, the nature, and the process, of this two-year project to these leaders (see p. 73 of this document). Much time was spent answering their questions regarding the project. The pastors instructed me to write a letter to the church board and explain to them the same details that I had provided them. Three weeks later, during the first week of September, I received a telephone call from the senior pastor who told me that the board voted unanimously for me to do this project in

their church. The church board expressed a desire for intervention in what many already perceived as a need in their congregation.

Immediately, arrangements were made for me to visit the general assembly and address the church. For the next hour, I spent the time highlighting the reality of membership loss, especially among new members, and how I could help the church to improve in the area of new member discipleship. At the end of my presentation the masses responded in strong affirmation. It was determined that we, (the church leaders and I) could do a series of surveys involving the new members. I subsequently enlisted the services of the Institute of Church Ministries (Andrews's campus) in order to develop and execute the survey instrument for this research project.

The idea was for me to survey two categories of new converts: a. The new converts who joined the church in the last five years and were still attending. b. The new converts of the last five years who no longer attended church. The survey questions for both categories of new converts were formulated. Both sets of participants were asked to answer 41 questions about their experience with the church. The questions covered their contact with the church before becoming members, while they were actively attending and after they had stop attending. We also found it necessary to do a simple congregational survey consisting of 12 questions.

### Survey Number One

Once the dates for the surveys were set with church leaders, a team of local assistants, more like the context support team, was formulated with the help of the pastoral staff. I met with this team a couple of times, and at those sessions we strategized and arranged for the survey of the two categories. The first survey was realized about the

middle of September. Again I was given permission to address the church during the Sabbath morning worship service at which time I appealed to all the new converts present to meet with me and the support group in a separate school building located about 500 yards from the sanctuary. After 20 minutes of transition, about 65 new converts joined us.

We prayed to start, and then introduced the support staff. For the next 30 minutes, I explained the details and purpose of the survey. I also handed to each participant two sets of documents. One was a thank you letter for their willingness to participate. The second document was the participant's consent form. I also handed them a document explaining their rights to have their personal identity not compromised during the whole process of my interaction with them.

We provided pencils, and survey questions, and then invited them to begin. While some participants finished faster than others, the whole process of the survey lasted one hour. There were frequent interruptions as participants sought clarification of particular questions. Overall, every participant was in a positive mood as they did the survey. As soon as the last survey document was collected, the support group put them all together and sealed them in an appropriate box. I then thanked everyone and left with the box.

### Survey Number Two

About three weeks later, we repeated the process. Everything was done as in the first session. Survey number two was necessary to complete the required amount of participants. While there were 63 participants in the first session, about 40 participated in



the second round. Our target was 100 participants for the category of new members who were still attending church.

### Survey Number Three

This survey involved new converts who stopped attending church. Because many were unaccounted for, there was always the fear that we would not locate enough participants in this category.

### Prayer Still Works

I engaged the support group in diligent prayer for the Holy Spirit to intervene, and He did. We worked with the local church clerk and the full time Bible instructor, who was instrumental in their “conversion” years’ earlier. She still knew the family whereabouts of many of these ex-members. We proceeded to make contact with several ex-members, including those who were qualified to take part in the survey. Once their locations were established, we mailed a simple letter to them explaining how much we still desired to be of help to them and, in return, how they could be of help to the church in establishing a system to better care for the people who join the church.

While the mails were being sent to these people, the church clerk and Bible worker labored long and hard to call and visit some of them at their work places with the letters. On some occasions relatives put us in touch with some who had already moved from the area. I, too, had to make several calls. Miraculously, many of these missing members, once we located them, were more than willing to participate in the survey. According to the field helpers, about 25% of these missing members, who accepted to take the survey, returned the finished document to the church by hand.

Finally, after nearly six weeks of calling and reminding and even showing up to explain the survey questions, we were rewarded with the return of some 89% of the survey documents.

Once we got back 89% of the survey, I mailed the set to the Institute of Church Ministries. About two months later, the Institute of Church Ministries emailed me the complete correlation matrix of both categories of survey. After studying and analyzing the data for significant relationships between questions and answers, I began documenting the significant findings in the fall of 2013.

The specific intervention events included, but were not limited to, a meeting with the church board on Sabbath, June 22, 2013. This meeting was for the purpose of updating church leadership on the status of the survey, referring to the blatant findings of the survey, and scheduling a six-month process of intervention. The intervention process included three training seminars for church leaders regarding the levels of discipleship, namely: welcoming new members into the church, teaching, training, and equipping new members, and engaging them as disciple-makers. The intervention process also included a two weekend seminar, and two Sabbath morning sermons with the larger church body.

The first seminar with the church covered the basic theoretical principles of discipleship, while the second seminar dealt with the practical application of those principles. The sources of material for these two seminars included the New Testament, the Spirit of Prophecy writings, and a collection of religious books that cover the topic. Ultimately, I compiled a wide variety of discipleship quotations, mainly from the book *Evangelism*, and from these sources, I prepared a discipleship handbook for youth

leaders. My plan is to donate this handbook as a gift for future use to the Maranatha Church.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Effective discipleship is the greatest need of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in my generation. The differences it will make are enormous. It will help to keep members attending, and it will increase their level of participation in the local congregation. But most importantly, discipleship will lead church members to complete spiritual maturity as they continue their walk with God. The church cannot be only about membership. Surely, the church must be about numbers. Yet, membership is neither the goal nor the end product. While the church must grow in membership, church leaders cannot stop their work once people join the church. They have a greater responsibility to disciple them through modeling and education until fulfillment of the great commission is achieved and becomes second nature to them.

The expectations of this research project are simple and clear. First, that the Maranatha Church leaders will themselves be more fortified in their relationship with God and reinforced in their passion for modeling discipleship and new member care. Second, that both leaders and members will be more informed in the discipleship process. Third, that this project will lead to a reduction in the rate of membership loss. Fourth, that the success of the intervention process at Maranatha will serve to benefit other congregations and the Kingdom of God.

This project may not lead to the successful discipleship of all the members. Perhaps more and better interventions may be required in the future, but it will certainly set in motion the tools that will help to change the predominant “numbers” culture of the

Maranatha Church. It will raise the awareness that there is more to the Christian experience than just being a member of the church. When all is said and done, the Maranatha leaders will have valuable tools at their disposal to facilitate the discipleship process in their church, tools that they did not have before.

## CHAPTER V

### ADDITIONAL INTERVENTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

In the stated opinion of several church leaders, this study has accomplished its main purpose. It has created, and made available to their church, a comprehensive, Bible-backed, principle-based, and competency-driven discipleship strategy aimed at retaining the people who join their church. This accomplishment, though, is only the beginning of what Christ expects of His church. Much more is needed in the application of this curriculum. The true test of its success will be observed over time as church leaders incorporate its principles into ministry practices.

#### **Challenges and Rewards**

This study had its challenges as well as its rewards. There were two formidable challenges. The first challenge had to do with the absence of a reliable antecedent to glean from. Because of the unavailability of a Bible-backed, principle-driven, competency-based, and user-friendly discipleship model I was forced to rely upon the learning outcomes of the new member surveys, the sparing input of church leaders, and the collective wisdom of selected literature.

