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Developing and Implementing a Community-Based Hospitality Awareness and Training Program in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church

Titus Naftanaila
Andrews University

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-BASED
HOSPITALITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING
PROGRAM IN THE GREEN BAY
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH

by

Titus Naftanaila

Adviser: Walton Williams

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

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Title: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-BASED HOSPITALITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE GREEN BAY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of Researcher: Titus Naftanaila

Name and Degree of Faculty Adviser: Walton Williams, DMin

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Problem

Most churches in North America usually consider themselves as welcoming and friendly to guests and existing church members. However, they may excel in programs and ministries, but visitors evaluate many as uncaring and cold. During my 25 years of ministry, I personally have pastored three mid-sized Adventist churches where a constant number of guests confirmed the difference of perception. The inhospitality of the church deprives the guests and the new converts of the essential benefits for emotional and spiritual growth with a direct impact on the retention rate.

Method

A community-based hospitality awareness and training program was developed and implemented in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Summer and Fall of 2020. Its main purpose was to encourage and inspire the church members to create a culture of welcoming based on a sense of community, with a positive impact on the integration and involvement of the guests and regular members. The project consisted of creating an Action Group for brainstorming, training, and planning. An awareness campaign was conducted with a sermon series about community, hospitality, and assimilation. Specific community-building activities and initiatives were suggested and implemented. Pre- and post-implementation surveys were created and administrated to assess the initial perception of the church's friendliness as well as to measure the impact of the intervention on the responders' attitude and commitment to change.

Results

A session of training of all departments with an interest in hospitality and community took place. Every department and ministry were encouraged to develop a culture of welcome and create opportunities to foster community and a spirit of believing for guests and church members. A one-month awareness campaign was launched to invite all church attendees to be part of God's hospitality team and extend His welcome to all. The post-implementation survey confirmed the progress in knowledge, understanding, and commitment to prioritize welcome and connectiveness.

Conclusions

Developing and implementing a community-based hospitality project in the local church is fundamental to Christian life and church growth in a mobile, 21st century society. Even though a complete welcoming ministry takes time and elaborate planning, this awareness and training program proved effective in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. When applied, this project is proficient in helping churches create a culture of welcome and belonging.

Andrews University

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A Professional Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

_____   _____
Adviser,   Director, DMin Program
Walton Williams   Hyveth Williams

_____   _____
Timothy Madding   Dean, Seventh-day Adventist
                                        Theological Seminary
                                        Jiří Moskala

                                        05-31-2022

_____   _____
S. Joseph Kidder   Date approved

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the ultimate example of Community Builder and Host, I wish to thank God for wisdom, strength, and perseverance during my entire ministry and especially for completing this project.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is an essential prerequisite for the growth of a local church. Often it is perceived as an auxiliary program that attracts and entertains newcomers with secular welcoming strategies and superficial relationships. However, when it is based on a genuine community spirit and includes welcome and integration, church hospitality represents the essence of the gospel. It is not a method of evangelism; it is evangelism in a nutshell.

Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been actively involved in preaching the gospel and inviting people to adhere to the *28 Church Fundamental Beliefs* as an imperative for baptism. Globally, the growth rate has been significantly high, the Seventh-day Adventist Church being considered one of the most rapidly growing churches. Unfortunately, the rate of loss has been significantly elevated as well. Consequently, recent denominational literature strongly advocates establishing solid relationships and extending God's welcome to people He attracts to His church.

This preliminary chapter presents a short description of the ministry context, the narrative of the current project, and its limitations. It defines the terms that are uniquely significant for this analysis, in addition to a summary of the chapter.

Description of the Ministry Context

Initially, the Madison East Seventh-day Adventist Church of Madison, Wisconsin, was intended to be the setting for this project. Although I was the Senior Pastor from 2011 until 2019, I accepted the Wisconsin Conference's call to become the Senior Pastor of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Both churches are similar in membership and demographics, being the second largest and the largest Adventist churches in State of Wisconsin.

I began my pastoral activity in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in July 2019 but, after only nine months, the COVID-19 crisis brought almost everything to a halt for three months. The main worship service was then resumed with approximately 60 to 70 percent of regular attendance and participation. Then, in January 2021, I was elected as the president of the Wisconsin Conference, thus ending my ministry as the local church pastor.

Incorporated in the Wisconsin Conference, the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized on May 26, 1876, with, as its first pastor, Ole Andres Olsen, a Norwegian immigrant who later became the Wisconsin Conference president, and in 1888, the General Conference president. In 2020, the church membership was 580 members with approximately 200 regular participants. The majority of church members are Caucasian, with few African and Hispanic descendants.

Green Bay's population was 105,000 people in 2019, although the greater metro area had 312,000 residents. The ratio of female/male was 50.7 percent to 49.3 percent. The median age was 34.0. The racial makeup of the metro area in 2010 was 77.4 percent white, 3.8 percent African American, 4.0 percent Asian, and 14.4 percent Hispanic.

Approximately 68 percent of the Green Bay residents were religious, 15 percent more than the state rate. The Catholic Church dominated the religious landscape with 45.1 percent, followed by the Lutheran denomination with 11.3 percent, the Methodist Church with 2.4 percent, and other Christian denominations with 5.3 percent.

Statement of the Problem

A 2019 review of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church's records indicates church growth and attendance stagnation. Pastoral observation suggests that one of the major causes is the lack of an intentional, community-based, hospitality ministry program. Even if several members are hospitable and offer a warm welcome to newcomers, the congregation seems to have lost its sense of community. Over the years, the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church organized several evangelistic campaigns with notable results, but in recent years, fewer people joined and were integrated into the church fellowship and membership. Additionally, the size of the church's membership and recent negative feedback from some guests have suggested the necessity of a focus on genuine hospitality based on a community that fosters inclusiveness and belonging for all.

Statement of the Task

This project developed, implemented, and evaluated a community-based hospitality awareness and training program at the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in a limited timeframe. Its primary focus was on encouraging all church members and designated stakeholders to create a community, welcoming, and belonging climate for guests and church members, directly impacting their emotional and spiritual well-being in a positive way.

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Delimitation of the Project

This project was limited from several perspectives. First, while still analyzing several universal concepts of community and hospitality, the project was designed for a Christian context and applied of a local Seventh-day Adventist church. Second, the project stakeholders consisted in a limited number of local leaders with direct responsibility for the welcoming culture of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. Third, the training program had a specific timeframe, limited to August through November 2020, and the awareness campaign was limited to the month of October 2020. Fourth, to avoid potential emotional or spiritual abuse, the Pre-implementation and Post-implementation surveys were limited to church attendees, guests, and members, 18 years of age or older.

Description of the Project Process

This community-based hospitality awareness and training project encompassed a theological reflection, a recent literature research, the development of the intervention, the narrative of the initiative, and, finally, the analysis and the evaluation of the project's outcomes.

Theological Reflection

As presented in Chapter 2, to create a theological platform for this project, I decided to analyze significant biblical passages related to the concept of hospitality in the context of community and belonging. Both the Old and the New Testaments reveal ample theoretical and pragmatic dimensions of the community's origin, purpose, and characteristics in congruence with the marks of personal and communal hospitality.

First, the concept of community represents God's gift to humanity with the main purpose of building strong relationships with Him and one another. Second, all Christians have been invited to follow Jesus' example of establishing and building the church as the community of God on earth. Third, the ministry of hospitality is defined as God's welcome for all people from the perspective of the host-guest paradigm. Finally, the ultimate goal of building community and promoting hospitality is integration and a higher degree of engagement and personal transformation.

Literature Review

Extensive literature research, as described in Chapter 3, was undertaken to provide a solid groundwork and comprehension of the concepts of community and hospitality. Recent relevant academic sources were surveyed, evaluated, and the most applicable concepts were synthesized, summarized, and incorporated in the current project, establishing a broad landscape for the chosen area of research.

First, I examined secular sources related to community fundamentals and key principles to comprehend the universal need for belonging and interconnectedness.

Second, I focused primarily on diverse strategies for effective community development. Also, I explored the latest tendencies and contributing factors for disengagement and disconnectedness to understand the competing forces against community-building and engagement.

Third, I explored relevant religious sources related to church growth and diverse community-building approaches experienced in various faith-based groups. I prioritized the divine origin, characteristics, and purpose of spiritual community, in contrast with any humanistic form of organization and engagement. I integrated literature that analyzed

key concepts as small groups, the third-place concept, obstacles to community development, and the impact of the community over personal and corporate spiritual transformation.

Fourth, I surveyed Christian literature related to diverse models of attracting and integrating newcomers. I investigated the impact of theology and church identity over the degree of cultural engagement and interactions, highlighting specific hospitality practices. The traditional, the seeker-friendly, the emergence, counter-culturalist, and two-kingdoms models were examined and juxtaposed.

Fifth, I focused on literature that examined the church guest profile, particularly the distinct needs and interests that necessitate a unique approach when designing the welcoming and assimilating process for a higher retention rate.

Finally, I examined relevant Adventist literature related to hospitality and integration, including articles from denominational publications, chapters in diverse books, workshop materials, seminars, and professional doctoral dissertations.

Development of Intervention

Chapter 4 describes the project's development having the primary purpose of promoting awareness and training for community-based hospitality to attendees of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. The theological reflection and the literature review mentioned previously constituted the framework for the entire project.

First, a survey instrument was created to harvest valuable information from church attendees 18 years or older. Next, a combination of quantitative and descriptive research methods was used to assess the responders' perception of the church's friendliness, potential challenges, and desired outcomes. The results were summarized,

analyzed, and synthesized for the benefit of myself and stakeholders and to constitute a basis for the final evaluation of the project.

Second, an Action Group was formed to meet the project's objective of promoting awareness to enhance the hospitality culture of the church. Training sessions, discussions, and brainstorming opportunities provided multiple benefits for the main stakeholders represented by the local church leaders with interest and responsibility about hospitality and community. For maximum effectiveness, I used the *ABCD Learning Objectives Model* (Henrich et al. 2001). *ABCD* is an acronym for audience, behavior, condition, and, respectively, degree of mastery.

Third, training and raising awareness about hospitality, community, and integration for specific departments were conducted. The corresponding leaders were strongly encouraged to create a culture of hospitality and inclusiveness in their departments or ministries. Thus, the second layer of welcome formed by the church elders was instituted.

Fourth, the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* was designated to encourage church leaders and attendees to embrace and practice hospitality. Based on the Theological Reflection and the Literature Review, I presented three sermons, expounding the concept of spiritual transformation in the context of community and the importance of "togetherness" for both hosts and guests. Despite the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis, I made a solid appeal to all attendees to accept God's mandate to extend His welcome to all.

Fifth, other practices were suggested to initiate or improve the existing hospitality and community-building culture. Thus, the *Care Ministry Project* was intended to assist

the pastoral team in providing spiritual and emotional care. Board members and church members were trained and coordinated to offer pastoral care on an individual or family basis. Also, a new welcome center and a connected space were proposed to create a designated area for information, socializing, and interactions.

Lastly, a Post-implementation Survey was created to measure the degree of awareness and commitment after the awareness campaign. I designed seven general statements on a Likert-type scale, with four of them being part of both Pre- and Post-implementation surveys. Findings showed that most survey participants highly valued the information that was presented during *Friendship Awareness Campaign*. The most substantial increase is related to the church's perceived necessity to purposely promote a hospitality culture of welcome, belonging, and mutual support. Notably, only a marginal increase was detected when respondents indicated their engagement in the community-based hospitality process. The complete description of the implementation and analysis of the Post-implementation Survey are presented in Chapter 5. The final evaluation of the results, accompanied by the all-encompassing conclusions of the entire project, is presented in Chapter 6.

Definition of Terms

While the terminology used throughout this project is explained in the respective context, some technical terms need more clarity from the beginning.

C*ommunity* is a concept used concerning a social condition or fellowship among the participants rather than the totality of individuals who share the same characteristics or geographical proximity. The *sense of community* and other terms like *companionship*, *connectedness*, and *belongingness* describe the relationships and camaraderie in the local

church setting. The concept of *community* is never used in this project as the population or the immediate environment outside the church.

COVID-19 is the short abbreviation for coronavirus disease 2019, a highly infectious respiratory illness provoked by SARS-CoV-2 that spreads via person-to-person interactions with some severe symptoms leading to death. Proposed preventive measures, such as physical distancing and limiting human interactions and church attendance during the 2020 pandemic, created some unique circumstances for implementing this project.

Church attendees refer to the habitual participants (members or non-members) to the church-related services or activities.

Guests will be the chosen term used in this project when defining people who start attending and who are not local church members. It may include but is not limited to first-time, non-Adventist visitors. Returning participants, members of other Adventist churches, are also included in this terminology.

Hospitality refers to the essential practice of welcoming, accepting, and offering emotional and spiritual support to guests and strangers. Even if the general concept of hospitality is described in the individual and family context, the hospitality practices or principles' applicability is intended for the local church setting.

The Post-implementation Survey, consisting of seven evaluating statements, was made available at the end of the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* to determine the degree of awareness, attitude, and commitment to the sense of community and hospitality.

Pre-implementation Survey encompasses seventeen questions or statements administrated before the project was implemented. The primary purpose of the

quantitative and descriptive research tool was to assess the perception of the surveyors related to the degree of the friendliness of the local church and to be the baseline for the project execution and final evaluation.

Summary

This brief introduction presented a preview of the community-based hospitality awareness and training project as an initiative to encourage and inspire local church members to create a sense of community, interconnection, and integration with a direct impact on personal and communal spiritual transformation. The interpretative examination of this project is envisioned to suggest valuable principles and concepts to any church that needs to create a hospitality culture based on the sense of community.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF COMMUNITY

AND HOSPITALITY

Introduction

Considerable contemporary church growth literature regarding hospitality focuses

on an attractional methodology based on felt needs, similar interests, and longing for

social connections. Such approaches can have a temporary effect and can be

manipulative. When considered as a divine mandate and a natural consequence of a

regenerated heart, the biblical community-based hospitality has positive effects on both

recipient and benefactor.

This chapter aims to reflect on the theological concept and practice of biblical

hospitality as it is understood in the context of belonging and the spirit of community.

The primary reason for this study was to develop a theological theory for welcoming,

retaining, and integrating guests in a local church setting.

Two distinct yet interrelated parts frame this theological reflection—first, the

origin, purpose, and the prominent ingredients of the biblical community. Second, the

marks of personal and corporate hospitality, as it is described in the Scripture. The

chapter concludes with a short overview of notion of integration in the context of

hospitality and community.

Biblical Community

God is One in Community

The concept of community, as an expression of belonging and mutually caring interactions, is initiated and revealed by the very nature of our triune God. The monotheistic Godhead, presented in the Bible, is manifested in three co-eternal persons–Father, Son, and Holy Spirit–uniquely and intrinsically interconnected, manifesting identical divine attributes with distinct but complementary functions and responsibilities.

To highlight the intricate nature of unity in plurality of the Divinity, Spitzer (2010) states that "the one God is a complex unity" (17). Each member of the Godhead is depicted by having collaborative working relationships that demonstrate the communal aspect of Divinity. Thus, several biblical passages provide support for this *perichoresis*, defined by Duggins (2017) as "interpenetration or complete comingling" (5).

The Book of Genesis begins with the clear statements that God "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1) and the Holy Spirit "was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). Jesus was the *Word*, described in the Gospel of John, as the active agent that "the world was made through Him" (John 1:10). Also, the Book of Genesis presents other illustrative expressions as: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen 1:26) and "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language" (Gen 11:7).

The incarnation experience is another significant event when all three persons of Godhead are manifestoed. As *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (2005) asserts, "The Father gave His Son, Christ gave Himself, and the Spirit gave Jesus' birth (John 3:16; Matt 1:18, 20)" (30). Furthermore, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were present at Jesus'

baptism (Matt 3:16-17), and later Jesus mentioned the Holy Spirit as a helper (John 14:16) Who will represent Him after His departure. Ultimately, on the last moments of Jesus on the cross, He cried out to God as "My God" (Matt 27:46), submitting His spirit to Him (Matt 27:50), thus accomplishing the plan of salvation for humanity by the triune God in community.

According to Gorman (2002), the concept of "oneness in community" (26), as it is applied to interactions within the Godhead, is being supported by solid biblical evidence as follows:

> There is reciprocal interdependence (John 3:16; 17:6); What belongs to One belongs to the other (John 17:6,10); What the Son had to give was given Him by the Father (John 17:7); One portrayed the other (John 14:9); Each honored the will of the other (John 4:34; 5:36; 14:10); Each showed deference to and dependence on the other (John 14:24; 8:26,28,38; 5:19,30; 16:13); One sought to please the other (John 5:30; 8:29); One gave glory to the other (John 16:14; 17:1); One obeys the other (John 16:7)" (26-27).

Designed to Connect

The concept of community was not only envisioned to reflect the harmonious interconnectedness within the Godhead but to be shared with humanity that was created in God's image with "a drive to relate" (Gorman 2002, 28) and as Lyons (2010) remarks, God had "made humankind intrinsically suited for companionship and community" (5). This reality has a direct impact on personal identity, as Gorman (2002) affirms, "Personhood is only known in relation to others" (27). Consequently, Adam and Eve were created to reflect the reality of the community in their relationship with God and with other fellow humans. The Godhead is both an example of unity and being other-centered, as opposed to our sinful nature, which is self-centered" (Gibson 2010, 34 and 95).

Desiring God

Created in God's likeness and capable of interrelating and cooperating with Divinity, Adam was designated to be "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). He also was appointed as the steward of planet earth, reflecting "God's beneficent rule over the universe" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 2005, 99). Consequently, he had to manifest an absolute relationship of love, respect, and dependency with the Creator and Owner of the world and to fulfill his role as leader over the animal kingdom and environment.

The Book of Genesis presents God's daily walks to meet Adam and Eve for companionship and instruction. In response, they were given the privilege of worship and daily communion with Him. They had not been created for a life of loneliness or self-reliance but to find joy and significance in a trusting relationship with the God of all creation. As Goggin and Strobel (2014) state, humanity was "created for fellowship with the Creator of the universe" (9).

The concept of friendship with God illustrates once more the human longing for interconnection with Divinity. Initiated at creation, "walking with God" as "embracing and fulfilling God's will on a personal spiritual journey" (Spitzer 2010, 26) was modeled by Enoch (Gen 5:22) and later by Abraham, "the friend of God" (Jas 2:23), and Moses (Exod 33:11). Jesus also invited His disciples to become His friends (John 15:15), epitomizing the true nature of companionship with God as a primary and ongoing experience.

Together

God not only created humankind to be in a relationship with Him but with one another. Even from the early days of creation, God declared: "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18), emphasizing the necessity of a partner, confidant, and friend. The newly formed community exemplifies the intrinsic reality of the communality and oneness of Divinity and their relationship with humanity.

"Two are better than one" (Eccl 4:9) is another persuasive confirmation of the fundamental need for community as a core characteristic of humankind. According to Putman (2016), "our biology works best when we form and sustain enduring, nurturing relationship with other people" (32). Also, John, referring to a person's attitude toward others in the context of a relationship with God, concludes that "he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). God created human beings with the capacity to love and to be loved in a family and friendly context. The aspirations and goals of life are intended to be fulfilled in a community, where every individual focuses on the growth and development of others.

Israel: The Community of Faith

After the Fall of Adam and Eve, the companionship with God was severely impaired and the capability to maintain interconnectedness with one another inherently damaged. Consequently, shame, culpability, and hate substituted love, harmony, and the sense of belonging. Gibson (2010) states that "self-centeredness replaced other-centeredness" (134, 144-145). The first murder recorded in Scripture (Gen 4:1-8) demonstrates the threatening consequences of moral failure from not promoting community among humanity.

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However, the Old Testament provides abundant evidence of God's intention to restore community spirit and His relational imprint with and within humankind. According to Gorman (2002), the most prevalent methods to promote the community of faith were "covenant and command" (30).

God designed and implemented the covenant based on His commitment to initiate and maintain the relationship with the created world. Abraham (Gen 15:18), Noah (Gen 9:1-19), Moses (Exod 19-24), and David (1 Sam 7:1-16) were the most representative beneficiaries of God's pledge to consecrate humanity with His presence and promised blessings.

Regarding the command, the Israelites were instructed to worship as a community of believers (Exod 29:44-46), to care for the underprivileged groups (Exod 23:11; Lev 25:47-48), to maintain the corporate moral health (Deut 28), and to extend God's Kingdom outside their designated territory (Gen 12:1-3). All the instructions and regulations were intended to foster a culture of interdependence among the community of faith.

Jesus: Restoration of the Divine Image of Community

The New Testament presents a more comprehensive picture of the idea of community. According to Breen (2011), "Jesus lived a three-dimensional life" (151), with the primary objective to reconnect the fallen human race with God through the incarnation, ministry, and the ultimate sacrifice. "Having communicated with the Father (Up) and gathered these friends [disciples] (In), Jesus then moved (Out) into the crowd and did the work of the Kingdom" (Breen 2011, 152).

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Regarding the Upward perspective, Jesus mentions that He came to represent the Father "as an image-bearer" (Gorman 2002, 33), reflecting His character and ministry, as John recorded Jesus' direct statements: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:17.19). While declaring His ministry of restoration the divine image of community among people, Jesus embodied the perfect unity of love with the Father (John 17:11) by having a permanent communion with Him (Luke 11:1), being dependent on Him, and being validated by Him (John 12:27-30).

The Inward aspect of Jesus' life and ministry reveals an emphasis on emerging "a group of people connected on a mission" (Lyons 2012, 252). He invited His disciples to a small "intentional learning community" (McNeal 2000, 131) to know the Father, the way He knew Him and to exercise connectedness, mutual respect, forgiveness, and altruism in a corporate setting. As Gorman (2002) states, the disciples were required to learn "how much they needed the others and what they could contribute to the building up of the whole" (36). The Priestly Prayer (John 17) highlights Jesus' desire for His disciples to live and minister in profound unity, replicating his harmonious relationship with God. They have been called exclusively to form "a model for the church… a model they would operate under in the Book of Acts" (Gorman 2002, 36), assuring them of His presence and authority even after His ascension (Matt 28:18-20).

The Outward dimension was the third facet of Jesus' life and ministry, "proclaiming the Good News, challenging injustice, teaching the people, healing the sick, and revealing the love of the Father to the world" (Breen 2011, 152). By upholding a

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solid connection with His Father and creating a small community with His disciples, Jesus wanted to execute God's plan for a fundamental covenant community where believers responded to God's love by exhibiting a Christlike character and extending His Kingdom on earth.

Church as the New Community of God

To properly understand the nature and the function of the church as the new community of God, it is imperative to comprehend the purpose of the church and its relationship with God and one another. The New Testament depicts the concept of the church as a direct manifestation of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's commitment to establish a community of believers "where hearts are open to the Lord, to one another and to a world in need" (Breen 2011, 32). This is a direct reference to the tri-dimensional aspect of Jesus' life and ministry defined in the previous section.

