ABSTRACT

A STRATEGIC PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN HARARE CITY CENTRE DISTRICT

by

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ABSTRACT OF POST GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

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Title: A STRATEGIC PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING MEMBERSHIP RETENTION IN
        HARARE CITY CENTRE DISTRICT

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For Seventh-day Adventists, membership retention is imperative towards their mission fulfilment. The challenge of membership loss affects the church's mission activities. Hence, God is concerned about the loss of members as He expressed through the three parables: the lost sheep; the lost coin; and the prodigal son (Luke 15). The task of finding lost members, feeding and folding them, is a dual responsibility of both the Church leaders and other established Christian believers.

Findings from the reviewed literature and conducted surveys, determined the development of a Team Ministry program as a strategy to improve membership retention. The program commenced with a series of trainings. Some of the topics discussed during trainings include: "Mission and Church Membership Trends, Building Team Ministry for Reclaiming the Lost, Building Team Ministry for Spiritual Growth, and Holistic Small Groups."

Three types of evaluation were used to measure the effect of the program: activity, impact and summative. Team ministries were established at each local church. Participants appreciated the proposed action plans. As a result, some backslidden members were reclaimed. There is significant improvement on the part of church members' involvement in church activities. Such benefit might be credited to the function of Team Ministry. The researcher recommends Team Ministry as a strategic program to improve membership retention.

Adventist University of Africa

A STRATEGIC PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING

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CITY CENTRE DISTRICT

A Project

Presented in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

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July 2013

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DEDICATION

To all caring under-shepherds concerned about the welfare of their flock in preparation to render a faithful account to the chief Shepherd, when He shall appear at His second coming.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC   African Initiated Churches

ANN   Adventist News Network

BEC   Bible Expository Commentary

CZC   Central Zimbabwe Conference

EZC   East Zimbabwe Conference

WZC   West Zimbabwe Conference

HCC   Harare City Centre

ZUC   Zimbabwe Union Conference

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The loss of church members in Harare City Centre district (HCC) of the

Seventh-day Adventists, presents a major problem that affects the church's progress

towards mission fulfillment. Based on statistical information, the district realized 294

members through baptism from the year 2007 to 2011. During the same period, 670

members were lost..[1] Such loss is equivalent to 277.9% of the members that had been

realized during the same period under study.

In addition, the East Zimbabwe Conference (EZC) within which HCC exists,

recorded baptismal gains of 83 215 members and lost 20 697 members between the

year 2007 and 2011.[2] That is approximately 24, 9% loss from membership gains, yet

the same conference seeks "to grow spiritually, numerically, and financially until

Jesus comes"[3] as it thrives in "proclaiming the gospel of Christ within its constituency

and even beyond its borders."[4] The churches within HCC district, share the same

vision and mission with its parent organization, the EZC.

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[1]Harare City Centre District, *Quarterly Statistical* Reports. (2007 -2011).

[2]''Annual Statistical Report,'' East Zimbabwe Conference Yearly Statistics, 2007 –2011, http://www.adventiststatistics.org/stats-y-stats.asp?FieldID=12003&view=y. pdf   (23 January 2013).

[3]''Vision'' *East Zimbabwe Conference* (2011-2015).

[4]''Mission'' *East Zimbabwe Conference* (2011-2015).

On a broader scale, the Zimbabwe Union Conference (ZUC), which parents the three conferences (East, Central and West), recorded a total loss of 54 431 members from the 214 148 gains that had been realized during the same period.[1] This figure is equivalent to 25, 4% loss from the membership gains. Such a scenario suggests a trend that might be prevalent in most local Seventh-day Adventist churches. A solution is needed in response to this problem.

The EZC sets baptismal goals for each district every year in compliance with the commission of Christ as recorded in Matt. 28:18-20, ". . . Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you, and surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." While these goals are motivational toward evangelism and realization of more decisions for Christ, James A. Cress argues, "It is disciple-making rather than decision-counting that must serve as the ultimate measure of an evangelist's accomplishment."[2]

The following report confirms that, loss of members affects church growth on a global scale; "The church baptized about 5.3 million people worldwide from 2005 – 2009. Membership losses during that period equaled 2.03 million. Current indications are that, annual membership losses for reasons other than death, approximates 40% of membership gains."[3] For that reason, Larry Evans, the undersecretary of the world church laments: "In the current administrative model, pastors and administrators only

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[1]"Annual Statistical Report" Zimbabwe Union Conference Yearly Statistics, 2007 – 2011, http://www.adventiststatistics.org/stats-y-stats.asp?FieldID=12003&view=y.pdf (23 January 2013).

[2]James A. Cress, *You Can Keep Them If You Care: Helping New Members Stay On Board* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association Resource Centre, 2000), 22.

[3]"Annual Statistical Report" General Conference Session, 2010, docs.adventistarchives.org//docs/Stats/GC2010_ASTReport.pdf#view (07 May 2013).

receive credit for new members added. I think we need to ask not only how many are we baptizing? But how many are we reclaiming?"[1]

Martin Werber shares a similar concern about the loss of Pastors' kids from the church, besides general church members. In the following words, he laments, "What shall it profit pastors to baptize the whole city but lose their own children? To dedicate one's entire lifework for the salvation of other people's children while losing your own, is not only a tragedy but a travesty."[2] This is a clear indication that the church's back door is open for untimely exits.

There is need, therefore, to study the situation in order to prevent further loss of members from the churches, and seek to create and maintain a nurturing environment for all members. As Jane Thayer remarks, "besides setting goals for baptism, the church should also set goals for teaching church members to obey Christ's commands, which is needed to make them disciples?"[3] Sharing the same vein of concern, James A. Cress asserts; "Follow-up to incorporate new believers is not an option; but an imperative—an integral part of the whole process. Anything less than an all-out effort for this task, is child abuse! It is criminal."[4] While membership statistics are good indicators of church growth, Kelly understands that "statistics are not the only index of either social or spiritual strength of a church. Instead, they point

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[1]Larry Evans, ''Conserving Membership Gains – An Appeal'' *General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC), Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, 7-14 April 2010, meeting of 10 April 2010.

[2]Martin Weber, ''Keeping Pks in the Church'' *Ministry*, April, 2009, 9-11.

[3]Jane Thayer, ''Pastors' Perspectives on Assimilating New Members, Part 1 - Challenges and Needs'' *Ministry*, February, 2010, 6-11.
[4]James Cress, *You Can Keep Them If You Care: Helping New Members Stay On Board* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association Resource Centre, 2000), 22.

to a certain inescapable, quantifiable 'thereness' in an organization, which has some direct and discernible relation to its reason for existence and success."[1]

The Southern Africa – Indian Ocean Division (SID), which is a parent organization of all the Union Conferences within the region implied by its name, presents five initiatives: Haggai Venture, Zechariah Project, Hezekiah Operation, Epaphras Ministry and Paul's Method, as strategies to improve its statistical growth rate of about 22% between the years 2005 and 2010.[2] However, Cress observes that, "the church that is interested in what interests Jesus, should be interested in numbers of people for His kingdom."[3] Hence, pursuing this study becomes a relevant endeavor.

Statement of the Problem

The loss of church members in HCC district undermines the Church's reason for existence. It is clearly evident that the church is baptizing and adding more new members into the community of believers while experiencing significant loss of church members. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the causes for the loss of church members with a view of developing a program for retaining and reclaiming the lost.

Purpose of the Research

The goal of this study was three-fold: (1) to understand why the church was losing members, (2) to gain some insights through a review of research surveys, Scriptures, and the writings of Ellen G. White on the issue of retention and

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[1]Dean M. Kelly, *Why Are Conservative Churches Growing* ? (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 16.

[2]Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, *Adventist Echo*, Vol. 8 No. 1, 2010. (June, 2010), 9.

[3]Cress, 63.

assimilation of church members. Finally, (3) this study sought to design a program that can be implemented towards membership retention and reclaiming the lost in HCC district of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Significance of the Research

The importance of this study is that, it is to provide a solution to the problem of membership loss. The results of this study may help the church in four ways: (1) determine the extent to which membership retention is realized and improved at the local church level for church growth, (2) provide an understanding of the factors that hinder the assimilation of members in the life of the church, (3) suggest possible ways by which the church can retain, reclaim lost members, and involve them in mission fulfillment, and (4) stimulate further research studies in other areas of membership retention.

Definition of Terms

Apostasy: In this study, this term refers to public denial of faith or committing a sin that leads to discipline through removal of name from church membership records.

Assimilation: refers to the process of genuinely becoming a part of something that already exist, taking on its life, and enriching the life of the organism that already exists."[1]

Contextualization: In this study, refers to "the efforts of formulating, presenting and practicing the Christian faith in such a way that is relevant to the cultural context of the target group in terms of conceptualization, expression and application; yet

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[1]Willie E. Hucks II. (Ass. ed.), ''The Benefits of Assimilation'' *Ministry*, February 2010, 5. The process of assimilation enhances Spiritual strengthening, allows people to fortify one another through their Spiritual gifts, and it facilitates burden-bearing of one another.

maintaining theological coherence, biblical integrity and theoretical consistency as also understood by Enoch Wan".[1]

Fellowship: In this research, fellowship presupposes the condition of having common interests, ideals, and experiences.[2]

Membership Loss: In this study, this phrase means losing church members through apostasy and missing rather than death and transfer.

Missing Members: In this study, refers to church members whose absence from church fellowship exceeds two continuous years.

Retention: In this research, this term shares the same definition as; "regular church attendance of members, while cherishing sound fellowship with one another and realizing spiritual growth through active involvement in church activities."[3]

Strategy: the art of devising and employing a careful plan to reach a goal. Since the Church is engaged in the Great Controversy, the military idea of the word suggests a careful planning necessary to fight a war in order to attain the ultimate goal of victory.[4]

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[1]Wan, Enoch, ''Contextualization'' in *A Review of Christian Conversation in an African Context* by Glenn J. Schwartz, 1999. (A Handout of Class Notes from Joel Musvosvi in a class presentation on ''Topics in Missions'') at Helderberg: South Africa, December, 2010.

[2]*SDA Bible Dictionary*, Logos Bible Software 2.0 "Fellowship." [Gr. (*koinonia*), generally refers to ''association, communion, participation, or sharing'' in some things]. The word is particularly found in passages that refer to the close relationship that Christians should experience with God (1 Jn. 1:3), and with fellow believers (1 Jn. 1:3, 7). In addition to its usual meaning, *koinonia* was used by the early church to describe the act of sharing one's temporal blessings with fellow believers (2 Cor. 8:4).

[3]Albert W. Dock, *Keeping Members in the Church: A Model that Works*. (USA: Xulon Press, 2008), xiii.

[4]John D. Robb, *Focus: The Power of People Group Thinking* ''A Practical Manual for Planning Effective Strategies to reach the Unreached.'' (Grand Rapids, MI: Book Crafters, 1989), 37.

Syncretism: is the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of a dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture.[1]

Delimitations of the Study

This program was conducted in three churches under Harare City centre district. The local church analysis was based on a five year period, 2007 to 2011. This study is not exhaustive; its development was particularly guided by insights from the reviews of relevant contemporary literature, the scriptures, and the writings of Ellen G. White on the issue of retention and reclaiming lost church members.

Methodology

The methodology of research adopted for this study was program development.[2] The identified problem was examined by analyzing membership trends, statistical data from the specified churches in HCC district. A review of literature was done by consulting library books and journals, the internet sources, the Bible and Ellen G. White writings. A description of the current situation of the district and the churches was done. Surveys were carried out through administering questionnaires and interviews. Then the researcher analyzed the collected data. That became the basis for program development. Finally, recommendations were presented.[3]

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[1]Gailyn Van Rheenan, "Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents" in Schwartz, Glenn J. *A Review of Christian Conversion in an African Context.* 2006, 45-50.

[2]Andrew Mutero and Gheorghe Razmerita eds. *Adventist University of Africa Standards for Written Work* (Kenya: Adventist University of Africa, 2010), 4.

[3]Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 153.

Chapter 1. Identification of the problem and development of the topic was done by analyzing statistical membership trends.

Chapter 2. Review of literature was done on membership loss, retention strategies, from the contemporary views, biblical concepts and the writings of Ellen G. White.

Chapter 3. Description of the local setting of the group in which the program was designed for. Surveys were carried out. Data was collected and analyzed.

Chapter 4. The development of the program includes a report of the following; Preparation = designing the program, Presentation = implementing it, and evaluation.

Chapter 5. The presentation of a summary, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

Introduction

This chapter reviews a historical trend on church membership loss and assesses some contributory factors toward apostasy. Then, focus will be directed on some selected reviews on retention and reclamation of lost members from a contemporary viewpoint, Biblical insights, and finally, Ellen G. White writings.

Historical Trend of Church Membership Loss

The Bible presents apostasy or religious disengagement as a trend that has affected God's church since the entrance of sin. Apostasy has marked the onset of the great universal controversy between good and evil.[1] While some lost members were pursued and reclaimed, some were never found despite God's endeavors. In heaven, God lost Lucifer and a third of angelic hosts (Rev 12:4). He pursued them, but they resisted reclamation. In Eden, (Gen 3), God lost Adam and Eve. He managed to reclaim them. Their son, Cain, rebelled. Although God endeavored to reclaim him by placing a mark on him (Gen 4:15), Cain purposed to run away from the presence of God (Gen 4:16). Before long, during Noah's day, God lost the entire generation due to apostasy (Gen. 6:1-8), except Noah and his family. Shortly after the flood, the entire

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[1]Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press , 1982), 6-7.

nation sank into apostasy by participating in the construction of the tower of Babel

(Gen 11). God never kept silent, He came down to redeem them, (Gen 11:5-8).

More to this, God's people (the Israelites), after being delivered from the

Egyptian bondage, rebelled against Him and sank into idolatry (Exod 32), adultery

and fornication (Num 25). Still, God pursued and reclaimed them. Upon their

settlement in the land of Canaan, Israel lost her identity and mission. Throughout the

book of Judges, it appears there was a repeated tendency of Israel's departure from the

true worship of God. The following texts from Judges are clear evidence of this fact:

(2:19; 3:7, 12, 14; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; 16:1; 20:14); "every man did that which was

right in his own eyes."[1] In response, God pursued, reclaimed, and retained them

through affliction and adversity.

During the times of kings and prophets, the church was divided and

apostatized as confirmed in (Jer 3:11), "Israel backslidden and Judah became

treacherous." Henry Matthew comments on this situation in the following words

"Judah falsely professed religion by only pretending to cleave to God . . . Israel sank

into idolatry, and that meant an open revolt against God"[2] Even so, God pursued and

reclaimed Israel. In the book of Hosea, the real tendency of waywardness among

God's children, and God's love for the erring members, is depicted through the

characters of faithless Gomer and loving Hosea, her husband, (Hos 2:14-23).

The New Testament also describes membership loss as a threat to the early

church and its mission. Christ Himself began His ministry with twelve disciples, only

to finish it with eleven. Judas became a traitor and he died unredeemed. Christ's

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[1]"The Period of Judges," *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1953 and 1976), 2:45.

[2]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible in one Volume, Genesis to Revelation* ed. Leslie F. Church (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1960), 941.

parables in Luke 15, of the lost and found sheep, coin, and the prodigal son, are clear expressions of His concern about the lost church members.

Paul lost some fellow apostles along the way as indicated in (2 Tim. 4:10-11), "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia, only Luke is with me. . . ." The trend of membership loss in the Christian church was intensified as a result of persecution among serious Christian believers (Acts 12:1-3; 13:50; Rev 1:9).

Besides biblical events of lost members, Papal declarations of persecuting Christians resulted in significant loss of church members.[1] The consequent Protestant reformation was God's initiative to reclaim His scattered children. Another notable event that saw a remarkable declension of church members was in 1844. People were disappointed after Christ had not come as had been promised. Since then, the rate of membership gains increases each day, while on the other hand the number of dropouts also gains momentum. With such a trend of membership loss and the consequences that followed, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in HCC district cannot afford to ignore this trend. To prepare the Church for the nurturing and reclaiming task, there is need for the church to understand the reasons for membership loss in each local church. Such is the task of the following section.

Reasons for Membership Loss

According to Rudi Maier, people leave the Seventh-day Adventist church on the basis of unmet needs. He classifies such needs into several categories that range from social to spiritual issues, physical, to life-cycle stage challenges, negligence on

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[1]''Persecution in the Early Church – Religious Facts.'' http:www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/persecution.htm (12 July 2012).

the part of existing church members, and many others.[1] Exploring and understanding

these aspects of life might be helpful in developing the church's capacity to attract,

reclaim, retain, and engage its members in active roles toward the mission of the

church. Needs-assessment is critical in an endeavor to retain and reclaim church

members. The Willow Creek Community Church of Bill Hybels makes use of "Seeker

Sensitive" approach, to develop their programs and activities for church growth. This

approach is "equally ideal for spiritual growth and maturity."[2] The following section

investigates some reasons for religious disengagement on basis of unmet needs.

