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A Strategy for Discipleship of New Members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

A STRATEGY FOR DISCIPLESHP OF NEW MEMBERS
AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Michael G. Coleman

Adviser: Larry Evans
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY FOR DISCIPLESHIP OF NEW MEMBERS AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: June 2018

Problem

There was no discipleship strategy for new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the majority of new converts remained with the congregation, the church lacked a clear plan for nurturing the spiritual growth and leadership development of its new members.

Method

A strategy was developed in harmony with the practices and principles of biblical discipleship found in the New Testament and described in academic literature. It entailed the development of new members, particularly, and the entire congregation in general, by addressing the following four areas: spiritual nurturing, evangelism, leadership
development, and stewardship/financial management. The strategy utilized traditional arenas in the church such as Sabbath worship service, Bible Class, Sabbath School, Prayer Meeting, and Revival Meetings to facilitate discipleship in the four dimensions mentioned above. It also provided for the establishment of small groups, workshops, and training sessions in order to equip new members and the greater portion of the church. A combination of quantitative and qualitative measures was used to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship strategy: namely, a questionnaire, a focus group, and an analysis of the church membership records.

Results

The discipleship strategy had a positive impact on the spiritual growth, leadership development, and retention rate of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Conclusion

In the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating the project, I have grown personally and professionally. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to engage reflectively with new members and the congregation at large in the mission of evangelism, spiritual growth, and leadership development—the essence of discipleship. The discipleship intervention had a positive influence on the spiritual growth and leadership development of the new members. However, this strategy would have been more effective if it had delineated various levels of competencies that the new members needed to reach and also provided for a rite of passage celebration at each level.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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ADVENTIST CHURCH

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

by
Michael G. Coleman
June 2018
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AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES SEVENTH-DAY
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The growth and development of new members is an important aspect of the mission of the church. Yet in many cases, once new converts are baptized and become official members of the church, the level of interest that went into leading them to join the church wanes and inadequate attention is given to facilitating their spiritual maturation. Thus, new converts are often left to fend for themselves without a clear plan for their development, as well as for support in their spiritual journey. As a result, some of them become discouraged, disoriented, and leave the church, especially during difficult times in their lives. In order to fulfill Christ’s commission in Matthew 28:19-20 to “make disciples of all nations” (NKJV) properly, every local church should have a clear plan to encourage the spiritual growth of their new converts and to equip them for Christian service. In this paper, I provide a strategy for the discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. This strategy addresses the growth of new converts by equipping them in the following areas: spiritual nurture, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management.

This chapter introduces and delineates the main sections of the project. It describes the ministry context in which the discipleship strategy was developed and deployed. It also provides a synopsis of my theological reflection and literature review on the topic of discipleship. Further, it gives a sketch of the development,
implementation, and evaluation of the strategy. Finally, it reveals the essence of my learning during the process of conducting and evaluating the project.

**Description of the Ministry Context**

The context for my project is the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York. I was pastoring this church for four and a half years during the course of the project. It is largely a Caribbean congregation with a few indigenous African Americans. The church has a book membership of 525 parishioners and an average weekly attendance of 300 congregants. The membership includes recent immigrants, naturalized citizens, and citizens by birth. Spanish is the first language of 30% percent of the members. All age groups are represented in the church. However, approximately 60% of the members are in their mid-50s and above. The congregation is composed of a mixture of middle class and working class families. Most of the young adult members and about 30% of those in their 40s and above have attained at least a Bachelor’s degree.

The most significant external demographic is that the Bushwick community is composed of approximately 70% Hispanics. The people in the neighborhood tend to be bilingual, family-oriented, and friendly. Bushwick is in proximity to areas where both Blacks and an increasing number of young adult Whites live. This community is located in about a 15-minute drive from downtown Brooklyn—where property value has gone up due to economic development, especially the new Barclays Center, the home of the Nets basketball franchise. Bushwick has benefitted in higher property value from its closeness to downtown Brooklyn. Bushwick also provides easy access to Manhattan and most of the boroughs of New York City. In addition, it has no shortage of public transportation.
A few of the members from Mount of Olives live in the neighborhood of the church; however, most of them commute to church from other parts of New York City. Most of the members are busy during the week and are only available for church-related activities on weekends. This often necessitates that we plan most ministry events on Saturdays and Sundays.

In the past eight years (2009-2016), the church has had an average increase of eight new members per year mainly through baptism. Many of these new members were either friends with a member of Mount of Olives, acquainted with a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, or had an Adventist background. Therefore, it may be assumed that it was not very difficult for the majority of the new members to be assimilated in the church. However, some of these new members feel that they have not received adequate spiritual support in their journey.

**Statement of the Problem**

At the time of the development of this project, there was no discipleship strategy for new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Testimonies from new members and reports from key officers and leaders of the church indicated that although efforts have been made to retain newly baptized members, new converts do not become a part of a well-defined process of spiritual development that motivates them to grow in Christ, stay connected to the church, and eventually develop as leaders in the church. Moreover, while membership records indicate that there was an improvement in the church’s retention rate of new members within the last two years (2012 and 2013) prior to the preliminary stage of the discipleship strategy, the retention rate in the three previous years (2009-2011) was an average of only 78%.
Statement of Task

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy for discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. This strategy was shaped by a biblical understanding of the meaning of discipleship based on my research.

Delimitation of the Project

This project was limited to new members who have been in the Mount of Olives Church under a year and a half. This provides a clearly defined group on which to implement and evaluate the impact of the strategy.

Description of the Project Process

The project process entails a theological reflection on the meaning and practice of discipleship, a review of recent literature, development of a strategy for discipleship, evaluation of the strategy, and learning from the project.

Theological Reflection

The theological reflection focused on five themes. First, it examined the biblical concept of discipleship as reflected in the ministry and teachings of Jesus, with reference to key passages such as Luke 14:25-33, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 3:14-15, 8:34-38, 10:17-21, John 15:8, and 13:35. Second, it focused on how the apostles conducted discipleship after the ascension of Christ, with particular reference to Acts 2:41-17 and 11:20-26. Third, it addressed the relationship between stewardship and discipleship. Fourth, it explored the topic of spiritual growth and the process of equipping church
members in the writings of Ellen G. White. Fifth, it discussed the role of the pastor as equipper based on an exposition of Ephesians 4:11-13.

Review of Literature

Academic literature on discipleship was reviewed. This also included books that placed priority on leadership development. Two main themes emerged: one emphasizing Jesus’ teaching on the cost of discipleship and the other highlighting Jesus’ method of developing disciples. The earlier seminal works of Bonhoeffer (1937/2011) and Coleman (1963/1986) each reflected one of these themes. Subsequent authors, to a large extent, expanded on these two themes. Thus, many authors either explicate the high commitment that is involved in being a follower of Christ (e.g., Platt, 2013; Stetzer, 2012; Willard, 2006) or focused on Jesus’ method of growing, training, and reproducing disciples, as a pattern for contemporary discipleship (e.g., Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Rainer & Geiger, 2011). Some authors provide a synthesis of both themes (e.g., Burrill, 1998; Hull, 1988/2007; Wilson, 2007). A portion of this literature review also examines how other congregations nurture and equip new members.

Development and Implementation of Discipleship Strategy

A strategy for discipleship of new members at Mount of Olives was developed with sensitivity to the limited time commitment and transportation challenges of working families in New York City. The strategy focused on the following four dimensions: spiritual nurture, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management. While the primary focus of the intervention was the new members, it was deemed important to get the entire church involved in various aspects of the discipleship
strategy with the aim of eventually creating a culture of discipleship in the church. The strategy included a preliminary stage and an official implementation phase. In the preliminary stage, the main objective was to create an awareness for discipleship in the church. This was done first through preaching and Bible studies on the topic of discipleship for the entire congregation and also through discussions with the board of elders on the said subject. A second way in which awareness of discipleship was created was by means of a three-month-long prophecy seminar in which members were asked to bring a guest and to be responsible for encouraging the attendance and participation of their visitors in the seminar.

The official implementation of the strategy went into effect in November of 2015 and lasted for approximately 15 months. This phase of the strategy included an emphasis on the four dimensions of discipleship through Sabbath sermons, Bible class, spiritual mentors, and small groups. The discipleship strategy’s implementation also involved a spiritual gifts inventory, a series of stewardship/financial management workshops, coordinated outreach through the Sabbath School classes, a lay Bible instructor training course, revival meetings, healthful living presentations, and deployment of new members.

Evaluation of Intervention

The evaluation of the discipleship strategy entailed the following measurements:

1. An examination of the church membership records to compare the retention rate of new members before the intervention with the retention rate of new converts after the intervention.

2. An assessment of both the spiritual growth of new members and the effectiveness of the discipleship strategy by means of a questionnaire.
3. Feedback from a focus group comprising new members and members who had joined the church two to three years prior to the deployment of the strategy.

The examination of the church membership records indicated that the retention rate during the period of the discipleship strategy was generally higher when compared to a period of two years prior to the intervention, and much higher when compared to a period of five years prior to the intervention. An analysis of the responses on the questionnaire reveal that the new members believed the discipleship strategy had a positive impact in facilitating their spiritual growth and leadership development. Moreover, the feedback from a focus group of new members who participated in the discipleship strategy along with members who had joined the church just a few years prior to the intervention indicated that the strategy had a meaningful impact in providing spiritual direction and leadership development for the new members.

Learning From the Project

The most essential thing that I learned from the implementation and evaluation of the discipleship strategy is that while the strategy was successful in facilitating the spiritual growth and leadership development of the new members, it might have been more effective if it had set forth various levels of competencies that the new members needed to attain and also provided for a rite of passage celebration at each level. Another important thing that I learned is that both new members and the greater portion of the church appreciate an intentional strategy designed for their spiritual development; such a strategy leads them to feel that the church cares about them, even though all of them may not actively participate in the intervention.
Definition of Terms

Below are definitions of key terms used in this paper:

*Discipleship* describes a progressive lifestyle of spiritual growth, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship in which a follower of Jesus seeks to reflect the life and teachings of Christ, under the mentorship of other Christians, and the transformative influence of the Holy Spirit (Pope, 2013; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Willard, 2006).

*Empower*, conveys the idea of strengthening and releasing church members to engage in ministry without being overly-dependent on pastors and other professional leaders. It also includes the concept of equipping believers.

*Equip* is used in the New Testament to refer to the act of perfecting, restoring, mending, and preparing (Green, 1963/1986; Nichol, 1980b, p. 1023; Strong, 1890/1988). It is used in this paper to refer to the task of preparing believers for spiritual maturity and engagement in ministry.

*Mentor*, according to the *American Heritage College Dictionary* (Pickett, 2002), refers to “a wise or trusted counselor or teacher.” The word mentor is derived from Greek mythology concerning a supernaturally inspired guide. However, mentoring as a practice is always influenced by a particular worldview and therefore, *Christian mentorship* shapes how mentoring is done. Christian mentoring places emphasis on the guidance/teaching element, the relational dimension, and the connotations of supernatural influence signified in the etymology of the word within a biblical worldview. Hence, a Christian mentor is someone who provides guidance to another in a relational manner in accordance with the practices of Jesus and the divinely inspired counsel of Scripture.
The biblical definition of *ministry* conveys the idea of serving or rendering service; it also has religious connotations (Horn, 1979, p. 744). The use of the word ministry in this paper refers to services centered on helping people experience God’s grace and power through attending to their legitimate physical, mental, emotional, social, material, and spiritual needs.

*Retention*, according to *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* (2003), refers to “the act of retaining: the state of being retained.” The word is used in this paper in the following ways: (a) in reference to new converts who remain in the church once they become members through baptism or profession of faith, and they show evidence of this by regularly attending the same local Seventh-day Adventist Church in which they hold membership, (b) in reference to new converts who remain in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist denomination but regularly attend a different local Seventh-day Adventist Church from the one that they initially joined by baptism or profession of faith. The first way the word is used is from the standpoint of the local church retaining its new converts in its congregation. However, second way the word is used is from the standpoint of the church denomination retaining the new members in the faith.

**Summary**

This introductory chapter has outlined the key components of my project. First, it describes the ministry context in which the project was developed and implemented. Second, it indicates that the strategy for the discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church was based on a theological study of biblical discipleship and a review of current scholarship on the topic. Third, it emphasized that the development and implementation of the discipleship strategy focused on equipping
the new members and the greater portion of the church through spiritual nurturing,
training in evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management.
Fourth, it reveals that the implementation of the strategy had a positive impact on the
spiritual growth and leadership development of the new members. Finally, it highlights
the salient things that I have learned from conducting this project.
CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON DISCIPLESHIP

The biblical concept of discipleship is gradually being understood by more and more Christian leaders as they reflect on the research and best practices of devout practitioners and scholars (e.g., Burrill, 1996; Hull, 2006; Ogden, 2003a; 1990/2003b; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Willard, 2006). This information is helping Christians leaders and churches to equip believers better to live more closely to the paradigm that Jesus exemplified and taught during His public ministry on the earth. Such information has also shaped the parameters for the development of a theological foundation on which to implement a strategy for discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus, it is within the parameters of previous research that I provide my own biblical study and theological reflection on what discipleship entails and how it is related to spiritual growth, empowerment of church members for service, and the pastor’s role in equipping the church for ministry.

A major portion of this study focuses on what Jesus taught concerning discipleship and on how he—and later-on, the post-Pentecost apostles—developed disciples. The study begins by examining the biblical narrative concerning Jesus’ calling and training of the Twelve disciples and His specific instructions relative to what it means to be His disciple. It proceeds to a reflection on how the apostles applied Jesus’ method of discipleship in the wake of Pentecost, when the membership of the New
Testament church began to increase rapidly. The study then transitions to a reflection on spiritual growth and the process of equipping church members for service in the writings of Ellen G. White. The final section briefly describes a conceptual model of the pastor as the key equipper in the discipleship process based on an exposition of Ephesians 4:11-13.

**Jesus’ Example and Teachings on Discipleship**

An examination of Jesus’ call of the first disciples provides a starting point to understand what discipleship looked like in Jesus’ day, and what kind of commitment was involved in becoming a follower of Christ. The four Gospels present Jesus’ call to individuals to be His disciples as something customary and expected by the people of Christ’s day. It was not uncommon in New Testament times and in the ancient world for philosophers and spiritual leaders to have disciples who followed them, embraced their worldview, and were closely committed to them (Wilkins, 1992, 1995). For example, both John the Baptist and the Pharisees had disciples (Mark 2:18). John 1:35-37 shows that at least the first two of the 12 individuals who would comprise the Twelve apostles were originally disciples of John the Baptist. Andrew is named as one of the two disciples of John in verse 40. Based on Matthew’s description of the Jesus’ calling of the first few disciples (4:18-22), it seems very likely that Peter, James, and John were also disciples of John the Baptist. Thus, these two distinct pairs of brothers seem to have been close friends and partners in the fishing trade, as well as followers of John the Baptist before they met Jesus.

In any event, what is very important in the narrative of the calling of the first few disciples is that the transition of these four disciples from John the Baptist to Jesus took place as a natural and expected outcome of the Baptist’s identifying Jesus as the Messiah:
“The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). While John the Baptist called people to repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah, Jesus called people to repentance in order to receive the kingdom of grace, of which he was/is the King, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Wilkins (1992) noted that in the days of Jesus, becoming a disciple meant a “life of commitment to a particular master and his way of life” (p. 25). The master determined the kind of adherence that was expected by the follower and what discipleship would mean for the follower (Wilkins, 1992, 1995). Accordingly, as John the Baptist directed his disciples’ attention to Jesus, it was expected that the Messiah would take discipleship to a higher level. Being a disciple of the Messiah would mean something exceedingly higher than being a disciple of other leaders. This high level of discipleship meant that disciples of Jesus were not merely to be committed to Him as believers in God who were being led by a great prophet, but they were also to be committed to Him because He is humanity’s only Savior—the Son of God. The disciples would progressively grasp and experience this truth as they followed Jesus (Matt 16:13-17; John 20: 24-29; Luke 24: 13-35).

Jesus’ calling of the Twelve disciples seem to have been understood by them to be a commitment that entailed such an extraordinary attachment to their Teacher and His work that the followers would be willing to leave family and home for extended periods of time in order to journey and work with their teacher (John 1:35-39; Mark 1:16-20). Yet, it appears that neither John the Baptist nor Jesus expected everyone who embraced their message to follow them in the same manner as the disciples who journeyed and work with them. Many people repented and were baptized by John the Baptist, but they did not become disciples in the same manner as the disciples who travelled and work
with him. Although Jesus took discipleship to a higher level, He did not require all converts to follow Him by forsaking their previous vocation, as in the case of the Twelve apostles. However, as I will explain below, Jesus required unswerving commitment from all His followers regardless of their vocation.

We see in the four Gospels a distinction between Jesus’ Twelve disciples and the larger group of followers who listened to His messages (John 6:60-67). The Twelve lived, worked, and journeyed with Jesus, but a larger group of disciples listened, obeyed, and, on occasion, worked with Jesus (Luke 9:57-62; 10:1-3). The distinction between the Twelve and the other disciples of Christ is not in regard to the level of commitment Jesus enjoined, but with respect to vocational and leadership responsibilities. Wilkins (1992) argued that the Twelve as disciples give us an example of how Jesus leads all believers, but as apostles, they are an example of how Jesus trains leaders for His church. Accordingly, the call to leave one’s occupation to follow Jesus into the gospel ministry as a vocation is not a call for all Christians, but rather for those who are to be key spiritual leaders of the church (e.g., pastors, missionaries, and administrators in the church). Jesus devoted considerable time to mentoring the Twelve in order that they may function as the principal leaders in the Christian church after His ascension (Coleman, 1963/1986). However, He required a high level of commitment from all His followers.

The Cost of Discipleship

Notwithstanding the distinction between the Twelve and the larger group of disciples, Jesus’ teachings emphasized that all His followers should have an attitude of total commitment to Him and the kingdom of God. Although there are various contexts to Jesus’ teachings on the cost of discipleship (e.g., Luke 14: 25-33; Mark 8:34-38;
10:17-21), the essence of these teachings is applicable to every disciple: every follower of Christ should actively manifest unswerving dedication to Jesus and the kingdom of God. This entails placing love and service to Jesus above family relations, cherished possessions, and aspirations (Luke 14:26-27).

In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus places emphasis on the cost of discipleship. The context of Jesus’ teaching on the cost of discipleship on this occasion is Peter’s resistance to Jesus’ declared intention to go forward with His mission to suffer and die for humanity in Jerusalem. The passage begins with a clear statement as to who is included in the audience: “When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’” (v. 34). Jesus presented this message to both the Twelve disciples and the larger audience. There is no distinction between the two groups with respect to the level of commitment that the Messiah required. Everyone who desires to be a disciple or a Christian must deny self, take up his or her cross, and follow Jesus. Jesus confronted the Rich Young Ruler of Mark 10:17-22 with a similar message. Christ called him to distribute his riches—the thing that was standing in the way of his total commitment to Jesus—to the poor and take up his cross and follow Jesus. However, the Rich Young Ruler was unwilling to surrender all for the kingdom of God.

Similar to His message to the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus confronted a large crowd of would-be-disciples with a message calling for total commitment (Luke 14:25-33). Many of the people in the crowd were following Him for superficial reasons such as

¹All Scriptures quoted and referred to in this chapter are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise specified.
food, curiosity, and the lure of peer pressure. Jesus’ words were designed to bring these people to a deeper level of commitment and thus, to separate the serious follower from the spectator. In this passage, Jesus emphasized that disciples of Christ must love God more than their own family members and even more than their own life. When the disciples’ love for God is compared with their love for family and friends, their love for God should be so superior to any human relation that such a relationship would be deemed insignificant in comparison with their relationship to God. Jesus also taught in the foregoing passage of Scripture that all who desire to be His disciples should consistently pick up their cross and follow the Messiah.

In light of the reality that being a disciple of Jesus is such an important commitment, each person needs to count the cost and see whether he or she is willing to go all the way. A hasty decision to follow Jesus can be hazardous. Like the seeds that fell among rocks in the parable of the sower (Luke 8:6-13), hasty decisions can lead to initial enthusiasm and devotion, but when trials come, there is a sudden falling away because the follower has little depth.

The teachings of Jesus on the cost of discipleship do not merely describe what a disciple is, but also, what a disciple must eventually become. Jesus placed the ideal of love and service to God before His hearers so that they may count the cost. Discipleship is a lifestyle of transformation and growth toward the character of Christ while in relationship with Jesus (Pope, 2013; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Willard, 2006; Wilkins, 1992). This lifestyle of conversion and growth begins with the goal in mind: namely, to love, obey, and serve the Son of God above all else. Such a goal is not something that can be easily achieved in a short time, but, as in the case of the Rich Young Ruler, the
clear goal helps the would-be-disciple to count the cost and make a decision either to go all the way with Jesus or to turn away from following Him.

Other Teachings on Discipleship

Thus far, with respect to Jesus’ teachings on discipleship, this study has focused primarily on His messages concerning the cost of discipleship. However, the Gospel of John, in particular, records some very important teachings of Jesus relative to being His disciple. John 15:5-8 is a significant passage of Scripture because in these verses Jesus uses the vine imagery to convey the fact that abiding in Christ and bearing fruit are core qualities of being His disciples. Disciples of Christ are people who intentionally abide in a relationship with Jesus and, through the power of Christ, bring forth much fruit.

Both Jesus and John the Baptist used the metaphor of bearing fruit to refer to the deeds and character qualities that people produce (Matt 7:15-20; Luke 3:6-14). The word fruit in the foregoing agricultural metaphor therefore refers to that which is generated from our lives such as behavior and character traits. Good fruits include the fruit of the Spirit and other good works (Gal 5:22-23), while bad fruits include the works of the flesh and related character qualities (Gal 5:19-21). John 15:9-10 shows that abiding in Christ means to remain in His love and keep His commandments. Verses 14-15 reveal that Jesus wants all His disciples—especially the Twelve apostles whom He was mentoring at the time—to be His friends, and, as friends, they are to keep His commands. Keeping Christ’s commandments is evidence of fruit-bearing, and bearing fruit is evidence that the disciple is abiding in Christ.

In John 13:34, Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another. In verse 35, He made it clear that love for one another is a salient trademark of Christian discipleship:
“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Love for one another brings unity, joy, and enthusiasm among God’s disciples as they carry out His mission. According to the context of John 13, the Twelve apostles had just seen a clear demonstration of the love they should have for one another when Jesus, their master, stooped to wash the feet of each of them, as none of them would humble himself to wash one another’s feet. Love for one another implies serving each other in a humble, caring, non-competitive manner.