Consequently, the Bible presents the intrinsic connection between Jesus and His church. Thus, all believers are baptized in Christ (Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 10:3), belong to Christ (Gal 3:29; Col 1:18), manifest "the fulness of Him" (Eph 1:23), gather in His name (Matt 18:20), are subject to Him (Eph 5:24), and ultimately display God's glory on earth.

Moreover, the New Testament writers portray togetherness in Christ, predominantly and metaphorically, as the body of Christ (Eph 1:22), a spiritual building (Eph 2:21-22), the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:12; Rev 19:7-8), the family of God (Matt 12:49-50; Eph 2:19), the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:6-7), God's field (1 Cor 3:9), and the Kingdom of God (John 18:36; Col 1:13). Piper (2006) concludes that Jesus calls His followers to be "a flock, a gathering, a community, and a church" (6857).

It is clear that the community aspect of believers is assigned by God for the spiritual and emotional benefits of the Christian gathering. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation (2012) conclude that "community is emphasized and commanded; it is never presented as optional" (2014). It starts with the Holy Spirit's inspiration to follow Christ and implies joining others with the same mindset. The following are the most significant features of the New Testament community: worship, fellowship, discipleship, compassion service, and church growth.

Worship

A closer analysis of the relevant New Testament materials shows that the early church gathered together and was involved in corporate worship as an essential part of knowing God and discipleship. Personal and communal spiritual disciplines were embedded to enrich every believer's spirituality by example, inspiration, and experience.

Thus, prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 4:16), blessings (2 Cor 13:14, Rev 22:21), reading the Bible (1 Thess 5:27; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 3:15-16), sermons (Acts 18:24-28; 1 Tim 3:2), praise (Eph 5:19; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 14:15; Rev 5:9-13), Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17-34), giving (2 Cor 9:7), confession of sins and baptism (Acts 8:37; 16:30-34) represented crucial components of their communal response to God's presence and the sacrificial death of Jesus. The believers were encouraged to submit themselves, individually, to God as an uninterrupted "spiritual service of worship" (Rom 12:1) and not to neglect the collective worship gatherings (Heb 10:24-25). Consequently, togetherness in worship grows faith and loyalty to God.

Fellowship

The New Testament community is proverbial for sharing a communal life among the followers of Christ. Acts 2:42 present that new disciples "continued steadfastly in fellowship," as a daily experience (Act 2:46), belonging to each other. Kidder (2011) describes that "biblical fellowship is always born of and nurtured by mutual fellowship with God" (1430-1438). Consequently, Rosenberg and Koshy (2012) advise the church members to "model the importance of warm Christian fellowship" (165). As a result of everyone having a relationship with God, Macchia (2004) concludes: "'one another' is not optional for the Christian life" (96), and commitment to loving and having deeper relationships were a priority for the followers of Christ (John 15:12-13).

With many new converts (Acts 2:41), it is implied that the fellowship was experienced more manageably in small groups and individual houses. The newcomers were invited to be part of the spiritual family, where fidelity, respect, harmony, reciprocal encouragement, and love were the norm. As they were able to experience the love of other "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19), they learned more about God's love and grace.

Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity (John 17:23) was incredibly fulfilled through His presence (Matt 28:20), awareness about God's oneness (Eph 4:3-6), and spiritual brotherhood of all believers (1 Cor 6:1-8). Cultural identity, social prominence, and even gender disparities (Gal 3:28) did not separate and alienate the new Christian community anymore. Consequently, the Apostle Paul concludes: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13).

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Discipleship

The vibrant communal life experienced by the Early Church was not intended only for fellowship and corporate worship. Being a byproduct of the Holy Spirit and Scriptures' influence over the church, the biblical community was crucial for instruction, character growth, encouragement, and discipleship. Spitzer (2010) affirms: "Discipleship is a spiritual journey that requires trust, vulnerability, and a willingness to share one's heart, mind, and soul with others" (80). God's purpose was to create an ecosystem for learning, growth, and continuous spiritual transformation through the interconnectedness and giftedness of the entire disciple-making community.

The regular communal Scripture reading was essential for the discipleship program of the early Christians as "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). Spiritual growth was based on the Word of God, as the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim 4:13) and to communicate the spiritual knowledge to "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (1 Tim 2:2). Studying collectively about God, epitomizing Jesus' character, and encouraging each other to focus on the "fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-16) represented vital practices of the early Christian community.

Only a caring and loving community can be beneficial for every believer's encouragement, positive modeling, and accountability. The mandate to watch over each other is essential for the spiritual well-being of the individual and the community. "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov 17:26). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes: "exhort one another daily […], lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13).

Furthermore, the early Christian community provided the opportunity for its members to express their diverse spiritual gifts "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 the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; (Eph 4:12-13). Peter is evident when he writes: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10).

The New Testament presents clear evidence of a correlation between spiritual growth and belonging to the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:14-18) as a "community-based discipleship environment" (English 2020, 50). "Salvation includes membership in God's group" (Hellerman 2009, 124). Total independence is not an alternative. It takes a group of dedicated individuals who share their journey with God with one another. Transformation and spiritual development occur in an intentional environment of love, grace, and mutual support (Barna 2001, 7).

Compassion Service

The early Christian community was preoccupied with every aspect of human life. Empathy, generosity, and the spirit of sacrifice were manifested predominantly as a natural consequence of the intimacy and closeness experienced in their relationship with God and one another. The Book of Acts describes the reality of a compassionate community: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Macedonian Christians become role models of generosity in their poverty as the

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Paul declares, "they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Cor 8:5).

Referring to the church assembly as the "body of Christ," Paul had a categorical statement: "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor 12:26). Wherefore, early Christians were encouraged to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), being constantly "ready to give, willing to share" (1 Tim 6:18). A genuine community is compassionate, caring, and generous towards people in need, based on deep vertical and horizontal relationships.

Church Growth

The early Christians were well-known for their vibrant worship experiences, intimate fellowship, personal growth programs, and compassion services. Predictably, harmony and mutual love among the Christian community had a significant influence over the entire society, directly impacting numerical church growth. In this regard, Luke reports: "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 the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47).

Church growth thrives in the community. Like a living organism that grows (1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 2:19-22), the early Christians conveyed "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18) "in every place" (1 Thess 1:8), as Paul commended Thessalonians: "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything" (1 Thess 1:8). They boldly fulfilled the Great Commission and subscribed to Paul's vision for their ministry: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for

each other and for everyone else" (1 Thess 3:12). Ultimately, the genuine human interconnectedness on earth is only a foretaste of the thriving community described in the Book of Revelation. "Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them" (Rev 7:15).

Biblical Hospitality: A Theology of Welcome

The study of the concept of community described in the previous section is beneficial for understanding the nature of hospitality as an essential practice of the Christian church. Francis (2012) considers them as "twin themes," interconnected and influenced by each other. In his perspective, hospitality is an extension of communal life that is graceful and inclusive. At the same time, hospitality has the potential of transforming the nature of the community (59) through the diversity a guest can bring into the collectivity.

The notion of hospitality, defined as a service of love for strangers, alienated and needy, is a dominant leitmotif throughout the biblical storyline. From Genesis to Revelation, the ministry of welcome, as an attitude of openness and inclusiveness, is recognizable in every generation, and according to Merida (2015), is a "biblical pattern, practiced among all types of God's people" (112). Undoubtedly, all Christians, members of God's Kingdom, are called to play concurrently the roles of hosts and guests as a reflection of God's character and mission

God as Host and Guest

As the developer and promoter of community and interconnectedness that are originated from His nature, God wanted to extend the sphere of welcome and acceptance to others. A serious biblical inquiry certifies that God is the primordial and ultimate host. Thus, God welcomed Adam and Eve into existence, providing an Edenic environment, provisions, and above all, His presence and companionship (Gen 2:8-24).

After the Fall, God's hospitality continues to be the central theme, when His grace and redemption were offered to the estranged humanity. Thus, God called Abraham into His covenant (Gen 12:1-7), took the Israelites out of slavery (Exod 14; Ps 81:10), inviting them to be His guests in the Sanctuary and the temple (Exod 25:8; 1 Kgs 8:10-11), providing for them in the wilderness (Exod 15:22-27; 16:1-36; Deut 8:2-5), offering them the promised land (Deut 31:20; Josh 5:6), where, as the perfect host, He fulfilled their needs over the years (Ps 23; 37:25; 121; Mal 3:10).

Moreover, the entirety of humanity is included in His gracious welcome and inclusiveness. "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45). Also, the Book of Isaiah presents God's all-inclusive invitation. "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat" (Isa 55:1).

Furthermore, God is a host in worship, inviting all people into spiritual communion in His "house [that] shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa 56:7). Jesus was evident when He declared: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). Referring to Gentiles, Paul emphasized God's universal welcome into the covenant of grace: "that at that time you were without Christ,

being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:12-13).

Concurrently, God is the divine guest that longs for human hospitality. Because they were given free will, He waits to be invited into a relationship with His creatures. Although each context determines the identity of the angel of the Lord, it can be considered that God Himself or Jesus were the guests on various occasions (Gen 18:1-11; 19:1; Judg 6:10-22; 13:1-22). Every time God is accepted as a guest, He provides the material and spiritual provisions.

<center>Jesus as Host and Guest</center>

A brief examination of the New Testament narrative shows that Jesus came on earth as a stranger, destitute, and an outcast who needed welcome and acceptance. Simultaneously, He perfectly epitomized God's hospitality for all in the framework of belonging and interconnectedness. Recognizably, He harmoniously combined both host and guest paradigm in His life, teachings, and ministry, modeling the actual dynamics of those relationships for mutual benefits.

John presents a prominent picture of how Jesus was accepted by the world to whom He came to extend God's welcome. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). As Pohl (1999) states, "Jesus experienced the vulnerability of the homeless infant, the child refugee, the adult with no place to lay His head, the despised convict" (17).

Thus, conventional gestures of hospitality were denied to Him, in His hometown (Mark 6), in Decapolis (Matt 11:23), by the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56), in the Pharisee's

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house (Luke 7:36-50). Ultimately, as the "stone which the builders rejected" (Matt 21:42), Jesus benevolently identified Himself with "the least of these" (Matt 25:40.45), who, according to Pohl (1999), were "persons in need of human care" (23). Nevertheless, when accepted, Jesus, the guest, brought the gift of friendship, forgiveness, and the blessings of His presence. Illustrative examples are Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (Luke 10:32-42), Zacchaeus (Luke19:3-9), the two disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-35), and anyone willing to accept Him (Rev 3:20).

Announcing His countercultural mission "to proclaim the acceptable [welcome] year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19), according to Jipp (2017), Jesus wanted to declare that "His ministry is an embodiment of God's hospitality toward the stranger and the oppressed" (21) and as "an enactment of the Divine Shepherd's recovery of the lost sheep of Israel" (23).

Consequently, a distinct consideration was given to table fellowship (John 2; Matt 9:10-17; 14:13; Luke 5:29-39, John 21:1-19), symbols (John 6:25-59; 7:37-39), teachings that inspire hospitality (Matt 5: 39-44; Luke 14:12-14), parables that illustrate grace, forgiveness, and acceptance (Luke 14:15-24; Luke 10:29-37; Luke 15:1-31). McIntosh (2006) affirms that "Jesus modeled the welcoming nature of God by accepting sinners" (11) and manifesting gentleness "often communicated by touch" (Klingbeil 2021, 11).

Particularly, at the Last Supper, through foot washing and offering Himself as the spiritual meal, Jesus demonstrated the concepts of hospitality and community in the context of redemption and anticipation of the great banquet when "the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18).

Church as Host and Guest

When on earth, Jesus promised: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). As members of the Body of Christ and God's household, early Christians were appointed as "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20) to exhibit "God's love, mercy, and compassion toward needy people" (Ennis and Tatlock 2007, 57). The guest-host role played concurrently by the followers of Christ provides an enhanced comprehension of hospitality in the context of evangelism and community.

A brief analysis of the Old Testament narrative is necessary to understand the framework of hospitality practiced by the early church. Leviticus 19:33-34 states: "And if a stranger dwell with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." Also, Israelites were asked to love and respect their neighbors and strangers as themselves (Lev 19:18).

Earlier, Abraham, a traveler stranger in the land, offered hospitality to three guests (Gen 18:1-15); Lot followed his pattern (Gen 19:1-8). Additional notable examples of offering hospitality are Bethuel and Laban (Gen 24:31-61; 29:13-20), Joseph (Gen 43:24), Jethro (Exod 2:22), Rahab (Josh 2:15), Gideon (Judg 6:11-24); Manoah (Judg 13:15), "the old man" from Bethlehem (Judg 19:20-21), Boaz (Ruth 3:6-13), Abigail (1 Sam 25:21), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17-18), and the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:8-37).

As evidenced in the Old Testament, hospitality was an essential moral value that was intended to emulate God's inclusive welcome. As God kindly took care of the

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estranged Israelites in the past, they were invited to be part of God's hospitable team, offering safety, company, and meeting basic needs as an expression of love for others (Lev 19:18). God is the ultimate host for all and invites humanity to offer hospitality to one another.

The New Testament validates and illustrates the sacredness of *philoxenia*, the Greek term for hospitality, in the context of a variety of needs, as Ennis and Tatlock (2007) present strong marks for welcoming practices:

> Preparing food ([…] Matt 14:15-21; Acts 2:46; 20:11); providing housing/lodging ([…] [Acts 10:1-6]); giving physical protection or safety ([…] [Acts 9:23-31]); sharing material possessions (Acts 2:44; Rom 12:13-20; Jas 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17); offering a place to rest ([…] Mark 15:3-8; Luke 7:36-47; John 12:1-8); extending love and encouragement (Rom 12:10-13; 1 Thess 4:9-10); sharing the Gospel (Acts 10:24; 20:20; 3 John 7-8); spiritual teaching and encouragement (Rom 16:5; Col 4:15).

Notably, the early church, as the household of God (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15) was equipped and organized to offer various hospitable services and specialized ministry in an environment of undiscriminating love (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 13:1-13). Believers were advised to "contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality" (Rom 12:13), "ungrudgingly" (1 Pet 4:9), "just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews connects Old Testament hospitality events: "for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Heb 13:2).

Additionally, the New Testament presents hospitality as a significant qualification for church leadership roles (Acts 18:28; 1 Cor 16:3; Phil 2:29-30; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8) and women's ministry (1 Tim 5:9-10). Besides hosting strangers, the early believers were expected to provide for the needs of the Gospel workers who travel (Acts 16:15.34; 18:1-11; 21:8.16; 28:7; Rom 16:23).

As practiced by the early church, hospitality was not an option or just a spiritual gift expressed by only a few, but the quintessence of the whole of Christian living. Also, it was not just a singular act of love or a secluded ministry, but as Russell (2009) states, it was a mindset of "solidarity with strangers, a mutual relationship of care and trust in which we share the struggle for empowerment, dignity, and fullness of life" (20). Khabbaz and Phillips (2020) conclude that "eating, drinking, laughing, and growing all become acts of worship when done in the name of God" (24).

Similarly, the guest-host paradigm, demonstrated in Jesus' life and exemplified in the Old Testament narratives, was evident in the Early Church's practice of hospitality. While still being "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Pet 2:11), after being adopted as spiritual children in God's family (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-5), the early believers were "transformed into agents of God's hospitality who share this hospitality with others who are searching for life" (Jipp 2017, 93).

Integration in the Context of Community and Hospitality

According to Russell (2009), the inclusion of a stranger is "a linchpin of any definition of hospitality" (102), based on a "community that practices God's welcome and hospitality in a world of difference and danger" (115). Similarly, Park (2002) considers hospitality as "a primary context for evangelism, within which an authentic evangelism takes place" (385). Furthermore, he reiterates the fact that hospitality "is integral to the Gospel" (386), mirroring John's statement: "that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Abundant biblical evidence conveys that the integration of a newcomer is the goal of community and hospitality. As the Old Testament reports, God called Abraham to be "a father of many nations" (Gen 17:5) and Israel as "a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). The primary reason for universal inclusion was extending God's all-encompassing grace to the people around them. Consequently, several non-Israelite converts like Melchizedek (Gen 14), Jethro (Exod 18), Caleb (Num 32:12), Rahab (Josh 2; Matt 1:5), Ruth (Ruth 1-4, Matt 1:5), Uriah (2 Sam 11-12) played an essential role in the biblical redemption narratives or were included in the covenant with God, demonstrating the validity of the indiscriminately call for inclusion.

Furthermore, after they experienced His love and caring, Jesus invited people to belong and commit to discipleship, denying themselves, following Him, and responding to His instructions (Matt 9:9; Mark 8:34; Luke 5:10; 14:26-33; John 14:15). The concept of "remaining" in a personal relationship with Him was strongly emphasized (John 8:31; 15:1-8), implying continuity and permanence of the attachment to His person and values. He also instructed His disciples to continue His legacy of loving and caring and making disciples (Matt 28:19), exposing them to His teachings (John 14:17; 15:26; 21:15-17).

Implementing Jesus' framework of integration and discipleship through devotion to the apostle teachings, fellowship, prayer, and communal meals, the early church experienced rapid spiritual and numerical growth. The results of the Acts narrative is indubitable: "and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). In essence, the newcomers were integrated and became part of the community of believers, the concept summarized in Eph 2:13: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." The new believers were

exhorted to "walk with Jesus" (Col 2:6), "examine themselves if they are in the faith" (2 Cor13:5), "be crucified with Jesus and let Him live in them" (Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17-19), "keep seeking the things above" (Col 3:1), and constantly "grow in faith" (2 Pet 1:4-10).

Conclusion

This theological reflection has emphasized that the community and hospitality concepts were gifts of God to humanity that was created in God's image of oneness and other centeredness. As Dever and Dunlop (2015) conclude, "The point is not the community; the point is God. Community is merely the effect" (117). Being designed to connect and suited for friendship and community, humankind was invited to share life with Divinity and fellow people.

After sin has radically damaged the vertical and horizontal togetherness, God desired to restore the genuine spirit of community and hospitality with and among His people. Consequently, Jesus, followed by the early church, modeled a covenant community, where "those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15). Finally, a genuine community will be fully reinstated when the saved ones "shall be caught up together […] and […] shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17).

This study of biblical narratives concerning community and hospitality is beneficial for establishing a solid foundation for any current efforts to create an environment of welcome, connectedness, and inclusion in a local church setting. The connection between community and hospitality is crucial, as Pohl (1999) states: "Nurturing hospitality often involves nurturing a community life that sustains practitioners and create a place into which outsiders want to come" (183).

"Seeing Jesus in every guest" (Pohl 2009, 68), placing a high value and acknowledging the dignity of every human being, represent the appropriate framework for any contemporary hospitality and community efforts. In an evangelistic context, Jesus has declared, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (Matt 10:40). Mostly, it is not an event or assignment; it is a way of life, a grateful answer to God's welcome to humanity.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW RELATED TO COMMUNITY-

BASED HOSPITALITY

Introduction

How can a stagnant, mid-sized, urban church be transformed, reinvigorated, and grow through an intentional community-based hospitality ministry? Over the past three decades, Christian denominations in North America were confronted with a decline in attendance. Barna (2016) states that even if 73 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians, only 31 percent attend church regularly and hold Christian values. Referring to Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America, Kidder (2011), based on findings of research from 2003 to 2007, found that "most of our churches (more than 80 percent) are plateauing or in decline" (13). He also emphasized the high rate of aging membership with a low impact on younger generations.

To stop the attendance and membership decline, Wadell (2007) reiterates that churches have "to recover the conviction that hospitality is essential to the Christian life" (77). His standpoint is endorsed by recent research (Barna 2016), showing that 47 percent of unchurched Americans are positively thinking of accepting an invitation from a friend to attend a church.

To create a community-based hospitality culture to welcome, integrate, and disciple newcomers, this thematic literature review focuses on community, hospitality,

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and discipleship. Preeminence has been given to selected relevant sources published between 2013 and 2021. However, earlier pertinent sources are considered because of the church growth movements emphasizing megachurch, attractional and missional models in the early 2000s.

This chapter begins by examining the concept of community from a secular perspective and then investigates what the church offers to meet this universal need; continues with the analysis of the church guests' profile and various models of hospitality, integration, discipleship; and concludes with an Adventist approach to welcoming and integrating guests and new members.

Overview of Community

Although social connectedness and belonging are universal longings of the human race, the erosion of the community spirit is increasing in the United States (Born, 2014). Putman R. (2000), in his analysis of the sense of community, describes a dramatic shift in thinking of American society at the end of the twentieth century to being disengaged, detached, and disconnected from civic involvement and interpersonal connections. As complex contributing factors, he identifies "pressure of time and money, suburbanization, mobility and sprawl, the effect of electronic entertainment and generational change" (283); meanwhile, Block (2000) highlights "self-interest, entitlement, the opposite of gifts, generosity, and accountability" (32).

The Social Fabric of Community

In secular literature, the term community has a complex and often ambiguous range of meanings. There is no uniformity among researchers, civic activists, and

sociologists in defining community. It can refer to a narrow or broad human geographical settlement, a virtual network of interests, or a formal or informal social institution. Consequently, the significance and nature of the community require more consideration and attentiveness.

Several essential elements are often mentioned that define the community. For Putman R. (2000), the fabric of the community is social capital, in contrast with physical and human capital. By social capital, he points out the value of "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (19).

As a community activist and writer, for Born (2014), "belonging" is the essence of community and the desire for "purpose, security and fulfillment" (16). He characterizes community from the perspective of five comprehensive types: "community as identity, community as place, community as spiritual, community as intentional, and community as a natural living system" (49).

For Douglas (2010), a community implies "a sense of belonging, connection, communication and interaction" (5). McMillan and Chavis (1986) recommended a definition that included four components to develop a sense of community: membership as a feeling of belonging, influence as something that matters, integration and fulfillment of needs, and finally, shared emotional connection. Vogl (2016) describes the core universal features of the community as: "shared values, membership identity, moral prescriptions, and insider understanding" (10).

Types of Community

Many types of communities are characterized and based on shared interests, boundaries, circumstances, types of relationships and connections, and degrees of attachment and interconnection.

In his survey of how researchers and experts have analyzed community, Jenkins (2014) highlights three predominant aspects: First, community as "physical space and proximity." Second, the community is a disembodied concept characterized by an environment of mutual beliefs, preoccupations, and affective support among a specific ethnic or linguistic group. Third, the community is a communicative process emphasizing everyday social interactions, community principles, and speech patterns.

Douglas (2010) appears to supply Jenkins' (2014) disembodied community with the term "virtual communities." This gives a more modern name to establishing connections without physical interactions. They provide a sense of belonging and operate based on a variety of preoccupations that each group chose.