Social Factors

Human beings have social needs that cannot be ignored. Hence, people's

desire to relate meaningfully, is expressed in different ways including religious

affiliation. However, such desires are usually hindered even in religious circles,

leading many to draw back. As concluded by James A. Cress, "A lack of fellowship is

the strongest factor influencing personal decisions to leave the church. . . . Such is a

living reality in the Seventh-day Adventists."[3] Sharing a similar observation, Carl S.

Dudley, argues that; "most dropouts, frequently cite broken relationships as their main

reason for leaving."[4] In addition, Olsen remarks that "converts sometimes join

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[1] Rudi Maier, ''Evangelism and Development – Freinds or Foes?'' in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World,* ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 96-103.

[2] Anna Galenniece, ''A Critique of The Church Growth Movement'' in a Class Presentation of the Course *Church Growth and Equipping the Pastor* (Helderberg College, Cape Town: M. A Pastoral Theology, 2012), (06 July 2012).

[3] Cress, 40 & 60.

[4] Carl S. Dudley, *Where have all our People Gone? New Choices for Old Churches* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 77. Dudley further affirms that people join congregations at least in part, for social satisfaction. They leave when these social expectations are damaged or are left unfulfilled.

religious groups in order to satisfy social needs."[1] This implies that, personal ties with group members attract new converts in some remarkable way. Social factors contribute towards membership loss or gains.

While this might be true with all other Christian churches in general, this might be also a prevailing reality within the Seventh-day Adventist church in particular. To confirm this, Megan Brauner reports that members leave the Seventh-day Adventist church due to social and relational factors than denominational teachings.[2] This implies the absence of an accommodative environment at churches due to lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission.

It is probable that this is the major reason for Schaller's conclusion; "Too often, congregations, by their actions, attitudes, and traditions, tends to cause people to stay away completely or to continue looking elsewhere for a new church home."[3] With particular emphasis on young people, Robert Laurent and Roger L. Dudley affirms that "alienation from the church is best predicted by unpleasant experiences with the church, lack of involvement, uninteresting sermons, deficient devotional life, and religious restrictions on lifestyle."[4]

In addition, East-Central Africa Division reveals that some people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS disease, leave the church as a result of rejection, stigmatization, discrimination, misunderstanding, and loss of trust from fellow church

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[1]Daniel V. A. Olsen, ''Church Friendships: Boon or Barrier to Church Growth?'' *JSTOR* Vol. 28, No. 4 (December 1989), 432-447. Blackwell Publishing at http://www.jstor.org.stable/1386585. (06 June 2012).

[2]Megan Brauner, (Asst. ed.), ''World Church: Keep Counting your Sheep'' *Adventist News Network,* 11 April 2007.

[3]Lylle E. Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1981), 69.

[4]Laurent, R. and Roger L. Dudley, ''Alienation from Religion in Church-related Adolescents,'' *SA* 49 (Winter 1989): 408-420.

members.[1] With the assumed prevalence ratio of 1 out of every 4 people, being HIV

positive,[2] the church is baptizing many people both infected and affected. Much to

their surprise, they experience stigmatization, rejection and discrimination as

reconfirmed by Allan Handysides.[3] This leaves the church with only figures in

records, but without the actual members. Hence, Jane Thayer concludes that new

church members are more concerned with the sense of belonging to the new

community of believers.[4]

<div align="center">Spiritual Factors</div>

According to Schaller, "people affiliate with churches to satisfy their spiritual

needs."[5] However, if this quest is selfishly indulged, again, people die spiritually as

understood by Ellen White; "Nothing saps spirituality from the soul more quickly than

to enclose it in selfishness and self-caring. Those who indulge self and neglect to care

for the souls and bodies of others are dry and sapless, like a tree that bears no fruit.

They are spiritual dwarfs, who consume their means on self."[6]

Levels of spiritual satisfaction vary from people to people depending on the

nature of spiritual problems encountered in one's Christian experience, or the kind of

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[1]*East-Central Africa Division* (ECD) of Seventh-day Adventist Church, ''Regional Workshop on HIV/AIDS'' Nairobi Kenya, (10-13 November 2003). http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resouces/documents. (09 June 2011).

[2]Diana Hardie, ''HIV/AIDS Prevalence'' *National Health Laboratory Service and University of Cape Town* (22 July 2010). http://www.health24.com/medical/condition   (12 June 2011).

[3]Allan Handysides, ''The Church in the face of a crisis'' *Ministry*, December, 2007, 10. Handysides acknowledges, ''We attach the ''stigma'' label to others, which implies that they are guilty, defective, less worthy, and less valuable than we believe ourselves to be.''

[4]Jane Thayer, 12.

[5]Schaller, 70.

[6]Ellen White, *Evangelism*, 356.

religious orientations that shaped them before joining the church. Among the dominant spiritual problems faced here in Africa, are; spiritualistic manifestations, ancestor veneration, and belief in mystical powers."[1] Common classes of religious orientations that are most popular here in Africa include; the conservative main-line churches, liberals that also include Pentecostalism, apostolic sects, and the African Traditional Religions (A.T.R). Kwabena Donkor affirms that a significant number of conversions to the Adventist church come from these religious groups. At most, they retain the worship styles and practices of their former church affiliations.[2]

Divided loyalty is a major problem that affects the church, particularly here in Africa, since dual allegiance leaves one without identity. Mensah asserts that, syncretism is major problem for African converts.[3] Members of the church who are found to have dealings with mystical powers are censured by the church and removed from the church membership register until they prove genuine conversion. Even when church members who get entangled with these powers are not found out and disciplined, they are spiritually cut off from the body of Christ. Either way, a loss occurs, says Amanze and Makinde.[4]

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[1]Kwabena Donkor, ed. ''Ancestor Worship, Biblical Anthropology, and Spiritualistic Manifestations in Africa'' chap. in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits : Adventism in Africa.* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 69-89.

[2]Ibid., Donkor points out that ''the popularity of deliverance ministries has made the question of demons and demon possession, witchcraft, magic, curses, and other related spiritualistic phenomena a rather acute problem for the Seventh-day Adventists Church.

[3]Vida Mensah, ''The Role of the Individual in Coping with Spiritualistic Manifestations'' 145-156, chap. in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, Biblical Research Institute Books, ed. Kwabena Donkor, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 145-156. Doctrinally, some African values and beliefs, are continued to be held by the African converts.

[4]Philemon O. Amanze and Kayode Makinde, ''Mystical Powers and How Some African Christians Get Involved'' 23-35. In Donkor, *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*.

In view of this, Dean F. Kelly in Benton Johnson, et al, observed that mainline churches lose members due to religious weaknesses.[1] The Seventh-day Adventist church is not without exception to this observed problem. G. T Ng admits that the established church members cause spiritual deaths of many new members.[2] Sharing the same vein of thought, Russell C. Burrill also realized that, the Adventist churches lose converts as a result of less emphasis on discipleship.[3]

Transition Challenges Within Life Cycle Stages

Roozen directly relates religious participation or disengagement to the entire spectrum of the life cycle, with disengagement increasing from adolescence through to the age thirty-five, and then steadily decreasing into old age.[4] In the African worldview, transition from one stage of the life cycle to the other, is generally punctuated by some challenges that can even threaten a person's spirituality. For Seventh-day Adventists, participating in traditional rites and ceremonies presents a problem whenever they are enacted within a spiritualistic frame of reference.[5] Donkor further suggests "the search for identity and peer pressure among adolescence,

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[1]Dean F. Kelly, ''Why Conservative Churches are Growing?'' (1972), in *Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline*, by Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hodge & Donald A. Luidens (Oregon: University of Oregon, 1993), 13-18.

[2]G. T. Ng, ''Faithfully Numbering the Faithful,'' in *Adventist News Network,* Ass. ed. Megan Braun, 2010.

[3]Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to The Life & Mission of the Local Church.* (California: Hart Books, 1998), 54.

[4]David A. Roozen, ''Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry.'' 427-450, article in *Review of Religious Research*, 21 (4) Supplement: (1980), Religious Research Association. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3510682 (16 December 2010).

[5]Donkor, ''Spiritualism and the Adventist Church in Africa: Guidelines and Recommendations'' chap. in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 227-239.

loneliness and the delay to get married for young adults, conception struggles for the newly- weds, handling divorce or separation, even the temptation of polygamy among the married ones, threatens retention of members in the Church particularly here, in Africa."[1]

Physical Factors

It appears people have physical needs that cannot be ignored regardless of satisfied spiritual needs. If such needs are not successfully addressed, backsliding will likely result. According to Dudley, material blessings can affect church membership trends"[2] Besides material resources, migration can affect church membership trends. Among other reasons for migrating are; "work, marriage, further studying, and even the search for political asylum."[3] Physical needs such as food, clothing, and illness, unless urgently addressed, have urgent effects on retention of church members.

Mental Factors

Caplovitz and Sherrow present three different causes for apostasy: secularization (cognitive conflicts between secular and religious view of the world); rebellion against dominant institutions and values of society; and achievement orientation (such as primary commitment to achieved status rather than ascribed statuses like one's religion). They conclude that secularization is the overwhelming determinant of apostasy.[4] While all classes of people are vulnerable to this problem,

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[1]Donkor, (2011), 432.

[2]Carl S. Dudley, (1979), 177.

[3]Dudley, 32.

[4]David Caplovitz and Fred Sherrow, *The Religious Dropouts* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977), 431.

"the youths and young adults are more vulnerable" as understood by Hoge, D. R and David A. Roozen[1]

Most disturbing are Dudley's results from his ten-year study with teenagers on why they leave the church? Major themes cited by teenagers for religious disengagement includes; "judgmental attitudes from adult members and church leaders, lack of love, politics in church governance, hypocrisy and gossip, rigid rules and codes, 'Holier - than – thou' attitude, and lack of attention."[2] Finally, Ellen J. Fedder presents a summary of ten points that lead people to leave the church: dissatisfaction with the church pastor, change, church leadership, church logistics issues, church programs, relocation away from church, ministry opportunities, disagreement with fellow church members, sense of isolation, and lifestyle or church creed disagreement .[3]

More to this, Carla Baker admits that women in particular, quit church based on the following reasons; conflict with spouse and/or divorce, conflict with other members of the church, move to another town with no follow-up between churches, making transition into a new stage of life and loneliness and feeling as though they don't belong.[4] Having discussed these identified reasons for religious disengagement, the following section discusses some contemporary views about membership

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[1]Hoge, Dean R. and David A. Roozen, ''Some Sociological Conclusions about Church Trends,'' chap. in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline,* D. R. Hoge and D. A Roozen, eds. (New York: Pilgrims Press, 1979), 315-333.

[2]Rodger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church? Personal Stories From a 10 year Study*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 141,170.

[3]Ellen J. Fedder, ''10 Reasons Why People Leave the Church'' an article from http://www.contributor.yahoo.com/ 12 January, 2009 (06 June 2011).

[4]Carla Baker, ''Reclaiming Former Members'' chap. in *General Conference Women's Ministries Leadership Certification Program,* Level 2 (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004), Lesson 8.

retention. As Larry Evans echoes, "We cannot ignore those who have left the church. We have to reach out to those who are hurting and bring them back into the ministry of the church."[1]

Membership Retention

The question "Why religious organizations lose members?" has been discussed to come up with recommendations for membership retention. Among such recommendations are four principles of membership retention by Braxton King; (1) Christian education;   (2) ministry to young adults, (3) positive interpersonal relationships, and (4) significant experiences and personal investments.[2] More to this, Thom Rhainer believes that addressing expectations, relationships, and meaningful involvement in some type of church ministry, enhances membership retention than observers.[3]

On the other hand, Jane Thayer argues that, "people come into the church primarily on doctrine level, but leave primarily on the social level.[4] For that reason, Rick Warren asserts, "love draws people in like a powerful magnet. A lack of love drives people away."[5] Christian Schwartz and C. Schalk sum up all these views through their Natural Church Development (NCD) strategy, by presenting eight areas of church life that are essential to healthy church growth as follows: Empowering Leadership, Gift-based Ministry, Passionate Spirituality, Effective Structures,

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[1]Larry Evans, 2.

[2]Braxton King, *The Brother Up Next: Qualified Deacons Needed* (Bloomington, IN: Westbrow Press, 2011), 101. The Church School enrollment is a very reliable predictor of what church membership will be like in five to ten years.

[3]Ibid., 102.

[4]Ibid., 10.

[5]Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 54.

Inspiring Worship Service, Holistic Small Groups, Need-oriented Evangelism, and

Loving Relationships as the heart of a healthy, growing church.[1] Focus on these eight

areas of church life, helps the church grow spiritually and statistically. While all these

concepts are ideal for membership retention, blending them with some biblical

insights would strengthen their emphasis. Thus, the following section reviews biblical

insights towards retention.

Biblical Insights of Membership Retention

Retention in the Old Testament

The concept of membership retention is biblical. While the church in the Old

Testament struggled with apostasy, God never kept silent. His initial attitude toward

the lost is first revealed after the fall. In Gen 3:8-10, God is clearly portrayed as a

caring Savior. Matthew Henry argues that, when God said to Adam in (verse 9),

"where are you?" He was checking on Adam's spiritual condition. This enquiry was a

gracious pursuit towards Adam's spiritual recovery.[2] It therefore implies that,

pursuing lost members is needed in order to reclaim them. Such concept is repeated

many times in the Old Testament; God delivered Noah and his family Gen 6-8,

Abraham and Lot likewise   Gen 18-19, and more to that Jacob was reclaimed

through pastoral visitation, Gen 31&32. In Gen. 11:5-8, God used pastoral

intervention to reclaim an apostate generation.[3] Through the covenant relationship

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[1]Christian A. Schwartz and Christoph Schalk, *Natural Church Development Survey* (Church Smart 1998) on http://www.living-stones.com/ncdmeasure.html (15 March 2012).

[2]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible in one Volume, Genesis to Revelation* Leslie F. Church ed. (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1960), 9.

[3]''God's Response'' Gen 11:5-9, *BEC* PC Study Bible V5, (1988-2007). The words of God ''let us go down'' is the language used to dramatize God's gracious

with Abraham, Gen. 15 &17, God brings home a lesson that fellowship enhances retention.

Consistent with the principle of pastoral visitation, Exod 3:4-6, 14 describes God as "the Angel of the Lord" who appears to Moses on a mission to reclaim His children from Egyptian bondage. After all the struggles with Pharaoh, God's people were delivered through observing the Passover festival, Exod 12. This implies that, participation of church members in observing church ordinances may be helpful in promoting a sense of belonging and intimate union with Christ.[1] On their way to the Promised Land, the children of God indulged in idolatry Exod 32; willful rebellion against God's appointed leaders Num 16 and sexual immorality Num. 25. In response, God used a variety of approaches to redeem His people.

God instructed Moses to establish cities of refuge as a way to rehabilitate victims of involuntary homicide, Num 35:6, 9-13, 15.[2] Besides, He also employed national calamities and judgments that were designed to bring men back to Him, not to drive them away.[3] In Deut. 6, the obligation of constant and regular instruction of God's children was primarily a family responsibility, verses 4-9. Roger S. Greenway

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intervention to spare the lives of His people and to give them an opportunity to return to Him, rather than His investigation in order to know what is going on in His universe.

[1]Herbert Keisler, ''The Ordinances: Baptism, Footwashing, and Lord's Supper'' chap. in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Vol. 12, Raoul Dederen & Nancy Vyhmeister eds. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 582-609.

[2]William Smith, LL. D. ''Sacrifice'' *Bible Dictionary* (1884), 578.

[3]''Judges,'' *SDA Bible Commentary*, F. D. Nichol, ed. (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 2:341.

remarks that the teaching of scriptures to children, and the life of faith and obedience, was part of the daily life of the Hebrew home.[1]

Upon their settlement in the promised land, it appears there was a repeated tendency of Israel's departure from God as depicted in the book of Judges, (2:19; 3:7, 12, 14; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; 16:1; 20:14). Thus, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."[2] In response, God disciplined them through affliction and adversity in-order to reclaim and retain them. More precisely, Matthew Henry further claims that, the God of infinite mercy took pity on them in their distress . . . and wrought deliverance for them. God raised up judges as instruments of their deliverance from among themselves; men to whom God gave extraordinary qualifications to reform and deliver Israel, and whose great attempts He crowned with wonderful success.[3]

This suggests church discipline is an effective tool for reclaiming wayward members. It worked for Samson too as Ellen White affirms, "In suffering and humiliation, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance." [4] As for John Gill, God raised judges to deliver His people out of the hands of their oppressors, and to restore them to their privileges and liberties."[5] Until the time of Samuel, both priests and judges were accountable for the moral and religious standing of God's children.[6] Such is also true today with regard to "the priesthood of all believers" (2 Pet. 2:9). E. G White

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[1] Roger S. Greenway, *Discipling the City: Theological Reflections on Urban Mission.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 117.

[2] ''The Period of the Judges'' *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 2:45.

[3] Henry Matthew, 243.

[4] Ellen. G White, ''Samson'' *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 756.

[5] John Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, (Jude. 2.16) ''Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges'' e-sword – the Sword of the Lord with an Electronic edge.

