Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Professional Dissertations DMin

Graduate Research

2011

Re-visioning the Sabbath School for Soul-winning in the Virgin Islands: A Strategy for Church Growth through Sabbath School Action Units

Henry Peters
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin>

Recommended Citation

Peters, Henry, "Re-visioning the Sabbath School for Soul-winning in the Virgin Islands: A Strategy for Church Growth through Sabbath School Action Units" (2011). *Professional Dissertations DMin*. 533.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dmin/533>
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/533>

This Project Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Professional Dissertations DMin by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

ABSTRACT

RE-VISIONING THE SABBATH SCHOOL FOR SOUL WINNING IN
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS: A STRATEGY FOR CHURCH GROWTH
THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

by

Henry Peters

Adviser: R. Clifford Jones

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: RE-VISIONING THE SABBATH SCHOOL FOR SOUL WINNING IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS: A STRATEGY FOR CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

Name of researcher: Henry Peters

Name and degree of adviser: R. Clifford Jones, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 2011

Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands experienced an average membership growth of 1.7 percent per annum during the period 2000-2009, which represents 49.7 percent of the projected baptismal goal. While public evangelism has been the most productive method of soul winning in the territory, the majority of churches, in spite of that approach, failed to achieve their annual baptismal goals, thus resulting in a moderate membership growth. However, when one considers the organizational structure of the local church as recommended by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, which encourages multiple evangelistic modalities, it is evident that major components of the existing structure, especially the Sabbath School,

are not being used effectively in leading souls to Christ and achieving targeted growth potential.

Method

The process adopted in this research involved the collection of data from the secretariat of the North Caribbean Conference and district pastors within the territory for comparison and analysis of baptismal goals and achievements; evangelistic methods and results; and church growth trends during the period 2000-2009. An examination of the data also served as a basis for developing a strategy for church growth through the Sabbath School Action Units.

The theological reflection focused on the following biblical theses: The Church as a congregation in both the Old and New Testament where God met with His people and empowered them for service; the command given to the church by Jesus to evangelize the world; soul-winning as a natural outgrowth of discipleship; the philosophy that a healthy church is characterized by active small groups such as the Sabbath School Action Units; and the role of the laity as a channel through which the church can experience growth. Current professional literature was also examined, which included books and publications on Sabbath School Action Units, small group evangelism, and church growth principles as they relate to the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Results

The quantitative data revealed that, during the period 2000-2009, 49.7 percent of the projected baptismal goal was realized; 58.2 percent of baptisms came as a result of

public campaigns; 53 percent of the accession to church membership was dropped, and the Church experienced an average annual growth of 1.7 percent.

The use of current professional literature on the subject of Sabbath School evangelism, small group evangelism, and church growth principles relating to the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church attested to the positive impact of the Sabbath School in the area of church growth. In addition, the data provided by the secretariat of the Conference showed a need for an intentional approach to soul winning that must incorporate the inherent structure of the Church and its membership.

Conclusion

An evaluation of church growth trends among the churches in the territory showed the need for a strategic approach to soul winning by the various congregations. This approach will require the re-visioning of the Sabbath School. This can be enhanced through leadership training and implementation of initiatives such as Sabbath School Action Units, Branch Sabbath School, and quarterly baptisms. When this approach is taken, the churches in the United States Virgin Islands will be positioned to experience a growth comparative to that of the Apostolic Church.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

RE-VISIONING THE SABBATH SCHOOL FOR SOUL WINNING IN
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS: A STRATEGY FOR CHURCH GROWTH
THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

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

by
Henry Peters
June 2011

© Copyright by Henry Peters 2011
All Rights Reserved

RE-VISIONING THE SABBATH SCHOOL FOR SOUL WINNING IN
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS: A STRATEGY FOR CHURCH GROWTH
THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Henry Peters

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Adviser,
R. Clifford Jones

Director of DMin Program
Skip Bell

Eduard Schmidt

Dean, SDA Theological Seminary
Denis Fortin

Kathleen Beagles

Date approved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
Chapter	
1. PROJECT PROPOSAL	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Statement of the Task.....	2
Justification for the Project.....	2
Description of the Process	3
Expectation from This Project	4
Limitations of the Project.....	4
Definitions of Terms.....	5
2. TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF CONGREGATIONAL SOUL-WINNING.....	7
Introduction.....	7
The Church as a Congregation in the Old Testament.....	8
The Church as a Congregation in the New Testament	10
Smaller Gatherings as a Theological Justification for Small Groups and Sabbath School Classes.....	11
The Church and its Mission	12
Making Disciples, the Focus of Mission.....	14
Discipleship Happens in the Context of a Small Group	20
Making Disciples Requires the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.....	22
Making Disciples Involves the Giftedness of the Congregation ...	23
Congregational Soul-winning Requires the Passion of the Early Church	24
A Passion for Holines	25
A Passion for Witnessing.....	26
A Passion for Christ's Return	27
Ellen G. White and Congregational Soul-winning	28
Conclusion	31

3.	LITERATURE CONTRIBUTION TO SOUL-WINNING THROUGH THE SABBATH SCHOOL	33
	Introduction.....	33
	A Brief History of the Sabbath School	33
	Organizational Structure of the Sabbath School	34
	Objectives of Sabbath School	36
	Ellen G White and Sabbath School Evangelism.....	37
	Transforming Sabbath School Action Units into Small Group Ministry.....	41
	Small Group Ministry	44
	Benefits of Sabbath School Action Units	47
	Conclusion	53
4.	ANALYSIS OF CHURCH GROWTH PATTERNS IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS	55
	Introduction.....	55
	Profile of the Ministry Context.....	55
	Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in the U.S. Virgin Islands During the Period 2000-2009	57
	Membership Added.....	60
	Membership Dropped	62
	Baptismal Goals	64
	Baptisms Through Public Evangelistic Campaigns versus Non-Public Campaigns	71
	Growing Churches in the U.S. Virgin Islands	74
	Evangelistic Strategy Employed in the U.S. Virgin Islands	75
	Distribution of Baptisms from Major Campaigns	76
	Sabbath School Action Units and Church Growth	78
	Conclusion	80
5.	STRATEGIES FOR SOUL-WINNING THROUGH THE SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS	81
	Introduction.....	81
	Maximizing the Structure of the Local Church for Soul-winning.....	81
	The Challenge	85
	Embracing the Sabbath School Action Units.....	86
	Re-visioning the Sabbath School for Church Growth	88
	Maximizing Opportunities	90
	Utilizing the Structure of the Sabbath School to Achieve Baptismal Goals	94
	Branch Sabbath School.....	95

	Matching Ministries with Gifts	100
	Conclusion	105
6.	SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION.....	107
	Summary	107
	Recommendations.....	109
	Conclusion	111
Appendix		
A.	STATISTICAL REPORTS OF THE ANNUAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS	117
B.	STATISTICAL REPORT OF PUBLIC EVANGELISM IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.....	128
C.	SURVEY SHEET INDICATING DIFFERENT METHODS OF EVANGELISM USED IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS.....	130
D.	SAMPLE OF REPORTING FORM USED BY THE NORTH CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS FOR OBTAINING MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP REPORTS FROM THE LOCAL CHURCH.....	132
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	134
	VITA.....	140

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Membership 2000-2009	59
2. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Thomas District #1	67
3. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Thomas District #2	67
4. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Thomas District # 3	68
5. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St John.....	68
6. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Croix District #1	69
7. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Croix District #2	69
8. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Croix District #3	70
9. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Croix District #4	70
10. Percentage of Annual Baptismal Goal Reached During 2000-2009, St. Croix District #5	71

LIST OF TABLES

1. Annual Membership 2000-2009	58
2. Membership Added 2000-2009	61
3. Membership Dropped 2000-2009	63
4. District Baptism Goals (2000-2009)	65
5. District Baptisms Reported (2000-2009)	66
6. Baptisms Reported per Church (2000-2009)	73
7. Membership Growth 2000-2009	74
8. St. Croix Island-wide Evangelistic Campaign in 2008	77
9. Sabbath School Action Units in the Virgin Islands	79

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with a deep sense of gratitude to God that I acknowledge His wisdom and direction in pursuit of this doctoral degree. I will forever remain grateful to my dear wife, Margaret, for her constant support, encouragement, prayers, and inspiration. To my son, Dennison, who encouraged and challenged me to finish my studies within a given period so that he could graduate together with me, and who willingly delayed his own graduation so that father and son could celebrate a rare and historical achievement, I will always be grateful.

I take this opportunity to express special thanks to my daughter, Denise, and her husband, Donnell, for their encouragement and support. Also, Keisha Dorsett, Kathleen Ogaroo, Lydia Charles, Karen Fleming, Dr. Najeeb Nakhle, and my colleagues in ministry, especially Pastor James Scarborough and Dr. Lloydston Burton, for the interest they have demonstrated in my educational goals. Thanks to the Secretariat of the North Caribbean Conference for providing the data for this study.

As I look forward to graduation, my heart-felt thanks go out to Dr. Kenley Hall for being my coach in the initial phase of writing this dissertation. To my advisers, Dr. Clifford Jones and Dr. Eduard Schmidt, thanks for guiding me through this process; your expertise, patience, and directives are greatly appreciated.

CHAPTER 1

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Introduction

The subject of soul-winning has always intrigued me. Having recognized that I was once lost in sin, but God in His love and mercy saved me, I am convinced that God is able and willing to save every sinner. Hence, the reason my passion for evangelism has driven me to explore potential avenues that could lead souls to Christ. In this proposal, I am of the view that the Church can experience unprecedented growth through its inherent departmental structure, especially as it relates to the function of the Sabbath School. For this reason, I have chosen the title “Re-visioning the Sabbath School for Soul Winning in the Virgin Islands: A Strategy for Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units.”

In this chapter, I will proceed with a statement of the problem, statement of the task, justification for the project, description of the process, expectation from this project, and the limitations of this project.

Statement of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands experienced an average membership growth of 1.7 percent per annum during the period 2000-2009, which represents 49.7 percent of the projected baptismal goal. While public

evangelism has been the most productive method of soul winning in the territory, the majority of churches, in spite of that approach, failed to achieve their annual baptismal goals, thus resulting in a moderate membership growth. However, when one considers the organizational structure of the local church as recommended by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, which encourages multiple evangelistic modalities, it is evident that major components of the existing structure, especially the Sabbath School, are not being used effectively in leading souls to Christ and achieving targeted growth potential.¹

Statement of the Task

This project focuses on reimagining and reestablishing the Sabbath School in the Virgin Islands, placing special emphasis on the Sabbath School Action Units as a channel through which the church can grow numerically. The project will show how effective the Sabbath School Action Units are in their contribution to measurable church growth through community outreach, Bible studies, and quarterly baptisms.

Justification for the Project

For the past thirty years, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Virgin Islands have experienced moderate growth through various forms of evangelism. For the past decade, although public evangelism continues to be the major outreach program of the local church, baptismal goals have not been reached. This trend needed to be re-examined

¹A key insight here is offered by Ellen G. White, the prophetic messenger of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who asserted in her writings that, "The Sabbath School should be one of the greatest instruments, and the most effectual in bringing souls to Christ." Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 10.

so that a more productive approach to soul-winning can be implemented.

A tentative hypothesis was investigated regarding the underachievement of soul-winning goals which revealed that churches depend on an island-wide campaign to achieve baptismal goals, and often the accumulated baptisms were insufficient to meet the goals of the various churches. Therefore, the evangelistic gifts of the various congregations, if utilized effectively in different methods of evangelism, could lead to an increase of baptisms in the local church.

A further hypothesis was that the churches in the Virgin Islands depended largely on the pastors to lead souls to Christ. That showed a need for greater involvement of the giftedness of the laity in the soul-winning program of local church.

Description of the Process

Theological reflection focused on the following biblical theses: (1) the Church as a congregation in both the Old and New Testament where God meets with His people and empowers them for service; (2) the command given to the Church by Jesus to evangelize the world; (3) soul-winning as a natural outgrowth of discipleship; (4) the philosophy that a healthy church is characterized by active small groups, such as the Sabbath School Action Units; (5) the role of the laity as a channel through which the Church can experience growth.

Current professional literature was studied that included books and publications on Sabbath School Action Units, small group evangelism, and church growth principles as they relate to the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Data of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands was obtained from the North Caribbean Conference secretariat for comparison.

An evaluation of growth trends of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Virgin Islands was done.

Strategies for growing the churches in the Virgin Islands through the Sabbath School Action Units were developed for implementation.

Strategies for creating a mission-driven congregation through Sabbath School leadership training and equipping skills were also developed for implementation in the Virgin Islands. This project was completed on April 31, 2011.

Expectation from This Project

This project will advance the kingdom growth of the churches in the Virgin Islands.

This project will transform the evangelistic climate of the churches in the Virgin Islands.

This project will provide a lasting new life of discipleship for the church membership of the Virgin Islands.

This project will help provide a framework from which the North Caribbean Conference can develop effective evangelistic strategies.

This project will help the North Caribbean Conference to implement the directives given in the Spirit of Prophecy regarding the need for small group ministry.

This project will help churches in the North Caribbean Conference and the Caribbean Union to transform regular Sabbath School classes into evangelistic units.

Limitations of the Project

The scope of this project takes in a portion of the North Caribbean Conference,

namely, the territory of the United States Virgin Islands, and does not include data from the other islands of the North Caribbean Conference. Therefore, the findings are limited to the church growth pattern of the territory examined, and do not reflect the church growth trends of the North Caribbean Conference as a whole.

In addition, while volumes have been written to aid the Sabbath School in its weekly programming and ministry, there is limited literary contribution toward the soul-winning aspect of the Sabbath School. With the exception of Ellen White's *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, and Calvin Smith's *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, few writers have focused on the soul-winning aspect of the Sabbath School, especially within the last five years. Since the Sabbath School Action Units are potential evangelistic units and are similar to Cell Group ministry, I have accessed related material and applied it to soul-winning through the Sabbath School.

Definition of Terms

Evangelism: Reaching out to an unbeliever or community in the name and directive of Jesus Christ with the intent of bringing about a conversion to Christ and His Church.

Soul-winning: The response to an invitation for unbelievers to accept Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives and thus become members of His Church.

Sabbath School Action Unit: The down-sizing of Sabbath School classes to sizes of six to eight members.

Discussion Leader: This refers to the one who is appointed by the Sabbath School committee as head of the Action Unit and serves as the class teacher.

Sabbath School Coordinator: This term refers to the Sabbath School superintendant and is used interchangeably in reference to the one appointed by the local church to serve as head of the Sabbath School department.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF CONGREGATIONAL SOUL-WINNING

Introduction

While the Seventh-day Adventist theology of congregational soul-winning is rooted in God's word, the Bible, Ellen G. White played a major role in its development. The relevance of her writings on the subject of congregational soul-winning is a reflection of a theological perspective that harmonizes with scripture. Therefore, in this chapter, in addition to the biblical rationale on the subject, I will also examine Ellen White's views on congregational soul-winning.

The Church¹ is often viewed as an assembly of believers for the purpose of worship. As a congregation, the church should also be seen as a body of believers organized for soul-winning (Rom 12:4; Eph 4:12). "The biblical word 'church', (Gk. ekklesia, Heb qahal) means 'assembly'. It describes the covenant-making assembly at Mt. Sinai (Deut 9:10; 10:4)."² The Greek word "'ekklesia' comes from the verb 'ekkeleo', to

¹The word "Church," when used with an upper case "C " in this dissertation refers to the universal body of Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, or the entire body of Christ in a particular country. The word "church" with a lower case "c" refers to the local church. If the distinction cannot be determined from the context, the uppercase is used.

²*New Dictionary of Theology* (1988), s.v. "Church."

summon, or to call out.”³ This term “is used in this secular sense in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41 in the account of the stirring events at Ephesus.”⁴ In “the New Testament use of the word is controlled almost entirely by its employment in the Old Testament LXX to translate, with remarkable consistency, the Hebrew *qahal*, which has much the same basic meaning of a convoked assembly.”⁵ This is evident in the death of Ananias and Sapphires, as recorded in the Apostolic Church: “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events” (Acts 5:11).⁶

The Church as a Congregation in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the words *qahal* and *edhah* are commonly used for “a gathering of people, assembly, or congregation.”⁷ *Qahal* is often used in reference to a coming together of people . . . or nations (Gen 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Jer 50:9), a company engaging in war (Num 22:4; Ezek 38:4, 7, 13), a public or civic assembly (Prov 5:14; Job 30:28), a gathering of people to listen to a speaker or to engage in worship (Deut 4:10; 9:10; 2 Chr 20:5, 14; Neh 5:13), and a group of returning exiles or the restored community after the return (Jer 31:8; Ezra 10:12-14; Neh 7:66). The word is used twenty-one times in the Pentateuch and is “usually associated with the Priestly writer.”⁸

³*New Dictionary of Theology* (1988), s.v. “Church.”

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this paper are from the New International Version (NIV).

⁷*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Congregation.”

⁸*Ibid.*

In Deuteronomy, the author

used the term to describe those who were or were not admitted to the ‘assembly of Yaweh’ (Duet 23:1-9). Other accuracies in Deuteronomy used qahal in reference to the ‘day of assembly’ at Horeb or other assemblies for cultic purposes (Duet 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 31:30). This cultic usage continued in the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua through Kings) generally. Similarly, the Chronicler used the term qahal (which occur thirty-three times) in reference to the complete assembly of Israel for worship or for feasts or fasts to worship Yahweh (2 Chr 1:3,5; 6:3,12; 7:8; 20:5,14; 30:2, 4,13,17, 23-25). It is within this cultic usage that the term qahal most clearly overlaps with the use of ‘edhah’ in other parts of the Old Testament.⁹

In Scripture, “a distinction between “qahal and edhah, which is apparent in places like Leviticus 4:13 and Numbers 20:2-10 (Priestly Writer), seems to be between the congregation (edhah) as a designation of the people and the assembly (qahal) as a reference to the congregation coming together on a specific occasion.”¹⁰

The Hebrew word translated congregation, *edhah*, “is commonly used as a corporate designation for the people of Israel or for the organized gathering of the Israelites for social, political, and, especially cultic purposes.”¹¹ In Exodus, the term is used in reference to the coming together of the Israelites to be addressed by Moses and Aaron on matters considering the “passover and unleavened bread (Exodus 12), the supply of food in the wilderness (Exodus 16), and the tabernacle and offerings (Exodus 35).”¹² The term is also used in Lev 4 and 8 and Num 14-16 in connection with the gathering of Israel for worship. The translators of the LXX often used the Greek *ekklesia* (to call out, or summon) for *qahal* and synagogue (gather together) for *edhah*; synagogue

⁹*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Congregation.”

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

was also used in reference to *qahal* and *edhah* (Exod 16:3; Lev 4:13).¹³

The Church as a Congregation in the New Testament

The occurrence of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament referred to “an assembly or congregation.”¹⁴ It conveys the same basic meaning as *qahal* of the Old Testament, which is a “convoked assembly.”¹⁵ When used, “it referred mainly to the people of God gathered in the name of Jesus or the God of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:21; 5:23; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Corinthians 10:32).”¹⁶ This usage of congregational setting is dominant throughout the New Testament. “Of the 114 occurrences, 109 times the term referred to the community of God’s people.”¹⁷ Although the word is used only twice in the gospel passages (Matt 16:18; 18:17), it is used 23 times in Acts, 46 times in the Pauline writings, 20 times in Revelation, and only in isolated instances in James and Hebrews.¹⁸

The church as a congregation is evident in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians in Macedonia (1 Thess 1:1; 2:14). Paul’s use of congregation as a term of local groups of Jesus’ followers in various locales is further confirmed in subsequent letters, including 1 Corinthians where it occurred 22 times, sometimes with the added descriptor

¹³*The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Congregation.”

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*New Dictionary of Theology* (1988), s.v. “Church.”

¹⁶*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (2000), s.v. “Church.”

¹⁷*Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (2000), s.v. “The Church.”