The tense of the verb “love” (agapaō) in John 13:34 denotes continuous action in the original Greek. Thus, Jesus’ command should literally read, “keep on loving one another.” Likewise, in verse 35, the same tense is used. Jesus is, therefore, telling His disciples to keep on having love one for another, rather than manifesting great deeds of love on occasions (Nichol, 1980a, p. 1032). The communal system in the early New Testament church is a manifestation of the principle of loving one another (see Acts 2-5). While there may be legitimate questions as to whether the communal system is normative or contextual, what is clearly normative for Christ’s disciples is that of reaching out in love to those who are in need (Acts 11:29; 20:35; Rom 12:13; 2 Cor 8-9; Gal 4:15).

We have observed that Jesus required a high level of commitment from His disciples and that this commitment includes abiding in Christ, bearing fruit, loving one another, and keeping His commandments. The Gospels show that Jesus called the first few of His Twelve disciples into discipleship with the simple yet profound words, “Follow me” (Mark 1:17; John 1:43; Matt 9:9). The disciples were being called to learn from Jesus by living with Him, working with Him, fellowshipping with Him, serving Him, and imitating Him in character, attitude, deeds, and methods.
Not only did Jesus use the words “follow me” to call the Twelve, as well as other would-be disciples (Matt 4:19; Mark 10:21; Matt 8:22), but He also used these words virtually every time His message centered on the cost of discipleship (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) and He used these words to refocus attention on the objective of discipleship (John 21:19-22). Thus, it is not surprising that before the term Christian came into common usage in New Testament times, the followers of Christ were known as the people or sect that followed the Way (Acts 9:1-2; 11:26; 19:9, 23). Discipleship is both a comprehensive way of life and the way to eternal life, which together center in following Jesus. It is comprehensive because it requires us to follow Jesus and to learn from Him—the perfect human being and the Son of God. It is the way to eternal life because it is centered in Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

The term Christian itself implies that those who are identified by this name are definitely followers of Jesus Christ. It was at Antioch—the capital city in Syria and one of the most prominent cities of the Roman Empire at the time—that the disciples of Christ were first called Christians, mostly likely out of ridicule because their peculiar lifestyle closely mimicked the life of their leader, Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26) (Nichol, 1980b, pp. 262-266). The terms disciple of Christ and Christian are therefore synonymous. They both denote following Jesus in a comprehensive manner. A disciple of Jesus is no greater than a Christian (Wilkins, 1992). Nevertheless, the term discipleship is often used today to refer to three related concepts: (a) the act and meaning of following Jesus, (b) the process of leading people to Jesus and helping them to grow in Christ, and (c) the spiritual growth and leadership development components of becoming mature Christians and leaders in the church. We have already highlighted the first
concept above; we now turn to the second and third concepts as we examine how Jesus
trained/developed His disciples.

Jesus’ Method of Discipleship

We established earlier that Jesus mentored the Twelve disciples to become the
principal leaders in the early church and that this role was not a role for every disciple of
Christ. However, we should not assume that Jesus’ method of mentoring and training the
Twelve is not applicable to the development of all disciples. We can learn something
about the How of discipleship by observing how Jesus mentored the Twelve. The way
that Jesus related to His disciples in the Gospels can be characterized by such words and
phrases as relational, mentorship, leadership by example, on the job training, and life-on-
John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, Andrew and another disciple of
John the Baptist followed Jesus and inquired of Him, “Where are you staying?” Jesus
replied to them in a manner that implied significant aspects of His method of
discipleship: “Come and see.” The rest of John 1:39 highlights the benefits of Jesus’
come-and-see method: “They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with
Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).”

Jesus invited these former disciples of John the Baptist into a relationship with
Him and He hinted to them that His way of discipleship involves learning through
experiencing life with Him on a consistent basis. These disciples were to live with their
new Teacher and see for themselves how He lived; they were to work with their new
teacher and see for themselves how He ministered to humanity. This particular concept
of discipleship was not foreign to the people of Jesus’ day (Wilkins, 1992). Thus, the
disciples of John the Baptist would have been familiar with Jesus’ come-and-see approach. Their first visit with Jesus proved to be so good that they remained with Him the entire day.

On the occasion of appointing the Twelve as apostles, the Scriptures again highlight Jesus’ method of discipleship: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15, emphasis supplied). Let us notice that the experience of being regularly with Jesus was a paramount part of the mission and job description of the Twelve apostles. Before sending them out to preach and granting them power to heal, they were to spend time with Jesus in order that His life might impact their lives. The Twelve spent time in a life-on-life learning relationship with Jesus both as disciples and apostles. By being with Jesus, they learned how to pray, how to minister to the poor, how to heal the sick, and how to deal with both raging storms and contentious crowds. They also learned how to preach, how to sacrifice, and how to glorify God in the midst of persecution. Therefore, it stands to reason that a life-on-life mentoring relationship is an important component of discipleship.

Jesus’ method of discipleship comes into sharper focus as we examine the Great Gospel Commission. The New Testament presents several versions of the Gospel Commission (Santos, 2007). However, Matthew’s account places a strong emphasis on making disciples. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus states,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
The whole thrust of Jesus’ Commission is that of making disciples. In Matthew 28:19, the Greek word, \textit{mathēteusate} (μαθητεύσατε) that has been translated “teach” in the King James Version of the Bible comes from the Greek verb, \textit{mathēteuō} (μαθητεύω) which literally means “to disciple” or to make a disciple of someone (Green, 1963/1986; Strong, 1890/1988). This verb is stated in the imperative mood, denoting a command. Everything that is written in Matthew 28:19-20 is supplementary and complementary to Jesus’ command “to make disciples of all nations.” Hence, the purpose for going, teaching, and baptizing is to “make disciples of all the nations.”

To baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit signifies submission to and communion with the Godhead; it is a recognition of the involvement of all three divine beings in the plan of salvation, of which discipleship is a core component (White, 1904). The Godhead is involved in the impartation of grace, the transformation of our lives, the perfecting of our characters, and the restoration of the image of God in us. In John 16:13-15, Jesus placed particular emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s role as the Helper who, after Jesus’ ascension, will teach and guide Jesus’ followers, as well as glorify Christ in their lives. In verses 14-15, Jesus explains that all that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son, and that the Holy Spirit will take what belongs to the Son and give it to His disciples. In other words, even though Jesus had to ascend to heaven, the Holy Spirit would continue the work of discipleship that Jesus began with His disciples. This passage supports the concept that the three members of the Godhead are involved in discipleship, which is part and parcel of God’s plan of salvation and restoration of humanity.

Jesus’ Commission links evangelism and discipleship together. Evangelism is an
essential component of discipleship. Evangelism—from the Greek noun *evangeliste,* “announcer of glad tidings,”—entails sharing the gospel with others and leading people to Jesus Christ (Horn, 1979, p. 346). Evangelism, therefore, begins the discipleship process. However, discipleship is more comprehensive than evangelism. Discipleship includes evangelism, but it also entails a biblically based strategy for the spiritual growth and development of the person who has been converted to Christ (Wilson, 2007).

The process of teaching what Christ has commanded is an essential component of both evangelism and discipleship (Matt 28:20). However, discipleship places strong emphasis on the fact that the teaching must continue after the person has been added to the church. The teaching should take place in a relational manner as Jesus and His apostles demonstrated. The objective of discipleship is to produce mature followers of Jesus who reflect His character and are committed to reproducing other disciples of Christ. Those who are seeking to teach all that Christ has commanded should, therefore, strive toward this goal.

In summary, our study of Jesus’ methods and teachings concerning what it means to be His disciple indicates that discipleship is a high commitment relationship with Jesus that includes loving God supremely, following Christ, spending time with Him, learning from Him, being transformed by the Holy Spirit, growing spiritually, bearing fruit, loving one another, and fulfilling the Great Gospel Commission. We have seen that Jesus’ method of discipleship involves life-on-life mentoring and teaching His followers. As mentioned, discipleship is a part of God’s plan of salvation and restoration. Accordingly, the goal of discipleship is to produce mature followers of Jesus Christ who reflect His character and who work toward reproducing other disciples for Christ. Having examined
Jesus’ example and teachings on discipleship, we will now focus on how Jesus’ apostles applied what they learned from their Master in fulfilling the Great Gospel Commission.

**Discipleship in the Apostolic Era**

In His last words to the apostles and other disciples just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus outlined an evangelistic strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The disciples were to extend Jesus’ Commission to make disciples of all nations by evangelizing Jerusalem, then Judea, and then the world. In order to accomplish this Great Commission, they would be empowered by a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The manner in which the apostles and disciples conducted their mission in Jerusalem after they were endowed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a fitting case study for how discipleship was implemented in the New Testament after the ascension of Jesus. Acts 2:41 shows that in response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 persons were baptized. This was a wonderful evangelistic outcome. However, the influx of more than 3,000 converts presented a challenge in terms of discipleship. How did the apostles facilitate the growth and development of such a large group of new disciples? Acts 2:42-47 reveals that the apostles ensured that the new disciples were nurtured both in small groups (“from house to house,” v. 46) and large assemblies (“in the temple,” v. 46), through studying “the apostles’ doctrine” (v. 42), prayer, fellowship, worship, and witnessing to others about the grace of God.
The apostles also provided a system for supplying the material needs of the new converts and other disciples. Most of the three thousand new converts who were added to the church were Jews, and due to the animosity of the Jewish establishment toward the followers of Christ, some of these converts were ostracized by their families and native communities, and some of them lost their jobs; thus, being cut off from home and family, they were dependent on the love and generosity of the church (Nichol, 1980b, p. 173). Acts 2:44-45 points out that these believers in Jerusalem “had all things in common” and that they “sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need.” Acts 4:32-37 reiterates that the apostles and other disciples provided material support for the believers by a communal distribution. The new converts must have felt especially loved and supported by the church at a time of emotional and material difficulty in wake of their transition to the new faith.

The apostles facilitated a very relational, caring, and spiritual atmosphere for the new disciples just as Jesus had provided for the Twelve. The discipleship strategy that the apostles established for the benefit of new converts clearly had a positive impact on the large group of new disciples. Acts 2:46-47 presents a positively compelling picture of the assimilation of the new converts, the growth of the New Testament church, and blessings of God upon the church:

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

A similarly positive scene describing the love, unity, and generosity that existed among the believers is presented in Acts 4:32. In spite of the reality that many of the new converts in the early New Testament church had to cope with persecution and ostracism
from family, these new Christians remained faithful and active in the church. The apostles had learned how to provide an environment of mentoring, teaching, and material support for the new converts based on what they had learned from Jesus. The evidence of the positive impact of the apostles’ discipleship strategy under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the cheerful piety of the new converts, the love and unity of all the disciples, and the consistent growth of the church.

While the second chapter of Acts presents the most salient sketch of a strategy for developing new disciples in harmony with the pattern established by Jesus, the eleventh chapter also gives us a glimpse of this strategy at work among new disciples at Antioch. Disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene preached the gospel at Antioch and “a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20-21). The leaders at Jerusalem learned of this wonderful influx of new disciples and sent Barnabas to help facilitate the development of the new converts. When Barnabas arrived, he was happy to see the new converts and “he encouraged them all that with purpose of heart that they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

Barnabas also went to Tarsus to get Paul to join him in the work of mentoring these new converts (Acts 11:25). Paul and Barnabas then spent a whole year at Antioch nurturing the new disciples in the Scriptures and also evangelizing the surrounding communities (Acts 11:26). We get a sketch of the impact of Barnabas and Paul’s discipleship strategy as we behold the new disciples’ love and generosity for their fellow Christians in Jerusalem during a time of famine. Acts 11:29 states, “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.” Love for one another—one of the marks of Christian discipleship—was clearly present
among the new converts at Antioch, reflecting the reality that the discipleship strategy of Barnabas and Paul made a palpable difference.

Thus far, we see a similar pattern for developing new members of the church in both the second and eleventh chapters of Acts. The new disciples are nurtured in a relational and spiritual environment where the teaching of the Scriptures is central, evangelism is ongoing, and love and generosity toward one another are exhibited. This pattern is consistent with how Jesus mentored the Twelve apostles and ministered to the multitude of people who listened to His preaching.

The apostles learned from Jesus how to make and mentor disciples, including providing suitable leaders to oversee the new disciples. For example, in Acts 6 the apostles appointed seven deacons in Jerusalem in order that the deacons might take on some of the apostles’ administrative responsibilities. These responsibilities revolved around caring for the new disciples, especially those who were Hellenists and consequently, in the ethnic minority. Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church in order that the new disciples in places that Paul and Barnabas labored would be sustained by proper leadership following their (Paul and Barnabas’) departure (Acts 14:21-23). Moreover, it is not difficult to find instances in the New Testament where the apostles intentionally sought to encourage new converts to continue in the faith (Acts 11:21-23; 14:21-22; 15:36; 16:4-5, 40; 20:1-2).

Another important aspect of how the apostles sought to fulfill the Gospel Commission is that they shared the burden and mission of their work with the whole community of disciples, thus empowering the entire church to be proactive and supportive in the work of making and developing disciples. In Acts 4:23-31, the apostles
reported the progress of the apostles’ mission and the strong resistance to their work by
the Jewish leaders to the community of disciples in Jerusalem. The disciples then prayed
that God would grant the apostles boldness to continue to preach the gospel in spite of the
threats of the Jewish authorities and that He would use the apostles to heal the sick and
work miracles. God responded to the prayer of the community of disciples by filling the
entire assembly with a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so much so that “the place
where they were assembled together was shaken” (v. 31).

Acts 4:23-31 not only highlights how the apostles shared the cares of mission and
ministry with the community of faith, but also underscores the powerful impact of the
Holy Spirit in the work of discipleship. Jesus had promised His disciples that the Holy
Spirit would be their Helper after His ascension (John 16:7). On the day of Pentecost, the
Holy Spirit came in an extraordinarily powerful way to aid the disciples in fulfilling the
Gospel Commission. The Holy Spirit not only helped the apostles to win thousands of
new converts, but He also helped them to implement Jesus’ methods in nurturing the new
converts as they poured into the church on a regular basis (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 5:12-14).
Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would assist His disciples by bringing back to
their minds the things that Jesus had taught them when He was with them (John 14:26).
Based on what we may observe in how the apostles nurtured and cared for the large
group of new converts that was added to the church on the day of Pentecost as well as the
other converts who came into the church on a regular basis, it is evident that Holy Spirit
guided and imbued the apostles’ efforts.

In summary, what we see in the narrative of the New Testament after Jesus’
ascension is that the apostles took the lead in fulfilling the Great Gospel Commission by
relying on the Holy Spirit as they intentionally made and developed new disciples in a relational setting that provided teaching, mentorship, spiritual nurture, and material support for the new converts. The nurturing environment provided for new converts by the apostles also entailed strong local leadership from elders and deacons. Many contemporary Christian leaders have endeavored to fulfill the Great Commission by conducting public evangelism initiatives and leading scores of people to Christ, but without providing a strategy for the spiritual growth of the new converts (Burrill, 1998; Wilson, 2007). However, we have observed that the apostles conducted evangelism in a manner in which leading people to Christ is paired with providing spiritual nurture, material support, and leadership for the new disciples. Contemporary pastors and Christian leaders thus have a clear biblical pattern to follow in implementing discipleship in their respective churches.

**Stewardship and Discipleship**

The biblical examples highlighted above concerning how the apostles provided spiritual nurture, material support, and mentorship for new disciples imply that stewardship is an important component of discipleship. A steward is one who manages the resources of another. Martin (2005) emphasized that the Greek word from which the words steward and stewardship are used in the New Testament center around managing a household for someone else and thus a steward is a trustee of the owner. Did the apostles see themselves as stewards of Jesus Christ—responsible for proclaiming the gospel and reproducing disciples for Jesus?

The concept of stewardship is embedded in biblical thought and it is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. Stewards are required to be faithful (1 Cor 4:2) and
all believers, as faithful stewards, are required to render a tithe and an offering to support
the work of the ministry (Mal 3:8-10; Num 18:21). The narrative of Creation and the Fall
in Genesis chapters 1-3 indicate that all human beings are stewards of the Creator, that
God has entrusted into the hands of human beings the management of all the resources
that He has created on earth—both the living and the non-living, and that He will hold us
accountable for our stewardship. Genesis 3:9-24 shows that God held Adam and Eve
accountable for their disobedience of His explicit command to not eat of the Tree of the
Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In Genesis 1:28, God specifically instructed the first human beings to populate the
earth by reproducing other human beings and to provide leadership over the entire world.
Likewise, in the New Testament, the followers of Christ are given specific instructions to
reproduce disciples for Christ, facilitate the new disciples’ spiritual development through
teaching and mentorship, and be stewards of the gospel of salvation (Matt 28:19-20; 1
Cor 4:1; Col 1:25-27; 1 Pet 4:10). These instructions indicate that stewardship is related
to leadership, evangelism, and spiritual nurture—core components of discipleship.

The apostles learned from Jesus how to be good stewards in respect to caring for
people’s spiritual, physical, material, and emotional needs. Matthew chapters 8-9
highlight various occasions in which Jesus compassionately attended to the needs of
others in the presence of His disciples. Notably, in the feeding of more than five
thousand people who tarried in His presence all day until evening, Jesus demonstrated to
His disciples the importance of providing for both the physical and spiritual needs of
others (John 6:1-14). By trusting in His Father to feed more than five thousand people
with five barely loaves and two fish, Jesus also revealed to His disciples the power of
depending on God to provide necessary resources in time of need. Furthermore, by the orderly arrangement of the people and the command to “gather the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost” Jesus showed the disciples that faithful stewards are those who efficiently manage the resources that have been entrusted to them (John 6:12).

The apostles also heard Jesus say that the Father has entrusted all things into the hands of His Son, including the disciples, and that the Son takes the words of His Father (as the incarnate faithful trustee) and gives them to His disciples; further, when the Son returns to heaven the Holy Spirit (as a faithful steward) will take the truths that belong to the Son and declare them to His disciples (John 16:13-15). The apostle Peter would later instruct members of the church to be good stewards in the employment of their gifts and abilities to serve one another (I Pet 4:10,11). Likewise, Paul would admonish the elders of Ephesus to “shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Thus, the apostles learned from both Jesus’s teachings and His example that faithful stewardship involves the prudent and compassionate use of God’s resources for the benefit of others and the glory of God. This concept of stewardship is evident in their explicit use of the words steward or stewardship and in the manner in which they cared for new converts, and also in how they instructed church leaders to care for the church.

Principles of Spiritual Growth and Member Empowerment in the Writings of Ellen G. White

We now turn to a discussion of spiritual growth and equipping church members for service in the writings of Ellen G. White. White’s writings are pertinent to Seventh-day Adventists’ understanding of evangelism, church ministry, spiritual growth, and
leadership development. In this section, we focus on what she taught regarding spiritual growth and equipping/empowering the members of the church for service. In another section, we will focus on the meaning of the phrase “equipping of the saints” as it is used in Ephesians 4:12. However, at this juncture the words equip and empower are used to refer to the act of preparing church members, including new converts, for service and leadership. Our discussion below begins by highlighting a few salient ideas from White on spiritual growth and then proceeds to some of her main thoughts on empowering the members of the church.

Spiritual Growth

It is important to grasp White’s understanding of what spiritual growth looks like in the life of a genuine Christian. Such a Christian is intentionally focused on Christ, service oriented, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, and manifesting good works, but such a person is also self-forgetful in regard to his or her spiritual achievements (White, 1892/1991; 1889/2006, pp. 12-13). The main idea is that Christians who are growing in Christ generate positive character qualities and good works as a result of their dependence on Jesus, but these Christians are not self-righteous and are often unconscious of their achievements and piety. We can get a sample of White’s (1889/2006) view of what a growing Christian looks like in the following statement:

All who come within the sphere of his influence perceive the beauty and fragrance of his Christian life, while he himself is unconscious of it, for it is in harmony with his habits and inclinations. He prays for divine light, and loves to walk in light. It is his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. His life is hid with Christ in God; yet he does not boast of this, nor seem conscious of it. God smiles upon the humble and lowly ones who follow closely in the footsteps of the Master. (p. 13)

White taught that even though growing Christians are often unconscious of their
spiritual attainments, they are nevertheless proactive in cooperating with God to live a sanctified life and to grow into the character of Christ. She underscored the importance of using our wills and making a daily choice to abide in Jesus by faith. In White’s perspective, the responsibility of nurturing our relationship with Jesus Christ should be paramount among our duties as Christians; a focus on our relationship with Jesus facilitates spiritual growth and character development in a manner that is not legalistic. The habit of focusing on Christ involves communion with Him in prayer, Bible study, meditation on the life of Jesus from the Scriptures, and the daily surrendering of our lives and plans to God (White, 1892/1991; 1898/1940b, p. 83; 1889/2006, p. 83).

One of White’s (1898/1940b) most vivid encouragements to Christians to meditate on the life of Christ begins in the following manner: “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones” (p. 83). She also highlighted several things that will happen when we meditate on the scenes of Jesus’ sacrificial suffering and death: “As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit” (White, 1898/1940b, p. 83).

In White’s view, proactive cooperation with God not only includes nurturing our relationship with Jesus, but also includes daily self-surrender and self-denial. For example, she made it clear that as we grow in Christ, we will encounter various obstacles and temptations. Our most formidable obstacle is usually self. Therefore, we must regularly surrender self and all our plans to Christ in order for us to be transformed by
God’s Spirit and be molded into the character of Jesus (White, 1892/1991, chapters 5, 7, 8).

In summary, White’s teachings on spiritual growth emphasize that a maturing Christian will have a strong relationship with Christ and will exhibit good deeds and positive character qualities without being self-righteous or self-focused. A maturing Christian will also be intentional in surrendering self and focusing on Christ through such means as regular communion with God, daily consecration, and meditating on the life of Christ. This is but a sample of some of White’s ideas on spiritual growth. Below we look at another aspect of her conception of spiritual growth with respect to the equipping and empowering of believers.