[6] White, ''Eli and His Sons'' *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 578.

further remarks, "Every church member is responsible for the spiritual standing of fellow believers. We are just as responsible for evils that we might have checked in others by exercise of parental or pastoral authority as if the acts had been our own."[1]

More to this provision, the Lord through Samuel, established schools of prophets "to serve as barrier against the widespread corruption, to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to promote the future prosperity of the nation."[2] Both Elijah and Elisha perpetuated the idea. White further elaborates that the chief subjects of study in these schools were the law of God, with the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. . . In the record of sacred history were traced the footsteps of Jehovah.[3] For that reason, schools were in connection with the synagogues, which were found in every city and in almost every village of the land.[4] It is likely that today, the church has formulated its philosophy of education from this background.

Evidence from wisdom literature points out that, the desire to "dwell in the house of God forever" (Ps 23:6) comes as a conviction through the rhythm of good psalms, implying that good music enhances strong religious attachment. More to this, meditating on God's Word Ps 119:11 strengthens people's relationship with their God. In addition, proper nurturing of children found in Prov 22:6 is remedial to the retention of kids even when they grow up. Besides, Prov 27:23 emphasizes that the

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[1]Ibid., 578.

[2]White, ''Schools of Prophets,'' 593.

[3]Ibid., 594. Students were taught how to pray, how to approach their Creator, how to exercise faith in Him, and how to understand and obey the teachings of the Spirit. . . . Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God.

[4]William Smith, LL.D. ''Schools'' *Bible Dictionary* (1884), 594. To expand the value of schools, Smith points out, ''Jerusalem was destroyed because the education of children was neglected.''

duty of nurturing church members belongs to the leaders of the church; "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and look well to your herds."

While insights from prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi suggest that each prophet was called for some specific task during a particular time, it seems there is also ample evidence that confirm unity of purpose regarding their mission; "pursuing and reclaiming the backsliding church to its Creator and Savior." (Isa 1:18; Jer 3:11-15; Ezek 2; Amos 3:1-2,7; Jon 1:1-2; Mic 1:1-7; Hos). The SID derives three of the five initiatives; (Zechariah Project, Hezekiah Operation, and Haggai Venture) from this section, towards growth, numerically and spiritually.[1]

In this section, God engaged prophets as instruments and agents of revival and reformation, but to no avail (Isa 30:8-11; 2 Chr 36:15-21). Hence, He resorted to punishing them through exile to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1-2) as a corrective measure to redeem them. After the exile, it seems there was order in the life of the church although they still needed guidance from God's servants: the prophets (Hos 1:12-13). Through the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah to Malachi, relationship with God was enhanced by emphasizing on faithfulness in tithes and offerings, and social justice, as implied in Hag 1:5; Zech 1:3-4; 7:8; Mal 3:7-10. It is evident that while the church in the Old Testament had a tendency of drifting away from their Maker, God used several approaches to reclaim them. The task of the following section is to assess God's attitude towards His wayward children in the New Testament.

Retention in the New Testament

The dawn of New Testament era saw the church of God without its initial identity through divisions, apostasy, legalism and divergent perceptions as evidenced

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[1]"Lift Up Christ – Tell the World & The Five SID Initiatives" *Southern Africa – Indian Ocean Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Harare: SID, 2006), 15, 20, & 26.

by different groups of people with various beliefs among them: Pharisees John 3:1;

Sadducees Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8, and Zealots, Luke 6.15. God's

people were scattered like sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:35-38). Christ describes

His mission as One "who came to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

To accomplish this mission, several approaches can be learnt from His works as

reflected from the first four books of the New Testament, (Gospels).

<p style="text-align:center">Member Care in the Gospels and the Book of Acts</p>

Church organization in the gospels presents Christ as our model toward

successful caring of members (Luke 19:10). While His works represent God's attitude

toward wayward mankind, the Gospels also point out nurturing strategies for church

members in the early church. Discipling involves "teaching them to observe all things

whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The "teaching them" from the Greek

didaskontes autos, is part of the commission. Before and after baptism, disciples must

teach new disciples. Teaching must be done at home, at school, at church and

wherever it can be.[1]

 Christ used several approaches to reclaim and retain His children. Burrill

points out some of the approaches that Christ used as follows: small group ministry,

discipleship, community-door to door visiting.[2] More to this, Christ was not ashamed

to identify with humanity in every aspect of life as a way of redeeming them from

their sins. Identifying with people in their local contexts enables people to relate more

meaningfully. To that effect, Christ appealed to His disciples; ". . . .I have set you an

example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Christ's example is

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[1]''Discipleship'' (Matthew 28:18-20) *Adam Clarke's Commentary* (Electronic Database, 1997), PC. V5, Biblesoft.

[2]Burrill, 100, 119.

revealed in such parables as the lost sheep, coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15). They all testify Christ's attitude towards reclaiming the lost. Hence, the remark: ". . . there is great joy in heaven over one sinner that repents" (Luke 15:8).

Some evidence in the book of Acts suggests that; "consistent study of the Word, addressing people's needs, fellowship, organized prayer meetings, participating in church ordinances such as Holy Communion" (Acts 2:41-47), were useful instruments for membership retention. Paul planted churches, and through some repeated follow-up programs, he strengthened new believers in the faith (9:31; 14:21-23). Likewise, Barnabas also used the follow-up method to retain new converts (11:22-26). Besides, Paul nurtured new converts by engaging them in missionary activities as seen in the case of Timothy, Silas and others (16:1-5). It is amazing to learn that the early church benefited from the ministry of appointed elders who shepherded them from savage wolves, (20:27-28). Hence, Josney Rodriguez asserts that "since the elders' task is amplified and defined in the Bible as a metaphor for shepherding, elders should develop abilities to efficiently care for and lead God's church.[1]

Care of Members in Paul's Epistles

Paul felt a deep responsibility for those converted under his labors such that he longed to realize their spiritual growth until the coming of Christ, (Phil. 2:16). To him, new converts should be nurtured until the day of Christ. Thus, he wrote extensively to each church that he had planted in order revive their faith. This suggests 'a principle of follow up' towards retaining church members. In these writings, Paul also portrays several approaches that he used to win and retain more for Christ. Such approaches

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[1]Josney Rodriguez, ''The Church Elder's 4 Pastoral Responsibilities'' in *Elder's Digest* July/September 2010, Vol. 16, Number 3, 22-23.

include the use of Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph. 4:1-16), that enhances Christian unity, spiritual growth, and mission fulfillment. Besides, the idea of 'contextualization' is implied as a means to win people for Christ "to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews . . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:19-23). Such was also Christ's practice as we have learnt earlier on. Burrill expands this concept by suggesting that, towards contextualization, "our theology must be uncompromisingly biblical, while our methodology needs to be predominantly cultural"[1]

In addition, Paul discourages believers from intermarrying and fellowshipping with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-16) as a remedy for enhancing spiritual growth and holiness among God's children. He compliments Philippians for their unity as a result of fellowship in the gospel (Phil 1:5-6). This suggests that fellowship and evangelism are twin concept that unifies people in the faith. With the same concern of retaining new believers, Paul again warns the Colossian converts from the influence of persuasive words, philosophy, secular tradition, and basic principles of the world (Col 2:1-8), implying that new converts should be jealously guarded from secular influence by consistently teaching them. Richard W. O'Ffil shares the same conviction, "In our evangelism, we must not only convince people of doctrinal truths, we must also teach them the things that will sustain them spiritually."[2]

More to these, Paul encourages people to work for themselves (2 Thess 3:6-12), rather than reliance on charitable gifts from others. Furthermore, he talks about "the value of prayer ministry" in 1 Tim 2: 1-5. Organized church leadership in 1 Tim 3: 1-13 & Titus 1:5-14, and the administration of church discipline to the offenders

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[1]Burrill, 36.

[2]Richard W. O'Ffil, *Lord Save My Church: Tackling the Tough Issues*, (Idaho: Pacific Press, 2007), 82.

Heb 12:5-11, are implied as twin concepts for nurturing believers. With these in mind, diligence in studying the Word of God is required, if one is to be approved of God as a faithful worker who need not to be ashamed and rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Having done that, he finally concludes by inviting church members to continue in brotherly love, honoring marital covenant, and be established in sound doctrine (Heb 13:1, 4, 9).

Retention in the Writings of Ellen G. White

While White was concerned about "doubling our diligence to the very utmost of our ability"[1] in searching and winning souls for Christ, she was equally concerned about member care[2]. The church of her time struggled with membership loss due to ethnic issues. Leslie N. Pollard expands White's view concerning; "slavery, segregation, racial discrimination, prejudice, bigotry, and how she appealed against that"[3]

From this background, Ellen G. White discusses various concepts for caring church members in light of Christ's approach. She counsels ministers to "learn Christ's method of laboring in order to fulfill their trust."[4] On the foremost, she invites the church to "trace the Divine footprints" through ministering to the needs of the poor.[5] As a role model, "Christ went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the consulate with unfailing

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[1]White, *Christian Service* (Washing DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 79.

[2]Ibid., 245.

[3]Leslie N. Pollard, ''Ellen White's Vision of Cross-Cultural Ministry: Diversity Principles for a Church in a New Millenium'' chap. in *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of all Culture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 104–112.

[4]White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 365.

[5]Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 640.

tenderness and gentleness. He met every form of human woe and affliction. He labored not for Himself but for others."[1] Ellen White asserts that, "People are easily reached through the avenues of the social circle."[2] Towards mission in general, and retention in particular, it appears Ellen White has nothing more other than Christ's model. Hence, she encourages both lay-members and church leaders to learn from Christ's example as she appeals:

> The example of the Savior should inspire us to put forth earnest, self-sacrificing effort for the good of others. Love for the lost race was manifested in all that He said and did. . . . He might be seen entering the humble abodes of want and sorrow, speaking hope to the downcast and peace to the distressed. This is the work that He asks His people to do today. . . . To all, He brought hope, gladness, Wherever He went, He carried blessing.[3]

Above all, she believes: "The best medicine that can be given to the church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them. If set to work, the despondent would soon forget their despondency, the weak would become strong, the ignorant intelligent, and all would be prepared to present the truth as it is in Jesus."[4] Besides, new converts "must be set to work immediately so that they grow spiritually strong, for it is by meeting opposing influences that they become confirmed in the faith"[5] Toward engaging church members into active service, Ellen G. White concludes, "The formation of small companies . . . has been presented unto me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed

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[1]Ibid., *Gospel Workers*, 187, 1915.

[2]Ibid., 338.

[3]Ibid., 7T, 221, 1902.

[4] Ibid., ''Establishing and Holding New Converts'' 356, 1946.

[5]Ellen G. White, 7T., 355.

into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers."[1] All these insights confirm that Ellen G. White also believed in membership retention.

Summary

This chapter reviewed some relevant literature on membership loss and retention. Through these reviews, it became evident that while the problem of church membership loss might be as ancient as the creation story, with people dropping out based on various factors, God is interested in pursuing lost members. Study after study from the contemporary writings, has shown that it is the duty of established church members to pursue the lost. Evidence from both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, clearly pointed out that the task of evangelizing, winning souls to Christ, retaining and reclaiming lost members lies solely upon the shoulders of those established already in the faith. The following chapter describes the local setting in which the study is carried out.

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[1]Ibid., ''Acceptable Service''

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING

Introduction

While the previous chapter reviewed related literature to the study, the purpose

of this chapter is to describe the context in which HCC church members exist. Since

program development is done for people, knowing about them is important.[1] Paul D.

Leedy and J. E. Ormrod explains that human actions are strongly influenced by the

setting in which they occur.[2] Therefore, several contexts are described in this chapter;

Zimbabwe as a country, the City of Harare, the East Zimbabwe Conference, and the

churches under study.

General Setting of the Country

Zimbabwe is a 150 804 square mile (390 580 square kilometer) land-locked

African country. It is a multi-cultured country. The estimated population as of June,

2007, stood at 12, 754 million.[3] About 65% of this population lives in rural areas, and

an average 35% living in urban areas.[4] Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate of 91%

among other African nations. It has a strong foundation of education, and an

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[1]Nancy Vyhmeister, 166.

[2]Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Designing,* 8th Edition (New York: Prentice Hall, 1985), 147.

[3]World Bank, ''Zimbabwe'' www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe. June, 2011. (12 February 2012).

[4]''Zimbabwean People Data, Statistics, Facts and Figures'' www.nationmaster.com/country/zi-zimbabwe/peo-people. (12 February 2012).

abundance of natural resources, which are assets that can be used toward the nation's progress and prosperity.[1] Since 2008, when the local Zimbabwe dollar lost its value due to inflation, the United States dollar and the South African rand are the major currencies in circulation. Black Africans make up 98% of Zimbabwean population. Although the English language is the official language, there are numerous tribal dialects that are also used to communicate; Shona 82%; Ndebele 14%; other 2%; mixed and Asian 1%; and European Languages, fewer than 1%.[2]

Like most of the Africans, Zimbabweans have a strong sense of "community consciousness" that brings them together. In typical Zimbabwean Shona culture, as Zacchaeus Mathema reckons, people are characterized by phrases like "mwana wamai", meaning, "my mother's child." This gives them a tremendous sense of belonging, identity, and fellowship.[3] Just like their fellow Africans, people in Zimbabwe are "notoriously religious" as John Mbiti suggests.[4] Based on this attitude toward religion, it is not surprising to note that some of Zimbabwe's population follows syncrestic religions: (part Christians and part indigenous beliefs). Christians make up 25%, those following indigenous beliefs 24%, Muslim and others, 1%.[5] The Shona emphasis on God does not interfere with their traditional belief in the ancestors

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[1]"Organizing Knowledge for Happiness, Prosperity, and World Pace" *New World Encyclopedia* www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/harare. (12 February 2012).

[2]Ibid.

[3]Zacchaeus Mathema, "Towards an Understanding of the African Worldview" in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, Donkor, 42.

[4]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 12.

[5]Main Demographic Features of the Population of Zimbabwe: An Advance Report Based on a 10% sample. (Harare: Central Statistical Office, June 2007), 45.

(Midzimu) for the latter are seen as intermediaries between men and God. Different tribes practice the same religion differently, but similarly.[1]

More to this, people in Zimbabwe generally share common religious interests especially in African Indigenous Churches (AICs). Most Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe fall into this category. These churches emphasize healing, miracles, and power over spiritualistic manifestations. They are particularly concerned about local traditional customs.[2] Spiritualism is a common feature in all these churches. Among AICs, is the United Family International Ministries (UFIM), founded by Emmanuel Makandiwa in 2008, which operates mostly around Harare and in Mashonaland Central. It is drawing huge crowds of followers from other Evangelical churches in Harare. This appears to be the fastest growing church ministry in Zimbabwe.[3]

African Independent Churches have a strong influence, because they are quite mystical in both doctrine and practice. They are more acceptable with people who have Traditionalist backgrounds. Retaining such converts is not easy. Pentecostalism promotes much celebration. Hence, the general religious environment is now flooded with Pentecostal influence, especially celebration and music. In this context, the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists with its different theology. This implies that every convert comes from any one of these groups with serious presuppositions that are contrary to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church. If the converts are not thoroughly taught, the possibility of retaining them, remain a dream that may not be realized. Adventist theology takes the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and

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[1]Joel Musvosvi, *Topics in Missions* (Cape Town: Helderberg, 2011).

[2]''Pentecostal and African Initiated Churches,'' an article from http://www.relzim.org/tag/pentecostals/aic (13 December 2010).

[3]Ibid.

the authoritative source for theological data. It believes in the temporal historicity of God who can reveal Himself directly and cognitively in both space and time.[1]

To a certain extent, even some Seventh-day Adventist homes are infiltrated with secular music and preaching. The environment in which both the new and old members of the church live seems to be secular in terms of media and lifestyle. It appears as if some people are not aware of the influence of such media. Hence a serious set-back on nurturing activities.

<div align="center">Religious Background of People in Zimbabwe</div>

To some extent, the Seventh-day Adventists in HCC district shares common religious challenges with other Zimbabweans. Donkor asserts that, "underlying the spiritualistic issues confronting Seventh-day Adventists in Africa, is the belief in the reality of a spiritual world that has an impact on people's day-to-day lives. Misfortunes such as traffic accidents, illnesses, and many others, are generally assumed to be the result of the work of forces in the spiritual world."[2] The majority of new converts into the Adventist church come from such religious backgrounds shaped by traditional African religious thought and contemporary evangelical/ charismatic practices that believe in "generational curses."[3] As such, Mbiti observed that even if Africans are converted to Christianity, they still retain traditional concepts which form the essential backgrounds of their life. Thus, the following summary categorizes the ATR into five pillars:

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[1]Fernando Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology : A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2010), 246.

[2]Donkor, ed. ''Ancestor Worship, Biblical Anthropology, and Spiritualistic Manifestations in Africa.'' 69-89. chap. in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (2011).

[3]Ibid., (91-104).