¹⁸*Ibid.*

“congregation of God” (1 Cor 1:1; 10:32; 11:16).¹⁹ The gathering of the followers of Jesus in homes was also referred to as the “congregation of the house” or local church (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; 2 Cor 4:15). “In Acts, James, 3 John, Revelation and the early writings of Paul, church is always a particular congregation.”²⁰ In both the Old and New Testament, the concept of ‘church’ as a congregation depicted the coming together of God’s people in celebration, worship, exhortation, and instruction in His Holy name. That congregational assembly also served as a reminder that the church should be seen as a united body of believers whose faith is centered in God, and whose mission is God-given.

Smaller Gatherings as a Theological Justification for Small Groups and Sabbath School Classes

The gathering of believers in scripture is often referred to as the Church, regardless of the size of the congregation (Acts 7:38; 12:12). The experience of Noah and his family in the ark can be referred to as the Church in its entirety (Gen 7:1); that gathering can also be referred to as a small group. In the New Testament, the calling of the twelve disciples was also a type of small group chosen and empowered for service (Matt 10:1-4).

J. D. Payne strongly emphasized “the Bible is very clear that the apostolic Church met in homes.”²¹ He cited examples such as: The meeting of the believers in the upper room following the ascension (Acts 1:12-14); the gathering of the believers in a

¹⁹*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Congregation.”

²⁰*New Bible Dictionary* (1993) s.v. “Church.”

²¹Jervis D. Payne, *Missional House Churches* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Publishing, 2007), 1.

house at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:2); the meeting of the believers in houses (Acts 2:46); the invasion of Jason's house by the angry mob to arrest Paul and Silas (Acts:17:5); the gathering of the church at Mary's house for prayer (Acts 12:12); Paul's greetings to "Nympha and the church in her house" (Col 4:15); Paul's greetings to Philemon and the church that met in his house (Philemon 1); Paul's greetings to the church that met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:5).²²

These biblical examples of house churches are clear indicators of a theological justification for the concept of small group ministries. When applied to the congregational setting, the organizing of Sabbath School classes also reflects a type of small group ministry. These gatherings, therefore, have a strong biblical rationale which inspires the Church to be mission-focused.

The Church and Its Mission

The mission of the church is outlined by its founder Jesus Christ and is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always to the end of the age." This command, often referred to as the Great Commission, gives the church its relevance in the world. It was established to fulfill God's purpose of carrying out His ministry and doing the things He would do if He were still on earth. It is within

²²Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 2.

this framework, Dederen argued that “the church does not merely have a mission, the church is mission.”²³

God’s love for fallen humanity is revealed in His mission to redeem humankind (John 3:16). Very often in Scripture, He engaged humans by sending them to speak to fellow humans for Him (Jer 26:5; 29:19; 35:15). He said to the people of Judah, “From the day that your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent my servants the prophets” (Jer 7:25).

Ruthven Roy described the mission of the church as the “purpose and reason for its existence in a particular community.”²⁴ This concept is demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus; He “sent out” the twelve, and later the seventy, with a message regarding the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 9). “To this mandate Christ added the post-resurrection commission in Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-48.”²⁵

Paul Borthwick described the mission of the church as “God’s mission.”²⁶ Roy affirmed that position by stating: “Mission, therefore, is God’s enterprise from beginning to end, not ours. Irrespective of her calling, her position in salvation history, or her great accomplishments, the role of the church is solely and completely participatory and not supervisory.”²⁷ When this perception of mission is fully realized, the church will no longer see itself struggling to accomplish a task that seems impossible, rather, it will

²³Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (2000), 12:549.

²⁴Ruthven Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant!* (Frederick, MD: Network Discipling Ministries, 2002), 119.

²⁵Dederen, “The Church,” 549.

²⁶Paul Borthwick, *A Mind for Missions* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), 23.

²⁷Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant*, 19.

obediently partner with God in the Great Commission. Borthwick stated:

The mission Dei (the mission of God) embraces all the divine-human activities involved in carrying out God's redemptive purpose to all the world, and has as its ultimate objective the complete reconciliation and restoration of the earth and the human race. Mission was born in the heart of a loving God who, in His divine foreknowledge, devised a plan from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:18) to take care of the catastrophic emergence of sin. Our God is a missionary God.²⁸

This concept of mission is clearly demonstrated in the first advent of Christ (John 3:16).

Roy argued:

While the well-spring of the mission Dei is divine love, the reason for that mission was man's utter lostness and dire need of a Saviour. . . . The Mission Dei, then, grew out of mankind's disobedience, downfall, and impending doom, and God's loving response in expending heaven's best resources to save His creation.²⁹

Given the Great Commission, the church, in response to the command (Matt 28:19-20), participates with God in making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded. The mission, therefore, takes in all three components: disciple-making, baptizing, and teaching.

Making Disciples, the Focus of Mission

Russell Burrill advocated that mission is not complete until all three components (making disciples, baptizing, and teaching) have been accomplished.

Only as a church follows this three-fold mandate can it claim to fulfill the gospel commission. Thus if a church baptizes people without discipling, or teaching them, it is disobedient to Christ. If church disciples people and fails to baptize them, it is likewise disobedient. If a church teaches people the commands of Christ, but does not disciple and baptize them, it too fails Jesus. Even if a church disciplines people and baptizes them into the church, but fails to continue to teach them the commands of Jesus, they are disobedient to Christ. The focus of the command is broad. . . . It

²⁸Borthwick, *A Mind for Missions*, 23.

²⁹Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant*, 14.

demands the church create a reproducing church of solid disciples.³⁰

The Greek word *mathetes*, translated disciple, is literally a learner. The term is “used 260 times in the New Testament, 230 of these in the four Gospels. . . . The verb *akoulouthen*, ‘to walk behind, or to follow,’ characteristically used in the New Testament as the specific term for the practice of discipleship.”³¹ In its original use, the term *mathetes* “was employed among the Greeks to designate one ‘who learns,’ and the notion of learning continued to be present in the use of the word through the history of the Greek language; but the term increasingly designated an adherent.”³² Throughout the writings of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the usage of the term indicated:

One who follows one’s teaching, as the disciples of John, Matt 9:14; of the Pharisees, Matt 22:16; of Moses, John 9:28; it is used of the disciples of Jesus (a) in a wide sense, of Jews who became His adherents, John 6:17, some being secretly so, John 19:38; (b) especially of the twelve apostles, Matt 10:1; Luke 22:11; (c) of all who manifest that they are His ‘disciples by abiding in His Word, John 8:31; 13:35; 15:8; (d) in the Acts, of those who believed upon Him, 6:1-2,7; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 19:1. . . . A ‘disciple’ was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitation of their teacher, John 8:31; 15:8.³³

Since the impact of the learning helps the learner to be an imitator of his teacher, it is only natural that disciples of Jesus Christ represent all that He taught. The definition of the term also requires the disciple to live in a relationship with the one he imitates. “In this relationship, one is to be constantly learning more about that person, while at the

³⁰Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 11-12.

³¹*Global Dictionary of Theology* (2008), s.v. “Discipleship.”

³²*The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Disciple.”

³³*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (1985), s.v. “Disciple.”

same time living in subjection to the person. The word itself does not suggest a rapid conversion to the person, but a slow process by which one is made into a disciple.”³⁴

This process involves an allegiance and loyalty to one master. As it relates to the Christian, he must experience the new birth and a death to self (John 3:3-7; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20).

The word pictures students sitting round a teacher more than it does penitents kneeling at an altar--an educational process more than an evangelistic crisis, a school more than a revival. The word's prosaic character relaxes and says in effect, "Work with people over a period of time in the educative process of teaching Jesus." Only the Cosmocrator can do the big things like convert, win, bring repentance, or move a person to decision--all authority is his alone. But disciples can, must, and will do the little thing of "discipling" others--that is, they will spend good time with people--in the confidence that sooner or later the Cosmocrator will create in these people the decision for baptism (or in Christianized cultures, the decision to own baptism) and so to follow Jesus.³⁵

A disciple (according to the Gospel of Matthew) is both a learner and a follower, commissioned to teach not only the theoretical truth of the kingdom, but also to teach obedience to everything Christ commanded (Matt 28:19-20). While the disciple is called to a life of obedience, he "is not portrayed as a superhuman, not as an exemplar of perfection, not immune to failure, not always demonstrating full and complete understanding of the Master and His teaching, but as a simple follower who in radical commitment, practices the way of faithful obedience and love."³⁶

George Knight argued:

Discipleship in Matthew has never been mere belief or knowledge. Rather, the first Gospel has repeatedly stressed obedience to the will of God in the things of practical

³⁴Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 16.

³⁵Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 1987-90), 2:1096-1097.

³⁶*Global Dictionary of Theology* (2008), s.v. "Discipleship."

life (Matt 7:21; 25:31-46). Not only does Jesus instruct the disciples to teach, but they are also to baptize in the 'name' (singular, indicating the basic unity of the Godhead) of the Trinity (Matt 28:19). We find the command to baptize being put into operation in the earliest records of the church after Jesus' ascension. Thus Peter on the day of Pentecost urges his hearers to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:37, 38).³⁷

Roy strongly emphasized that the gospel commission calls us:

First and foremost, to make disciples of new believers, and in the process, we are to teach them to observe all things (Matt 28:19, 20). While church membership and Christian discipleship are not mutually exclusive entities, they connote two distinct experiences. Church membership communicates a sense of belonging and inclusiveness. Discipleship, on the other hand, communicates a sense of mission and purpose, and this can be easily lost sight of if there is a preoccupation with the former orientation.³⁸

Jesus, in His discourse with His followers, reiterated, "A student [*mathetai*] is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!" (Matt 10:24-25).

The one who becomes a disciple of Jesus is called to demonstrate faith in Him, and faithfulness to the call (Heb 11:6). He can be expected to be treated as Jesus was treated—misunderstood and persecuted, and even killed. Therefore, the disciple-making process should help the prospect "develop a faith mature enough to withstand persecution or ridicule."³⁹

As was demonstrated in the lives of the early disciples, the call to discipleship "involved a total commitment to the person and destiny of Jesus himself, even to the

³⁷George R. Knight, *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994), 282.

³⁸Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant*, 152.

³⁹Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 18.

point of abandoning the security of vocation, possessions, and home, and repudiating family ties and responsibilities just as Jesus had separated himself from His own family and abandoned vocation and home.”⁴⁰

Jesus further stated:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26-33).

This role of cross-bearing is characteristic of discipleship and relates to the gruesome act of crucifixion. “Thus to bear the cross is to . . . endure without complaint or regret the frown of friends and relatives and to bear the reproach of Christ with patience and humility.”⁴¹ While the call to discipleship is not one of ease and comfort, “It doesn’t mean that the Christian goes through life moody and joyless, but . . . finds joy in the affliction and trouble caused by his allegiance to Christ, counting it a privilege to suffer with Christ.”⁴²

To the believers, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). A disciple is one who hears the call of Jesus and responds to His teaching by joining His company. In his book, *I Believe in Church Growth*, Eddie Gibbs, commenting on the word ‘disciple,’ said, “In its Jewish context it means much more than in secular Greek. For the Greek, it meant student, pupil, or apprentice. In the New Testament, it means total

⁴⁰*The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “Disciple.”

⁴¹Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 21.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 19.

allegiance. This is reflected in the teaching emphasis in making disciples.”⁴³

Jesus emphasized, “A new command I gave you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). This manifestation of love is to be the absolute, infallible test of one’s discipleship. It becomes evident when a person is a disciple, that person loves as Jesus loves, unconditionally. Burrill strongly advocated, “It does not mean that love is fully perfected, but the agape love of Jesus should be found, at least embryonically in the life of . . . a disciple.”⁴⁴

In addressing His followers, Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). A disciple, therefore, is one who “stays connected to his Master and multiplies himself.”⁴⁵ To be connected with Christ becomes a union that will inevitably result in fruit-bearing (John 15:5). Hence the reason, “The Christian who is not producing by creating other disciples is not really a disciple. . . . Jesus wants us to produce much fruits.”⁴⁶ This is perhaps the most visible evidence of discipleship.

When one is converted to Christianity, Hunter is of the view, and rightly so, he “should grow up to the maturity of discipleship and then reproduce other disciples. Every disciple should be a spiritual parent for other growing disciples, then a grandparent, then a great grand-parent.”⁴⁷

⁴³Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (London, England: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981), 135.

⁴⁴Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 20-21.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Kent R. Hunter, *Foundations for Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church* (Corunna, IN: Church Growth Centre, 1994), 85.

An examination of these passages addressing the subject of discipleship has revealed the following about Jesus' teaching of what it means to become a disciple:

1. A disciple is one who is willing to endure persecution and ridicule for the sake of Christ.
2. A disciple is one who lives in total allegiance to the Lordship of Christ, being willing to forsake all—property, family, friends, etc.—for the cause of Christ.
3. A disciple is one who understands and keeps the basic teachings of Jesus.
4. A disciple is one who loves unconditionally with the *agape* love of Jesus,
5. A disciple is one who is bearing fruit by creating other disciples for Jesus.⁴⁸

Discipleship Happens in the Context of a Small Group

When Jesus called His twelve disciples, He kept them together as a selected group so that they could be empowered for service (Matt 10:1-8). Having been called out from a life of sin and ungodliness, they needed to be in the company of Jesus to learn about the new lifestyle of a believer. Jesus presented to them a model by His own lifestyle. He was the teacher; they were the students. As students, the group setting provided the opportunity for growth in discipleship and Christian maturity.

Robert E. Coleman, in his book titled *The Master and His Plan*, suggested eight principles of Jesus' method that served as a model for discipleship in a small group setting. These principles are:

⁴⁸Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 23.

1. Selection: In this principle, Jesus focused on training a few men who were willing to learn so that He could provide quality leaders to carry on the work of the kingdom in His absence.
2. Association: In this principle, Jesus exhibited a very informal teaching method; He allowed His disciples to be with Him and follow Him. They were able to observe, discuss, ask questions, and listen to His teaching.
3. Consecration: This principle highlighted a life of obedience and commitment as they spent time with Him.
4. Impartation: This principle showed Jesus as One who gave Himself in love, so they could learn how to love their fellow human beings.
5. Demonstration: In this principle, Jesus modeled a life of prayer, reliance on scripture, and soul winning
6. Delegation: In this principle, the disciples were sent into the community to share the gospel.
7. Supervision: This principle showed that Jesus monitored the progress of the disciples so that they could be brought to maturity.
8. Reproduction: This principle emphasized the importance of fruit-bearing as disciples.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993). The suggestions given by Coleman summarized the content of the book. Therefore, no specific page is given for this footnote.

Making Disciples Requires the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Shortly after the Great Commission was given, Jesus assembled with His disciples and commanded them:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or date the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8).

The command to “wait” was specific. The place appointed was Jerusalem. “There was to be (1) a devout expectancy of the great power of God, (2) a deep longing for that power, and for fitness to receive it; (3) and earnest, united prayer that God would fulfil His promise.”⁵⁰ Jesus referred to the Spirit as the “promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). This emphasized the fact that “the Spirit is God’s Spirit who continues to mediate God’s Word before, through, and after Christ (2:33) . . . who empowers an effective ministry of word and living witness.”⁵¹

The outpouring of the Spirit is also referred to as receiving “power.” The word translated power is the Greek “‘dynamis,’ which denotes a robust force at work in demonstrative ways for all to see and feel. . . . The Spirit does not confer a political authority upon the apostles but rather new competencies that enabled them to perform the tasks given them, whether through their inspired words, their miraculous works, or their

⁵⁰“Interpretation of Acts,” *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-80), 6:127.

⁵¹*The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. “The Spirit.”

leadership within the community's common life."⁵² Following the ascension, they waited in Jerusalem according to the command given by Jesus, and the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled (Acts 2:2-4).

The outpouring of the Spirit enabled the disciples to disciple others for Christ and His Kingdom (Acts 2:41). Without the fulfillment of the promise, the followers of Christ would be powerless to carry out the mission of the church.

Making Disciples Involves the Giftedness of the Congregation

The apostle Paul referred to the Church as "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:7). By comparing the Church with the human body, he stated: "We do not all have the same function. So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us" (Rom 12:4-6).

C. P. Wagner defined such a gift as "an attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace for use within the context of the body."⁵³ In the New Testament, three words are used in reference to the gifts the Holy Spirit dispenses to the church:

Charismata, pneumatikos, and dorea (Rom 5:15,16; 1 Cor 12:1; Acts 2:28). Charismata, from the root word 'charis' (grace, favor) literally means "grace-gift," and is used by the Apostle Paul in reference to spiritual gifts. The word "pneumatikos" (spiritual) like charismata, is used almost exclusively by Paul (23 times). . . . This adjective appears in the neuter gender and is used as a noun ('spiritual things' or 'spiritual gifts').

. . . Dorea (gift, used 11 times), is not used for spiritual gifts: however, its use by Luke (four times in Acts) . . . is used for the reception of the Holy Spirit as a gift.⁵⁴

⁵²The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (2006), s.v. "The Spirit."

⁵³C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 42.

⁵⁴George Rice, "Spiritual Gifts," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (2000), 12:612.

These gifts are identified as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, ability to distinguish spirits, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, giving aid, acts of mercy, helpers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11). They are given by the Holy Spirit to each individual “to prepare God’s people for the work of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12).

As the various gifts distributed by the Spirit were used for the purpose given, the early Church experienced an unprecedented growth (Acts 2:41). Today, if the gifts given by the Spirit are effectively used by the Church, the salvation of souls will be realized, and the mission of the Church will be fulfilled.

Based on the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts, “Charismata are given to enable the church to fulfill its mission in the world.”⁵⁵ As the members of the Church receive these gifts, they are empowered for service both individually and corporately.

Congregational Soul-winning Requires the Passion of the Early Church

After the ascension the disciples continued to gaze at the heavens. The record stated:

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

Following this experience, they demonstrated a passion for the proclamation of

⁵⁵Rice, “Spiritual Gifts,” 617.

the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was reflected in a life of holiness, a passion for witnessing, and a passion for Christ's return. It is this passion of the early Church that remains a model for an authentic and effective ministry in soul-winning.

A Passion for Holiness

The experience in the upper room testified of a Church with a passion for holiness. The record says:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Mathew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:12-14).

Richard C. H. Lenskie commented that "these eleven . . . not only had their headquarters in the upper room, but were continuing steadfastly in prayer . . . and they did this with one accord. . . . The phrase 'with one accord' occurs ten times in Acts and is a significant adverb to express oneness of heart and mind."⁵⁶ The upper room experience can be considered "an excellent formula for effective prayer: (1) The petition - they prayed; (2) the perseverance - they continued in prayer; (3) The unanimity - they prayed with one accord."⁵⁷ "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit therefore, is a prerequisite for effective witnessing and congregational soul winning.

⁵⁶Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 41.

⁵⁷"Interpretation of Acts," 6:127.

A Passion for Witnessing

The passion demonstrated by the Apostolic Church in the proclamation of the gospel is a reflection of conviction, conversion, and commitment. This conviction was based on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that left no doubt in their minds that He was the promised Messiah (John 1:1-3, 14). Their conversion was personal and radical so that even their vilest opponents admitted that “they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Their commitment was so uncompromising and unwavering that they felt the whole world should know that “there is salvation in no other name but in Jesus” (Acts 4:12).

What was responsible for such boldness? It was clearly the fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). The fulfillment of this promise was phenomenal.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

Those who attended the feast of Pentecost commented on this amazing experience by asking “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2:12-13). This response opened an avenue for Peter to bear witness of the power of the gospel to a multitude that needed to move beyond religious forms and rituals to a personal encounter and an on-going relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Peter seized the opportunity to tell the whole truth about Jesus Christ and His salvation to the human race (Acts 2:14-36).

Peter's passion for witnessing was a direct result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church. He spoke with such authority and conviction that his hearers were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37), and Peter did not hesitate to implement the directive given by Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20).