Born (2014) analyzed the three main interpersonal strategies, described by Horney (1992), "detachment, aggression and compliance," to draw attention to three ways an individual can relate to the community: "turning away from others" (shallow community), "turning against others" (fear-based community), "turning toward others" (deep community) (16).

Community Development

In *Community, The Structure of Belonging,* Block (2000) explored a collection of insights of five authors that "have shaken his thinking" to comprehend the structure of belonging and transformation of the community, as follows:

1. The McKnight Insights: focus on assets and resources, not on problems; associational life and personal and group responsibility for meeting the community's needs (12-14).

2. The Erhard Insights: the power of language, context, and power of possibility (14-17).

3. The Putnam Insights: social capital as "social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance and trustworthiness"; the quality of relations and the cohesion among the community members (17-18).

4. The Alexander Insights: aliveness, wholeness, and upholding (18-20).

5. The Koestenbaum Insights: "paradoxical nature of human affairs," freedom and accountability (20-21).

Born (2014) attempted to discover effective ways of deepening community. In his perspective, the community is not "automatic" and is realized through the following suggested four acts: "(a) sharing our stories, (b) taking the time to enjoy one another, (c) taking care of one another, and (d) working together for a better world" (14). Douglas (2010) considers that "a sense of community connections can be built among members either accidentally, or via a deliberate and informed process" (6). Based on Kelly and Sewell's formula (1998) of "head, heart or hand" (6), he states that a purposeful commonality construct rests on an associated triad of intelligent, emotional, and

performing actions to create an environment of trust and homogeneous attachment for its members.

The Church as a Community of Purpose

The overview and the features of community described in the previous section are beneficial in analyzing how the church meets the universal human need for connectedness and belongingness in a culture where various sources of religious and secular entertainment compete.

Faith communities that once considered themselves inherently connectional solely based on the assumption that worship and various programs provide an atmosphere of closeness and inclusiveness must now admit that such spiritual togetherness culture demands deliberate efforts to construct profound mutual engagements among members and guests. Crabb (1999) concludes that naturally, "churches are rarely communities" (180-182), and they cannot be effective based on superficial friendliness. Moreover, Stetzer and Dodson (2010) warn against exclusiveness, saturated relationships, and unavailability for new connections, a generalized practice in most churches that plateau and decline (2676-2681). Wilson (2016) also stresses the idea that churches have to be on guard against the contemporary culture "that conspire[s] to limit community and connectedness" (337).

Community Building Approaches

The consensus of the Christian literature on church growth, even if humans are "hardwired to connect" (J. Putman 2016, 27), is that a genuine community in the church context does not involuntarily occur and is not just an optional task among others.

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Instead, the community is the essence of the church gathering and the framework wherein each ministry practice occurs. Francis (2012) promotes a radical change from "Churchianity" or "Sunday Christianity" (120) to "Jesus Communities" characterized by breeding welcome, consolidation interactions, and constructing bonds. He concludes: "The gospel calls people in community, not isolation" (99).

A review of recent literature either analyzing secular or faith-based groups validates similar essential markers that define community, described in the previous section as a sense of belonging, trustworthiness, integrations, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections. The church-growth consultants have endorsed two principal methodologies: the operational or structural methodology and the spiritual purpose methodology.

The operational or structural methodology consists of tasks, activities, and structures based on organizational and administrative proficiencies to promote community in a church setting. Dever and Dunlop (2015) describe it as a "demographic phenomenon" (20) or as a social enterprise. They introduce the term "gospel-plus community" (22), where communality is initiated by the "gospel plus something else" (20).

The community built without the gospel, in their assertions, is often established on the affinity model, a generally accepted concept among community experts that promote similar life experiences, identity, cause, needs, and social positions. T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008), state that sociologically, "within a community a group of people share an environment with common beliefs, intent, resources, preferences, needs, and risks" (50). Essentially, they agreed with Gelder (2000) who previously warned about the

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risk that the operational or structural methodologies might "seduce leaders into placing too much confidence in their managerial skills or their use of organizational techniques" (23).

By contrast with the community built without the gospel, spiritual purpose methodology or "gospel-revealing community" (Dever and Dunlop 2015, 22) or "supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement," Crabb (1999, 525) views the church community preponderant as a divine institution with a distinctive dual nature. Then Gelder (2000) describes a "social organization and a spiritual community" (25) that mirrors "the social reality of the Trinity" (108) and exhibits a "new type of humanity on earth" (153).

Although structures and procedures are not eliminated, the church community "doesn't exist as a consumer choice" (Thompson 2014, 139), but it is being instituted and developed by God (Dever and Dunlop, 2015), Jesus Christ (Rainer and Rainer III, 2008), or the Holy Spirit (Gelder, 2000). Crabb (1999) describes it as a "supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement" (525-526). Speaking about the divine origin of community, Gorman (2002) is very straightforward: "All community begins and ends in God. The concept is His; the purpose is His; the power to actualize it is His; the resulting benefits are His" (283).

Similarly, Keller (2012) insists that "the Gospel creates community radically different than any society around it" (314). In Crabb's opinion (1999), the "spiritual community first celebrate[s] God and people secondarily" (2346). Previously, Yancey (1998) declared that the church was not intended to support "entertainment or to

encourage vulnerability or to build self-esteem or to facilitate friendship, but to worship God" (30).

T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008), do not exclude the human role when they assert that "the people of the church create community" (47), while Dever and Dunlop (2015) indicate that people can nurture it, preserve it, and benefit from it, but never create it. In their opinion, pretending to create community means to sabotage God's plans for the church (Introduction).

The affinity model is still present in the church's relationships, but it does not emphasize the main emphasis. Dever and Dunlop (2015) go one step farther when stating that supernatural commonality in Christ transcends all-natural bonds" (Introduction). Adequately, the intensity of commitment to cultural diversity is encouraged as the distinctive mark of the church as a spiritual community.

<center>Small Groups, Community, and Belonging</center>

The small group movement that became a widespread sensation in the late twentieth century was classified mainly by the growth experts as the community itself with the aspects of growth, personal involvement, and outreach. Gorman (2002) acknowledges the dynamics and the benefits of small groups as they expand learning, increase achievement, and participation.

In *The Big Book on Small Groups*, Arnold (2004) offers analyses of different models of small groups "cell church," "meta," and "a church of small groups" with a vital role in the spiritual and numerical disciple-making process. Inspired by the Old and especially the New Testament models, Arnold believes that small groups are the new community that promotes unity in diversity, based on consensus, in an environment of

mutual caring, empowerment, and acceptance. Werner (2016), in his study of the United

Methodist tradition, found three essential characteristics of small groups: "believing,"

"belonging," and "behaving" (137), mirroring Rice's (2002) trio of "believing, behaving,

belonging."

However, Frazee (2001) affirmed that small groups are not the only ways to

create community. He mentions that "belonging cannot be limited to the small group

experience but must be extended to the full experience of life together in the body of

Christ" (91). Also, Myers (2003) considers that often small groups generate "forced

belonging," resulting in social and emotional discomfort because of the lack of "group

chemistry," and spontaneity in interactions (78). Putman D. (2008) agrees with Myers

when he affirms that "belonging is not something you can program, and it is certainly not

something automatic, merely because you are in a group" (79).

As an alternative to "group programmers," Myers (2003) endorses "group

environmentalists" that construct a beneficial ecosystem for a natural "front porch"

community, based on storytelling and where all types of interactions occur in a safe and

relaxed venue. Furthermore, Myers insists that belonging does not depend on the quantity

of time, level of commitment, proximity, type of personality, or interactions in a small

group setting. He also asserts that belonging "need not be reciprocal" (25), but individual

proficiency is based on preferences and personal needs.

In Myers' perspective (2003), a healthy community can be experienced

spontaneously in all "four spaces": public, social, personal, and intimate, not just in one

or two. He suggests that "harmony means more public belonging than social. More social

than personal. And very few intimate" (51). Consequently, he advises community

developers to validate how individuals develop meaningful connections in all four areas based on personal preference and desired level of commitment. Indeed, there is excessive pressure to have all people experience unnatural togetherness and preprogrammed intimate belonging.

<div align="center">Community, Connections, and Personal Growth</div>

Research in the field of personal spiritual growth places the accent on the importance of Christian fellowship over personal and communal spiritual development. Putman D. (2008) states doubtlessly that "believing requires relationships" (66). Spiritual maturity does not appear instantly or in obscurity (Warren, 1995; Gelder, 2000; Macchia, 2004; Stetzer and Dodson, 2007; Spitzer, 2010; Breen, 2011; Beagles, 2012; Vogl, 2016; Werner, 2016) and needs a community of believers as a "spiritual greenhouse" (Stetzer and Dodson, 2842), that cultivates an intentional culture of spiritual growth and discipleship (Gorman, 2002; Crabb, 2007; Keller, 2012, Wilson, 2016), as the "ultimate goal of the community in Christ" (Arnold, 2004, 21), "*Coram Deo*" (in the presence of God), (Gorman, 95). Putman J. (2016) advocates that the paradigm "'Just me and Jesus' is not sufficient" (21).

Both research and theory consider community, "high friendship density and strong ties" (Spitzer 2010, 80), mutual submission (Daman 2008, 129), and "discipling relationships" (Dever and Dunlop 2015, 120) being essential to cultivate personal spiritual growth practices. Relationship with God and His church "foster changes in character and spiritual growth" (Stetzer and Dodson 2007, 3225-3232), and the essence of discipleship is informally seen by Keller (2012) as "becoming like people we hang out with the most" (314). Additionally, he remarks that "Christian community is more than

<div align="center">44</div>

just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternate society" or a "community of learning and practice" (314), through whom God is known better, and characters and ethics are developed, mirroring the Old and New Testament ethical and moral instructions that were entrusted to groups of people rather than individuals.

Similarly, Schultz (2013) highlights the importance of the community for personal spiritual growth and considers the development of Christian character as a "non-sequential," "rarely as a strict, linear process" (117). He also takes into consideration Frost's statement (2006) about the prospect of "experiment[ing] with new types of behaviors" (284) with a notable influence over the manifestation of the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit (Spitzer, 2010) and the impact of relationships on adult retention, as also mentioned by Brown (2016).

Several key components of an environment for personal spiritual growth in the community play a vital role in success. Mutual sharing, storytelling, and empowered intergenerational mentoring (Arnold 2004), a church of "sufficient depth to disciple and feed" (Belcher 2009, 1432), and personal example, preaching, prayer, and patience (Dever and Dunlop 2015). As Crabb (1999) mentioned, "togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ" (541-545).

In particular, coaching, mentoring, disciplining, and training was considered related but distinctive crucial instruments to promote personal transformation and spiritual development. All three methods share the same goal but use different ways to achieve the desired outcomes.

Thus mentoring, in Hall et al.'s (2009) perspective, is considered sharing the knowledge and wisdom that was accumulated to help the mentee grow in a similar way

(23), while coaching is seen as the "unlock[king] the wisdom in another person so she finds her own path for success" (23). Caracter training (Prov 22:6) is based on teaching, discipline, and exercising in a formal and organized structure. Ultimately, disciplining is, in Dever's (2016) perspective, "helping someone to follow Jesus doing deliberate spiritual good in his or her life" (47).

The Third Place

Community observers and researchers exhibit significant interest in "the third place" concept defined by Ray Oldenburg (1999), as a space distinct from home and work that creates a sense of belonging, significance, and community. In its "communitarian, commercial and digital variations," according to Wexler and Oberlander (2017), the third places represent a fundamental solution to build an interactive ecosystem in the context of "impersonality and anonymity of mass society" (24).

Church growth experts who previously considered churches as hubs of networks and personal involvement are currently lamenting the loss of the primordial role in the life of a disintegrating society. In competition with coffee shops, bars, clubs, and other public places, T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008), consider that the "church must reclaim the status of the third place" (61). According to Jenkins (2014), the megachurch movement created a welcoming third-place outreach and ministries.

Alternatively, Frost (2006) disagrees with the church as the third-place paradigm and strongly promotes the "missional proximity" concept that encourages Christians to "practice the presence of Christ" (178) and taking "more frequent and spontaneous" advantage of secular third space opportunities (172).

Obstacles to Community Development

Community is universal among faith groups but, by some means, not many churches experience healthy spiritual fellowship with a real impact on its members and guests. As major causes, Gorman (2002) lists "self-centered individualism" endorsed by evangelical Christianity, "rights language," and "competitive edge" as significant impediments to the community in the framework of small groups. She completes her list with biased expectations, labeling, discriminating and controlling attitudes, inflexibility, insecurities, and fear.

Other noteworthy obstacles against deliberately creating a culture of meaningful relationships are mentioned: a "disconnected soul" (Crabb, 1997), busyness (Putman D., 2008), a complex church with many programs and activities (T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008), formalization (Vogl, 2016), entitlement (Helland and Hialmarson, 2011), "disenfranchised friendships," (Breen, 2011), "saturated" relationships (Stetzer and Dodson, 2007), "entertainment-intoxicated pragmatism," (MacArthur, 1993), and "unrecognized exclusion barriers" (King, 2011).

**Models of Attracting and Integrating
Newcomers**

The concept of community described in the previous section is beneficial to visualize the direct interconnection between the type of communal relationships in faith-based organizations and the strategies for hospitality and integration used to fulfill the primary goal of any church: the numerical and spiritual growth.

In this section, a distinctive consideration will be given to the debate over the way theological and denominational identity determine the degree of cultural engagement and

the approach used to attract and retain new people in the church community. A profile of the church guest will be generated, with specific needs to be met, and the section will conclude with gestures that communicate welcome and integration.

<div align="center">Church, Culture, and Mission</div>

Contemporary literature reveals that the methodology to attract and integrate new members is diverse and constantly adaptable to new challenges and opportunities. Also, denominational and theological identity, congruent with the degree of cultural engagement or antagonism, shapes the message, values, and philosophy of ministry, determining the applicable methods to invite outsiders to a particular church.

In this regard, Keller (2012) refers to Niebuhr's classic book *Christ and Culture* (1951) which describes five frameworks to relate Christ and cultural context: (1), Christ against culture (a withdrawal model); (2), Christ of culture (an accommodationist model); (3), Christ above culture (a synthetic model); (4), Christ and culture in paradox (a dualistic model); (5), Christ transforming culture (a conversionist model) (194).

Since the chosen structure is key to the methodology to follow, it is helpful to look further into these frameworks referenced by Keller (2012). Carson (2008), the author of the book *Christ and Culture Revisited*, states that Niebuhr's paradigms are "painfully reductionistic" (499), biblically and culturally irrelevant. However, he admits that they may explain how theology and worldview influence church interactions with proximate culture and strategic frameworks for attracting new members and their assimilation.

In the same fashion, Keller (2012) examines four major models as responses to the culture: "the Transformationist model, the Relevance model, the Counterculturalist model, and the Two Kingdoms model" (194).

The Transformationist Model

The Transformationist or the conversionist model (in Niebuhr's paradigm, 1951) focuses on a direct and assertive implication of Christians to change the culture in "every area of life" (Keller 2012, 196). Exponents of this model, The Religious Right movement, or Christian conservatives, promote "confrontational Christianity" (Gansky 2015, 514) and the dominance of Christian worldview over the culture with the assumed intentionality to transform it with "God's raw truth" (MacArthur [1993] 2010, 172), based on the "explicit Christian truth-telling is the church's reason for being" (Mohler 2015, 261).

Referring to a potential paradigm to attract new members, MacArthur (1993) is very straightforward: "The church is not a lodge recruiting member. It is not a pub for the neighborhood" (193). Indicating Heb 10:24-25, he firmly believes that "church services are for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers" (194), the emphasis being placed on the preaching of the Inerrant Word, corporate worship, and edification of the "saints."

Predominantly, traditional churches, even if they do not fully adopt MacArthur's view, are denounced for being religious "fortresses," culturally insensitive, inward-focused, trying to impose pre-existent, "uncompromised" church culture on new converts. The Transformationist Model is abrasive rather than based on love, persuasion, and a spiritual change of heart (Jennings, 2017), and so would not draw people to church.

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The Relevance Model

From Keller's perspective (2012), relevance model is comparatively epitomized by Niebuhr's models (1951), "Christ of culture" (accommodationist model), and "Christ above the culture" (synthetic model) (201). It mainly focuses on the adaptability of church theology and practice to meet the needs of a shifting society, with the belief that Christianity is "fundamentally compatible with the surrounding culture" (Keller 2012, 201). As leading representatives of this paradigm, Keller references the megachurch and emergence movements.

First, as conveyed by Bill Hybels and Rick Warren, the megachurch movement is considered by its supporters as the restoration of Jesus' and apostle Paul's principle of "seeker sensitivity" (MiJelburg and Groothuis, 2009). Based on this premise, non-traditional messages, innovative programs, contemporary worship, media resources, multi-site congregations lead to explosive numerical growth with an unprecedented influence over the American religious landscape.

The seeker-sensitive phenomenon has, however, received substantial criticism related to allegations of diluting the Scripture "more likely to impress but less likely to save the unbeliever" (Groothuis, 2009), consumerist mentality, contemporary music and drama, success based on numerical growth, not on "conversion growth" (E. J. White, 2012, 409), prosperity Gospel, market-driven strategies, fostering "the worst trends of secular culture" (MacArthur [1993] 2010, 177).

Second, the Emergence movement, according to Belcher (2009), is contemplated as a reaction to the traditional church that promotes "belief before belonging" (528-530), where unchurched persons must accept the correct doctrine before they are accepted into

the church membership. Promoting "open-border mentality," where people are invited to be part of the community first, for the emergent movement, "belonging precedes belief" (530-533). Some think this approach weakens the importance of the doctrinal truths (and so is considered divisive) and favors the experiential connection with Divinity and fellow worshipers.

Felt needs are a common feature for both systems, but for emergent groups, they are fulfilled in a "self-organizing and self-correcting" (Tickle 2012, 208) community, organized and led by consensus, where people "focus on the journey of faith and the experience of God" (Frost [2003] 2013, 86).

The two types of "relevant" churches are no longer mutually exclusive or always warranting negative assessment based on more current research. *Baylor Study* presented by Bird (2018), comparing churches with the attendance under 100 against megachurches, concludes that larger churches are more relevant to the culture, are more attractive to guests, and encourage volunteering and social outreach. In Thumma and Bird (2015)'s report, megachurches are portrayed as "inspirational, joyful, nurturing of faith, thought-provoking, and filled with a sense of God's presence" (2). They have a "clear mission and purpose," are "vital and alive" (3), and promote mentoring and leadership development (6), considering small groups as the key to the more personal decision-making of their individuals. The analysis does not emphasize the differences between regular churches and megachurches but what draws the current culture. The current dichotomy with megachurches seems to be "meeting mild spiritual needs" (doing good, being kind; non-controversial Bible truths) versus how Jesus changes everything (Biblical Depth).

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Both seeker-friendly and emergence models are recognized for the intentionality and openness to attract and integrate new people despite being criticized for compromising hermeneutical, soteriological, and liturgical principles in favor of met needs and numerical growth.

The Counterculturalist Model

Considered as an opposition approach for promoting a total separation and a lack of involvement in the surrounding culture, the Counterculturalist model is based on the premise that "the church needs to follow Jesus 'outside the camp'" (Keller 2012, 206), creating a parallel culture as a counterpart to the existing decadent human society.

Radical reformers of the sixteenth century and other pietistic groups are the exponents of this model, and they promote "a life of simplicity, of material self-denial for the sake of charity, justice, and community" (206). The quality of the Christian fellowship, especially unity and love relationships, are considered effective ways to attract and integrate new converts to an "alternative society" (206). Not many strategies to attract new members are developed and promoted. The quality of the Christian fellowship prevails over the numerical growth of the spiritual community.

The Two Kingdoms Model

In Keller's description (2002), the Two Kingdoms model indicates two parallel spiritual entities based on the natural or unique revelations they benefit (209). On the assumption that both kingdoms are ruled by God distinctively, the Christian is called to respect and serve God in both realms, not trying to change the culture and model it from a Christian worldview (209). It is considered that human society already benefits from the

general revelation of God, and this is sufficient. The literature does not provide comprehensive data concerning practical methods to attract and integrate new people into the "two kingdoms" community.

An Objective "Christ and Culture" Paradigm

How do churches discover the most influential paradigm that encourages openness and commitment with nonbelievers based on the theological identity and engagement to the surrounding culture? As briefly analyzed, every model of relating church to culture has strengths and limitations, none standing alone. All have traits that are effective in specific cultural settings, responding to various needs and expectations in a changing cultural environment. A judicious approach is to study all models, avoiding extremes, and concentrate on the strengths in each paradigm.

The word *missional* is a unique alternative concept advocated in the church growth literature. Derived from the expression *Missio Dei* and comprehended as the salvific intervention of the Divinity in the world, it is mainly used to describe the very "essential nature" (Gelder 2000, 31) of the church. It was designed to incorporate the dominant traits of every church engagement to culture model, as Gelder and Zscheile, cited by Keller (2012), describe it: evangelistic, incarnational, contextual, and reciprocal/ communal (258-259).

In contrast with the attractional model (attracting non-Christians inside its own culture), the missional model concentrates on the intentionality of "opening" the church towards the needs of people. In Keller's perspective (2012), the "center church" "must be ready to respond to the presence of people who do not yet believe" (276), and as Belcher (2009) affirms, "the deep church" should not only be preoccupied to welcome people into

the church community but "to disciple and feed those who have made the commitment to travel deeper in" (1432). Based on what is happening in spiritually vital and alive churches, there does not need to be a contrast between missional and attractional (Thumma and Bird 2015, 7). People are attracted to Redemption.

Church Guest Profile

The literature on church growth provides a diversity of purposes a guest has when deciding to attend a church service. Ratz (2004) presents, in summary, several types of visitors: the "disgruntled church-hoppers, unsaved people genuinely seeking either spiritual or material help, newcomers to town, recent converts, and spiritual prodigals returning to God" (1). Considering genuineness of the spiritual interest, Behnken (2005), in the article "Profiles of Seekers," mentions Clegg and Bird's triad (2001) of needs of a postmodern "seeker": "transcendence, significance, and community" (119). Barna and Kinnaman (2014) also state that church guests "are seeking to experience the essence of who He [God] is: love…drawn by the promise of love" (324-325).

Several other motives deserve to be mentioned—desiring a safe place for spiritual growth through mentorship, sharing personal stories, involvement in other people's lives (Waltz, 2009; Thayer, 2010a; Attebery, 2017). On the other hand, Charles (2001) remarks that "guilt still motivates some people to attend church" (8).

It was observed that church guests have different needs and must be treated individually based on their particularity. Acknowledging diverse categories of visitors and their distinct interests can help avoid generalization and facilitate creating opportunities for various ministries and services. Rather than "selling" the church to the

guests, King (2011) suggests a "newcomer triage strategy" (22) which will assess their needs and decide on an approach to meet them.