The second challenge that impacted this study had to do with insufficient time. A study of this nature requires adequate time. Each competency that emerged to shape the curriculum requires long-term application in order to bring meaningful results.

This study also evoked two noteworthy reactions from Maranatha Church leaders. On the one hand, a few church leaders were anxious and uncertain. Those leaders had become accustomed to think that they were doing everything right, and now, they had to wait for the unbiased opinions of their new members. On the other hand, most of the Maranatha Church leaders expressed hope and optimism in the study. Those leaders believed that something beneficial would come out of the study.

Although it was a bit challenging to share research findings with the anxious leaders, I still had to do it. The counsel of Williams and Denney, (2013, p. 122), “If you want to influence others in a positive way, you have to tell the truth,” became empowering to me.

Whether, or not, some church leaders would be shocked, or embarrassed, by the research data concerning their discipleship practices, my goal was always to build on the positive and learn from the negative. However, the study of the Maranatha Church was not just challenging; it was also rewarding. Many church leaders shouted success at different stages of the implementation process. One woman said, “God has sent you here with this program at the right time; our church really needed help.”

### **Chapter Goals**

While the previous chapter outlines the development of the intervention process, this chapter provides, as required, “a concise narrative of the precise chronological

implementation of the intervention.” To accomplish this task the following three-fold goal was developed:

First, to describe the chronological implementation of intervention at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Second, to reveal and explore the six curriculum competencies that emerged from this study.

Third, to provide valuable counsels regarding the use of this discipleship curriculum.

In this chapter, we are going to explore the theory and practice of the discipleship curriculum as it relates to a particular congregation.

This curriculum was introduced in January 2012 and concluded in September 2014. The following table design was found to be an effective way to present the implementation process.

Table 4

*Narrative of Precise Chronological Implementation of Intervention Process*

January 2012	First official contact was made with the senior pastor of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. The purpose of the contact was to inform the pastor of my intention to conduct a research study in his church. The pastor requested that I present a written request for permission from the church board. I made the request, and the church board granted the needed permission.
April 2012	Second meeting with pastoral staff. At this meeting, I answered questions regarding the nature, purpose, and method of the study. I also secured the full support of church pastors.
May 2012	Contract was made with the Institute of Church Ministries (ICM), Andrews University about collaboration for this research. Consequently, Dr. Roger Dudley made a contract with me to design survey instrument and process survey information for best results.
August 2012	Church pastors invited me to meet with church board. The purpose of this meeting was to explain the purpose, nature, and method of the research project.
September 2012	I met with the congregation for two main reasons:  First, to address and alert the church at Sabbath School time concerning the urgency for an effective discipleship program and how church leadership permitted me to intervene. I also used the opportunity to explain how the church would be involved.  Second, I was asked to preach the sermon for that day. The sermon focused on the “Missional purpose of the church” and how this mission was bi-focal. It is about growing membership and growing members into a discipleship program—numerical and spiritual growth.
October 2012	I contacted and contracted with ICM, Andrews, to develop survey instruments.
November 2012— March 2013	I formed a Local Context Support Team and utilized team members to identify names and locations of research subjects.
June—September 2013	All three sets of the survey were executed involving new converts and active church members.



Table 4 Continued.

September— December 2013	Survey documents were sent to ICM, processed by ICM, and results were sent back to me.
December 2013— March 2014	I familiarized myself with the survey results and analyzed the correlation matrix. Consequently, I identified the most relevant findings for curriculum development.
March—May 2014	Development of intervention process.
June 2014	Launching of Curriculum Implementation with the first of six Leader’s Training Seminars.
July 2014	I conducted the second Leader’s Training Seminar. At this time, the participants were assigned to read relevant literature and make notes. They were also handed a hard copy of the seminar outline.
August 2014	Third and fourth Leader’s Training Seminars were conducted.
September 2014	Leader’s Training Seminars 5 and 6 were conducted.
September 2014	Final contact with congregation to share the significant findings of the surveys. Consequently, I commended the positive ministry/discipleship practices of the church, and I challenged every member to get involved with church leadership in their attempts to apply the principles and recommendations of the curriculum. I also used the occasion to present the church with the corresponding Manual for New Member Care that was developed as one of the goals for this study. To this end, a brief analysis and evaluation of the study was done and shared with the congregation.

### **Identifying and Exploring Curriculum Competencies**

Six main curriculum competencies emerged from this two-year study. Although several teaching points popped up from time to time during this period, the six competencies that were selected appeared to have greater missional value to this study.

Each of those curriculum competencies had three important components. First, it was Bible-based. Second, it was relevant to a particular need in the Maranatha Church. Third, it was associated with the “Jesus model” of discipleship, which serves as the paradigm for this project.

Another important feature of these six competencies is their capacity for both theoretical learning and practical application. Each of these competencies was easily developed into a teaching curriculum, and as Mallory and Smith (2001) rightly concluded, an effective training must involve more than theory. They said, teach people the skills and knowledge necessary to make them effective in leadership (see p. 337), create role-play opportunities, and involve them in ministry (see p. 338).

The six curriculum competencies that shaped the leaders training seminars are biblical discipleship, transformational relationships, spiritual disciplines, nurturing, biblical stewardship, and attitude to missing members.

### **Crafting a Series of Training Seminars for Church Leaders**

Crafting six training seminars based on the six competencies above combined four key components. Those components included curriculum theory, seminar schedule, participants, and ministry opportunities.

#### **Curriculum Theory**

Since each curriculum competency grew out of a particular need in the discipleship practices of the Maranatha Church, the theory of the seminar was outlined and delivered with a need-based approach. The delivery approach answered several questions and established several compelling points regarding the importance of the

subject. Participants were given a list of 50 books for further education on discipleship. Also, each participant in the training seminars was given access to the new member manual, which provided the nuts and bolts of discipleship.

### Seminar Schedule

The seminars were conducted on Sabbath afternoons, from four to seven. This way they would not have to compete with participant's jobs nor their secular commitments. Church leadership facilitated the training seminars by postponing all their regular Sabbath afternoon ministry activities. They really gave priority to this program. Appendix B reveals the details of the Leader's Training Seminars.

### Concise Statistical Report of Training Seminars

There were 85 participants in the first seminar, and 75% of them serve as ministry leaders. The remaining 25% of seminar participants were comprised of regular church members and ministry volunteers. The second seminar, however, was attended by 240 participants with as many as 63% pastors, leaders, and other officers of the church. The additional 37% of those who attended the second training seminar were comprised of regular members and ministry volunteers. The remaining four training seminars were attended by the same numbers of participants as the second seminar. At the end of each seminar, a special promotion of the next seminar was made, and the same people returned. Each session began with prayer, which was followed by a brief review of the last session and the assignments associated with it. A full evaluation of training seminar impact is covered in Chapter 6 and Appendix C.

## Engaging Sessions

Delivery of theory did not follow a one way track. Every effort was made to avoid a monologue. Consequently, participants were fully engaged. With rap attention, participants carefully followed the outline of theory material that was presented at the beginning of each session. There was a brief break after every 35 minutes. Class participants were invited to ask relevant questions, make relevant comments, and read selected relevant Scriptures as they followed along.