This bold and fearless witnessing continued in the midst of persecution, threats, and death (Acts 4:18-20; 6:8; 7:57-60). With such a passion for witnessing, the apostles gave themselves in selfless service for the advancement of God's kingdom. This is meant to characterize the life of every true disciple of Christ. God's remnant church needs to rekindle that passion for witnessing as demonstrated by the Apostolic Church, but this is possible only when there is genuine conversion and commitment inspired by the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

A Passion for Christ's Return

The apostles demonstrated a passion for Christ's return which was a natural result of a personal encounter with Him. Apart from being eye-witnesses of His ministry, crucifixion, and post-resurrection reunion, the void left by His ascension triggered a passion for His return (Acts 1:9-11). This event (the ascension) was foretold by Jesus (John 6:62). The event was again related by Peter (Acts 3:21), and was later referred to by Paul (1 Tim 3:16). "The ascension was a fitting climax to Christ's ministry on earth. Our Saviour had descended from heaven to effect man's salvation (John 3:13, 16). When His earthly work was finished, He planned to return to His heavenly home (John 14:2), to

mediate for man (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 7:25; 8:1, 2, 6; 1 John 2:1) until His second coming (John 14:3).”⁵⁸

The question posed by the angels at the ascension (Acts 1:11) was one that called their attention to the mission of the Church and the urgency of its fulfillment. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus stated, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14).

“This gospel” (*eueggeion*), as referred to by Matthew, is all about Jesus: His incarnation, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and second coming—the total package. The apostles were the ones given the responsibility to bear witness to the world of “this gospel” (Matt 24:14; Acts 1:8). This, in their minds, was the condition that must be met for seeing Jesus again. The words spoken by the angels in Acts 1:11 reminded them of the promise made by Jesus of His return (John 14:1-3). The fact that Christ’s return is hinged on His “going,” once the “going” took place, the return is imminent and certain. It is this certainty of the promise, coupled with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that drove the apostles to preach with such conviction and authority (Acts 2:38-41).

They had learned to trust Jesus by holding on to His promises. Therefore, the angels’ reference to the second coming at the ascension serves as a reminder to every believer that the Blessed Hope (Titus 2:13) remains a prime motivation for soul winning.

Ellen G. White and Congregational Soul-winning

Recognizing the relevance of the church, and the urgent need to be organized for

⁵⁸“Interpretation of Acts,” 6:125.

service, Ellen White stated, “Time is short, and our forces must be organized to do a larger work.”⁵⁹ She reminded God’s people: “The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth.”⁶⁰

In addressing the leadership of the Church, she advised: “Those who have the spiritual insight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work.”⁶¹ Looking at the model of the early Church, she reminded the church of today that “it was the organization of the twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ’s departure was to carry on His work on the earth.”⁶² Ellen White’s emphasis on congregational soul winning continues to challenge the Church to utilize its existing structure to fulfill its mission. She stressed that “the organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of the churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel. . . . Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him.”⁶³

Ellen White’s emphasis on organizing the congregation for soul-winning takes a

⁵⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:27.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 6:29.

⁶¹Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 500-501.

⁶²Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1970), 18.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 91-92.

holistic approach to ministry that keeps the Church focused on its mission. Keeping before the congregation the combined efforts of pastors and laity, using their spiritual gifts for soul-winning is a reflection of Paul's analogy of the Church as a body in which every member has a function (Rom 12:4-8). Recognizing this, she counseled the Church: "The work of God in this earth can never be finished until all the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."⁶⁴

To accomplish this task, ministers are warned of their responsibility toward their congregation: "Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden the Lord has laid upon them,--the burden of leading souls into the truth."⁶⁵ Therefore, "every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught how to give Bible readings, how to conduct and teach Sabbath school classes, how best to help the poor, and to care for the sick, how to work for the unconverted."⁶⁶

Using her prophetic insight, she recommended: "As churches are established, it should be set before them that it is even from among them that men must be taken to carry the truth to others, and raise new churches; therefore they must all work, and cultivate to the utmost the talents that God has given them, and be training their minds to engage in the service of the Master."⁶⁷

⁶⁴Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 35.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁶Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 149.

⁶⁷White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:205.

Since Jesus has given the command to “teach all nations . . .” (Matt 28:19), “God expects His church to discipline and fit its members for the work of enlightening the world.”⁶⁸ The involvement of the congregation in soul-winning requires the commitment of every member. She urged: “In every church the members should be trained that they will devote time to the winning of souls for Christ.”⁶⁹ When this approach to congregational soul winning is taken, the members are reminded that “the secret of our success in the work of God will be found in the harmonious working of our people. Every member of the body of Christ must act his part in the cause of God, according to the ability that God has given him.”⁷⁰

The contribution made by Ellen White toward the theology of congregational soul-winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has served as a basis for our growth and development as a Church. Her Christ-centered approach to evangelism, and her ability to give insights into the operation and mission of the Church continue to be a source of inspiration and motivation both to Church leaders and members.

Conclusion

God’s Church, throughout history, has been called to demonstrate a life of commitment and loyalty to Him. As a congregation in both the Old and New Testament, the Church assembled for worship. It was an opportunity given to the people of God, as a corporate body, to hear from Him and receive a clearer revelation of His will and purpose

⁶⁸White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:431.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 6:436.

⁷⁰Ellen G. White, “Workers with Christ,” *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890, 1.

for their lives. It was in the congregational setting that the members of the Church were able to benefit from the giftedness of its membership and be motivated for service.

The disciples were first given the Gospel Commission and were obedient to the command. In response to the injunction given by Jesus in Acts 1:4, they waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit until its fulfillment. Having received the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to be witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The experience of Pentecost inspired them to a life of sacrifice and service to the One who had become the Lord of their lives. They used their giftedness to expand the mission of the Church and, as a result, both Jews and Gentiles were exposed to the preaching of the Gospel, and were given an equal opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and live with the assurance of salvation and the Blessed Hope (Titus 2:13-14).

The concept of congregational soul-winning is derived from God's initiative to establish a Church, empower its members with His Spirit, and require of them to fulfill the Great Commission. Ellen White's understanding of congregational soul-winning takes in the involvement of the entire congregation of believers wherever they are located, uniting their efforts to rescue the lost. This message has been communicated to the remnant Church through her writings so we could be reminded of our mission, and pattern our efforts after the spirit and commitment of the early Church.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE CONTRIBUTION TO SOUL-WINNING THROUGH THE SABBATH SCHOOL

Introduction

While volumes have been written to aid the Sabbath School in its weekly programming and ministry, literary contributions to soul-winning through the Sabbath School is limited. With the exception of Ellen White's *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, and Calvin Smith's *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, few writers have focused on the soul-winning aspect of the Sabbath School, especially within the last five years. However, since the Sabbath School Action Units are potential evangelistic units and are similar to cell group ministry, I will access related material and show how it applies to soul-winning through the Sabbath School.

Due to the limited resources published within the specified period (2004-2009), I will also utilize relevant literature on the subject that exceeds the above mentioned time-frame. A brief history of the Sabbath School, its organizational structure, objectives, and operation will also be given. This approach will serve as a basis for the literature cited and the relevance it brings to this chapter.

A Brief History of the Sabbath School

The Sabbath School in the Seventh-day Adventist Church "began in 1852 when

James White wrote the first Sabbath School lessons. . . . White organized the first regular Sabbath School around 1853 in Rochester, New York. Another was organized by John Byington in Buck's Bridge, New York in 1854 and the third in 1855 by M. G. Kellog in Battle Creek, Michigan."¹ However, it was not until 1870 that a definite Sabbath School program was developed. As that ministry grew, the various local groups were organized into associations based on their geographical locations. By 1878, "there were twelve state associations."² At the General Conference Session in 1901, "the international Sabbath School Association was replaced by the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference."³

Since its humble beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the Sabbath School has grown into a world-wide institution comprised of 20,295,344 members located in 203 countries, as of December 2008.⁴ With such a phenomenal growth amidst the existing conflicts and triumphs of major world religions, the Sabbath School Department has positioned itself as a major entity in the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, responsible for the growth and expansion of its mission.

Organizational Structure of the Sabbath School

The organizational structure employed in the Sabbath School reflects accountability

¹*Sabbath School Handbook*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2004), 3.

²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Sabbath School Department, *The Sabbath School Manual: For Sabbath School Officers and Teachers* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 1.

³*Ibid.*

⁴This information was made available by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in their statistical report of the world church and was compiled by the Office of Archives and Statistics as of December 31, 2008.

at every level of its operation. At the local level, the membership is organized into divisions which are categorized into ages. These divisions include:

1. Beginner (ages 0-2)
2. Kindergarten (ages 3-5)
3. Primary (ages 6-9)
4. Junior (ages 10-12)
5. Earliteen (ages 13-14)
6. Youth (ages 15-18)
7. Young Adult (ages, 19-35)
8. Adult (35+)

Each age group is provided with a quarterly study guide that promotes Bible study and spiritual growth.⁵

At the local level, the coordinator is given a team of officers that functions as an executive body. This committee governs the operation of the Sabbath School, and reports to the Conference or Mission. This statistical report is sent on to the General Conference via the Union and the Division. "In reverse order instructions and plans flow out to the

⁵*Sabbath School Handbook*, 3. These Lesson Guides fit within a curriculum structured by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist and are broken down as follows: Beginners (0-2), are provided with a 2-year Grace Link Series, teacher and student Bible study guide, and *Our Little Friend* magazine; Kindergarten (3-5), is provided with a 2-year Grace Link Series, teacher and student Bible study guide, and *Our Little Friend* magazine; Primary (6-9), is provided with a 4-year Grace Link Series, teacher and student Bible study guide, and *Primary Treasure* magazine; Juniors (10-12), are provided with a 4-year series, PowerPoint resource for teachers and students, Bible study guide, and *Guide* magazine; Earliteens (13-14), are provided with a 2-year series, Real Time Faith teacher's guide, and student study guide, and also *Guide* magazine; Youth (15-18), are provided with *Cornerstone Connections*; Young Adults (19-35), are provided with *Collegiate Quarterly*; Adults (35+), are provided with the adult Bible study guide.

world field through these respective channels to our Sabbath School members in all parts of the world.”⁶

This approach facilitates a working relationship with the various levels of the organizational structure of the Church, and helps in the implementation and accountability of world-wide initiatives. It also helps to advertise the Church as a caring family in which there is a place for every member. It embraces the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9), and serves as an evangelistic and nurturing environment for its members.

Objectives of Sabbath School

Since its adoption as a major department of the Church, the stated objectives continue to serve as a guide for the relevance and functional role of the Sabbath School, both at the local and Conference levels. The manual states:

The Sabbath School was developed to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in response to the command of Jesus, and in the setting of the three angels’ messages. In loyalty to this original purpose the Sabbath School continues to communicate the good news with objectives to win, hold, and train for Jesus Christ, men, women, youth, boys and girls, in all the world.⁷

These objectives are demonstrated in the following areas:

1. Faith Emphasis
2. Fellowship Emphasis
3. Community Emphasis

⁶GC of SDAs, S. S. Dept., *The Sabbath School Manual*, 17. This system facilitates the flow of information from the local church to the General Conference and from the General Conference to the local church. It also keeps both entities informed of the advancement of the gospel as it relates to the Sabbath School.

⁷Ibid., 9.

4. World Mission Emphasis⁸

When applied, these objectives harmonize with the Great Commission outlined in Matt 28:19-20, and serve as disciple-making approaches for the readiness of the second coming of Christ. Leaders are encouraged to incorporate these objectives in the ministry of the Sabbath School at every level of its plans and implementation.

Very often, the Sabbath School finds itself focusing on programs that have little or no bearing on the outlined objectives. While the programs sometimes carry good moral lessons and are spiritually based, they often lack focus and appropriateness required for Sabbath School. In planning for the Sabbath School, leaders should continually keep in mind the purpose of Sabbath School and should intentionally allow the established objectives to serve as a guide for effective planning.

Ellen G. White and Sabbath School Evangelism

The counsels given by Ellen G. White in regard to Sabbath School evangelism serve as an inspiration to unlimited possibilities in the field of evangelism. She stated: “The Sabbath School is a missionary field, and very much more of a missionary spirit should be manifested in this important work than has been manifested in the past.”⁹

⁸GC of SDAs, S. S. Dept., *The Sabbath School Manual*, 9-10. These objectives are carried forward through the following: Faith Emphasis makes the saving gospel of Jesus Christ central in all its plans, projects, and programs. It also cultivates the attitude of prayer and devotion on the part of all members and fosters spiritual growth through the regular study of God’s Word. The Fellowship Emphasis is a weekly feature of the Sabbath School program and should motivate members to recruit new members. The Community Emphasis encourages the sharing of one’s faith with the community and teaches the art of soul winning. The World Mission Emphasis helps to maintain a clear vision of the global mission of the church. It also encourages children, youth, and adults to have a desire to serve in mission fields, and support missions through offerings.

⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 35.

Considering the time of her writing and the concern expressed, it is obvious that Ellen White was not satisfied with the emphasis that was placed on missions and that reflected strongly on those chosen to work in the Sabbath School. The growth of the Sabbath School was not as progressive as envisioned. As a result, leaders were encouraged to put the Sabbath School in the hands of those who were missionary-minded. However, that concern continues to be a major issue in the Sabbath School. While growth has taken place, the Sabbath School remains a missionary field, and should be approached as such. When such a mind-set is applied, workers in the Sabbath School will begin to see themselves as missionaries called by God to lead souls to Christ. The various division leaders, teachers, and officers of the local church are strategically placed in positions of responsibility to plan and implement ministries that will bring about conversion and discipleship in the lives of the membership.

Mrs. White further assured:

Our Sabbath schools are nothing less than Bible societies, and are in the sacred work of teaching the truths of God's word, they can accomplish far more than they have hitherto accomplished. The Sabbath school when rightly managed, possesses marvelous power, and is adapted to doing a great work, but it is not now what it may and should be. The influence growing out of Sabbath school work should improve and enlarge the church. . . . There is a most precious missionary field in the Sabbath school, and if there are now omens of good, they are only indications and beginnings of what may be done.¹⁰

The "indications" spoken of by Ellen White can be seen in the worldwide expansion of the Sabbath School and the contribution it has made toward the growth of the church. However, the Church at present should be reminded that these are "only

¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), 35.

indications and beginnings of what may be done.”¹¹ This leaves no room for complacency. We have not yet reached our potential as a Sabbath School. The accomplishments of the past should inspire us to do a greater work. To accomplish this task, a committed and knowledgeable management should be in place and the Word of God must be fundamental to the ministry offered.

As I take a closer look at the writings of Ellen G. White and her counsels on Sabbath School evangelism, I am deeply inspired and motivated by her insights. The fact that I am now writing on this subject is a direct result of the impact her writings have had on me, especially the following statements:

1. “The Sabbath School, if rightly conducted, is one of God’s great instrumentalities to bring souls to acknowledge of the truth.”¹²

2. “The Sabbath School should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ.”¹³

Upon examining those statements, and having observed the operation of numerous Sabbath Schools, I am convinced that there is a need to conduct Sabbath School differently, making it one of the greatest instrumentalities of soul-winning in the church. The structure in which the Sabbath School now functions provides opportunities to minister to the needs of the various age groups of our congregation and at the same time meet its objectives by winning, holding, and training men and women, boys and girls for the kingdom of God. In collaboration with this objective, it is recorded: “The

¹¹White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 35 .

¹²*Ibid.*, 115.

¹³White, *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work*, 20.

object of Sabbath school work should be the ingathering of souls. . . . If the children and youth are not brought to Christ, the Sabbath school is a failure.”¹⁴

The effectiveness of the Sabbath School is revealed in its ability to win souls and prepare them for service and readiness for Christ’s return. Considering the large number of children who have attended our Sabbath Schools and have left the church, the question remains: How effective is our Sabbath School? Certainly, there is a need to examine our present approach and implement the counsels given by E. G. White.

She further stated, “The most important of all missionary work is to train workers to go into the field to preach the gospel to every creature.”¹⁵ When this approach to Sabbath School work is taken, members will be led to discipleship, which will inspire growth both spiritually and numerically. The Sabbath School provides an opportunity to inspire the youth to be actively engaged in the service of God. The counsels given stated: “There is a broad field in the Sabbath School work that needs to be diligently cultivated, and that is to inspire our youth to give themselves wholly to the Lord, to be used by Him in. . . . They should help the church upward and onward, as far as it lies in their ability, going from strength to strength.”¹⁶

On various occasions, the emphasis has been on the involvement of the youth in missionary work. This, to a large extent, lies in the ministry of the Sabbath School. Based on the counsels given by Ellen G. White, this is the department responsible for cultivating in the hearts of the youth a desire for the mission field. Hence, the reason the mission

¹⁴White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 61.

¹⁵White, *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work*, 34.

¹⁶White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1938), 11.

reports are given weekly and, on the thirteenth Sabbath, special programs are held highlighting the importance of missions.

Another important aspect of Sabbath School evangelism is the work of the teachers. Ellen G. White lamented by stating: “There should be more personal work done in the Sabbath school. . . . The teacher should labor tenderly and earnestly for the conversion of his scholars.”¹⁷ Sabbath School teachers are called to function in a nurturing and evangelistic role. They are encouraged to seek the lost and labor for the salvation of their students. The directive given requires involvement in personal work and this may require house visitation. This personal work helps build relationships and demonstrates the qualities of a caring church.

Transforming Sabbath School Action Units into Small Group Ministry

While the Sabbath School is often referred to as a “department” of the Church, it is more appropriately identified as a “ministry” and functions as such. In the *Sabbath School Handbook*, it is stated: “The Sabbath School was designed to involve a holistic experience that will encourage personal growth, and facilitate evangelistic growth in the congregation.”¹⁸ The fulfillment of this expectation calls for intentional planning guided by the objectives outlined. As a result, the traditional classes have been reorganized into Sabbath School Action Units.

These Action Units are basically the down-sizing of traditional Sabbath School classes into smaller units comprised of six to eight members. These members are

¹⁷White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1938), 11.

¹⁸*Sabbath School Handbook*, 1.

organized into small groups, and are nurtured into discipleship. Calvin Smith, in his description of the plan, suggested the following:

1. *Classes of six to eight.* This size will facilitate greater involvement and participation. It also serves as a support group in which members experience a bond.

2. *Outreach Leaders.* Each unit appoints a class member who has a burden for souls to serve as the outreach leader. This individual leads out in planning evangelistic projects for his/her unit and works closely with other outreach leaders and the personal ministries leader of the local congregation. This person also functions as the *care coordinator*.

3. *Outreach Plans.* This function is carried out by the outreach leaders in consultation with the personal ministries leader and the superintendents. It also requires the outreach leaders to meet with their respective units for detailed planning and implementation.

4. *One-Hour Class Time.* This is the allotted time given to the units by the superintendent for carrying out the Action Units' plan, ensuring that attention is given to fellowship, community outreach, world mission emphasis, and the study of God's Word.

5. *Time for Missing Members.* The discussion leaders, in their initial welcome to the class, are given five minutes to mark the records, identify the missing members, and plan visits as may be necessary.

6. *Time for Outreach.* This portion of time (20 minutes) is also utilized by the outreach leader for getting reports and updates on outreach projects undertaken by the group.

7. *Lesson Discussion Application*. The discussion leader is given 35 minutes to lead out in the class discussion and application.

8. *Weekly, Then Monthly Leaders' Consultations*. Discussion leaders are encouraged to meet weekly for Sabbath School lesson review, and monthly for leaders' consultation.

9. *Monthly Corporate Sharing*. This time is given to the various units during the superintendent's program to highlight the successes of the Action Units. This helps to encourage the church, especially the weaker units.

10. *Monthly Home Fellowship/Evaluation*. In order to sharpen progress and build mutual trust and fellowship, evaluation meetings should be held in the homes.¹⁹

The *Sabbath School Handbook* endorsed this approach by stating:

A Sabbath School Action Unit is a small group Sabbath School class organized in a way that provides time for sharing, Bible study, and systematic planning for outreach. Many Sabbath Schools have discovered that Sabbath School Action Units provide supporting fellowship and relevant nurture. . . . Sabbath School Action Units are continuous training schools. They provide weekly promoting and training in the practical skills of soul winning. Outreach leaders, care coordinators, and Sabbath School Action Unit leaders are all involved in this important training.²⁰

This approach to Sabbath School brings together members in an environment conducive to nurturing, participation, and empowerment. The role of the outreach leaders helps the units to identify and embrace outreach projects with the intent of leading souls into the Kingdom of God. With this emphasis on evangelism, the units function similar to cell groups except for the "worship" component which is characteristic of cell groups.