Gestures that Communicate Welcome and Integration

Once a person decides to attend a church service, what explicit actions show hospitality, acceptance, and facilitate integration into the church community? Addressing this matter, Durey (2000) proposes a guiding pattern for the integration process: "attracting, retaining, joining, discipling, belonging, and serving" (25). In consonance with Durey, Searcy, and Henson (2007) highlight a basic three-step integration process: "(a), to turn a first-time guest into a second-time guest, (b), to turn a second-time guest into a regular attendee, and (c) to turn a regular attender into a fully developing member" (44).

In Pohl (1999)'s broad perspective, hospitality has to replicate "God's gracious welcome" (157) and deliver "welcome, equality, and care" (157) to all people. Schultz and Schultz (2013) encourage "Jesus-style love" (132) which is characterized by "authentically caring for others, a caring curiosity and being a friend even though it's not your 'job'" (198-203). A ten-year survey conducted by church growth expert McIntosh (2016) reveals that 82.6 percent of the respondents certify that "warmth, openness, or acceptance" (131) of the church represents the main reason for integration after the initial contact.

The church growth literature mentions several noteworthy aspects of welcome and integration as the orientation class (Durey, 2000; Milburn, 2007; Wolfenbarger, Jr, 2016), fellowship and relationships (McMullen, 2008; Brown, 2016; J. Ming, 2018),

small groups (Durey, 2000; Bowen, 2005; McMullen, 2008), mentorship and discipleship (McIntosh and Martin, 1992; Waltz, 2009; Thayer, 2010b; Attebery, 2017), and service involvement (McIntosh and Martin, 1992; Durey, 2000; Attebery, 2017).

Furthermore, Charles (2001) encourages creating a critical thinking and intellectually challenging church environment (17) for enhanced retention. Pew Research Center (2016) shows that 83 percent of the responses specify "quality of sermons, welcoming leaders and the style of worship services are also key factors for attending" (1), while Attebery (2017) certifies that "expressions of sincerity and concern" (62) of church leaders and their formal and informal connections with new members are considered vital to integration.

An Adventist Perspective on Hospitality and Integration

Evangelism is the core value and the focal purpose for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Historically, the Adventist Church preached the "present truth" (distinctive testing doctrines) through public evangelism, and the new converts were invited into the church fellowship, as E. G. White (n.d.) mentions that "evidence of change must precede baptism" (128). As E. G. White (1899) also indicates, "connection with a church does not take the place of conversion" (163.3). The new converts were trained to share their convictions to enhance their spirituality and avoid backsliding.

Consequently, after more than 170 years, in 2017, according to (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018, 2), the Adventist Church consisted of 20.72 million members worldwide. During the previous fourteen years, more than one million new members were annually added to the church membership (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2).

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However, according to the same report, a "global loss rate of 40 percent in the last fifty years" (2) is reported. As the main reason, Doss (2016) states that this drawback occurs when "baptism becomes the single marker of success in mission" (6). This explanation can be correlated with results of 2008 research, conducted by Thayer (2010a) in selective conferences in the United States, which reveals specific challenges for the new converts to Adventism: "language barrier, Adventist lifestyle (Sabbath-keeping, healthy diet), personal and family challenges, and post-evangelism unfriendly church culture" (para. 2).

Recent denominational literature on integration and discipleship strongly suggests that the church must focus on "building solid friendships with unchurched people" (Burrill 2009, 69), or friendship evangelism (Kidder 2014, 17), seeker-friendly environment, meeting the needs of the unchurched (Kidder 2015, 50), and discipleship model (Santos, 2011; Doss, 2016).

Community is essential for the existence and the mission of the church. In the respect, Rice (2002) states: "Believing, behaving, and belonging are all essential to the Christian life, but belonging is more important, more fundamental than the others" (Introduction).

Notably, current Adventist literature on hospitality is limited to articles in denominational publications, online personal blogs, or chapters in books published by Adventist scholars in the context of church growth and discipleship. The Northern Asia-Pacific Division (Sabbath School and Personal Ministries) published, in 2015 *Retention and Reclamation*, a collection of articles to address the global church's urgent low rate of retention. Also, the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department developed, in 2015, the *Discipleship Handbook*, a six-month discipleship

plan to address areas of devotional life, personal evangelism, lifestyle, and church experience for new church members. Notably, Madding (2012) developed a doctoral project on guest retention at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church for "maximal evangelism effectiveness" (109) and offered a training kit about biblical hospitality in the local church setting. In Madding's opinion, the integration of a new visitor should start at the first contact with a believer or a church, not after baptism (58), which is often assumed.

The Adventist Church is intentionally mission-driven, preaching the Gospel and adding new members into church membership. However, despite a growing shift from the mass evangelism approach to a focus on discipleship programs, there is still a dichotomy between theory and practice. Nevertheless, Adventist churches need to learn to genuinely welcome and integrate new visitors beyond superficial techniques and shallow methods, as Kidder (2015) states that "love and acceptance form the atmosphere of an evangelistic culture" (37). As Winseman (2007) states that without a genuine hospitality spirit, "the church's numerical growth will probably be short-lived" (29).

It is especially evident regarding meeting diverse needs in the community that there is a lack of sufficient resources for connectedness and a sense of belonging. As Penno (2011) suggests, an authentic community will flourish when we "move beyond toleration to authentic acceptance and celebration of all groups in the church" (para. 19). A targeted methodology must be implemented to address visitors' low rate of retention and commitment, integrating them relationally into the church fellowship. The specific needs for more profound Christian experiences, doctrinal interests, social concerns, crisis management, and desire for significance must be met in the community through various small groups.

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Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to study the direct interconnection between types of community and paradigms for hospitality and integration in faith-based organizations. A distinctive consideration has been given to the methodology that churches use to meet the universal need for connectedness and belonging in the broad context of a growing trend of disengagement and scarcity of interpersonal connections.

By studying the relationship between theological or denominational identity and degree of cultural relevance, diverse and contrasting models have been observed directly impacting the theory and practice of welcoming and hospitality paradigms. Each approach has its strengths and limitations which lead to the necessity of an essential equilibrium between biblical truths and cultural relevance without compromising the essence and purpose of the church.

Churches, and Adventist congregations included, are hardly genuine communities based exclusively on superficial friendliness and apparent love. It takes intentionality and persistence to foster a welcoming and integration cultural shift.

Additionally, being attractional and missional concurrently does not mean a contradictory hypothesis but a vivid illustration of the dual nature of the church as a social organization and a spiritual community. Authentic churches must manifest both facets of the same reality based on a correct interpretation of Scripture. Apprehension of being identified with the negative aspects of the seeker-sensitive church model led to a scarcity of comprehensive Adventist resources related to missional-attractional common ground. This gap needs to be tackled if the church wants to fulfill its mission to proclaim

the Good News in such a way, attracting people to God, discipling and empowering them

to serve people in the community.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY-BASED HOSPITALITY

AWARENESS AND TRAINING PROJECT

Introduction

The general purpose of this project is to encourage the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church members to create a climate of community, belonging, and inclusiveness for guests and regular members. Statistical data and pastoral observation indicate an imperative need for an awareness and training program to stimulate a paradigm shift to a constructive environment of welcoming and integration.

The main objectives of the projects are (1) to promote maximum awareness that ideally leads to increased responsiveness and involvement in creating a culture of closeness and inclusion for all; (2) to offer tailored training for the stakeholders who have a direct and indirect responsibility; (3) to create opportunities for guests and members to deepen relationships and foster spiritual growth based on love, grace, and mutual support.

In this chapter, I describe a brief demographic profile of the City of Green Bay, Wisconsin, and the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church profile as the ministry context which justifies the purpose and relevance of this project. Then I outline the methodology and procedures executed based on the theological reflection and the literature review. Finally, a concise description of the intervention is presented, and the chapter concludes with a reiteration of the summary.

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Ministry Context

Green Bay, Wisconsin Profile Data

Green Bay is the third-largest city in Wisconsin, situated on the west shore of Lake Michigan. Although, according to World Population Review (2019), 105,000 people live in Green Bay, "the urban area has a population of 206,000 while the metro area has 312,000 residents," 50.7 percent female and 49.3 percent male, "with a median age of 34.0.

In terms of racial demographic, according to the 2019 estimation, we have the following information: "White: 77.4 percent, African American: 3.8 percent, Asian: 4.0 percent, Native American: 3.5 percent, two or more races: 4.9 percent, Hispanic or Latino of any race: 14.4 percent (United States Census Bureau, 2018).
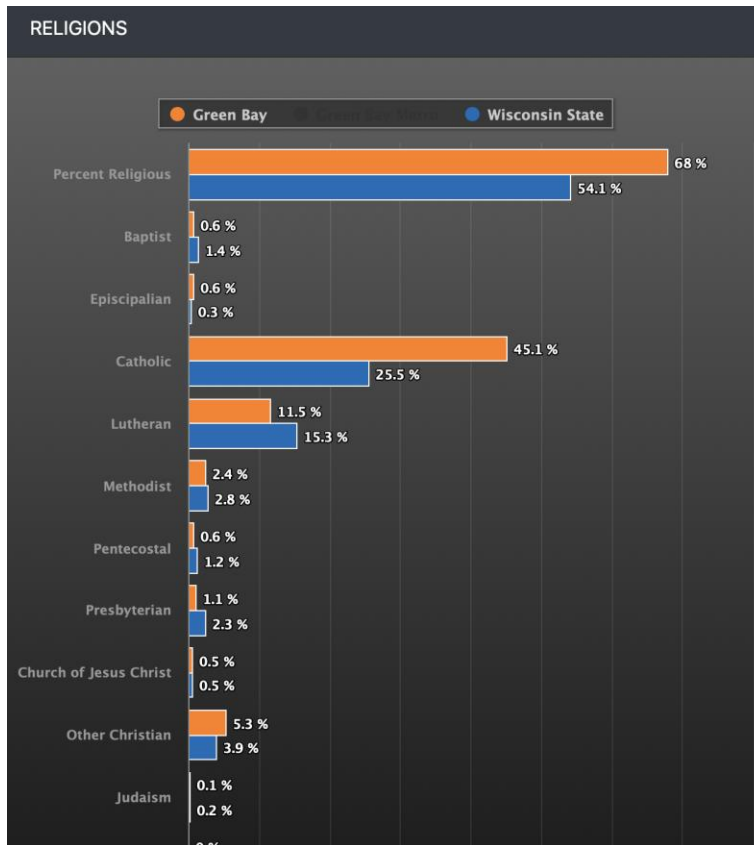
Figure 1. Racial demographic 2019

As seen on the chart above (Best Places, 2019), Green Bay, Wisconsin, is predominantly religious in terms of faith. Approximately 68 percent of people are part of organized religious groups, in contrast with 54.1 percent of religious presence statewide. Several remarks about the religious spectrum can be taken into consideration.

First, Green Bay shadows the state configuration by having a 45.1 percent Catholic presence as the dominant Christian denominations who originated with Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century. The double rate in contrast with the other religious groups and having 20 percent more members than statewide is due to the increasing Hispanics presence in the area, with a growing rate of "10.4 percent in the last decade" (World Population Review, 2019).

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Second, Lutherans represent 11.5 percent, with 3 percent less than the statewide rate. Evangelicals, Christian minority groups, and non-denominational churches measure under the state and level.

Third, non-Christian faith groups are represented by Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism. Their slightly growing presence is stimulated by the religious freedom which Green Bay and the State of Wisconsin promote, the immigration opportunities, and the refugee programs sustained by federal and state authorities.

<center>Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist
Church Overview</center>

The Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church is part of the Wisconsin Conference; in 2020 had 580 members, with approximately 200 regular attendees. The demographic of the congregation is predominantly Caucasian, with a balanced ratio of children, young people, adults, and elderly. An academy school on the church property provides Christian education for approximately 36 students from the first- to tenth grade. The worship services are broadcasted live on social media. In addition, the church has a community service that serves between 88 and 95 people per month. I started my ministry in this church on July 12, 2019, until January 1, 2020, when I accepted the call as the Wisconsin Conference president.

According to the church archives, the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized on May 26, 1876, under the leadership of pastor Ole Andres Olsen, a Norwegian immigrant. Pastor Olsen was hired by the Wisconsin Conference in 1869 to work with Norwegians in this part of the state. He was elected as the president of the

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Wisconsin Conference in 1888, and between 1888 and 1897 he served as the president of

the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
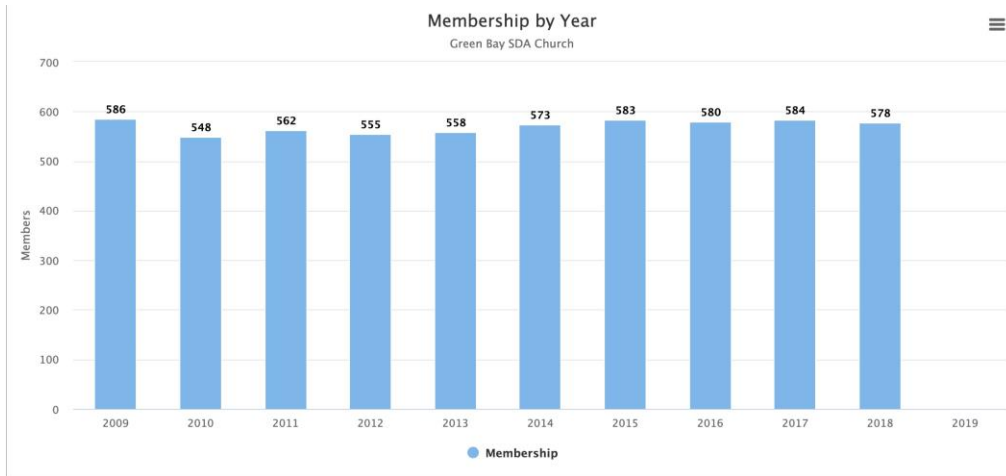
Figure 2. Membership, 2009-2018
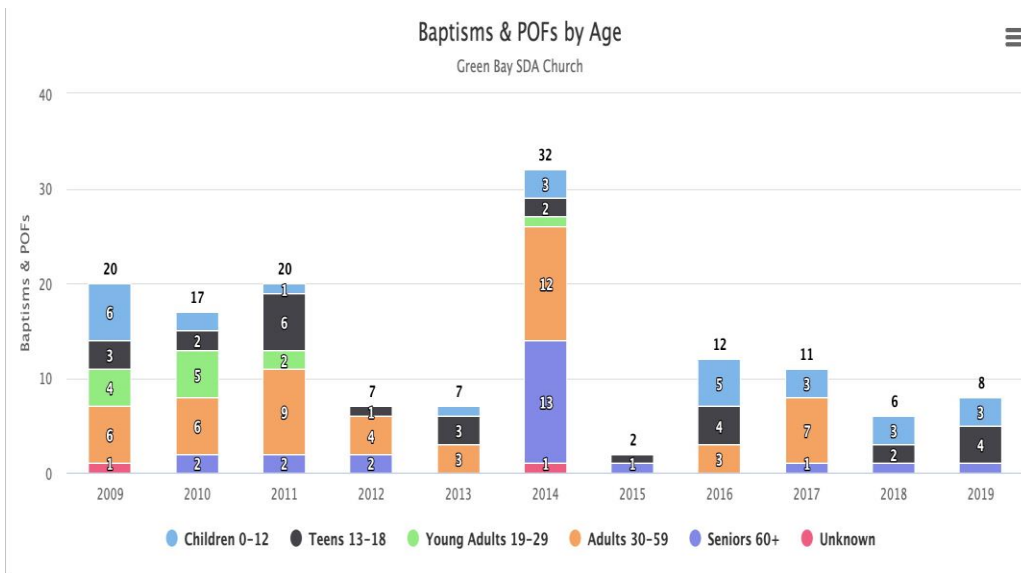
Figure 3. Baptisms and professions of faith by age, 2009-2019

The Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church had a remarkable impact on thousands of people over the 140 years of its existence. Numerous faithful and dedicated members sacrificed their time and resources to spread the Good News to people in the Green Bay area and abroad.

In the past decade, as the official data shows, the church growth rate has been stagnant or relatively negative. Thus, despite the significant number of baptisms, professionals of faith, and transfers in, the total increase at the end of the designated decade is quite minimal. In this respect, several observations are necessary.

In 2010, 20 members decided to plant a new church in Suamico, Wisconsin, acknowledged by the Wisconsin Conference as the Living Faith Fellowship and included in the Lena District. Also, several other members decided to move out of the city limits into rural areas.

Another significant cause of the slower or negative membership growth rate is the losing interest in public evangelism. During this period, the church invited only three guest evangelists with a result of 33 baptisms and professions of faith. A significant number of them were children belonging to Adventist families, and some young adults and adults who joined the church previously belonged to different Christian denominations in the area. This reality demonstrates the importance of Christian education provided by the school, church and families.

Only a few members are interested to conduct Bible studies or invite their friends to attend church activities. In addition, because some of the church members are inactive, there is a danger of burnout for the existing leaders and volunteers.

How Does the Ministry Context
Relate to the Project?

Pastoral observation shows that the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church is not well known in the community and does not benefit from the opportunities to create a community-based hospitality culture to welcome and integrate first-time and frequent guests.

The demographic profile of the Green Bay area conveys the necessity of complementing the traditional outreach approach, primarily based on a proclamation with a community-based hospitality that will foster inclusiveness and belongs for all.

Research Methodology

Research in church development indicates that the friendliness of the congregation and sense of belonging play an essential role in the rate of integration, spiritual and numerical church growth (Gorman, 2002; Pohl 2009; Francis 2012). In addition, Christian fellowship and close relationships between members of the congregation stimulates spiritual maturity, "togetherness in Christ" (Crabb 1999, 541), and discipleship opportunities for all (Arnold, 2004, Schultz 2013; Dever and Dunlop 2015).

A data collection tool will be created to assess the degree of friendliness, social belonging, and a sense of openness to guests and existing members in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. Valuable information will provide a basis for me and the other stakeholders to identify the difference between the church's and guests' perceptions, identify significant challenges and desired outcomes, and allow its use as a reference point for the final evaluation of the project.

A mix of quantitative and descriptive methods will be used to collect the data that will be summarized, analyzed, and evaluated. As a result, the considerable volume of information is expected to identify specific patterns, attitudes, and conducts within the target research group.

I plan to create my surveys based on the specifics of the project and the ministry context. There are several notable online surveys which focus on concepts of church hospitality and community, but I could not find one that concentrates primarily on the community-based hospitality in a church setting.

The survey will consist of questions with two or multiple options, rating scales, evaluation, and open- and close-ended questions. Also, the questionnaire will contain thematic statements encompassing the main topics used in the training sessions. I will avoid using rank-order statements because the respondents will be forced to differentiate between two or more essential concepts.

Survey Participants

The regular attendees (members and guests) of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church, 18 years of age or older, will represent the sampling pool for the research instrumentation. Several questions will be designated to assess the demographic variables: age group, sex, marital status, church membership status, attendance rate, and distance from the church. Level of education, race/ethnicity, employment, lifestyle, and income level will not be included in the survey for the lack of relevance in the present research.

Research Themes and Theoretical Assumptions

The following questions and theoretical assumptions will be addressed in the present research:

1. Is gender a determining factor for the climate of community and sense of belonging for church members and guests?

2. Is age group a determining factor for the climate of community and sense of belonging for church members and guests?

3. Is church membership a determining factor for the climate of community and sense of belonging for church members and guests?

4. Is the length of attendance a determining factor for the perception of community climate and sense of belonging for church members and guests?

5. Is the degree of involvement in ministry a determining factor for the perception of community climate and sense of belonging for church members and guests?

I assume that gender is a casual feature when determining the perception of community climate and sense of belonging for church members and guests. I believe that female members and guests are presumably more attached to the church than their male counterparts. I assume that the older individuals are more connected to the church. I believe that a church member is experiencing a higher rate of belonging and inclusivity than a guest or a member from another Adventist church. I hypothesize that the more frequently a member or a guest attends the church services, the better s/he connects with the other participants. Finally, I assume that the degree of involvement in ministry is a causal feature when determining the perception of community climate and sense of belonging for church members and guests.

Plan of Action

The research methodology will imply the subsequent stages and correlated activities:

1. Recruiting for the research will be done orally on Sabbath, at the beginning of the worship service, and through a short note in the church bulletin. The announcement will be made for two Sabbaths in a row and indicate the date, time, place, and duration.

2. Deacons will distribute one hundred paper-based surveys to all attendees during July 2020. The participants will have two weeks to complete and return the surveys to the pastor or the church secretary.

3. No pressure, intimidation, or coercion will be used to determine participation.

4. The anonymous data generated by the survey will be summarized, manually analyzed, and evaluated by myself. The main themes will be identified.

5. All the data will be kept confidential and accessible only to me as a researcher and coordinator of the project.

6. Data examination will be shared with the Action Group for training, brainstorming, creating, and implementing the project.

The Action Group

A training session for the main stakeholders and interested people will be conducted at the beginning of the project. I will use the *ABCD Learning Objectives Model* (Henrich et al. 2001). The *ABCD* abbreviation means audience, behavior, condition, and, respectively, degree of mastery. For this project, the *ABCD Model* will be designed as follows:

1. Audience: The Associate Pastor, at least three elders, three greeters, Sabbath School leaders, head deacon, personal ministry leaders, social committee leaders, and other interested members. The estimated total number will be 15 participants.

2. Behavior: is expected to be better informed about the importance of community-based hospitality, assess the current church hospitality level, and develop and manage a work plan for their department or ministry.

3. Condition: after being exposed to PowerPoint seminars, video presentations, reading materials, discussions, and brainstorming sessions.

4. Degree of Mastery: in harmony with the goals assumed by the Action Group.

A formal invitation through email will be sent, and an announcement will be inserted into the bulletin. A 90-minute training and planning session is intentioned to be scheduled on Monday, at 6:00 p.m., in the Board Room. The participants will be part of the training session voluntarily without being required or manipulated.

The opening session will start with an orientation about the purpose and dynamics of the Action Group and its role in the whole project. The main findings from the initial survey will be presented and discussed. I will give a three-part seminar on the following topics:

1. Building Community

2. Ministry of Hospitality

3. Retention and Assimilation

Every 30-minute PowerPoint presentation will be followed by a Question-and-Answer session (approximately 20 minutes). After every presentation, a brainstorming session will encourage the participants to discover innovative ideas and solutions to

create and implement a work plan for the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* and other activities related to the project.

For the brainstorming session, the Action Group participants will be invited to individually and anonymously record their answers on index cards to the following questions:

1. What do you think are the reasons newcomers are attracted to our church?

2. What do you think are the main reasons a guest stops attending our church?

3. Why do new members not attend other programs or activities besides the main worship service?

4. What is the best way to welcome and integrate guests and new members?

5. What is the best way to strengthen relationships among members and guests?

All answers will be gathered and shared with the entire group to discover and reflect on the main themes and actions related to the project. Then every departmental leader will be encouraged to have meetings with their ministry associates to discuss and create a specific work plan in harmony with the goals assumed by the Action Group. Finally, a post-implementation survey will assess how the project outcomes reflect the original objectives.