Member Empowerment

Ellen White saw an inextricable link between spiritual growth and empowerment for service through various ministries, especially evangelism. For example, in the following statement, she advised church leaders to equip and encourage the members of the church to engage in evangelism:

We cannot advance in the work, we cannot grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus, until methods are adopted to secure all the working force in our churches to reach souls where they are. (White, 1895, para. 6)

Notice that in this statement, the spiritual development of the members of the church is connected to their participation in evangelistic activities. Hence, there is a link in White’s analysis between spiritual growth and outreach ministries. In another statement, White emphasized that church members have become too dependent on their pastors to do the work in the church and in the community. This kind of dependence robs parishioners of the privilege of leading people to Christ and of exercising faith and
personal effort, which would help them to become spiritually strong (White, 1889, para. 8). She also believed that there was too much sermonizing taking place in the church and not enough education on how members can use their gifts and talents to work for God. Consequently, the members had become too dependent on their ministers and, as a result, spiritual atrophy was withering the churches (White, 1948a, p. 431; 1948b, p. 19). The following statement captures well White’s sentiments on this issue:

It is evident that all the sermons that have been preached have not developed a large class of self-denying workers. This subject is to be considered as involving the most serious results. Our future for eternity is at stake. The churches are withering up because they failed to use their talents in diffusing light. Careful instruction should be given which will be as lessons from the Master; that all may put their light to practical use. (White, 1948a, p. 431)

Ellen White consistently encouraged leaders to focus on equipping all church members to labor for people outside the church, as well as to work for the overall development of the church. The church, in her view, should be a training center to teach its members how to minster in various ways such as giving Bible readings, teaching branch Sabbath schools, being medical missionaries, visiting the sick, helping the poor, developing cooking schools and schools of health, and doing evangelism (White, 1948c, pp. 117, 119; 1905/1942, p. 149). She also advised pastors and other church leaders to lead the way in doing various ministries among un-churched people. As the pastors and church leaders lead the way in implementing various ministries, the members should unite with the leaders and learn how to effectively work for the Lord from their example (White, 1905/1942, p. 149).

To recapitulate, we have observed that spiritual growth and member empowerment are closely connected in White’s analysis in that she emphasized that engagement in evangelism is essential to spiritual development; she also encouraged
pastors to equip church members to do various outreach ministries. White’s views on these matters are consistent with what we have thus far observed in our reflection on the teachings and example of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. Below we focus on the role of the pastor in equipping and empowering the church for ministry.

**The Pastor’s Role in Discipleship**

The example and teachings of Jesus in combination with the actual practices of the New Testament church provide a solid basis on which to formulate a theology of discipleship. Furthermore, the counsel of Ellen White concerning empowering church members for service gives us a biblically based conceptual framework on which to build an understanding of the pastor as the key equipper in the discipleship process. One particular passage in the New Testament that can provide insights into the role and objectives of the pastor in relation to empowering the membership in discipleship is Ephesians 4:11-13:

> And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

In the above passage of Scripture, Paul placed emphasis on the primary function of key spiritual leadership roles that God has given to various leaders for the overall benefit of the church. The offices of elders and deacons are not listed in Paul’s enumeration of the primary roles of key spiritual leaders because Paul is putting the focus on the main function that all the spiritual leaders have in common, rather than the authority of the office. Again, Paul’s point is that God has given spiritual leaders different kinds of leadership functions in order to benefit the entire church. Accordingly,
all categories of spiritual leaders have one common purpose—“the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Hirsch (2006) has provided an interesting explanation for the reason “apostles” is mentioned first in Paul’s enumeration of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28; he posited that the apostolic ministry is foundational to all other functions in that it creates an environment and reference point for all the other gifts. Hirsch argued that the apostolic ministry in combination with the prophetic ministry creates a covenant community in which all the other gifts/functions can thrive and have meaning. He also suggested that each function listed in Ephesians 4:11 is foundational to the subsequent one. Thus, the apostolic function provides the environment for the prophetic, the prophetic creates the environment for the evangelistic, the evangelistic creates the environment for the pastoral, and the pastoral provides the environment for the teaching. The acronym for Hirsch’s (2006) paradigm is APEPT (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, teaching). He argued that the APEPT gifts/ministries have been assigned to the entire church, not merely to the official leaders.

Hirsch’s (2006) argument for the reason “apostles” is listed first in Paul’s enumeration of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 has merit. The consistent sequence of 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 is that the word “apostles” is listed first, followed by “prophets,” and then other gifts/functions. This sequence does indicate a foundational role for the apostolic and prophetic functions in creating a covenant community.

However, in a manner similar but different from that of Hirsch, I suggest that in Ephesians 4:11, four leadership functions with their implied spiritual gifts are listed—
apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teacher—and that all four functions are critical to the creation and leadership of a covenant community. Again, Ephesians 4:11 is placing emphasis on the four key leadership functions/ministries that are foundational to the creation and advancement of the covenant community. The “apostles” and “prophets” were and are the pioneering leaders in the birth of the covenant community from a historical perspective. Apostles and prophets led the way in the establishment of the New Testament Church beyond the borders of Jerusalem. It might also be said that apostles and prophets led the way in the birth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Apostles” provide pioneering and authoritative leadership in the establishment of the church in foreign territories. “Prophets” give inspired leadership that helps the new covenant community to grasp God’s vision for them and to be grounded in His word. “Evangelists” and “pastor-teachers” provide pioneering and authoritative leadership in the expansion of the covenant community by planting and shepherding churches in the local context.

The contemporary pastor, at some point and in certain contexts, can assume virtually all the functions (with the exception of prophet) listed in Ephesians 4:11. This is a reality of how pastors—whether they are referred to as “pastor” or “bishop” or “priest”—function in today’s world. Today’s pastors assume the functions of the evangelist, the pastor-teacher, and, in some cases, the apostle by the demands of their spiritual role. In light of the versatile functions of the contemporary pastor, a clear mission and responsibility rest with the pastor to “equip the saints” of the church for “the work of ministry” and to edify or build up the body of Christ until the church comes into full spiritual maturity—an ongoing process.
The overarching message of Ephesians 4:11-13 is that the spiritual leaders in the church, whether they be pastors, elders, deacons, or evangelists, should seek to empower the entire church for the work of ministry. Now, from what we have seen above in the New Testament’s description of the example of Jesus and the apostles, this kind of empowerment is to be facilitated through mentoring, training, teaching, and encouragement. This should be an on-going process. The word translated as “equipping” in Ephesians 4:12, in the New King James Version (NKJV), comes from a Greek verb *katartizō* (*καταρτίζω*), which means “to complete thoroughly”, “to perfect”, “to restore,” “to mend,” “to prepare” (Green, 1963/1986; Nichol, 1980b, p. 1023; Strong, 1890/1988). Thus, the responsibility of the pastor is to prepare the members of the church thoroughly in accordance with the model exhibited by Jesus and his apostles in order to be mature followers of Christ and to engage effectively in ministry with the objective of fulfilling the Great Gospel Commission.

The concepts and practices of discipleship highlighted above from the New Testament and from the writings of Ellen White form the foundation on which the contemporary pastor should function as the key equipper of the members of the church. This includes mentoring church members to be effective workers and leaders for God in a similar manner as Jesus trained His disciples. The pastor should not do the work for the church members but empower and prepare them to be competent workers for the Lord in a variety of ways such as personal and public evangelism, nurturing spiritual growth, health ministry, providing for the material needs of those who are less fortunate, and caring for new converts.
Especially in the area of nurturing new converts, the contemporary pastor has an established New Testament pattern to follow which entails creating a relational environment that provides mentorship, teaching, material support, encouragement, and strong local leadership. The contemporary pastor also has the vivid example of how the apostles and disciples depended on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Gospel Commission effectively in both the evangelistic stage and the stage of nurturing new disciples.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to provide a biblically based theological reflection on discipleship and its relation to spiritual growth and empowerment of church members for service. We have explored in the New Testament the relevant teachings and methods of Jesus Christ and the post-Pentecost ministry of His apostles. In addition, we have examined the inspired writings of Ellen G. White. From these analyses, a clear picture has emerged regarding what Christian discipleship entails, including insights that are applicable to the role of the contemporary pastor as the key equipper in preparing the entire church to engage effectively in ministry.

We have seen that Jesus requires unswerving love, dedication, and service from all His followers, regardless of their vocation or position. Jesus also desires that His disciples spend time with Him and learn from Him. Moreover, we have observed that Christ implemented a specific relational/mentoring model of discipleship and that He commissions every Christian to go and make other disciples according to His methods, which includes baptizing them and teaching them everything that He has commanded.

Our study has referenced several New Testament passages that show that the apostles
were intentional about following Jesus’ methods of providing an environment of spiritual instruction, mentoring, small group fellowship, material support, local leadership, and encouragement to all disciples, especially new converts. Thus, we see from the example of Jesus and His apostles that discipleship is to take place in a relational manner in which there is multi-dimensional nurturing (spiritual, mental, social, and material) and leadership development, particularly when new converts have been added to the church.

The pattern of discipleship that has been highlighted above is relevant and conducive to the mission of the contemporary Christian church and the role of the contemporary pastor as a vital leader the discipleship process. In fact, discipleship should be at the core of the church’s mission. Accordingly, the primary role of the contemporary pastor should be to equip the church to serve God and humanity in a manner in which mentoring relationships are developed and consistent teaching of the principles and methods of Christ is on-going. The objective of the pastor should be to prepare each member to serve as mature disciples of Christ—disciples who are committed both to reproducing new disciples for Jesus and nurturing them to maturity.

Contemporary pastors and Christian leaders can learn from the apostles and disciples to depend on the Holy Spirit and to pray fervently for the Spirit’s empowerment as we seek to win and develop new converts according to Jesus’ methods.

The implications of what we have examined concerning discipleship in the New Testament are that the entire church should be empowered and accountable for evangelizing its community and developing its new converts in accordance with Jesus’ methods. Our theological reflection on discipleship in this chapter thus provides a solid
biblical basis for the strategy that I have formulated for the multi-dimensional nurturing and development of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

Within the last four decades, there has been increasing awareness and concern among Christians that the cultural hegemony of Christianity has dramatically collapsed in Europe and has been rapidly declining in the United States. We now live in a postmodern and post-Christendom age in which Christianity has to compete for attention amid various beliefs and ideologies (Hirsch, 2006; Jones, 2006; Lyons, 2010). This reality has impacted both quantitative and qualitative growth in the church. People are not turning to Christ in the United States as they used to in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s (Paulien, 2008). Moreover, the notions and practices of the world seem to be making strong inroads in the church, so much so that both research and anecdotal evidence indicate that there is little difference in the lifestyle of the average church-going Christian in America from that of the unchurched (Foss, 2000; Platt, 2010; Putman, 2010).

These cultural shifts, as well as different political and technological changes in the 20th and 21st centuries have, at various intervals, stirred Christians to evaluate the church in terms of its mission and growth, its obedience to and understanding of the Great Gospel Commission, and its lifestyle in regard to reflecting the character of Christ in the world (Detrick, 2013; Geiger, Kelly, & Nation, 2012; Kinnaman, 2007, 2011). Christian authors have given careful attention to both Jesus’ mandate in Matthew 28:19,
20 to make disciples and His methods in the calling and training of His disciples.

Furthermore, Christian researchers are now focusing on assessing the qualitative growth of the church with as much, or even more attention than they have given to quantitative growth (see Barna, 2001; Schwartz, 1996).

More church leaders and members are now concerned not only with how many were baptized or joined the church (quantitative growth), but also with whether or not new members and longstanding members are growing spiritually, obeying Jesus’ commandments, manifesting Christlikeness, being equipped to serve, and engaging in some aspect of ministry (qualitative growth). For example, Hirsch (2006) decried the consumer-driven attractional model of church growth that places emphasis on devising programs to attract a contemporary crowd to the church edifice but neglects to take discipleship seriously. Similarly, Bill Hybles, the widely esteemed pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago and a proponent of the seeker sensitive model for church growth, made a sobering confession concerning the failure of his approach in producing mature and responsible Christians (Burney, 2007). These are some of the basic interests and questions that have led authors to examine the subject of Christian discipleship.

In the previous chapter, I described and defined Christian discipleship on the basis of a biblical and theological study of the teachings and example of Jesus and His apostles. Accordingly, I emphasized that a disciple is no more than a Christian. The goal of both discipleship and Christianity is that of Christlikeness (Wilkins, 1992; Willard, 2006). As we will see below, one of the reasons the term Christian may not carry the same aura as disciple of Christ is that modern Christianity has for a long time virtually severed faithful
obedience to Christ from salvation by grace (Bonhoeffer, 1937/2011; Willard, 2006). However, today the term discipleship carries with it the aura and emphasis of cooperating with God in a lifestyle that involves both justification and obedience to God’s commandments; this process also involves principles and methods to stimulate spiritual growth, evangelism, and leadership development. The clear objective of discipleship is to develop mature followers of Christ who obey Jesus, reflect His image, and make disciples. Discipleship, therefore, describes a lifestyle of conversion and spiritual growth in which the follower of Jesus endeavors to internalize and reflect the life and teachings of Christ under the mentorship of other Christians and the transformative influence of the Holy Spirit (Habermas, 2003; Hull, 2006; Jones, 2006; Pope, 2013; Putman & Harrington, 2013; Wilkins, 1992; Willard, 2006).

There is greater consensus today regarding the definition of discipleship that I have presented above. For most of the 20th century, this was not the case. However, much discussion and clarification of the topic at various intervals in the 20th century have, by the turn of the century, engendered a better understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

In the pages below, we will explore some of the salient findings in the literature on discipleship. I will first provide a brief sketch of the evolution of the concept of discipleship in the 20th and 21st centuries by highlighting two broad emphases that have emerged on the topic. I will then examine major components of Jesus’ disciple-making strategy that are discussed in literature such as empowering church members, leadership development/mentoring, intentional spiritual nurturing, imitation, community/small
groups, and reproduction/multiplication. These components form the basis of what discipleship should look like at the local church level.

Two Major Emphases in Discipleship

Two seminal works on discipleship in the 20th Century appeared 26 years apart and produced two separate, but related foci. These are Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s 1937 publication of The Cost of Discipleship and Robert Coleman’s 1963 publication of The Master Plan of Evangelism. The major difference in the two works is that Bonhoeffer focused largely on Jesus’ radical theology/teachings on discipleship, while Coleman concentrated on Jesus’ strategy for making disciples. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer placed strong emphasis on the costly grace of Christ that inspires us toward loving obedience and self-denying service to God, rather than the cheap grace that leads modern Christians to accept the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice without following His commandments. Coleman, on the other hand, focused on Jesus’ intentional relational strategy of training His disciples and its implications for spiritual and numerical growth. Jesus’ strategy, in Coleman’s analysis, becomes a model for how pastors and church leaders should equip and mentor members to evangelize the world. This is not to say that Coleman does not draw attention to the sometimes-stringent teachings of Christ concerning the cost of discipleship, nor that Bonhoeffer does not mention Jesus’ strategy for training His disciples. Rather, each author has a different emphasis on the same topic.

Prior to Robert Coleman’s work, Roland Allen’s influential 1912 publication—entitled Missionary Methods of St. Paul’s or Ours?—placed emphasis on the how apostle Paul evangelized and mentored disciples according to Jesus’ methods, in contrast to modern missionary practices.
Not surprisingly, it appears that much of the literature on discipleship from the 20th century to the present follows either Bonhoeffer’s or Coleman’s emphasis. Those who focus on the theology/teaching-dimension will often highlight the importance of not separating loving obedience to Christ from salvation by grace. They will also draw attention to Jesus’ teaching on the cost of discipleship, the Sermon on the Mount, and the kingdom of God. Those who focus on the strategy-dimension usually talk about the training of the Twelve, leadership/mentoring, and Jesus’ methods for the reproduction and multiplication of disciples. However, both of these emphases on discipleship highlight the priority of fulfilling the Great Gospel Commission and also emphasize the importance of spiritual growth. Interestingly, at the dawn of the 21st century, we find that some writers, who formerly focused on one or the other emphasis, have moved toward a synthesis of both dimensions of discipleship (Hull, 2006; Willard, 2006).

Bonhoeffer’s activism during an epochal period in the 20th century gave impetus to his work on discipleship. As an influential Lutheran theologian and pastor in Germany during the rise of Hitler and Nazism in the 1930s, he believed that the Protestant church in Germany had become too accommodating and well-nigh complicit with the state, especially Hitler’s increasingly fascist regime. He openly and consistently called on the church to resist Nazi dictatorship and Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. During the 1930s he studied in London and in June 1939, just before the outbreak of war, he travelled to New York on invitation from Union Theological Seminary. His friends in America sought to persuade him not to go back to Germany, but he declared to them that in order to be a conscientious part of the reconstruction of Christian society in post-World War II Germany, he would have to suffer with his people during the war. Therefore, he returned
to Germany later in the year 1939, was imprisoned by the Gestapo in 1943, and hanged on April 9, 1945 (see Introduction to Bonhoeffer, 1937/2011).

Bonhoeffer’s persevering resistance against an evil empire and his subsequent martyrdom gave his book an immensely powerful appeal. His life and his message represent a provocative critique of contemporary Western Christianity’s divorce of grace from faithful obedience to Christ. He claimed that Christianity in the West had become an abstract system of beliefs that has little or no bearing on how Christians live their daily lives. He argued that discipleship is not merely a belief in a doctrinal system; it is not primarily an intellectual activity; it is pure loving obedience to the claims of the Savior. Following Jesus is a relational dynamic that involves both receiving His grace and joyfully submitting to His Lordship.


One of the most cogent advocates for practical Christian living and biblical discipleship today is philosopher and evangelical author Dallas Willard (1998, 2002, 2006). He leads a persistent call in literature for the church to become relevant and effective in post-Christendom/postmodern society by returning to biblical discipleship. In his analysis, contemporary Christians’ lack of obedience to the claims of Christ has made Christianity irrelevant in our world. The omission of discipleship from the church’s attempt to fulfill the Gospel Commission is the great problem in Christianity today. Many churches do not require people to become a disciple of Christ in order to be
a Christian. As a result of this omission, people join the church and remain members without ever deciding to follow Christ (Willard, 2006, pp. 2-5). The church, Willard contended, needs to fulfill the Great Gospel Commission by both proclaiming and living the message that the abundant life of God’s kingdom begins now, not only when we get to heaven. The kingdom of God is a present reality and Christians should reflect this reality by joyfully living an obedient life as a disciple of Jesus Christ, not merely as a consumer of His grace (1998).

Like Bonhoeffer, Willard (1998) also argues that the church’s lack of focus on the theology of the kingdom of God and on Jesus as Teacher/Example—not only Savior—has led pastors to place the making of converts, rather than the making of disciples, their mandatory goal. He further contends that there is a huge difference between trusting in the real person of Jesus Christ and trusting in a transaction for the remission of sins. That is, our salvation is centered on our daily relationship with Jesus, not on our doctrinal construct of what happened on the cross and its implications. He believes that the emphasis on forgiveness alone, rather than forgiveness and grace-inspired obedience, has been destructive of practical godliness among Christians; although this false theology has been around for centuries, it has now reached a boiling point.

The call for discipleship and kingdom-living that Willard has emphasized is also highlighted by Platt (2010, 2013) and Stetzer (2012). Platt, a mega-church pastor who became well known in the news media for having one of the fastest growing churches in the United States, came to the conclusion that the mega-church model did not harmonize with what he had studied of Jesus’ ministry and the New Testament church. Platt observes that Jesus gave a huge amount of time to training His disciples. He also
discovers that as the early church followed Jesus’ example in making disciples and training leaders, it grew exponentially. However, much of contemporary church growth strategies and Christian practices reflect the self-centered, market driven, and mass-produced consumer culture of the West. Platt contends that Christians in America have espoused values that contradict the gospel. Therefore, he proposes a radical discipleship that is consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus. In a similar vein, Stetzer places emphasis on the need for Christians to live a kingdom lifestyle in a tactfully subversive manner to the culture of a world that is in rebellion against God.

The works of Hull (1984/2004, 2006, 1988/2007, 1990/2010), Wilson (2007), and Burrill (1998) reflect more of a synthesis of the two different emphases in the literature on discipleship that have been pioneered in the twentieth century by Bonhoeffer and Coleman, respectively. Although Hull, Wilson, and Burrill have much to say about Jesus’ strategy for making disciples, they also provide strong critiques of contemporary Christianity’s failure to prioritize discipleship in the church. Hull, a pastor and administrator who has written perspicuously on discipleship for three decades and has also established an international training network, was appalled by the way the church has used the doctrine of justification by faith to steer Christians away from following Jesus. He believes that Christianity without discipleship leads the church to conform to the culture of the world. Accordingly, he posits that materialism has clouded the judgment of American Christians. He has also been disturbed by the evangelical church’s preoccupation with felt needs to the point that this preoccupation is placed above the clear mandate of the Gospel Commission.
Wilson (2007) argues that we often water-down the gospel to accommodate notions that are in harmony with modern and postmodern worldviews; however, discipleship calls us to live in harmony with the principles of God’s kingdom. He emphasizes that Christ’s commission to make disciples is the telos of the church—telos refers to the purpose for which something was designed—therefore evangelism should not be disconnected from discipleship.

Burrill (1998), realizing the damage that has been done to the church as a result of the neglect of discipleship in many churches’ evangelistic plans, argues that an important part of the process of making a disciple is to help people before they are baptized to develop a level of spiritual growth in which they are at least mature enough to endure persecution and ridicule and also understand and practice Jesus’ basic teachings. Therefore, he recommends solid preparation prior to baptism and intentional nurturing afterwards.

The ideas of Hull, Wilson, and Burrill concerning Jesus’ disciple making strategy will be referenced along with other authors as we discuss some of the elements in Robert Coleman’s emphasis on Jesus’ method for discipleship. As mentioned, Coleman (1963/1986) concentrates on Jesus’ strategy for making disciples and its implication for both quantitative and qualitative growth. Accordingly, we have in Coleman’s analysis an incisive articulation of some integral areas of discipleship such as leadership development, evangelism, and spiritual growth. Coleman’s book makes it clear that Jesus’ evangelistic strategy, His method of leadership, and His approach to spiritual growth focused on people rather than programs. Jesus spent much of His waking hours of ministry with the Twelve in order to mentor them in a manner that not only involved
impacting information but also hands-on training, fellowship/community, and His life impacting and transforming theirs. While, Jesus did not neglect to minister to the masses, He concentrated on training a few ordinary men whom He would use to reproduce other disciples, who would in turn make other disciples, and in so doing, reach the masses. In other words, in order to provide for sustainable growth in the church Jesus spent time developing leaders that He could depend on to train and equip the multitudes who would enter the church after His ascension.