¹⁹Calvin Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 9-10.

²⁰*Sabbath School Handbook*, 82.

This approach to Sabbath School has the potential to transform the congregation into a “cell” church.

Small Group Ministry

In church growth, the term “small group” is used interchangeably with “cell group” and, while the definition of each term may carry shades of variation, the most essential characteristic remains; that is, their intentional focus on evangelism. In defining small group ministry, Jeffery Arnold stated, “A small group is an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.”²¹ He further stated, “The goal of small group ministry is discipleship. . . . And the structure of small group ministry is community.”²² Cell group ministry on the other hand is defined as:

A church that has placed evangelistic small groups at the core of its ministry. . . . Cells are open, evangelism-focused small groups that are entwined into the life of the church. They meet weekly to build up each other as members of the Body of Christ, and to spread the gospel to those who don’t know Jesus. The ultimate goal of each cell is to multiply itself as the group grows through evangelism and then conversions.²³

Scott Boren advocated that “cell groups are simply a form designed to create a place where people experience a radical connection with other brothers and sisters, where

²¹Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 9. According to Arnold, within the broad context of the definition given, small groups assume various formats and focuses. This may include prayer groups, Bible study groups, fellowship groups, sharing and caring groups, evangelistic teams, church ministry committees, new-member classes, house churches, covenant groups, as well as a number of other groups. “All these are good examples of small groups to the extent that they are marked by a commitment to share the process of growth as disciples.”

²²*Ibid.*, 11.

²³Joel Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1998), 17.

they enter into a life of unity with one another, where they learn to sacrifice for one another.”²⁴

Based on the approach to Sabbath School evangelism, the definition and views given by Comiskey, Arnold, and Boren fit into the Action Unit model applied in Sabbath School. Phrases such as “evangelistic-focused small groups;” “entwined into the life of the church;” “meet weekly to build up each other;” “to spread the gospel;” “multiply itself;” “grows through evangelism;” “intentional gathering of three to twelve people;” “discipleship;” “radical connection;” “a life of unity with one another” are all practical terms applied in Sabbath School evangelism, especially as they relate to the Sabbath School Action Unit. The views expressed also synchronize with the objectives of the Action Units.

In conjunction, Ellen G. White strongly advised: “If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers.”²⁵ This dual purpose of small group ministry is comparable with the objectives of the Action Units. Members are encouraged to care for those who are in the household of faith and at the same time work for the salvation of the lost. The directive given by Mrs. White requires the church to be organized for service. She declared: “Let there be in every church, well-organized companies of workers to labor in the vicinity of that church.”²⁶ In Sabbath School evangelism, this focus on community

²⁴M. Scott Boren, “Form Follows Function: Moving Beyond the Models to Biblical Community,” in *Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide* (Houston, TX: TOUCH Outreach Ministries, 2003), 43.

²⁵White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:22.

²⁶Ellen G. White, “Missionary Work,” *Review and Herald*, September 29, 1891, 2.

outreach is one of the main objectives and is better achieved when the small group approach is applied.

In small group ministry, “There are five fundamental small group tasks within the framework of the Christian community: study, worship, prayer, evangelism and mission . . . at its core community involves . . . relationships between God and a group of believers.”²⁷ These fundamental tasks are related to the objectives of Sabbath School, namely: Study of God’s Word, community outreach, world mission emphasis, and fellowship. With such entrenched relationships, the Action Units are, in essence, small group ministry.

Robert Logan advocated: “The small group forms the relational cornerstone of the church community—this is where much of the evangelism, discipleship, and leadership take place.”²⁸ Christian A. Schwartz echoed a similar view by stating:

Our research in growing and declining churches all over the world has shown that continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church growth principle. . . . They must be holistic groups which go beyond just discussing Bible passages to applying its message to daily life. . . . Holistic small groups are the natural place for Christian to learn to serve others-both in and outside the group-with their spiritual gifts.²⁹

Both Logan and Schwartz, in emphasizing the importance of small groups, are strengthening the concept of the Sabbath School Action Units. This model meets Schwartz’s criterion of holistic small groups, and Logan’s fundamental approach to evangelism and discipleship. It also attests to the authentic ministry of the Sabbath

²⁷Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 42.

²⁸Robert E. Logan, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2006), 47.

²⁹Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 32.

School and its potential for church growth comparable to that of established small group ministry.

William Beckham, a consultant on cell groups, suggested that groups should maintain a clear focus during their meetings by applying a simple format which he labeled “the four Ws. . . . Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness.”³⁰ This approach is evident in the operation of the Action Units, even though it is not labeled as such. Nevertheless, it is demonstrated in the format employed, thus creating an atmosphere of friendliness and fellowship, conducive for worship and witnessing.

Peter Wagner, a specialist in the church growth movement, believed that one of the signs of a healthy, growing church is that it ministers not only in a large celebration-of-worship service, but also in small fellowship circles, sometimes called “cells.”³¹ Rodger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., in their book, *Adventures in church growth*, agreed with Wagner, based on research by stating: “Our research has shown that the principle applies to Adventist churches also.”³² The application of this principle of church growth has been a feature of Sabbath School evangelism, and has been integrated in the function of the Action Units.

Benefits of Sabbath School Action Units

Robert Logan, in his book *Beyond Church Growth*, emphasized: “Fulfilling the

³⁰William A. Beckham, “The Cell Groups Meeting,” in *Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide* (Houston, TX: TOUCH Outreach Ministries, 2003), 175.

³¹C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 97-109.

³²Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., *Adventures in Church Growth* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983), 34.

Great Commission should be the focus of all that we do together as a church.”³³ While Logan was not addressing Action Units, his concern is applicable to all initiatives embarked upon by the Church. In reflection, the implementation of the Sabbath School Action Unit is a definite effort to fulfill the Great Commission. The revolution it brings to the Church has the tendency to challenge the status quo and generate resistance from a few. But the suggestions given by Del Dunavant in his book *From Membership to Discipleship*, listed four ways to improve motivating members for ministry which when applied opens the door for the blessings of the Action Units. He suggested the following:

1. “Communicate how this ministry makes an eternal difference, and what you hope this ministry will accomplish, and your appreciation for their time and efforts.

2. Provide a clear job description, provide appropriate training, and ongoing support.

3. Develop mutually agreeable goals that utilize the members’ specific gifts.

4. Provide training according to the members learning style and availability.”³⁴

Dunavant’s suggestions, when applied to the small group structure as practiced in the Sabbath School Action Units, can be one of the most effective approaches to accomplish the Church’s mission. This mode generates involvement of the group members in the vision casting and mission development by creating an environment of open dialogue. It also communicates to the group the value and appreciation of their commitment to a preferred future and the benefits of pursuing a particular ministry. This

³³Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 191.

³⁴Delbert Dunavant, *From Membership to Discipleship* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2006), 80.

approach will lead to a group consensus, which, when agreed upon, places the group as combined owners of the vision and jointly responsible for its mission. The small group concept also provides opportunities for every member to be assigned a role that allows each one to develop his or her giftedness in a non-threatening environment. To facilitate this process, the leadership of both the local church and the Sabbath School should provide training for the various categories of ministry leaders and their assigned roles. By working together as a group, members should be encouraged to generate a team spirit among themselves; this will ensure an ongoing support for the group members.

The achievement of mutually agreed goals requires that the right persons be assigned to the task that matches his or her giftedness. If, among the group members, no one seems to possess the required gift for the assigned task, a gift inventory should be taken by the group to ascertain its potential; training should be given to equip the group for ministry. Having agreed on the mutual goals, the group leader should hold its members accountable for the assigned tasks.

Dunavant's submission for training members in their learning styles fits into the existing ecclesiastical structure of the Sabbath School. Even though the effectiveness of the Action Units requires a reorganization of the traditional Sabbath School classes into smaller sizes, the model of a group setting remains. This setting provides an environment for learning. Therefore, for each discussion leader, continuing education should be mandatory. This should be provided by the pastor and Sabbath School leaders or any qualified personnel. Ellen G. White supported this idea by stating: "Teachers should feel their responsibility, and make use of their opportunity to improve, that they may render

the best kind of service in a manner that will result in the salvation of souls.”³⁵ This counsel reinforces the need for the Sabbath School teacher to be empowered for effective service.

Once these steps are taken, members are most likely to show less resistance to innovation, making implementation easier. In the *Sabbath School Handbook* it is recorded, “The Sabbath School Action Unit organizes members into ‘units’ that systematically reach out to inactive and former members, participate in and support weekly soul-winning in their local community and the world field.”³⁶ This aspect of reaching out to inactive members and participating in soul-winning activities of the church reflect the qualities of the caring church.

Calvin Smith’s highlights of success stories resulting from the implementation of Sabbath School Action Units showed the transforming effect on local congregations. Inactive members became active participants in soul-winning, missing members became regular attendees, and non-participative members became actively engaged in class plans and lesson discussions. The down-sizing of the traditional classes brought about a high level of participation in the units and gave members a sense of belonging and serves as a motivation for service.³⁷

³⁵White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 94.

³⁶*Sabbath School Handbook*, 84.

³⁷Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 4-9. As a result of *Action Units*, Smith reported the following: 1. Increase in baptism: 44 Moslem families prepared for baptism in one village in the West Indonesia Mission; increase in soul-winning activity only six months after the plan was introduced; baptisms have tripled in Irian Jaya in the same period of time. 2. Increase in soul-winning activity including giving Bible studies: An increase from 3-30 members giving Bible studies in a few months in Michigan. 3. Inactive former members return: About 50 families have returned to Sabbath School, reported a Michigan Sabbath School. 4. Increase in Sabbath School attendance: From 20 to 100 in six weeks in Oregon; from 15 (including children) to 70 (excluding children) in two months in New Jersey.

Apart from the personal fulfillment the Action Unit brings to its members, it motivates them to labor personally for lost souls. Peter Prime convincingly echoed the impact of such involvement on the church by stating: "The total involvement of the total church in personal evangelism will yield unparalleled success. With each Christian embodying God's love and then transmitting that love to even one person at a time, how soon will the world enveloped in love!"³⁸ The Action Unit plan creates the milieu that facilitates the fulfillment of this dream.

Donald McGavran, in his book *Understanding Church Growth*, referred to Ralph Winter's terminology that distinguishes between E-0, E-1, E-2, and E-3 Evangelism.³⁹ The Sabbath School Action Units create an environment for such evangelism, especially E-0 and E-1 types. However, in our quest to evangelize the world, George Barna reminded us that "in our communication with the unchurched, we must remember that while relationships are important in building a church, those whom we want to attract are a less relational group of people. . . . Do not propose Christianity as a system of rules but as a relationship with the One who leads by way of example."⁴⁰ Barna's concern can be

5. Increase in personal Bible study: Daily lesson study jumped from 15 to 90 percent in two months in Michigan. 6. Increase in caring atmosphere: Four non-Adventist husbands in California attended one Sabbath School to find out why their wives had changed so much.

³⁸Peter J. Prime, *The Gospel of Love and Real Evangelism* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 2009), 145.

³⁹Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 47-48. Winter's findings led him to devise a new terminology representing the true world's situation as it relates to evangelization. The terminology used (E-0, E-1, E-2, and E-3) has been widely accepted in the field of missiology and church growth. E-0 Evangelism aims to bring existing church members to a personal commitment to Christ. E-1 is neighbor evangelism of non-Christians whose language and customs are those of the Christian who is witnessing. E-2 is evangelism across a small linguistic, cultural, or ethnic gap. E-3 is evangelism across a large linguistic, cultural, or ethnic chasm.

⁴⁰George Barna, *Grow Your Church From the Outside In* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002), 161.

adequately addressed with the implementation of the Sabbath School Action Units, due to the emphasis placed on a relational approach to soul winning.

Another benefit of the plan is the activation of holistic small groups. This component has been identified by Christian Schwartz as one of the major characteristics of growing churches.⁴¹ This also coincides with Logan's ten principles which he considered to be crucial to the health of growing churches. These principles, when examined, are basically embedded in the Action Unit plan and should be considered an asset to the church. They are identified as: "visionizing faith and prayer; effective pastoral leadership; culturally relevant philosophy of ministry; celebrative and reflective worship; holistic disciple making; expanding network of cell groups; developing and resourcing leaders; mobilizing believers according to spiritual gifts; appropriate and productive programming; starting churches that reproduce."⁴²

Within the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Sabbath School is given the responsibility to organize its membership into discussion groups that provide a holistic ministry to its members. These groups, known as Action Units, are nurtured, empowered, and challenged to be engaged in outreach projects, making the church relevant in its community. Boren advocated: "The function of cell groups can be summarized in two words: *biblical community*. Church members generally don't need another meeting to add to their weekly schedule. . . . They don't care about church

⁴¹Christian A. Schwarz, *The ABCs of Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 9-17. Schwarz listed eight quality characteristics of growing churches. These characteristics are identified as: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.

⁴²Logan, *Beyond Church Growth*, 19.

growth. . . . But there is an experience for . . . true biblical community.”⁴³ This view fits into the structure adopted by the Sabbath School, and fulfils the need for holistic small groups within a healthy church.

Conclusion

The literary contribution to soul-winning through the Sabbath School has shaped the present trends in Sabbath School evangelism. The contribution made by Ellen White and the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains foundational to Sabbath School ministry. The four basic objectives continue to give relevance to a ministry that caters to the entire church membership and the world in which it exists.

Calvin Smith’s introduction of the Sabbath School Action Units has the potential to transform any congregation into a “cell” church. His reliance on Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White substantiates the paradigm shift from “traditional” large Sabbath School classes to smaller units. This shift, especially as it relates to the size of the units (6-8), is conducive for participation and learning, and is strongly supported by modern educators. His approach fits into the mold of small group ministry and should remain the practice of Sabbath Schools everywhere.

The contribution of “small group” proponents validates the organizational structure of the Sabbath School as an evangelistic environment. It also shows that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in actuality, can be credited as a pioneer of small group ministry. Nevertheless, the church needs to constantly evaluate its approach and

⁴³Boren, “Form Follows Function,” 42.

purposely incorporate the ingredients of successful small groups into its established Sabbath School classes.

As the Sabbath school continues its function, the relevance of the units should be seen as a divine directive; one that is destined to succeed. Ellen White affirmed: "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err."⁴⁴ This endorsement of small group ministry should be seen as God's approval, and when rightly employed receives the blessings of God. She further stated: "In every church let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love."⁴⁵ In response to this appeal, the Sabbath School is committed to the concept of small group ministry and its focus on soul-winning.

⁴⁴White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:21, 22.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 6:21.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF CHURCH GROWTH PATTERNS IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

Introduction

To effectively give an analysis of the church growth pattern in the United States Virgin Islands, I will examine the data as it relates to church growth in the United States Virgin Islands during the period 2000-2009. This includes a comparative analysis of the annual membership; a comparison of the actual baptisms with the expected baptismal goals of the various pastoral districts; and a comparison of baptisms through public and non-public evangelistic campaigns. I will also examine the trends as they relate to Seventh-day Adventist Church growth within the geographical context of the study, and the evangelistic strategies employed.

In addition, I will give a breakdown of the Sabbath School Action Units in the various islands within the territory, and show the need of re-visioning the Sabbath School and making it a viable means of church growth in the United States Virgin Islands. Considering the framework of the study and the multiple districts involved, I will also give a brief profile of the ministry context in relation to the specific task of the project.

Profile of the Ministry Context

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands is

comprised of fourteen congregations, located on the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. Of the fourteen congregations, eight are located in St. Croix, five in St. Thomas, and one in St. John. These congregations accumulated a combined membership of 8,121, with a ministerial staff of eight district pastors, one associate pastor, and a Bible Instructor. These islands occupy an area of 133.73 square miles, with a combined population of 108,612 inhabitants. The ratio of Seventh-day Adventists to the general population is 13:1.

Based on the 2000 census, there were 40,648 households and 26,636 families residing in the United States Virgin Islands. The racial makeup of the territory is comprised of 75.6 percent Blacks, 6.2 percent Whites, and 14.6 percent Hispanics. The census also revealed that 33.2 percent of the population was married couples living together; 34.7 percent of parents had children under the age of 18 living in the same household; 24.9 percent had a female householder with no husband present, and 6.3 percent had senior citizens who were 65 years of age or older living alone. The average household size was 2.64 and the average family size was 3.34.

The census also revealed that in the territory, 31.6 percent of the population were under the age of 18 years; 8 percent were between the ages 18 to 24 years; 27.1 percent ranged between the ages of 25 to 44; 24.9 percent were between the ages of 45 to 64; and 8.4 percent were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 33 years. For every 100 females there were 91.4 males; for every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 87.7 males. The annual population growth was - 0.12 percent.¹ Within this context, the

¹U.S. Census Bureau, "United States Census 2000," <http://www.census.gov/census2000/pdf/usvifullprofile.pdf> (accessed January 2011).

Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced moderate growth during the period 2000-2009, as revealed in the analysis of the data.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in the U.S. Virgin Islands
During the Period 2000-2009

In 2000, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands began with a membership of 7,037. At the end of 2009, there was a membership of 8,121. This gave the church an increase of 1,084 members during that period,² as shown in table 1. This table also shows the breakdown of the annual membership during the period 2000-2009 and confirms the actual membership at the beginning of each year culminating with the membership at the end of 2009.

²The statistical information obtained for this study was made available from the secretariat of the North Caribbean Conference, of S.D.A. Christiansted, St. Croix, USVI.

Table 1. Annual membership 2000-2009

Churches	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2009 (End)
ST.THOMAS											
City	648	660	633	664	612	628	632	634	628	645	648
Maranatha	217	222	228	230	251	249	259	261	267	275	275
Philadelphia	909	941	973	996	1018	1031	1038	1038	1038	1065	1088
Agape	273	288	288	315	331	349	360	360	364	385	386
Shiloh	821	873	887	902	931	952	951	965	988	1008	1019
ST.JOHN											
St. John SDA	109	107	114	111	82	82	88	88	94	93	93
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	659	659	680	686	672	711	714	721	719	716	704
Hope	143	151	159	174	189	189	202	210	224	231	254
Central	1468	1523	1536	1541	1562	1583	1580	1575	1599	1634	1615
Bethel	327	353	363	390	411	390	394	394	403	429	437
Faith	638	662	662	664	665	502	501	497	544	541	547
Peter's Rest	530	547	558	565	594	661	680	679	718	759	755
Sunny Acres	295	312	282	276	283	275	278	282	282	273	277
Campo Rico	N/A	N/A	29	29	29	29	26	26	18	23	23
TOTAL	7037	7298	7422	7543	7630	7631	7703	7730	7886	8077	8121
Annual Growth	NA	3.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.1%	.01%	0.9%	.35%	2%	2.4%	.54%

During that same period, a total of 2,256 members were added to the church by means of baptisms, transfers, and profession of faith, as shown in table 2. Table 3 revealed, during that same period, a total of 1,195 members were dropped from church membership due to death, apostasy, transfer, and missing, representing 53 percent of the total accession. This drop in accession resulted in a net growth of 15 percent over the period 2000-2009. The following figure (figure 1) shows this increase by confirming the membership at that end of 2009 as 115 percent when compared to the 100 percent at the beginning of 2000.

Figure 1. Membership 2000-2009.