## Role-Play

Some church leaders were invited, before class time, to share inspiring testimonies that endorsed the teaching points of the seminar. One elder shared his own experience as a disciple-maker. Some volunteers were called upon to act the role of a new member while experienced leaders acted the corresponding role as disciple-makers.

## Ministry Practicum

The fourth component of the training seminar is probably the most important one. It brought together the link between theory and practice. One hundred seasoned, long-term leaders were identified during the second training seminar. These long-term leaders were required to select at least one new member; that is, a person that joined the church in the last two years. Every effort was made to avoid mentoring relationships between close friends and members of the same family. Church leaders who played the part of disciple-makers or mentors were given specific instructions regarding their responsibilities to their new members. These responsibilities included, but were not limited to, regular personal visits, phone calls, Bible study, prayer, sharing in giving

Bible studies, church attendance (the four components of the spiritual disciplines), and participation in various church and ministry activities.

There were three main goals for the discipleship training seminars: first, to build new personal relationships which are basic to successful discipleship; second, to increase personal participation in ministry; and third, to make church leaders accountable. The Scriptures say that church leaders must know their members and attend to them (Jer 23:4).

### **Exploring Curriculum Competencies**

The first major curriculum competency that was taught to seminar participants was biblical discipleship. Since there was a noted lack of efficiency, both in theory and practice, this seminar was developed to explore the purpose, scope, and benefits of a strong, Bible-based, Jesus-modeled, and sustainable brand of discipleship. The competency is known to link existing assimilation practices and education programs with a system of coaching and mentoring that will bring head knowledge to the heart (Mallory & Smith, p. 204). It is more than an assumption that the more a leader knows about the discipleship process and the more he applies that knowledge, the more positive effects he will have on the life of the members. While this comment is yet to be tested by me, I agree with Raines (2006, p. 57) who believes that, “our assumptions shape the outcomes.”

Bolsinger (2004, p. 25) makes a huge deal about reflecting Christ in the context of our community of faith. He says that we must expect people to be influenced and led to Jesus as we model Him before them. Leaders disciple people even as they imitate the life of Christ.

The second curriculum competency of the subject theory was Transformational relationships. This seminar explored and explained the emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits of strong relationships. It also showed how the lack of multiple, strong relationships in the church are likely to cause new church members to leave the church.

The third curriculum competency of the subject theory was spiritual disciplines. This training seminar explored and highlighted the role that the four major components of spiritual disciplines play in the Christian life. These four major components include: Bible study, regular prayer, attendance and participation at church, and personal witnessing.

The fourth curriculum competency of the subject theory was stewardship. This seminar discussed the four components of Christian stewardship. These components include: time, spiritual gifts, health, and financial resources. It also discussed the correlation between these competencies and longevity in the church.

The fifth curriculum competency that was taught is nurturing as a membership retention strategy. This seminar on the theme of nurturing consisted mainly of a definition and description of practice. It answered questions like, what is nurturing? How do church leaders nurture new members? What does the Bible say about nurturing? How did the New Testament church provide nurturing for beginning Christians? The seminar also reviewed the various aspects of the nurturing process. These include: member care, discipline, instruction, relationship, partnership, responsibility, accountability, supervision, and ministry deployment.

The sixth curriculum competency that was identified is accountability for and sensitivity to missing members. This seminar was based on the parable of the lost sheep

(Luke 15:3-7). It explored the need for church leaders, and members to be vigilant, quick to respond, tender and loving, relentless, and forgiving. It also viewed Jesus' ministry practice and instructions concerning lost members, stories of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), woman caught in adultery (John 8:4-10), and Peter in denial of Christ (Mark 14:66-72). These formed the support pillar for this seminar.

There were limitations in these curriculum competencies. While there was ample biblical and extra-biblical support for the theory of these competencies, the practical application was limited. There was not enough time, nor willing participants, to test these competencies for effectiveness.

### **Method and Extent of Discipleship Curriculum**

Once the principal competencies of this discipleship curriculum were identified, the question of how to package and deliver them effectively took some careful planning. It was always the plan to make and keep the entire process as simple as possible, since this research was more of a pilot study for the Maranatha Church. Iyengar (2010, p. 1922) remarked that, "When we learn...to simplify, prioritize, and categorize elements and to recognize patterns, we are able to create order even in seeming chaos.

The method that was employed to construct this curriculum reflected simplicity. The theory for this curriculum sprang from three sources:

First, the new member's survey.

Second, the Bible.

Third, a cluster of literary works that have missional value.

The training seminars covered a wide gamut of related subjects that explained each of the curriculum competencies. Furthermore, each competency became the kernel

upon which the seminar was shaped. The delivery of theory was also simple and engaging. The idea was to entertain relevant questions, provide informed and satisfactory answers, and facilitate appropriate comments. Participants were also divided into work and learning groups for peer discussions and role play. Every effort was made to incorporate a variety of learning styles. Further insight into the subject theory is available in Appendix B.

### **Effective Application of Training Curriculum**

Church leaders who are serious about discipling their members, based on this training curriculum, cannot stop at theory. They must become relentless in converting theory into practice. Each of the six curriculum competencies plays such a vital role in the life of church members that leaders of the Maranatha Church must act now. They should pray, plan, and follow five important action steps. These five courses of action are also strongly recommended for any other church that wants to adapt this training curriculum.

#### **Action Step 1: Create a Sense of Urgency**

Since every congregation is settled into its own culture, its own comfort zone, church leaders have to create a sense of crisis in the congregation. The whole congregation must be made to view the need for change as a matter of life and death. Miller and Rollnick (2002, p. 52) suggested that “step one must involve building intrinsic motivation for change.” The talk of a solution must be preceded by a crucial talk of the problem, the wrong that must be made right. Leaders must inform the people of things like the dropout rate, the contributing factors, as they are described in Appendix A



(former members survey correlations), the value Christ places on a soul, and the biblical obligation to give account for the members (Prov 27:23; Jer 13:20; John 21:15-17).

With the help of the Maranatha Church pastors, N. King and G. Etiene (Personal communication, April 20, 2012) I managed to create a palpable sense of urgency among church members and lay leaders. Once the curriculum competencies were identified and revealed to the pastors, they approached the congregation with a “let’s get it on” attitude. Their question to me was, “How soon can the church be informed of the serious problems we are having?” Miller and Rollnick believe that a church that develops a sense of urgency will be more inclined to welcome meaningful intervention that leads to solutions (p. 54). Another scholar, Wibberding (2010), suggests “that when church leaders’ awareness of missional decline is raised, the people’s sense of urgency will grow” (p. 85).

#### Action Step 2: Form a Leader Training Committee

The second step for implementing the curriculum for training church leaders is to form a training committee. There are three vital advantages of a training committee:

First, a training committee will guarantee more buy in and foster a sense of shared ownership. Most congregations will be more likely to embrace the vision of a group more than that of a single leader, especially when the vision is focusing on changing the culture of a congregation.