1. Salvation as success,

2. Heaven in the here and now,

3. Physical manifestation of the spirit,

4. Transference of the spirit into metaphysical such that the metaphysical becomes supernatural

5. Immaculate role of the mediator as a new Pontifex Maximus (the Bridge-Builder).[1]

Considering this current background, it is probable that church members in HCC district fear spiritualistic powers, thus, resorting to syncretism, by seeking help from AICs that emphasize miracles, healing, exorcism, and power over spiritualistic manifestation. People compromise their faith due to poverty and suffering.

General Setting of the City of Harare

Harare is both the capital city and the economic heart of Zimbabwe. It is the centre of such functions of the country as; administrative, commercial, manufacturing, communications, and education. For this reason, in 2008, it had an estimated population of 1, 9 million, with 2,8 million in its metropolitan area, and a growing rate of 5 - 7% due to internal displacement caused by drought, political and economic instability.[2]

Since then, there has been an increasing flow of people into urban areas in search of better economic opportunities. Local statisticians project Zimbabwean urbanization at 49.5% by 2015.[3] Over-population in the city of Harare due to

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[1]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), xii, 1.

[2]Corinne, 3.

[3]''Zimbabwean People Data, Statistics, Facts and Figures'' www.nationmaster.com/country/zi-zimbabwe/peo-people. (12 February 2012).

urbanization is not consistent with the city's holding capacity.[1] Besides, there appears to be high unemployment rate in Zimbabwe. With this in mind, Roger S. Greenway had fore-warned, "in Africa, people are moving from the bush to the city, unless old time missions move with them into the cities, the precious fruit will be lost."[2] As a result of this trend, there are several classes of people in the city of Harare based on their socio-economic status. Among them are; business people, professionals, students in colleges, entrepreneurs, job-seekers, domestic workers, idle street people, school leavers, and street vendors.

Due to such background, the social setting of the city suggests a problem of "stratification" (the arrangement of a society into a hierarchy of layers that are unequal in power, possessions, prestige, and life satisfactions).[3] The primary bases of stratification being occupation, income, and education. People gain social identity because of what they do or have.[4] Such an environment might not be consistent with church practice, since it portrays a discriminatory and segregatory outlook. In addition, some of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines like the Sabbath, stewardship, health message, and immortality of the soul find major distortions among the protestant churches. Retaining converts from such backgrounds suggests careful planning and thorough work by committed church leaders.

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[1] "Interdependencies: Resources and Salience. Zimbabwean Unemployment Rate," December 2008. http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/unemploymentrate.html (23 January 2012).

[2] Roger S. Greenway, ed. *Guidelines for Urban Church Planting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 7.

[3] "Social Stratification" *Class, Status, and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective*, 2nd ed. New York, 1966.

[4] Claerbaut David, *Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1983), 56-7.

Target Population

According to John J. Macionis, target population refers to the population that is being studied or researched upon.[1] In this case, the target population comprises members of the three churches in Harare City Centre district of the Seventh-day Adventist church; Belvedere, Harare City Centre, and Parirenyatwa. Among them are different classes of people such as; nuclear families, single parents, child-headed families (orphans), one-member families, divorced and separated families, young couples, and youths in general. In this age of modern technology, it supposes that the majority of the target population is compliant to the use of internet services and mobile phones. Some among the target population are victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, either by infection or being affected by the loss of loved ones. Harare City Centre district is a sub-entity of the East Zimbabwe Conference. Therefore, whatever is reflected in this district, to a certain extent, also affects the picture of East Zimbabwe Conference. Likewise, whatever is reflected in EZC, also suggests a reality that might be present in HCC district. Hence, brief analysis of membership statistics from both the EZC and churches in HCC district is important.

Church Statistics

As stated earlier, membership statistics are an index of social and spiritual strength of a church.[2] Since HCC district exists in East Zimbabwe Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church, it suggests necessity to consider membership statistics of both the Conference and the churches in Harare City Centre District. Only the figures of members added by baptism, and dropped by apostasy or who went missing

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[1]John J. Macionis, *Sociology* (11th edition), (New York: Prentice Hall, 1989), 43.

[2]Kelly, 16.

are considered as reflected from the beginning of 2007 to the end of 2011. Table 3.1

below reflects statistical information of the East Zimbabwe Conference.

Table 3.1 Statistics of East Zimbabwe Conference [1]

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Totals
Beginning Membership	191335	202400	219491	234488	248717	
Added by Baptism	12382	17984	17807	18349	16693	83215
Dropped by Apostasy	139	145	616	692	797	2389
Missing	1176	748	2194	3327	3443	10888
Members at Year end	202400	219491	234488	248717	261170	

While 83 215 members added into the church through baptism, presents a

positive outlook towards church growth at conference level, the loss of 13 277

members due to apostasy and those missing raises a concern that cannot be

overlooked. Such a loss is equivalent to 16% of membership gains. Considering that

the total membership of the Seventh-day Adventists is about 3.5% of the total target

population, such loss cannot be ignored.   Figure 3.1 below is graphic picture of the

situation that is real in East Zimbabwe Conference.

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[1] ''Annual Statistical Reports'' *East Zimbabwe Conference* on
http:www.adventiststatistics.org (2007-2011), (13 January 2013).
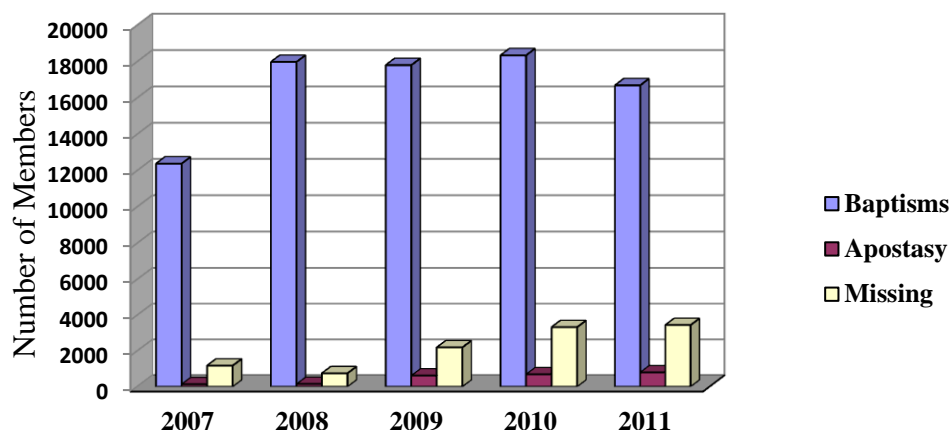
Fig. 3.1 Statistics of East Zimbabwe Conference from 2007 to 2011

Figure 3.1 indicates the year 2008 with the lowest figure of membership loss, while 2009 shows an upward trend of loss that increased each year. During the three years;

2008 – 2010, baptismal gains soared high. The years 2009 onwards saw a slight economic improvement in Zimbabwe. It appears that as the economic environment was improving, loss of members from the church also gained momentum. Mission fulfillment declined. Identifying some factors leading to this trend might be helpful in addressing this problem.

Statistics of Harare City Centre District

As stated earlier on, "statistics are an index of social and spiritual strength of a church."[1] Church membership trends of churches in HCC district are discussed chronologically. Table 3.2 below reflects membership statistics of Belvedere church. In terms of membership, this is the smallest church in the district.

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[1]Kelly, 16.

Table 3.2 Statistics of Belvedere Church

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Totals
Beginning Membership	66	58	56	45	39	
Addition by Baptism	0	12	8	4	19	43
Dropped by Apostasy	0	0	0	0	2	2
Missing	8	14	19	10	13	64
Membership at Year-end	58	56	45	39	43	

For Belvedere church, through-out the five-years under study, figures of membership losses are surpassing figures of membership gains, with the exception of 2011. On a cumulative basis, the church gained 43 new members through baptism, and lost 66 members through apostasy and missing. Such loss is equivalent to 153%. Unless urgent retention and reclaiming structures are put in place, Belvedere church could end with few members. Figure 3.2 below presents a graphic analysis of its membership trends.
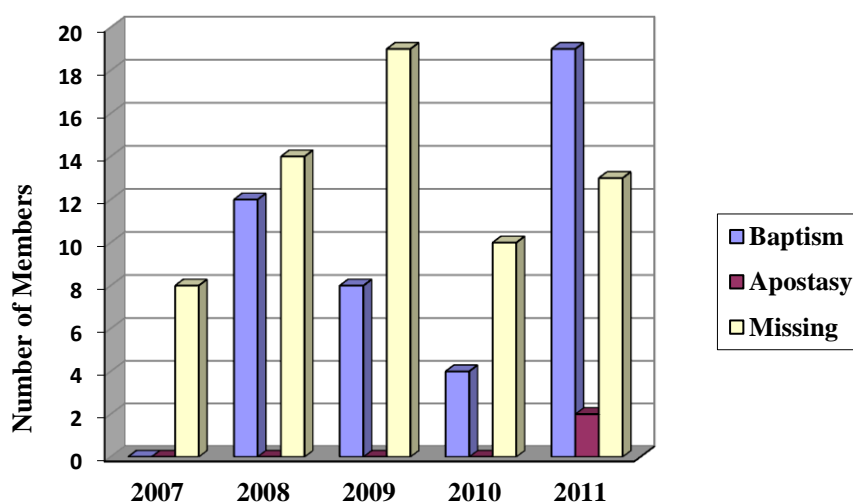
Fig. 3.2 Statistics of Belvedere Church

The year 2007 indicates no baptisms, and 2010 realized 4 membership gains. This suggests a lack of mission emphasis on the part of existing members. It therefore implies, there was no church activity to nurture the members already gained, and to reach out to those still outside. Hence the loss of significant numbers in each succeeding year. In view of mission fulfillment as mandated in Matthew 28:19, the church appears to be dying. The next church to be analyzed is Harare City Centre church as shown in Table 3.3 below. In terms of membership, City centre church is the largest in the district.

Table 3.3 Statistics of Harare City Centre Church

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Totals
Beginning Membership	670	574	487	435	364	
Addition by Baptism	7	37	46	21	30	141
Dropped by Apostasy	0	1	0	0	1	2
Missing	103	113	98	92	88	494
Membership at Year end	574	487	435	364	305	

During the five years, Harare City Centre church gained 141 members, totaling to 21% growth. On the contrary, the same church lost 496 members during the same period. Thus, the church began 2007 with 670 members and closed 2011 with 305 members. Such loss is equivalent to 351.8% of membership gains. The following graph presents a scenario that denies Harare City Centre Church reluctance to afford silence.
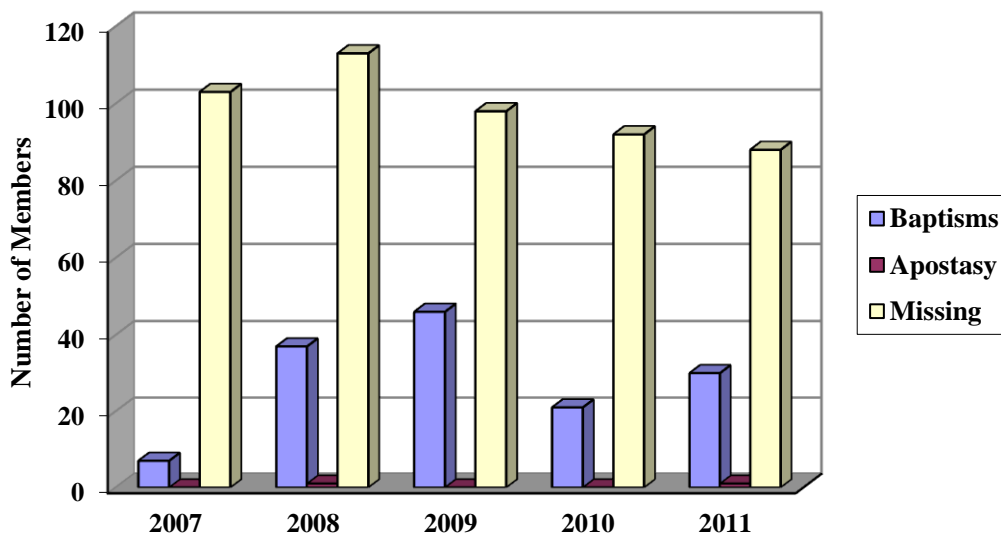
Fig. 3.3 Statistics of Harare City Centre Church

Throughout the five years, the number of losses far surpassed that of gains. Such evidence suggests the Church's unawareness of its reason for existence, and that is 'The Mission'. This picture points out that there are no nurturing structures in place; no one cares about the other. Such a trend requires immediate solution from the leaders. Table 3.4 is an analysis of Parirenyatwa Church membership statistics.

Table 3.4 Statistics of Parirenyatwa Church

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Totals
Beginning Membership	127	125	121	111	137	
Added by Baptism	18	21	8	39	24	110
Dropped by Apostasy	0	0	0	1	0	1
Missing	20	25	18	12	32	107
Membership at end of the Year	125	121	111	137	129	

Unlike other churches in the district, Parirenyatwa church realized 86.6%

growth rate during the five years under study. Having done this, like other churches in

the district, it also lost a significant number of members during the same period. Such

a loss is equivalent to 98.2% of membership gains. The trend of membership gains

and losses indicate that there were more losses than gains in all the years except 2010.

Plans ought to be put in place to address such a situation as Figure 3.4 portrays.
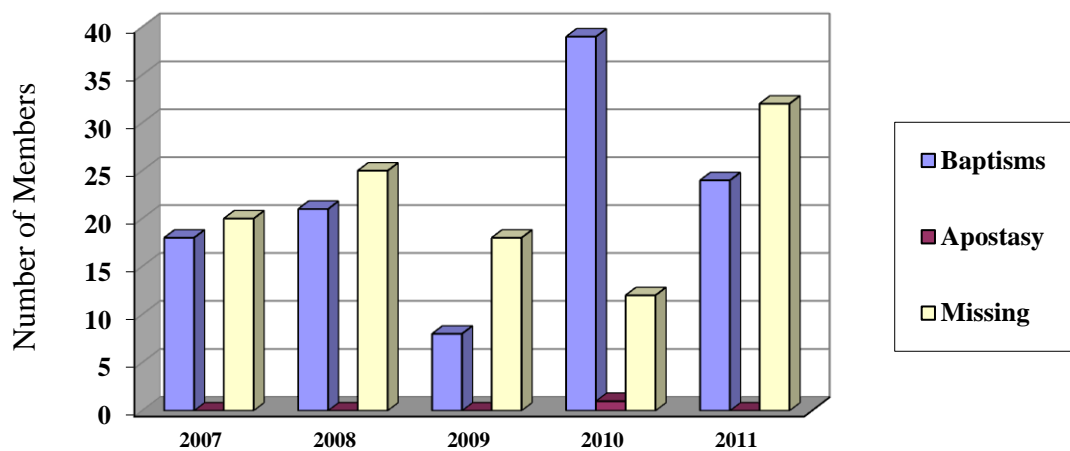
Fig. 3.4 Statistics of Parirenyatwa Church

Collectively, the entire district gained 294 new members during the five years

under study, an equivalent of 34% growth rate. During the same period, the district

lost 670 members; an equivalent of 277.9% of members gained. That shows, the

church lost the gains, including a significant number of the initial members. Thus, at

the beginning of 2007, the district had 863 members, and it closed 2011 with 487

members. Such findings might be helpful if the churches in HCC district and beyond

are to realize growth after the missionary mandate of Matt. 28:19. Therefore, there is

need for follow-up and nurturing programs in HCC district, so that the Church can

reclaim the lost members and improve its retention capacity of its members.

Church Member Surveys

In addition to analyzing statistics of churches under study, questionnaires were also administered to selected respondents. The researcher used random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to select 75 respondents from the target population. Random sampling ensures that each member in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. According to Tuckman, this method limits the probability of bias on the part of the researcher.[1] Dan L. Sullivan et al., assert that purposive sampling technique specifically excludes certain types of people since their presence might confuse the research findings.[2] In this study, the researcher employed his preference to choose some groups of respondents based on the characteristics he was interested in. Bailey credits this technique with the advantage of being more representative and leaves the room to generalize over a large population.[3]

Analysis of Findings

Among the 75 respondents, were 45 church members that were randomly selected from their churches. Since the remaining 30 respondents were specific categories of people, purposive sampling was used to select them. Both structured and unstructured questions were administered to collect data from the selected respondents because they are easy to interpret and analyze as understood by Earl R. Babbie.[4]

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[1]Bruce W. Tuckman, *Strategies: Basic Group Theory* (1978), 227. http://www.lightbryan.com/../tuckman.htmail (23 February 2012).

[2]Dan L. Sullivan, D. Frigstad, and K. Srivason, *Growth Strategy Consulting and Research* (California: Sullivan Research Services, 1990), 134.

[3]Kenneth D. Bailey, *Social Research Methods* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 187.

[4]Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 9th Edition. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. http:www.saciwaters.org/CB/IFRM/IFRM/IV (13 September 2012).