Coleman (1963/1986) argues that if the church follows Jesus’ strategy we would not have the kind of reversals that we find in contemporary evangelistic initiatives, where many people get baptized but they do not become stable members of the church. The question each pastor and evangelist must decide is whether to do the hard work of focusing on mentoring leaders who would assist in making disciples of the masses or to follow the popular evangelistic strategies of preaching and baptizing the masses with little or no plan for their growth and development?

In Coleman’s (1963/1986) book we have the basic elements for much of the literature in the 20th and 21st centuries on the strategy or method of disciple making. The authors who follow Coleman’s stream of thought are more numerous than those who focus on Jesus’ radical teaching on discipleship, perhaps because Coleman’s emphasis deals more with the practical how to of discipleship, a dimension that Christians gravitate towards. Thus, the authors who follow Coleman’s emphasis include Ogden (1990/2003b, 1998/2007), Putman (2010), Schwartz (1996), Rainer and Geiger (2011), Ferguson and Ferguson (2010), Hull (1984/2004, 2006, 1988/2007, 1990/2010), Wilson (2006), and Burrill (1993, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2009). Therefore, I will highlight some elements of
Jesus’ strategy that were presented in Coleman’s classic book and have been expanded by other authors. These elements are reflected in the subtitles below. These elements are also the practical components of what discipleship should look like in the local church. The elements include empowering church members, leadership development and mentoring, nurturing and spiritual growth, and evangelism and reproduction of disciples.

**Empowering Church Members**

An important aspect of leadership and spiritual growth that Coleman (1963/1986) highlighted in Jesus’ disciple-making strategy is the fact that when people came to Christ, they became a part of the fellowship of other disciples. Jesus did not disciple each convert, but rather, trained the Twelve to care for, fellowship with, and reproduce new converts. Oosterwal (1972), Hull (1984/2004, 1988/2007, 1990/2010), Burrill (1993, 1996, 1998), Ogden (2003a, 1990/2003b), and others (McDonald, 2004/2007; McNeal, 2003) have expanded on this principle. They showed that the typical traditional division between clergy and laity has fostered a culture in the church where the pastor is expected to do ministry and the laity is only to play a supportive role. This pastoral paradigm is an inheritance of the church-state hierarchical culture established by Emperor Constantine in the 4th century and continued by the church throughout the Middle Ages, and even beyond the Protestant Reformation. However, there needs to be a paradigm shift from a pastor-centered church to a model where the entire church is involved in ministry. Pastors should train and equip the members for both in-reach and outreach rather than try to do all of the work themselves.

The paradigm shift from the pastor-centered church has been conceived by some authors as a Second or New Reformation (Hull, 1988/2007; McNeal, 2003; Ogden,
The first Reformation took the Bible from the exclusive use of the clergy and returned it to the people; the New Reformation takes the ministry from the exclusive domain of the clergy and restores it to the entire church. Ogden (1990/2003b) emphasized the fact that the whole church has been called into a relationship with Christ, into community with the saints, and into a process of lifelong transformation; this is our primary call.

Oosterwal (1972) was among the earliest authors to emphasize that a rediscovery of the biblical meaning and role of the laity has consistently sparked a missional awakening and expansion of the church. According to Oosterwal, such evangelistic growth occurred in the Protestant Reformation, the Pietistic lay movement, the missionary awakening in the 19th century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the first three decades of its official organization, and the expansion of Christianity in Africa and Latin America in the second half of the 20th century.

Burrill (1993) showed how the early Seventh-day Adventists had a model of church leadership and evangelism in which pastors were not settled over a congregation. Rather, pastors were itinerants who planted churches and trained the members to care for themselves and to engage actively in ministry. Under this model, Adventism experienced its most rapid and extensive growth. This model continued in the Adventist denomination until the early decades of the 20th Century. According to Burrill, it was in North America that the Adventist church began the practice of settling pastors over congregations. Hence, by the latter half of the 20th century, Adventism in third world countries was experiencing explosive growth; however, in North America, Europe, and Australia, the growth rate went from 7% per annum to less than 2%. Burrill, therefore,
contended that the Adventist church needs to revert to its foundational model of non-pastor dependent congregations.

Pastoral Authority

Although Ogden, Hull, and Burrill all embraced the priesthood of believers and the empowerment of the laity, there is a substantial difference between Hull and Ogden with respect to the authority of the pastor and elders vis-à-vis the other members of the church. In Hull’s (1988/2007) analysis, the pastor and elders form a leadership team that has authority and oversight in the church. This team trains and equips the church for ministry as well as providing guidance and care. Therefore, the pastoral team is pivotal for the discipleship process in the church. In Ogden’s (1990/2003b) analysis, the pastor trains and equips the church for ministry, but the pastor, and presumably the elders, do not appear to have any more authority in the church than the other members. It appears that Ogden assumes that in the priesthood of all believers, every member, including the pastor, has equal authority to lead and guide the church, and therefore, the authority of pastors and elders is probably negotiable. Burrill (1993) emphasizes that pastors are on equal status with the laity in performing ministry. However, pastors have a leadership role as shepherds to train and equip the laity. Therefore, Burrill seems to lean closer to Hull’s position with respect to the authority of pastors and elders.

Spiritual Gifts

One important way in which disciples can be empowered for ministry is through the identification and utilization of their spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12 reveals that a diversity of gifts have been given to the church so that it can function as one body in a
manner in which there is interdependence among its members in the corporate fulfillment of its mission. Schwartz’s (1996) research shows that Christians tend to be more contented and to rely more on God than on their own strength when they are functioning in the area of their giftedness (p. 24). He and other authors contend that pastors and local church leaders should help members identify their gifts and function in an area of ministry where their gifts can be naturally utilized (Burrill, 1993; Hirsch, 2006; Ogden, 1990/2003b).

**Leadership Development and Mentoring**

The pastor’s character, as well as his/her leadership, has a huge impact on the success or failure of the discipleship process in the church (Breen & Kallestad, 2005; Hull, 1988/2007, 1990/2010; Putman & Harrington, 2013). The pastor is not to be primarily a manager or a chaplain, but a transformational, relational, servant leader who is first and foremost a disciple of Christ—one who is prepared to train and equip the congregation both to minister to each other and to reach the unchurched (Breen & Kallestad, 2005; Burrill, 1993; Foss, 2000; Ogden, 1990/2003b; Stetzer & Rainer, 1999/2010).

There is substantial evidence for the positive impact of spiritual leadership on discipleship and growth in the church. Based on extensive research of growing churches, Schwartz (1996) identified empowering leadership as one of the main characteristics of thriving churches. Kidder’s (2011) research reveals that one of the four major factors among thriving Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America is effective and empowering leadership. Easton (2004) contends that the best kind of leadership for the church is team leadership in which the clergy empowers the laity by equipping them for
ministry and sharing leadership with them. Putman (2010) and Ferguson and Ferguson (2010) see the reproduction of leaders as essential to discipleship and church growth. Geiger and Peck (2016) and Forman, Jones, and Miller (2004) place emphasis on the local church as the biblically proscribed center for leadership development. McCallum and Lowery (2012) note that one weakness in popular literature on discipleship is that it is more focused on anchoring new members than on training and equipping Christian leaders.

Jesus spent most of His time in His three and one-half years of ministry in training the Twelve in a very relational environment. Thus, discipleship entails a special kind of leadership development: one that takes place within relational communities. Putman and Harrington (2013) call this intentional relational discipleship. Pope (2013) called it the life-on-life model. The life-on-life model and the intentional relational model both emphasize the process of one leader mentoring another person with the objective of developing mature and well-equipped followers of Christ. Accordingly, Hull (2006) argues that an essential part of being a disciple of Christ is to be willing to submit to the mentorship of one who teaches you how to follow Jesus. McCallum and Lowery (2012) shows that personal individual mentoring is far more effective than corporate mentoring. They also argue that discipleship is a form of leadership development that facilitates reproduction and multiplication of leaders because it does not require a central location where teaching and training must be done. Rather, leaders reproduce themselves in the ones they are mentoring at any location. Most writers on discipleship, spiritual growth, or leadership development agree that some form of mentoring is an integral part

One important issue in the literature on Christian discipleship is the question as to how should we distinguish between Jesus’ training of the Twelve as disciples and as apostles (Wilkins, 1996). Does Christ want all His disciples to leave their fulltime occupations and follow Him like the Twelve did? Is there a difference between those called to be pastors and those who are the ordinary followers of Christ? Should all disciples become leaders?

Wilkins (1996) emphasizes that as disciples, the Twelve present an example of how Jesus leads all believers but as apostles they are an example of how Jesus mentors spiritual leaders for His church. Hull (1988/2007) points out that certain clusters of spiritual gifts are for leadership and administration, and that not everyone in the church has been given gifts for corporate spiritual leadership. He posits that only about 10% of the church members are candidates for corporate spiritual leadership.

**Nurturing and Spiritual Growth**

The Christian’s need for spiritual nurturing and growth is a topic that is increasingly discussed today (Willard, 2006; Hull, 2006). Dybdahl (2007) speaks of the universal hunger for God in the human soul and argues that contemporary Christianity has been so preoccupied with dogma and denominationalism that it has intellectualized the faith in a manner that does not satisfy our spiritual hunger. Davis (2013) frames discipleship in terms of two infinite journeys: (a) an outward journey of advancing the Kingdom of Christ throughout the world through the proclamation of the gospel and (b) an inward journey from justification toward sanctification, and ultimately, glorification.
Davis and other Christian leaders recognized that the church cannot effectively fulfill the outward journey if its individual members are not making progress on their inward journey (Kidder, 2011; Paulien, 2008). The inward journey will motivate them to be witnesses for Jesus everywhere and the experience of sharing their faith will also advance their internal spiritual development.

The main goal of discipleship is to develop mature followers of Christ who obey Jesus, reflect His image, and make other disciples. Putman and Harrington (2013) highlight five levels or stages of spiritual growth: (a) the spiritually dead, (b) infant, (c) child, (d) young adult, and (e) spiritual parent. According to Putman and Harrington (2013), the church should identify the stages of growth of a disciple, understand the basic characteristic and needs of each stage, recognize the key phrases that people say in each stage, and help the person to develop and move forward. Therefore, the goal of the inward journey dimension of discipleship is to help people to develop and move forward by the intentional nurturing of their relationship with God through regular bible study, prayer, worship, meditation, Christian fellowship/community, sharing their faith, and spiritual/doctrinal education on a variety of subjects. Among the methodologies or processes that have been recommended for spiritual nurturing and growth are small groups, imitation, and Christian/spiritual formation. We will look at each of these below.

Small Groups/Community

Christian fellowship or community is a vital component of discipleship (Hirsch, 2006; Jones, 2006; Putman, 2010; Walton, 2014). In reference to the 3,000 new members who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:42 (NKJV) states, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread,
and in prayers.” This is a colorful picture of the prominence and importance of community in the apostolic church. Individual new members and longstanding members did not function in isolation from the community of believers during the week. They did not merely come together for worship on the weekend and perhaps for mid-week prayer service, as is often the case today in the West. Rather, there was consistent interaction, accountability, and interdependence among these disciples of Christ. More often than not, this kind of fellowship took place in their homes. Platt (2010, 2013) observes how, in an atmosphere of religious discrimination and persecution, a deep sense of community and commitment to discipleship is part and parcel of the underground church in China. Furthermore, the underground church in China is growing at an exponentially high rate similar to the church in New Testament times.

One of the best ways to foster community in a setting designed for intentional spiritual nurturing and growth is through small groups or discipleship groups (Hull, 1988/2007; Putman, 2010; Walton, 2014). James’ (2010) manual on discipleship groups shows that when the traditional program-based church adds small groups as one of their programs, they move from 30% membership involvement in the church’s ministries to 50%. However, when a church has most of its members in small groups, it tends to have about 90% membership involvement in ministry. Schwartz (1996) shows that the multiplication of holistic small groups is a solid growth principle. According to Schwartz, holistic small groups do more than read and discuss Scripture; they create an atmosphere where members can share their concerns and struggles (p. 32). Hull (1988/2007) sees small groups as the best vehicle for making disciples and facilitating spiritual growth in the congregation.
Imitation

Many authors on discipleship either emphasize or allude to the necessity of imitating or following Jesus. Hull (2006) states that a typical disciple in New Testament times “learned how his teacher kept God’s commands, including how he practiced the Sabbath, fasted, prayed, and said blessings in ceremonial situations” (p. 63).

Furthermore, such a disciple also learned the traditions the teacher adhered to and his teaching methodology. Bennett (2001) points out that Jesus revolutionized discipleship in His day because He told His followers that attachment to Himself above everyone else along with doing everything He said were absolutely necessary to being His disciple. Wilkins (1992) shows that while disciples of other leaders in New Testament times followed their masters and adhered to the master’s teachings because such masters were great leaders, the disciples of Jesus were to follow Him and grow in conformity to His image because He is Savior and God, the One who gives eternal life.

Following Jesus, doing things the way He did, and growing in conformity to His image is the essence of what is referred to as imitation. Augsburger (2006) highlights the importance of imitation in arguing that discipleship entails radical attachment to Jesus, and that radical attachment involves participation, rather than mere intellectual knowing. We must participate in following Christ and in learning from Him in the process of following him, rather than merely learning about Him. Imitation involves participation in following Jesus and internalization of the life and ministry of Jesus.
Christian/Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation is a term used today by a growing segment of religious thought-leaders, practitioners, and authors to refer to the process of intentional development of the spiritual life and transformation of character through the regular use of spiritual disciplines and other methods. McNeal (2003) sees life-coaching, worship, sharing one’s faith, community, and life-experience-based-learning as important components of spiritual formation. Detrick (2013) uses the terms discipleship and spiritual formation interchangeably in reference to organic spiritual growth, which is defined as “the natural growth that occurs when authentic faith in Jesus Christ is merged with intentional alignment to the principles of Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit, while living and serving others” (Chapter 4, para. 19). Willard (2006) argues that spiritual formation is the “buzz phrase” today because the term discipleship has lost its original meaning in contemporary Christianity.

The term spiritual formation has also been a point of controversy due to its pluralistic/ecumenical nature. Christian leaders are now relabeling the process Christian formation because Eastern religions, with non-biblically based worldviews and non-Judeo/Christian values, also refer to their methodologies as spiritual formation. Christian leaders are also being cautious not to allow into their process certain spiritual techniques that are not biblically based (Hull, 2006). Although Willard (2006) acknowledged that the term spiritual formation is being used by other religions and that these religions believe that their spiritual movement is equal to Christian spiritual formation, he nevertheless defended the term and the movement.
The controversy over spiritual formation also extends to the Seventh-day Adventists Church. Some Adventist leaders and members are disturbed by some of the practices and spiritual disciplines that contemporary ecumenical Christianity and the spiritual formation movement seem to be embracing, such as contemplative prayer, the emptying-of-the-mind form of meditation, centering prayer, transcendental meditation, and other practices derived from medieval Roman Catholic mysticism and Eastern religions (Cork, 2011; Finley, 2012; Knott, 2011; Pipim, 2010). As a result of the controversy surrounding spiritual formation, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrew University has changed the labeling of its course on spiritual formation to that of Biblical Spirituality. The seminary points out that it does not teach contemplative or emergent types of spirituality. Members of its faculty in charge of Biblical Spirituality state emphatically that they do not teach unbiblical practices; rather, they focus on teaching “whole life spirituality” which is consistent with Adventist fundamental beliefs (Knott, 2011).

Dybdahl (2007) argues that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has been so preoccupied with teaching the right doctrine that it has neglected to focus on systematic spiritual growth. However, to the contrary, I contend that Adventists have consistently focused on spiritual growth in their literature, especially in the writings of Ellen G. White. Nevertheless, the worldliness of a capitalistic and consumer-driven society is increasingly impacting the spiritual lives of Christians in the West, including Adventists, to the extent that we have almost imperceptibly imbibed the prevailing assumptions and values of a culture that is inimical to biblical spirituality. The extensive research of Geiger et al. (2012) on spirituality and discipleship among Protestants in North America
revealed that there is a great deficiency of discipleship in most churches, resulting in a scarcity of transformed lives (p. 15).

**Evangelism, Reproduction, and Multiplication**

Evangelism and discipleship are symbiotically related: one cannot survive without the other (Wilson, 2007). Evangelism describes the process of reaching people with the gospel in order to lead them to follow Christ and become His disciples. Discipleship will determine both how evangelism is conducted and how to develop new disciples into mature followers of Jesus Christ—who will in turn reproduce other disciples. McGavran (1970/1990) and the Church Growth Movement place strong emphasis on understanding how people come to Christ by employing the best practices in evangelism and missions and holding the church accountable for the use of resources in proportion to the results obtained in missional endeavors. The Church Growth Movement thus launched an empirical or evidence-based approach to evangelism, which helped Christian practitioners witness more fruitful evangelistic outcomes. While the church growth movement places priority on making new converts, today’s discipleship movement gives equal priority to the task of growing new converts into mature followers of Christ. The discipleship movement emphasizes that qualitative growth is as important as quantitative growth. As a result of evangelism and discipleship, the church will grow both numerically and spiritually.

Burrill (2009) shows that growing churches had one major thing in common regardless of what evangelistic methodology they used: they created a culture of evangelism. In growing churches, evangelism is not merely an event or a program; it is a core component of the lifecycle and mission of the church. In harmony with Burrill’s
findings, Rainer and Geiger (2011), after surveying more than four hundred evangelical
churches, found that the healthiest churches in America follow a simple process of
discipleship, rather than a multiplicity of programs. Further, the entire congregation is in
alignment with this process. Rainer and Geiger (2011), therefore, counsel that when it
comes to evangelism, church growth, and discipleship, simple is better. A simple process
that is clear, intentionally progressive, unifying, and focused is what works.

Thompson (1981) highlights the fact that in both evangelism and discipleship,
building relationships is essential. Moreover, he argues that our evangelism would be far
more effective and more in harmony with Jesus’ methods if we followed the path of
relationships that have already been established. Accordingly, we should start with
reaching the people we already know with the gospel; then the circle of these established
relationships extends further and further out to others whom we can also lead to Christ.
The gospel should go first to the inner circle of immediate family, then to relatives, then
to close friends, then to neighbors and coworkers, then to acquaintances, and then to
strangers. However, much of traditional and contemporary evangelism focuses on the
stranger and neglects starting with established relationships.

One very important aspect of discipleship that can and should directly influence
the way evangelism is conducted is the principle of reproduction and multiplication.
Disciples are not just made, they are reproduced, and they are multiplied when each
disciple reproduces another disciple. Reproduction of a disciple involves more than
leading a person to Christ; it also entails helping the person to mature in Christ and
teaching the person how to reproduce other disciples. Reproduction and multiplication,
therefore, involves relational evangelism in which each person disciples at least one
person, who also will be trained to disciple others, and thus the multiplication cycle continues (Ogden, 2003a, Putman, 2010).

Ferguson and Ferguson (2010) have applied the principle of reproduction and multiplication systematically to church planting, small groups, and leadership development to the point that they have a multi-site church (one church in various congregations, meeting at different sites), a network of more than 30,000 disciples, several thousand small groups, scores of newly trained pastors and leaders, and the original church site with 7,000 attendees. In defining what a reproducing church is Ferguson and Ferguson stated the following:

A reproducing church is a church that is repeatedly launching new small groups, teams, services, campuses, churches, and even networks. And there are really no shortcuts to doing this. More than anything else, it demands the intentional and systematic reproduction of leaders. (p. 60)

Interestingly, Burrill (2009) highlights the fact that Seventh-day Adventists are quite proficient at getting scores of people to be baptized and become members of the church, but we are not as effective at retaining them. This reality exposes a weakness in the Adventist Church’s contemporary evangelism and pastoral leadership practices: namely, that we do not have an effective process for making new converts into mature disciples. As a result, we tend to follow contemporary evangelistic approaches that are primarily focused on getting a decision. Some Adventists pastors and evangelists have opted for teaching very little doctrine prior to baptism in order to make it easy for the candidate to make a decision. However, as Arn and Arn (1998) observe, the preoccupation with getting a decision may be one of the reasons why church membership—in virtually all denominations—continues to decline nationally in America,
in spite of the large numbers of new members that come from public evangelistic meetings.

Therefore, the Adventist church needs a discipleship process that clarifies the ultimate goal of evangelism, influences how evangelism is done, and determines how pastoral leadership is to function in relation to the development and empowerment of church members. The principle of reproduction and multiplication offers a foundation for a biblically based approach to evangelism that is intensely relational and symbiotically connected to discipleship and pastoral leadership. Moreover, Thompson’s (1981) model of concentric circles of relationships offers a practical and organic way to reach people with the gospel—a way that seems to be more conducive to forming spiritual relationships and through such relationships, helping to retain new converts after they are baptized.

**How Other Churches Equip New Members**

A germane and practical aspect of discipleship is the insights that can be gained from examining how other churches nurture and equip their new members. Relevant research shows that churches that are intentional about discipleship nurture and equip new members by a variety of methods—many of which have been highlighted above—such as small groups, new member classes, mentorship, Bible study sessions, involvement in ministry, leadership development, and having high expectations for new converts (Anderson, 2017; Ball, 2013; Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010; Harvey, 2016; Lawless, 2005/2009; Makori, 2014; Rainer, 1999/2010; Santos, 2011).
Summary and Implications

The above literature review has sought to explore the major emphases and issues concerning Christian discipleship. Given the breadth of the topic, this was not an exhaustive review. In the literature, we reviewed the relevance in our postmodern age of both Jesus’ radical teaching on discipleship and His strategy for disciple-making.

Discipleship, we have seen, is indispensable to the mission, growth, and health of the church. We have also shown that the discipleship process definitely has a clear leadership/mentorship component, a deep spiritual nurturing objective, a strong relational quality, and a unique evangelistic/reproductive strategy. Discipleship, therefore, should influence the importance of evangelism (e.g., Christ commands us to make disciples from every people group), the objective of evangelism (e.g., we must make mature followers of Christ who will in turn produce other disciples), and the way evangelism is done (e.g., through the reproduction and multiplication of disciples).