Team work is always powerful in the process of change. Smalley (2007) advocates for the examples of team work shown in Scriptures. He draws attention to the fact that the Bible does not talk about team sports as the society does, but it says a lot about working together for a common goal. He states, “Scripture draws on the picture of

a body to convey the same idea” (pp. 137, 138). The thought that people are more likely to trust a multitude of counsellors (Prov 11:14) more than a single leader, no matter how charismatic he may appear to be, is a valid one.

Second, a training committee brings together a diversity of opinions more reflective of a congregation. Then, there is the component of shared accountability. Bandy and Easum (2006) summed it up well when they said, “Accountability combined with responsibility and authority is to assure a connection between achievement and reward” (p. 72).

Third, a training committee is more suitable for developing a process of evaluation. In order to test the success of a leader training program, an effective evaluation instrument is deemed necessary. In the case of the Maranatha project research, three different groups did the evaluation of training impact. Max Lucado (2010) believes everyone can do something . . . and that cooperation is more than a good idea; it is a command” (pp. 46, 48).

### Action Step 3: Shape the Path by Modeling it

When leaders model what they require of their members, the result can be powerful. Chip and Dan Heath (2010) concluded that “To make changes stick, leaders have got to think about shaping the path.” Like Breen and Cockram (2009) said, Jesus is our perfect pattern. We emulate Him. Church leaders, including training committee members, must set the example by modeling the principles and practices of the discipleship curriculum. For the discipleship program to achieve success, every member of the church must be included.

Bosh (2010) states, “The movement away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men to ministry as the responsibility of the whole people of God, ordained as well as unordained, is one of the most dramatic shifts taking place in the church today” (p. 467).

Kidder (2011, p. 39) adds that spiritual leaders live out the vital principles of discipleship in their ministry.

Kaiser (2006) shared this thought with both Bosh and Kidder that ministry is an all-member sport, for leaders as well as parishioners (p. 82).

#### Action Step 4: Grow Your People

The success of leaders is measured by their positive effects upon their people. C. Heath and D. Heath are of the opinion that a church leader’s first responsibility is to create a “growth mindset.” By asking the question, “Can people with a fixed mindset learn to adopt a growth mindset,” Chip and Dan Heath (p. 167) have triggered off a needed discussion on the process of congregational change. Other scholars, like Miller and Rollnick (2002), cautioned that the process of changing an established mindset requires more than mere talk. Instead, it requires much preparation and much patience. These scholars shared “specific strategies for building motivation and strengthening commitment to change, responding to resistance, enhancing the clients confidence, avoiding first-session pitfalls, and recognizing readiness to change” (Cover Page).

Since the stated purpose of this study involves growth change among Maranatha Church leaders from a culture of numbers to a culture of discipleship, I recommend three areas where urgent growth is needed:

### **Growth Area 1: Spiritual Commitment**

The first area where Maranatha Church leaders need to experience growth is in their commitment to God and His mission. This genre of growth leads to spiritual changes in the heart and in the actions of the leader. God alone is able to create this kind of growth (Ps 51:10; Prov 3:6; Jer 10:23).

Since church leaders will be working to change the hearts and conduct of the members in their church, they will need to experience God's changes in their own lives.

### **Growth Area 2: Cognitive Growth**

The second area in which church leaders need to experience growth is in the area of knowledge. Because information on discipleship and new member care is widely available, church leaders need to be learning constantly. There is no secret that knowledge, intellectual and experiential, is able to improve leaders' effectiveness. The strong recommendation is that leaders should stock up on relevant resources for better discipleship theory and practice.

### **Growth Area 3: Ministry Practice**

The third area in which all church leaders need to grow is in their discipleship ministry practices. They need to practice the recommendations from this study based on the six curriculum competencies. It is in the practical application of this discipleship model that its effectiveness will be truly tested. There is no substitute for on the job learning. We all learn, or unlearn, according to the results of our actions.

## Action Step 5: Create Ministry Opportunity

The end of spiritual growth is active involvement. This brand of growth reveals two powerful facts:

1. The Holy Spirit equips each Christian with special gifts. Because each Christian is uniquely gifted for their personal ministry within the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-13), church leaders cannot ignore, nor restrict, the gifts of a member. The roles of the leader include, helping members to discover their spiritual gifts and helping them to unleash those gifts; that is, to create the ministry opportunity and incorporate the member into active ministry.

2. Spiritual gifts multiply with use. Paul (1 Cor 14:12) tells Christians to “try to excel in gifts that build up the church.” Jesus’ parable about the talents (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27) conveys the message that a buried resource will accomplish nothing but one that is used appropriately will increase. An active member blesses other people and blesses himself. It is in giving that one receives (Matt 6:38). This chapter is all about converting theory into practice. It is about knowing all that can be learned and doing all that can be done to disciple God’s people.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter examined the two most instructive components of a discipleship curriculum. First, it identified and explored the theoretical content of the curriculum competencies that emerged in this study. Maranatha Church leaders can now say that they have available to them a competency-driven, Bible-backed, principle-based, and user-friendly discipleship curriculum they can understand. Second, this chapter offered appropriate action steps for the successful application of this discipleship curriculum.

Leaders now have the tool and the guidelines for using it effectively. Three vital lessons were learned during the implementation of this intervention process: One, there are challenges associated with the practical application of a discipleship curriculum. There is the challenge of time. Since people learn and grow at a different pace some church leaders require more time than others. While some leaders claimed to observe changes in the new member they mentored, others reported that they did not detect any obvious changes in behavior. There cannot be a time limit for the application of this discipleship curriculum, since people change over time and at a different pace.

There is also the challenge of new member shortage. Only 65% of participating church leaders found new members to mentor. Although the church reportedly baptized more than one hundred members in the last two years, less than half were present at the time of the training seminars. The challenges that were not answered in this study provide an opportunity for church leaders to seek further intervention and work harder and more intentionally to disciple new believers.

The second beneficial lesson that was learned during the implementation process of this discipleship curriculum is that changes are needed in the relationship practices of both church leaders and new members. While church leaders attempt to make new believers consistent and actively involved, they must experience changes in their relationship practices also. It is just not enough to be more attentive and instructive. There is always the greater need for leaders to be more relational and caring. Both the head and the heart must come into play. Although relationship is more effective in retaining new members than doctrinal theory, both are important and neither should be ignored.

The third beneficial lesson from study is that the more people are disciplined, the more equipped and empowered they will be to unleash their spiritual gifts in active ministry.

This chapter answered the most important questions regarding curriculum theory and curriculum practice. All that is now needed is for church leaders, at Maranatha and any other churches that may desire to utilize this curriculum, to be committed and consistent. They must pray and get to work with the tools they now have available to them.

Chapter VI will provide further details about the Maranatha new member research and how this curriculum will help church leaders to improve their discipleship practices.

This chapter addressed the most important essentials of a discipleship curriculum. It advocated for the conversion of curriculum theory into ministry practice. Furthermore, it has highlighted valuable action steps that will aid curriculum success. All that is now needed are leaders who are dissatisfied with business as usual and are committed to change culture—the kind of leaders who, like Jesus, will stop at nothing to keep their members and develop them into disciple-making disciples.

The church of Jesus needs leaders who will begin now to pray and work with the tools they now have available to them. Chapter VI will address five more important essentials that were not addressed in this chapter.