Personal Attributes

Figure 3.5 below, presents categories of respondents on the basis of their occupational status. This gives an idea of the kind of people in HCC district.
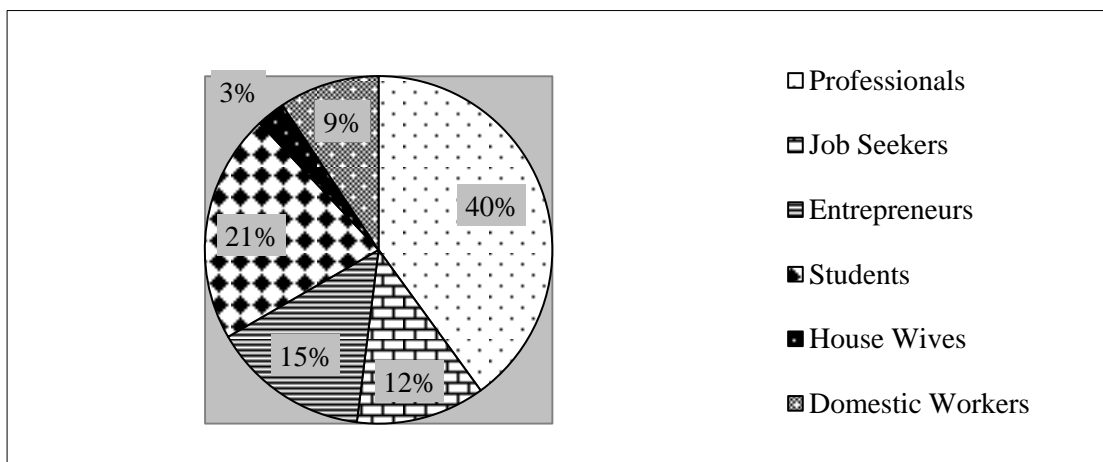
Fig. 3.5 Occupational Status

Among the 75 respondents, 38 are women and 37 men. From the outlook of the Fig. 3.5, it is evident that most people in Harare City Centre district belong in the category of: professionals = 30; students = 16; and entrepreneurs = 11. While this suggests high levels of literacy in the district, to some extent it portrays a picture of the church members' pre-occupational activities that hinder spiritual growth. It seems most people are too busy to mind and care about each other's spirituality. This was confirmed by some responses to question 23 on reasons of membership loss: "(i) people are too busy to meet for mid-week prayers; (ii) there is more of 'mind your own business situation' among church members, no one cares especially for the

visitors". Considering the collective 21% of both job-seekers and domestic workers, it is highly probable that the Church loses such people due to movements for search of better employment opportunities. For domestic workers, unless their employers are also Adventists, there is high probability that they may be denied permission to come for worship on Saturdays. About 79% of the respondents are forty years and below. Most people in this age category might still need to be established in terms of marriage, carrier, employment and accommodation. Upon establishment in any of these areas of their life, there is high possibility of relocating. Such scenarios present a convenient platform of church membership loss if necessary steps are not taken to transfer their membership.

Religious Background of the Church Members

It is probable that people's affiliation with church is determined by the avenue through which that person entered the church. Figure 3.6 shows a relative distribution of such avenues.

Other 7%

Invitation by friends 15%

Invitation by family or relatives 12%

Personal initiative 11%

Born in an Adventists family 55%
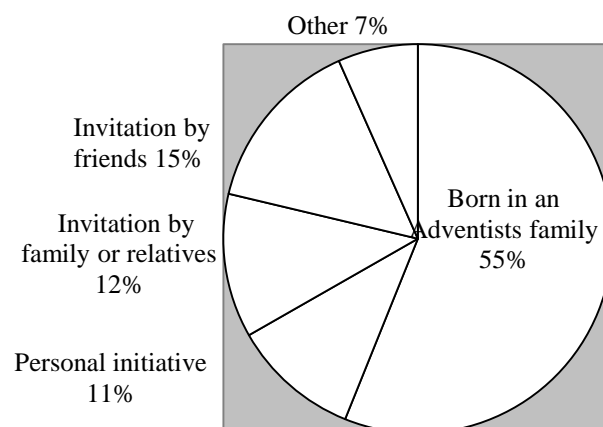
Fig. 3.6 Sources of Initiatives for People to Come to Church

Figure 3.6 indicates more than half respondents were born into Adventist families. Having been in the church for so long, some members that were born into Adventist families might enhance assimilation of new members. That would confirm the positive impact of "community consciousness" among the dominant cultures of people in Zimbabwe. On the contrary, the same "community consciousness" implies a negative effect of excluding those coming from outside. That possibility was implied to by several responses to question 23: "there are already established social structures in the church that appear to be non-accommodative to those from outside". Even so, 27% who were not born in Adventist families came to church through the efforts of their Adventist family members, relatives and friends. To a certain extent, this may also suggests that, the Church has less assertive programs for finding; 'Evangelism' and folding; 'Discipling.' Hence, those who come with acquaintances remain in the church, while those that come without close people around them drawback for of lack of social and spiritual support. Although spiritual parents are assigned to the newly baptized for nurturing, 2 responses to the question why the church loses people, indicated that the problem with the church is, assigning "unspiritual parents to nurture unspiritual children". That might be the reason for the 24 responses who confirmed that their expectations in the church are partially fulfilled, and 3 are not satisfied at all. For question 8, about 28% of the total respondents pointed out that the church is not hospitable.

Church Experiences

About 20% of responses to question 13 indicated that they sometimes contemplate disengaging from church due to lack of love on the part of already established members. The same reason was confirmed by almost 50% of the respondents who acknowledged that lack of love in the church was a probable factor

for loss of some members. Among other issues, 31 responses indicated that marital problems weaken people's commitment to God. In addition, 36 people of the sample group cited doctrinal issues as possible causes for religious disengagement. More than 60% responses cited that baptizing people before grounding them into doctrines is contributory towards membership loss. About 24 responses were not convinced with church programs in addressing people's needs. These responses indicate that most respondents were at least aware of probable causes of membership loss. On average, the churches in HCC district share a neutral attitude towards the vulnerable as highlighted by 34 responses to question 16.

Questions 14 to 21 measured the eight quality characteristics that have been found to be essential to healthy church growth.[1] Figure 3.7 reflects some relative strengths and weaknesses of Harare City Centre churches. Evidence shown indicates that the Churches are generally weak in almost all areas. Towards retention, particular focus is required in Holistic Small Groups, which has the lowest: 35%; followed by Empowering of Leadership and Inspiring Worship Service, both with 42%, and then the rest.

According to Schwartz, (the author of this survey tool), the goal for a church engaged in the NCD process is to raise the scores of all eight characteristics to 80% or higher and keep them there. When a church scores 80% or higher on all eight characteristics, there is 99% chance that it will also be a numerically growing church. The focus of the church should not be on numerical growth, but on becoming

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[1]Schwartz, ''Natural Church Development,'' 1996.

healthier, and let numerical growth take care of itself.[1] Therefore, this shows that HCC churches need improvement on all the eight focus areas of church growth, towards 80% or higher.
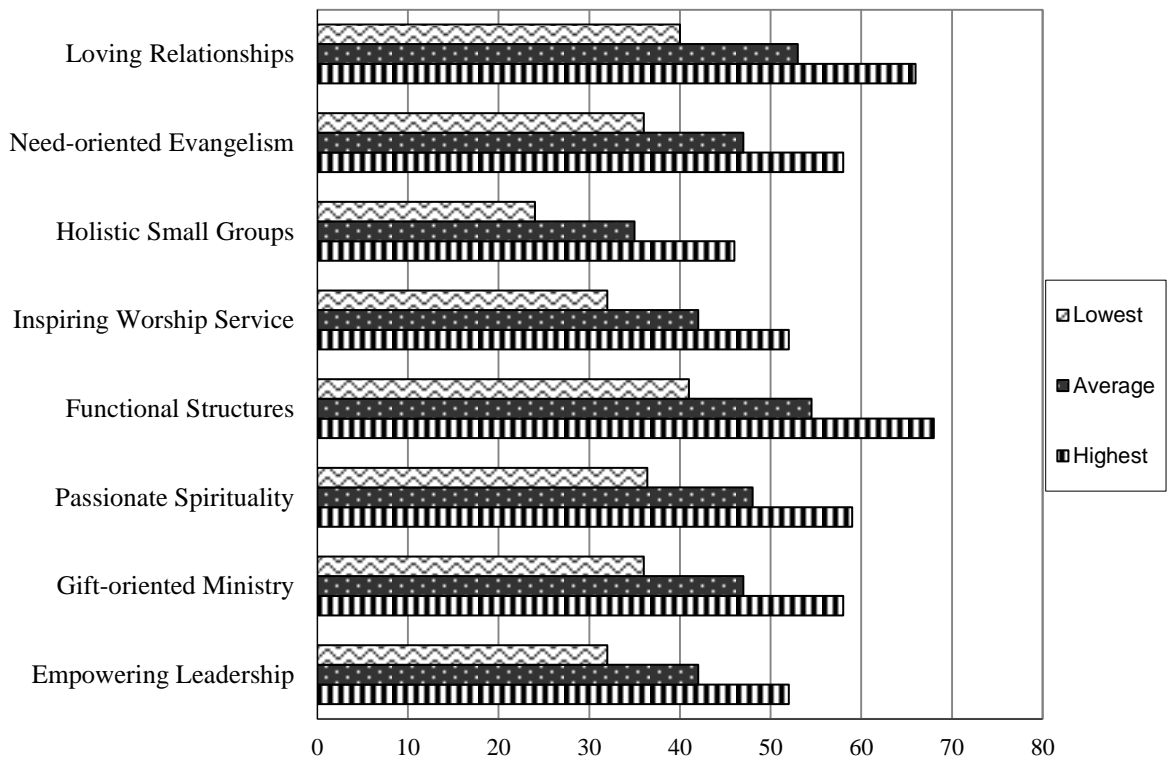
Fig. 3.7 Essential characteristics of HCC District

Measure of Bonding with the Church

Responses to questions 18 to 22 indicate that there are limitations at local churches for participation of members in church activities. In general, church members in HCC district are committed to the life of the church. Such commitment

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[1]Eddy Hall and Greg Peterson, ''Natural Church Development Survey'' in *Report & Recommendations: Integrated Planning Consultants* (Ohio: Living Stones Associates, 2005), 7.

might also imply involvement in already established social structures that are difficult to penetrate by new comers. Although members in HCC district value church identity as shown by the majority responses, the rate of membership loss suggests lack of missionary consciousness among them. With this background, it is likely possible that membership loss is due to non-involvement of new members in church activities, and negligence on the part of already existing members.

Table 3.5 Measures to Enhance Church Membership Retention

23. Do you think church membership retention has been good over the past years?	Yes	22
	No	47
If No, give reasons why people leave Harare City Centre churches_ (i) **36** No sense of belonging, social needs are not met (ii) **32** Loneliness, one cannot break into already established social networks (iii) **29** No caring and follow/up structures are in place to pursue the lost (iv) **28** Inadequate preparation for baptism (v) **12** Feel inferior, cannot measure up to already established standards (vi) **7** Assigning unspiritual parents to nurture unspiritual new converts (vii) **4** More doctrinal emphasis and less emphasis on sanctified life-style.		
24. What do you think the church should do in order to retain and reclaim its lost members? (i) **42** The church should provide adequate spiritual guidance to all church members (ii) **39** Establish supportive structures especially for the newly baptized (iii) **38** New converts should be thoroughly taught before they are baptized (iv) **28** Involve all members in church ministry activities (v) **22** Church leaders should visit church members without discriminating anyone (vi) **14** Planting more congregations around the City to accommodate more people.		

Evidence from responses to questions 27 and 28 indicate that some of the church members in HCC district acknowledged awareness concerning the existing problem. They stated the reasons why people leave the church and what should be done to prevent further loss of members. In other words, some of the responses agreed with some reviewed issues for membership loss and retention. The following reasons for membership loss were pointed out: inadequate preparation for baptismal candidates, lack of caring and follow-up structures to those going astray, and lack of sense of belonging by new converts. The following ideas for improving retention were highlighted: establishing supportive structures for newly converts, involving all members in church activities, and visiting church members without discriminating anyone. About 28% of responses indicated that they were not aware of membership loss at their churches. That unawareness may suggest several possible reasons: (1) the ignorant members are fairly new to their churches such that they do not know of any missing member; (2) as long as close friends and relatives of these ignorant members are around, they do not care about the rest; and (3) church statistical registers are not regularly updated in the presence of the whole church.

Responses from the Reclaimed Members

During the implementation of the program, some members were reclaimed. The researcher conducted personal interviews with 12 of them. Interview questions mainly focused on three aspects of their church experiences: (1) Area of church life they appreciate and enjoyed most before leaving; (2) Reasons for leaving church; and finally, (3) Suggestions to improve retention of church members.

Cherished Church Experiences

Firstly, about 92% of the responses acknowledged that the Seventh-day Adventist church teaches truth from the Bible. Secondly, almost all of them indicated

the uniqueness of quality Adventist music, despite some attempts from young people in particular, to dilute it. Finally, about 80% pointed that they enjoyed powerful preaching especially during camp meetings.

Reasons for Leaving the Church

From the responses, about 56% indicated that the church seems intolerant with sinners. Once a person is disciplined whether by way of censure of dropping of name it seems a permanent stigma is placed upon that member. More to that 32% of them highlighted politics in church governance (especially during elections time and how church discipline is administered), as the major reason of their departure from church. Some accused the church of frequent monetary demands from the church. About 80% cited "lack of fellowship" especially on the part of established members to accommodate new comers as contributory towards loss of members.

In addition to that, 16% feels that participation in church activities (like leadership roles) is limited to those members with material advantage. To them, it seems more recognition is given to people with material things than spiritual maturity, to lead and participate in church activities. Besides that, 48% pointed out "pre-mature baptisms" as reasons for membership loss, it appears no-one was available for them after baptism. Indications from reclaimed members suggest that the church members in HCC are more interested in adding figures of baptism than in the actual baptized members. Regardless of different reasons for leaving church, almost all respondents appreciated the church's passion and efforts to pursue them. However, several indications expressed concern on whether there were any improved changes at their churches to re-accommodate them.

Suggestions for Improving Membership Retention

The following suggestions were brought forward: (1) The church should take its time to prepare candidates before baptizing them; (2) Established church members should not discuss church politics with new converts; (3) The church should be more redemptive than punitive in administering church discipline; (4) Regular visitations should be done particularly to encourage the new church members; (5) Church members should be treated equally, regardless of economic status; (6) Established social structures should open to accommodate new converts, and (7) The churches should work with budgets than requesting money regularly from the church members.

Summary

There are several contributory factors towards membership loss that were realized within the local context in which Harare City Centre district of the Seventh-day Adventist church exist. Some of the identified factors are; economic, social, and spiritualistic manifestations. However, the findings from the conducted surveys revealed that the challenge of membership loss in the district appears to be intensified by some members that are already established in the church through their social structures that cannot accommodate new members. The findings also revealed that some church members in HCC district are pre-occupied by studies, work and personal businesses such that they cannot afford to meet for mid-week church activities. It is possible to reclaim lost members. Responses from the surveys conducted among reclaimed members indicated that discussing church politics with new converts destroys their faith than establishes it. It is suggested that if the churches would create equal opportunities for ministering in church activities, more members might be retained in the faith. There is need to mobilize available church members to reclaim the lost.

CHAPTER 4

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

When people are converted and baptized as mandated in Matt 28:18-20, they are expected to grow spiritually and bear fruits accordingly. If the desired outcome is not realized due to some reasons, silence might not be the best option. Instead, the church is encouraged to set up some nurturing structures. The previous section described the local setting in which the problem of membership loss exists. This chapter discusses the development of Team Ministry as a program that improves church membership retention. Such a developmental process is marked by the following three-steps: Designing, Implementation, and Evaluation of the program. The plan of action when fully implemented is anticipated to become the life-style of the churches in HCC district of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Program Design

The choice and designing of Team Ministry as a program was informed by some principles gained from the reviewed literature. Such literature includes contemporary views, some insights from Ellen G. White, and from the Bible.

The following objectives guided the preparation of the program development:

1. To identify missing members in HCC district, in order to reclaim them.

2. To establish reclaiming Team Ministry at each church within Harare City Centre district, that targets lost members.

3. To establish healthy retention Team Ministry, so as to prevent further loss of members from the church.

3. To establish meaningful small group ministries at each church, as a way of incorporating member participation in caring for each other.

4. To identify and train church members how to build healthy Team Ministries.

5. To involve every new member in activities that will contribute to the grounding of their new faith.

6. To alert church members that evangelism must include a structured nurturing program.

7. To assist individual church members to realize that Christian life can be experienced by those who are personally involved in winning and nurturing others.

8. To assist church leaders in planning and implementing inspiring worship services at each church in the district.

The Strategies

The researcher considered Team Ministry as a strategy to reclaim the lost members and improve retention based on insights gained through literature reviews, and information obtained from the conducted surveys. From the literature reviewed, the aspect of "community consciousness" among general Zimbabwean people was considered significant towards reclaiming and retention of members. From the conducted surveys, it became evident that the problem of membership loss occurs in the context of various categories of people; professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and others. With such a background, the general lesson we learn from the English proverbs: "send a thief to catch a thief; Birds of the same feathers flock together" meaning people of the same background understand each other much better than those of different backgrounds. This suggests that if church members in HCC district are grouped according to their classes (age, profession, level of education, etc.) into their

respective Team Ministries, there will be high chances of reclaiming lost members of their classes and improving their retention. Thus, towards developing Team Ministries program, the following steps were considered:

1. Developing materials for use during the initial trainings of the church board members from the three churches under study.