The clear implication of the literature that we have reviewed is that discipleship should be the centerpiece of the overall mission of the church. It should not be one of several church programs. Rather, it should be an ongoing lifelong process, an integral part of the lifecycle of the church. This is particularly germane to the Seventh-day Adventist Church because our denomination has many useful programs for evangelism, spiritual growth, and leadership development; however, these programs tend to be transient and optional. Moreover, while evangelism is frequently made a priority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is often separated from a clear process of spiritual growth and leadership development. Discipleship, however, is not a temporary or optional or departmentalized program, but a comprehensive life-long process—a process
that is mandated by Jesus Christ as the essential mission of the church. When discipleship is being practiced, the church leadership will be engaged in training and equipping its members in a relational environment to grow intentionally in Christ and to participate in ministry, particularly in the areas of each member’s giftedness. The discipleship process will not be merely dependent on human effort, but on the guidance, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the church commits itself to this process it will experience both quantitative and qualitative growth.
CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE DISCIPLESHIP OF NEW MEMBERS AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Introduction

The proposed strategy for discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church has been informed by a theological reflection on the teachings and methods of Jesus and His apostles as presented in the New Testament (the subject of the second chapter of this paper). In addition, this discipleship initiative is also based on a review of literature which revealed the historical developments and trends in the understanding and implementation of Christian discipleship across denominational and geographic boundaries in the 20th and 21st centuries (the theme of the third chapter of this paper). The theological reflection has shown that a Christian disciple is one who is expected to follow the life and teachings of Jesus, lovingly abide in an intimate relationship with Christ, bear fruit in character and works, love others, reproduce other disciples for Jesus, and exhibit a high level of commitment to God.

Some salient features regarding how Christian discipleship should be done have also been highlighted in both the theological reflection and the literature review. For example, mentorship, life-on-life teaching, and relational settings were part and parcel of the methods that Jesus and His apostles used to equip disciples. Other prominent traits of a methodology for Christian discipleship include dependence on the Holy Spirit,
evangelism, empowerment of church membership, shared ministry, regular teaching from the Scriptures, small group nurturing, and selecting and developing suitable leaders.

The objective of this chapter was to design a strategy that, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, can be useful in developing new members into mature disciples of Christ, according to the essence of what has been presented in the theological reflection and literature review concerning the meaning and methods of Christian discipleship. An important component of this objective was to get the entire church involved in the process of discipleship so that the strategy to disciple new members does not merely become another program of the church, but rather, it becomes ingrained in the culture of the church. Therefore, this strategy endeavored to create a culture of discipleship in the life of new members and in the entire church by focusing on the following four areas: spiritual nurturing, training in evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management. These four dimensions were to be addressed within a relational context that included mentorship, teaching, and small groups.

A few challenges presented themselves in this endeavor: (a) in contemporary society, the average church members devote a huge amount of time to their jobs or careers and therefore have little time to engage in church ministry, (b) most church members in urban settings do not live in the community where the church building is located and therefore spend an hour or more in round-trip commutes to the church, (c) in metropolitan settings, most people spend an hour or more in round-trip commutes to work and therefore have a small amount of time in the week to devote to activities that involve traveling to the church building, and (d) most church members in large cities do not live in the same neighborhoods; therefore, they seldom see each other until they meet
at their local church. The factors above adversely impact the amount of time that parishioners have to work with each other in ministry. These factors are precisely what we have to deal with at Mount of Olives. We are located in one of the largest cities in the world (New York); most of our members are middle to low income working class families; and the members have only a small amount of time to devote to spiritual growth and ministry. The discipleship strategy that was proposed for the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church was sensitive to the above-mentioned realities. Therefore, it was implemented within the constraints of the church members’ time commitments.

The description of the initiative below begins with a brief outline of the preliminary steps that were to be taken to create a culture of discipleship. It then describes how and when the strategy for discipling new members were to be officially deployed. This is followed by a description of what were to be done in the four areas of the strategy to disciple new members: namely, spiritual nurturing, training in evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management.

**Preliminary Steps**

Drawing on Burrill’s (2009) research regarding the importance of a culture of evangelism for the health of the church, the initial phase of the strategy focused on arousing the awareness of the church regarding the importance of making and maturing disciples for Christ. Although the official launch of the strategy for discipling new members was scheduled to begin in November of 2015, the plan was to create an awareness of the importance of discipleship in the church by preaching and teaching on the subject at different intervals, beginning in the spring of 2014. During the same time, we had also planned a series of discussions among the elders regarding discipleship and
its relationship to evangelism, spiritual growth, and leadership development. In addition, we were to conduct a Prophecy Seminar for three nights a week from April 19 - June 21, 2014 as a means of integrating the practice of public evangelism, total member involvement, and discipleship into one event. In order to create a sense of responsibility to potential new converts among the church members, members were to be encouraged to invite family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and schoolmates. The members were to be asked to sit with their guests during the Seminar. All of the above initiatives were to be assisted by the fact that the first quarter’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for 2014 was on the subject of discipleship.

In accordance with the goal to build a consciousness of the relevance of discipleship in the life of the church, our plan entailed making discipleship the main theme of the church’s annual officers workshop and prayer breakfast in January of 2015. For example, we were going to highlight the importance of the need for church officers to mentor members for leadership and to nurture spiritual growth intentionally. As a means of reinforcing the link among public evangelism, total member involvement, and discipleship, we had also planned to conduct three weeks of revival meetings in September of 2015. The meetings were scheduled to take place on weekends and on Wednesdays in order to accommodate the time commitments of the majority of the church members. Parishioners were to be encouraged to invite those closest to them such as family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Church members were also to be instructed to sit with their guest(s) during the meetings. Furthermore, we were to encourage the parishioners to be an integral part of the process of leading their guests to Jesus and helping them grow in Christ.
Official Deployment of Strategy

The official deployment of the strategy was scheduled to take place in November of 2015. During the same month, I had planned to preach a sermon on discipleship and also lead discussions on the importance of small groups for spiritual growth, discipleship, and leadership development. An announcement was to be placed in the church bulletin calling for a meeting with new members (who have been in the church under 19 months) and all church officers to implement a strategy to facilitate spiritual growth and support for our new converts. In this meeting, I was to emphasize that the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church desired to care for its new members; therefore, we have designed a strategy to encourage their spiritual growth and development with the goal that they would become mature disciples of Jesus Christ. A brief description of the strategy was to be given, noting the four dimensions of discipleship that the strategy centers on. The new members were to be informed that they would be asked to evaluate the impact of the discipleship strategy by means of a questionnaire and a focus group. Department leaders were to be asked to share with the new members what ministry their particular department provided and how their department could support the new members. New members were to also have an opportunity to ask questions of the church leaders.

Now that a description of when and how the strategy was to be officially launched has been presented, the following sections focus on a description of the activities and methods that were to be employed in the following four areas of the discipleship strategy: spiritual nurturing, training in evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management. Some of these methods such as the use of small
groups and mentorship embrace all four areas of the discipleship strategy and overlap in a variety of ways. In each area of the strategy, the activities and methods designed for the new members were also to be implemented with the entire church membership in mind in order that the whole church might be involved in growth in the four areas of the strategy and that discipleship would become a part of the culture of the church.

**Spiritual Nurturing**

The use of the term spiritual nurture is intended to refer to activities such as prayer and Bible studies that are designed to enhance a person’s spiritual life. Spiritual nurturing is essential to new members’ growth and development. A strategy for nurturing spiritual growth does not need to be complicated. Rainer and Geiger (2011) found that the healthiest churches in America have a simple process of discipleship, rather than a host of programs. What is necessary is a relational environment that encourages Bible study, prayer, fellowship, worship, and witnessing. Due to the fact that most new members are in the infancy to childhood stages of spiritual growth, as reflected in Putman and Harrington (2013), they need to have a disciplined routine of simple activities that strengthen their spiritual lives.

In light of these factors, the plan was to provide for new members’ spiritual enrichment through solid biblical preaching, Bible study, worship, fellowship, and emotional support in traditional arenas such as Sabbath worship service, Prayer Meeting, Sabbath School, and Bible Class at Mount of Olives. However, we were also going to provide for spiritual nurturing activities by designing new arenas in the church such as discipleship groups. As was discussed in the third chapter of this paper, small groups are among the best vehicles to provide spiritual nurturing and stimulate growth (Hull,
The new member small group was scheduled to be organized by November of 2015. Not long after that, we were to organize small groups for the whole church. The new member small group was to be led by the pastor and this group would meet on alternate Sabbath afternoons. Leaders who were to be selected by the membership at large would guide the other small groups. All small groups were to be encouraged to meet at least once a week either in person or by means of conference calls or video conferencing. Moreover, small group leaders were to meet once a month with the pastor for training/mentorship.

One of the resources that were to be used to facilitate small groups ministry at Mount of Olives is Kurt Johnson’s (2011) book, entitled, *Successful Small Groups: From Theory to Service*. This book has a strong emphasis on building community through small groups. It is also written in a very practical, user-friendly manner. For example, it highlights the point that there are four main components that should be part of the agenda for any small group: sharing, Bible study, prayer, and mission. This information is useful in helping leaders of small groups to know what core areas they need to give attention to every time the group meets.

New members were also to be advised to attend Bible class, which meets on alternate Sabbath afternoons at Mount of Olives. The new member small group and the Bible class were to be synchronized so that each of these activities took place on different Sabbaths. The new members would therefore be able to have Bible study and fellowship in either the small group or the Bible class on each Sabbath afternoon. We had also planned to encourage new members to attend the church’s Wednesday evening Prayer
Meeting service, which, in addition to prayer, provides fellowship, and a brief study of the Bible or biblically based literature. However, the bulk of our meetings were to be on Sabbath afternoons in order to accommodate the time constraints of members who came from their jobs and had to commute to church.

One very important thing that we had envisioned doing in the new member small group meetings was to show the new converts how to build a strong devotional life during the week. This included highlighting our need to depend on the Holy Spirit in a similar manner to the early New Testament church. We were also going to encourage the new members to communicate with another member of their group during the week. In addition to the mentoring that were to take place in the new member small group, new converts were to be assigned a Spiritual Guardian who would be responsible for providing support and mentorship.

An often-neglected aspect of nurturing in the church is that of helping people to deal with emotional wounds. There are people in local congregations who have emotional wounds from relationships of the past or on-going relationships. When many of these individuals get converted they expect their emotional wounds/scars to be miraculously healed; not infrequently other sincere Christians give them the impression that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will automatically restore them. However, many of these members suffer with their problems long after they have been converted because conversion does not automatically guarantee that emotional scars will be healed. These members’ damaged emotions need to be addressed because their emotional wounds will adversely impact their spiritual growth and thus, hinder them from becoming mature disciples of Christ.
The plan was to sensitize the congregation and the leaders of the church on the issue of damaged emotions and emotional healing by preaching sermons on the topic, discussing ways to address it in my meetings with the small group leaders, and dealing with the topic in the new members’ small group. Two books that were to be used in these endeavors were David Seamands’ (1981) *Healing Damaged Emotions* and Peter Scazzero’s (2010) *The Emotionally Healthy Church*.

In summary, the expected outcome of the initiatives above in spiritual nurturing was that new members particularly, and the entire church, would have consistent spiritual growth. We also expected that the above nurturing strategy would help to hone the shepherding/nurturing skills of the pastor and the lay leaders of the church.

**Training in Evangelism**

Individual witnessing for Christ is a neglected area in the life of many contemporary Christians. Many churches have become accustomed to having experts do evangelism for them, rather than train their members to share their faith and depend on the laity to lead people to Christ. However, the Great Gospel Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 requires every disciple to reproduce other disciples for Christ. The personal sharing of our faith is therefore a commandment of Christ and is necessary for the fulfillment of the goal of making disciples of all nations. Furthermore, individual witnessing is important to each member’s spiritual growth. Accordingly, White (1946/1973) encouraged church leaders to engage new members in some form of outreach in order to strengthen their spiritual development:

> When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger. It is by meeting opposing influences that we become confirmed in the faith. As the light shines into their hearts, let them diffuse
its rays. Teach the newly converted that they are to enter into fellowship with Christ, to be His witnesses, and to make Him known unto the world. (pp. 355-356)

Therefore, we were going to teach new members how to share their faith effectively on a regular basis and how to cooperate with the church in doing public evangelism. Most of the training for the new members were to take place in the small group meetings; however, we had also planned workshops and special presentations for the entire church. One of the training courses that we provided for was designed to teach members, including new members, how to become lay Bible Instructors so that they could have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead people to Christ and to prepare them for baptism. Such a training course is offered by the Northeastern Conference’s Personal Ministries Department. This training course is usually conducted in four distinct sessions of three hours each, thus providing a total of 12 hours of training. A public evangelistic initiative will be planned each year that will draw on the skills of lay Bible Instructors. We were also going to seek to obtain total member involvement in our public evangelistic meetings.

It was also our goal to embed evangelism in the culture of the church, rather than merely to have an event-based public evangelism approach. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Burrill (2009) observes that healthy churches fostered a culture of evangelism. Likewise, rather than focusing only on evangelistic programs, Schwartz’s (1996) Natural Growth Development approach highlights the following eight qualities that all growing churches possess: (a) empowering leadership, (b) gift-oriented ministry, (c) passionate spirituality, (d) functional structures, (e) inspiring worship service, (f) holistic small groups, (g) need-oriented evangelism, and (h) loving relationships. Our overall approach to evangelism and church growth seeks to nurture these eight qualities which are, in effect, important
components of our discipleship strategy.

In light of the fact that Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church is in one of the largest cities in the world (New York), the challenges that come with urban ministry needed to be understood and appreciated so that the church’s evangelistic initiatives could be, in Schwartz’s (1996) analysis, “need-oriented” and effective. In urban areas, all basic human needs—food, clothing, shelter, community, and security—are intensified because there are far more people living in a square mile than in rural communities and there are usually insufficient resources and interventions to address the needs of the residents. Consequently, poverty, sickness, homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism, domestic abuse, crime, violence, and other problems tend to plague large urban communities. On the positive side, large cities also have many caring people, including community activists and leaders of non-profit organizations, who desire to help their neighbors and enhance the quality of life in their community.

Our strategy had envisioned addressing some of the needs in the Bushwick community and also making our evangelism more effective in the following ways: (a) by enhancing our food pantry and clothing distribution from once a month to once a week, (b) utilizing our Sabbath School classes to do targeted outreach in the community at least once a month, and (c) providing training for the members in doing health ministry/medical missionary and developing health ministry-related intervention in the community via the church’s Health Ministries Department. The first item above needs no elaboration; however, I will elaborate on the second and third items. Our Sabbath School classes were already accustomed to doing outreach in the form of visiting homes to pray with residents and to build a rapport with them on our monthly field days. However, we
were going to be more intentional with our outreach in that we would ask each Sabbath School class to target a particular entity in the community—business, non-profit organization, nursing home facility, or homes on a particular set of blocks. The objective was to build a rapport with the people of these entities in the community and to minister to them in a meaningful way. The new members were to work alongside of more experienced members in their Sabbath School classes in these outreach initiatives; this would help them gain experience in community outreach and evangelism.

Health ministries is an important line of work not only because it helps people to live healthier and thus, happier lives, but it also paves the way for the reception of the gospel due to the fact that people tend to be receptive to information and methods concerning health and healing. Once people’s trust in the health presenter has been established, they tend to be more willing to hear the gospel from that particular presenter. Accordingly, White (1899) dubbed the medical missionary work an “entering wedge” and “the right arm” in relation to the gospel. Therefore, our plan envisioned providing training and special presentations in health ministries for the entire church.

One of the training courses that we were planning to facilitate is the 8 Weeks to Wellness Series, a program in which lay people are trained in the local church by certified coaches from the Northeastern Conference Health Ministries Department to conduct healthful living presentations for both the church and the community. New members were to be encouraged to take advantage of the health ministry’s training for themselves and for the purpose of using their new knowledge and skills to benefit others and to lead people to Christ.

The expected outcome of the evangelism dimension of the discipleship strategy
was that new members, as well as the entire church, would be passionate, knowledgeable, confident, and skillful in leading people to Christ. Through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, on whom we depended, we hoped that our efforts would result in a consistent flow of new converts into the church each year.

**Leadership Development**

Leadership development is an essential component of discipleship (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010; McCallum & Lowery 2012; Putman, 2010). Jesus spent a large amount of time with the Twelve apostles, training them to be effective leaders of the church He would entrust to their care at His ascension. As shown in the second chapter of this paper, mentorship was Jesus’ method for developing leaders. In this regard, Hull (2006) argues that Christian discipleship requires that converts be willing to submit to the mentorship of a person who can teach them how to follow Jesus. Mentorship was to be the centerpiece of our leadership development strategy. As mentioned above, a Spiritual Guardian were to be assigned to each new convert. The Spiritual Guardians would be the primary mentors of the new members. Each Spiritual Guardian were to be required to meet once a month with the pastor for training/mentorship. These monthly meetings would provide the opportunity for the pastor to give guidance and mentorship to the Spiritual Guardians and also for all those in the meetings to evaluate the progress of the leadership development strategy.

The new members were to also have pastoral mentorship via the small group meetings. In fact, we hoped to engender a culture of mentorship in the church through the various small groups. Each small group leader would be responsible for mentoring the members of his/her group. Among the things that we were going to do in my separate
meetings with the Spiritual Guardians and small group leaders were to read and discuss insights from various books on leadership such as *Servants & Friends* (Bell, 2014), *The Three Levels of Leadership* (Scouller, 2011), *A Work of Heart* (McNeal, 2000), and *Christian Leadership* (White, 1985).

One major challenge to contemporary pastors and church leaders who would like to develop leaders is the reality that most church members’ work schedules do not allow them to have sufficient time during the week to focus on ministry-related activities. This is especially the case for those living in large cities. Therefore, our leadership development strategy sought to adapt to this contemporary challenge by maximizing the quality of face-time that mentors have with their mentees on Sabbath and weekends. We also encouraged mentees to model what they have learned at church on the job, at home, and during the week.

In connection with leadership development, new members, as well as the entire church, were to receive guidance on identifying and deploying their spiritual gifts in a specific area of ministry. The objective of identifying and deploying spiritual gifts was to do ministry both in the outreach and in-reach dimensions. Spiritual gifts are important in both leading people to Christ and in helping them to mature in Christ. Ephesians 4:12 states that certain gifts were given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (NKJV). The main “work of ministry” is that of making disciples of Christ (Matt 28:18-19). I have shown in both the second and third chapters of this paper that making disciples of Christ involves both evangelism and spiritual growth—leading people to Christ and helping them to mature in Christ. Thus the “edifying of the body of Christ” comes when both dimensions of the work of ministry
are addressed with the spiritual gifts that have been divinely entrusted to the church.

The main source that we had planned to use to help parishioners identify and deploy their spiritual gifts was Dick and Dick’s (2001) book, *Equipped for Every Good Work: Building a Gifts-Based Church*. A spiritual gift inventory can be found in this book and on the authors’ website. This particular spiritual gift inventory is well written, organized, free of cost, and, with a couple minor adjustments, easy to use. Schwartz (1996) has shown that Christians who serve in the area of their giftedness tend to have a sense of fulfillment and are usually more reliant on God than on self. New members were to be encouraged to take an active role in both the evangelistic and spiritual growth dimensions of the work of ministry by exercising their spiritual gifts in ways that could enhance the overall mission of the church. As the new members utilized their gifts, they would eventually grow into a particular area of ministry in which they would have fulfillment, confidence, and joy.

In summary, the leadership development strategy that is outlined above sought to equip the new members, in particular, and the entire membership, in general, to be effective leaders in fulfilling the mission of the church. This strategy was based on a mentorship model derived from the New Testament, particularly the ministry of Jesus. The strategy also included helping the new members and the whole church to identify and deploy their spiritual gifts. What we expected to achieve from this leadership development strategy was that the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church would be effective at facilitating a process that mentors new members into becoming mature leaders, who, in turn, would be able to mentor other leaders. In addition, we expected
each member to become confident in utilizing his or her spiritual gifts in a specific area of ministry.

Stewardship/Financial Management

Stewardship/financial management is an integral component of both spiritual growth and leadership development. In his research of churches that were effective in assimilating new members, Lawless (2005/2009) reveals that 85% of these churches emphasized stewardship in their membership classes. He also observes that 65% of the laypersons he surveyed indicated a greater willingness to support the church financially after attending their church’s membership class. Thus, it was my aim to provide the new members, in particular, and the church, in general, with a consistently clear understanding of stewardship and its relation to spirituality. Pursuant to this objective, the plan was to collaborate with our local Stewardship Leader and the church’s finance committee in order to present practical advice to the members on how to manage their resources so as to sustain their families, themselves, and the mission of the church effectively.

One of the ways in which we were going to educate new members and other congregants about stewardship and financial management was by a series of one-hour presentations with discussion for five consecutive weeks. The majority of the presentations would take place on Sabbath afternoons, but the first two presentations would occur during the Sabbath morning worship service. The first session was to focus on what it means to be a steward from a biblical standpoint. Our second presentation was to emphasize planned giving, as opposed to fortuitous and sporadic giving. The third presentation would inform the members in detail of the financial state of the church, how the funds of the church are utilized, the variety of ministries that we provide, and the cost
of everything related to the church. Our fourth presentation was to concentrate on managing personal resources, as well as church resources. The final presentation would deal with how God’s plan for supporting His church helps to destroy selfishness from our lives and aids in our preparation for heaven.

In addition to our weekly Sabbath bulletin reminders, I had planned to continue to preach a stewardship sermon a minimum of once a quarter to remind the congregation of our financial commitment to God’s work. Moreover, I was to educate the new members on stewardship in our small group meetings. One of the blessings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that we have an abundance of wise counsel on stewardship from the inspired writings of Ellen G. White and also from various church leaders. Some of the resources that we had planned to use in preparing my presentations and to recommend to our leadership team were Counsels on Stewardship (White, 1940a), Stewardship Roots: Toward a Theology of Stewardship, Tithe and Offerings (Rodriguez, 1994), and The Abundant Life (Lézeau, 2013).

