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### BOOKSHELF

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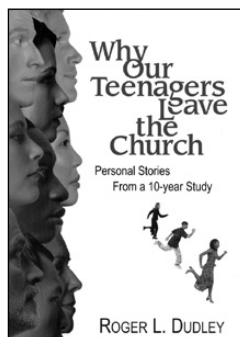
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# BOOKSHELF



***Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church.***  
By Roger L. Dudley, director of the Institute of Church Ministry, emeritus professor of church ministry. Review and Herald, 2000, 221 pages.

*Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* is a result of a ten-year study that started with 1,523 teenagers and ended with 783, tracing their lives as they grew up and made the transition from the teenage to the adult world.

The Seventh-day Adventist church knew there was a crisis in regard to the loss of its young people; however, church leaders did not know the extent of the crisis. Thus, the North American Division asked the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews to conduct a study exploring why some young people leave the church and why others stay. The significance of the study is seen in the following statement: "If the church loses its teenagers and young adults, the church will die out."

Unlike other books of this kind, this one is unique in the sense that Dudley interspersed statistics with stories which make the study more personal. The book presents vital statistics on the young-adult picture of the church, free-response answers and a number of case studies.

*Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* helps answer a very important question: "How many teenagers are we really losing and why?" As important as the statistics and reasons are, Dudley goes even further and gives suggestions on how

homes, schools, and congregations can help win back more of those who have drifted away.

This book draws on the vast knowledge, research, experience and love which Dudley has for the teenage world. It is his conviction that if con-

gregations, schools, parents, and church members would take an interest in kids, many would not leave our church. His endurance with this longitudinal project and his responses to its subjects well define his aim, which is to save the new generation.

Individuals like Kathleen, Ariel, Benson, Celeste, Patti and Sally tell their stories throughout the book. At one point Kathleen states: "Although I feel a closeness to my Jesus, sometimes I feel isolated from church. I usually always take my daughter to Sabbath School, hardly ever to church."

When asked what she would like to change about her religion, Ariel replied: "Our incredible ability to turn off youth to religion." She felt that we tell young people to get close to God, but we don't tell them how. Furthermore, she declared: "As we continue our pew-warming careers, will we—like the Pharisees—miss, or even be the cause of, the signs of Jesus' time?" Benson, like Kathleen, questions: "Why can't my church forgive me? My youth minister will not speak to me!" Celeste pointed out: "We are fast leaving the church, not because of doctrinal disagreement, but because of a lack of love, acceptance, and openness to our new and creative ideas."

In regards to the story of

Patti, Dudley asks: "Where is our passion for lost people? Why do we insist on an exclusive club for the saints?" Furthermore, Sally makes a striking statement: "My church refuses to invest in a youth pastor to rebuild our non-existing youth program. They do invest most of their time and effort in outreach to the community by seminars and door-to-door evangelism—at the same time looking away, as the youth slip out the back door of their own church." Even though we cannot predict the future, points out Dudley, the frightening possibility that the present picture represents tomorrow's reality should involve each reader in some serious consideration.

Nevertheless, the author indicates that there is good news. In spite of the teenagers who leave the church, some do come back. What is even more intriguing is his treatment of the question of why Adventist teenagers stay in the church.

He comments that many of our young adults have had pleasant church experiences and hold positive attitudes toward their congregations. Thus, if we

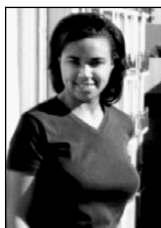
can help all our youth to experience what those who have remained faithful have experienced, many more of them will be part of the church as adults.

In *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, the reader can find out what the youth of our church are trying to tell us, are not telling us, and why.

Youth pastors, pastors, church officers, teachers, parents, denominational leaders—every individual that is part of a congregation—will find it a helpful resource. It is not an academic exercise, but something that can be useful to a wide range of individuals. As the author points out, the church should have no higher priority than stemming the loss of young adults and winning back those who have left its ranks.

Reviewed by HELENA R. GREGOR (PhD '96), adjunct professor, SDA Theological Seminary.

## ANDREWS IS READING



***Choosing God's Best***  
by Don Rannikar

**Wanda Vaz**  
Assistant Women's Dean

This book puts forth the philosophy that the choice of dating styles sets a firm or wavering foundation for the future marriage relationship. Rannikar focuses on the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of relationships and shares his perspective on courtship versus the present dating system. He offers an alternative which includes the establishment of a firm spiritual foundation before embarking on the search for a life partner and the importance of Christians helping each other be accountable toward successful partnering.