2. Organizing meetings with district board of elders to plan for the training seminars. These plans include: frequency and length of meetings, venues, and costs to be incurred.

3. Re-affirming the mission of Seventh-day Adventist church in view of Matt. 28:18-20.

4. Reviewing the trend of membership loss from a Biblical perspective, analyzing the consequences of such loss, and God's attitude toward loss of members from His church.

5. Analyzing statistical data of both gains and losses, from the three churches under study.

6. Discussing the reasons why the trend of membership loss is high at each local church.

7. Building team ministries at each church for improving membership retention.

8. Developing material for use during further training of the identified members who will assist the pastor in implementing the program plan for reclamation and retention.

Targeted Responsible People

1. The District Pastor: Trainer of Trainers.

2. All Elders and other church board members: Equipping these leaders for implementing the program in their respective churches and/ or departments.

3. Organized team ministries from the targeted churches.

Table 4:1 Planned Timetable

ACTIVITY	DATE
Discussing plans with the church elders	04 Feb. 2012
Training number One. Target Group: Church board members	18 Feb. 2012
Building the two teams from each church	18 Feb. 2012
Discussing plan with the whole congregations	03 March 2012
Training number Two. Target Groups: Church Board Members	17 March 2012
Training number Three. Target Group: Church Board Members	31 March 2012
Training number Four. Target Group: Church board members	14 April 2012
All lessons to be completed	05 May 2012

The timing shown on the timetable was tentative. Firstly, it fell in the first three months of the year when people are eager to work. Most trainings and seminars of the church's departments are conducted during this period of the year in order to realize maximum benefits. Secondly, programs are punctuated by two-week intervals so as to allow understanding of the matter. The 5th of May was marked as the date when all lessons were supposed to have been discussed.

Material Covered in Team Ministry Training

While the same material was used as background information toward program development, specific materials were prepared for further instructing participants of each particular team. Towards developing reclaiming Team Ministries, some insights were borrowed from Carla Baker's views.[1] These included guidelines to organize

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[1]Carla Baker, *Reclaiming Former Members in Women's Ministries Leadership Certification*, Level 2.

reclaiming team ministry at each local church. The following topics were discussed during training; Ministering to the missing, the Healing Process, Building Trust and Faith, Renewing a Commitment to Christ, and How to Manage Follow-up Meetings.

Some materials for training retention Team Ministries were borrowed from the Natural Church Development instrument by Schwartz.[1] This instrument emphasizes on the following eight key-focus areas that characterize a healthy growing church; Empowering Leadership, Gift-based Ministry, Passionate Spirituality (prayer life, Bible studying, and evangelism), Functional Structures, Inspiring Worship Services, Holistic Small Groups, Need-oriented Evangelism, and Loving Relationships. The lowest score among all the characteristics is called the Minimum Factor. It indicates the area that is likely doing the most to limit healthy growth in the church. This suggests that focusing attention on strengthening this area is likely to produce the greatest return on improving the church's health. Often, the Minimum Factor is a "blind spot" that has received limited attention.[2]

Topics discussed for building both teams, were selected on the basis of program objectives. While there are various approaches that might be used to address the presented problem, it appears the program of Team Ministries might be ideal for reclaiming the lost and retaining them. Such a program seems consistent with the Bible and some insights from E. G White on membership retention. Before printing the materials to be used in each training session, the researcher was privileged to work with Martin Kaseke (one of the church members in Harare City Centre district), in the preparation of PowerPoint presentations for use during trainings. Printed materials

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[1]Christian Schwartz, *Natural Church Development Survey*, 1996.

[2]Christian Schwartz and Christoph Schalk, ''Interpreting Scores of Natural Church Development.'' *Program Development*. www.coachnet.org

were intended to be given as handouts to participants. The designed plan was anticipated to be implemented expecting both positive and negative outcomes.

Program Implementation

The program was implemented according to the designed plan. The researcher sold the vision to the district board of elders on the 04th of February, 2012. About 90% of the elders bought the vision and looked forward to its implementation. They agreed to have the initial training of all church board members on the 18th of the same month. The venue was prepared for use during training sessions. Two projectors were offered from Belvedere and Harare City Centre churches.

Training Number One: Mission and Church Membership Trends

On the 18th day of February, 2012, the first training was conducted with church board members. Sessions were one-hour long with ten-minute breaks in between. The topics presented were; Historical Trend of Church Membership Loss, God's Attitude Toward Loss of Members, Local Church Statistics, Reviews of Membership Loss and Retention, Team Ministry as a Strategic Program for Improving Membership Retention. For each presentation, handouts were given to participants.

When the program started about 65% of the expected attendees had arrived for the training. In the afternoon, there was an increase of participants to about 80%. At the end of the first training program, three things were realized: (1) Awareness of membership loss had increased among church board members; (2) Attendees expressed their willingness to reclaim the lost members, and nurture membership gains; and (3) The adoption of Team Ministry program as a strategy to reclaim the lost. Towards building Team Ministries, some insights were borrowed from Ray Bowman and Eddy Hall. They identified the following advantages: (1) Team approach empowers every team member to minister out of his or her spiritual gifts. (2) Provides

built-in support. (3) Makes it easier to find qualified, enthusiastic workers. (4) It solves the substitute problem. (5) It models community and reduces social isolation. (6) Team approach reduces competition. (7) It improves quality of ministry that enhances mission fulfillment.[1]

To maximize membership participation, on the 03rd of March 2012, the researcher collaborated with the elders of all the churches to sell the plan to the church members in general. The exercise of mobilizing church members to participate started at Belvedere Church during morning service, and in the afternoon, Parirenyatwa and Harare City Centre churches respectively. When church members realized the high trend of membership loss in their local churches, they were concerned. About 75% indicated their commitment to reclaim the lost. The next step was identifying the missing members and each church compiled a list of the missing members. After compiling the list, the missing members were classified into two categories; (1) those whose whereabouts are known, and (2) those whose whereabouts are not known.

Training Number Two: Building Team Ministry Program for Reclaiming Lost Members

On the 17th of March, church board members from the three churches together with their teams met for training. Some topics for discussion were adopted from Carla's strategy for reclaiming former members. The topics were as follows; (1) Ministering to the Missing,   (2) The Healing Process, (3) Building Trust and Faith, (4) Renewing a Commitment to Christ, (5) Follow-up Meetings.[2] After training, reclaiming teams were assigned to work for the recovery of those whose whereabouts

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[1]Ray Bowman and Eddy Hall, ''The More we Teach Together'' in *WHEN NOT TO BUILD: An Architect's Unconventional Wisdom for the Growing Church*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 2-3.

[2] Carla Baker, Level 2.

were identified. Retention teams were tasked to work for those whose whereabouts were not known. Of interest, Belvedere church had a significant number of missing members who were identified as former students. The church realized that students, having been baptized there, probably for lack of knowledge, did not transfer their names upon completion of their studies. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, church membership is transferrable when a member moves to another locality for more than six months.[1] If it happens that a member fails to claim his/her membership for a period of two years, that member will be considered missing. However, the name is not cancelled from the Church records, lest one day the member comes to claim it.

Unlike Belvedere, it was established that some of the missing members of HCC Church went to Diaspora in search of greener pastures. It is probable that, they did not transfer their names with the hope of coming back soon. To address this kind of a challenge, the Church Clerks were mandated to identify such and establish contacts with them. Report back was expected by the end of September. More to this, it was also established that HCC Church had lost a significant number of members on the basis of language problems. Since services are conducted in English, some newly realized members would prefer the use of Shona. This preference was also indicated in responses to the administered questionnaire. To address this problem, the reclamation teams were tasked to deal with this issue in their reclaiming endeavors by working towards affiliating them with Shona-speaking churches.

For Parirenyatwa Church, among the identified lost members were former student nurses, house-maids and some nuclear families. Like students from Belvedere

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[1]General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* 18th Edition (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 52.

Church at the campus of Belvedere Technical Teachers' College, upon completion of their studies from Parirenyatwa Hospital, some members just left without claiming their membership from Parirenyatwa Church. A record keeper of the Reclaiming Team at Parirenyatwa church was tasked to work with the Church clerk and some fellow nurses at the hospital in order to establish the whereabouts of those lost members. Likewise, it was observed that another significant number of house-maids that had been realized during period under study, were also unidentified.

Training Number Three: Building Team Ministry Program for Spiritual Growth

Another training program was held on the 31st of March, 2012. The church board members and some established Teams from each church were expected to attend. Attendance of members increased with time. Hence, about 95% of team members registered their presence when the program commenced. During this training, the researcher had two objectives; (1) to assess progress through some feedback from the Teams, and (2) to intensify the concept of Team Ministry program in the minds of attendees. For that reason, the entire first session of the training was dedicated to discussion of reports from the Teams. From the reports presented emerged a notable increase of identified lost members. Two Teams had already made some initial contacts. The other remaining three sessions, were dedicated to discussing the eight key characteristics of naturally healthy church.

Topics discussed include: (1) Empowering Leadership: as encouraged by Ellen G. White, "Ministers should become efficient in teaching others and training minds of those who will counsel and instruct the newly-come to the faith. . . ."[1] (2) Gift-Oriented Ministry: towards improving members' involvement in church activities, the knowledge of Spiritual gifts seems necessary. (3) Passionate Spirituality (Prayer,

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[1] White, ''Education for Missionary Work.'' *Gospel Workers* (1892).

Bible study, and Evangelism): all these three are key instruments for Spiritual growth

and prevention of apostasy. (4) Functional Structures: enhances quality in church

administration including non- discrimination when appointing leaders and those that

participate in church activities.   (5) Inspiring Worship Services: attracts and

transforms worshippers. (6) Holistic-Small Groups: enhances Team Ministries at each

local church towards reclaiming lost members and building their faith. (7) Need-

Oriented Evangelism; and (8) Loving Relationships.   For improved results, each

team was tasked to meet regularly for planning and assessing progress on all these key

areas at their local churches. In order to maintain the vision alive in the minds of

church board members, a proposal was made for progress reports to be presented to

them at church board meetings. Then at the end of every three months, teams met for

sharing reports on challenges encountered, successes realized, and lessons gained

through the experience. The two teams from each local church were tasked to pilot

this project in reclaiming and nurturing programs at their churches. This was done

with the hope of expanding this ministry to the entire congregations at the end of the

year. For that reason, there was necessity of preparing the church members by training

them about Holistic Small Groups.

Training Number Four: Building Team Ministry through Holistic Small Groups

From the surveys conducted in the district, Holistic Small Groups had the

lowest percentage. That became the Minimum Factor which according to Schwartz

should receive much focus towards healthy church growth.[1] For that reason, building

Team Ministry through Holistic Small Groups became the subject of discussion

during the training of church board members on the 14th of April, 2012. About 98% of

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[1]Christian Schwartz and Christoph Schalk, ''Interpreting Scores of Natural Church Development.'' *Program Development*. www.coachnet.org (01 February 2012).

them were present when the program commenced. This subject was discussed in four sessions. The fourth session was a practical exercise of forming "Team Ministries" based on similarities of members. Topics discussed during the training include: The Concept of Small Group Ministry (from a Biblical perspective and insights from White), Qualities of a small group, How to build Team Ministries through small groups? According to Eddy Hall, strong small groups constitute the heart of the church if they are built along the lines of existing relationships. They grow healthiest when they grow "organically", instead of "mechanically". Organically, in the sense of plant or animal cells that grows by multiplication not addition.   A healthy small group has some advantages of the following essential systems: (1) It provides a convenient platform of mentoring/discipling, (2) It facilitates community-building structures, (3) A healthy small group offers leadership development opportunities, (4) Small-group based evangelism is likely to be realized, and (5) A healthy small group can easily multiply, (Every small group should be "born pregnant)."[1]

The formation of team ministries during the fourth session of training was more of train-the-trainer kind of practice. That was done with the intention of extending the idea to the local church members through their departments. Church board members were tasked with selling the idea of Holistic small groups to their local churches and implement it as soon as it was bought. Feedback from each local church was scheduled to be done together in October. The program was designed and implemented in all three churches within HCC district.

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[1] Eddy Hall, 22.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation consists of objective assessment of a project or program. The purpose of evaluation is to measure success. It also serves as the basis upon which recommendations for future plans are suggested. There are different types of evaluation. Three types were used in this project; process, impact and summative.[1] Each of these forms was used at particular intervals during the implementation process. At the end of the set period, some results were presented. These results are the basis for the final conclusion and recommendations.

Process Evaluation

Focus of this form of evaluation include: what has been done, who has been reached, and the quality of activities. The program was implemented according to the designed plan. Its success depended on the convictions and level of commitment from the implementers. During the initial planning of the program, the researcher successfully sold the program plan to the church elders. In turn, the elders also managed to present the same vision to the local church board members. Success was measured on the basis of realized attendance to the initial training program on the 18th of February, 2012. The average attendance of 88% during the initial training was good, but to some extent it might suggest resistance on the part of the remaining 12%. Despite that, the program succeeded. This was confirmed by the successful formation of Team Ministries per church: for reclaiming and retention. Through that realization, the second and third objectives of the program plan were fulfilled.

Participants marveled to receive some informative materials about mission and church membership trends. They were concerned about significant figures of lost

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[1] South Australian Community Health Research Unit, *Planning and Evaluation Wizard,* www.sachru.sa.gov.au (10 April 2013).

members from their churches. Some were shocked to realize God's attitude in view of their reluctance over the situation. That probably re-awakened a sense of mission in each one of them as evidenced by some cooperation in the formation of teams for each local church. Harare City Centre church board members identified 16 team members for Reclaiming Team Ministry, instead of 5 that had been proposed. That seemed to indicate some conviction of duty consciousness among them. With such implied conviction in mind, on the 3rd of March, the church board members succeeded in selling the vision to their fellow church members. Thus, members contributed significantly in identifying and locating missing members. That was realization of the first objective of the program plan.

As per plan, the scheduled training for the 17th of March 2012 was a success. Although some had proposed postponement so as to accommodate Youth Ministry programs on the same day. There was a significant improvement on attendance which eventually rose to 100%. The concept of reclaiming lost members brought joy and hope to participants according to some comments during training. Data gathering of lost members helped available church members realize their weakness in nurturing each other. Although some of the identified missing members were former students from neighboring colleges, and some house maids, church members indicated their desire to establish their whereabouts. Attendees rejoiced to receive printed handouts of the materials discussed in each training program. That would enable them to further study shared information.

There was rejoicing of board members on the 31st of March, 2012, when they shared experiences during feedback time. Such sharing of successes realized, and challenges encountered, helped to increase commitment to reclaim the lost, according to comments received. Among the challenges encountered include: difficulties to

obtain details of some members who went out of the country; members who married non-believers and are experiencing difficulties to practice their Adventist faith. Some of the identified lost members go to work on Sabbath. Such issues were shared and discussed in order to come up with ideal approaches to reclaim them. The majority of participants were excited about the program of Team Ministries. They gladly accepted it. Having been convinced of its relevance, few among them doubted the applicability of such an instrument in view of meeting times. The elders promised to work with such few board members in collaboration with the pastor.

Focus of training number four on the 14th of April, 2012, was directed on the Building Team Ministry through Holistic Small Groups. Having been accustomed to some cherished concept of small groups, church board members were doubtful of Holistic Small Groups. At last, they marveled to learn about the formation, core values, and some advantages of the new concept forming Team Ministries on the basis of similarities and relationships. Since the training was more of train-the-trainer workshop, attendees rejoiced through practical experience of the formation of relational cell groups. During the sessions, some comments from church board members acknowledged ignorance on the part of leaders to implementing Team Ministry program. About 98% of participants appreciated the concept of "Team Ministry" as an ideal approach for both evangelism and nurturing of realized new members. Participants including the researcher marveled to learn from one member who commented that Team Ministry is the ideal basis for mission fulfillment.

<div align="center">Impact Evaluation</div>

This form of evaluation focus on assessing the extent to which the program realized its objectives, contributory factors toward desired change, preventive factors

toward desired change, and efficiency of the project in producing desired changes.[1] The concern over missing members was not a strange thing in HCC churches. That was evidenced by compiled registers of absent members produced by the Church clerks from each Church. Belvedere produced a compilation of 64 lost members. Harare City Centre Church did likewise by producing a register of 494 absent members. Parirenyatwa Church clerk termed it, "the Second Church register" where she produced 107 names of unavailable members. With the exception of Parirenyatwa, the other two churches had submitted their lists of absent members to the EZC office as "Missing members". Harare City Centre church further realized that regular church attendees without names in the church records were more than absent members with names in the records. Such was also the case with Parirenyatwa church.