Membership Added

The addition of new members to the church is a “solemn obligation . . . in the body of Christ.”³ Ellen G. White reminded the church that God has called us “out of darkness into His marvellous light . . . to show forth His glory.”⁴ The response to God’s call resulted in the addition of new believers to the local church through baptisms, transfer of membership, and profession of faith.⁵ As indicated in table 2, the period covered in this study, 2000-2009 attested to baptisms which yielded 1,932; transfers which resulted in 290; and acceptance by profession of faith which accounted for 34, producing a total of 2256 accessions.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of membership added during the period 2000-2009. It also revealed that 85.6 percent of the total accessions to church membership came by baptisms, 13 percent by transfer, and 1.5 percent by profession of faith.

³*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Bogota, Colombia: Panamericana Formas e Impresos, 2010), 33.

⁴White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 9.

⁵*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 34-45.

Table 2. Membership added 2000-2009

Churches	Baptisms	Transfer	Profession of Faith	Total
ST. THOMAS				
City	109	13	0	122
Maranatha	90	16	0	106
Philadelphia	202	34	3	239
Agape	112	5	0	117
Shiloh	237	32	4	273
ST. JOHN				
St. John SDA Church	28	2	0	30
ST.CROIX				
Christiansted	107	15	2	124
Hope	119	42	0	158
Central	328	33	5	366
Bethel	149	23	2	174
Faith	140	12	6	158
Peter's Rest	267	52	2	321
Sunny Acres	41	11	7	59
Camp Rico	3	0	3	6
TOTAL	1932 (85.6%)	290 (13%)	34 (1.5%)	2,256

An analysis of the data as shown in table 2 verified that each island within the territory experienced an accession of new believers. The congregations in the St. Thomas experienced an accession of 857 members, representing 38 percent of the total accession of those accepted in membership in the United States Virgin Islands during that period, and 25 percent of the membership on St. Thomas. However, at that same time, a total of 309 members were removed from church membership, leaving a net gain of 548 members, as shown in table 3.

St. John experienced an accession of 30 members during the same period, representing 1.3 percent of the total accession in the United States Virgin Islands, and 33.2 percent of the membership in St. John. Conversely, during that same period 46

members were dropped from membership as indicated in table 3, resulting in a negative growth of -17.2 percent.

The churches in St. Croix had an accession of 1,369 members representing 60.7 percent of the total accession in the United States Virgin Islands, and 29.7 percent of the membership in St. Croix. However, 840 members were dropped from church membership during that period, resulting in a net gain of 529 members, as revealed in table 3.

Membership Dropped

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, members are dropped from church membership primarily by transfer, death, and apostasy. However, there are instances where members are unaccounted for, in spite of efforts to locate them over an extended period amounting to years; in such cases, the church in a business meeting can vote that such members be declared missing and dropped from church membership.⁶

The data as revealed in table 3 showed 528 members were dropped due to transfer of membership; 203 due to death; 320 due apostasy; and 81 as missing. Table 3 gives a break-down of members dropped during 2000-2009.

⁶According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, members are removed from church membership by a vote of the local church except in case of death (p. 45).

Table 3. Membership dropped 2000-2009

Churches	Transfer	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total
ST.THOMAS					
City	23	24	75	0	122
Maranatha	33	5	10	0	48
Philadelphia	43	15	2	0	60
Agape	1	1	2	0	4
Shiloh	43	26	6	0	75
ST. JOHN					
St. John SDA Church	12	3	21	10	46
ST. CROIX					
Christiansted	46	19	14	0	79
Hope	32	14	4	0	50
Central	110	24	75	0	219
Bethel	33	5	26	0	64
Faith	45	27	116	59	247
Peter's Rest	50	24	21	0	95
Sunny Acres	48	11	8	10	77
Campo Rico	0	1	2	6	9
TOTAL	519 (46.6%)	209 (18%)	382 (28.2%)	85 (7.1%)	1195

An analysis of the data confirmed 46.6 percent of those dropped from church membership were transferred; 18 percent died; 28.2 percent apostatized; and 7.1 percent were declared missing. The data also revealed that the members dropped amounted to 53 percent of its accession. While the growth from 2000 to 2009 showed an increase in church membership of 15 percent, the annual growth ranged from a low of 0.01 percent to a high of 3.7 percent that resulted in an average annual growth of 1.7 percent, as revealed earlier in table 1. The data also revealed that the growth of the church was largely attributed to conversion of non-Seventh-day Adventists to Adventism, which ultimately resulted in baptisms as indicated in table 2.

This analysis also showed that when the Church was engaged in its mission as outlined in Matt 28:19-20, numerical growth occurred. The increase of 15 percent in membership growth during the ten-year period when applied to the Church of the future, also revealed that the Church runs the risk of having a reduced membership of 15 percent within the next ten years, providing there is no conversion growth. Even with the accession of new members, the Church will most likely lose 53 percent of the total accession within the next ten years due to death, apostasy, transfers, and missing members. A review of the data underscores the need for greater emphasis on church growth and membership care in the United States Virgin Islands.

Baptismal Goals

In the North Caribbean Conference, district pastors are allowed to set their annual baptismal goals for their district. This practice was adopted during the period under review and does not identify the goal of any particular congregation, except in areas where a district is comprised of a single congregation. The following is a break-down of the district goals, as indicated in table 4.

Table 4. District baptism goals (2000-2009)

Districts	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
St. Thomas #1	75	75	60	60	60	60	30	50	50	40
St. Thomas #2	75	75	60	60	60	60	40	50	50	40
St. Thomas #3	70	70	70	55	60	60	40	30	40	25
St. John	10	10	10	11	12	12	20	10	11	12
St. Croix # 1	75	75	60	40	40	40	30	35	35	35
St. Croix # 2	60	60	50	65	100	100	85	85	85	85
St. Croix # 3	50	50	30	50	50	50	30	30	40	40
St. Croix # 4	30	30	50	35	30	30	6	8	10	11
St. Croix #5	N/A	30	40	50	50	50	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	445	475	430	426	462	462	281	298	321	288

The following table shows the baptisms reported during the period 2000-2009. An analysis of the baptisms reported from the various districts showed that only three of the eight pastoral districts reached their goals for the year 2000, as shown in table 5, when compared to table 4. However, in 2001 the pastoral districts were reorganized into nine districts, as revealed in tables 4 and 5. This arrangement continued until 2005—a period of five years. In 2006, the pastoral districts were again reorganized and resorted back to eight pastoral districts until 2009 (see tables 4 and 5).

The data showed that in 2001 and 2002, every district fell short of its baptismal goal, as shown in table 5. In 2003, one district met its goal and in 2004, two districts met their goals. In 2005, only one district met its goal; and in 2006, every district fell short of its goal. In 2007, two districts reached their goals; in 2008, two districts reached their goals, and in 2009, every district failed to reach its goal, as shown in table 5.

Table 5. District baptisms reported (2000-2009)

Districts	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
St. Thomas # 1	19	22	17	41	21	24	10	9	33	5
St. Thomas # 2	35	30	27	28	17	4	0	0	27	34
St. Thomas #3	70	10	44	58	45	19	16	29	43	15
St. John	2	7	0	0	0	13	0	6	0	0
St. Croix # 1	38	20	18	19	49	26	13	52	42	13
St. Croix # 2	74	46	32	30	29	8	12	46	43	44
St. Croix # 3	63	29	25	33	25	9	1	56	28	20
St. Croix # 4	18	2	0	6	2	3	4	3	3	3
St. Croix # 5	N/A	21	9	27	63	20	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	319	187	172	242	251	126	56	201	219	134

Having examined the achievements of baptismal goals, over the ten-year period, the data revealed that three of the nine pastoral districts consistently fell short of their annual baptismal goals; two districts met their goals on three occasions; two districts met their goals once; and one district met its goals on two occasions. This constant failure to reach annual baptismal goals by the pastoral districts accounted for the failure of the North Caribbean Conference to achieve its baptismal goals over the period 2000—2009. During that period, the baptismal goal stood at 3,888; the achievement was 1,932, representing 49.7 percent for that period. The data as shown in figures (2-10) revealed annual achievements per districts ranging from 0 to 186 percent.

These figures show the percentage of annual baptisms achieved in each island of the United States Virgin Islands.

Figure 2. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 3. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 4. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 5. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 6. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 7. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 8. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 9. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Figure 10. Percentage of annual baptismal goal reached during 2000-2009.

Baptisms Through Public Evangelistic Campaigns versus Non-Public Campaigns

Public evangelistic campaigns have become an annual event in the United States Virgin Islands. However, great emphasis was placed on personal evangelism and other methods of soul-winning during the period 2000-2009.⁷ The combined efforts of public and non-public campaigns yielded a total of 1,932 baptisms, as shown in table 6. Unfortunately, many churches have been delinquent in preserving detailed records of their growth. Consequently, baptisms reported to the secretariat of the North Caribbean Conference on the forms provided (see appendix D) did not distinguish between public and non-public evangelistic campaigns. Therefore, baptisms were reported without indication of the method used.

In an attempt to retrieve this data, church pastors and church clerks were

⁷Surveys from the congregation involved in the study showed multiple approaches to evangelism contributed to the soul winning in the various churches (see appendix C).

contacted. As a result, four congregations were able to provide the necessary information, namely two from St. Thomas (Maranatha and Shiloh), and two from St. Croix (Bethel and Faith), as shown in table 6. The following table shows the total baptisms reported by each church, with only four churches making the distinction between baptisms from public and non-public evangelistic campaigns.

As revealed in table 6, of the 327 baptisms reported from the two congregations in St. Thomas, 208 were from public campaigns, representing 63.6 percent of the baptisms. From St. Croix, the two congregations reported a total of 289 baptisms, of which 153 came from public campaigns, representing 52.9 percent. While those four congregations represent only 28.5 percent of the congregations in the United States Virgin Islands, an analysis of the data showed a trend which supported the hypothesis of this study that the majority of baptisms in the United States Virgin Islands came as a result of public evangelism, notwithstanding the significant contributions of other approaches.

Table 6. Baptisms reported per church (2000-2009)

Churches	Public Campaigns	Non-Public Campaigns	Total
St. Thomas			
City	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	109
Maranatha	57	33	90
Philadelphia	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	202
Agape	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	112
Shiloh	151	86	237
St. John			
St. John SDA	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	28
St. Croix			
Christiansted	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	107
Hope	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	119
Central	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	328
Bethel	70	79	149
Faith	83	67	140
Peter's Rest	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	267
Sunny Acres	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	41
Campo Rico	No distinction Indicated	No distinction Indicated	3
Total			1932

Growing Churches in the U.S. Virgin Islands

The growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands has been nominal. The following table shows the membership growth over the ten-year period, 2000-2009.

Table 7. Membership growth 2000-2009

Churches	2000	2009	Percent
ST. THOMAS			
City	648	648	0
Maranatha	217	275	26.7
Philadelphia	909	1088	19.6
Agape	273	386	41.3
Shiloh	821	1019	24.1
ST. JOHN			
St. John SDA	109	93	- 14.3
ST. CROIX			
Christiansted	659	704	6.8
Hope	143	254	77.6
Central	1468	1615	10
Bethel	327	437	33.6
Faith	638	547	- 14.3
Peter's Rest	530	755	42.4
Sunny Acres	295	277	6.1
Campo Rico	29 (From 2002)	23	- 21.7

An analysis of the membership growth, as indicated in table 7, showed that the fastest growing congregation over the ten-year period experienced an accession of 77.6 percent. This growth was attributed to multiple approaches used, without any distinction made between public and non-public campaigns. The data also revealed that five of the growing congregations experience a growth in excess of 25 percent over the ten-year period. Three congregations experienced growth ranging between 10–24 percent. Two

congregation experienced growth between 6.1–6.8 percent; four congregations had a negative growth, ranging from 0–21.7 percent.

While the data revealed a phenomenal growth of 77.6 percent in one congregation, and moderate growth in others, it also revealed a decline in membership of 21 percent of the congregations in the United States Virgin Islands. Considering the mission of the Church and its function in the community, the data revealed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has failed to attract new believers in some communities while there was evidence of its influence in other communities.

Evangelistic Strategy Employed in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Public evangelism remained the dominant approach to soul-winning in the United States Virgin Islands. However, during the period 2000-2009 various strategies were employed: Bible Studies; Revival Services, Bible Correspondence Course; Cell Group Ministry; Sabbath School Community Guest Days; Sabbath Worship Service; Departmental Outreach Projects; Youth Camps; Summer Camps/Vacation Bible School; Open Air Services; Prison Ministry; Seventh-day Adventist Radio and Television Programs, and Friendship Evangelism.

Based on open dialogue with the pastoral staff of the churches of the Virgin Islands, it was revealed that some of the above-mentioned approaches were used in field preparation for public evangelistic campaigns, but there was no compelling evidence that showed that the success of public campaigns was a direct result of the above-mentioned strategies. This is by no means a reflection of the ineffectiveness of those approaches; rather, it is a reflection of how intentionally and convincingly those methods were employed. Very often before an evangelistic campaign, Bible lessons were given out to

the churches so that prospects could be prepared for both graduation and baptism at the end of the series or during the evangelistic campaign, but this often resulted in major disappointments with the cancellation of graduations due to incomplete Bible lessons and inconsistencies by both church members and prospects in utilizing those lessons. There were other instances in which the departments of the local church were challenged to prepare prospects for baptism during evangelistic campaigns, but that approach had not made any significant impact on baptisms. However, evangelistic meetings were conducted despite poor field preparation, and while the baptisms reflected success, one is left to wonder what might have been the result with effective field preparation.

Most of those evangelistic campaigns covered a period of approximately four to five consecutive weeks. When more than one church or district jointly conducted an evangelistic campaign, the baptisms were distributed to the churches involved based on the choice of the new believers. While this approach to island-wide campaigns brought the community of believers together in a concerted effort, the baptisms gained fell short of annual goals as set by the various districts.

Distribution of Baptisms from Major Campaigns

Attempts were made to get a breakdown of baptisms from major crusades to show how the new believers were distributed to the various churches that participated in island-wide campaigns. However, both the local church clerks and the secretariat of the North Caribbean Conference were unable to provide the relevant data for the period 2000-2009, except for the year 2008 in relation to the island of St. Croix. The reasons given for the lack of relevant data regarding the distribution of baptisms from island-wide evangelistic campaigns stated that the reports were sent to the secretariat of the North Caribbean

Conference by the various congregations, which reflected accessions only of the particular church reporting and not the total baptisms of the island-wide campaigns. In addition, the inconsistencies and lateness of reports from the local church to the conference contributed to the absence of relevant data.

Based on the 2008 baptismal report from a major island-wide evangelistic campaign on St. Croix, the results showed a total of 61 baptisms, as shown in table 7. However, when compared with the island-wide goal of 170 for that given year, the baptisms represented 36 percent of that goal. That result showed that public evangelism, though productive, should be supplemented by other methods of soul-winning to ensure that annual baptism goals are met. The following table shows the distribution of baptisms from an island-wide evangelistic campaign.

Table 8. St. Croix island-wide evangelistic campaign in 2008

Churches	Number of Baptisms
Bethel	13
Campo Rico	01
Central	17
Christiansted	04
Hope	07
Peter's Rest	19
Total	61

While the baptisms for the other years during the period 2000-2009 reflected the total baptisms deriving from crusades and other forms of evangelism, no distinctions were made among the methods used. There was also no distinction between island-wide crusades and district crusades.

Having lived and worked in the United States Virgin Islands, based on my observation and experience, many of the island-wide crusades have not yielded adequate baptisms commensurate to the baptismal goals of the combined districts of the island. For example, the 2008 island-wide crusade in St. Croix which yielded sixty-one souls. When distributed to the various churches, each church was short of its goal. Hence, the success of baptismal goals required a combination of varied methods of evangelism. Therefore, in order to achieve baptismal goals, there is a need to employ other methods that will complement the results of public campaigns.

Sabbath School Action Units and Church Growth

The potential of the Sabbath School Action Units is yet to be realized in the United States Virgin Islands. While efforts have been made in the implementation of these units, the focus has not been on soul-winning, but rather on the nurturing and caring of the membership. This approach has been the practice of traditional Sabbath School classes. However, when rightly employed, the Sabbath School Action Units have the potential of transforming the church into a caring evangelistic body of believers.⁸ The

⁸ Calvin Smith reported success in the implementation of the *Sabbath School Action Units*. In one instance, he reported that four non-Adventist husbands came to church one Sabbath to find out why their wives had changed so much. On arrival, they were received so warmly that, before the service ended, they expressed their desire to come back to Sabbath School. It was like this all the time. That week the care coordinator of the class reached out to them and they continued attending church.

Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands established a total of 271 units in the various congregations, as shown in table 8. The sizes of those units ranged from 6 to 20, which showed the need for restructuring in order to comply with the recommended size (6-8).⁹ A breakdown of those units as established in the following islands is as follows:

Table 9. Sabbath School action units in the Virgin Islands

ISLANDS	NO. OF ACTION UNITS
St. Croix	130
St. Thomas	129
St. John	12
Total	271

The number of units from the various islands, when compared with the church membership, revealed that a sizable number of the church membership had not been attending Sabbath School. The constant absence of members from Sabbath School

Paradise Valley established *Action Units* and the Lord has blessed. Thirty-five people were soon brought back to church. Involvement in Ingathering was larger than ever. In 1989, one baptism resulted from Ingathering, and seven earliteens reached out and added thirteen young people to their class. Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 7-8.

⁹Ibid., 11. Calvin Smith asked the question, "Why should classes be formed into groups of 6-8? Small groups' specialists tell us . . . in a group of 20, normally only three or four persons become involved, whereas, 100 percent participation usually occurs in a group of 6-8 people."

highlighted the need for re-visioning the Sabbath School as a viable means of church growth in the United States Virgin Islands.

Conclusion

The data relating to the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands revealed that the Church experienced a moderate growth in membership of 15 percent during the period 2000-2009. While there was an accession of 2,256 members during that period, a total of 1,195 were dropped from church membership, which is equivalent to 53 percent of its accession. This analysis showed that the drop-out rate stood at a ratio of 2:1.

The data also revealed a baptismal goal of 3,888 over the ten-year period of which 1,932 were realized representing 49.7 percent of the goals. It also confirmed that the majority of churches fell short of their baptismal goals, thus impacting negatively the numerical growth of the Church in the United States Virgin Islands. While other methods of soul-winning were used that effected growth in the various congregations, public evangelism remains the primary method used for generating baptisms.

With the constant lack of success in obtaining baptismal goals, greater emphasis must be placed on the mission of the Church and its relevance in the community. With such emphasis, the Sabbath School must be challenged to fulfill its objectives, especially as it relates to community outreach. This approach has the potential to grow the Church through its existing structure and thus fulfill its mission.

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIES FOR SOUL-WINNING THROUGH THE SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

Introduction

Soul-winning is not an accident; rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of unbelievers leading them to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives and thus become members of the Body of Christ—the Church. It is the ultimate fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore, in this chapter, I will emphasize the importance of embracing the mission of the Church by maximizing the congregational structure of the local church for soul-winning, especially as it relates to the Sabbath School. I will outline a strategy for achieving baptismal goals through the Sabbath School Action Units, which will ultimately grow the church through its inherent structure. I will also show how ministries can be matched with spiritual gifts, especially as it relates to the work of Sabbath School.

Maximizing the Structure of the Local Church for Soul-winning

The local church, as defined by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, is “a group of members in a defined location that has been granted, by the constituency of a

conference in session, an official status as a church.”¹ The effective function of this local church is largely dependent on her ability to utilize the organizational structure inherent in the body. The manual further stated, “The most important elements of structure and organization are the officers and the departments. . . . Every church should utilize the services of the departments and organizations to nurture its members and accomplish the mission given by Christ (Matt 28:19; Rev 10; 11; 14:6).” These departments are organized into assigned ministries with the intent of fulfilling the Gospel Commission and achieving the goals of the local church. The following is a list of departments:

Children’s Ministries

Communication

Education

Family Life Ministries

Health Ministries

Music

Personal Ministries

Public Affairs and Religious Liberty

Publishing Ministries

Sabbath School

Stewardship Ministries

Women’s Ministries

Youth Ministries

¹*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 15.