Friendship Awareness Campaign

A Friendship Awareness Campaign during July-August 2020 is intentioned to be part of the project. The overall purpose is to motivate members and guests to know each other better and become more intentional in welcoming one another. After the campaign is over, I expect more members to accept the concept of community-based hospitality epitomized by several markers: higher rate of personal interactions before and after the

worship services, a higher social participation rate at events inside or outside church settings, and a higher satisfaction rate concerning the quality of friendliness and social connections among the church members and guests.

The target audience of the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* will be all adult regular members and guests who attend the main Sabbath worship services of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. A particular focus will be on the pre-project survey respondents who do not comprehend the influence of the concept of community on the spiritual growth of the individuals. The online participants of the worship services will not be considered a target audience and, therefore, will not be included in the evaluation process of the campaign.

The key message of the Friendship Awareness Campaign will be summarized in the following: Just Jesus and You is Not Enough: The Necessity of Christian Community for Spiritual Growth and Maturity. Three sermons will be the top part of the awareness campaign: (1) Designed to Connect, (2) A Spiritual Greenhouse for Transformation and Growth, and (3) Welcoming Them into God's Kingdom. The overall focus of the sermons will be on informing, inspiring, and generating excitement and enthusiasm for a community-based hospitality culture as a spiritual environment for growth and maturity in Christ.

Social events and interactions, small groups, and other related community-based hospitality actions and projects will be implemented as suggested by the Action Group. Christian fellowship is more than a series of programs or events. It is togetherness in Christ and an essential prerequisite for the spiritual maturity of all individuals.

Besides the three-sermon series which will be presented during the worship services, the central message of the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* will be promoted by a variety of communication tools consisting of special announcements during the main services, specific inserts in the church bulletin, emails, newsletter, and social media. Other opportunities to promote the community-based hospitality paradigm include regular and special meetings and small group gatherings, besides pastoral visits at homes or the church office.

Post-implementation Evaluation

Besides monitoring during the entire implementation process, a post summative evaluation is imperative after finalizing the awareness campaign. Its purpose is to comprehend the degree of effectiveness of the intervention, whether the desired objectives were met, measure the campaign's immediate impact and outcome, guarantee that the church has maximum benefit from the project, and explore an alternative way for improvement and further development.

The Post-implementation Survey will consist of seven general statements on Likert-type scale. It will measure and highlight the degree of awareness, knowledge, and apprehension concerning the concepts, opinions, values, and behavioral changes promoted during the entire awareness campaign.

The following markers will measure the success of the campaign: (1) a 50 percent of response rate of the pre-implementation survey, (2) progress in understanding and accepting the core message of the campaign, (3) percentage increase in behavioral and attitudinal long-term intentions for a coherent change.

The results of the post-implementation evaluation will be compiled and presented to the Action Group which will analyze and determine whether the community-based hospitality project was meeting its short-term desired outcome, potentially long-term impact over the climate of togetherness and inclusiveness, and prospective unintended negative consequences.

The general assumption is that the community-based hospitality culture will continue to be developed and improved after the current project is over. However, behavior adjustments need time, and assessing the results too soon can provide deceptive suppositions about the project's outcomes.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this intervention is to develop, implement, and evaluate a community-based hospitality awareness and training project in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its primary focus is to raise awareness and encourage a climate of community, belonging, and acceptance for all, positively impacting social relationships and spiritual growth.

This chapter presented a brief demographic profile of Green Bay, Wisconsin, and the ministry context that justifies the project's significance and purpose. Then I outlined the methodology and the procedure executed, based on the theological reflection and the research on the literature described in the previous chapters. Next, I explained how I assess the actual situation through a survey, organize and train the Action Group members as the project stakeholders, execute the *Friendship Awareness Campaign*, and other programs planned by the Action Group. Finally, the Post-implementation

evaluation will measure and highlight the degree of effectiveness of the project and

critical lessons learned for future projects.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF INTERVENTION

Introduction

The overall purpose of this project was to promote maximum awareness and
training programs to establish an environment of the community, genuine relationships,
and inclusiveness for guests and regular members with a direct impact on spiritual growth
and active involvement in ministry.

The implementation process focused on carrying out the vision and plans outlined
in the previous chapter, based on the Theological Reflection and Literature Review
chapters. The *Community-Based Hospitality Awareness and Training Program at Green
Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church* was a complex process that required the management
of comprehensive types of activities and programs anticipating, meeting, or exceeding the
projected goals and objectives in a limited timeframe.

This chapter is divided into nine sections outlined as follows: Institutional Review
Board (IRB) Approval, COVID-19 Challenges, Pre-implementation Survey and Data
Interpretation, Action Group Training and Brainstorming, Departmental Training
Sessions, Awareness Campaign, Other Community Development Projects, Post-
implementation Survey and Data Interpretation, Summary, and Conclusions.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Before implementing the project, a Research Protocol was submitted to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to evaluate and supervise the human subject's research. The purpose of IRB review is to guarantee both in advance and during the project implementation that human participants' rights, privacy, and safety in the research are respected and protected.

The Research Protocol consisted of the following documents: (1) certificate of completion issued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research that confirmed completion of the web-based training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants," (2) application, (3) consent document, (4) recruitment materials, (5) research instruments, and (6) project proposal narrative. The entire process took approximately two months, and the Exempt from IRB review under regulation CFR 46.104(3)(i)(A) was granted.

COVID-19 Challenges

In March 2020, the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak had rapidly affected the global economy, traveling and entertainment industries, and social and religious organizations. In addition, it caused a disproportionate level of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety for individuals at increased risk: older people (65+ years), individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, vulnerable populations (prisoners, refugees, homecare residents), first responders, medical professionals, and front-line workers.

To prevent the spreading of the deadly virus, national and local health and governmental agencies have enforced mitigation strategies and safety guidelines directly impacting the respective communities, organizations, and individuals.

Physical distancing, quarantine, isolation, and other radical measures were encouraged and even required as critical strategies to prevent spreading the COVID-19 virus. According to the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC), *physical distancing* is defined as "avoiding personal contact with other people, keeping at least 6 feet away from another person, staying home, and avoiding crowds."

Consequently, in the middle of March 2020, the Sabbath worship services and other public activities in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church were limited to 10 persons. Thus, even after reopening at the end of May 2020, the church attendance was reduced, and the degree of social interactions was inhibited by the required measures for physical distancing and individual prudence.

On August 1, 2020, the statewide indoor face-covering mandate also altered the degree of attendance and participation. Several members considered the obligation to wear a mask in the church was a violation of the First Amendment's stipulations related to freedom of speech, assembly, and religion. Consequently, they stopped attending church services entirely. Along with the lower rate of attendance of seniors (60+ years), representing 37.5 percent of the total church membership, and according to pastoral observation, at the date of implementing this project, the average attendance was 30 to 40 percent lower than the timeframe pre-COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, a minimal number of guests visited the church during this time.

The coronavirus outbreak has redesigned human interaction and how ministry was done in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church setting. Essential volunteers who were part of the at-risk groups were unable to attend and coordinate their departments besides several ministries or practices being canceled entirely like: "meet-and-greet,"

handing out a paper bulletin, shaking hands, giving hugs, corporate singing, Communion, potlucks, social events, in-person prayer meetings, and other church-related activities and events.

While prioritizing the safety and health of members and guests, this community-based hospitality project required creativity and innovation. Raising awareness and providing training for leaders and members to create an environment of welcoming, belonging, and inclusiveness needed an intentional methodology to reset, reframe, and restart all Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church ministries and activities.

Pre-implementation Survey and Data Interpretation

Extant research in the church context indicates that experiencing a sense of belonging and involvement represents a fundamental prerequisite for the emotional and spiritual wellness of the parishioners and guests (Crabb 1999; T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008); D. Putman 2008; Myers 2003). Both the Theological Reflection and Literature Review showed a strong correspondence between personal spiritual development and belonging to the body of Christ. Genuine conversion and character growth occur in a deliberate atmosphere of welcome, friendship, and mutual emotional and spiritual nourishment.

Purpose of Data Collection

Surveying the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church was essential to discover, analyze, and comprehend the attendants' perception related to the level of openness, welcome, and sense of belonging.

Valuable findings, as presented in Chapter 4, were expected: (1) to show the potential variance of insight between long-attending members and guests, (2) to discover if the sense of belonging is influenced by demographic variables as gender, age group, marital status, attendance, family relations, the degree of involvement, (3) to identify significant threats and contributing factors for a healthy environment of welcome and integration, (4) to inspire the stakeholders to promote a culture of connectedness and inclusiveness.

Procedure and Participants

After the Andrews University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the project and particularly the data collection tools, the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church was informed, in August 2020, about the opportunity to be part of a research survey (see Appendix A).

The announcements were made through the regular church communication channels (weekly newsletter, bulletin, and a public announcement at the beginning of the worship service on Sabbath). The attendees' participation in the research project was encouraged by the elders, the associate pastor, and the church secretary. A total of 120 hard copies were inserted in the bulletin and distributed for two consecutive Sabbaths.

Because of a lower attendance due to the COVID-19 crisis, the survey was attached to the weekly email newsletter as a separate document and sent to 210 email addresses. The regular attendees (members and guests) of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church, 18 years of age and older, were asked to complete the survey regardless of their demographic characteristics. No incentives were promised other than the prospect of being part of the research project directly affecting the local church. The

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participants' willingness to complete and return the survey indicated their consent to participate in the study. Only one reminder was provided through each regular church communication channel (weekly newsletter, bulletin, and public announcement).

<div align="center">Data Entry, Coding, and Assessment</div>

After collecting the paper surveys from all 66 respondents, it was imperative to find affordable software to analyze and evaluate the quantitative data, calculate percentages, and generate a report that could be used for both theoretical and practical aspects of the project. Therefore, even if it was considered a time-consuming process, I decided to use a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

The church secretary transcribed the data manually. First, she assigned a unique identification number (as 1,2,3,4) to each survey. Second, she entered a numeric coding for each question (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) with a descriptive header for all multiple-option and straightforward questions. Thus, she recorded the data of every survey on rows using numerical coding and each survey question on columns. Third, she typed the respondents' exact answers whenever necessary. The missing responses were also coded because Excel does not operate with empty cells. Fourth, ambiguous and inconsistent data was inspected and revised. Forth, she created a separate spreadsheet for every question for brief analysis, and added filters for graphs and chart reports. Fifth, she created several cross-tabulations to compare the results of two or more survey questions for further analysis.

<center>Respondent Demographics</center>

Several questions had been designated to measure the standard demographic variables: age group, sex, and marital status. However, the level of education, race/ethnicity, employment, lifestyle, and income level were not included in the present research for the lack of relevance.

Fifty-six participants (46.6% response rate) completed and returned the survey on hard copies provided during the worship service, and ten (4.76% response rate) printed the attached document to the email sent out. Of the 66 participants, 41 were females (62%), and 25 were males (38%). Participant ages ranged from 18 to 65 and over. Three people were between 18 to 30 (5%), three between 31 to 40 (5%), seven were 41 to 50 (11%), 22 were 51 to 65 (22%), and 31 were 65 years of age or older (47%). Forty-seven respondents were married, four were single, ten were divorced, and five were widows.

The age group with the highest response rate was females 65 years of age and older. This age group appears to have a greater interest in church matters and is keen to voice their opinions. However, the big surprise was the participants' scarce response of those ranging from 18 to 40 years of age. Even if an email was sent out with the attached survey during the COVID-19 crisis, the response rate of this age group was low.

<center>Church Participation and Involvement</center>

Additional information about the participants was harvested through the Pre-implementation Survey, directly impacting the understanding of the context for this project. Therefore, the following data was considered very important: church membership status, the modality they used to become members of the church, the length and

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frequency of the church attendance, the existence or nonexistence of close family relations, reasons for starting attendance, involvement in church activities and social events sponsored by the church, and the overall attitude toward the importance of the close relationships with other church members.

Sixty participants were church members, four were members of other Adventist churches, and only two were not Adventist members. Thirty-three respondents became church members through baptism, 29 through membership transfer, and four were only attendees.

Concerning the self-reported attendance, data shows that four attended the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church less than one year, seven between 1 to 5 years, ten between 6 to 10 years, and 45 more than ten years. Forty-one participants stated that they attend, on average, four Sabbaths per month, 11 attend three, eight attend two Sabbaths, and only one mentioned attending only one Sabbath per month. Thirty-five respondents stated that they did not have any relatives when they joined the church, while 31 mentioned close family members and other relatives.

When inquired about the main reasons they "started attending this church," the respondents selected the following answers: nine, "born in the area"; 28, "relocated to the area"; ten, "friendliness of the church members"; 16, "quality of the worship services"; 11, "programs for children and youth"; 23, "desire to belong to a spiritual community"; and five, "dissatisfaction with the previous church." In addition, they offered other notable answers such as the church school, Bible study with a church member, attending an evangelistic series, the size of the church, the message that was preached, music, and family ties.

The survey participants were asked if they had "ever played an active role in the church." Fifty-four responded "yes"; ten "no"; and two did not answer. When they were questioned if they attended social events with people from church, 21 responded "often"; 36 "rarely"; seven "never"; and two did not indicate their position. Twenty-seven considered "to have close relationships with other church members" as "very important"; 28 "not very important"; eight "not important at all"; and three did not answer.

<div align="center">

Perceived Church Friendliness and Sense
of Belonging
</div>

Out of 31 questions in the Pre-implementation Survey, 18 were intended to collect data related to the past and present respondents' personal experience and their views on church friendliness, sense of belonging, and attitude of inclusiveness. Also, hypothetical causes of the lack of a welcoming atmosphere and possible recommendations were highly assessed.

Consequently, the survey participants were invited to reflect on their first visit to the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church (Question #11) and provide a "yes" or "no" responses to the retrospective closed-ended questions described in the below table:

Table 1. Percentage of answers for question #11 ("When you first attended this church")

Question	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
Did you receive a genuine welcome in the church lobby?	82%	15%	3%
Were members friendly and made you feel welcome?	73%	18%	9%
Did someone invite you to the fellowship meal?	45%	42%	11%
Were you invited to be part of a small group?	23%	67%	9%
Were you asked to participate in a particular ministry or program?	45%	45%	8%

Findings presented in Table 1 must be correlated with the self-related attendance data (Question #4), which shows that 68 percent of surveys started to attend the church more than a decade ago. Overall, the vast majority reported a genuine welcome and a friendly attitude when they started attending the church. However, when they were asked about the reasons they started attending (Question #9), unexpectedly, only 17 percent of responders indicated the "friendliness of the church members" (Question #9c). This apparent discrepancy can be clarified by taking into consideration the most invoked reasons for which they joined the church: "relocated to the area" (47%) and "desire to belong to a spiritual community" (38%), friendliness of the church being considered a secondary one.

Through Question #15, the participants were also invited to rate the level of openness, welcome, and belonging at the time of administrating the pre-implementation survey. To measure the degree of their perceptions, feelings, and opinions about some specific characteristics, a Likert Scale (1-5) was used as indicated in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Respondent's perception of church belonging and impact on personal spiritual growth

(Based on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most)

Statements	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Most conversations I have are superficial*	0	16	10	23	10	7	2.7
I feel I do not belong to this church family*	4	34	8	9	8	3	1.8
It is difficult for new people to become integrated into our church*	3	15	13	17	9	9	2.6
There are not enough opportunities for fellowship*	1	21	15	13	6	10	2.4
Members help each other in times of crisis	1	2	3	16	25	19	3.8
There is a sense of community and belonging	0	4	2	22	19	19	3.7
Being part of this church family helped me to grow spiritually	4	2	5	16	19	20	3.5
The atmosphere in the church is positive and uplifting	3	1	3	19	18	22	3.7

*For negatively worded statements, the numerical value for the final score is reversed. (1 being the most and 5 being the least)

As Table 2 shows the degrees of opinion, it is evident that most responders reported an above-average degree of church belonging and a positive impact on spiritual growth. Participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statements, "I feel I do not belong to this church family" (Statement #b), "Members help each other in times of crisis"

(Statement #g), "There is a sense of community and belonging" (Statement #h), "Being part of this church family helped me to grow spiritually" (Statement #i), and "The atmosphere in the church is positive and uplifting" (Statement #j).

At the same time, three statements in Table 2 generated an overall average response. Thus, "Most conversations I have are superficial" (Statement #a), "It is difficult for new people to become integrated into our church" (Statement #c), and "There are not enough opportunities for fellowship" (Statement #d) indicate the overall responders' neutrality or ambivalence related to the respective topics. Of course, a precise cause cannot be determined, but these findings must be interpreted with the other indicators with higher values.

Table 3. Descriptive statistic for responders' perception of belief statements and personal commitment

(Based on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most)

Statements	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Besides my personal relationship with God, being part of a spiritual community is essential for my spiritual growth.	1	1	4	8	14	38	4.2
The church has to be more intentional in creating a culture of welcome, love, and mutual support.	2	6	3	18	12	25	3.6
Welcoming, integrating, and discipling a newcomer is the goal of a spiritual community and church hospitality	0	2	2	12	18	32	4.1
I am committed to deepening my relationships within our church	1	1	6	12	19	27	3.7

As seen in Table 3, four statements measuring the responders' perception of belief statements and personal commitment were included in the survey. The overall degree of acceptance and commitment represent a crucial factor to the success of the current project. The higher the average score, the better chances that responders will plan to improve their social skills and, as a result, a better welcoming culture in the church.

Table 3 shows that most responders believed that "besides personal relationship with God being involved in a community is essential to personal spiritual growth" (Statement #e). They primarily thought that "The church has to be more intentional in creating a culture of welcome, love, and reciprocal support" (Statement #f). "Welcoming, integrating, and discipling a newcomer is the ultimate goal of a spiritual community, and church hospitality" (Statement #K) received a high score, too. Lastly, 70 percent of survey participants reported a firm or powerful intention and level of commitment to deepen their relationships within the church context.

To measure the overall perception of church friendliness, a separate statement was created: "On a scale from 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the friendliness of the church?" (Question #16). The response scale ranged from 1 to 10, with 1 being the least and 10 being the most. The Linear Numeric Scale was used to provide variation and an advanced precision rate due to the broad character of the statement. Overall, the survey results indicated an above average (7.00) result.

<center>Group Variances and Church Friendliness
and Belonging</center>

An additional set of cross-tabulations was performed to discover whether the theoretical assumptions presented in Chapter 4 have been validated. Subsequently, I

assumed that: (a) female members and guests in contrast with the male counterparts, (b) individuals with a longer attendance, (c) church members in contrast with guests, (d) frequent attenders, and (e) people who are involved in ministry experienced a sense of belonging and inclusivity and placed significant value on the climate of welcome, community, and integration.

Therefore, Statements # 1, 2, 4, 6, and 12 were analyzed in correlation with Statements 15b, 15h, and 16 (Appendix A). Contrary to initial expectations, the main findings indicate that demographic features—like gender, age group, church membership, length of attendance, and the degree of involvement in ministry—are not casual occurrences when determining the perception of community climate and sense of belonging for church members and guests.

Also, the results present that participant of ages 18 to 30 experienced a higher sense of belonging and community, in contrast with the guests who reported lower satisfaction with the church climate. Even if the number of guests who participated was small (four), findings from this research indicate a difference in perception between long-time members and guests related to the level of openness, welcome, and sense of belonging.

Suggestions for a More Welcoming Church

Question #17, an open-ended one, asked the responders to provide an answer in their own words to the following: "What suggestions you may have to make our church more welcoming for guests and existing members?" Out of 66 surveys returned, 35 of participants offered the following themes as recommendations: intentional greeting at all doors, welcoming packages, greeting cards, up-to-date website, trained Sabbath School

teachers, fellowship meals at church and home, better signage and directions, personal (or family) guide/aide for guests and members, phone calling ministry, intentional friendships, valet or reserved parking spots for visitors, "every member a greeter," activity packet for children, annual *Bring-a- Friend Sabbath*, evaluation cards for guests, [intentionally extend] invitations to small groups, involvement in ministry, sincere love and friendship, drinks or simple snacks, youth programs, and "closing the back door."

Several responders indicated some negative aspects to be addressed: superficiality and segregation of relationships, lack of mentoring and discipleship programs, and inconsistency in the integration of newcomers and existing members.

As anticipated, the pre-implementation survey provided valuable quantitative and qualitative data that constituted a starting point for the other stakeholders and me to identify significant challenges and desired outcomes. Also, it was intended to be used as a reference point for the final evaluation of the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* and training sessions.

The Action Group Raising Awareness and Brainstorming

Three promoting awareness and training sessions for the main stakeholders and interested people were designed for beginning the implementation of the project. Thus, I sent a formal invitation by email to the Associate Pastor (note taker), three elders, three greeters, Sabbath School leaders, Pathfinders leader, Adventist Junior Academy school board chairman, Personal Ministry leaders, Communication Department representatives, and other church members with an interest in this project.

The first meeting took placed on Monday, August 24, 2020, from 6:00 p.m. to

7:20 p.m. At the beginning of the meeting, I presented the structure and the overall

purpose of the *Community-Based Hospitality Awareness and Training Project* as part of

the Doctor of Ministry Program. Then, I continued with the seminar of the session,

Building Community, in a PowerPoint format (See Appendix B). Next, I presented

several preliminary results of the Pre-implementation Survey to emphasize the necessity

of executing the project.

Afterward, a brainstorming session challenged the participants with the following

questions: "What do you think are why newcomers are attracted to our church?"

Conversely, "What do you think are the main reasons a guest stops attending our

church?" As the main reasons for attracting new members, the participants indicated:

doctrinal and health teachings, youth programs, personal invitations, relocation,

accessibility of the church campus, and church presence and message on social media.

Also, lack of mentorship and involvement system, judgmentalism, political, demographic

segregation, and personal related reasons were significant causes for stopping church

attendance. Finally, I ended the session requesting all participants to submit a list of

building community activities in their assigned department or ministry.

The second meeting took place on Monday, August 31, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. First, I

presented the seminar of the session, *The Ministry of Hospitality*, in a PowerPoint format.

Next, the participants watched *Learning a New Language* by Mark Finley, a 25-minute

video program, part of the *Ministry in Motion*, moderated by Derek Morris and posted on

Adventist Learning Community, with the following significant advice to develop a vision

of guest care in the church: "(a) Create a hospitality team, (b) train the team well, and (c)

make your team diverse in age, sex, and race." Also, Finley discouraged the idea of imposing standards for church fellowship, while biblical and higher ethics are appropriate for church membership and, respectively, for church leadership *(Learning a New Language)*.