An ongoing task for reclaiming Team Ministries from each local church began with those identified names. From the contacts made up to September, 2012, Belvedere church reclaimed a total of 15 members from the identified list. This number includes 3 professionals. The other 12 reclaimed members include: 7 former students; 2 house-maids; and 3 family members who had backslidden. By March, 2013, the number of confirmed whereabouts had exceeded 35. Out of these, 16 members are still working with the reclaiming Team Ministry. While still on Belvedere Church, the researcher observed that baptisms increased to 22 for the year 2012. None of the church members was declared missing. This reflects 100% of membership retention from the realized gains. That suggests efficiency of Team Ministry as a program towards improving church membership retention. The church board members of Belvedere church at the board meeting of 13 April, 2013, acknowledged that Team Ministry is an effective program for healthy church growth.

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[1]South Australian Community Health Research Unit, *Planning and Evaluation Wizard*. www.sachru.sa.gov.au (10 April 2013).

The program of reclaiming missing members began with little progress at Harare City Centre church. From the contacts made by the end of September, 2012, the church had reclaimed 9 members. Among them were: 2 business people, 2 professionals, 3 students and 2 housewives. Although this work is progressing, it appears the atmosphere in the church is not welcoming to re-accommodate the lost and found members. Such attitude was manifested during the board meeting conducted on 13 January, 2013. Some board members expressed reservations to accept returning members particularly those from outside the country. That is, if their church practices while abroad could not be supported with convincing evidence.

As a result of successive combined district workshops of Team Ministry trainings, there was remarkable improvement in reclaiming lost members and retaining won members. Such change suggests that reinforcement is a necessity if the churches are to reclaim the lost members and realize healthy church growth. By the end of March, 2013, the church had baptized 19 members through evangelism and reclaiming activities. One of the recently reclaimed business member at Harare City Centre church expressed great joy upon his re-baptism on the 23rd of February, 2013. He appreciated the church's endeavors toward the lost, while at the same time was still concerned about unresolved relational issues with fellow church members.

Another reclaimed member shared an observation concerning the church facility's limited sitting capacity in view of increasing attendance. He proposed to one of the church elders about planting another English-speaking church within the City, so as to facilitate spiritual growth for church members. While planting another church was a contemplated desire for some years among Harare City Centre church leaders, it took a reclaimed member to remind them that establishing new congregations creates a healthy church environment for both old and new members. That confirmed what

Rodger L. Dudley and Clarence B. Gruesbeck had already asserted, "New congregations offer opportunity for members who are seeking a deepening spiritual experience."[1] This shows the significance of reclaiming lost members. Therefore the establishment of Team Ministry program at Harare City Centre church has proved to be an effective towards improving membership retention. It was realized that this ministry require reinforcement workshops to motivate church members for improved results. Even so, there is remarkable change of attitude among City Centre church members towards Team Ministry due to their increased involvement in that program.

Unlike Harare City Centre church, the work of pursuing missing members at Parirenyatwa church realized results from the onset. By end of September, 2012, about 16 members had been reclaimed to the fold. According to the report received by the researcher, it appears the Reclaiming Team at Parirenyatwa met regularly for planning, praying, and follow up visitations to the identified missing members. In addition to that, the church board members frequently referred to the Team Ministry program during each board meeting.

Since, the establishment of Team Ministry program, Parirenyatwa church has been forth-coming in implementing it. Through the efforts of that ministry, 14 members were baptized on 23rd of March 2013, as confirmed from the shared testimonies. By end of March, 2013, the church had reclaimed about 14 members including 9 re-baptisms. Local elders of the same church were pleased to report 95% retention of members added in 2012. During the board meeting of 13 April, 2012, Church board members of Parirenyatwa also acknowledged the efficiency of Team Ministry program. That indicates effectiveness in the area of reclaiming the lost, out-reach activities, and nurturing the newly converted.

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[1]Rodger L. Dudley and Clarence B. Gruesbeck, *Plant a Church, Reap a Harvest* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1989), 27.

Summary

While the churches in Harare City Centre district struggled with the challenge of membership loss, the development of Team Ministry program has proved to be a solution for improving membership retention in the district. For improved results, regular trainings are needed beginning with small groups of people at first, who should eventually sell the vision to the entire church. Team Ministry is ideal for reclaiming lost members, reaching out to the unbelievers, and for establishing Spiritual growth of both old and new members.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The development of this research program was realized through a step by step process that commenced from chapter one until chapter five. As such, this chapter presents a summary of the research findings, drawn conclusions from the developed program, and suggested recommendations. Therefore, the following section is a summary of chapter by chapter activities that punctuated the progress of this research program.

Summary

Chapter one is the introduction in which a research problem was identified as membership loss in Harare City Centre district. A research proposal was made. It included the background of the problem, and how it was affecting mission fulfillment in the district and the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large. A statement of the problem was presented with a view of developing a strategic program for improving church membership retention and reclaiming the lost. The goal of the research was established as three-folded: to understand reasons for membership loss; to improve retention concepts through literature reviews; to design and implement a program for membership retention and reclaiming the lost. Areas and ways through which the church can benefit from this study were identified. The extent of research period was determined between the years 2007 and 2011.

72

In chapter two, a study of theoretical foundations was done. The following sources were consulted: The Bible, Ellen G. White writings; and contemporary views. Some issues reviewed from the Bible include; an analysis of historical trend of membership loss, God's attitude regarding lost members, and concepts of membership retention from both the Old and New Testaments. The researcher found out that the challenge of membership loss has been a historical problem that hinders mission fulfillment. As such, God is concerned about the loss of His children. The three parables in (Luke 15), clearly pointed out that God is interested in improving membership retention by reclaiming the lost. Even 1% loss of members displeases God, (Luke 15:3-7). Several reasons for membership loss were identified from contemporary reviews. Some of them were classified in the following categories: social, physical, spiritual and mental factors. Towards retention, some concepts were realized as follows: pastoral visitation, discipleship, holistic small groups, involvement of church members in the life of the church, and the eight key characteristics of Natural Church Development. Ellen G. White presented Christ's method as a sure remedy for improving membership retention.[1]

Chapter three described the local context in which Harare City Centre district of the Seventh-day Adventists exists. There are several factors identified in the local setting that contributes to the perpetuation of church membership loss. Some of them are: economic factors, spiritualistic manifestations, syncretism, Pentecostal influences and lack of care from the established church members. From the surveys conducted, it was established that some church members in Harare City Centre district were aware and also concerned about the problem of members that go astray. As a result, they highlighted some probable solutions to the realized problem such as: grounding

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[1]White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 365.

converts into doctrines before they are baptized, giving church members equal opportunities for participating in church activities, accommodating new comers into already established social structures, and avoiding church politics in church administration.

In chapter four, the choice and development of Team Ministry as a program for improving membership retention in HCC district was done according to some insights learnt in chapter two. As such, four workshops were conducted with church board members from the three churches in the district. Materials discussed included: Mission and church membership trends, Building Team Ministry for Reclaiming Lost Members, Building Team Ministry for Retaining won Members, and Building Team Ministry through Holistic Small Groups. Two teams were organized to pilot this project for each church; one team for reclaiming and the other for retention. The program was implemented according to the design. Although some challenges were encountered during the implementation due to resistance on the part of the members to be reclaimed, some members were reclaimed and retained through Team Ministry program. Some evaluations were done. Church board members from the three churches shared the joy of realizing some significant results towards improving retention of church members.

Conclusion

The loss of members affects the church's endeavors toward mission fulfillment. God is not pleased even with the loss of one church member for whatever reason. The churches in Harare City Centre district gradually lost members due to various reasons like: lack of care and support from already established members, syncretism, pre-mature baptisms before members were grounded in church doctrines, marriages outside the church, lack of follow-up from church leaders, unhealthy social

climate at churches, church politics, and an unforgiving attitude of the church members to the offending members. More to this, the researcher learnt that church members can easily disengage if they are not organized into meaningful involvement in church activities. The Seventh-day Adventist churches in Harare City Centre district lose members for social reasons more than doctrinal. In some churches, there are less conscious efforts to strategically nurture new members. If the churches are not friendly, caring and supportive, new members will drop-out from the church in spite of the truth taught by the church. Regardless of reasons for dropping from church, it is possible to reclaim lost church members.

Therefore, to improve church membership retention in HCC district, each church should have an established Team Ministry program. The local church membership records are now regarded as the people it represents since that is the sacred responsibility of each church. As such, regular church statistical surveys are now conducted. Accountability and thoroughness should punctuate every level of God's work. For this to be realized, there is an ongoing training program for church workers so that they can implement the obtained knowledge, and evaluate the work done.

Recommendation

Having understood that: (i) the situation in Harare City Centre district of the Seventh-day Adventist church reflects to some extent, the possible reality of the Church in the East Zimbabwe Conference, and in Zimbabwe as a whole; (ii) further research in this area of church life is required; (iii) the researcher presents the following recommendations:

1. The Seventh –day Adventist churches in Harare City Centre district and even beyond, should adopt and implement Team Ministries program in order to improve membership retention in their churches.

2. New converts should be thoroughly taught church doctrines before and after baptism.

3. Team Ministries should be built on relational basis than task basis only.

4. Church membership statistical surveys should be conducted frequently so as to establish and engage available members in church activities.

5. Each church should be a training centre for continuous training workshops with church board members in particular, and church members in general, about mission emphasis.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

EXHIBIT 1: **Questionnaire for Regular Church Members**

I, Oswell Dzvairo am a student at Adventist University of Africa pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Pastoral Theology. I am carrying a study on improving church membership retention. Your responses and input will assist in making Harare City Centre churches better places to grow spiritually and ultimately in winning more people to Christ.

I kindly ask you to complete the questionnaire guide as openly and frankly as possible. No names or any identification marks are required. So please feel free to respond honestly. The information you are going to supply will be used for the purpose of this study only and will be treated with strict confidentiality.

SECTION A: PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐

2. Age: below 25 yrs. ☐   25-40 yrs. ☐   41 and above ☐

3. Highest level of education: Primary ☐   Z.J.C ☐   O' Level ☐

                    A' Level ☐   Tertiary _____

4. Marital status.   Single ☐   Married ☐   Divorced ☐

                    Widowed ☐   Separated ☐

5. Occupational status?   Student ☐   Entrepreneur ☐   Professional ☐

            Domestic worker ☐   Job seeker ☐   House wives ☐

SECTION B: RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

6. Were you born in the Adventist church? Yes ☐ No ☐

      If No, state your previous denomination _____

7. What brought you to the Adventist church the first time?

        I found it myself ☐   Invitation by a friend ☐

Invitation by a family member/relative ☐   born an Adventist ☐

        Other ☐

(a) What were your expectations when came into the church? _____

_____

(b) To what extent were those expectations fulfilled?   (i) Fulfilled ☐

        (ii) Partially fulfilled ☐   (iii) not fulfilled ☐

8. Indicate your opinion on whether or not the church is hospitable and welcoming

        Yes ☐   No ☐

9. Where do you stay? (Location) _____

10. What is your language preference in doing church? _____

11. Where do you go for worship? Belvedere ☐   HCCC ☐   Pari. ☐

12. Give reason(s) to justify your choice of place for worship

      (a) _____

      (b) _____

SECTION C (i) : CHURCH EXPERIENCES

13. Do you sometimes contemplate going out of church? Yes ☐   No ☐

      If yes, state reason(s) _____

      _____

14. State the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following as causes of

people disengaging from your church

	Yes	No	Not sure
Program not meeting your needs	☐	☐	☐
Lack of love	☐	☐	☐
Marital issues	☐	☐	☐

	Yes	No	Not sure
Differences in spirituality levels	☐	☐	☐
Baptizing people before they are fully taught the doctrines	☐	☐	☐
Influence from friends	☐	☐	☐
Doctrinal issues	☐	☐	☐

15. In your opinion, how would you rate your church's attitude towards vulnerable people on a 5 point scale of highly positive (5) to highly negative (1). Such as the poor and HIV/AIDS victims

5 = Excellent ☐   4 = Positive ☐   3 = Neutral ☐

2 = Negative ☐   1 = highly negative ☐

SECTION C (ii): ESSENTIAL QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH

16. State the extent to which the following qualities are present in your church on a 5 point scale of excellence to very poor

5 = excellent   4 = very good   3 = good   2 = poor   1 = very poor

		5	4	3	2	1
1	The ministry of church leaders in equipping others for Christian service					
2	The distribution of church responsibilities based on spiritual gifts of church members					
3	The spiritual life of your local church members as characterized by: (i) Prayer					
	(ii) Bible study					
	(iii) Personal evangelism					
4	Measure the following in facilitating mission fulfillment					
	(i) Church decision processes					
	(ii) Church operating procedures					
	(iii) Church committee structures					
5	Worship services					
6	Are there small groups that meet real life needs in a holistic way					
7	Contents of evangelistic activities in relation to the needs of target people groups					
8	Relationships of church members at your church with reference to love and affection					

SECTION D: MEASURE OF BONDING WITH THE CHURCH

17. Have you ever participated in any line of church ministry? Yes ☐   No ☐

     If not, state reason(s) _____

18. Have you ever faced any challenge in any line of church ministry that affected your bonding with the church?   Yes ☐   No ☐

     If yes, specify the line of ministry and the nature of challenge _____

_____

19. Which of the following best describes your commitment to Christ? Just tick one

     Very highly committed   ☐   highly committed   ☐

     Committed   ☐   Partially committed   ☐

     Never committed   ☐

20. How do you value church membership or identification with the church? Just tick one

     Very highly important   ☐   Very important   ☐

     Important   ☐   Less important   ☐

     Not important   ☐

21. How often do you attend worship services in your local church?

     Always   ☐   Usually   ☐

     Sometimes   ☐   Seldom   ☐

     When I have nothing to do ☐

SECTION E: MEASURES TO FACILITATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

22. In your opinion, do you think church membership retention has been good over the past years?   Yes   No

     Give reason(s) to justify your answer

     (i)

_____

     (ii)

_____

     (iii)

_____

23. In your opinion, what do you think the church should do in order to retain and reclaim lost church members? Give your suggestions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

EXHIBIT 2: Interview Questions for the Reclaimed Members

I am a student at Adventist University of Africa pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Pastoral Theology. I am carrying a study on improving church membership retention. Your responses and input will assist in making Harare City Centre churches better places to grow spiritually and ultimately in winning more people to Christ.

I kindly ask you to respond to the following questions as openly and frankly as possible. The information you are going to supply will be used for the purpose of this study only and will be treated with strict confidentiality. So please feel free to respond honestly.

SECTION A: RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

1. Were you born in the Adventist church?   Yes ☐   No ☐

     If No, state your previous denomination

_____

2. What brought you to the Adventist church the first time?

       I found it myself ☐   Invitation by a friend ☐

Invitation by a family member/relative ☐   born an Adventist ☐

       Other ☐

(a) What were your expectations when came into the church?

_____

_____

(b) To what extent were those expectations fulfilled?   (i) Fulfilled   ☐

        (ii) Partially fulfilled ☐   (iii) not fulfilled ☐

3. Indicate your opinion on whether or not the church is hospitable and welcoming

        Yes ☐   No ☐

4. From the time you joined the church, how long did you take before leaving it?

_____

SECTION B: REASONS FOR LEAVING THE CHURCH

5. What were the reason(s) that led you to leave the church?

    (i) _____

    (ii) _____

    (iii)

_____

    (iv)

_____.

6. From your assessment, what do you think might be the reasons for people to leave the church, particularly those in the City centre district?

    (i)

_____

    (ii)

_____

    (iii)

_____

    (iv)

_____

SECTION C: CHERISHED CHURCH EXPERIENCES

7. When you joined the church for the first time, what things did you appreciate in the life of the church?

(i)

_____

(ii)

_____

(iii)

_____

(iv)

_____.

8. Since you left the church, which lines of church activities were you missing?

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(iii) _____

(iv) _____

9. While you were out of the church, how were you addressing your spiritual needs?

(i) _____

(ii) _____

SECTION D: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

9. In your opinion, what do you think the church should do in order to retain and reclaim lost church members? Give your suggestions:

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(iii) _____

(iv) _____

(v) _____.

APPENDIX B

PASTORAL ACTION PLANS

EXHIBIT 1: **Mission and Church Membership Trends**

Introduction

One of the key areas towards mission fulfillment is improving retention of membership gains. Baptizing people is one thing, and retaining them is quite another thing. While the church is concerned about increasing membership gains, there is also need for the church to address the problem of membership loss. The focus is not on numerical growth, but on improving the health of the church, with the understanding that when a church is sufficiently healthy, numerical growth will follow.

The Church and its Mission

The church exists for MISSION. What is MISSION? Where did MISSION come from? Why MISSION after all? What is the duty of the church towards MISSION? Answers to these crucial questions about mission are useful for generating the Church's Mission statement in view of Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 14:6-12. Mission fulfillment implies realizing more souls for Christ. Losing gains suggest otherwise.

Fishing Illustration: (Mark 1:16-18). Catching and retaining are twin concepts in fishing.

Historical Trend of Membership Loss

1. In heaven; (Revelation 12:7-17); Lucifer and third of angelic host were lost, they were never reclaimed. That saw the birth of the GREAT CONTROVERSY.