The expected outcome of the stewardship/financial management component of our discipleship strategy was that the entire church, including the new members, would be well informed and motivated to fulfill their commitment to God faithfully by planned financial giving in tithes and offerings and by prudent management of their personal resources and the resources of the church. It was anticipated that a well-structured stewardship initiative, such as the five-week presentations mentioned above, in conjunction with regular stewardship sermons and reminders, would motivate our new members and the membership at large to view stewardship as a valuable part of their service to God and their preparation for heaven.
Conclusion

I have outlined above the activities and methods that were to be deployed to facilitate a structured process of discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our discipleship strategy was designed with four key components: spiritual nurturing, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management. Facilitating a comprehensive strategy of discipleship of new members would require the involvement and growth of the entire church. Thus, much of the activities that we had planned for new members also included the entire congregation. One of the benefits of this arrangement was that new members would be able to observe that spiritual nurturing, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship were not mere programs that have been designed for new members, but rather, are essential dimensions for growth in the lives of every disciple of Christ. This view of discipleship, it was hoped, would become part and parcel of the culture of Mount of Olives.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

Introduction

Pursuant to the objective of developing new members into mature disciples of Christ, it was deemed necessary to get the church involved in the discipleship process by having the congregation participate at various junctures of the strategy’s implementation and by creating an awareness for discipleship in the church. As described in the previous chapter, the discipleship strategy focused on the following four dimensions: spiritual nurture, evangelism, leadership development, and stewardship/financial management. We used a combination of regular church services, sermons, workshops, evangelist/revival meetings, and small groups as the main vehicles to facilitate development in these four areas. In most cases, we worked with the existing structures of the church such as Sabbath School classes, Adventist Youth Ministries, and departmental leaders to advance our objectives. With sensitivity to the transportation challenges and the limited availability of church members during the week, we conducted most of our discipleship activities on weekends and made use of communication technology such as conference calls when necessary. Below I describe how we implemented the discipleship strategy that I outlined in the previous chapter.
Preliminary Stage

In the spring of 2014, prior to the official launch of the discipleship strategy, I began to create awareness in the church regarding the priority of discipleship by preaching sermons on the topic, leading discussions on the subject among the elders, and presenting a study on the topic in the Bible Class (Appendix D). These initiatives were greatly assisted by the first quarter’s Sabbath School lessons on the topic of discipleship. As a way of integrating discipleship, evangelism, and total member involvement into one event, I conducted a Prophecy Seminar for three nights a week from April 19 to June 21, 2014. The seminar was promoted as a way for church members to grow spiritually and to develop transforming relationships with visitors. Church members were asked to invite family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and schoolmates to the seminar. The members were also instructed to be responsible for sitting with their guests and to encourage them to participate in the seminar.

Approximately 90 church members and 15 visitors attended the seminar on a regular basis. A sense of community developed among the attendees as they studied the Scriptures and fellowshipped. Towards the end of the seminar, three converts were baptized and thus became our newest members. Those who took responsibility to sit with and encourage the three newest members during the seminar eventually became their spiritual mentors.

In September of 2015, following a recent baptism of six people, the first elder of the church took the lead to meet with the board of elders and assign mentors or spiritual guardians to the new members. This was an indication to me that the elders were becoming more sensitized toward discipleship. Therefore, this experience stirred in me a
sense of gratitude to God that progress was being made in the church with respect to discipleship.

**Official Launch of Discipleship Strategy**

We officially launched the discipleship strategy on Sabbath November 7, 2015. Prior to this date, I had led discussions with the elders on the importance of small groups for spiritual growth, discipleship, and leadership development. I had also placed an announcement in the church bulletin, calling for a meeting on this date with new members and all church officers to implement a strategy to officially to facilitate spiritual growth and care for our new members. During the worship service on this particular Sabbath, I preached a sermon on what it means to be a disciple of Christ and on how to grow spiritually. Immediately after the worship service, I met with new members who had been in the church under 19 months. The meeting also included department leaders and church officers. Eight new members were present at the meeting. Approximately 15 new members technically qualified to participate in the discipleship strategy; however, some of them felt that they were already assimilated into the church and therefore, they did not consider themselves to be new members. Furthermore, three of them were children whose parents were members of the church. In addition, these children were already enrolled in standard church programs that are designed for their development, such as Adventurers and Pathfinders. In addition, three new members went back to their native homeland after being with the church for several months.

At the meeting, I emphasized that the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to care for its new members; consequently, we had designed a strategy to encourage their spiritual growth with the goal that they would become mature disciples of
Jesus Christ. A brief description of the intervention was given that underscored the four dimensions of the discipleship strategy. We also informed the new members that they would be asked on a voluntary basis to evaluate the impact of the discipleship strategy by means of a questionnaire and a focus group approximately one year from the launch date. The leaders of various departments of the church shared with the new members what ministry their particular department did and how their department could support the new converts. We then invited the new members to become active participants in a New Member Small Group that would be led by the pastor and would meet on alternate Sabbaths at 3:00 pm in the pastor’s office. The meeting ended with a prayer for consecration and guidance of new members and church officers.

Most of our discipleship activities for both new members and the rest of the church took place on Sabbath. Below I describe how we facilitated spiritual nurturing, evangelism, leadership development, and training in stewardship/financial management through Sabbath sermons, Bible class, small groups, and other means.

**Spiritual Nurturing**

Nurturing the spiritual growth of our new members as well as the entire congregation was a priority for me even before the implementation of the discipleship strategy. The standard arenas for spiritual nurturing prior to the implementation of the strategy had been divine worship service, Sabbath School classes, Sabbath afternoon bi-weekly Bible Class, Wednesday night prayer service, and Sabbath afternoon bi-weekly prayer service. Furthermore, revival meetings or prophecy seminars, which I customarily conduct or facilitate annually, have also been sources for spiritual nurturing in addition to their evangelistic objectives. All of these arenas continued to be important matrices for
the spiritual enhancement of the church members during the implementation of the strategy. However, the strategy added discipleship small groups to these arenas.

Lawless’ (2005/2009) survey of churches that were successful in attracting, retaining, and deploying new members in ministry showed that most of these churches had multiple types of small groups. For example, these churches had groups for such purposes as Bible study, fellowship, discipleship, home cells, support, life needs, and accountability. At Mount of Olives, Sabbath School classes, Bible Class, and Wednesday evening Prayer Meeting usually functioned as small groups since they facilitated fellowship and spiritual engagement in a less formal and more relational setting than the main worship service. However, in harmony with James (2010), who called our attention to designing small groups with a specific purpose, we established small groups specifically for the purpose of discipleship. The discipleship strategy also increased the intensity of facilitating spiritual nurturing in all of the arenas mentioned above. Below, I describe the means by which we provided spiritual nurturing to the new converts and other members in various arenas.

Sabbath Sermons

According to the research of Lawless (2005/2009), one of the key components of churches that are effective at assimilating new members is convictional preaching. With this in mind, I have sought to advance the objective of helping to develop mature followers of Christ by delivering a variety of sermons that emphasized spiritual growth and character development (Appendix A). These messages focused on strengthening one’s relationship with Christ, depending on the Holy Spirit, and proactively seeking to live victoriously amid the challenges and temptations of life. Inspiration for such
messages often came from a combination of devotional readings (of the Bible, the writings of Ellen White, and the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide), my own life experiences, reading other Christian literature, and conversations with fellow Christians. These sermons presented the bigger picture of what God is seeking to accomplish in His people in preparation for Jesus’ return; consequently, the messages gave practical points on how to live faithfully to God when our faith is being tested. Some of the sermons dealt with issues that tend to derail and confuse new converts: for example, emotional scars that linger with us even after our conversion, un-forgiveness, and dysfunction in marriage and family.

Bible Class

New members were encouraged to attend the church’s bi-weekly Bible Class which was conducted by the pastor on alternate Sabbath afternoons. Several of them attended and participated regularly. At the time of the official launching of the discipleship strategy, the Bible classes had already covered doctrinal subjects and were then focused on a chapter-by-chapter exposition of the Gospels. The classes were done in an interactive manner in which members volunteered to read the selected passages of Scripture and asked questions or make statements. In these classes, I intentionally placed emphasis on developing a strong personal relationship with Christ, discussed how to conduct meaningful personal devotions, and created an atmosphere in which we celebrated testimonies of personal witnessing. These classes provided the opportunity for new members in particular, and the church at large, to clarify issues and questions, receive guidance and affirmation in a variety of areas, and deepen their understanding of the Scriptures.
Prayer Services

Personal and corporate prayer is vital to the life and growth of every Christian. Group prayer provides the opportunity for new members to share their cares with other experienced members and to unite in depending on God to answer their prayers. Hence, we (the pastor, elders, and Prayer Coordinator) encouraged our new converts and parishioners at large to avail themselves of the opportunities provided at the various prayer services. We also led by example by being engaged in these prayer services. New members participated in our two main prayers services—on Wednesday evenings and bi-weekly on Sabbath—conducted by the elders and department leaders. Some of the new members also participated in our Sunday morning prayer service, conducted by the church’s Prayer Coordinator. Moreover, a few new converts became active participants in a team that has the responsibility of engaging in prayer ministry.

Revival Meetings

Revival meetings create a space of time for the church to intensify its focus on spiritual renewal and evangelism. During the course of the discipleship strategy’s official implementation, two revival meetings were conducted. The first meeting was for one week in December of 2015 and it was conducted by a guest pastor. The second meeting was for two weeks in October of 2016 and it was also conducted by a guest pastor. Both meetings included sermons that focused on the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church such as justification and sanctification through Christ, loving obedience to God’s law, the Second Coming, and the Great Controversy theme. These meetings also emphasized in practical ways the priority of depending on Jesus. New members and others pondered solid biblical truths, spent time in corporate prayer, and enjoyed
Christian fellowship during these seasons of spiritual emphasis. We encouraged the new members not merely to attend the meetings, but also to invite their friends and neighbors. In addition, new members were asked to serve in the meetings as ushers, as well as in other capacities. Several of them invited guests to these meetings and some of them served as ushers, members of the prayer team, and as apprentices to more experienced Bible instructors.

Sabbath School

Sabbath School provides the opportunity for the church to study biblical subjects in a small group context. The new members were integrated into the regular Sabbath School classes in order that they might fellowship with a variety of other members as they studied and discussed biblical themes. We also encouraged the Sabbath school leaders and teachers to view the classes as a small group and to develop ways to enhance the relational connections in their group. For example, teachers were to call missing class members during the week.

More than half of the new converts attended Sabbath School regularly. As I will discuss below, the Sabbath School classes not only provided an opportunity to study the Scripture, but also functioned as outreach groups. Hence, new members were given the opportunity to share their faith as they worked with other members. These dynamics furthered stimulated new members’ spiritual development.

Small Groups

As highlighted in the third chapter of this paper, small groups are among the best vehicles to provide spiritual nurturing and growth (Hull, 1988/2007; Putman, 2010;
Walton, 2014). In the theological study of discipleship provided in chapter 2, we underscored the fact that Jesus and His apostles intentionally facilitated community and connectedness among the disciples and new converts, and that it was often in a small group setting that these followers were nurtured and equipped. Johnson (2011) emphasizes the importance of small groups in creating community, and James (2010) highlights the benefit of forming small groups with a specific purpose. With this knowledge in mind, I began to talk about the importance of small groups in sermons, officers’ workshops, and in meetings with the board of elders more than a year before we set out to form discipleship small groups in the church.

By January of 2016, we had established seven small groups in the church with the intention that these groups would facilitate spiritual nurturing, evangelism, Christian fellowship, and leadership development. The New Member Small Group began its meeting on November 21, 2015, a week later than originally scheduled due to competing activities surrounding a special Pathfinder Day celebration on the previous Sabbath. Only two new members and one spiritual mentor were present for this first meeting. This was a somewhat discouraging start, but I realized that there were a variety of church activities taking place on Sabbath that occasionally impacted people’s decision to meet with a small group in the afternoon. In this first meeting, I outlined some of the objectives and plans for the group. We then engaged in a devotional study of Jesus’ calling of the first few disciples in John 1; the group also talked about what this account can teach us about being a disciple of Christ.

The New Members Small Group continued to meet bi-weekly for several months, but the attendance at the meetings averaged three new members per session.
Approximately 13 new members attended the Sabbath worship service on a regularly basis, including the eight new members who were present at the official launch of the discipleship strategy. However, it appears that most of them either did not commit to attending the bi-weekly small group meetings or had competing interests that kept them from these meetings. It therefore became clear to me after a while that although a discipleship group would be ideal for the spiritual nurturing and training of the new members, I would have to rely more on the traditional arenas mentioned above, particularly divine worship service, Bible Class, Sabbath School, Prayer Meeting, and revival meetings/prophecy seminars. At least three of these settings had some of the features of a small group. However, this did not mean that I was abandoning the New Member Group or the discipleship group concept; rather, it meant that I would adjust to the realities that confronted us while attempting to find ways to ameliorate the situation.

As mentioned, six other small groups were established in the church to provide and encourage spiritual nurturing, personal witnessing/evangelism, Christian fellowship, and leadership development. These groups were led by leaders who had been selected by the congregation—after prayer for divine guidance—at a special service in January of 2016. Four of the small group leaders were elders and two of them served as officers in the church. Each small group was established with at least six and a maximum of 12 members. Group leaders were encouraged to maintain contact with their group every week and to facilitate an in-person meeting on at least a bi-weekly basis. The group leaders were also asked to follow a simple format in the group meeting which included prayer, a brief study of a Scripture passage, words of encouragement to share one’s faith,
and testimonies concerning personal witnessing—including follow-up with potential converts.

Most of the small groups functioned well for about six months and some of them are still functioning today. However, it appears that after a while competing interests and other concerns derailed more than half of these groups. Nevertheless, we were in the process of revitalizing them during the writing of this chapter.

I have given some details about the small groups, rather than only describe the New Member Group because the establishment of the small groups in the church helped to accentuate in the minds of the church members the importance of spiritual nurturing, personal witnessing, and mentorship. Moreover, a few new members who considered themselves to be well-assimilated in the church chose to be a member of one of the other six small groups, rather than join with the New Member Small Group.

**Evangelism**

We engaged the church members in personal witnessing activities and provided training for them in evangelism. Rather than an event-based evangelistic approach, our focus was to create an atmosphere that was conducive to organic or natural growth evangelism in harmony with Schwartz’s (1996) analysis of Natural Church Development. In other words, our aim was to embed a culture of outreach and personal witnessing in the life of the church, rather than merely to conduct public evangelistic meetings. This approach is congruent with research that shows that one of the most consistent things among healthy churches is that they fostered a culture of evangelism (Burrill, 2009; Kidder, 2011). Further, we believed that this approach was more in harmony with biblical discipleship than an event-based evangelistic model in which paid professionals
largely do the work. My personal experience in conducting several evangelistic meetings and my observation of the field indicated that churches are more likely to retain new converts who have been baptized as a result of a process in which the members of the church have actively participated in the outreach and discipleship strategies. Below, I describe the ways and means in which we engaged in organic evangelism.

Field Days

One way in which we engaged the congregation in outreach is through regular field days. On one Sabbath each month, the church entered into the community after worship service and visited homes to meet and pray with the residents and to give them Christian literature. On these field days, the members of each Sabbath School class were responsible for working in a particular area of the community. In the summer and autumn of 2016, we asked each Sabbath School class to choose a particular institution or venue in the community on which to focus its ministry. Some classes chose to visit nursing homes, others visited shelters, and still others visited people in parks and held a brief service of singing and devotional sharing with them. New members participated in these outreach activities with their Sabbath School class on the field days. Thus, the new converts learned how to share their faith and to minister to other people by working with other church members.

Health Ministries

With the understanding that health ministries can open doors for witnessing opportunities, our church’s Health Ministries Department facilitated a Health Expo in which members and community residents could learn more about healthful living, get
free screening from health professionals, and eat wholesome plant-based foods. We were not able to implement the 8 Weeks of Wellness series during the period of the strategy’s implementation; however, we provided healthful living workshops and cooking classes for members and community residents. New members worked alongside more experienced members in these practical training events.

Other Forms of Outreach

In light of the reality that there are always people in the inner city who are in need of food, we increased our food pantry and clothing distribution from once a month to once a week. Other departments of the church such as Family Life and Personal Ministries have reached out to the community by doing such thing as visiting shelters, providing school supplies for children, and taking surveys of residents’ needs. New members participated in these activities along with more experienced members.

Lay Bible Instructor Training

We facilitated the training of 17 members to be lay Bible instructors. This training involved 12 hours of class time, in addition to field work in which candidates did personal outreach and developed a listed of contacts for Bible studies. The new lay Bible instructors also had the opportunity to work in a two-week revival series that we facilitated at the church. The training course was conducted by the Northeastern Conference Personal Ministries Department in September 2016. Two of our new members became lay Bible instructors as a result of taking the course.

Evangelistic Meetings

As mentioned, we facilitated two short-duration revival meetings: one for two
weeks and the other for one week. In preparation for these meetings, we emphasized total member involvement. New members assisted in these meeting by becoming a part of the prayer team, ushering, inviting visitors, and helping to give Bible studies. While we did not baptize anyone during the meetings, the revival services were an important link in a chain of activities that helped to prepare some people for baptisms a few months later.

Leadership Development

In order for new members and others to develop as effective leaders they need to have good role models and mentors. Therefore, the leadership development strategy started with the board of elders and extended to department leaders and small group leaders. It included group meetings, workshops, sermon presentations, a spiritual gifts inventory, and one-on-one feedback. In the sections below, I describe how we implemented leadership development among the leaders and new members of the church.

Board of Elders

The elders are the main leaders next to the pastor for the governance and care of the church. Hence, their effectiveness as mentors and role models will indirectly impact the development of the new converts and the overall attitude of the church toward the discipleship strategy. Therefore, I have been intentional in creating an atmosphere for spiritual growth, character development, and best leadership practices in our monthly elders’ meetings. We have discussed and underscored principles from books such as White’s (1985) *Christian Leadership* and Covey’s (1990) *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. 
For example, one of the leadership principles emphasized by White (1985) is that of delegating responsibilities to others and respecting their abilities and opinions. Accordingly, she encouraged leaders not to follow any one person’s plans without question, regardless of their status, but to allow for a diversity of perspectives on the matter at hand (White, 1985, p. 43). Therefore, we actively encouraged ourselves to model shared leadership in the way we interact with department leaders and other members of the congregation. We also promoted the concept that the care of our new members is the shared responsibility of the entire church.

Another example is that Habit 2 of Covey’s (1990) book emphasizes “begin with the end in mind” (p. 95). Accordingly, we vocalized in our meetings that the development of new members into mature followers of Christ is a paramount objective. Furthermore, we highlighted the need to facilitate the spiritual growth of the entire congregation. In order to achieve these objectives, we, as the main leaders of the church, committed ourselves to nurturing our own spiritual development intentionally, model effective leadership, and mentor new members along with other people in the congregation. The other habits emphasized in Covey’s book are as follows: Habit 1—Be proactive; Habit 3—Put first things first; Habit 4—Think win/win, Habit 5—Seek to understand, then to be understood; Habit 6—Synergize; and Habit 7—Sharpen the saw.

As a group, we have spent time before God praying for the needs of the church and for guidance in our leadership. Our group has also deliberated and drafted a useful handout entitled *Criteria for Leadership in the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Appendix B) which we provide to every official officer and anyone who is leading in any capacity in the church. We have discussed how to mentor and care for our
new members and we have implemented many of our ideas. For example, the elders took the lead in assigning spiritual mentors to each new convert.

In harmony with the example of Jesus who shared His ministry with the Twelve apostles, I have intentionally shared the contemporary challenges of pastoral ministry with the elders. For example, I have talked with them about sensitive and sometimes baffling issues that have taken place in the church on the local level and also on higher levels of the denominational structure. Another way in which I have shared ministry with the elders is that each elder has been assigned to serve as a liaison and adviser to one or more departments and to provide a report of the ministry in those departments at our monthly meetings. As a group, we discussed the progress of the work in the departments and also talked about ways in which we could assist the department leadership teams in their ministry. While these practices did not directly impact the new members, they did influence the attitude of our leaders and the culture of the church in respect to working collaboratively and caring for one another, which in turn influenced the disposition of the congregation toward nurturing and equipping our new converts.

Department Leaders and Officers

As with the elders, department leaders’ attitude and preparedness can influence the way new converts view the church and the quality of care that these leaders render to our new members. Therefore, we encouraged our department leaders to exhibit conscientiously a caring disposition toward the new converts and to model good leadership. In this regard, I have sought to use a variety of settings as opportunities to proactively facilitate leadership development among the department leaders and church officers. For example, at our monthly board meetings, we discussed relevant theory and
best practices in leadership development, drawn at times from Covey (1990), White (1985), or Geiger and Peck’s (2016). The latter views the local church as the preeminent center for developing leaders for both religious and seculars spheres. I challenged each board member to view our board meetings as an opportunity to hone skills in leadership as we learned from each other (All leaders of departments serve on the church board). I also encouraged our department leaders to mentor others in their department and share leadership with them.

Another way in which we facilitated leadership development among our department leaders and officers is by means of our annual officers’ workshop. In these meetings, department leaders share their ministry plans, discuss best practices in leadership with other church officers, and pray for the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to put theory skillfully into practice. For example, in our Officers’ Workshop of January, 2015, we placed strong emphasis on mentoring and team leadership. Department leaders were encouraged to mentor another leader within their department. Moreover, we discussed in groups the importance of delegation and communication in the work of the church. One of the things we did in our most recent Officers’ Workshop in February 2017 was to watch and discuss a video presentation by John Maxwell on “The 5 Levels of Leadership.”

In Maxwell’s (2011) analysis, each level of leadership represents the quality of influence that the leader has on his or her followers. The higher the level, the greater the quality of influence. Accordingly, Level 1, the lowest level of leadership, focuses on positional influence. People follow the leader because they are obligated to by virtue of his or her position. This kind of leadership usually does not engender deep commitment
to service, but rather, a calculated work-for-compensation attitude. Level 2 represents relational influence: people follow the leader because they genuinely want to. Level 3 builds on the previous level by adding production and results to the equation. In other words, people follow because they like the leader and appreciate his or her success. Level 4 emphasizes people-development. People follow because the leader has invested in their development. Level 5, represents the pinnacle of effective leadership. On this level, the leader specializes in training and reproducing leaders who will in turn equip other leaders. People follow out of respect and admiration for the kind of person the leader represents.

As mentioned, it was envisioned that as we invest in the development of the department leaders and officers, this will not only benefit them, but will also benefit the new members and the entire congregation by the quality of influence that these leaders exert upon the members. This process of leadership development is a work in progress that extends beyond the time limitations of the Doctor of Ministry project.

Small Group Leaders

The establishment of small groups at Mount of Olives provided an opportunity for the group leaders to foster administrative and mentoring skills, as well as to nurture the growth of the members in their group. The small group leaders were selected by the members who constituted their group; hence, there was a natural connection between the leader and the group members. In theory, I was to meet with the small group leaders once a month. However, while I met with most of them in elders’ meetings—due to the fact that the majority of them are elders—I did not get to meet with all of them in a separate meeting on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the small group leaders and I have
worked on creating a culture in which mentorship, spiritual growth, and personal witnessing are embedded in the day-to-day practice of the church.