These important essentials of the discipleship curriculum include: further details of the implementation process, a concise description of the evaluation of seminar success, a comprehensive summary of this research study, a concise description of this study's

impact on my professional development, and some vital recommendation for future research.



## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYZING AND EVALUATING CURRICULUM IMPACT

#### **Project Summary**

The task of this research project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a membership retention strategy for the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Despite some formidable challenges, this task was accomplished. The main challenges to this project included the lack of previous research involving the Maranatha Church, insufficient time for implementing and testing curriculum success, the researcher's distance from the church, and an insufficient number of new members to join with church leaders in mentoring relationships. These challenges, however, did not prevent the development of a principle-based, curriculum-driven and user-friendly discipleship strategy for the Maranatha Church and any other congregation that may deem these findings applicable to their context.

#### Notable Success

In the collective opinion of Maranatha Church leaders the following accomplishments made the project a huge success:

First, the new member manual. With practical and theoretical ideas for effective discipleship, a New Member Care manual was prepared and presented to the church. This was done in fulfillment of one of the goals of the project proposal. Already this

manual is being used as resource material for discipleship training in the Maranatha Church. To date, at least nine other churches are requesting use of this material for similar purposes.

Second, reconnection with missing members. The success we had in relocating and involving eighty-six missing new members into the new member survey is redounding to the benefit of the church. Consequently, church leaders are celebrating. They are grateful that execution of this project has put them back in touch with these former members. Now, they have vowed to be more sensitive and attentive to these vulnerable spiritual lambs. The church's Bible worker has reported that some of these once inactive and missing members are returning to church.

Third, motivated and educated leaders and members. The whole church expressed their gratitude for church leaders and members who are better prepared and more motivated to engage in meaningful discipleship practices.

#### A Work in Progress

The notable success of this project does not mean that Maranatha Church leaders and members must relax. On the contrary, they must get and stay busy in their efforts to convert the principles of this discipleship curriculum into on-going ministry practices.

They are urged to do three very important things:

1. Create and re-enforce more mentoring relationships between experienced members and nascent ones.
2. Establish more ministry opportunities for inactive church members and incorporate them.

3. Create and conduct meaningful evaluation of ministry success and make improvements where necessary.

#### Creating an Evaluation Method

The evaluation method that was developed for measuring the success of this discipleship curriculum was used in two phases.

First, it was used to assess the impact of the training seminars upon those who participated. At the conclusion of the training seminars, all the participants (300) were asked to respond prayerfully, honestly, and clearly, to the following five general evaluation questions.

Question 1: Have you grown in your knowledge of the subject of Discipleship and New Member Care?

Answer: To this question, 300 (100%) hands were lifted to indicate yes.

Question 2: Do you think that God wants the church to value soul-winning and discipleship of new members as equally important?

Answer: To this question, 300 (100%) hands were lifted indicating yes.

Question 3: Do you presently have a new member that you are mentoring?

Answer: To this question, 195 (65%) lifted their hands indicating yes while 105 (35%) lifted their hands indicating that they are waiting for available new members.

Question 4: How many of you commit yourselves to continue the process of learning and practicing the learned principles of this discipleship curriculum?

Answer: To this question, 300 (100%) hands went up indicating that they

are committed.

Question 5: Will you document the progress of your mentoring relationships and submit copies to your pastors whenever they request them.

Answer: To this question, 300 (100%) said yes by raising their hand.

#### Further Evaluation

The local congregation also measured the growth of their leaders. Three groups were selected to rate the present capability of participants of the Leader's Training Seminars, and the future success of the discipleship strategy. These groups included the general congregation, church pastors, and participating church leaders. The written instruments that were designed for these three evaluations are on full display in Appendix C.

#### Evaluation Summary

Overall, participants in the training seminars showed improvement in several areas. They grew in their commitment to discipleship, in their theoretical knowledge of discipleship, in their level of participation, in their relationships with new and formerly inactive church members, and in their desire to continue the process of discipleship. By their consistency in attendance, response to seminar assignments, and preservation of class handouts, participants indicated the value of the experience for them. Moreover, they also expressed strong determination to grow their church both quantitatively and qualitatively.

## **Invaluable Learnings**

The efforts to develop an effective, principle-driven, competency-based, and Bible-backed discipleship strategy for retaining members at the Maranatha Church have given birth to nine significant learnings:

First, discipleship is a process, not an event. This process is viable as long as the church functions as a soul-winning agency. While churches seek to grow their membership numerically, they are obligated to disciple their members as required by the Great Commission.

Second, church leaders who disciple their members are themselves disciplined. Discipleship transforms both the giver and the receiver. Cress (p. 139) was right when he said, “Go to work to win someone else, and you will be revived.”

Third, when we model discipleship, we are more effective than when we merely teach it.

Fourth, theoretical information regarding discipleship is abundant. Due to the wide-spread problem of membership attrition more church leaders and religious organizations are showing interest in discipleship. Thus, what is in more demand is the practical implementation of discipleship.

Fifth, successful discipleship programs must include both theory and practice. In his classic work (*Successful Discipling*) Allen Hadidian (1979) expressed the view that since a disciple is a learner he must be taught. This signifies that discipleship theory is essential for growth. Melbourne (2007) seems to suggest a similar view that Jesus’ disciples demonstrated growth, which was aided by theory (p. 101). Hadidan further

notes that trying to disciple someone without teaching him is contradictory to the whole purpose of discipling (p. 92).

Sixth, most church leaders want to grow in both their knowledge and practice of discipleship. Nevertheless, they require help from professionals in the field.

Seventh, the great commission of Matthew 28 is the paradigm for biblical discipleship. Jesus taught and practiced discipleship the way He wants church leaders to do it.

Eighth, the most effective method of membership retention is transformational relationship. Borthwick (2003) is of the conviction that the apostle Paul learned more from being in a relationship with Christ than from sitting at His feet and being taught by Him (p. 33).

Ninth, the process of discipleship should not commence when new members join the church. It needs to be an on-going process in the church, one that is already in motion, and new members, even visitors, are integrated accordingly as soon as they enter the church (Matt 28:19-20 says Go + Disciple + Baptize + Teach).

### **Impact of the DMin Program on my Professional Development**

Through the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University, God has transformed my life in significant ways. Now, I feel spiritually re-energized. My relationship with God has been deepened through prayer, exhaustive reading, and the rich comradery I have been privileged to have with my Andrews professors and my Doctor of Ministry colleagues. I have also received a new call from God to focus on a new area of ministry-discipleship.

## A Story Worth Telling

The first elder of my home church asked me, at the tender age of 15, to preach for six nights per week in a 4-week youth evangelistic series. I quaked at the thought at first, but with the promises of a preaching coach and a financial gift at the end of the series, I gladly said, “Yes.”

When the series was over, 21 precious new members joined the Adventist Church through baptism. Of these new members, 95% were significantly older than the evangelist, and only 5% were his age or younger. That experience gave me my initial call to the gospel ministry. Not only did I finish high school and go on to study theology, but I used every holiday opportunity to engage in soul-winning evangelism. Consequently, hundreds of souls joined the church as a result of my preaching. In the years 1983-1992 I was recognized by the West Indies Union of Seventh-day Adventist as the most outstanding soul winner among active district pastors. Again, in 1996 and 1997, the Texas Conference voted me to be the most outstanding soul winner in the conference in the category of lay pastors (any ministry worker that was not full time was referred to as a lay pastor, and I was only part time).