Afterwards, all participants were invited to reflect on both presentations and respond to the following questions: "What is the best way to welcome and integrate guests and new members?" "What is the best way to strengthen relationships among members and guests?" Significant responses were offered, including the necessity of connecting with guests, being interested in their lives, offering invitations for lunch, engaging them in various activities and programs. Finally, the Action Group members were invited to create a welcome strategy for their assigned departments or ministries.

The third meeting took place on Monday, September 21, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. First, I presented the session, *Retention and Assimilation* seminar, in a PowerPoint format (see Appendix B). Next, several layers of hospitality were introduced as (1) church property, (2) website and Facebook, (3) greeters, (4) pastors, elders, deacons, and board members, (5) all members, (6) worship, and (7) after service and follow-up. Next, I presented several opportunities for welcoming and integration: new member welcome packet, mentor coach, Sabbath School class or any small group, potlucks, picnics, social events, and being part of the worship service or ministry. Finally, I challenged the participants to reconnect and engage with church members, making three phone calls to pray and listen to their stories.

Departmental Training Sessions

The next significant activity of this project included raising awareness and training for specific departments directly concerned about hospitality, community, and integration. Thus, between September 28, 2020, and November 2, 2020, greeters, adult and youth Sabbath School teachers, deacons and deaconesses, and board members had separate meetings to assess and envision a hospitality culture in respective departments. Church elders were assigned to constitute the second layer of hospitality, being present in the church lobby to interact primarily with guests, assess their needs and interests for other connections, and facilitate their integration into specialized small groups and ministries.

A variety of training resources were used as follows: *Biblical Hospitality: Reaching Those God is Drawing,* a DVD-based study (five videos) by Timothy Madding; *Adult Sabbath School Facilitator Guide* (online versions), edited by the Adult Ministries Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America; *Youth Sabbath School Leader Guide: A Ministry Description for Local Church Leaders* and *Deacon and Deaconess: A Ministry Description for Local Church Leaders* provided by AdventSource; and *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church,* by Garry L. McIntosh.

All participants were urged to prioritize welcoming and integrating the guests and consolidating the existing relationships in their departments and in the overall church experience.

Friendship Awareness Campaign

October 2020 was designated as the *Friendship Awareness Month* for the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. Initially planned for August, it was postponed because of some scheduling conflicts. The overall purpose was to encourage all leaders and church members to embrace and practice a theology of welcome and inclusivity, conveyed in close interactions and relationships with guests and existing church members. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 crisis, personal contacts were minimal and social events organized by the church were restricted to a minimum.

The *Friendship Awareness Campaign* was announced through posters, emails, social media, and public announcements during the worship service (see Appendix E). In addition, special weekly bulletin inserts and newsletter articles provided information about the importance of creating a climate of love and connectedness with a direct impact on discipleship and spiritual growth (see Appendix F).

However, the critical feature of the Friendship Awareness Campaign was epitomized by the sermon series, Just Jesus and You is Not Enough: The Necessity of Christian Community for Spiritual Growth and Maturity. On the first three consecutive Sabbaths in October, I preached three sermons (see Appendix C) based on the Theological Reflection and the Literature Review, described in chapters 2 and 3 respectively, of this project.

The first sermon, *Designed to Connect*, expounded the concept of community, originated and exemplified by the Persons of Divinity and being shared with humanity created in God's image with the longing to connect. Without diminishing the importance of independence and personal relationship with God, togetherness in Christ with an

emphasis on the emotional and spiritual growth represented the kerygma of the sermon. Following Jesus' example of restoring the divine image of community, the contemporary church must act as the new community of God on earth. Church members and guests were recommended alternative ways to connect during COVID -19 crisis: cards, phone calls, food delivery, and outdoor interactions.

The second sermon, *A Spiritual Greenhouse for Transformation and Growth*, reiterated the concept of unity between Jesus and His church and the necessity of being part of this ecosystem for learning, spiritual transformation, and growth through the communal devotional disciplines. The core message of the sermon focused on the biblical evidence of the correlation between spiritual growth and belonging to the body of Christ. A strong appeal for commitment to "one another" was made as a high priority for a disciple-making and loving community of believers.

The third sermon, *Welcoming Them into God's Kingdom*, introduced the guest-host paradigm illustrated by God concerning His creation and practiced by both Jesus and the early church. Being a guest in God's household, every individual is invited to extend God's welcome to all. As a sacred duty and a privilege, hospitality is essentially defined as "seeing Jesus in every guest" (Pohl 2009, 68). Highlighting the diversity of people, Carroll (2013) states that "today Jesus comes in many shapes and colors" (103). Church members were urged to accept the invitation to be part of God's welcoming team, introduce the guests to the new culture, and embrace the unique gifts the guests may bring to change the church culture.

The primary purpose of the sermon series was to raise awareness, inspire, and generate enthusiasm for a community-based hospitality culture with emotional and spiritual benefits for both guests and existing church members.

Other Community Development Projects

The Action Group and other departments suggested a series of other projects to create or improve the existing hospitality and community-building activities. Some were temporary, related to the COVID-19 crisis; others were intended to be permanent. Some were new; others were a restored or improved version of past or ongoing practices.

Care Ministry

The associate pastor and the church secretary were assigned to develop a new structure to assist the pastoral team in ministering to all church members' emotional and spiritual needs. In a nutshell, dedicated laypeople were intentioned to be invited to take care of five families or individuals, to contact them, pray, visit, make phone calls, send encouraging cards, mentor new members or guests, and offer other types of spiritual assistance.

I instructed the associate pastor to invite the church-elected officers (elders, deacons, Sabbath School teachers, board members) and other people who exhibit a gift to be part of this ministry and to commit to it for at least two years. They were intended to receive specific training related to active listening, caring, relating, and spiritual mentorship. Confidentiality had to be strictly held except when crucial information must be shared with the pastoral team as permitted by the respective person.

No group meetings were necessary, and the Care Ministry was not intended to substitute the ministry of the pastoral team. However, a quarterly meeting of the Care Ministry leaders with the pastoral team was intended for reports, continuous training, and team building.

<center>Information Center and Connecting Space</center>

I submitted a proposal to the church board to create an information center and a connecting space in the church lobby. I emphasized the importance of a space for information, socializing, and community-building in an attractive, relational area. The church lobby makes excellent first impressions for guests and sets the tone for the fellowship and worship experience that follows. Unfortunately, the church lobby has not been modernized for some time, and several updates were considered essential: a fresh coat of paint, new carpet, lights, and décor, besides a small remodeling intervention.

I proposed purchasing a new guest desk to be used for distributing the church bulletin and a guest welcoming packet in the most visible place. The new updated guest packet contained: (1) the welcoming message from the pastoral team, (2) information about the church, (3) statement of faith, (4) current calendar of activities, (5) information about specific ministries and programs, (6) school brochure, (7) current church newsletter, (8) connecting card, and (9) welcome gift.

The Connecting Space was intended to serve as a "family room" type area, where sofas, chairs, and appropriate décor could create an intimate environment for lengthier conversations and interactions. The Board transferred my request to the Renovation Committee for considering a plan to execute the project.

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Post-implementation Survey and Data Interpretation

The Post-implementation Survey was planned to solicit feedback from church attendees immediately after the *Friendship Awareness Campaign*. On a Likert-type scale (see Appendix D), seven general statements were advertised on October 22, 2020, through the weekly email and a post on the church's Facebook Page that contained a link to a Google form. Additionally, approximately 60 hard copies were provided to the church attendees on October 24, 2020. A total of 68 responses were received, inserted, and coded into the same Excel spreadsheet previously populated with the results of the Pre-implementation Survey for analysis and evaluation.

Specifically, four statements, included in both Pre-implementation and Post-implementation surveys, were designated as the baseline to measure the degree of change in (1) knowledge, (2) attitude, and (3) engagement related to the climate of the community, deep relationships, and inclusiveness for guests and regular members. I did not intend to harvest any demographic data or include any supplementary information the responders provided for this study. Instead, that data was intended to be used for further analysis and intervention.

Table 4. Pre- and post- implementation survey comparison

Based on a Likert-type scale
(Strongly Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree)

Statement	Before	After	Difference
Welcoming, integrating, and discipling a newcomer is the ultimate goal of a spiritual community and church hospitality.	4.15	4.47	0.32
Besides my personal relationship with God, being part of a spiritual community is essential for my spiritual growth.	4.23	4.49	0.26
The church must be more intentional in creating a culture of welcome, love, and mutual support.	3.62	4.56	0.94
I am committed to deepening my relationships with guests and existing church members.	3.93	4.13	0.20

As seen in Table 4, all responses for both surveys were coded, averaged, and compared. Most of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all four statements. Nevertheless, all four results indicate a slight increase in a positive response towards the message of the *Friendship Awareness Campaign*. The most notable difference is the necessity that the church should be more intentional in creating a culture of welcome, love, and mutual support. The slightest increase is observed when respondents indicated their commitment to deepening their relationships with guests and the other church members.

Summary and Conclusion

The main objective of this community-based hospitality awareness and training project was to promote awareness and training for a welcoming, more profound relationship and integration for the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church's attendees,

with a direct impact on spiritual growth and discipleship. The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, with specific physical distancing and safety guidelines, brought important challenges for the very essence of the church as a spiritual community of believers and for the implementation of this project.

Surveying the church attendees, before and after the implementation of the project, has demonstrated the importance of creating and strengthening of an intentional climate of trust, openness, and mutual support. In addition, during the training events and the awareness campaign, the participants were invited to accept the privilege to be part of God's hospitality team and to prioritize the welcome and integration of every guest and existing member. Chapter 6 presents the final considerations and recommendations related to this project.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

Abstract of the Project Implementation

The task of this professional dissertation was to develop, implement, and evaluate a community-based hospitality awareness and training program in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church in a limited time allotment. An authentic community spirit with a direct impact on welcoming and integrating newcomers was promoted as a high priority for personal and corporate emotional and spiritual wellness.

A pre-implementation survey was administrated to collect essential data measuring the church members' and guests' perception of the degree of hospitality, belonging, and community. Special attention was given to the variances related to demographic variables, membership status, length of church attendance, and the degree of involvement in church activities and services.

An action group was formed by certain departmental leaders for brainstorming, training, and creating a community-based hospitality culture for their departments and ministries. The following seminars, in PowerPoint format, were presented: *Building Community, The Ministry of Hospitality,* and *Retention and Assimilation.* Also, the participants were invited to watch and reflect on *Learning a New Language* by Mark Finley, a 25-minute video program, part of the *Ministry in Motion*, moderated by Derek Morris.

Separate training sessions using various resources for greeters, adult and youth Sabbath School teachers, deacons and deaconesses, and board members were conducted. Every department and ministry were encouraged to assess the community and hospitality culture, finding innovative ways to prioritize consolidation of the existing relationships and welcoming and integrating guests.

The month of October 2020 was dedicated to the *Friendship Awareness Month.* All church attendees were encouraged to dedicate special time and create new opportunities for fellowship and close relationships with guests and fellow church members. The three-sermon series, *Just Jesus and You is Not Enough: The Necessity of Christian Community for Spiritual Growth and Maturity*, was presented. The concepts of community, togetherness in Christ, and hospitality were emphasized as crucial for personal and corporate spiritual transformation and growth. The main goal of the sermon series was to raise awareness and motivate church members to create an environment of belonging and inclusivity with emotional and spiritual benefits for all church attendees.

Other community building and hospitality projects and initiatives were suggested. Some were intended to be short-term; others were envisioned to be long-lasting. Mainly, the *Care Ministry*, the information center, and the connecting space were left under the supervision of the associate pastor and the board after my sudden transfer to the Conference office. This project does not include a report about them.

A post-implementation survey was administrated to collect measurable data after the *Friendship Awareness Campaign.* Special consideration was given to the degree of change in awareness, attitude, and commitment to an environment of welcome, belonging, and mutual support.

The Framework of the Project Evaluation

Evaluation of the project and especially the awareness campaigns provide an opportunity to gain insights about the practicability, efficiency, and visible impact of the intervention in rapport with the initial goals and desired outcomes. Due to the short time allocated to the intervention, as explained above, the evaluation considered only the impact of the awareness campaign and the training events with its strengths and limitations.

Evaluation Methodology

The Pre- and Post-implementation surveys constitute the primary evaluating instruments supplemented by personal observation. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the central purpose of the two audits was to assess the degree of friendliness and belonging for both guests and existing church members before and after the intervention. The success indicators of the project being the degree of responsiveness, awareness, and commitment for attitudinal and behavioral change.

As described in Chapter 5, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data was collected, organized, coded, and interpreted. Several cross-tabulations were created to analyze some characteristics of the profile of the responders in terms of demographic, church participation, and degree of involvement. A set of theoretical assumptions were tested, with no significant results. Input from responders about innovative ways to improve the welcoming atmosphere were provided, along with several negative aspects that had to be addressed.

Analysis of Results (Chapter 5)

A close examination of the data harvested before and after the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* revealed several notable themes, as described in Chapter 5. The information gathered before the project's debut showed that the group with the higher response rate was females 65 years of age and older. This category seemed to be the group with the highest rate of church involvement (in contrast with the age group ranged from 18 to 40 years of age). They attend the church regularly and played an active role in church activities. Most responders appraised the church as friendly and welcoming when they started to attend, while some, especially the guests, indicated a lower degree of welcome and belonging. The vast majority strongly agreed that there is a correlation between personal spiritual growth and belonging to a community of believers.

Consequently, they indicated a strong desire to deepen their relationships with the other church participants. When asked to suggest ways to improve the church's hospitality and spirit of community, half of the participants mentioned significant recommendations to be implemented and negative aspects to be addressed. The post-implementation survey revealed a marginal increase in awareness and commitment to contribute to the church's overall welcome and mutual support culture.

Reflections from the Statistical
Outcomes (Chapter 5)

Based on responders' feedback and personal observation, the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* and the training sessions were considered positive and instrumental in promoting a climate of love, openness, and integration of guests and church members. While the participants' degree of involvement and contribution in church ministries and

programs differs, each appeared interested in promoting a hospitality culture. The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, with the imposed physical distancing, reduced attendance, and limited interactions, created a challenging context for the implementation of the project and required creativity and innovation. The very thing that created an environment of stress and anxiety for some provided an opportunity for a better understanding and appreciation of the importance of close relationships and the spirit of community for emotional and spiritual wellness. Even if the timeframe was relatively limited by the reasons mentioned above, the design and the implementation of the project effectively met the intervention's purposes.

Results of Project Implementation

While a short-term awareness campaign and training program do not quantitatively reveal substantial progress, the metrics presented in Chapter 5 revealed considerable effects on understanding, acceptance, and intention for a behavioral change. Targeting the right people and creating a message that compels for concrete and immediate action can be an efficient way to generate interest in the topic of hospitality and motivate for long-lasting change.

The seminars for training stakeholders and the sermon series, *Just Jesus and You is Not Enough: The Necessity of Christian Community for Spiritual Growth and Maturity*, were beneficial in understanding the importance of the community for the emotional and spiritual benefits of the individuals. Without lessening the importance and necessity of the individual connection with Divinity, the core message of the series asserted the strong association between spiritual growth and church inclusion and participation.

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Even if the *Friendship Awareness Campaign* was limited to only one-month pastoral observation and feedback from the church members indicated an immediate impact on the church attendees. For instance, a young non-Adventist couple who started attending the church services during the campaign was very impressed with the church's warm welcome. They mentioned that specific fact during their public testimony at their baptism several months later.

Synopsis of Additional Conclusions

The community-based hospitality ministry is imperative to advance God's Kingdom of love and grace for all people. The theological, academic research, and interventional conclusions presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are essential in constructing the ultimate conclusions of this project.

Theological Conclusions – Chapter 2

In contrast with the contemporary attempts to attract and entertain guests based on felt needs and similar interests, the biblical evidence establishes the spiritual nature of the hospitality and community concepts. The main conclusion of the chapter is that both concepts originate and are exemplified by God as a way of life in the context of the relationship between Divinity with humanity. God creates community, and He is the ultimate host. Also, the concepts of the community and hospitality become part of the Great Commission and are considered mandatory for every believer as a foretaste of the glorious fellowship that will be experienced for eternity. The host-guest paradigm is the central theme of the Bible, having a positive spiritual impact on both the beneficiary and patron.

Academic Research Conclusions – Chapter 3

Starting with secular sources, continuing with current Christian literature, and culminating with Adventist resources, a thematic literature review of the concepts of community and hospitality was completed. One critical conclusion is that the notion of community is a universal desire of humanity and a fundamental right for everyone. Consequently, faith-based organizations need to consider it when creating their strategies of attracting and integrating new members. Another significant conclusion conveys that community and hospitality concepts focus on God as the ultimate objective and goal, rather than concentrating on entertaining people and fulfilling the felt needs.

Distinctive models of attracting and integration newcomers were experimented based on the various theological and denominational identities and the degree of affinity and engagement to the surrounding culture. As presented in Chapter 5, Keller's four significant models of responding to culture were explored, emphasizing their positives and negatives characteristics. Finally, the Adventist perspective emphasize the idea of friendship evangelism and discipleship besides other pragmatic hospitality strategies and programs.

Interventional Conclusions – Chapter 4

After the biblical research and literature review were completed, a community-based hospitality awareness and training were planned. Because of the specific COVID-19 crisis in 2020, a series of limitations were taken into consideration. The pre-and post-implementation surveys were crafted to measure the level of awareness and commitment, allowing respondents to contribute to a better climate of welcome and belonging in the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Overall Summary

The preliminary conclusions from the theological reflection, literature review, and interventional chapters, along with the implementation section (Chapter 5), will naturally lead to an overall tripartite summary.

First, God has a primordial role in creating and promoting community and hospitality. Even though the human factor is crucial in community-building and hospitality, the divine agency has to be given the ultimate credit. Both concepts are God's gifts He wants to share with humanity. An authentic community and hospitality are experienced when God attracts people to gather together for worship, fellowship, and service. Church members need to understand that God is in charge, and they have to represent Him while they welcome and connect with others.

Second, building community and showing hospitality to others is not a program or a set of activities to attract new people to church. It is a way of life and the very essence of the church's mission. Jesus Himself demonstrated the importance of these two concepts both through His teachings and His lifestyle. In the early church, hospitality and community represented vital pillars and distinctive signs of the Christian faith.

Third, the ultimate purpose of expressing hospitality and promoting community makes God the central focus, closing the circle. People are invited and welcomed into a close relationship with God, experiencing the true spirit of the community under the influence of the Holy Spirit. All other significant needs are met only due to unique encounters with Divinity in a supportive communal context.

Personal Transformation and Growth

All stages of developing, implementing, and evaluating this project created a positive learning environment that will influence my future ministries beyond concluding this project. In retrospect, there are three lessons particularly worthy of attention.

First, the process of researching the literature and the theological reflection increased my knowledge and comprehension related to the concepts of community and hospitality for local churches. It exposed me to new ideas and correlations between various theories and models besides being encouraged to specialize in this particular area of ministry. Also, I am better equipped to pursue similar projects in other areas of ministry.

Second, even for a limited time framework, implementing the project allowed me to see value in the awareness and equipping programs. It was rewarding to see an immediate impact of the intervention that will build confidence and boost morale and perseverance. The departmental leaders have developed a series of practical methods to promote the community spirit in their respective ministries and focus more on welcoming guests with their spiritual wellness as a primordial emphasis. Church members also expressed their appreciation for the awareness campaign, commending the messages that I presented and adopting practical hospitality practices such as greeting guests and existing church members, calling or sending cards of encouragement for shut-inns.

Third, the interventions also helped me learn that raising awareness by increasing knowledge on one topic is not always enough. Instead, the awareness campaigns have to lead to action based on a consistent theory of change with long-term, lasting results.

Recommendations

Additional reflection on research and intervention generated a series of recommendations for similar projects in the future. Because of some constraints of timeframe and context encountered during my short pastorate at the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, new dimensions would be valuable to be explored.

1. The literature review indicated an insufficiency of Adventist resources related to community-based hospitality for local churches. I recommend that more research be done by the North American Division Evangelism Institute (NADEI).

2. A curriculum that incorporates the concepts of community and hospitality for local churches should be developed and used by the Adventist Theological Programs to be engrained in the basic pastoral training.

3. The Conference should perform a hospitality audit for every church within its jurisdiction using a specialized agency to evaluate and monitor the friendliness and inclusion climate. Targeted extensive training should be offered to address potential inappropriate practices and areas of weaknesses.

4. A longer timeframe for implementing and monitoring the project is necessary. An extensive awareness campaign and a continuous training program will lead to a more consistent and durable impact on the local church culture. At least six sermons are recommended for better exposure to the message of the awareness campaign.

5. The complexity of the environment, with direct effects on the campaign's success, must be given more attention. Mainly, demographics, personality patterns, and

social contexts could reveal crucial data about mindsets, beliefs, and shared values.

6. A theory of change could be developed to measure progress in achieving the campaign's goals effectively. Mainly, it is necessary to better understand the causes or reasons people accept behavioral changes.

7. The success metrics should concentrate more on engagement and commitment rather than on impressions and incorrect assumptions or understanding of the hospitality and community concepts.

8. A more integrated approach should characterize the awareness campaigns to maximize the success rate. Multiple channels to engage the target audience should be used, including social networks and online community platforms.

9. Even the most successful hospitality awareness campaigns in a local church setting have a limited impact on the target audience. It should lead to creating and implementing a guest retention and discipleship program.

10. A non-monetary, team-based reward system should be explored and implemented in harmony with the church culture and spiritual context. The desirable performance should be recognized and celebrated based on positive incentives rather than on a sense of fear, obligation, and guilt.

Concluding Remarks

This project aimed to develop, execute and evaluate a community-based hospitality awareness and training program for the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church. The ministry of welcome and inclusion are fundamental to evangelism, and they are engrained in the very fabric of discipleship.

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Being hospitable implies the acceptance of the great privilege and responsibility to be part of God's welcoming team. He is the ultimate Host and the community builder for the entire humanity, now and for eternity. The whole concept of community-based hospitality is conclusively presented by one of the last invitations of the Bible: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17). When His invitation is accepted, He provides the gifts of His presence: comfort, significance, and transformation.

APPENDIX A

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church: Hospitality Survey
Thank you for completing this survey. Evaluate our church as you experienced it before COVID-19. Your honest perspective will be anonymous.