Youth and Young Adults

Forty percent of the new members were between 15 and 30 years old and it was not difficult for this age group to build a rapport with the other church members in their age bracket. Most of the new converts in the foregoing age bracket have other persons in their family who are members of the church. We sought to mentor this age group for leadership in the church, both the new converts and others. Dudley’s (2000) research on why Adventist young people leave the church indicates that, for those who came back to the church, the desire to be involved and feel needed had a significant impact on their return.

We encouraged our teenagers and young adults to think intentionally about becoming effective leaders, rather than to assume that election to an office in the church would automatically make them a leader. As we worked in collaboration with the leadership teams of the departments that directly influence young people—such as Youth Ministries, Pathfinders, the Youth & Young Adult Choirs, and the Audio/visual Department—we encouraged the leaders to proactively equip and support the youth and young adults within their sphere of influence.

The objective of our strategy was not merely to place young people in office as a way of convincing ourselves that we are supporting the youth, but rather to equip them for competent Spirit-empowered service. Thus, we elected young people to such offices as elder, deacon, deaconess, clerk, Adventist Youth Director, Pathfinder Director, and Social Committee Chairperson because they were qualified. We also worked with them
to help them to mature as leaders. For example, I actively promoted the concept that Adventist Youth Ministry should be more focused on activities that help to fulfill the mission of discipleship, rather than on merely providing entertainment for young people during the hours of the Sabbath. Accordingly, we elected an Adventist Youth Director who was sympathetic with the vision and mission of discipleship; we also equipped her and her staff with proper training. Furthermore, we sponsored this new youth leadership team to attend various training workshops, including the annual convention of Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), a grassroots missional-minded youth organization.

Development and Deployment of New Members

We focused on the mentorship of our new converts by assigning them spiritual guardians and also by placing them with more experienced members in a variety of settings. The New Member Small Group also provided a level of mentorship. As new members grew spiritually alongside the other members through the discipleship intervention, it was important to select some of them for official leadership in the church. Therefore, we elected some of the new members to church office who had been in the church for at least a year. As mentioned, some of the young people mentioned above who were elected to office were new members who had become fairly well assimilated into the church. Most of the new members served as ushers; however, we elected some of them to be clerks, assistant leader in the Adventist Youth Society, and members of the Community Service Department. We were careful in our selection of new members to office, as we are with all members. Consequently, we made sure that new members were placed in positions in which they would be mentored by leaders more experienced than themselves.
Sermons and Spiritual Gifts Inventory

One way in which pastors can promote leadership development is to preach about it in a manner that highlights its importance to the health and mission of the church. This is what I did during the implementation of the discipleship strategy. For example, one of the sermons I preached was entitled “Son of Encouragement.” It focused on how Barnabas of the New Testament—in harmony with the meaning of his name—was very effective at nurturing and mentoring new converts. Barnabas even mentored the initially timid John Mark, believed to be the author of the Gospel of Mark, into a competent minister. Another sermon, entitled “Fulfilling the Mission,” articulated how Jesus spent a large portion of time with His disciples in relational settings in order to help them develop as effective leaders and ministers. It also emphasized that Jesus placed a high priority on developing leaders and so should we.

In the context of leadership development and service, I also preached a sermon on discovering and deploying our spiritual gifts to fulfill the mission of the church. On the same day that I preached that sermon, I facilitated a spiritual gifts inventory produced by Dick and Dick (2001). This particular spiritual gift inventory, which can be found on the author’s website, is well organized, free of cost, and easy to use. Many of the members, including new members, who participated in the spiritual gifts inventory, gave me very positive responses about it. For example, immediately after we did the spiritual gifts inventory, one member gleefully met me at the door of the sanctuary and told me that she had not planned to take the Lay Bible Instructors Course, but that now she desired to enroll in the course because the spiritual gifts inventory indicated that she was strong in the area of evangelism.
This was the first phase of shaping a gifts-based ministry in the church. In this phase, the spiritual gifts inventory helped the members to identify their gifts so that they could know in what areas of ministry they would likely experience satisfaction and where they would fit best. The second phase is to deploy members in the areas of their giftedness. We have begun this second phase in a gradual way. However, this is a process that is ongoing, and it entails having conversations with the members, providing guidance to them, and creating a culture in the church where one’s giftedness is an important component in the election of people to serve in various offices of the church.

**Stewardship and Financial Management**

We desired that every member, especially new members, see the importance of stewardship/financial management and develop positive habits in this area. Therefore, we presented this topic within the context of spiritual growth and leadership development. I met with our local Stewardship Leader and the church’s finance committee and we planned a strategy for presenting practical advice to the church members on how to manage their resources in order to sustain their families, themselves, and the mission of the church effectively. The strategy involved some of the things that I was already practicing, such as preaching a stewardship sermon a minimum of once a quarter to encourage the congregation to be faithful in their financial support of God’s work. Therefore, I continued this practice. The Stewardship Leader also continued to place weekly reminders about stewardship in the church bulletin.

The main thing that we added to what we were already doing was a series of five stewardship presentations for one hour on consecutive Sabbaths. As the pastor, I led the way in November of 2016 with the first two stewardship presentations of the series in the
form of sermons during the Sabbath worship service on two consecutive Sabbaths. The first sermon focused on what it means to be a steward from a biblical standpoint. The second sermon emphasized planned giving, as opposed to fortuitous and sporadic giving (Appendix A). The third presentation was done by the church treasurer. He gave the members a detail perspective of the financial state of the church, how the funds of the church are utilized, the variety of ministries that we provide, and the cost of everything related to the church. Our fourth presentation was done collaboratively by the Stewardship Leader and the Finance Committee Chairperson. It concentrated on managing personal resources, as well as church resources. The first elder of the church gave the final presentation, which dealt with how God’s plan for supporting His church helps to destroy selfishness from our lives and aids in our preparation for heaven.

New members and longstanding members benefitted from the stewardship series. The church at the time was involved in refurbishing and repairing the sanctuary. We were able to raise about $75,000 in a matter of nine months to add to our building fund and we completed our refurbishing project by the end of 2016. Amid the refurbishing project, both the annual tithes and offerings of the church increased.

**Summary**

In the various sections above, I have provided a description of the ways and means in which we implemented a strategy for discipleship of new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. A key feature of the strategy’s implementation was that in the process of fostering the development of new members, we included the participation of the board of elders, small group leaders, department leaders, and the church at large. Our intervention engaged the new members and the greater portion of
the church in spiritual nurturing, evangelism, leadership development, and
stewardship/financial management, in accordance with the plan that I outlined in the
previous chapter and with sensitivity to the church’s local context. I had hoped to have
had a greater number of new converts participating in the New Member Small Group;
however, because the level of participation in this particular small group was low, I
decided to place a stronger emphasis on ministering to the new converts along with the
members at large in the various arenas that I have mentioned above. Our intervention
was, therefore, flexible enough to adapt to changes and also sensitive to the time
constraints and transportation challenges of church members in New York City. The
intervention had a preliminary stage and an official launch period. The preliminary stage
paved the way for the official period by creating awareness for discipleship and also
provided practical first steps in this direction. The official period of intervention
facilitated learning, best practices, and growth in the four dimensions of the discipleship
strategy for both new members and members at large in harmony with the objective of
developing mature followers of Christ.
CHAPTER 6

PROJECT EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the implementation of a strategy to provide discipleship to new members at the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is important to have a concrete sense of whether or not this intervention produced the intended results. Moreover, it is rewarding to reflect on what has been learned from the experience of conducting this project. Thus, in this chapter, I endeavor to answer the following questions:

1. What effect did this intervention have upon the spiritual growth and leadership development of the new members?

2. What methods and instruments were used to evaluate the impact of the strategy?

3. What are the salient things that I have learned as a result of conducting this intervention?

I will discuss below how the implementation of the discipleship strategy was assessed by a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. First, I examine the church membership records and provide a quantitative comparison between the retention rate of new members before the intervention and after the implementation of the discipleship strategy. Second, an analysis of new members’ responses from a
questionnaire containing both quantitative and qualitative questions is presented. Third, feedback from a focus group of new members and members who had joined the church a few years prior to the intervention help to give qualitative insights concerning the impact of the discipleship strategy. Finally, I share the main things that I have learned from conducting the project and offer recommendations.

**Assessment of New Members’ Retention**

The retention of new members was assessed by comparing the number and names of new members who were added to the church in each year from 2009 to 2016 with the number and names of new members who are still members of Mount of Olives or are members of another Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the period between 2009 and 2016, a total of 68 new members were added to the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Sixty-three of the new members came into the church by baptisms and five, by profession of faith. Three of the 63 baptized members were re-baptisms. However, due to the reality that in the spiritual dimension—not the social—re-baptized members often require a similar level of nurturing and support as brand-new members, I have included the re-baptized in the total of new members. Seventeen of the 68 new members were baptized between the spring of 2014 and the end 2016, the period of the preliminary and official phases of the discipleship strategy’s implementation. Of the 17 baptized during the said period, 15 of them are still active in the church. However, of the 51 persons who were added to the church by baptism and profession of faith from 2009 to the winter of 2014—prior to the two stages of the discipleship intervention—41 of them remained in the church.
Table 1 shows the number of new members who came into the church through baptism or profession of faith each year from 2009 to 2016 and the number and percentage of new members who were retained in each year during the same period.

The average retention rate (ARR) of new members during the two stages of the discipleship strategy’s implementation (spring, 2014-2016) was 93%. However, the ARR for both the three-year period (2011-2013) prior to the intervention and the five-year period (2009-2013) prior to the intervention was 80%. In the official stage of the strategy’s implementation (Nov 7, 2015-2016), the retention rate was 100%. Thus, the ARR during the two stages of the intervention was higher than the ARR before this period. This indicates that although the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church was fairly successful at retaining its new members prior to the strategy’s implementation, the discipleship intervention increased the rate at which it retained its new members.

Table 1

*New Members Added and Retained Each Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Added</th>
<th>Retained</th>
<th>Percentage retained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results From Questionnaire

A simple questionnaire was prepared that contained 31 Likert scale type questions, six fill-in-the-blank questions, and a few demographic questions. The Likert scale questions measured quantitative data and the fill-in-the-blank questions provided a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. Six of the new members completed the questionnaire and one participant out of the six failed to complete the last three Likert questions and the six fill-in-the blank questions.

Quantitative Responses

Table 2 shows that the Likert scale questions were categorized into 12 dimensions and that the level of response to these questions were categorized in terms of strong, weak, or mid-range. The numerals under each of the three levels of response indicate the number of participants whose answer to the question indicated a strong, weak, or mid-range level of growth. Notice that the majority of new members scored in the strong category on 11 of the 12 dimensions. It was only in the area of “perception of church involvement” that there were not more than three new members who felt that their involvement in the church was strong. Thus, the new members’ responses denote above average growth in all but one area that the Likert scale questions measured.
**Table 2**

*Areas of New Members’ Growth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Growth</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
<th>Number of Participants per Level of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church attendance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular devotion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism/witnessing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Growth</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from church</td>
<td>4**</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Jesus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian values</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of church involvement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This dimension had one question that overlapped with another dimension  
**This dimension had two questions that overlapped with another dimension

The questions were further categorized into the following three areas: theory, experience, and behavior. The questions that revolved around theory were questions about the participants’ knowledge or understanding of biblical truths and Christian values. The questions that pertained to experience went beyond mere knowledge of something; they measured the emotions and attitude of the participants towards the phenomenon. Similarly, the questions that centered on behavior measured the actual actions, practice, and habits of the participants toward the teaching, value, or event.

As shown in Table 3, the majority of participants had very strong scores on the questions that involved theory and experience, and moderately strong scores on the questions that involved behavior. This seems to indicate that the new members have a
good understanding of the fundamental beliefs of the Church and of Christian values.

The new members also have a positive experience with the Church and the faith.

However, while they are making progress in a variety of Christian behaviors, they are still in the process of developing strong spiritual habits.

Table 3

New Members’ Response According to Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Question</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
<th>Number of Participants per Level of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Response

There was a total of six fill-in-the blank questions. Five of the six participants who filled out the questionnaires completed this section. The fill-in-the-blank questions were aimed at getting an understanding of the participants’ experience and preferences in relation to spiritual growth and involvement in the church. These questions elicited a combination of quantitative and qualitative data which provided a basis for further reflection and inquiry. For example, the third question asked: “What programs, activities and presentations in the church have helped you to grow spiritually and to share your faith within in the last year?” The last question asked: “Please share what your experience with the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist church within the last year has been.”
The majority of the participants indicated that they have grown spiritually and have had a positive experience with the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church. Most of these new members noted that they have benefited spiritually from the Sabbath worship service. Some of them highlighted Sabbath School and Prayer Meeting as arenas that have helped them to grow. Most of the participants desired to have a deeper understanding of Scripture. One young person among the participants indicated that he desired more programs for the youth. Another young person noted that Sabbath School and talking with the elders helped him to grow spiritually.

In response to the question, “In what ways are you serving in the church?” two of the new members mentioned tithes and offerings. This indicates a commitment on their part with respect to stewardship and it probably corroborates the point that the discipleship strategy’s emphasis on stewardship/financial management had a positive effect on the new converts. However, this response may also imply that these particular new members have not yet been involved in serving the church in other areas; therefore, they list tithes and offering as a way of contributing to the mission of the church, instead of their actual involvement in ministry. Overall, the majority of participants responded to the previous question in a manner that suggests that their involvement in specific areas of church ministry was not very strong. While we have evidence that some of the new members are serving in specific areas of ministry in the church, the participants’ response in this particular section of the questionnaire seemed to suggest that more work needs to be done to get all of the new members to engage in specific areas of ministry.

**Feedback From the Focus Group**

Additional insights concerning the growth of the new members and the impact of
the intervention came from the feedback of a focus group, consisting of five new members and three members who had joined the church two to three years prior to the preliminary stage of the intervention. The focus group met in the afternoon of July 29, 2017. Two practices emerged out of our discussion as being very effective in helping the new members to grow spiritually and be assimilated into the church: namely, mentorship and involvement in a specific area of ministry in the church. New members shared stories of how particular persons befriended them, encouraged them to attend various services and Christian activities, and helped them to do certain spiritual practices such as studying the Bible and witnessing more effectively. Moreover, various members of the focus group mentioned that being asked to serve in some capacity, whether officially or unofficially, helped them to feel more connected to the church.

Some of the new members stated that the discipleship strategy has helped them to grow spiritually and develop as a leader. Furthermore, one of the members who had joined the church two years prior to the preliminary stage of the discipleship strategy wished that she had gotten the kind of care that the new members were now receiving. “I didn’t get the nourishment that I needed,” she said, reflecting on when she had first joined the church. The overall sense of the group was that of appreciation and gratitude that the church was making the care and development of new converts a priority.

**Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

The implementation and evaluation of the discipleship strategy provided an opportunity for me to reflect critically on what in the intervention actually worked and what could have been done differently. The strategy was successful in facilitating the spiritual growth and leadership development of the new members. However, an
important observation that I made as I was evaluating the intervention was that the strategy might have been more effective had it set forth various levels of competencies that the new members needed to attain and also provided for a rite of passage celebration at each level. This recommended component to the discipleship strategy would have helped both the new members and the implementers of the intervention to measure more accurately the development of the new converts and also to encourage them in very specific ways to go to the next level of growth. For example, I had envisioned that the small groups at Mount of Olives would function for at least a year, but most of them only lasted six months. However, I later realized that the small groups would probably have been more effective if I had clearly stated the expected duration for the groups and regularly encourage the group leaders to work toward some measurable goals that they would accomplish and that they would celebrate achieving within the specified duration.

Another thing that I learned was just how critical it is to involve new converts in a specific area of ministry. I knew that new converts should be taught to share their faith as soon as they make a commitment to follow the Lord; however, I did not realize that early involvement in the church was so pivotal to new members’ assimilation and growth. In addition to the testimony from members of the focus group regarding the positive effect of new converts serving in the church, I received additional corroboration of the importance of early involvement in the church from a new member who was baptized in the spring of 2013 and had already been assimilated into the church so well that by the time of the official launch of the discipleship strategy she no longer considered herself to be a new member. In reflecting on her experience, she remarked that as she began to work with other members in prayer ministry, giving Bible studies, and singing in the
youth choir, she felt closely connected to the church. It was also evident to me and other leaders that this young woman was maturing in Christ at a remarkable pace and was poised to assume leadership in the church; therefore, we deployed her in official leadership positions.

In light of what I have learned during the development and implementation of the discipleship strategy, I would recommend that new members be deployed in a specific area of ministry as soon as they become members. This may involve decisive action by the pastor to assign them as a mentee or an apprentice with an experienced ministry leader prior to their being elected to a church office. Early involvement of new members in serving in the church is so critical to retention, spiritual growth, and leadership development that pastors need to be instrumental in helping the church leaders and the entire congregation support initiatives that deploy new converts in specific areas of ministry under the mentorship of an experienced leader.

Overall, I learned that both new members and the greater portion of the church appreciate an intentional strategy designed for their spiritual development. New members and members at large expressed to me their appreciation for both the attention the church was giving the new converts and for the proactive efforts to enhance the spiritual growth of the congregation. Thus, I inferred that a discipleship strategy, like the one we implemented, leads congregations to feel that the church cares about them and is also committed to its mission, even though all of the members of the congregation may not actively participate in the intervention. This conclusion is in harmony with the research of Rainer and Geiger (2011) which found, based on a survey of 400
evangelical churches, that the healthiest churches have a simple and clear discipleship strategy that moved Christians along the process of spiritual development and also aligned whole congregations with the strategy.
APPENDIX A

SERMON OUTLINES
Fulfilling the Mission

In the Great Gospel Commission that Jesus gave to the church our primary mission is defined. Let me read in your hearing, Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV:

“And Jesus came and spoke, saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

The primary mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ! The reason for our existence is to make disciples who look like Jesus, talk like Jesus, love like Jesus, and keep God’s commandments like Jesus! Expound

Discipleship involves evangelism—leading people to Christ. And the Seventh-day Adventist Church tends to very good at this. But Discipleship also involves spiritual nurturing and Biblical education. And the Adventist church is pretty good at this! Furthermore, discipleship entails mentoring & leadership development! And the Adventist Church needs to get better at this!

Let’s briefly take a closer look at mentoring & leadership development.

1. Jesus spent a huge amount of time during his 3 & 1/2 years of ministry in mentoring 12 disciples.
   • This was a wise investment: when thousands of new converts began to pour into the church after Christ’s ascension, Jesus had a team of leaders in place who knew just what to do to nurture, train, and develop these new members.
   • Jesus placed a high priority on developing leaders and so should we.

2. Now, let’s underscore the way in which Jesus developed His disciples: He spent time with them and trained them in a very relational environment.
   • The church today needs to follow Jesus’s example in mentoring people in a relational context as best as we can.

3. Talk about the principle of reproduction and multiplication of disciples & leaders.
   • If the Adventist Church follow this principle we would have healthy numerical and spiritual growth and we would hasten our journey to the New Jerusalem!

I would like to also speak briefly on “time” and connect this to our mission: discipleship and mentoring.
   - It is during difficult kairos times that mentorship becomes very relevant
   - Slinky illustration

2. Often before God takes us to the next level of spiritual growth and maturity He allows difficulty and challenges to come our way.

Talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s last speech before he died — “I’ve been to the mountain top!” King had not reached perfection. He seems to have had some skeletons in the closets. But I want to believe, and the evidence seems to suggest, that in the last year of his life God took him to a higher level of spiritual growth! A level in which he was not fearing any consequence from doing the right thing … A level in which his goal was not merely to achieve equality and justice for his people but rather to work for the transformation of humanity! Expound… Tavis Smiley’s book, *The Death of a King.*

Tavis Smiley states that in the final year of his life, King “faced a torrent of vicious assaults from virtually every segment of society, most painfully his own people.” (p. 4)

   - In order to take us **higher** God often has to put us through the **fire**! And in the furnace of our affliction our lives are purified and we move from weakness to strength!

So, as we journey from New York to New Jerusalem let us be determine to be molded by Jesus Christ by allowing Him to intervene in our lives in our “kairos” moments. Let us also help one another to get to our final destination through mentoring and leadership development—through the reproduction and multiplication of disciples of Christ!

Finally, in the words of the hymn:

“Let us then be true and faithful, trusting, serving every day
Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay!

When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory!”
God’s Stewards

Introduction: There was a time when flight attendants on airplanes were called stewards and stewardesses. These labels are still prominent in other countries. Why do you think that the cabin crew on airplanes were called stewards and stewardesses? And is this a fitting title for them? What is the primary task of a flight attendant? Answer: to ensure passenger safety. **Expound**

What is a steward? Answer: A steward is someone who manages and cares for someone else’s property, finance, and/or affairs. So, the steward is not the owner; the steward is a manager of the owner’s property, finance, and affairs.

Now, we are stewards of God’s property, finance, and affairs. God is the owner and we are the managers. **How much does God own?**

We are not only stewards; we are also sons and daughters of God. Just as parents like to give good gifts to their children so God has given some good gifts to us in order that we may enjoy them and manage them well. Let’s name a few of these good gifts:

1. Life: When we wake up in the morning we should praise the Lord! When we live to see another birthday we should praise the Lord! Lamentations tell us that God’s mercies are new every morning and great is His faithfulness!

2. Health & Strength: In Deut 8:17-18 NKJV, God warns us of boastfully taking the credit for our prosperity: “then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ **18 And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.’” (NKJV). **Expound.**

3. Time: God gives us time to repent and to live in harmony with His will. I am so glad He doesn’t cut us down in our sins or else the church would be virtually empty this morning!

4. Talent: Our talents should be used to glorify God and not self.

- We don’t have to be talented or have the skills of an expert to manage God’s resources; we just have to be willing, humble, and consecrated! (e.g., Sis. B & the audio/visual department)
- When we feel that we are so talented and skillful that we are indispensable to the church guest what God does? He moves us out of the way and finds someone who is humble! (Talk about how the Lord called William Foy then Hazen Foss before He called Ellen White)
5. Property: My car ultimately belongs to God. Our house ultimately belongs to God! Your property and my property belong to Him! We should manage and care for God’s property!

- Let’s talk for a moment about the church property right here at Mount of Olives. This property has been dedicated to God as a sacred house of worship and a place from which the ministry of the gospel is advanced through a variety of methods.
- How should we treat such a place? How should we manage such a place?

6. Money: Our money belongs to God! God has instructed us to return to him a tithe of our income and an additional offering in order to remind us that we are His stewards. He is the owner and we are the managers!

So, what are we saying to God when we faithfully return 1/10 or 10% of our income and also give an additional offering? What are we saying to God when we neglect to return a tithe and give a generous offering? Expound

Malachi 3:8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, in what way have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings.”