My success in soul-winning evangelism convinced me for 25 years that I was called to be a soul winner.

## Type of Epiphany

While my passion for soul-winning continues, something dramatic started happening to me since I matriculated in the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University. Several assigned readings (Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson, Russell Burrill, James Cress, Bill Easum, Tom Bandy, Monte Sahlin, Dick O’fill, Richard Rice, Bertram

Melbourne, N. T. Wright, and a host of other missional writers) have opened my eyes to something new.

The Adventist Church is losing members at such an alarming rate that my soul was troubled. I struggled with this harsh reality until God called me to do something about it.

My new call is to dedicate myself to the discipleship of church members. Now, I cannot think of soul-winning without thinking of member-retention. Every sermon I preach, every seminar I conduct, every conversation I have with my church, and every evangelistic effort I get engaged with, I promote discipleship principles.

I am sure that the issue of discipleship was always there in the Great Commission of Jesus to the church, but for some reason I became oblivious to it. Not anymore. My call to ministry is now a call to discipleship, thanks to the missional track of the doctor of ministry program in Andrews University. I have even been thinking that God may call me sometime in the future to teach theology students to become effective discipleship pastors.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The limited scope of this study precluded the identification and exploration of all the aspects of a comprehensive discipleship strategy. Thus, more research is necessary. While it accomplished its main goal of developing a Bible-backed, principle-based, curriculum-driven, and user-friendly strategy aimed at membership retention, this study stopped short in three important areas:

1. The time period covered by the study was not long enough. A study of this nature covering a five-year period would yield more vital learning competencies.



2. A study of this nature should involve more than one congregation. A more comprehensive research that involves multiple and different types of congregations would generate more reliable and informative results.
3. A research with the potential to influence several congregations like this one should be conducted by a coalition of professional researchers. Although I created a context support team and utilized the Maranatha Church board as a support committee, no other professional researchers were involved.

These limitations obligate the following six recommendations, both at the conference level and at the level of the local church:

First, I recommend that the Florida Conference sponsors a more comprehensive study of the factors that affect membership growth and decline that involves multiple congregations. These congregations do not have to be located in the same regions, nor share similar characteristics. It would be of greater missional value if this future study involves at least four types of congregations.

1. Large and small congregations.
2. Immigrant and indigenous congregations.
3. Caucasians and non-Caucasian congregations.
4. English-speaking and Spanish-speaking congregations.

Missional studies that include factors of comparison are usually informative.

Second, I recommend further studies of this kind that last for as long as ten years. This would create opportunities for further testing of curriculum theory.

Third, I recommend further studies that involve more research subjects and more training participants. This way more learning outcomes would emerge to inform a discipleship curriculum consisting of many more than six competencies.

Fourth, I recommend that the Florida Conference channel its evangelism dollars into creating a discipleship culture in all its churches. This would require local congregations to develop and submit a discipleship strategy to the conference before they receive evangelism funds. This discipleship strategy should be set in motion before new members join the church and continue until those new members become disciplined and active disciple makers themselves.

Fifth, I recommend that church leaders complete a discipleship capacitation program before they are elected to the position of elder or department leadership. That is, they must become qualified as disciple-makers before they occupy positions of leadership in the local congregation.

Sixth, I recommend that every new member be assigned a mentor within the first six months of joining the local congregation. This relationship is for the purpose of discipling the new believer.

## APPENDIX A

### A CONCISE SURVEY REPORT

While chapter 4 covers only the categories, scope, and method of the three survey instruments that were employed in this research project, Appendix A includes the results and implications of the surveys. Also, special emphasis is given to survey answers that directly impacted the six selected competencies of this discipleship curriculum.

#### Three Survey Instruments

The survey of the congregation was designed to obtain an accurate description of the general spiritual state of the Maranatha Church. Further comments on each survey appear below:

1. The survey of the active new members was mainly to discover the discipleship practices that were effective in keeping new members in the church.
2. The survey of inactive new members was for the purpose of detecting the causes of new member drop out. In other words, these were the contributing factors to the disappearance of new members.

#### Scope

The survey questions covered three main stages of the new member's experience: First, their religious background before joining the Adventist Church; second, the period that they were active in the church; third, the period that they were inactive in the church.

## Method

The method that was employed in these surveys consisted of written survey questions. Participants were assembled at different times and places, and they were handed survey questionnaires to respond to. Also, some participants received their written survey in the mail, or hand-delivered, because they no longer were attending church.

## Concise Statistical Results of Surveys

### 1. Congregation Survey

Approximately 50% of the average weekly worshippers answered the congregation survey. Of those who participated, 87% reported that they were satisfied spiritually, and a further 97% said that they were happy in Jesus. It was also heart-warming to learn that 73% of church members regularly support their church financially, and a further 75% are actively involved in some church activities and ministries.

### 2. Active New Member Survey

The active new members of the Maranatha Church also indicated that many positive things were happening, and those things were having an impact on their spiritual lives. First, 54% of active new members reported that the truth impacted them positively. A further 50% described the fellowship of the congregation as warm and friendly. Of active new members, 64% reported that they love their church, while 32% said that their feelings about their church were positive. On the day of this survey, 87.1% of active new members were present at worship. Another alarming

data is that 84% of active new members claimed to have their spiritual needs met regularly. Of new members, 78% claimed that fellowship with friends in the church is a strong reason they attend. It is also significant to learn from 82% of new members that the pastor's sermons keep them coming, while 65% said they love their pastors.

### 3. Former New Member Survey

The former new members, however, painted a grim picture in four areas of their church experience:

First, in the area of fellowship. Only 22.7% of the non-reporting new members found the church to be warm and friendly, and 49.3% claimed that they either had no friends, or they barely knew the other members of the church while they attended worship.

Second, in the area of participation. Sadly, only 2.6% of former new members reported that they were actively involved in some church activities while they were in attendance. The church activities referred to here include church worship, prayer meetings, Sabbath school, and other department ministries.

Third, in the area of personal friendship. The majority (54.8%) of former new members reported that they had no friends in the church.

Fourth, in the area of personal visit. Only 24.1% of former new members reported that a pastor visited them since they stopped attending, while 33.8% claimed that no one from the church called them.

The results of the new member's surveys were mixed. In each category there were reports of positive and negative discipleship practices. The positive practices will serve to encourage church leaders to do more of the same, while the negative practices will force meaningful changes. The following pages of Appendix A will provide more details regarding the survey instruments.