1. Gender:
   - Female
   - Male

2. Age Group:
   - 18 -30
   - 31 – 40
   - 41 – 50
   - 51 – 65
   - 65 – over

3. Marital Status
   - Married
   - Single
   - Divorced
   - Widow

4. How long have you been attending the Green Bay Church?
   a. Less than one year
   b. 1-5 years
   c. 6-10 years
   d. More than 10 years

5. How far do you drive to church?
   - Less than 20 minutes
   - 20-30 minutes
   - 30-60 minutes
   - More than 60 minutes

6. Church Membership:
   - I am a member of the Green Bay Church
   - I am a member in another Seventh-day Adventist church
   - I am not a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church

7. How did you join this church?
   - Baptism
   - Profession of Faith
   - Transfer
   - I attend but I am not a member

8. Did you have any relatives in the church when you decided to attend?
   - YES
   - NO

9. Reasons you started attending this church (multiple answers allowed):
   - Born in the area
   - Relocated to this area
   - Friendliness of the church members
   - Quality of the worship services
   - Programs for children and youth
   - Desire to belong to a spiritual community
   - Dissatisfaction with the previous church
   - Others_____

10. How many Sabbath services do you attend on monthly basis?
    - One
    - Two
    - Three
    - Every week
    - Less than once per month

11. When you first attended this church:
    a. Did you receive a genuine welcome in the church lobby?   YES   NO
    b. Were members friendly and made you feel welcome?   YES   NO
    c. Did someone invite you to the fellowship meal?   YES   NO
    d. Were you invited to be part of a small group?   YES   NO
    e. Were you asked to participate in a particular ministry or program? YES NO

12. Have you ever played any active role in the church or in an outreach ministry of the church?
    - YES
    - NO
    Comments_____

13. Do you attend social events with people from church?
    - Often
    - Rarely
    - Never
    Comments_____

14. How important is it for you to have close relationships with other church members?
    - Very important
    - Important
    - Not very important
    - Not important at all

15. What is your honest opinion about the following statements in our current church context? (1 being the least and 5 being the most)

   a. Most conversations I have are superficial   1 2 3 4 5
   b. I feel I don't belong to this church family   1 2 3 4 5
   c. It is difficult for new people to become integrated in our church   1 2 3 4 5
   d. There are not enough opportunities for fellowship   1 2 3 4 5
   e. Besides my personal relationship with God, being part of a spiritual
      community is essential for my spiritual growth.   1 2 3 4 5
   f. The church has to be more intentionally in creating a culture of
      welcome, love, and reciprocal support.   1 2 3 4 5
   g. Members help each other in times of crisis   1 2 3 4 5
   h. There is a sense of community and belonging   1 2 3 4 5
   i. Being part of this church family helped me to grow spiritually   1 2 3 4 5
   j. The atmosphere in the church is positive and uplifting   1 2 3 4 5
   k. Welcoming, integrating, and discipling a newcomer is the
      ultimate goal of a spiritual community and church hospitality 1 2 3 4 5
   l. I am committed to deepen my relationships within our church   1 2 3 4 5

16. On a scale from 1 to 10 how do you evaluate the friendliness of the church?
   (1 being the least and 10 being the most)

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

17. What suggestions you may have to make our church more welcoming for guests and existing members?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey. Please hand it to the pastor or the church secretary at the end of the service today.

APPENDIX B

THE ACTION GROUP TRAINING MATERIALS

Introduction of the Project and Building Community

Community-Based Hospitality Project

Titus Naftanaila

Our Project

- Initial intended for Madison East Church
- Implementation in Green Bay Church
- COVID-19

Title of the Doctoral Project

Developing and Implementing a Community-Based Hospitality Awareness and Training Program at Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Theological Reflection
3. Literature Review
4. Description of the Project
5. Narrative of Initiative Implementation
6. Evaluation and Learnings

Critical Challenge

How can a mid-sized urban church be transformed, reinvigorated and grow through an intentional community-based hospitality ministry?

Purpose of the Project

The overall purpose of this project is to encourage the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church members to create a climate of the community, belonging, and inclusiveness for guests and regular members.

Main Objectives

1.To promote maximum awareness that ideally leads to increased responsiveness and involvement in creating a culture of closeness and inclusion for all.

Main Objectives

2. To offer tailored training for the stakeholders who have a direct and indirect responsibility.

Main Objectives

3. To create opportunities for guests and members to deepen relationships and foster spiritual growth based on love, grace, and mutual support.

A Pre-Project Survey

To assess friendliness and sense of community, to identify the difference between the church's and guests' perceptions, to identify major challenges and desired interpersonal outcomes, and to use it as a reference point for the final evaluation of the project.

The Action Group

Elders, greeters, Sabbath School teachers, deacons, personal ministry leaders, social committee leaders, and other interested members. The main actions will include a three-part seminar followed by discussions about assessing the current situation, brainstorming, creating and implementing a work plan.

Three Seminars and Discussion Sessions

1. Building Community
2. Ministry of Hospitality
3. Assimilation

"Jesus and I" Is Not Enough: The Necessity of Christian Community

1. Designed To Connect
2. A Spiritual Greenhouse For Transformation and Growth
3. Welcoming Them In God's Kingdom

Friendship Awareness Month Campaign

A three-part sermon series to foster a culture of "one-another", creative post worship service engagement actions, and other Connecting Projects advocated by the Action Group.

Post-Project Survey

To evaluate the impact of the project on the culture of community-based hospitality.

Reality

A genuine community in the church context doesn't involuntarily occur and is not just an optional task among others.

Another Reality

The Holy Spirit sends new people to our church but not all of them decide to join or remain for a longer time.

Questions or Comments

Building Community

Titus Naftanaila

Realities

- Proclamation preaching is not enough for the Kingdom growth
- "Crying Wolf" Campaigns have only a short term effect
- "Jesus and I" is not sufficient for spiritual growth

Seventh-day Adventist Church

"After more than 170 years, in 2017, the Adventist church, according to GC, 2018, 2) consisted of 20.72 million members worldwide. During the previous fourteen years, more than 1million new members were annually added to the church membership (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2).

Seventh-day Adventist Church

However, according to the same report, it is reported a "global loss rate of 40% in the last fifty years" (2).

Main Cause

As the main reason, Doss (2016), states that this drawback occurs when "baptism becomes the single marker of success in mission" (6).

Solution

- Discipleship Program: making disciples as Jesus did.
- A Community - Based Hospitality program is part of the Discipleship Program

Building Community is Critical

1. God is One in community
2. Created in God's Image
3. Hardwired to connect
4. Social isolation is the norm
5. Personal spiritual growth happens in a community of believers
6. Church growth thrives in community

Larry Crabb

"Churches are rarely communities. The invitation to greet pew mates during the early part of the worship service typically leads nowhere.

Larry Crabb

You could state your name was Bob or Howard or Rita or Sue and it would make no difference. Those kinds of interactions rarely create community—they more often substitute for it."

Who Creates Community?

- God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit
- The Gospel
- Dedicated church leaders
- Every believer

God is One in Community

Three co-eternal persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – uniquely and intrinsically interconnected, manifesting identical divine attributes with distinct but complementary functions and responsibilities.

God is One in Community

- Creation Story. Gen 1-3
- "Our Likeness" Gen 1.26
- "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language" (Gen 11:7)
- The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were present at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16-17)

Designed to Connect

"The concept of community was not only envisioned to reflect the harmonious interconnectedness within the Godhead but to be shared with humanity that was created in God's image with a drive to relate." DMin Project

Together

God not only created humankind to be in a relationship with him but with one another.

- "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18)
- "Two are better than one" (Eccl 4:9)

Together

Putman (2016): "Our biology works best when we form and sustain enduring, nurturing relationship with other people"

Israel: The Community of Faith

- To worship as a community of believers (Exod 29:44-46),
- To care for the underprivileged groups (Exod 23:11; Lev 25:47-48),
- To maintain the corporate moral health (Deut 28)
- To extend God's kingdom outside their designated territory (Gen 12:1-3).

Jesus – Restoration of the Divine Image of Community

He invited His disciples to a small discipling community to know the Father, the way he knew Him and to exercise connectedness, mutual respect, forgiveness, and altruism in a corporate setting.

The Priestly Prayer… (John 17)

highlights Jesus 'desire for his disciples to live and minister in profound unity, replicating his harmonious relationship with God. They have been called exclusively to form "a model for the church… a model they would operate under in the Book of Acts"

Church as the New Community of God

The New Testament depicts the concept of church as a direct manifestation of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's commitment to creating a community of believers "where hearts are open to the Lord, to one another and to a world in need" (Breen 2011, 32).

Larry Crabb

"The church is a community of people on a journey to God. Wherever there is supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement, there is the church—a spiritual community."

Togetherness in Christ

- The body of Christ (Eph 1:22)
- A spiritual building (Eph 2:21-22)
- The bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:12)
- The family of God (Matt 12:49-50)
- The temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17)
- God's field (1 Cor 3:9)
- The kingdom of God (John 18:36).

Act 2:46-47

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 the people.

One Another

- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Be honest with one another (Colossians 3:9)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Confess to one another (James 5:16)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Acts of the Apostle, 109

"With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Savior's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour..."

Other Noteworthy Obstacles

- "disenfranchised friendships," (Breen, 2011),
- "saturated" relationships (Stetzer and Dodson, 2007),
- "entertainment-intoxicated pragmatism," (MacArthur, 1993),
- "unrecognized exclusion barriers" (King , 2011).

The most significant features of community

- Worship
- Fellowship
- Discipleship
- Compassion service
- Church growth.

One Another

- Love one another (John 13:34, 15:12)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Comfort and agree with one another (2 Corinthians 13:11)
- Serve one another (John 13:1-20; Galatians 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)

Conflict and Courage p. 357

"Christians are all members of one family, all children of the same heavenly Father, with the same blessed hope of immortality. Very close and tender should be the tie that binds them together.... "Let us not love in word," the apostle writes, "but in deed and in truth.""

Noteworthy Obstacles

- a "disconnected soul" (Crabb, 1997)
- busyness (Putman D., 2008),
- a complex church with many programs and activities (Rainer T., and Rainer S. III, 2008),
- formalization (Vogl, 2016),
- entitlement (Helland and Hialmarson, (2011)

Welcoming – Connecting - Involving

Welcoming: friendly atmosphere, meet new people
Connecting: make new friends, being acquainted with the church, attend social events
Involving: growing spiritually, ministry involvement, receiving and mentoring others

Larry Crabb

"I want spiritual community in all its dimensions: prayer, meditation, telling stories, playing, practical helping, supporting in crisis, eating, weeping, laughing, doing ordinary things. What makes it spiritual is the Spirit. No matter what we're doing—sharing ordinary moments or joining together in sublime worship—Jesus Christ is our connection."

Prov 17:26

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Hebrews 3:13

Exhort one another daily [...], lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Surveys Participant Feedback

GENDER

TOTAL:	59
• Female:	36
• Male:	23

Surveys Participant Feedback

AGE GROUPS

• 18-30	3	5%
• 31-40	3	5%
• 41-50	7	12%
• 51-65	21	36%
• 65 over	25	42%

Surveys Participant Feedback

ATTENDANCE

Less than one year	4
3-5 years	7
6-10 years	9
More than 10 years	39

Surveys Participant Feedback

REASONS FOR STARTING TO ATTEND	
Born	9
Relocated	28
Friendship	10
Worship Service	18
Children Programs	12
Spiritual Community	23
Discipleship	5
Others	20

Surveys Participant Feedback

AVERAGE FRENDLINESS:		7.2
• 18-30	9	
• 31-40	6	
• 41-50	6	
• 51-65	7	
• 65 over	8	

Surveys Participant Feedback

"It seems as though family groups tend to keep to themselves. The pandemic has also not helped. There have been times in the past I could have rated the overall friendliness and hospitality higher. I also realize that I would likely feel more connected if I came to church more often. Unfortunately the times I come and feel totally alone do not make me want to come more often."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"I have returned to church after 20 years and very few people (only the few that I previously knew) have welcomed me back. So many keep to themselves. So many won't even give you the time of day. I don't come to church for the people, I come to hear God's word and spend time in his house. (In the 20 years that I was not attending church, not 1 person contacted me to find out why I wasn't coming to church."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"Many members have extended family in this (GB) church and that who they mostly sit and socialite with. Very, very few members even, greet visitors, and new attendees, much less show any interest in them or in other members besides their family or long-time friends."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"GB members like to say this is a friendly church, but except for a very few members some who have died, I don't consider it a friendly church overall, Some past greeters have been so busy visiting with their good friends, they've totally ignored other members entering church, much less any visitors! Emphasize intentional welcoming/friendliness to everyone, especially the greeters showing that."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"The Green Bay Church has a lot of large networks of extended families. It is very difficult for a new member unrelated to these families to break into those networks and those networks are very engaged with their family members leaving little time or energy for including or reaching out to, integrating people outside their network or comfort zone."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"There is a palpable superficalness to the friendships and social interactions. I think people like the idea of being friendly but don't want to get uncomfortable and reach out or open their homes to new people. I've been here 10 years and have had lots of church members over. I can count ~ 2 or 3 that have opened their homes to me."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"Very friendly church"

"We could have a better place (designated place) for visitors or new members to be greeted in the lobby. Maybe some members could be designated as disciples to be connected to new members."

Discussion Questions for the Action Group

1. What do you think are the reasons newcomers are attracted to our church?
2. What do you think are the main reasons a guest stops attending our church?

How to Build Community in Our Church?

- Friendlier atmosphere
- Small groups
- Social events
- Invitation to lunch
- Acts of love and service
- Emotional and spiritual support
- Involvement in ministry

How to Build Community in Your Department?

- Elders
- Deacon/deaconess
- Sabbath School
- AJA
- Personal Ministry
- Youth Ministry
- Pathfinders
- Etc

Retention and Assimilation

Retention and Assimilation

Assimilation

- Mission of the church
- Regular participation
- Spiritual growth
- Fellowship
- Ministry
- Stewardship

The Friendship Factor

- The main reason people decide to come back
- It is inexpensive
- Two way satisfaction
- Best method for integration

Assimilation Opportunities

- New Member Welcome Packet
- Mentor Coach
- Sabbath School class or any small group
- Potlucks, picnics
- Friendships
- Social events
- Part of the worship service or ministry

Effective Churches

- Leadership that encourages church members to use their gifts
- Members committed to a clear vision
- Members feeling that the church has helped them grow in their faith

Effective Churches

- A strong and growing sense of belonging among church members
- A culture of inviting people to church
- A perception that the church is moving in new directions
- Members informally helping one another

Reconnecting and Engaging with non-Attending Members

- Make three phone calls to people of your choice
- Just listen and offer to pray for them
- Don't pressure them to come back
- Suggest them to call other three people and do the same thing

APPENDIX C

THE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN SERMONS

Designed to Connect

Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church

- Organized on May, 29, 1876
- The founding pastor, Ole Andres Olsen, later become the president of the Wisconsin Conference and of the General Conference
- The largest church in Wisconsin with 584 members
- Adventist Junior Academy: 34
- Pathfinder Club: 28 pathfinders
- Youth/Associate Pastor
- Community Service
- Variety of ministries and programs

Is Our Church An Authentic Spiritual Community?

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

Acts 2:42–47

1. Full Devotion to Christ and His Cause

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (v. 42)

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

2. Anticipation of God's Supernatural Work

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. (v. 43)

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

3. A Strong Commitment to One Another

All the believers were together and had everything in common. (v. 44)

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

4. Generosity in Meeting Needs

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (v. 45)

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

5. Laughter and Fellowship

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (v. 46)

Surveys Participant Feedback

"This church has a lot of large networks of extended families. It is very difficult for a new member unrelated to these families to break into those networks and those networks are very engaged with their family members leaving little time or energy for including or reaching out to, integrating people outside their network or comfort zone."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"Many members have extended family in this church and that who they mostly sit and socialite with. Very, very few members even, greet visitors, and new attendees, much less show any interest in them or in other members besides their family or long-time friends."

6 Traits of Authentic Christian Community
by Mike Ayers

6. A Sense of Shared Destiny from God

. . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (v. 47)

Surveys Participant Feedback

"I have returned to church after 20 years and very few people (only the few that I previously knew) have welcomed me back. So many keep to themselves. So many won't even give you the time of day. I don't come to church for the people, I come to hear God's word and spend time in his house. (In the 20 years that I was not attending church, not 1 person contacted me to find out why I wasn't coming to church."

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"Very friendly church"

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"It seems as though family groups tend to keep to themselves. The pandemic has also not helped. There have been times in the past I could have rated the overall friendliness and hospitality higher. I also realize that I would likely feel more connected if I came to church more often. Unfortunately the times I come and feel totally alone do not make me want to come more often."

Surveys Participant Feedback

"There is a palpable superficiality to the friendships and social interactions. I think people like the idea of being friendly but don't want to get uncomfortable and reach out or open their homes to new people. I've been here 10 years and have had lots of church members over. I can count 2 or 3 that have opened their homes to me."

The Source of Unity
Letty M. Russell

- The church is the community of Christ where everyone is welcome.
- The source of unity is the gift of Christ's presence in our midst, calling us to be open to others.
- To test of that unity is how well our churches break down barriers and welcome those who have been at the margin of church and society.

Matt Chandler

"It is apparent that community is not some peripheral Christian teaching but is central to the outworking of God's purpose in the world. God is glorified when He is properly reflected; by dwelling in unity, we rightly image our communal Maker."

God is One in Community

Three co-eternal persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – uniquely and intrinsically interconnected, manifesting identical divine attributes with distinct but complementary functions and responsibilities.

God is One in Community

- Creation Story. Gen 1-3
- "Our Likeness" Gen 1.26
- "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language" (Gen 11:7)
- The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were present at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16-17)

Designed to Connect

"The concept of community was not only envisioned to reflect the harmonious interconnectedness within the Godhead but to be shared with humanity that was created in God's image with a drive to relate."
DMin Project

Together

God not only created humankind to be in a relationship with him but with one another.

- "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18)
- "Two are better than one" (Eccl 4:9)

Together

"Our biology works best when we form and sustain enduring, nurturing relationship with other people" Putman (2016)

Together

The aspirations and goals of life are intended to be fulfilled in a community, where every individual focuses on the growth and development of others.

The Fall: Destroyed Community

- Conflict with God
- Conflict with others
- Conflict with self
- Conflict with nature

Israel: The Community of Faith

God structured Israel's entire society to:
- Worship as a community of believers (Exod 29:44-46),
- Care for the underprivileged groups (Exod 23:11; Lev 25:47-48),
- Maintain the corporate moral health (Deut 28)
- Extend God's kingdom outside their designated territory (Gen 12:1-3).

Jesus – Restoration of the Divine Image of Community

"Seldom did Jesus spend time with just one disciple. He spent significant time with the multitudes, with the twelve, or with three, or even by Himself to pray and be with the Father.

Even in Jesus' most significant moments, such as the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus brought with Him not one, but several disciples." Julie A. Gorman

Priestly Prayer... (John 17)

... highlights Jesus 'desire for his disciples to live and minister in profound unity, replicating his harmonious relationship with God. They have been called exclusively to form "a model for the church... a model they would operate under in the Book of Acts"

Church as the New Community of God

The New Testament depicts the concept of church as a direct manifestation of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's commitment to creating a community of believers "where hearts are open to the Lord, to one another and to a world in need" (Breen 2011, 32).

James W. Thompson

"Life in Christ is no private matter. Paul does not speak of a "personal relationship to Jesus Christ" but speaks of the community in Christ. Individuals do not come together in a social contract or to have their needs met.

To be "in Christ" is to be in the company of others who come together not only for worship but also to share a common life in congregations that live and proclaim the story of Christ.

The church is the community of those who have been baptized into one body and "live no longer for themselves" (2 Cor. 5:15).

The Most Significant Features of Community

- Worship
- Discipleship
- Fellowship
- Compassion service
- Church growth.

Conflict and Courage p. 357

"Christians are all members of one family, all children of the same heavenly Father, with the same blessed hope of immortality. Very close and tender should be the tie that binds them together.... "Let us not love in word," the apostle writes, "but in deed and in truth.""

Acts of the Apostle, 109

"With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Savior's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour..."

David Putman

"We were created with the need for belonging, and if the church needs to be relevant, the first need we should meet is this need for community. It is impossible for us to be the church God had in mind if we do not offer authentic, loving, warm environments where people can belong in healthy community."

Larry Crabb

"I want spiritual community in all its dimensions: prayer, meditation, telling stories, playing, practical helping, supporting in crisis, eating, weeping, laughing, doing ordinary things. What makes it spiritual is the Spirit. No matter what we're doing—sharing ordinary moments or joining together in sublime worship—Jesus Christ is our connection."

Noteworthy Obstacles

- a "disconnected soul" (Crabb, 1997)
- busyness (Putman D., 2008),
- a complex church with many programs and activities (Rainer T., and Rainer S. III, 2008),
- saturated" relationships (Stetzer and Dodson, 2007),
- "unrecognized exclusion barriers" (King , 2011).

Anonymous Pastor

"People come into church primarily on the doctrine level, but leave primarily on the social level"

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1 Corinthians 12: 25

So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Who Creates Community?

- God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit
- The Gospel
- Church leaders
- Every believer

How to Build Community in Our Church?

- Friendlier atmosphere
- Small groups
- Social events
- Invitation to lunch
- Acts of love and service
- Emotional and spiritual support
- Involvement in ministry

October
FRIENDSHIP AWARENESS
What can I do?

SEND A CARD

CALL A FRIEND YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IN AWHILE

MAKE FOOD, EAT TOGETHER OR LEAVE AT THE DOOR

SHARE FAVORITE MEMORIES

MEET AT A PARK OR TAKE A WALK TOGETHER

TAKE TIME TO TALK TO SOMEONE AT CHURCH

TELL SOMEONE WHAT YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT THEM

A Spiritual Greenhouse for Transformation and Growth

I Only Need Jesus, Not the Church

- Unnecessary
- Irrelevant
- Hypocritical
- Abusive
- Political
- Babylon

Is Church Membership Required?

- "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" Acts 16:5.
- "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings" Rom 16:16.
- "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" 1 Cor 4:17.
- "If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God" 1 Cor 11:16.

Baptism and Church Membership

"So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers" Acts 2:41.

Fundamental Relationship Between Jesus and His Church

- All believers are baptized in Christ
- Belong to Christ
- They are added to the church
- Manifest "the fulness of him"
- Gather in his name
- Are subject to him
- Displaying God's glory on earth.

The Great Commission

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" Matt 28:18-20.

Church as a Greenhouse
by Lane Corley

1. "Disciples must be nurtured.
2. A Disciple's needs change over time.
3. Disciples will eventually need to be sent out from the greenhouse to multiply themselves.
4. Not all disciples will respond to the conditions you create.
5. The church is the perfect tool to create the conditions for multiplication & growth of Disciples."

Crucial Components of the Communal Response to God's Presence

- prayer
- blessings
- reading the Bible
- sermons
- Lord's Supper
- giving
- confession of sins
- baptism

Togetherness in Christ:

- the body of Christ
- a spiritual building
- the bride of Christ
- the family of God
- the temple of God
- God's field
- the kingdom of God

"One Another"

- Used 100 times in the NT
- 47 of those verses are for the church
- Apostle Paul used 60% of "one another" commands

"One Another" - Unity

- "Be at peace with one another" Rom 12:18.
- "Don't grumble among one another" John 9:50.
- "Be of the same mind with one another" Rom 12:16.
- "Accept one another" Rom 15:17.
- "Don't bite, devour, and consume one another" Gal 5:15.
- "Don't challenge or envy one another" Gal 5:26.
- "Gently, patiently, tolerate one another" Eph 4:2.
- "Don't complain against one another" Jam 4: 11.