The local church, in its strategic planning, should seek to engage the departments in soul-winning by securing their involvement in the evangelistic plans and goals of the local church. Once those plans and goals are agreed upon and voted by the church, each department should be assigned a portion of the church's evangelistic goal, and should be held accountable to the pastor. The role of the pastor is crucial. William M. Easum strongly argued that "the single most important factor in determining the growth of a church is the pastor's attitude toward its mission."²

With the pastor and members working as a team, there is a greater assurance of success. The pastor functions as the team leader and the various ministries' leaders as members of the team. This concept of a team is described by Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith as "a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."³ When this concept is grasped by church leaders, there will be greater participation of ministries' leaders in establishing a clear vision and mission focus along with attainable goals and objectives. This approach will foster better working relationship with pastors and local church leaders and will give departments a sense of ownership and responsibility for the growth and advancement of the local church. George Barna, in his research concluded:

Intentional outreach will fail to have a significant impact, though, unless the ministry is undertaken by the congregation rather than just the paid professionals. Keeping in mind, turnaround pastors gave top priority to equipping the laity for effective, targeted ministry. Indeed, until the people believe enough in themselves as ministers

²William M. Easum, *The Church Growth Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 56-58.

³Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams* (Boston: Harper Business School Press, 1993), 45.

on God's behalf, there was little chance that they would believe the church could sustain a comeback.⁴

While each department is expected to be engaged in the fulfillment of the Gospel Commission, the Personal Ministries Department is responsible for training and equipping the church for soul-winning; notwithstanding the role of the pastor as one assigned by God to equip the saints for ministry (Eph 4:11-13). According to the General Conference *Personal Ministries Handbook*, "The mission of Personal Ministries is to provide resources and train church members to unite their efforts with the ministry and in the final proclamation of the gospel of salvation in Christ. The aim of the department is to enlist every member in active soul-winning service for God."⁵

To strengthen the relevance of this department, the handbook further states:

The Personal Ministries Department was established as a major setting for soul winning activities in the Church. It exists to teach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in response to the command of Jesus, in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. To honor this original purpose, the Personal Ministries Department continues to communicate the good news with the objective to win, hold, and train for Jesus Christ, men, women, youth, boys and girls, in all the world where church growth is limited.⁶

In conjunction with the role of the Personal Ministries Department, each department, though functioning in a nurturing role, should take the initiative to empower its team members in knowledge and skills for the task of soul winning.

⁴George Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 49.

⁵General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *The Personal Ministries Handbook* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2003), 3.

⁶Ibid.

The Challenge

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is given the solemn responsibility of proclaiming the Three Angels' Messages (Rev 14:6-12) to a lost world. We are reminded that "time is short, and our forces must be organized to do a larger work."⁷ Considering the context in which the Church is established, with a ratio of 13:1 Seventh-day Adventists to the general population in the United States Virgin Islands, the admonition given by Ellen G. White is timely and should influence our evangelistic plans. She stated: "The Sabbath School if rightly conducted, is one of God's great instrumentalities to bring souls to the knowledge of truth."⁸ This statement brings into question the manner in which Sabbath school is conducted. It also raises our awareness of the need for evaluation and improvement of the Sabbath School.

The Sabbath School, in its present structure, needs to employ the avenues created by the Action Units to do a greater work. Organizing the Sabbath School into Action Units can pose numerous challenges. Some of these challenges identified in the North Caribbean Conference include: lack of discussion leaders for additional classes as required by the Action Units; lack of space in the congregational setting; resistance to change of seating areas. In addressing these challenges the Sabbath School committee should be proactive in providing possible solutions. These should include: appointing existing assistant discussion leaders to be discussion group leaders of the additional units. With smaller classes, less space is occupied, therefore, more classes do not necessarily

⁷White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:27.

⁸White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 115.

require more space. The church should also educate its membership on the relevance of change and the benefits it brings to the congregation. This will also require pastors and church leaders to demonstrate tact, leadership, and sound biblical rationale in facilitating the change. In collaboration with the Sabbath School Council and the church board, the coordinator of the Sabbath School should inform the discussion leaders of the direction in which the Sabbath School is heading and, at the same time, secure their commitment and cooperation for effective implementation. They should constantly be reminded that they are members of a team.

Ellen White further asked the question: "What evidence can we give to the world that the Sabbath School work is not a mere pretence?"⁹ Again, she expressed her concern by stating: "Our views are too narrow; we need a more extended vision that we may take in the wants of the cause."¹⁰ Hence, the reason re-visioning the Sabbath School as a viable means of church growth in the United States Virgin Islands is germane to the fulfillment of the Gospel Commission.

Embracing the Sabbath School Action Units

The implementation of the Sabbath School Action Units is an attempt to utilize the structure of the Sabbath School for the fulfillment of the Gospel Commission. This also provides an avenue for adequately reaching the community with the gospel and thus achieving the evangelistic goals as set by the church. Evangelistic goals are not restricted to baptismal goals, but takes in new evangelistic challenges such as: entering new

⁹White, *Counsel on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 61.

¹⁰Ibid., 67.

territories, reaching the upper class, taking the gospel to the unchurched and the various people groups that are yet to be reached with the gospel. This endeavor requires an organized approach and the involvement of each unit. These units, when organized for service, should be responsible for assigned areas and various ministry challenges.

Calvin Smith's work on Sabbath School Action Units emphasized the importance of "nurturing new members, reclaiming the missing, and fulfilling the mission of the church."¹¹ In embracing this concept, churches have experienced a transformation both in caring and nurturing.¹² However, utilizing the units to intentionally evangelize the community and grow the Church has not been a major emphasis of the Sabbath School. Based on Ellen G. White's vision and counsels in regard to Sabbath School work, this ministry has the potential to attract and win the greatest number of souls coming into the ranks of church membership.¹³

Considering her role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and her insights on Sabbath School work, when compared to the present condition of the Sabbath School in the Virgin Islands, it is noticeable that full attention has not been given to her counsels. She often referred to the Sabbath School as a "soul-winning ministry."¹⁴ This ministry,

¹¹Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 1.

¹²Ibid., 4-5. Smith reported: 1. 44 Muslim families were ready for baptism as a result of *Sabbath School Action Units* in one village in the West Indonesia Union Mission only six months after the plan was introduced. 24 baptisms reported in the first four months of the fourth year of *Action Units* in one Michigan church. The church, prior to the *Action Units* had experienced only one or two baptisms per year for ten years. 2. Inactive former members returned to church. About 50 families returned to Sabbath School, reported a Michigan Sabbath School. 3. Increasing caring atmosphere. Four non-Adventist husbands in California attended one Sabbath School to find out why their wives had changed so much.

¹³White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 10.

¹⁴Ibid., 157.

when embraced by leaders who are consecrated, will grow the church both spiritually and numerically. Calvin Smith advocated:

Sabbath School members who unite as one in love for souls, who show unselfish, caring concern, are able through the power of the Holy Spirit to provide an atmosphere where outreach can truly be effective and lasting. The church then becomes a safe place for the Lord to bring new believers. New converts, who in the past were often not assimilated and bonded into the family, are now provided with a warm climate where they can grow spiritually, be challenged and trained effectively, and become happily involved in the outreach mission of the church.¹⁵

Re-visioning the Sabbath School for Church Growth

Ellen G. White, in commenting on Sabbath School work, said:

Our Sabbath Schools are nothing less than Bible societies, and in the sacred work of teaching the truths of God's word, they can accomplish far more than they have hitherto accomplish. The Sabbath school, when rightly managed, possesses marvellous power, and is adapted to doing a great work, but it is not now what it may and should be. The influence growing out of Sabbath school work should improve and enlarge the Church; but in no case should it ever be allowed to divert from the interests of the church. There is a most precious missionary field in the Sabbath school, and if there are now omens of good, they are only indications and beginnings of what may be done.¹⁶

While this concern was expressed in 1889 within a different geographical context, Ellen White's dream is still relevant to the context of this study, and is yet to be realized in its fullness. The success of Sabbath School work, therefore, must be measured by its objectives, namely: Fellowship, World Mission Emphasis, Study of God's Word, and Community Outreach. When the Sabbath School, in its weekly operation, is characterized by these objectives, it can be labeled as a success. However, as it relates to the churches in the United States Virgin Islands, there is a need for a

¹⁵Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 2.

¹⁶White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 9.

balanced approach to Sabbath School and greater emphasis on Community Outreach.

This aspect of Sabbath School is fundamental to the growth of the Church, and is keeping in sync with its mission (Matt 28:19-20).

With the implementation of the Sabbath School Action Units, avenues are created for meeting the outlined objectives of the Sabbath School. The weekly format, as suggested by Calvin Smith, gives the Church an opportunity to build relationships and empower its members to reach out to the wider community. His recommendation for the operation of the units is as follows:

1. The presiding Sabbath School Coordinator must turn the class over to the Discussion Group leaders by 9:40 on Sabbath mornings.
2. The Discussion Group leaders should spend five minutes in welcoming those present and identify the missing members.
3. The units should then be handed over to the respective care-coordinators for a maximum of 15 minutes. During that period the care-coordinator is expected to call for experiences related to class plans; assign visits to missing members; promote class plans; and conduct prayer sessions.
4. The Discussion Group leaders should then assume their role in leading the group discussions. This portion of the study of God's word should be given 35 minutes. During that period the Discussion Group leaders are expected to function as facilitators: reviewing the high points of the lesson, encouraging participation in an interactive manner, and applying lessons to real life situations.¹⁷

By applying these basic guidelines, the Sabbath School will be enhanced, the objectives will be met, the needs of the members will be addressed, and they will be empowered for service.

¹⁷Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 37.

Maximizing Opportunities

The Sabbath School in the Virgin Islands is blessed to have in its weekly programs guests from the community who have chosen to congregate with the church family in worship and study of God's Word. Very often, these guests are made to feel welcome in church and are left with no follow-up plan until invited to another program. In such cases, the Sabbath School should seize the opportunity to develop a friendly relationship with these individuals by visiting and praying with them during the week. Their needs should also be identified, and efforts must be made by the church family to meet the needs of these prospective members. According to Scott Dawson and Scott Lenning, "Evangelism is not a program we use but a relationship we share."¹⁸

Apart from the weekly attraction of visitors to the Sabbath School, there are Sabbath School Community Guest Days, Sabbath School picnics, community prayer walks, and other programs sponsored by the Sabbath School that facilitate contacts with potential members of the Church. These prospects should be seen as individuals who have been introduced to Christ and should be given an opportunity to make a decision for Christ through follow-up Bible studies, invitations to evangelistic meetings, and other church-related services. In relation to Sabbath School Community Guest Days, the program should be properly planned; special recognition should be given to the guests who have responded to the personal invitation of the Sabbath School. James Cress believed that "churches in smaller communities can have a greater impact on an

¹⁸Scott Dawson and Scott Lenning, *Evangelism Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 168.

established society by honoring others in the community who are known by all residents.”¹⁹

Another area of evangelistic opportunity is the Children’s Division of the Sabbath School. Children should be challenged and encouraged to invite their friends and neighbours to Sabbath School. While this approach has not been very successful among adults, the children, if rewarded and recognized for their effort, are most likely to respond positively. When these little friends visit Sabbath School, they must be treated with love and acceptance, and be encouraged to bring their parents along with them. Whether the parents of these children respond to their children’s invitation or not, it gives the Sabbath School an opportunity to dialogue with these parents and establish a relationship with them. This can be done by sending them “thank you” notes, planning home visitation, praying for the well-being of the family, and being there for them in times of need.

Our Sabbath School has been affected by the constant absence of members who have eventually been declared missing and, as a result, dropped from Sabbath School and church membership. Others have apostatized, and they too have been dropped from church membership and sometimes Sabbath School membership.²⁰ In such cases, the Sabbath School must seek to develop an approach to reclaim missing members. Imbedded in the operation of the Sabbath School Action Units is the concept of membership care. However, reaching backslidden members requires much prayer and

¹⁹James A. Cress, “The Pastor as a Catalyst for Creating Special Ways to Enhance Special Services,” in *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, eds. Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), 110.

²⁰Members who are dropped from church membership based on church policy and continue to attend Sabbath School are considered to be members of the Sabbath School and not members of the church.

tact. The following guidelines, recommended by Calvin Smith, have proven to be helpful when visiting former members:

1. Pray for your prospect before and during the visit.
2. Claim for yourselves the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, His wisdom, and Christ's love for the former member.
3. Avoid arguments with former Adventists—you are a witness.
4. Do not defend yourself, the Church, or anyone.
5. Do not preach by telling the person he should look to Jesus and not others.
6. Study information you have about that person, for example, why dropped from church membership, age, present interests and concerns.
7. Make your first visit short. Use warmth, tact, and gentleness.
8. Introduce yourself as from the Seventh-day Adventist Church to have a short visit.
9. If you are not acquainted with the person, you may use the acronym F O R T - (Family, Occupation, Religion, Testimony). Under "Religion" say, "Tell me something about your religious background." If the following information is not volunteered under "Family," then ask: (a) "Did your parents attend the Adventist Church?" (b) "Did you attend church school? If so, for how long?"
10. Help the prospect to remember the past with fondness. Ask questions such as: (a) "Who baptized you?" (b) "Were you happy?" (c) "Did you hold a church office?" (d) "What did you especially enjoy?"
11. Ask the prospect, "How long has it been since you've attended church?" Also ask, "Would you mind sharing what caused you to become inactive?"

12. Express appreciation for honesty; do not refute or argue.
13. Listen attentively before responding with comments or suggestions. If the person was treated badly, do not take sides.
14. At the appropriate time, ask: "May I ask you a personal question? "Do you still believe the message the Church teaches is still the message the Church has for the world?"
15. Then ask, "Have you thought recently of coming back?"
16. Invite the person back and do everything you can to be of help.
17. Encourage the prospect to read, study, pray, and listen so the Holy Spirit can speak to his or her heart and create a desire.
18. If the person expresses interest in returning to church, be willing to commit to the following:
 - (a) Arrange to bring him or her to your Sabbath School class or to church.
 - (b) Have sundown worship together.
 - (c) Pray with and for the individual.
 - (d) Leave something to read, such as *Steps to Christ* or any other appropriate literature.
19. If the prospect is not ready to return, find a reason to visit again and pray before leaving.
20. Subsequent visits to a prospect that is not ready to return should be arranged with him or her and should include members who have had similar struggles.²¹

²¹Smith, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*, 65-66.

Utilizing the Structure of the Sabbath School to Achieve Baptismal Goals

Apart from the departmental structure of the local church, the Sabbath School being the major department has a structure that incorporates every member and worshipper of the local congregation.²² The membership is grouped by ages and stages, which are labeled: Beginner, Kindergarten, Primary, Junior, Earliteen, Youth, and Adult. Each group is ministered to through the various divisions; namely, children, youth, and adult. However, the purpose of Sabbath School is not limited to the nurturing of its members, but also requires the membership to be engaged in the evangelization of the community.

Since the Gospel Commission requires the Church to make disciples, baptism remains an integral part of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). Therefore, in response to the commission given, the Church must aim to baptize those who are reached with the gospel, and must be intentional in setting baptismal goals. The following proposition, when applied, can revolutionize the local church:

1. The Sabbath School Department should set quarterly baptismal goals.
2. Each Sabbath School Action Unit must be challenged to prepare one candidate for baptism at the end of each quarter.
3. This initiative should be launched at the beginning of each quarter with prayer, fasting, and a consecration service especially prepared for Sabbath School Action Unit leaders and their teams.

²²According to the *Sabbath School Handbook*, the membership of the Sabbath School is comprised of all ages (0–Adult) and provides a ministry for each stage of the member’s development, thus making it the largest department of the church.

4. Weekly reminders of the initiative should be placed in the church bulletin, multi-media screen, and other forms of church-related announcements.

5. A semi-annual service of thanksgiving and celebration should be held in gratitude for souls baptized.

When such initiative is taken, a church, for example, with ten functional Sabbath School Action Units is expected to baptize ten souls per quarter, and a total of forty souls per year. The same applies to any church, regardless of the number of units. This prospect of such phenomenal growth should not come as a surprise to the Church. Ellen White's counsel serves as a reminder: "The Sabbath School, if rightly conducted, is one of the great instrumentalities to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth."²³ Added to that, White encouraged the Church: "We are living in the time of the Holy Spirit's power. It is seeking to diffuse itself through the agency of humanity, thus increasing its influence in the world."²⁴ The work of the Holy Spirit, though incomprehensible, is available (Zach 4:6). Hence, the reason the Church must launch out in faith, expecting great and marvelous things as she responds to the Gospel Commission (Matt 28:19, 20). This can be evident in the implementation of Branch Sabbath School as a form of Community Outreach of the Sabbath School.

Branch Sabbath School

Branch Sabbath School is defined as an evangelistic program coordinated by the

²³White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 115.

²⁴Ellen G. White, *Instruction for Effective Christian Service* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Home Missionary Department, 1947), 251.

Sabbath School, using Sabbath School materials, to be held on any day of the week.²⁵

This is an avenue that provides evangelistic opportunities for the Church to make an impact on the community. According to the *Sabbath School Handbook*, the operation of Branch Sabbath School requires a leader whose duties “fall into three categories: organization, programming and soul winning.”²⁶ However, the success of this neglected area of Sabbath School work necessitates the leadership of the Sabbath School to take the initiative and educate the Church for this potential evangelistic explosion. Branch Sabbath School can be held “in all kinds of places,” such as private homes, public buildings, vacant buildings, nursing homes, prison, outdoors, or any other setting deemed appropriate.²⁷

With the emphasis placed on the Church’s mission and the need for the Sabbath School to meet its objectives, the implementation of Branch Sabbath School is in keeping with the objectives and will satisfy the need for Community Outreach. Jan Paulsen, former president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, at an international conference on Adventists in the community, remarked: “We need a paradigm shift—service is service, and the focus should be on people. After all, the church is part of a community, and we should help people feel that our presence in the community makes a difference to their welfare.”²⁸ Therefore, to ensure that the Church

²⁵*Sabbath School Handbook*, 90.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸Jonathan Gallagher, “GC Promotes Adventists in the Community,” *Adventist Review*, November 18, 2004, 18.

makes a positive impact on the community, each Sabbath School Action Unit must be challenged to have as its Community Outreach project, a Branch Sabbath School. This will not only ensure the fulfillment of a fundamental objective of the Sabbath School, but it can also be the focus for ensuring quarterly baptismal goals of the Action Units. This approach to Community Outreach fits into the evangelistic concept of Scott Dawson when he says:

Evangelism must be intentional--our approach in our communities must be thought-out and be deliberate. Evangelism has to be authentic-people need to believe in the person speaking before the message is presented. Evangelism should be targeted-we are seeing a paradigm shift from event to experience. Evangelism must focus on specific groups-students to seniors will seek out those who identify with their struggles and will likely be attracted to people or groups that are similar.²⁹

Considering the importance of Dawson's notion, the following guidelines should be applied for the success of Branch Sabbath School:

1. Sabbath School leaders must see Branch Sabbath School as an integral part of Sabbath School operation and the mission of the Church.
2. Resource personnel should facilitate training sessions for Branch Sabbath School leaders from each Action Unit prior to launching.
3. Inform the church and ask each Action Unit leader to secure commitment from his or her unit for the operation of a Branch Sabbath School.
4. Arrange for an appropriate time and venue for the weekly meeting and seek to incorporate prospective members in the process.
5. Identify target groups (children, youth, single parents, families, or any such group that is receptive to the gospel).

²⁹Dawson and Lenning, *Evangelism Today*, 18.

6. Allow each unit to choose a target group. Having chosen a target group, the unit must study the context in which the group lives, and seek to build a friendly relationship with the community and potential Branch Sabbath School members. This can be done through friendly house-to-house visits, prayer walks, literature distribution, food and clothing distribution, and meeting felt needs at least three months prior to the launching of the Branch Sabbath School.

7. Adopt a program format that will generate interaction and help build relationships. This can be done by teaching new songs, DVD presentations, storytelling, group discussions, and other interactive program ideas.

8. Each Action Unit is responsible for preparing its Branch Sabbath School members to participate in a Sabbath School program in the local church once per quarter.