## Survey One

### Congregation Survey

#### Comments

1. A short and simple written interview consisting of only 12 questions was distributed during the worship services on Sabbath, July 20, 2013. The purpose of this interview was to obtain an accurate description of the demographic and spiritual sketch of the congregation.
2. A total of 300 of the 310 survey sheets that were distributed found their way back to me. This number of participants represented over 50% of the average weekly attendance. This happened because of three reasons:
  - a. Nearly 100 hundred of the church members in attendance that day (the new members of the last two years) were already pulled out of the main congregation for the purpose of participating in another survey that was being administered at the same time.
  - b. The youth and children, along with their teachers, had not yet reunited with the main congregation. Most of them were still in their Sabbath school division classes.
3. Some church members were still arriving for the worship service. The general tone of the church, according to the responses participating

members gave, was very positive: 87% of participating members reported that they felt happy in their church; 97% felt happy in Jesus; 73% claimed to have been financially supportive of their church; 73% said that they attended worship four Sabbaths for the month while the others attended two-three times monthly.

4. Another 75% reported that they were involved in some church activities (social and, or, spiritual). Because of the volume of participation in this category this report did not include a full data table.



## Congregation Survey Questionnaire

**No name please.  
Only honest answers.**

1. Gender:  Male  Female
2. Membership:  Baptized Adventist  Visiting  Adventist, but not yet baptized.
3. Age Group:  0-10  11-18  19-25  26-40  41-55  
 over 55  over 75
4. How long in church:  6-10 yrs  11-20 yrs.  21-35 yrs.  36-60 yrs.
5. Marital Status:  Single  Married  Divorced  
 Remarried after death  Widowed
6. Home Life:  Live alone  Have family  At least one child in the home.
7. Employment status:           Employed at the moment.  Yes  No
8. Are you the only Adventist in the home?  Yes  No
9. Are you active in any church Ministry?  Yes  No
10. Are you happy in Jesus?  Yes  No
11. Do you support your church financially?  Yes  No
12. How often do you attend church?  Once per month  Two times per month  
 Three times per month  Four times per month

**Thank you for answering and returning this questionnaire to Conrad Duncan - Interviewer**

## **Survey Two**

### **Active New Member Survey**

#### **Comment**

One hundred new members who joined the church during the last two years responded to a written survey consisting of 44 questions.

## APPENDIX B

### TRAINING CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

This appendix consists of the script that was employed for the church leader's training seminars at the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. The more comprehensive lecture module, with class activities such as role play documents, questions and answers, comments, and reading reports are not included. The training sessions are referred to as seminars. The seminars were developed to explore the six discipleship competencies that emerged from this study. These competencies revealed some of the most important areas of need in the discipleship practices of the Maranatha Church. The six competencies are biblical discipleship, transformational relationships, Christian stewardship, spiritual disciplines, spiritual giftedness and sensitivity to missing members.

## **Church Leaders Training Seminar**

**Instructor: Conrad Duncan B. A. , MAP Min.**

**[Conrad.duncan@floridaconference.com](mailto:Conrad.duncan@floridaconference.com)**

**407-644-5000**

### Justification for Training Seminars

To answer the demands of the Great Commission. Jesus ordered His church leaders to make and keep disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). The Maranatha Church urgently needs church leaders who are disciple-makers, and not just soul-winners, and new members need to be disciplined into responsible disciple-makers and be involved into ministry. And, most importantly, the Maranatha Church leadership needs to do more to keep new members in the church and reclaim those who have gone missing.

### Seminar Objectives

The specific goals of these seminars are as follows:

- To awake church leader's awareness of the need to obey Jesus' command, which requires us to make disciples not just church members.
- To equip church leaders with both the knowledge and the skills needed to apply the discipleship curriculum that this study created.
- To empower church leaders to live out their calling by providing them with a discipleship certificate of completion. This is the only discipleship training experience some will ever receive.

## Educational Theory

The educational theory that frames this series of training seminars is rooted in four basic principles:

First, church leaders love God and want to obey His command to win souls.

Second, church leaders love their members and want to help them become responsible disciples who make other disciples.

Third, church leaders lack information and practical demonstration regarding effective discipleship practices.

Fourth, church leaders are gifted by God's Spirit but they need to stir up their gifts and utilize them better.

## **SEMINAR MODULES**

The six seminar modules are based upon the six discipleship competencies that emerged in this study. These competencies are already listed in the introduction of this Appendix B.

Gist of Seminar Theory

### **Seminar 1 - Biblical Discipleship**

This seminar explores and explains the discipleship model of Jesus as it is defined in the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts. The class theory is also informed by a wide range of discipleship books and articles.

### **Seminar II - Transformational Relationships**

This seminar explores the benefits and effects of strong relationships in the church. It also discusses the role of church leaders in the formation and nurturing of relationships.

### **Seminar III - Spiritual Disciplines**

This seminar reviews the scope, purpose and the results of the 4 major spiritual disciplines. The disciplines of Bible study, prayer, church fellowship/attendance and personal witnessing.

### **Seminar IV - Christian Stewardship**

This seminar explores the 4 major dimensions of biblical stewardship. These are the gift of time, the gift of talents, the gift of health, and the gift of material possessions. In each of these four dimensions Christians have a God-given responsibility that cannot be ignored. It will guide church leaders to help their members understand how to incorporate this principle into their daily lives.

### **Seminar V - Spiritual Giftedness**

The seminar is developed to explore four vital aspects of spiritual gifts. These aspects include identifying one's spiritual gifts, the purpose of spiritual gifts, the variety of spiritual gifts and the application of spiritual gifts. The premise of this seminar is that every member of the body of Christ is endowed with at least one spiritual gift. A principal role of church leaders is to stir up the gifts of church members and help them to use their gifts appropriately.

### **Seminar VI - Sensitivity to Missing Members**

Because 51% of missing new members of the Maranatha Church reported that no one from the church contacted them since they stopped attending this seminar is considered crucial, it is developed to address three elements.

First, the value of each member of Christ's body.

Second, the main reasons why members stop attending church.

Third, the need for mentoring relationships.



## SEMINAR REQUISITES

**Attendance** – Each participant is required to attend each of the six seminars and remain until the session is finished. Participants also have to be punctual and attentive.

**Participation** – Each participant is required to make comments, ask questions and interact with other members during the mandatory role plays.

Practical application in ministry – long-term members and church leaders will be asked to form personal mentoring relationships with new members. They are also required to exchange contact information and make contact with their ministry partner weekly. These contacts include, but are not limited to, telephone, e-mail, face-to-face conversations, prayer partnerships, Bible study activities, and personal witnessing in conjunction with their ministry partners.

Also, one hour sessions are made available in seminars 3, 4, 5 and 6 for general reports concerning the partnership ministry activities. These reports feature the kind of ministry activities, the lessons learned, and any significant recommendations. Participants are given the option to submit their reports in writing, through email, or orally, at the time of the seminar. The mentoring relationships are not to stop because the seminars end. In fact, a list of all the mentoring relationships will be prepared and delivered to the church pastors who are encouraged to continue their operation indefinitely.

**Grading** – There is no official grading of participants. However, an official certificate of completion will be handed to all the participants who successfully

complete all the requirements of the seminars. Participants will be qualified for a certificate of completion if they attend at least 75% of the seminars, complete the assigned readings of the book *Evangelism* by E. G. White (pp. 335-385), the entire book of *Acts*, and maintain an active mentoring relationship with a newer church member.

**Special note** – A record will be kept of those who attend the seminars and remain throughout the series. If any participant is absent for more than 25% of the series, he/she will not receive a certificate of completion.