**Planned giving versus sporadic/emotional giving**

- Preparation is very important. Notice Paul’s instructions to the church at Corinth concerning collecting funds for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem:
  “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:2 NKJV

The instruction to put funds aside on the first day of the week was a call to give priority to reserving a portion of our monies for the cause of God. In other words, don’t wait until the end of the week—when most of your money has been expended—to give something to the cause of God!

- Our giving should be guided by a plan rather than emotions

God has entrusted all of the above gifts to us in order that we may enjoy them and manage them as faithful stewards. Expound

Tell the story of when Pastor R’s father left him in charge of the shop in Costa Rica
Let us highlight a few things in this story about stewardship:

1. Pastor R’s father, the owner, made him the chief manager or a steward of his shop while he was away.
2. The young man disobeyed his father and temporarily turned over his stewardship to another.
3. While the young man neglected his duty as manager of the store a theft was perpetrated by a senior employee whom the young man blindly trusted.
4. There was a day of reckoning—an audit was done by the owner and the young man was called to give an account of his stewardship.

**Conclusion**

The reason why the young man was left in charge of the store as the chief steward was because he is the owner’s son! While all human beings are stewards of God’s resources we who are Christians are not only stewards, we are God’s sons and daughters through the blood of Jesus Christ! **Expound**

“I will sing of Jesus’ love
Endless praise my heart shall give;
He has died that I might live
I will sing His love to me.”

So then we are special stewards, sons and daughters of God, who have been entrusted with the Lord’s store until Jesus returns! **Expound**
Healing Damaged Emotions

Introduction: Conversion to Christ does not mean that the emotional wounds have automatically been healed. No matter how severe the emotional pain, it is not God’s will for us to remain wounded or to give up on life.

Notice what an Old Testament prophecy said about the Messiah: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench.” Isaiah 42:3 NKJV

Eight Steps to Facilitate Healing of Damaged Emotions:

1. Face your Problem Squarely
   - Realize that you may be both a victim and a perpetrator
   - Accept responsibility within your sphere

2. Take the Initiative to Seek Help
   “When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him ‘Do you want to be made well?” John 5:6 NKJV

3. As Far as Possible, Hold the Perpetrator Accountable

4. Forgive
   - Perpetrator
   - Self

5. Be Patient and Longsuffering Toward Others
   “. . . with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:2 NKJV

6. Realize That You Are Valuable in the Sight of God
   “For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” 1 Corinthians 6:20 NKJV

7. Recognize That God Can Provide the Strength to Overcome All Things
   “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippian 4:13 NKJV
   “For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV

8. Trust God to Work All Things Together for Your Good
   “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28 NKJV
Restored with Questions Left Unanswered

Job 42:10 NKJV
“And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

**Introduction:** I have preached several sermons on Job in the past but I have not until now dealt with the connection between Job’s intercession for his friends and his restoration. This passage clearly states that it is when Job prayed for his friends that the Lord restored unto him twice as much as he had before. **Expound** (This is not a mere coincidence! There is something in this connection that the Lord wants us to dig deeper into).

I think there is something more here than the wonderful idea that when we unselfishly pray for others it paves the way for God to intervene on our behalf. It is true that while we are taking care of God’s business by praying for other people that God is also taking care of our business! But I think there is something more than this in the connection between Job’s prayer for his friends and his own restoration!

What is it that God’s wants us to know about concerning the link between Job’s prayer for his friends and his own healing and restoration?

Now I would like to emphasize a few points in route to answering this question.

1. **We human beings have limited knowledge—even the wisest of us.** Therefore, we must be careful not to draw the wrong conclusions from the information that we currently have.
   - Because we have limited knowledge we can sincerely come to wrong conclusions even when we are attempting to defend God or preserve the truth.
   - Job’s friends sought to defend God by blaming Job . . . They reasoned that Job’s extraordinary losses must be a result of some sin in his life because God would not otherwise have allowed this to happen to him.
   - When the Bible tells us not to judge is not saying that we should not determine whether a person words and deeds are in harmony with God’s law. This we should do! Rather, it is saying we should not make a decision about a person’s character and salvation based on insufficient information. Our deductions and surmising may very well be totally wrong!

2. **Rather than answering certain questions, God put us into situations where we are forced to empathize with the reality that answers to our questions may not be the best solution.**
Why did God instruct Job’s friends to repent and apologize to Job? And why did God tell Job to pray for these friends who unjustly accused him of sin and hypocrisy?

In the process of praying for his judgmental friends who accused him of sin based on limited information, Job came to understand that what his friends had done to him he almost did to God. (He accused God of punishing him for the sins of his youth because Job was going on limited information.)

“For You write bitter things against me, and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.” Job 13:26 NKJV

Job eventually empathized with God. This was the divine purpose for linking Job’s prayer for his judgmental friends with his restoration.

3. God will not answer all of our questions but He is committed to acting in our best interest.

- Good parents do not always answer every question their child has but they act in their child’s best interest. (When I was a child I did not understand when my parents said they couldn’t afford something, especially when I saw that they had money in their wallet and purse, and also when I knew that they had a container of coins on the top of their dresser... but I knew they were acting in my best interest)
- Notice that God did not give Job the answers to His questions. Rather, God asked Job some questions that forced him to think differently
- Then God acted in Job’s best interest by restoring to him twice as much as what he had before. But notice that even after God restored Job He still did not tell Job the reason why all the calamities, suffering, and lost had come upon him in the first place. God did not even explain to Job the great controversy between God and Satan.
- In this life we will experience restoration with questions left unanswered. We must live with the tension that some of our questions will remain unanswered but the biggest question in life has already been answered: Does God love me? Yes He does! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Expound

The man who dreamed of footprints on the beach. The man in the dream receive an answer to his question form God but in Job’s case God carried him without explaining! Expound

“My faith has found a resting place, Not in a manmade creed;
I trust the ever living One, That He for me shall plead.
I need no other evidence, I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died, and rose again for me.”
Son of Encouragement

Introduction: Talk about the people who are great encouragers. Some people are good mentors. Some people have the gift of making and nurturing new members (Discipleship).

- The pastor from Allegheny East who helped me and gave me consistent encouragement

Today we will focus our study on a person in the early Christian Church who had a special set of gifts that greatly helped the small church to grow and mature. His name is Barnabas. He had the ability to encourage and empower people. We will also learn some other things about this person’s character that showed him to be the epitome of a good mentor.

Act 4:33-37 NKJV:
“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among the who lacked for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses who was also name Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated ‘Son of Encouragement,’ a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

1. Notice that verse 36 says that the name Barnabas, which means ‘Son of Encouragement’ was given to him by the apostles

   - The apostles saw that he had the special gift of Encouragement—this was indelibly a key feature of his character (he definitely had the gift of exhortation)

   - We see him as one who comes to the rescue of the poor believers with his possession. Verse 37 says that he sold his land and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

2. The second time we hear about Barnabas in the New Testament is after Saul gets converted and is renamed “Paul” by the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ. Paul then seeks to join with the disciples in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26-27 NKJV:

   “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord and that He had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”

   - Barnabas speaks up for Paul. What does this tell us about Barnabas?
When we hear a false or negative report about someone we should correct it. Sometimes we say it’s none our business but it is our business because we are our brother’s and sister’s keeper!

3. On the third occasion that we read about Barnabas in the New Testament, the church leaders in Jerusalem send him out to oversee the work of evangelism and discipleship of new converts at Antioch and the surrounding regions. Acts 11:19-24 NKJV:

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene who when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. 22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.”

- What do you learn about Barnabas from this text?
- What vital ministry does Barnabas provide?
- Does the church need this ministry today?
- Is there someone who after reading this is feeling impressed that the Lord is calling him or her to this ministry?
- Barnabas plays and important role here in encouraging and mentoring these new members

4. Let’s notice something else about Barnabas: He is not too proud to ask for help and he takes pleasure in identifying other people’s gifts and deploying those people in ministry.

Acts 11:25-26 NKJV:

“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

- Barnabas exemplifies humility and also the wonderful ability to appreciate other people’s talents.
- The ministry of Barnabas and Paul had impacted the disciples at Antioch in such a powerful way that these disciples exemplified the characteristics of Christ to the point that those who saw them call them “Christians.”
5. According to Acts 13:1-2, Barnabas is listed among the prophets and teachers at Antioch; and the Holy Spirit led the church at Antioch to send Barnabas and Saul as missionaries and apostles. In Acts 15:22-29, Barnabas and Paul along with others are sent by the Jerusalem Council after the controversy about circumcision to bring word to the rest of churches in other regions of the world concerning the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

- Barnabas and Paul are trusted because they have proven to be trustworthy
- Can God trust you? Can the church trust you?

6. There are other things that we can read about Barnabas but just one more thing suffice to give us a fairly complete picture of his character. Acts 15:36-40 NKJV:

“There then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’ 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.”

- As mentioned Barnabas had the gift of encouragement and mentorship. He saw what John Mark could become under his care but Paul, who had been burnt by Mark in the past, did not want to take the risk.
- Barnabas had allowed Paul to take the lead in their missionary endeavors and to be their spokesperson but on this occasion Barnabas stood his grounds. Why?
- The contention did not cause Barnabas and Paul to be hostile toward each other. Rather, they chose to agree to disagree and each man parted with another partner and God’s work moved on!
- There are times when two committed Christians cannot agree; in fact, they passionately disagree. In those cases, they need to agree to disagree on the particular issue and focus their energies on their common mission!

Barnabas is a model of what a good Christian leader should be. The main qualities that he exemplified:

1. Encourager
2. Mentor/Disciplier
3. Humility
4. Trustworthiness
5. Untiring commitment to the Great Gospel Commission
The Discipleship Curve

Acts 9: 1-22

Introduction: One of the most important aspects of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is spiritual growth. If you are a disciple of Christ you have to grow and bear fruit. A disciple who does not grow and bear fruit is like the fig tree that Jesus cursed. Expound

A disciple is one who is committed to learning from his or her mentor. Jesus is our great mentor and we should be committed to learning from Him. But He is not physically here to teach us.

How then shall we learn from Him? We learn through: (1) studying His Word (2) depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (3) following the example of ministers & leaders who are following Christ

Now, it is important to recognize that as disciples of Christ we are not all learning at the same rate. We are at different levels of spiritual growth. Expound

• All apple trees are not growing at the same rate. However, at some point each will bear fruit.
• Thus, there is a discipleship learning curve
• But again, the important thing is that we individually commit ourselves to spiritual growth

The life of Paul, the apostle, is a powerful example of the journey of discipleship and of the power of God in transforming us and bringing us to the intersection of deep learning. In today’s message we will follow the life of Paul as he moves from being Saul, a disciple of the great Jewish leader, Gamaliel, and a zealous persecutor of Christians, to Paul, one of the greatest disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let us begin with Paul’s own testimony of his former life in Acts 22:3-11 NKJV

“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictest of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5 as also the high priest bear me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. 6 ‘Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? 8 So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord? And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ 9 ‘And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10 So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are
appointed for you to do.’ 11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”

A. Saul had a great Jewish teacher but Saul was blinded by religious bigotry.

1. Gamaliel was a wise and tolerant Pharisee, a grandson of the great Jewish Rabbi, Hillel, and a member of the Sanhedrin Council

“Like other great rabbis he had a great saying: “Procure thyself a teacher, avoid being in doubt; and do not accustom thyself to give tithes by guess.” He was a man of judicial temper and not prone to go off at a tangent . . .” (Word Pictures in the New Testament) 1

A statement of the Mishna: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.” (New American Commentary) 2

“Jewish tradition reveals him as the ideal Pharisee, a worthy representative of Hillel’s school, which was more tolerant and less legalistic than the opposing school of Shammai. Paul was privileged to study under him (ch. 22:3). The teacher’s influence may possibly be traced in the development of his famous pupil. (The SDA Commentary).” 3

2. We have an example of Gamaliel influence, wisdom, and broadmindedness in Acts 5:27-40 when Peter and other apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin Council.

   o Gamaliel has so much influence that he commanded the council to put the apostle out of the room for a little while to that he may address the council in their absence. The phrase, “a little while” suggests that he believes in his power to persuade the council.
   o He no doubt recognized the Sanhedrin Council rushed to judgment in their decision to sentence Peter and the other apostles to death for disobeying their command to not to preach about Jesus
   o He may have remembered how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea became disciples of Jesus after Jesus’s death

3. Although Saul’s teacher was broadminded, the Jewish leaders in Saul’s day had taken a course that made them vulnerable to religious bigotry:


They placed their own rules and traditions above the Scriptures
They became prideful of themselves as God’s chosen people and therefore became exclusive and prejudice

4. Saul became prejudice toward the disciples of Christ

5. We Christians must be careful of the blinding power of religious bigotry.

- It can manifest itself in people of both conservative and liberal tendencies
- Be careful of cliques, parties, groups, and friends where everybody thinks alike and there is little tolerance for those of opposing views (the crowd who cried “crucify Him” did this)
- Be careful of letting other people speak and think for you while you merely agree with them because they are your friends (the crowd who cried “crucify Him” did this)
- Be careful of implicitly following customs and traditions just because this is how you were brought up (the crowd who cried “crucify Him” did this)
- Be careful of following the latest trends, fashions, and opinions just because they are popular (the crowd who cried “crucify Him” did this)
- Let us have a welcoming attitude toward strangers and those who may think differently than us

6. When Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them because they know not what they do” that prayer included forgiveness for religious bigotry because many religious people tend to be prejudice and prone to commit hostile acts toward others.

- We can talk about the radicalism of Islamic extremism, the extremism of a certain sector of the religious Right in America, and the extremisms of a certain sector of the atheistic, humanistic, and hedonistic left in America—the ones who want to get rid of all trace of Christianity from public life—the ones who would who are politically driven to even persecute those who oppose gay marriage. The left is very zealous in their opposition to Biblical principles; they embrace an essentially human-centered religion.

- When people honestly come to grips with their bigotry and ask for God’s forgiveness His grace covers them, no matter what sin their prejudice has led them to commit

7. The Holy Spirit had been speaking to Saul’s conscience but his prejudice led him to shut his eyes to the light.
B. But God does not give up on us when we turn away from truth. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus brought Saul to the intersection of transformation and deep learning. (Tell the story)

1. God blinded Him physically in order to open up His eyes spiritually.
   - A flood of light filled his soul
   - The risen and gloried Christ became His mentor
   - He was told that he will suffer many things for Jesus and he was now willing to go all the way

2. Now as a disciple of Christ, he submitted to the guidance of the leaders in the New Testament church

Conclusion

Paul could now say in the word of the hymn:

“Love of Christ so freely given, Grace of God beyond degree, Mercy higher than the heaven, Deeper than the deepest sea

“All that thrills my soul is Jesus; He is more than life to me; And the fairest of ten thousand, in my blessed Lord I see.”
APPENDIX B

CRITERIA FOR LEADERSHIP
Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church
Criteria for Leadership

1. What are the criteria for leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

- Knowledge of the church’s fundamental beliefs and an adherence to them
- Be in regular standing
- Demonstrate commitment to the Great Gospel Commission
- Understand one’s ministry requirements as described in the Church Manual
- Set an example in stewardship
- Possess a good reputation in and out of church
- Commitment/dedication to one’s office
- Exhibit good Christian morale
- Teachable spirit
- Open to constructive criticism
- Manage home and children well
- Exemplary Sabbath observance
- Observe the church’s standard on jewelry and colorful cosmetics
- Practice dress reform/morality in clothing choices
- Address conflicts according to Matthew 18.

2. How should we grow leadership?

a) Mentoring: Jesus set the example in this area in His relationship with His disciples.

- Since mentee looks to the mentor for guidance, the presence and interaction of a mentor is important.
- Mentoring can be informal and intentional. We should foster intentional mentoring within the church: elders mentoring department leaders and department leaders mentoring their assistants; assistants should be prepared to assume responsibility of the department in the absence of the head-leader.
- Growth should be in accordance with the criteria enumerated in question #1.

b) Training/education is essential for leadership growth

- Training/educational programs provide avenues to teach and demonstrate best practices. They also provide relevant resources to help accomplish the task.
- Leaders should also avail themselves of relevant books and other materials to enhance their growth

3. How should we measure leadership growth?

- Leadership growth should be measured at regular intervals
- Training is essential if we intend to measure leadership
• Evaluations will help to point out difficulties within departments
• The Church Board can assess leaders, offering constructive criticism
• The evaluation should not take the form of a pass/fail method. Moreover, we would take into consideration such factors as the individual’s length of time as a member and as a leader.
• Leaders should endeavor to model Matt. 18 when dealing with conflicts. When others observe how leaders deal with conflicts in accordance with Matt. 18, they will be inclined to do the same.

4. How can we hold leadership accountable to the criteria?

• The board should evaluate the leaders in accordance with the leadership criteria. Leaders should receive constructive criticism by their fellow workers in harmony with the leadership criteria and the objectives of their departments.
• The leader will be encouraged by the pastor to faithfully implement the objectives of his or her department and to live up to the criteria for leadership stated above.
• Leaders who have consistently neglected to meet the leadership criteria should not be reelected to any office in the church.
• Leaders who adhere to the leadership criteria but have not perform well in their respective office should not serve in the said office but should be evaluated to determine if another office is more suitable for him or her.
• When necessary the church should apply the procedures for “church discipline” that is outlined in the Church Manual.
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE
NEW MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE

Prepared by Pastor Michael Coleman
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This questionnaire represents one element in a series of steps that will be taken to understand and access new members in order that Mount of Olives Church may provide effective discipleship of its new members. This is a voluntary survey, whether or not you participate will not affect your standing in the church.

CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBE YOUR RESPONSE:

1. How often do you attend the services of the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist church?
   1. Two to three times a week.
   2. Once a week
   3. Two to three times a month
   4. Once a month
   5. Less than once a month
   6. I no longer attend this church
   7. I no longer attend church

2. How often do you attend a local Seventh-day Adventist church?
   1. Two to three times a week.
   2. Once a week
   3. Two to three times a month
   4. Once a month
   5. Less than once a month
   6. I no longer attend

3. How often do you read your Bible?
   rarely   sometimes     regularly     frequently

4. How often do you pray?
   rarely   sometimes     regularly     frequently

5. How often do you share your faith with others?
   rarely   sometimes     regularly     frequently
For each of the following statement below, please indicate the extent to which you personally agree or disagree with that statement by putting a “✓” in the box that best describe your feelings about the statement. If the statement does not apply at all put a “✓” in the middle box under “no opinion.”

(1) Strongly agree  (2) agree somewhat  (3) no opinion   (4) disagree somewhat   (5) strongly disagree

1. The seventh-day Sabbath is very important to me.  
2. I do my best to keep the Sabbath day holy.  
3. I believe that I have grown spiritually within the last year of attending this church.  
4. I feel welcomed in this church.  
5. My church has been very supportive of me.  
6. I have lost interest in my church within the last six or more months.  
7. I actively participate in the services of my church.  
8. My small group has helped me to be a stronger Christian.  
9. I seek to strengthen my relationship with Jesus and live according to God’s word.  
10. My spiritual life has diminished within the last six or more months.  
11. I have been assisted in my spiritual growth by one or more persons at Mount of Olives.  
12. I feel I am developing as a spiritual leader because of the mentoring that I have received at my church.  
13. I understand the importance of tithes and offerings.  
14. I am being faithful in returning tithes and giving offerings.  
15. I believe that sharing my faith with others on a regular basis is very important to being a committed Christian.
16. I feel that my church has helped me to grow spiritually and to share my faith. 

Rate the importance of the following statement in your life:
(1) very important (2) important
(3) somewhat important (4) not important

1. Keeping the Sabbath day holy. 
2. Living up to Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
3. Understanding the teachings of the Bible.
4. Developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
5. Having personal devotion daily.
7. Being prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
8. Witnessing to others about Jesus Christ.
9. Gaining victory over bad habits and addictions.
10. Being a part of a small group that is focused on discipleship.

WRITE YOUR ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Do you understand the fundamental principles of Christianity taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

________________________________________________________________________

2. How can the church help you to grow spiritually?

________________________________________________________________________
3. What programs, activities, and presentations in the church have helped you to grow spiritually and to share your faith within the last year?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. In what ways are you serving in the church?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. In what ways would you like to serve in the church?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Please share what has been your experience with the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist church within the last year?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

1. What is your age? (please circle the answer below)
   Under 13        under 18      18-25       26-34    35-44    45-54    55-64   65-over

2. What is your gender?    Female        male

3. What is your ethnicity?    Black    White    Hispanic    Asian    Multi-ethnic
   other (please specify)  ____________
Discipleship

How Did a Person Become a Disciple in Jesus’s Day?

John 1:35-45

To Whom Does Jesus Extend the Invitation to Be a Disciple?

Matthew 11:28-30

What Did it Mean to be a Disciple in Jesus’s Day?

1. Matthew 16:24-26
2. Matthew 5:10-16
4. John 13:35
5. John 15:8

What Commission Did Jesus Give to His Disciples Before His Ascension?

Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV

The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ. (Ellen White, Desire of Ages, 822)

1. Mark 16:14-18
2. Acts 1:4-8

What Ministry Has God Given to the Church?

2 Corinthians 5:15-20

What is the Pastor’s Role in this Ministry?

Ephesians 4:11-13
REFERENCE LIST


CURRICULUM VITA
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Name: Michael G. Coleman

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Family: wife: Rose Marie; children: Sarah, Moriah, and Nadine

Education:

2014-2018 Doctor of Ministry with a concentration in Organizational Leadership, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
2005-2008 Master of Arts in History, Lehman College, City University of New York
1988-1991 Master of Divinity, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
1984-1988 BA in Theology (Minor in Psychology), Oakwood University, Huntsville, AL

Ordination:

1996 Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Experience:

Present Pastor of the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, Brooklyn, NY
2013-2018 Pastor of the Mount of Olives Seventh-day Adventist Church, Brooklyn, NY
2007-2012 Pastor of the Corona Seventh-day Adventist Church, Queens, NY
2001-2007 Pastor of the Spring Valley Seventh-day Adventist, Spring Valley, NY
1998-2001 Founding Pastor of the Uniondale Seventh-day Adventist Church, Uniondale, NY
1994-2001 Pastor of the Bethany Seventh-day Adventist Church, Westbury, NY
Church Planter for Northeastern Conference
1993-94 Associate Pastor of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, Harlem, NY
1991-93 Associate Pastor of the Bronx Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bronx, NY (Washington Ave.)