9. At the completion of a quarter's lesson study, a certificate of participation should be issued to each participant at a planned church service, and each student should be enrolled for the following quarter, which will focus on another series of lessons.

10. After one year of operation, new students should be recruited, and those who have completed a year should be graduated and be attached to the local church as members of the Sabbath School and, hopefully, members of the church.

The use of the Sabbath School lessons as a study guide in Branch Sabbath School is a most valuable tool that should not be ignored. Jonathan Kuntaraf, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Director of the General Conference said, "Studying the Sabbath School Bible study guide is vitally important for our members for their spiritual growth,

and also to equip them to share the good news of salvation with others.”³⁰ These lessons, whether they are current or not contain truths that are relevant, not only for church members, but also for those who are seeking salvation and a closer walk with God.

Ellen G. White, in commenting on the relevance of the Sabbath School lessons, emphasized the following:

1. “Not only because it gives to young and old knowledge of God’s word, but because it awakens in them a love for sacred truths, and a desire to study them for themselves. . . . It teaches them to regulate their lives by its own teachings.”³¹
2. “Great truths which have been neglected and unappreciated for the ages, will be revealed by the Spirit of God, and new meanings will flash out of familiar texts.”³²
3. “The most precious truths are revealed; the living oracles are heard by wondering ears, and the consciences of men are aroused”³³
4. “The precious knowledge thus gained will build a barrier about the soul.”³⁴

The involvement of the Church in Branch Sabbath School will impact the community and will make the Church relevant in its locale. It will maximize the use of the Sabbath School lessons both as a study guide and a valuable evangelistic literature. It will also help build a stronger relationship with the community. Jeff Anderson, Billy Graham Crusade Director, said, “Effective evangelism is relational. It is relating to

³⁰Jonathan Kuntaraf, “Why Study the Sabbath School Lessons?” *LEAD 3* (April-June 2010): 3.

³¹White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1966), 10, 11.

³²*Ibid.*, 35.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, 36.

individuals one-on-one. It is intentionally being there at a point of need to comfort and encourage in a practical way.”³⁵ This concept of evangelism is realized through the operation of Branch Sabbath School. This avenue reaches both the young and the old for Jesus and should not be seen as merely another program of the Church. It can prove to be one of the most effective evangelistic approaches to soul winning with an impact similar to cell group ministry.

Matching Ministries with Gifts

The use of spiritual gifts to advance the mission of the Church is God’s plan for effective ministry (1 Cor 12; Rom 8; Eph 4). These passages teach that God gives every believer a spiritual gift to be used in ministry. Therefore, the ministry of the Sabbath School should be placed in the hands of those who are gifted by the Holy Spirit for the assigned responsibility. The concept of matching ministries with gifts has its roots in the New Testament Church. The record stated:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert of Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6: 1-7)

³⁵Dawson and Lenning, *Evangelism Today*, 168.

This is an example of a ministry that was created to fulfill a need and remains a model for God's Church today. As it relates to the Sabbath School, the fulfillment of its objectives is largely dependent on finding the right match to meet the ministry challenge. Rick Warren advocated that "the most critical factor in a new ministry isn't the idea, but the leadership. Each ministry rises and falls on the leadership. Without the right leader, a ministry will just stumble along, possibly doing more harm than good."³⁶

For effective ministry, the Sabbath School must employ the following guidelines.

1. Identify the spiritual gifts of the Sabbath School membership. It is the responsibility of the pastor to help each member of the congregation to identify his or her spiritual gifts. However, in the best interest of the Sabbath School and its pursuit for excellence, the coordinator should initiate a spiritual gifts assessment among its membership. This can be done by taking a spiritual gifts inventory of every member on a given Sabbath morning. It can also be done in every Sabbath School Action Unit as a feature of the Sabbath School. Another approach, as recommended by Rick Warren, suggested that the believer should start experimenting with different ministries and then the gifts would be discovered.³⁷ This coincides with Burrill's approach to spiritual gifts discovery in which he outlined a five-step process: Pray; Explore possibilities; Experiment with many gifts; Examine your feelings; Evaluate your effectiveness.³⁸ Whatever approach is taken, ensure that both the believer and the church leadership are

³⁶Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 384.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 371.

³⁸Russell C. Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 72-76.

knowledgeable about the spiritual gifts available in the congregation.

2. **Assess the needs of the Sabbath School.** This can be adequately done through a survey. It can also be done through open dialogue with the Sabbath School, allowing the membership to share their concerns and identify needs.

3. **Conduct training sessions for the various clusters of spiritual gifts identified.** These clusters can be classified as: evangelism, leadership, faith, giving, healing, intercession, discernment, knowledge, shepherding, teaching, administration, hospitality, tongues, and wisdom (Rom 12; Eph 4; 1 Cor 12). This step, when taken, is in keeping with the counsel given by Ellen G. White, which says: “The greatest help that can be given to our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers.”³⁹ She further stated: “The work of God in this earth can never be finished, until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”⁴⁰

4. **Match the ministry need with the identified gifts.** This approach places every member in an area of competence and giftedness and will make implementation of initiatives, such as Sabbath School Action Units and Branch Sabbath School, easier and more successful.

The use of spiritual gifts, according to Bruce Bugbee, brings benefits to the person, the church, and God’s kingdom.⁴¹ He referred to personal benefits by stating:

³⁹White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:17.

⁴⁰White, *Gospel Workers*, 52.

⁴¹Bruce Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 39.

“Once you know and use your spiritual gifts, you will know your job description. . . .

When you know your spiritual job description, your ministry will be more focused.”⁴² He referred to church benefits as “more unity and harmony in churches that teach and develop gift-based ministries.”⁴³ He viewed kingdom benefits when “God is glorified and people are edified in the church that teaches and develops gift-based ministries.”⁴⁴

The benefits that come to the individual, the church, and God’s kingdom when given the opportunity to minister in the area of giftedness can spark a revolution in the Church, as spoken of by Russell Burrill.⁴⁵ Warren echoed similar concern when he said: “The greatest need in evangelical churches is the release of members for ministry.”⁴⁶ He cited a Gallup survey which stated that “only 10 percent of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry and that 50 percent of all church members have no interest serving in any ministry . . . 40 percent of all members have expressed an interest in having a ministry, but they have never been asked, or they don’t know how.”⁴⁷

This situation can be adequately addressed when the church maximizes the giftedness of its membership. Warren emphasized the importance of laying a biblical foundation for everything that is done in church. He said: “People always want to know

⁴²Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*, 39.

⁴³Ibid., 40.

⁴⁴Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵Russell Burrell, in his book *Revolution in the Church*, proposed that the work of the pastor is not primarily soul-winning. He established from the Bible that the chief job description of pastors is to train laymen and women for ministry. When this biblical directed is followed, there will be a revolution in the church.

⁴⁶Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 365.

⁴⁷Ibid., 365, 366.

‘why’ before you teach them ‘how.’ Invest time teaching your members the biblical basis for lay ministry.”⁴⁸ He encouraged church leaders to teach the members what he considered to be the “four pillars of lay ministry.”⁴⁹ These pillars are stated as follows:

1. *Every believer is a minister*: This biblical truth does not mean that every believer is a pastor, but every believer is called to minister (Mark 10:45). Warren proposed that every member of the body of Christ is created for ministry (Eph 2:10), saved for ministry (2 Tim 1:9), called into ministry (1 Pet 2:9-11), gifted for ministry (Matt 28:18-20), commanded to minister (Matt 20:26-28), to be prepared for ministry (Eph 4:11-12), needed for ministry (1 Cor 12:27), accountable for ministry, and will be rewarded according to his or her ministry (Col 3:23-24).

2. *Every ministry is important*: This concept is recorded in 1 Cor 12:18-22 where the apostle Paul stated that God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. The eye cannot say to the hand that it’s not needed; and the head cannot say to the feet, that they are not needed. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

3. *We are all dependent on each other*: This concept states that every ministry is intertwined with the other ministries of the church; each depends on the other for cooperation and success. This is clearly demonstrated in the analogy in which the church is compared to the body (Rom 12:6). When one member is sick, the entire body is affected.

⁴⁸Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 367.

⁴⁹Ibid.

4. *Ministry is the expression of spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences:* This pillar, as proposed by Warren, is referred to as SHAPE, the acronym for spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences. He believes that each of us was uniquely designed or shaped by God to do certain things.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The departmental structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church can be viewed as the foundation laid for the growth and expansion of its mission. Each department was designed to nurture and empower its members for effective Christian witnessing and the saving of souls for God's Kingdom. In pursuit of that goal, the Personal Ministries Department is given special responsibilities to train and equip the membership for soul-winning. The Sabbath School, on the other hand, being the department assigned with four main objectives (Fellowship; Study of God's Word; World Mission Emphasis; Community Outreach), is given the responsibility of membership care and evangelism. This task requires a Sabbath School leadership that is committed to its objectives and focused on the Church's mission. It also requires a leadership that is prepared to downsize the traditional Sabbath School classes into sizes of six to eight, transforming them into Sabbath School Action Units. This approach, when taken with the cooperation of the membership, has the potential to move the church in a direction conducive for growth.

The inherent structure of the Sabbath School provides it with an opportunity to minister to varied age groups (beginner, kindergarten, primary, junior, earliteen, youth,

⁵⁰Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 367-368.

and adult) in an environment favorable for sharing and learning. In addition, this structure facilitates and motivates the membership to achieve evangelistic goals. As proposed in this chapter, the Sabbath School, if rightly conducted, can revolutionize the Church. The witnessing opportunities provided through the many programs and initiatives should be maximized for soul winning.

One of the most effective methods recommended for reaching baptismal goals is the quarterly baptisms through the outreach program of the Sabbath School Action Units. Sabbath School coordinators are challenged to schedule these baptismal services in collaboration with the pastor, expecting each unit to prepare one candidate for baptism each quarter of the calendar year. This concept is a formula envisioned for church growth within the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It encourages friendship evangelism, and motivates the church to be mission-focused. It does not only generate an increase in membership, but it is structured to nurture and care for new believers. Another area of great evangelistic potential is the Branch Sabbath School. Each Sabbath School Action Unit is encouraged to embrace this initiative as an opportunity to reach the community for Jesus.

The success of these initiatives necessitates the giftedness and willingness of the believers to work harmoniously for the building-up of God's kingdom. God has empowered His Church with spiritual gifts; when those gifts are identified and adequately matched with ministries, there will be a joy in service comparable to the Apostolic Church. In addition, souls will be added to the church, the mission will be accomplished, and Jesus will come (Matt 24:14).

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Re-visioning the Sabbath School as a viable means of church growth through its Action Units has the potential to revolutionize local congregations in the United States Virgin Islands. The theology of congregational soul winning in the Seventh-day Adventist Church involves the giftedness of every member in the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-9). This concept is primarily based on Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. The usage of the words *qahal*, *edhah*, and *ekklesia* in Scripture (as indicated in chapter 2), all relate to an assembly and are used in reference to God's people.

In the New Testament, the usage of *ekklesia* as a congregation revealed the responsibility placed upon the believers to make disciples of men. This process of disciple making was experienced by the twelve disciples, whom Jesus called and nurtured in a small group setting. In obedience to Jesus, they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and bore witness to the gospel of Christ. Their focus on the mission of the Church and the hope of the second coming served as a model of faith and commitment for the remnant Church. Ellen G. White, in her writings, encouraged the Church to be organized and trained for the task of fulfilling the Great Commission so that the return of Christ could be realized (Matt 24:14).

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church embarks on its mission, the existing

departmental structure should focus on accomplishing that mission as outlined in Matt 28:19-20. Based on the counsels given by Ellen G. White, the Sabbath School is expected to champion the cause of soul-winning. The engagement of the Sabbath School in this process is in keeping with its objectives, namely: Fellowship; World Mission Emphasis; Study of God's Word; Community Outreach.

The contribution of the *Sabbath School Handbook* published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen G. White's *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, and Calvin Smith's publication on *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units* have contributed greatly to the evangelistic focus of the Sabbath School. While the Sabbath School has benefited from literature that addressed the evangelistic potential of its operation, publications relating to small group ministry have also contributed and continue to be relevant to the purpose of Sabbath School. The similarities that exist between the operation of Sabbath School Action Units and small group ministry present a compelling reason for Sabbath School evangelism to utilize resources that address the subject of small group ministry, especially as they relate to soul-winning.

Given the context in which this study was conducted, the growth of the Church during the last decade (2000-2009) has been below the projected expectations. The analysis of the data revealed that 49.7 percent of the projected baptisms were realized; 53 percent of the total accessions were dropped from Church membership, which resulted in an average annual growth of 1.7 percent of membership over the period, 2000-2009. The revelation brought about by the data showed the need for devising new methods of achieving baptismal goals and experiencing growth.

This desired growth and fulfillment of the church's mission require church

leadership to take the initiative in planning strategies that will incorporate the departmental structure that now exists in the local church to accomplish evangelistic goals. The implementation of Sabbath School Action Units has the potential to serve as an environment where spiritual and numerical growth could be accomplished. The attention given to membership care, involvement, and evangelism in the Action Units will serve as a possible antidote for inactivity, drop-outs, and the failure to reach baptismal goals. With the functioning of these units under the supervision of the Sabbath School coordinator, the Church will experience the desired growth and its mission will be accomplished.

Recommendations

After examining the data presented in this study in reference to the biblical teaching of the Church and its mission, the following recommendations are submitted:

1. The Seventh-day Adventist congregations in the United States Virgin Islands need to demonstrate an intentional focus on the Church's mission to the territory. This can be accomplished by pastoral involvement in training the laity and getting them involved in ministries of their giftedness.
2. Pastoral leadership needs to guide departmental leaders in the local church to function as a team in order to accomplish the church's mission. This can be done through leadership seminars geared to empower local church leadership.
3. Sabbath School leaders should be instructed by church leadership to set baptismal goals; these goals must be assigned to the Sabbath School Action Units. This should be communicated to the various Action Units at the beginning of each calendar year.

4. Quarterly baptisms must be scheduled by each Sabbath School in collaboration with the pastor.

5. Sabbath School Discussion leaders, known as Sabbath School teachers, should be appointed based on their spiritual gifts and their willingness to work as a team.

6. Discussion leaders should be monitored by Sabbath School coordinators to ensure implementation of Action Units and initiatives that require the involvement of these units.

7. Sabbath School Action Units need restructuring to ensure that the members of the units share common interests that foster effective working relationships (families, age groups, geographical proximity). This restructuring process should be done by the Sabbath School council in consultation with discussion leaders.

8. Each Sabbath School Action Unit should be encouraged to identify a community project as a mission focus. This initiative should be taken by the Sabbath School Council, and supervised by the elected Sabbath School coordinator.

9. The coordinator of Sabbath School should also initiate the implementation of Branch Sabbath Schools. This should be operated by each action unit to ensure an on-going evangelistic outreach program.

10. Sabbath School officers should be exposed to a minimum of six to eight hours of training before functioning in any given year. The local pastor and director of Sabbath School ministries at the Conference should facilitate this process.

11. The officers of the Sabbath School should be made aware of the vision of the church (local and universal), and have a clear understanding of the role of the Sabbath

School in making this vision a reality. This awareness should be made by the pastor and local church leadership.

12. Baptism Reporting Forms must be revised to reflect recording of relevant data for the history of the local church and the analysis and evaluation of church growth in the United States Virgin Islands. These forms should be provided by the Conference director of Sabbath School ministry.

Conclusion

The challenge of soul-winning in the Virgin Islands can be addressed adequately through the implementation of Sabbath School Action Units. These units, when rightly organized, will lead souls to Christ and thus fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). God's Church, throughout history, has been called to demonstrate a life of commitment and loyalty to Him. As a congregation, in both the Old and New Testament, the church assembled for worship. It was an opportunity given to the people of God as a corporate body to hear from Him, and receive a clearer revelation of His will and purpose for their lives. It was in the congregational setting that the members of the church were able to benefit from the giftedness of one another and be motivated for service. This was clearly demonstrated in the assembly of the church in the upper room (Acts 1:26).

The disciples were first given the Gospel Commission and were empowered by the Holy Spirit for its fulfillment (Acts 2:1-4). Having received the Holy Spirit, they boldly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:4-41). The experience of Pentecost inspired them to a life of sacrifice and service to the One who had become the Lord of their lives. They used their giftedness to expand the mission of the church both to Jews and Gentiles, giving them an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and

live with the assurance of salvation and the blessed hope (Titus 2:13-14).

The concept of congregational soul-winning is derived from the New Testament concept of discipleship, from which each disciple is expected bear fruit. In addition, God's initiative to establish a church and empower its members with spiritual gifts reflects His will for a healthy, growing Church. When these gifts are used for the intended purpose, the evidence of growth will be seen in the congregation.

While the Seventh-day Adventist theology of soul-winning is rooted in the Word of God, the writings of Ellen G. White also contributed towards the Church's theology of soul-winning. Ellen White's understanding of congregational soul-winning takes in the involvement of the entire congregation of believers wherever they are located, uniting their efforts to rescue the lost. The counsels given to the Church through her writings serve as a reminder of our mission. It also validates the mission-focus of the Apostolic Church as the model for God's remnant Church—the Seventh-day Adventists.

Considering the mission given to the Church, the organizational structure, comprised of departments, facilitates effective evangelistic planning. These departments, especially the Sabbath School, should function primarily for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. As outlined in the *Sabbath School Handbook* issued by the General Conference, evangelization of the community is fundamental to the operation of Sabbath School.

The literary contribution to soul-winning through the Sabbath School has shaped the present trends in Sabbath School evangelism. However, within the last five years, literary contributions with a focus on soul-winning through the Sabbath School have been limited. Calvin Smith's introduction of the Sabbath School Action Units has the potential

to transform any congregation into a “cell” church. His reliance on Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White substantiates the paradigm shift from “traditional” large Sabbath School classes to smaller units. This shift, especially as it relates to the size of the units (6-8), is conducive to participation and learning, and is strongly supported by modern educators. His approach fits into the mold of small group ministry and should remain the practice of Sabbath Schools everywhere.

The contribution of small group proponents validates the organizational structure of the Sabbath School as an evangelistic environment. It also shows that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in actuality, can be credited as a pioneer of small group ministry. Nevertheless, the Church needs to constantly evaluate its approach and purposely incorporate the ingredients of successful small groups into its established Sabbath School classes.

As the Sabbath School continues its function, the relevance of the units should be seen as a divine directive; one that is destined to succeed. Ellen White affirmed: “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.”¹ This endorsement of small group ministry should be seen as God’s approval and, when rightly employed, receives the blessings of God. She further stated: “In every church let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ’s love.”² In response to this appeal, the Sabbath School is

¹White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:21, 22.

²*Ibid.*, 6:21.

committed to the concept of small group ministry and its focus on soul-winning. The contribution made by Ellen White and the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains foundational to Sabbath School ministry. The four basic objectives (Fellowship; Study of God's Word; World Mission Emphasis; Community Outreach) continue to give relevance to a ministry that caters to the entire church membership and the world in which it exists.

The data relating to the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States Virgin Islands revealed that the Church experienced a moderate growth in membership of 15 percent during the period 2000–2009. While there was an accession of 2,256 members during that period, a total of 1,195 were dropped from church membership, which is equivalent to 53 percent of its accession. This analysis showed that the drop-out rate stood at a ratio of 2:1.

The data also revealed during the period 2000–2009, there was a baptismal goal of 3,888, of which 1,932 was realized. This total represents 49.7 percent of the projected goal. It also confirmed that the majority of churches fell short of their baptismal goals, thus impacting negatively the numerical growth of the Church in the United States Virgin Islands. While other methods of soul-winning were used that effected growth in the various congregations, public evangelism remain the primary method used for generating baptisms.

With the constant lack of success in obtaining baptismal goals, greater emphasis must be placed on the mission of the Church and its relevance in the community. With such emphasis, the Sabbath School must be challenged to fulfill its objectives, especially as it relates to community outreach. This approach has the potential to grow the Church

through its existing structure and thus fulfill its baptismal goals and mission.