2. In Eden; (Genesis 3:1-10); God lost the first family, and He reclaimed them.

3. Cain was lost, (Genesis 4), he was never reclaimed.

4. The Antediluvians, (Gen 6:1-7), only Noah and his family were reclaimed

5. Soon after the flood, (Gen 11 & 12), Abraham and his family were reclaimed

6. The Exodus suggests a reclamation exercise.

7. In the Promised Land, the church of God pursued other religions

8. During kings and prophets, the church was divided (Jer 3:11)

9. In the New Testament, Jesus began His ministry with twelve disciples, only to finish with eleven.

10. Paul began his ministry with many disciples, but lost some (2 Tim 4:9-11).

11. During dark ages, through Papal persecutions, the church sank, but God pursued.

12. During Protestant Reformation era, in 1844, God's people were greatly disappointed with the church. They lost trust and confidence to do church.

God's Attitude about Membership Loss

In heaven, God never kept silent, He pursued Lucifer but to no avail "The Temptation and Fall" (E. G. White, 3SG, Chapter 2).

In the Old Testament, Genesis 3:10; God sought Adam and Eve, Genesis 4:15; God pursued Cain to no avail. Genesis 6-12: God pursues Noah, Abraham, and many others.

In the New Testament: Luke 4:16- (Christ's Mission Statement)

> Luke 19:10 "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"
>
> Luke 15; The three parables of lost and found.

The Need for Reclaiming the Missing

Before talking of a reclaiming ministry, there must be a recognizable need in the church as well as a strong desire to win back members who are no-longer attending. As God impresses our hearts, we should begin praying about it, and seek to identify who is missing and how many are such?

Reasons for Membership Loss

1. Discuss the Reasons why people leave the church.

2. Share the identified list of common reasons that people use to quit church, based on previous research studies:

    a.   Unmet needs: Rudi Maier noted the following; (social, physical, spiritual, etc

b. Negligence on the part of the already established church members; Lack of fellowship is the strongest factor influencing people to leave the Adventist church (James Cress).

c. Broken relationships, (Dudley Roger).

d. Social and relational factors; no sense of belonging, (Megan Brauner).

e. Lack of involvement, Misunderstandings, Deficient devotional life, Religious restrictions on life style, Rejection, Discrimination, Stigmatization, Unrealized spiritual satisfaction due to religious backgrounds; (Pentecostalism, Spiritualistic manifestations, etc.)

f. Primary commitment to achieved status, Life-cycle stage challenges, marital issues.

g. Baptizing before teaching, Lack of love and care, assigning unspiritual people to nurture new converts.

Concepts of Membership Retention

1. Contemporary views on membership retention
2. Ellen G. White's views
3. Biblical insights

EXHIBIT 2: **Building Team Ministry Program for Reclaiming the Lost**

Leading Texts: (Gen 3:8-10; Luke 15; 19:10)

People leave Church for various reasons. Regardless of whatever reason, God expects His children to pursue and reclaim those that go astray. God is interested in finding, feeding and folding of His flock. Ellen G. White presents Christ's example as the model to be followed.

> The example of the Savior should inspire us to put forth earnest, self-sacrificing effort for the good of others. Love for the lost race was manifested in all that He said and did. . . . He might be seen entering the humble abodes of want and sorrow, speaking hope to the downcast and peace to the distressed. This is the work that He

asks His people to do today. . . . To all, He brought hope and gladness. Wherever He went, He carried blessing.[1]

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

1. **Ministering to the Missing**

Areas of Focus: (a) Establish reasons why do People Leave the Church?

(b) How to Identify Members who left the Church? (Check Church records, Get Referrals from Adventist friends, etc.)

(c) How to contact Missing Members? (Make appointments, visit in pairs, call, Listen to emotions such as; resistance, suspicion, anger, bitterness, surprise, hesitations, invite, pray).

2. **The Healing Process**

Areas of Focus: (a) Learning the Art of Effective Listening: (Listen kindly, interestedly, and calmly, express sense of humour appropriately, Remember names of people the member is interested, Talk about their interests, Affirm their significance, listen more and talk less, Maintain shared Confidentiality, Do not scold, beg or plead, Do not be Defensive, Show Empathy, Be Open-minded, and Honest, etc)

(b) Learning the Art of Caring: (Always call first before visiting, Respect personal space, offer to meet in a neutral place, Make appropriate Appointments, Have a Positive, Supportive attitude, Know when to leave).

(c) Learning the Art of Ministering to the needs of disengaged members: (Find out if there is any need for Support, Identify needs and offer to address them such as transport)

3. **Building Trust and Faith**

Areas of Focus: (a) Know when and how to share your faith with members who are not attending Church: (Do not equate experiences, Avoid making arguments).

(b) Invite them to join your Holistic Small Group: (Prayer meetings, Bible studying, Evangelism).

(c) Share your Spiritual tools with them: (Bible study guides, periodicals, Devotionals, Be kind and compassionate, Do not lecture about doctrines and Church standards, etc).

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 7, 221.

4**. Renewing a Commitment to Christ**

Areas of Focus: (a) Inviting a Friend to attend Church on Sabbath: Organize transport for them if there is need, Ushers should be trained to welcome former members without questioning them about why they have been absent so long, Invite them to join a Sabbath School Class, Invite them and their families for Sabbath lunch, and Avoid introducing them as visitors.

  (b) Invite a Friend to an Evangelistic Meeting: Offer to attend the series with an identified member

   (c) Planning events to welcome former members back to Church: Discuss ways your reclaiming team ministry or your Church can rejoice in welcoming back the members who are returning to Church. Consider giving each one a token of appreciation to show your joy; (flowers, book, certificate, a meal)

5. **Follow-up Activities**

Areas of Focus: (a) Nurturing and Discipling reclaimed members to prevent them from   leaving again.

  (b) Involve the newly-returned members in ministry

  (c) Praise God for blessings in reclaiming ministry

EXHIBIT 3: Building Team Ministry Program for Spiritual Growth

Leading Texts: (Matthew 28:18-20; John 21:15-17; Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12.)

There is more to Mission than numbers. Baptizing people is one thing. On the other hand, retaining them is a different task that requires a significant amount of resources: time, energy, praying, and Bible studying. Towards this, Christian Schwartz presents eight quality ingredients of Natural Church Development that measure the health of a local church in eight areas that are essential to healthy church growth. These characteristics form the basis of discussion in this Action Plan.

1. Empowering Leadership: Leaders of growing churches concentrate on equipping other Christians to serve. Under this area, three things must be accomplished; Explanation, Motivation, and Liberation.

2. Gift-based Ministry: Spiritual gifts are special abilities and talents given by the Holy Spirit to enable each Christian to play an important part in God's plan for loving

and saving humanity. When Christians serve in their area of spiritual gifts, they generally function less in their own strength and more in the power of Holy Spirit. The tasks in our Church should be distributed according to the spiritual gifts of individual Christians. Conduct Spiritual Gifts Survey.

3. Passionate Spirituality: The spiritual life of Church members should be characterized by prayer, Bible Study, and Evangelism. That can only be realized through small groups.

4. Effective Structures: Check the three dimensions; Upward, Inward, and Outward. Decision-making process, Operating procedures, and board committee structures should facilitate rather than hinder the fulfilment of the church's mission.

5. Holistic Small Groups: These are disciple-making communities that nurture the three H's: Heart, Heard, and Hands. They have a positive effect on both quality and numerical growth within a Church. They too, should meet the real life needs of our members in a holistic way.

6. Need-oriented Evangelism: Focus evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians. The forms and contents of the evangelistic activities must be related to the needs of target groups to be reached.

7. Inspiring Worship Services: Check on Liturgy, Teachings, and Praise.

8. Loving Relationships: Genuine practical love has a magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs that depend mostly on verbal communication. Relationships of the Church members should be characterized by a high degree of love and affection. Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing Church. Practical demonstration of love builds authentic Christian community. The Biblical concept of love is based on three pillars; justice, truth, and grace. Balancing these three is the greatest challenge (Ps 85:10; 89:14).

EXHIBIT 4: **Building Team Ministry through Holistic Small Groups**

Leading Texts: (1 Cor 12:25; Eph 4:2, 32; 5:21; Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 John 3:22, 23, 4:4, 11)

Introduction

> "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. . . . Let small groups come together in the evenings or early morning to study the Bible. That the small groups set aside a period for prayer so that they may be strengthened, illuminated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit."[1]

Some of the following guidelines for small groups were adopted from Osmar Reis and Ramildo Bezerra.[2]

Topics for Discussion

1. Why Small Groups for the Church?

    (a) It is God's idea (E. G White, Christian Service, 72).

    (b) It is a Biblical principle (Ex. 18:17-25; Mark 3:13-15; Acts 2:42-47)

    (c) It is God's plan for the Church during the end time (Christian Service, 72).

2. What are the Objectives of Small Groups? "So that they work not only for the members but also for the unbelievers," (*Evangelism*, 115). This thought shows two main objectives of small groups: <u>Spiritual Growth</u> (Prayer and Bible study); and <u>Evangelism</u> (Fellowship – Relationship and Friendship).

3. Principles of Organizing Holistic Small Groups

(a) Prepare and train Leaders before starting Small Groups, (b) Provide good Materials about the issue to all participants, (c) Because Small groups are relational, they grow healthiest when they grow "organically" than "mechanically". Like a plant,

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[1]Ellen G. White, ''Work for the Church'' *Testimonies for the Church*, 7: 9.

[2]Osma Reis and Ramildo Bezerra, ''Small Groups'' *Personal Ministries Initiatives of the South American Division of Seventh-day Adventists Church*, January, 2002.

they start small, grow, and reproduce. It is far more effective to begin with a single group per church. Because an organically grown small group system is not grown by adding new cells but by multiplying cells from the original cell, great care must be invested in defining the DNA of the original prototype cell; (Core values).

Core Values: It is a serious mistake to establish small group ministry while focusing on structures and functions rather than values. Structures and functions can be imitated without a deep commitment to the core values behind them.

(a) Relationship with God: A relationship of listening, obedience, growth, and worship.

(b) Relationship with one another: We cannot relate with God as Father, without relating also to each other as brothers and sisters, (*Koinonia* = Fellowship).

(c) Relationship with those outside the church: Our love for those outside, compels us to reach out to touch them in meaningful ways that brings joy and glory to God. We share God's love and deed, this result in growth of God's family.

These three core values are organically related to one another. Ministry, the third core value, is the fruit. Community, the second core value, is the tree which bears the fruit. Intimacy with God, the first core value, is the root system of the tree. If the church is not bearing the fruit, check the root system to see if people are rightly connected to God; (hearing and obeying Him)? Next, check the tree, the Community of Faith?

4. Advantages of Holistic Small Groups:

(a) They promote relational growth with God and increase the knowledge of Bible Study.

(b) They facilitate development of relational bonds among group members and thereby addressing the needs of those in need.

(c) Members are equipped for ministry through identifying their spiritual gifts and developing them for use in the church.

(d) Since small groups seeks high involvement of church members in Church ministries, the rate of apostasy likely decreases thereby enhancing retention of members.

(e) A great number of members will be mobilized for soul winning

5. Leadership Structure of Small Groups and their Functions.

(a) **The General Coordinator**: Supports the small group activities and provides material for the leader. Furthermore, he/she helps in the organization of leaders' meetings and leads the weekly meetings in the absence of the Pastor. Finally, this person leads the committee of small groups.

(b) **The Leader**: Leads the weekly meeting of the group and helps the group to participate in evangelistic programs. Promotes and visits the absentees and helps them in daily prayers for the small group.

(c) **The Associate Leader**:

Supports the leader with pray, Leads the meeting when the leader is absent, Invites new members to the small group, Helps to visit the absentees, Assists the leaders' meetings, Provides a list with the names and address of the members, Fills in the reports.

(d) **The Host**:

Offers his house for meetings, Provides accommodation for all, Welcomes the members and visitors when they arrive, Helps the leader and the associate in what is needed

6. A Sample Program of a Holistic Small Group.

The time of each part of the program is suggestive and flexible:

Welcome and praise – 10 minutes.

Fellowship – 10 minutes.

   Introducing the visitor(s) and Informal conversation

Testimony – 15 minutes.

   Evangelistic plan of the group; Spiritual and missionary testimony of the work that has been conducted; Assessment of the activity

Prayer – 10 minutes.

   Thanksgiving and requests; Intercessory prayer

Bible Study – 35 minutes

   Participation of everyone in the study

   Applying the studied message in the lives of the members

   Appeal to all to live what they have learnt

LETTERS FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY

EXHIBIT I: My Application Letter to the Conference

Flat No 9 Kianga Court
87-5th Street & Baines Ave.
Avenues,
HARARE

14 May 2012

THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
EAST ZIMBABWE CONFERENCE
P. O. BOX W19,
WATERFALLS,
HARARE.

Dear Sir

**RE: REQUEST TO DO RESEARCH PROJECT IN HARARE CITY CENTRE   DISTRICT**

The above matter refers.

I am seeking permission from your office to conduct research surveys in Harare City Centre District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is an academic requirement towards my Master of Arts Degree in Pastoral Theology with Adventist University of Africa. The title of my project is ''A Strategic Program for Improving Membership Retention in Harare City Centre District''.

 Your permission to this request will be highly appreciated.

Yours in His Service

Oswell Dzvairo.

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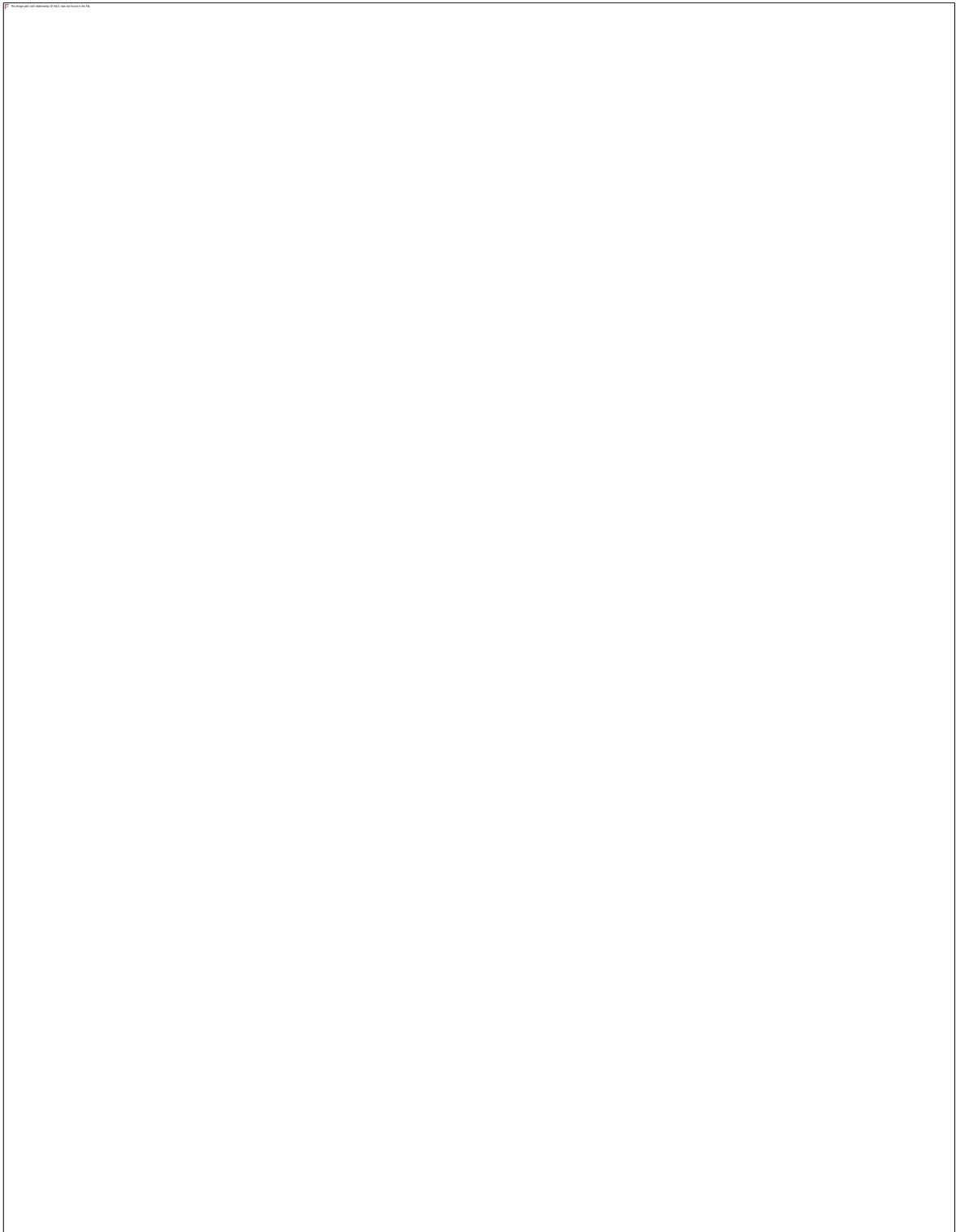
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