## Attendance Sample Sheet

The following sample sheet is employed to track the level of trainee participation.

Seminar Number \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Seminar \_\_\_\_\_

Date and Duration of Seminar \_\_\_\_\_

Time remained in class \_\_\_\_\_

### Assignments Completed

- Personal Reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Partnership Ministry Activities
  - 2 Telephone prayer calls \_\_\_\_\_
  - 1 Home Bible Studies \_\_\_\_\_
- Personal Witnesses with my partner present \_\_\_\_\_

### Report of Ministry Activities

- Written \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Oral, and in front of class \_\_\_\_\_

### Name of Participants

- Your name \_\_\_\_\_
- Ministry partner \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

### **Seminar Assignment Instructions**

Between seminar sessions participants are required to:

- Maintain weekly contacts with ministry partners (mentors).
- Review the material covered in the seminar (at class time).
- Do the assigned reading and take notes.
- Engage in practical ministry with ministry partner.

These practical ministry activities must include personal witnessing to non-believers, participation in church service, and review seminar assignments with ministry partners.

- Submit a report of ministry activities that are performed between seminars.
- Be engaged in seminar discussions and role plays.

#### **Role Play Requirements**

Role plays demonstrate both the correct and incorrect approach to witnessing and the various ways in which non-believers respond to the gospel. Every attendee participates in the role plays. Assignment reports are due at the beginning of seminar session.

## APPENDIX C

### THE EVALUATION OF LEADER'S TRAINING CURRICULUM SUCCESS

This appendix consists of the subjects, instruments, and methods that were designed to rate the impact of the training seminars upon Maranatha Church leaders.

While there are many and varied ways to measure curriculum success, the method employed in this study was simple and user-friendly. Three distinct groups of people were asked to rate the impact of this curriculum upon participating leaders. Also, evaluation questions were design to reflect both qualitative and quantitative growth in the areas of awareness (theory) and performance (practice).

The three groups of individuals that were asked to answer particular evaluation questions are: The general congregation, church pastors, and the participating church leaders. The evaluation questions were designed to focus specifically on six components. These components include increase or decrease in attendance, overall interest and commitment of participants, response to seminar requirements, increase in knowledge of theory, level of practical demonstration, and preservation of literary handouts. Participants were instructed at the beginning of the training seminars to preserve a collection of all class handouts, reading assignments, and personal notes for future reference.

The following pages consist of copies of the evaluation questionnaires.

### Congregation Evaluation of Participating Leaders

The purpose of this evaluation is to obtain your honest opinions about the impact of these training seminars on your church leaders. By scoring them in the above six categories you will compare their present capability to their capability and commitment before the seminars. On a scale of 0-10, with 10 being highest growth and 0 being no growth, proceed to circle the most appropriate number.

<u>Growth</u>	<u>Biblical Discipleship</u>	<u>Transformational Relationship</u>	<u>Spiritual Disciplines</u>	<u>Christian Stewardship</u>	<u>Spiritual Gifts</u>	<u>Sensitivity to Missing Members</u>
Highest	10	10	10	10	10	10
	9	9	9	9	9	9
High	8	8	8	8	8	8
	7	7	7	7	7	7
	6	6	6	6	6	6
Low	5	5	5	5	5	5
	4	4	4	4	4	4
	3	3	3	3	3	3
Lowest	2	2	2	2	2	2
	1	1	1	1	1	1
None	0	0	0	0	0	0

### **Pastor's Evaluation of Participating Leaders**

The purpose of this evaluation is to obtain your honest opinions about the impact of these training seminars on your church leaders.

Please compare leader's capability before the seminars with is capability after the seminar by circling the most appropriate number between 0 and 10 on the following scale. The number 10 indicates the highest level of growth while the number 0 indicates no level of growth.

<u>Growth</u>	<u>Biblical Discipleship</u>	<u>Transformational Relationship</u>	<u>Spiritual Disciplines</u>	<u>Christian Stewardship</u>	<u>Spiritual Gifts</u>	<u>Sensitivity to Missing Members</u>
Highest	10	10	10	10	10	10
	9	9	9	9	9	9
High	8	8	8	8	8	8
	7	7	7	7	7	7
	6	6	6	6	6	6
	5	5	5	5	5	5
Low	4	4	4	4	4	4
	3	3	3	3	3	3
	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lowest	1	1	1	1	1	1
None	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Church Leaders Self-Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to learn what church leaders say about their own level of growth as a result of their participation in the training seminars.

On the following scale of 0 – 10, with 0 being no growth and 10 being highest growth, indicate how you have grown in your capability to disciple church members.

Your response should reflect your growth in theory and performance. Also, please answer the accompanying questions on the next page.

<u>Growth</u>	<u>Biblical Discipleship</u>	<u>Transformational Relationship</u>	<u>Spiritual Disciplines</u>	<u>Christian Stewardship</u>	<u>Spiritual Gifts</u>	<u>Sensitivity to Missing Members</u>
Highest	10	10	10	10	10	10
	9	9	9	9	9	9
High	8	8	8	8	8	8
	7	7	7	7	7	7
	6	6	6	6	6	6
	5	5	5	5	5	5
Low	4	4	4	4	4	4
	3	3	3	3	3	3
	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lowest	1	1	1	1	1	1
None	0	0	0	0	0	0



**In which competency/s would you say you have grown the most?**

**Please circle where you have grown the most:**

Biblical Discipleship

Transformational Relationships

Spiritual Discipline

Christian Stewardship

Spiritual Giftedness

Sensitivity to Missing Members

Describe briefly how you plan to use your knowledge of discipleship in the future.

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### MINISTRY GOAL

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My ministry goal is to discover, understand, and practice God's purpose for my life in a manner that will honor Him and bless the lives of people. My plan is to live, speak, teach, preach, play and help people to learn and fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

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2011 – Present Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI  
*Doctor of Ministry*

Concentration: Missional Church

Dissertation topic: A Strategy for retaining new members in the Maranatha SDA Church

Projected date of completion: May, 2015

2012 – Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, TN

Completion of academic credits (6 credits) for entry into the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University.

1993 – 1995 Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico

*MA in Pastoral Theology*

Minor: Spanish

1979 - 1983 Northern Caribbean Adventist University (formerly West Indies College)

*BA of Arts in Theology*

1983 – 1985 University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica

*Certificate of Advanced level Spanish*

WORK EXPERIENCE

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2006 – Present Vice-President for General Administration  
Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
2002 – 2006 Ministerial Field Secretary  
Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
1998 – 2002 Pastor of Maranatha SDA Church, Miami  
Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
1995 – 1998 District Pastor  
Texas Conference of Seventh-day  
1993 – 1995 Pastor of Campus churches  
N E Mexican Conference, Mexico  
1983 – 1993 Pastor of Multichurch Districts  
West Jamaica Conference

SKILLS

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Pastor/Evangelist  
Bi-lingual (English/Spanish)  
Excellent in Conflict Management  
Great team player  
Aspiring writer

PUBLICATION

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Several religious articles in Conference and Union magazines.  
Semi-professional Booklet – The Negative effects of the Television on  
Young Children  
Professional Booklet – Manual for New Convert Care: With Practical  
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