The departmental structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church can be viewed as the foundation laid for the growth and expansion of its mission. Each department was designed to nurture and empower its members for effective Christian witnessing and the saving of souls for God's Kingdom. In pursuit of that goal, the Personal Ministries Department is given special responsibilities to train and equip the membership for soul-winning. The Sabbath School, on the other hand, is given the responsibility for membership care and evangelism. This task requires a Sabbath School leadership that is committed to its objectives and focused on the Church's mission. It also requires a leadership that is prepared to downsize the traditional Sabbath School classes into sizes of six to eight, transforming them into Sabbath School Action Units. This approach, when taken with the cooperation of the membership, has the potential to move the church in a direction conducive for growth.

The inherent structure of the Sabbath School provides an opportunity to minister to varied age groups (beginner, kindergarten, primary, junior, earliteen, youth, and adult) in an environment favorable for spiritual growth which can be experienced in their various learning styles. In addition, this structure facilitates and motivates the membership to achieve evangelistic goals. As proposed in this chapter, the Sabbath School if rightly conducted can revolutionize the Church. The witnessing opportunities provided through the many programs and initiatives should be maximized for soul winning.

One of the most effective methods recommended for reaching baptismal goals is the quarterly baptisms through the outreach program of the Sabbath School Action Units.

Sabbath School coordinators are challenged to schedule these baptismal services in collaboration with the pastor, expecting each unit to prepare at least one candidate for baptism each quarter of the calendar year. This concept is a recipe envisioned for church growth. It encourages friendship evangelism, and motivates the church to be mission focused. It does not only bring in new members, but it is structured to nurture and care for new believers. Another area of great evangelistic potential is the Branch Sabbath School. Each Sabbath School Action Unit is encouraged to embrace this initiative as an opportunity to reach the community for Jesus.

The success of all these initiatives necessitates the giftedness and willingness of the believers to work harmoniously for the building-up of God's kingdom. God has empowered His Church with spiritual gifts; when those gifts are identified and adequately matched with ministries, there will be a joy in service comparable to the Apostolic Church, souls will be added to the church, the mission will be accomplished, and Jesus will come (Matt 24:14).

The reality of the Blessed Hope requires obedience to the Great Commission. While the Church has responded positively to the command given by Jesus (Matt 28:19-20) and the concept of church growth, there is a need to grow the Church from within. This notion calls for the involvement of the established departments to share in the mission focus and baptismal goals of the church. But even more crucial, is the re-visioning of the Sabbath School for soul winning—a strategy for church growth through the Sabbath School Action Units.

APPENDIX A

STATISTICAL REPORTS OF THE ANNUAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

2000 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	648	14	5		19	6	1			7	660
Maranatha	217	5	6		11	6				6	222
Philadelphia	909	35	4		39	6		1		7	941
Agape	273	15			15					0	288
Shiloh	821	55	1		56	2	2			4	873
ST. JOHN	109	2			2	3	1			4	107
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	659	10	2		12	10	2			12	659
Hope	143	9	6		15	3	2	2		7	151
Central	1,468	65	4	2	71	11	5			16	1,523
Bethel	327	29	4	1	34	7	1			8	353
Faith	638	34	4	1	39	9	6			15	662
Peter's Rest	530	28	6		34	17				17	547
Sunny Acres	295	18		1	19		2			2	312
*Campo Rico					0					0	-
TOTAL	7,037	319	42	5	366	80	22	3	0	105	7,298

2001 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	660	11	1		12	8		1		9	663
Maranatha	222	11	2		13	5		2		7	228
Philadelphia	941	30	9		39	5	2			7	973
Agape	288				0					0	288
Shiloh	873	10	7		17	2	1			3	887
ST. JOHN	107	7	2		9			2		2	114
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	659	20	2		22		1			1	680
Hope	151	6	4		10	2				2	159
Central	1,523	40	3		43	13	6	11		30	1,536
Bethel	353	15	1		16	6				6	363
Faith	662	14			14	9	5			14	662
Peter's Rest	547	21	3		24	6	3	4		13	558
Sunny Acres	312	2			2	32				32	282
*Campo Rico					29					0	29
TOTAL	7,298	187	34	0	250	88	18	20	0	126	7,422

Adjustment

2002 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	663	13			13	5	1	6		12	664
Maranatha	228	4			4	2				2	230
Philadelphia	973	27	3	3	33	6	3	1		10	996
Agape	288	25	2		27					0	315
Shiloh	887	19	3		22	3	4			7	902
ST. JOHN	114				0	3				3	111
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	680	4	2	2	8		2			2	686
Hope	159	14	5		19	2	1	1		4	174
Central	1,536	32	3		35	19	5	6		30	1,541
Bethel	363	19	11		30	2	1			3	390
Faith	662	6			6	4				4	664
Peter's Rest	558	9	5		14	5	2			7	565
Sunny Acres	282				0	3	2	1		6	276
*Campo Rico	29				0					0	29
TOTAL	7,422	172	34	5	211	54	21	15	0	90	7,543

2003 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	664	17	2		19		6	65		71	612
Maranatha	230	24	4		28	6		1		7	251
Philadelphia	996	28	1		29	5	2			7	1,018
Agape	315	17			17			1		1	331
Shiloh	902	41	2		43	7	3	4		14	931
ST. JOHN	111				0	1		18	10	29	82
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	686				0	11	3			14	672
Hope	174	19	1		20		5			5	189
Central	1,541	30	1	1	32	7	2	2		11	1,562
Bethel	390	22	1	1	24	2	1			3	411
Faith	664	11	2		13	10	2			12	665
Peter's Rest	565	27	3	1	31	2				2	594
Sunny Acres	276	6	2	1	9	2				2	283
*Campo Rico	29				0					0	29
TOTAL	7,543	242	19	4	265	53	24	91	10	178	7,630

2004 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	612	16			16					0	628
Maranatha	251	5			5			7		7	249
Philadelphia	1,018	17			17	4				4	1,031
Agape	331	18	3		21	1	1	1		3	349
Shiloh	931	27	5	1	33	10	2			12	952
ST. JOHN	82				0					0	82
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	672	46	1		47	5	2	1		8	711
Hope	189	5	1		6	5	1			6	189
Central	1,562	29	12		41	16	4			20	1,583
Bethel	411	11	1		12	8		25		33	390
Faith	665	14			14	4	3	111	59	177	502
Peter's Rest	594	63	11		74	2	5			7	661
Sunny Acres	283	2		1	3	5	2		4	11	275
*Campo Rico	29				0					0	29
TOTAL	7,630	253	34	2	289	60	20	145	63	288	7,631

2005 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	628	8	2		10		4	2		6	632
Maranatha	249	16			16	3	3			6	259
Philadelphia	1,031	4	3		7					0	1,038
Agape	349	11			11					0	360
Shiloh	952	8		2	10	5	4	2		11	951
ST. JOHN	82	13			13	5	1	1		7	88
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	711	6	2		8		4	1		5	714
Hope	189	20	5		25	12				12	202
Central	1,583	8	2		10	10	2	1		13	1,580
Bethel	390	6			6	2				2	394
Faith	502	3	1	3	7	3	2	3		8	501
Peter's Rest	661	20	4		24	1	4			5	680
Sunny Acres	275	3		2	5		2			2	278
*Campo Rico	29				0					0	29
TOTAL	7,631	126	19	7	152	41	26	10	-	77	7,706

2006 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	632	5	2		7	2	3			5	634
Maranatha	259	5			5	2	1			3	261
Philadelphia	1,038				0					0	1,038
Agape	360				0					0	360
Shiloh	951	16	2		18	3	1			4	965
ST. JOHN	88				0					0	88
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	714	11	3	0	14	7				7	721
Hope	202	1	7		8					0	210
Central	1,580	11	6	1	18	19	4			23	1,575
Bethel	394				0					0	394
Faith	501	1			1	3	2			5	497
Peter's Rest	680	2	5		7	3	5			8	679
Sunny Acres	278	4			4					0	282
*Campo Rico	26				0					0	26
TOTAL	7,703	56	25	1	82	39	16	-	-	55	7,730

2007 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Membership	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	634				0		5	1		6	628
Maranatha	261	9	3		12	5	1			6	267
Philadelphia	1,038				0					0	1,038
Agape	360	4			4					0	364
Shiloh	965	25	6		31	6	2			8	988
ST. JOHN	88	6			6					0	94
ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	721	5	3		8	9	1			10	719
Hope	210	12	8		20	2	3	1		6	224
Central	1,575	34	1		35	11				11	1,599
Bethel	394	11	3		14	2	2	1		5	403
Faith	497	45	2	2	49					0	546
Peter's Rest	679	47	9		56	14	3			17	718
Sunny Acres	282	3	4	1	8	4	2	2	2	10	280
*Campo Rico	26				0			2	6	8	18
TOTAL	7,730	201	39	3	243	53	19	7	8	87	7,886

2008 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Members	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	628	20	0	0	20	0	3	0	0	3	645
Maranatha	267	11	1	0	12	4	0	0	0	4	275
Philadelphia	1,038	27	2	0	29	0	2	0	0	2	1,065
Agape	364	21	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	385
Shiloh	988	22	2	0	24	3	1	0	0	4	1,008

ST. JOHN	94	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	93
-----------------	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

ST. CROIX			0	0							
Christiansted	719	4	0	0	4	3	4	0	0	7	716
Hope	224	8	0	0	8	1	0	0	0	1	231
Central	1,599	35	0	0	35	0	0	0	0	0	1,634
Bethel	403	26	2	0	28	2	0	0	0	2	429
Faith	544	2	0	0	2	0	3	2	0	5	541
Peter's Rest	718	38	3	1	42	1	0	0	0	1	759
Sunny Acres	282	0	2	0	2	1	1	5	4	11	273
*Campo Rico	18	3	0	3	6	0	1	0	0	1	23
TOTAL	7,886	217	12	4	233	15	16	7	4	42	8,077

2009 STATISTICAL REPORT

CHURCHES	Beginning Members	Membership Added				Membership Dropped					Ending Members
		Baptism	Letter	Pro. Of Faith	Total	Letter	Death	Apostasy	Missing	Total	
ST. THOMAS											
City	645	5	1	0	6	2	1	0	0	3	648
Maranatha	275	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	275
Philadelphia	1,065	34	12	0	46	17	6	0	0	23	1,088
Agape	385	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	386
Shiloh	1,008	14	4	1	19	2	6	0	0	8	1,019

ST. JOHN	93	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	93
-----------------	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

ST. CROIX											
Christiansted	716	1	0	0	1	1	0	12	0	13	704
Hope	231	25	5	0	30	5	2	0	0	7	254
Central	1,634	44	1	1	46	4	6	55	0	65	1,615
Bethel	429	10	0	0	10	2	0	0	0	2	437
Faith	541	10	3	0	13	3	4	0	0	7	547
Peter's Rest	759	12	3	0	15	0	2	17	0	19	755
Sunny Acres	273	3	3	1	7	3	0	0	0	3	277
*Campo Rico	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
TOTAL	8,077	159	32	3	194	39	27	84	0	150	8,121

APPENDIX B

STATISTICAL REPORT OF PUBLIC EVANGELISM IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

North Caribbean
Conference

P.O. Box 580
Christiansted, St. Croix
U.S. Virgin Islands 00821
Telephone: (340) 778-6589
Fax: (340) 778-6593
www.northcaribbeanconference.org
E-Mail:
northcar@northcaribbeanconference.org

DISTRICT GOALS

DISTRICT	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
St. Thomas #1	75	75	60	60	60	60
St. Thomas #2	75	75	60	60	60	60
St. Thomas #3	70	70	70	55	60	60
St. John, V.I.	10	10	10	11	12	12
St. Croix #1	75	75	60	40	40	40
St. Croix #2	6	60	50	65	100	100
St. Croix #3	50	50	50	50	50	50
St. Croix #4	30	30	30	35	30	30
St. Croix #5	30	30	40	50	50	50

DISTRICT	2006	2007	2008	2009		
St. Thomas #1	30	50	50	40		
St. Thomas #2	40	30	40	25		
St. Thomas #3	40	67	60	50		
St. John, V.I.	20	10	11	12		
St. Croix #1	30	35	35	35		
St. Croix #2	85	85	85	85		
St. Croix #3	30	30	40	40		
St. Croix #4	6	8	10	11		

ANTIGUA • BARBUDA • MONTserrat • ST. KITTS • NEVIS • ANGUILLA • ST. MAARTEN
ST. EUSTATIUS • SABA • BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS • U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

APPENDIX C

SURVEY SHEET INDICATING DIFFERENT METHODS OF EVANGELISM USED IN THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

**NORTH CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-
DAY ADVENTIST**

EVANGELISM SURVEY IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

NAME OF CHURCH _____

Apart from *Public Evangelistic Campaign, kindly indicate other methods of soul-winning that resulted in baptisms during the last decade (2000-2009).

- ☐ **Bible Studies**
- ☐ **Revival Services**
- ☐ **Bible Correspondence Course**
- ☐ **Cell Group Ministry**
- ☐ **Sabbath School Action Units**
- ☐ **Sabbath School Community Guest Day**
- ☐ **Sabbath Worship Service**
- ☐ ***Departmental Outreach Projects**
- ☐ **Youth Camps**

Others:

***Public Evangelistic Campaigns refers to both pastoral and lay crusades.**

***Departmental Outreach projects refer to the departments of the local church setting evangelistic goals and devising ways of reaching those goals.**

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF REPORTING FORM USED BY THE NORTH CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS FOR OBTAINING MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP REPORTS FROM THE LOCAL CHURCH

North Caribbean Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Statistical Report of the _____ Church
For the Month Ending _____

1. Church Membership at beginning of month.....
2. Church Membership added since:
 - (a) By Baptism.....
 - (b) Profession of Faith.....
 - (c) By Letter.....
 - Total.....
3. Church Membership dropped since:
 - (a) By letter.....
 - (b) By Death.....
 - (c) Apostasy.....
 - (d) Missing.....
 - Total.....
4. Church Membership at close of the month.....

Name Added	Date of Birth	Sex M/F	How Admitted: 1. Baptism 2. Prof. of Faith 3. Letter	Date Baptized* Date Received**	If by Letter, from what Church

*If added by baptism, indicate date baptized. If added by Profession of Faith or letter, indicate the date received.

Name Dropped	Date of Birth	Sex M/F	How Dropped: 1. Letter 2. Death 3. Apostasy 4. Missing	Date Dropped	If by Letter, to what Church

Name of Church Clerk _____

Mailing Address _____

Note: If space is not enough, kindly continue on the attached page. Please print all names clearly, after first checking your copy of the Pastor's Baptismal Report to be sure it coincides with your report before mailing it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000. S.v. "The Church."

Barna, George. *Grow Your Church From the Outside In*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002.

_____. *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993.

Beckham, William A. "The Cell Groups Meeting." In *Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide*, 175. Houston, TX: TOUCH Outreach Ministries, 2003.

Boren, M. Scott. "Form Follows Function: Moving Beyond the Models to Biblical Community." In *Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide*, 42-43. Houston, TX: TOUCH Outreach Ministries, 2003.

Borthwick, Paul. *A Mind for Missions*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987.

Bruner, Frederick D. *Matthew: A Commentary*. 2 vols. Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 1987-90.

Bugbee, Bruce. *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Burrill, Russell C. *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998.

_____. *Revolution in the Church*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993.

Cassimy, Steve D., Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer, eds. *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009.

Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993.

Comiskey, Joel. *Home Cell Group Explosion*. Houston, TX: TOUCH Publications, 1998.

- Cress, James A. "The Pastor as a Catalyst for Creating Special Ways to Enhance Special Services." In *A Guide to Effective Pastoral Ministry*, edited by Steve D. Cassimy, Abraham J. Jules, and Nikolaus Satelmajer, 109-112. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009.
- Dawson, Scott, and Scott Lenning. *Evangelism Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.
- Dederen, Raoul. "The Church." *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Edited by Raoul Dederen. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000. 12:549.
- Dudley, Roger L., and Des Cummings Jr. *Adventures in Church Growth*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983.
- Dunavant, Delbert. *From Membership to Discipleship*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2006.
- Easum, William M. *The Church Growth Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by David N. Freedman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. S.v. "Church."
- Gallagher, Jonathan. "GC Promotes Adventists in the Community." *Adventist Review*, November 18, 2004, 18-19.
- General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *The Personal Ministries Handbook*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2003.
- General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Sabbath School Department. *The Sabbath School Manual: For Sabbath School Officers and Teachers*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *I Believe in Church Growth*. London, England: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981.
- Global Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008. S.v. "Discipleship."
- Hunter, Kent R. *Foundations for Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church*. Corunna, IN: Church Growth Center, 1994.
- "Interpretation of Acts." *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Edited by F. D. Nichol. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-80. 6:125-7.
- Katzenbach, Jon R., and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*. Boston: Harper Business School Press, 1993.

- Knight, George R. *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom*. The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier. Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994.
- Kuntaraf, Jonathan. "Why Study the Sabbath School Lessons?" *LEAD* 3 (April-June 2010): 3.
- Lenski, Richard C. H. *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961.
- Logan, Robert E. *Be Fruitful and Multiply*. St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2006.
- _____. *Beyond Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989.
- Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide*. Houston, TX: TOUCH Outreach Ministries, 2003.
- McGavran, Donald A. *Understanding Church Growth*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- New Bible Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Edited by J. D. Douglas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. S.v. "Church."
- The New Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987.
- New Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. S.v. "Church."
- The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Katharine D. Sakenfeld. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006. S.vv. "Congregation," "Disciple," "The Spirit."
- Payne, Jervis D. *Missional House Churches*. Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Publishing, 2007.
- Prime, Peter J. *The Gospel of Love and Real Evangelism*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 2009.
- Rice, George. "Spiritual Gifts." *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Edited by Raoul Dederen. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000. 12:612-617.
- Roy, Ruthven. *A Challenge to the Remnant!* Frederick, MD: Network Discipling Ministries, 2002.
- Sabbath School Handbook*. 2nd ed. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2004.

Schwarz, Christian A. *The ABC's of Natural Church Development*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998.

_____. *Natural Church Development*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual. Bogota, Colombia: Panamericana Formas e Impresos, 2010.

Smith, Calvin. *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992.

U.S. Census Bureau. "United States Census 2000." <http://www.census.gov/census2000/pdf/usvifullprofile.pdf> (accessed January 2011).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. Edited by W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985. S.v. "Disciple."

Wagner, C. Peter. *Your Church Can Grow*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984.

_____. *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1979.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995.

White, Ellen G. *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1970.

_____. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938.

_____. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966.

_____. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943.

_____. *Gospel Workers*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915.

_____. *Instruction for Effective Christian Service*. Washington, DC: General Conference Home of Seventh-day Adventists, Home Missionary Department, 1947.

_____. *The Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942.

_____. "Missionary Work." *Review and Herald*, September 29, 1891, 1, 2.

_____. *Testimonies for the Church*. 9 vols. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948.

_____. *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900.

_____. "Workers with Christ." *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890, 1, 2.

VITA

VITA

Name: Henry Peters

Place of Birth: St. Andrews, Grenada

Spouse: Margaret Peters

Children: Denise & Dennison

Grandchildren: Daryll & Derwin

Education:

2006-11	D.Min.	Evangelism & Church Growth, Andrews University
1993-95	M.Div.	Andrews University
1980-85	B.A.	Theology and History, Caribbean Union College (University of Southern Caribbean)

Credentials

1990	Ordination (December), St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands
------	---

Ministry/Professional Experience

2010–Present	Executive Secretary, North Caribbean Conference
2010–Present	Personal Ministries Director, Caribbean Union Sabbath School Director, Caribbean Union
2007–Present	Evangelism Coordinator, North Caribbean Conference
2001–Present	Personal Ministries Director, North Caribbean Conference Sabbath School Director, North Caribbean Conference
1996–2001	Pastor, St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles Evangelist, North Caribbean Conference
1985–1993	Pastor, St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles & Anguilla, British West Indies