"One Another" - Love

- "Love one another" John 13:34.
- "Through love, serve one another" Gal 5:13.
- "Tolerate one another in love" Eph 4:2.
- "Greet one another with a kiss of love" 1 Pet 5:14.
- "Be devoted to one another in love" Rom 12:10.

"One Another" - Humility

- "Wash one another's feet" John 13:14.
- "Give preference to one another in honor" Rom 12:10.
- "Serve one another" Gal 5:13.
- "Be subject to one another" Eph 5: 21.
- "Regard one another as more important than yourselves" Phi 2:3.
- "Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another" 1 Pet 5:5.

Colossians 1:28-29

"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

Ephesians 2:19-22

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

"One Another"

As a result of each individual having a relationship with God, Macchia (2004) concludes: "'one another' is not optional for the Christian life" (96) and commitment to loving and having deeper relationships were a priority for the followers of Christ.

Communal Spiritual Disciplines

- "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" Act 2:42.
- "Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" 1 Tim 4:13.

A Caring and Loving Community

- "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" Prov 17:26.
- "Exhort one another daily [...], lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" Heb 3:13.

Spiritual Gifts

- "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" Eph 4:12-13.
- "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" 1 Pet 4:10.

The Importance of the Community for Personal Spiritual Growth

- Putman D. (2008) states doubtlessly that "believing requires relationships" (66).
- Spiritual maturity definitely needs a community of believers as a "spiritual greenhouse" (Stetzer and Dodson, 2842), that cultivates an intentional culture of spiritual growth and discipleship (Gorman, 2002).
- Putman J. (2016) advocates that the paradigm "Just me and Jesus" is not sufficient" (21).

The Importance of the Community for Personal Spiritual Growth

- "high friendship density and strong ties" (Spitzer 2010, 80), and "discipling relationships" (Dever and Dunlop 2015, 120) are essential to cultivate personal spiritual growth practices.
- "Togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ" (Crabb 1999, 541-545).

A Correlation Between Spiritual Growth and Belonging to the Body of Christ

- 1 Cor 12:13
- Eph 2:14-18

The Dream Church by Joseph Kidder
The Big Four Secrets to a Thriving Church Family. P 11-12

"Imagine if everyone in [our] church were able to say:
- Here I feel safe
- I am respected
- I am growing in Jesus
- I am involved in ministry
- God is using me to touch the lives of others
- I love my Sabbath School
- We have inspiring worship

The Dream Church by Joseph Kidder
The Big Four Secrets to a Thriving Church Family. P 11-12

- I am so proud of our church – I love inviting people to it
- I look forward to going to church. I could stay there all day
- I could never get tired of my pastor's sermons- they are filled with hope
- What happens at our church is a matter of eternal life and death. It's that important."

Welcoming Them into God's Kingdom

The Theology of Welcome

From Genesis to Revelation, the ministry of welcome, as an attitude of openness and inclusiveness, is recognizable in every generation. and according to Merida (2015), is a "biblical pattern, practiced among all types of God's people" (112).

God the Host

- God welcomed Adam and Eve into existence
- Called Abraham into His covenant
- Took the Israelites out of slavery and invited them to be His guests in the Sanctuary and in the temple
- Provided for them in the wilderness
- Offered them the promise land
- Fulfilled their needs over the years

God the Host

"He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt 5:45).

God the Host and Guest

- Because they were given free will, He waits to be invited into a relationship with His creatures.
- Every time God is accepted as a guest, He provides the material and spiritual provisions of a host.

Jesus as a Host and Guest

Harmoniously combined both host and guest in his life, teachings, and ministry, modeling the true dynamics of those relationships for mutual benefits.

Jesus as a Host and Guest

"Jesus experienced the vulnerability of the homeless infant, the child refugee, the adult with no place to lay his head, the despised convict" (Pohl 1999, 17)

Jesus as a Host and Guest

"to proclaim the acceptable [welcome] year of the Lord." (Luke 4:19

Jesus as a Host and Guest

"...but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing" Luke 9:11.

Jesus as a Host and Guest

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them"

Luke 15:1-2

Jesus as a Host and Guest

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" Rev 3:20.

Church as Guest and Host

Human hospitality, as evidenced in the Old Testament, was an essential moral value that was intended to emulate God's inclusive hospitality.

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Church as Guest and Host

"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" Lev 19:18.

Church as Guest and Host

"You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" Lev 19:34.

Church as Guest and Host

Notably, the early church, as the household of God (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15) was equipped and organized to offer a variety of hospitable services and specialized ministry in an environment of undiscriminating love (Gal 3:28; 1Cor 13:1-13).

Church as Guest and Host

Believers were advised to "contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality" (Rom 12:13), "ungrudgingly" (1 Peter 4:9), "just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

Church as Guest and Host

Additionally, the New Testament presents hospitality:
- as a major qualification for church leadership roles (Acts 18:28; 1 Cor 16:3; Phil 2:29-30; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8)
- the ministry of women (1 Tim 5:9-10)
- the early believers were expected to provide for the needs of the Gospel workers who travel (Acts 16:15.34; 18:1-11; 21:8.16; 28:7; Rom 16:23).

Church as Guest and Host

While still being "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11), after being adopted as spiritual children in God's family (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-5), the early believers were "transformed into agents of God's hospitality who share this hospitality with others who are searching for life" (Jipp 2017, 93).

Seeing Jesus in Every Guest

"Seeing Jesus in every guest" (Pohl 2009, 68)
A biblical paradigm for a hospitality ministry.

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" Matt 10:40.

1 Peter 4:8-9

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."

Romans 15:7

"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Questions Guests Ask
Gary L. McIntosh

- "Is there room for me?
- Is there room for me personally?
- Is there room for me relationally?
- Is it worth it?"

The Church Responsibility

- All of us are part of the welcoming team
- The worship service has to be vibrant and authentic
- Introduce the guests to the new culture
- Guests bring their unique gifts from God to change the church culture
- Let's extend God's welcome to all

Be A Great Host
Garry L. McIntosh

- "Invite your guests with a personal invitation
- Arrive early to make sure everything is ready for the guests' arrival
- Greet the guest warmly at the entrance and escort them to their seats

Be A Great Host
Garry L. McIntosh

- Assist guests in understanding what is taking place
- Anticipate and answer as many questions as possible in advance, so guests do not have to ask
- Do something extra to make your guests' visit special
- Walk guests to the door and invite them back"

POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Friendship Awareness Campaign Survey

Please offer valuable feedback by circling the most appropriate answer

1. God created us to be in a close relationship with one another

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

2. Welcoming, integrating, and discipling a newcomer is the ultimate goal of a spiritual community and church hospitality

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

3. Besides my personal relationship with God, being part of a spiritual community is essential for my spiritual growth.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

4. Sharing with other people in our church about my spiritual journey inspires them in their walk with God.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

5. The church must be more intentionally in creating a culture of welcome, love, and reciprocal support.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

6. God-inspired hospitality is vital for numerical and spiritual church growth.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

7. I am committed to deepen my relationships with guests and existing church members.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

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Thank you for your vital feedback. Please return your completed survey to the pastor or the church secretary.

APPENDIX E

CORRESPONDENCE

Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church

1414 Shawano Avenue
Green Bay, WI 54303
(920) 494-5245

Feb 17, 2020

PROJECT APROVAL AND CONSENT

Institutional Review Board
Andrews University
4150 Administrative Drive, Room 322
Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355

To Whom It May Concern:

On Feb 17, 2020 the Church Board gives the needed permission to Pastor Titus
Naftanaila to assess, develop, and implement his project entitled: DEVELOPING AND
IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY- BASED HOSPITALITY AWARENESS AND
TRAINING PROGRAM AT GREEN BAY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

A church welcome audit, an action group, and training through seminars and sermons
will be part of the project toward his degree of Doctor of Ministry at Andrews University.

Sincerely,

Head Elder

Church Clerk

March 17, 2020

Titus Naftanaila
Tel. 715-718-0556
Email: titusnft@gmail.com

> **RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**
> **IRB Protocol #:** 20-050 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Doctor of Ministry
> **Review Category:** Exempt **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** David Penno
> **Title:** Developing and implementing a community-based hospitality awareness and training program at Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Your IRB application for approval of research involving human subjects entitled:
"*Developing and implementing a community-based hospitality awareness and training program at Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church*" IRB protocol # 20-050 has been evaluated and determined Exempt from IRB review under regulation CFR 46.104 (3)(i) (A): Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written responses or audiovisual recording and in which subject identification is handled confidentially and appropriately. You may now proceed with your research.

Please note that any future changes made to the study design and/or informed consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Incase you need to make changes please use the attached report form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Katherine, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Mordekai Ongo, PhD.
Research Integrity and Compliance Officer

Institutional Review Board – 8488 E Campus Circle Dr Room 234 - Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355
Tel: (269) 471-6361 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu

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Action Group Invitation

Dear Church Leaders,

On Monday, August 24, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. (Board Room), you are invited to attend the first meeting of the Action Group. The training event with Q&A session at the end will last 1 hour-and-a-half. This is part of my Doctoral Project entitled: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY- BASED HOSPITALITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM AT GREEN BAY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

Participation is voluntary. There is a minimum risk no greater than any normal activity of life. You are free to stop participating at any time. No audio or video recordings will be produced.

Your participation implies your voluntary consent and will be an effective contribution to creating a climate of the community, belonging, and inclusiveness for guests and regular members in our church.

Sincerely,

Pastor Titus Naftanaila

Pre-implementation Project Survey

Pastor Titus Naftanaila is conducting a Church Welcome Audit, part of his Doctoral Project entitled: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY- BASED HOSPITALITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM AT GREEN BAY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

All members and guests, age 18 and older, are invited to complete a 10-minute survey that will help create a culture of welcoming and togetherness in our church. Your anonymous feedback will be greatly appreciated. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Please return your completed survey to the pastor or the church secretary at the end of the service.

Thank you.

September, 2020

Dear Green Bay SDA Greeters,

Thank you for being part of this ministry. Our goal is to provide a warm and loving welcome and a sense of belonging to every person that comes through the doors of our church. As we begin this 2 year term, (a delayed start due to covid), here is information to help you in providing that welcome.

Pray to be used by God. Smile. Make eye contact. Represent God and His church by your actions, dress, and service to others. First impressions make a lasting impact. Follow in the steps of Christ by serving others.

Arrive at 9 am. Stay at your post until the church announcements are finished. If you wish to attend part of your Sabbath School class please make certain that there is still one greeter at each door.

Know where the children's and youth Sabbath School classrooms are for each age group. This information is posted on the bulletin board. Know the location of the 4 adult Sabbath School classes. Please walk guests, especially children, to the correct room. Direct guests to restrooms, the infant/parent room and sanctuary entrances as needed.

Take the initiative and greet. Don't wait to be approached. If you don't know someone simply say, *"I'm (insert your name), I don't think we've met"*. This may be a person that has been attending for many years and may be offended by being mistaken as a visitor. Regrettably, I learned this the hard way…

Limit distractions. This can be a difficult part of the job. It is for me. It's easy to get involved in catching up with friends while guests pass by unnoticed.

Offer guests a bulletin. As a safety precaution we are now pointing out the location of the bulletins rather than handing them out. Also, face masks and hand sanitizer are available at both entrances.

If you are unable to greet on your scheduled Sabbath please trade with another greeter or ask someone on the back up list to cover for you. Please call or text me if you can't find anyone.

Pastor Titus will be having an informational meeting to discuss the importance of the greeter ministry. You will be notified when the date is set. Please plan to attend.

As you can see, there are some spots yet to be filled and I am working on that. Ideally, we would like to have 3 greeters scheduled each week. I don't want to wait any longer to get this information to you and I will update you with any changes.

1st Sabbath:

2nd Sabbath:

3rd Sabbath:

4th Sabbath:

5th Sabbath:

Back up coverage:

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEST

I have a friend who has two simple goals for each person who comes through the door of his church each week: by the time they leave the building they need to experience the God who loves them unconditionally, along with at least one other member who also accepts them without conditions. Loving God and loving others are the two key principles of his congregation. His church flourishes and grows because people feel loved and welcome.

The warm welcome of God's love is irresistible. Let it flow through you into the hearts of everyone you meet, at church and in your everyday life. Make it possible for new faces to want to come back and experience that amazing love all over again, week after week. ◎

"God works through us, sending us out to share His love, a divine appointment. Our words and actions are powerful, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant." *Joseph Kidder*

""Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." *Hebrews 13:2, NIV*

Thank you,

APPENDIX F

MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS

The Messenger

Newsletter of the Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist Church

NOVEMBER 2020

TO A FRIENDLIER CHURCH

More and more churches are intentional with preparing an appropriate welcome which integrates and disciples newcomers. They spend considerable time in raising awareness, training, and putting in place strategies to make everyone welcome and accepted in the community of believers.

No church is automatically friendly. We normally are shy to meet new people and we are friendlier with people whom we know already.

One person who responded to a recent survey that assessed the degree of the friendliness in our church mentioned the following:

> "The Green Bay Church has a lot of large networks of extended families. It is very difficult for a new member unrelated to these families to break into those networks as those networks are very engaged with their family members leaving little time or energy for including or reaching out to and integrating people outside their network or comfort zone."

Another one had a similar response:

> "I have returned to church after 20 years and very few people (only the few that I previously knew) have welcomed me back.

So many keep to themselves. So many won't even give you the time of day. I don't come to church for the people; I come to hear God's Word and spend time in His house. In the 20 years that I was not attending church, not one person contacted me to find out why I wasn't coming to church."

This is not entirely accurate concerning everyone who attends our church. A number of us try to do our best to meet new people and spend quality time welcoming them to our spiritual fellowship. Regardless, during the COVID-19 crisis, it is even more difficult to express our friendliness in the context of physical distancing.

But we absolutely can do better. Here there are several practical principles for a friendlier church.

Take your time before and after the service to meet and greet someone you have never met before. Introduce yourself to them and discover something about them. Don't apologize you did not do it before. Just mention your interest to know them better at this time. We all have someone we never talked to, even if we noticed them frequently.

Introduce someone you know to others. You are the best person to introduce them to the pastor, the elders, or other church members. A guest or a newcomer needs several new friends in order to consider our church a home church.

Invite them to attend or be part of a small group such as Sabbath School, a study group, and/or a social event. Small groups should never replace the church, but they can provide an excellent opportunity for deeper socializing, vulnerability, and spiritual development.

Follow up with them. Make a phone call, send a text, reach out to them on social media, send a card. Reach out to them and make them feel both desired and valuable.

Everyone who enters our church's door is a special messenger of God to us. We need to see Jesus in every guest and welcome him/her accordingly. Our church is destined to be a place of acceptance and inclusiveness where everyone is a host, reaching those God is drawing.

Pastor Titus

Pastor Titus Naftanaila

Local Church Budget Update*

September tithe received	$	28,234.69
Tithe received YTD	$	116,027.84
Monthly Budget Need	$	11,165.00
Received in September	$	6,040.50
Under	**$**	**5,124.50**
Yearly Budget Need	$	133,980.00
Needed YTD through September	$	33,495.00
Received YTD through September	$	29,205.40
Under	**$**	**4,289.60**

*YTD = Year to Date*

GB SDA Church Major Projects

| Donations received in September | $ | 1,820.00 |

YES Fund 2020-2021 Commitment $ 1,000.00
Thank you, church family! Goal has been met.

ADVENTIST GIVING

*Please continue to faithfully return your tithe and offerings. You can send a check in the mail OR online giving is available. CTRL+Click on the Adventist Giving icon above OR go to the GB SDA website (www.greenbaysda.org).

*"How different our standard is from Christ's.
We ask how much a man gives.
Christ asks how much he keeps."*
— Andrew Murray
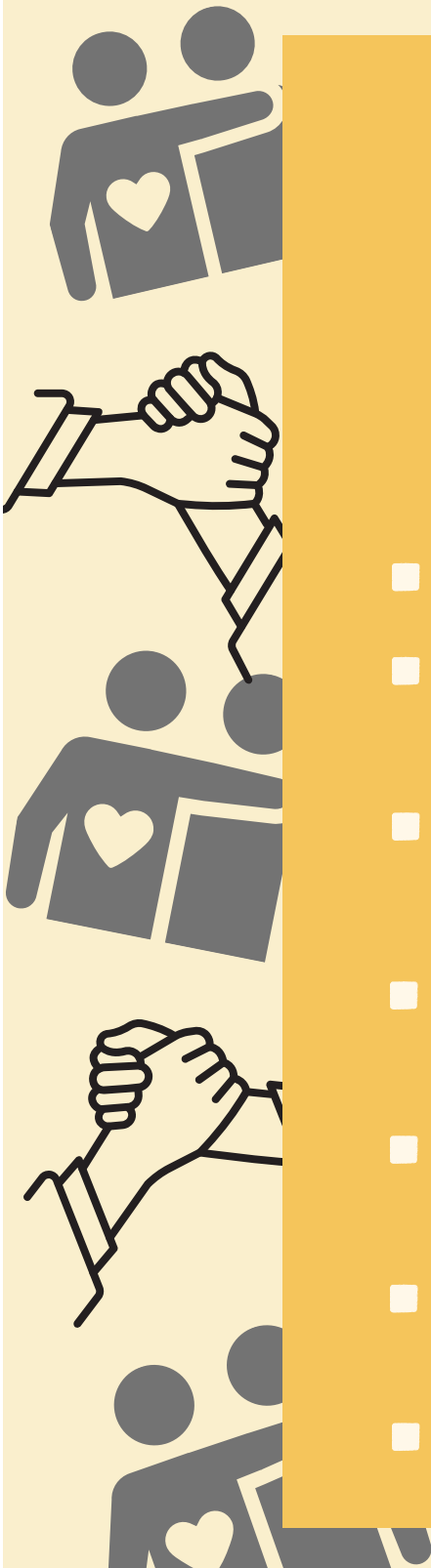
October

FRIENDSHIP AWARENESS

What can I do?

- ☐ SEND A CARD.

- ☐ CALL A FRIEND YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IN AWHILE.

- ☐ MAKE FOOD. EAT TOGETHER OR LEAVE AT THE DOOR.

- ☐ TAKE TIME TO TALK TO SOMEONE AT CHURCH.

- ☐ MEET AT A PARK OR TAKE A WALK TOGETHER.

- ☐ TELL SOMEONE WHAT YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT THEM.

- ☐ SHARE FAVORITE MEMORIES.

Do you care?

Do you care... for the mother of three who comes to church alone, and struggles to keep her kids under control in the pew? As she leaves church more tired than blessed she wonders "Is it worth it anymore?"

Do you care... for the exhausted businessman who is out of town most of the week, and being on the platform on Sabbath is just another appointment on his already crammed schedule? He just wants to sit with his family and be spiritually fed.

Do you care... for the teen who used to come to church only to be chided unkindly about her clothes, hair, and ornaments? She wonders why her friends at the club will accept her, but not her church?

Do you care... for elderly woman who sits by herself at the fellowship dinner, where everyone fellowships with everyone else but her? Most people don't know that this is the only cooked meal she gets each week.

Do you care... for the 30 year old who struggles to keep a job, and has failed at keeping a marriage? He wonders why, when his wife was unfaithful, that he is the one ostracized by his church family.

Do you care... for the graduate student who struggles for answers to his faith? He seldom comes to Sabbath School anymore because all people do there is argue.

Do you care...for the newlyweds with a 3 month old baby? The hard stares from across the isle reminds them all too vividly that no one has forgotten their "mistake" before marriage.

These, and others, are on their way out of your church fellowship...

If you care

If you care... you will sit with the mother in church, and help her get her 3 kids through line at the fellowship dinner.

If you care... you will remember the sigh as the businessman agreed last time to call for the offering, and not get to sit with his family. You will give some else the opportunity to call for the offering.

If you care... you will call the teen with the purple hair by name when you see her at the store, ask her how she is doing, and then carefully listen with a smile on your face, and in your heart.

If you care... you will invite elderly Eva to sit with you at the fellowship dinner, and listen as she re-tells the same story for the third time. You will invite her to go grocery shopping with you, and help her find nutritions bargains.

If you care... you will invite the young man with a hurting heart to your Bible study group, and to join you on your daily bike rides.

If you care... you will pick up on the deep faith/doubt questions of the scholar and take an hour or so at a restaurant listening to him grapple with life's most difficult questions, and providing Biblical-based answers to those questions.

If you care... you will make sure that the church throws the newlyweds a beautiful baby shower, and that if they need a break, you would be happy to care for their child while they go out for an evening.

If you care... you will look around your church this Sabbath, and see hurting hearts that need your healing touch, and empty pews of those who have wandered away.

And because you care... you will do something about it.

NEW CONVERTS

Anticipations and Hesitations

BY PHILIP ATTEBERY

1. New converts looked forward to becoming part of a family-like fellowship.

2. New converts looked forward to receiving Bible teaching as part of their assimilation and retention experiences.

3. New converts looked forward to sharing their testimonies in hopes of helping others.

4. New converts hesitated to receive baptism and church membership due to particular fears.

5. New converts decided to stay in a church long-term when shown kindness and acceptance.

6. New converts considered positive speech and treatment of others as a sign of Christian maturity and spiritual growth.

7. New converts looked forward to spiritual growth which results in in-creased Bible knowledge and service opportunities.

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VITA

Name: Titus Naftanaila

Background: I was born on July 15, 1967, in Romania. I was baptized and became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1983.

Education:

2018-2022   DMin in Discipleship from Andrews University Seventh-day Adventists Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, MI

2003-2007   MA in PMin from Andrews University Seventh-day Adventists Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, MI

1991-1995   BA in Theology from Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Romania

Ordained:

2001   Ordained by Muntenia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Romania

Experience:

2021 -   President, Wisconsin Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Fall River, WI

2018-2020   Personal Ministries Coordinator, Wisconsin Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Fall River, WI

2014-2018   Religious Liberty/Stewardship Coordinator, Wisconsin Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Fall River, WI

2019 -2020   Senior Pastor, Green Bay Seventh-day Adventist District, Green Bay, WI

2011-2019   Senior Pastor, Madison East Seventh-day Adventist District, Madison WI

2007-2011   Pastor, Superior Seventh-day Adventist District, Superior, WI

2001-2007   Pastor, Addison Romanian Seventh-day Adventist Church, Addison, IL

1998-2001   Pastor, Dynamis Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bucharest, Romania

1998-2001   Religious Liberty Director, Muntenia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Bucharest, Romania

1995-1998   Pastor, Targoviste Seventh-day Adventist District, Targoviste, Romania